

HOME TO ROOST

A FARCE IN ONE ACT

By Ray Sheers

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SYNOPSIS: Lou Pickens is a dastardly, unsuccessful private detective who thinks he's quite the ladies man, (he's as good at juggling women as he is at detecting), and all the ladies get wise to his wily ways on the same day. Furthermore, he's about to be evicted, and he's being sued by his one and only client, the wealthy Mrs. Cresspoole, who discovers that he's been concealing her cat Prince William while pretending to search for her precious feline (who now needs extensive therapy). Just when things can't seem to get any worse, Mama and Auntie arrive with bizarre cousin Felice in tow. Rosa, the sweet young girl he left waiting at the altar, arrives with her brother, Tony, who's out for blood. In a single day, all Lou Pickens' chickens come home to roost.

CAST OF CHARACTERS

(2 MEN, 9 WOMEN, FLEXIBLE)

LOU T. PICKENS (m).....A young, private detective whose luck is about to run out. He's a fast-talking, double-talking, sweet talking, and preposterous conniver. He considers himself a ladies' man, but he has quite a lot to learn about women. (170 lines)

HORTENSE JESSUP (f)Lou Pickens' secretary who tends to be gullible when men are concerned, though she's not as gullible as she might at first appear. (47 lines)

ELSIE (f).....One of Lou Pickens' (soon-to-be) former girlfriends. (12 lines)

MRS. GERTRUDE

CRESSPOOLE (f)One of Pickens' clients (possibly the only one). She is a wealthy, no-nonsense kind of woman. One doesn't mess with her or her precious cat without dire consequences. She may wear the finest Italian leather shoes, but she herself is tough as boot leather. (30 lines)

DANIELLE (f).....One of Lou Pickens' (soon-to-be) former girlfriends. (19 lines)

MAYBELLE PICKENS

(MAMA) (f)Lou's mother. Despite appearances, she's a strong woman, the owner of Pickens' Chickens. She has come to check up on her worthless son. Little does she know she's walked into the fox's den where the chickens rule. She decides to take matters into her own hands and get her no-good son back on the straight and narrow path. She knows she has her work cut out for her, but she's probably up to the task - - as long as she doesn't let him out of her sight. (63 lines)

AUNT TESSIE (AUNTIE) (f).....Lou's aunt. She's never had much use for Lou. She calls things as she sees them, and she always sees the worst in Lou. (64 lines)

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FELICE (f).....Auntie's bizarre and morbid teen-aged daughter. She has long fingernails painted black. The rest of her outfit should be equally bizarre. Despite her stand-offish veneer, she is not at all immune to a man's charm and flattery. (48 lines)

MRS. HIGGLESBOTTOM (m/f)...The owner of the building where Pickens rents his shabby office. Higglesbottom has heard far too many of Pickens' excuses for not having his rent. If the character is female, she is a rather matronly businesswoman in contrast to all Pickens' other supposed conquests. *NOTE: For even greater comic effect, cast a male Mrs. Higglesbottom. If the role is Mr. Higglesbottom, he is an intimidating sort of guy. In either case, Higglesbottom needs to be able bully Pickens, physically and verbally.* (32 lines)

ROSA (f).....The girl Lou left waiting at the altar. She's pretty with a simple, trusting nature. Tony's sister. (15 lines)

TONY (m).....Rosa's brother who's out to avenge his jilted sister, but finds romance along the way. *NOTE: Tony may be portrayed as someone who's genuinely infatuated with Felice, or, more cynically, as just another operator, a younger and less practiced version of Lou. The wink and smile at the audience at the end should reveal which he is . . . either endearing*

and genuine or conniving and false. (35 lines)

SETTING: Lou Pickens' shabby office

RUNNING TIME: Approximately 40 minutes

PROPS

- ☐ Shabby office furniture: two desks, waste paper basket, sofa, end table, coat rack, filing cabinet (optional), phone, computer (optional), etc.
- ☐ Typical office supplies: tape dispenser, stapler, pens, desk knick-knacks, etc.
- ☐ Shopping bag
- ☐ Small bag with two doughnuts
- ☐ Dictionary
- ☐ Handkerchiefs (2)
- ☐ Rings (2), one for Elsie to throw, one for Felice to find
- ☐ Large magnifying glass
- ☐ Umbrella
- ☐ Bouquet of plastic flowers
- ☐ Throw pillow (powdered to create cloud of dust)
- ☐ Purses
- ☐ Umbrella
- ☐ Wedding or formal dress with optional veil
- ☐ Men's hats (2), suits (2)
- ☐ Large pair of scissors
- ☐ Apple (rotten or plastic)
- ☐ Several cans of cat food
- ☐ Kazoo (optional)

SETTING:

Lou Pickens' shabby office. There are two desks, a few chairs, a coat rack, a waste paper basket, and a sofa with a throw pillow. The coat rack might have Hortense's coat hanging on it. These are the basics, but the set may be more elaborate, if desired.

AT RISE:

Hortense is onstage emptying out her desk and putting the items into a shopping bag.

Lou Pickens enters, munching a doughnut. He carries a bag with another doughnut in it. He wears a tasteless suit that's seen better days. He tosses the bag onto his desk and his hat onto the coat rack.

PICKENS: Afternoon, Miss - - *(He stops, his doughnut partway to his mouth when he sees what Miss Jessup is doing.)* Miss Jessup, what are you doing?

HORTENSE: *(Continuing to pack.)* Packing.

PICKENS: Packing?

HORTENSE: I'm sorry, Mr. Pickens, but I have to find another job.

PICKENS: What! Find another job?

HORTENSE: I'm quitting.

PICKENS: Quitting? Now, wait a minute, Miss Jessup - -

HORTENSE: I don't want to quit, Mr. Pickens, but I have to.

PICKENS: But why? You can't quit! What will I do without you?

HORTENSE: I have no choice.

PICKENS: Aren't you happy here, Miss Jessup? *(Offering her the partially eaten doughnut.)* Doughnut?

HORTENSE: No thank you. I'm on a diet. *(He takes another bite.)*

PICKENS: If the workload is too much, we - -

HORTENSE: Oh, the work is fine. In fact, there isn't very much to do since business is so bad. With all the crime in this city, you'd think a private detective would always have clients.

PICKENS: We're in a temporary downturn, that's all. Things will pick up.

HORTENSE: But you haven't paid me for three months. My landlord is going to throw me out of my apartment if I don't pay the rent this month.

PICKENS: (*Relieved.*) Oh, so that's all it is! Well, that's no problem. (*He starts removing her things from the box.*) No problem at all! Why didn't you tell me?

HORTENSE: You mean you can pay me?

PICKENS: I'll do better than that!

HORTENSE: You will?

PICKENS: Sure! Why don't you move in here?

HORTENSE: Here?

PICKENS: Of course, my little pine nut. After all, nobody uses the office at night. And I won't charge you much rent. What's this landlord charging you anyway?

HORTENSE: (*Looking around.*) No, I don't think I could live here. (*She resumes packing.*)

PICKENS: Why not? The bathroom's right down the hall.

HORTENSE: It's filthy.

PICKENS: Well, try not to look. I always close my eyes whenever I use it.

HORTENSE: That's probably part of the problem.

PICKENS: I'll complain to the management and have the bathroom cleaned more often.

HORTENSE: It's not just the bathroom.

PICKENS: Now, let's not do anything rash, Miss Jessup. Speaking of rashes, did that nasty rash of yours ever clear up?

HORTENSE: Yes. The doctor said I probably got it by using that filthy bathroom.

PICKENS: Great, we're back in the bathroom again. Listen, Miss Jessup, let's be rational. Let's stop and look at the big picture.

HORTENSE: Beyond the bathroom, you mean.

PICKENS: Right, forget the filthy bathroom! Listen, if you lived here, think of all the time and money you'd save traveling back and forth to work each day. I'll even stop charging you for coffee.

HORTENSE: No . . . I don't think it would work.

PICKENS: And you've got the microwave. (*Looking around.*) Where's the microwave?

HORTENSE: Don't you remember? It exploded.

PICKENS: It did?

HORTENSE: Months ago. Remember when I was almost electrocuted?

PICKENS: Oh, right. How is your hand?

HORTENSE: Well, I've got the feeling back in most my fingers. *(She winces as she flexes her fingers.)*

PICKENS: That's great! And remember, I never charged you for that microwave.

HORTENSE: It was a piece of junk.

PICKENS: You're absolutely right, it was junk. Don't you worry, we'll get you another microwave.

HORTENSE: Another one?

PICKENS: Sure, when you move in, bring your microwave with you. And if you have a small refrigerator - -

HORTENSE: No, no, I can't live here. I've already applied for a new job and - -

PICKENS: What! *(He puts his arm around her shoulder and leads her to the sofa. She brings her bag and sets it down next to the sofa.)* Sit down, Miss Jessup. *(She sits.)* Before you leave, I have to tell you something. *(He sits next to her, setting the doughnut down on the sofa.)* May I call you Hortense?

HORTENSE: Well, yes, I suppose so.

PICKENS: Hortense. Such a lovely name!

HORTENSE: You really think so? I never liked it.

PICKENS: Oh, I do. I think it fits you like a glove, a boxing glove. Have you ever boxed, Hortense?

HORTENSE: Boxed? Good heavens, no!

PICKENS: Oh, I don't mean professionally. *(He holds up her face and examines it.)* Are you sure you've never boxed? *(He jumps up and starts shadowboxing.)* Oh, I'd love to go a few rounds with you in the ring. Speaking of rings, *(He takes her hand.)* I've noticed you aren't wearing any. Does this mean no one's corralled you yet, my little mustang?

HORTENSE: Corralled me? Mustang?

PICKENS: Do I have to draw you a picture? Have you no horse sense, Hortense?

HORTENSE: What are you talking about?

PICKENS: Hortense, I have to tell you something that's been eating away at me like . . . like *maggots*.

HORTENSE: (*Rising.*) Maggots!

PICKENS: (*He pulls her back onto the sofa.*) Oh, Horsetly . . . I mean Hortense, can't you see what I'm trying to tell you? I love you!

HORTENSE: What! (*Flustered.*) Oh, Mr. Pickens, this is so unexpected.

PICKENS: Unexpected? (*Romantically.*) Call me Lou. (*He slips his arm around her.*)

HORTENSE: Lou, I never imagined you and me . . .

PICKENS: Horse feathers! Don't play innocent with me. You mean you haven't noticed how I look at you with my big, brown, manly eyes? (*He flutters his lashes.*) How could you not have noticed, my sweet? Why, every time I get close to you I practically swoon.

HORTENSE: Swoon?

PICKENS: You heard me! Swoon, swoon, you loon! (*Catching himself.*)

HORTENSE: Loon?! (*She picks up a dictionary from her bag and starts paging through it.*) Loon, loon - -

PICKENS: Yes, my lovely little loon. You're such a darling, graceful little bird! (*Moving even closer to her.*) Tweet, tweet! Tweet, tweet! - - Tweet! (*He munches on the doughnut.*)

HORTENSE: (*Looking through her dictionary.*) Loon: (1) any of several large, short-tailed, web-footed fish-eating diving birds - - (*She give him a nasty look.*) (2) a crazy or simple-minded person! (*She throws the dictionary at him and starts to rise.*)

PICKENS: Well, I may not know my birds, but I do know my heart flutters whenever you're in the room. Of course, it may only be indigestion, but - -

HORTENSE: Indigestion?

PICKENS: Do you have it, too, my little cuckoo? You'll have to give up these greasy doughnuts. (*He finishes the rest of the doughnut into his mouth.*) Oh, you can't leave me, Hortense! I could never live without you!

HORTENSE: But - -

PICKENS: Mrs. Hortense Pickens! Oh, the very sound makes my spine tingle. (*Elsie enters, unnoticed; she stands, arms crossed, watching the scene in utter disgust.*) I'll tell you a secret. It's not every woman who can make my spine tingle, you little spine tingler, you! (*Cuddling her.*)

Elsie approaches, standing behind them, still unnoticed.

HORTENSE: (*Giggling.*) Oh, Mr. Pickens!

PICKENS: (*Wagging his finger.*) Ah, ah, ah! Lou. After all, we're practically engaged!

HORTENSE: Engaged?

PICKENS: Of course! If we're going to get married, don't you think we should get engaged first?

HORTENSE: Married?

PICKENS: Let's not put the wagon before the horse, Hortense. First we'll get engaged, then . . .

ELSIE: (*From behind, she knocks him off the sofa.*) Lou Pickens, you are the scum of the earth! That's what you are!

PICKENS: (*Looking up at her from the floor.*) Elsie! Sweetheart!

ELSIE: Don't you sweetheart me, you weasel, you!

HORTENSE: Who's this?

PICKENS: Weasel? Is that any way to speak to the man you love?

HORTENSE: Oh, I get the picture now.

ELSIE: Ugly, isn't it! Lou Pickens, you're nothing but a two-timing . . .

HORTENSE: (*Pickens covers his head with his hands. She hits him on the back with her purse.*) Snake in the grass!

PICKENS: Ow!

ELSIE: (*Hitting him with her purse.*) Oh, "snake in the grass" is too good for him!

PICKENS: Elsie, I'm surprised at you - - hitting an unarmed man.

HORTENSE: Here's another surprise. (*She hits him.*)

ELSIE: And another! (*She hits him.*)

PICKENS: Ow! And you told me you never boxed! (*Getting up.*) Look, Elsie, there's an explanation.

ELSIE: Explanation! Ha! Lou Pickens, I hope I never see you again!

PICKENS: What about our honeymoon? Our plans . . .

ELSIE: Honeymoon! Ha! I wouldn't go to Viagra Falls with you if you were the last man on earth!

PICKENS: Not Viagra! Niagara! Niagara Falls!

ELSIE: And here's your cheap ring! *(Pulling it off her finger and throwing it to the floor.)*

PICKENS: Cheap? *Cheap!* Do you know what that ring cost me?

ELSIE: A lot of cereal box tops.

PICKENS: Oh, so you save them too.

ELSIE: And don't try calling me either! It's over! Over! *(To Hortense.)* Oh, why do I always pick losers?

HORTENSE: Men! They're all alike! *(She picks up her shopping bag.)*

ELSIE: You can say that again. Who needs them?! *(Hortense takes his hat off the coat rack and tosses it to Elsie who throws it at Lou. Hortense puts on her coat, then picks up the coat rack as they both begin to exit.)*

PICKENS: *(Approaching them.)* Hey, my coat rack!

HORTENSE: *(Stopping.)* It's my coat rack! I bought it so I'd have a place to hang my coat, you cheapskate!

ELSIE: A miserable, two-timing cheapskate!

HORTENSE: Right! *(They storm off.)*

PICKENS: *(He picks up his hat and brushes it off.)* If you can't respect the man, at least respect the hat! *(He puts on the hat.)* Great! Now I'm out a secretary, a girlfriend, and a coat rack! I really liked that coat rack! Women! Now where is that cheap ring? *(He takes the doughnut from the bag on the desk. With his back to the audience, he puts the doughnut between his teeth as he crawls on the floor searching for the ring.)*

Enter Mrs. Gertrude Cresspoole.

CRESSPOOLE: Mis-ter. Pic-kens!

Pickens turns to look at her, the doughnut poised in his teeth. He might have powdered sugar on his face.

PICKENS: (*Removing the doughnut.*) Oh, Mrs. Cresspoole, what a delightful surprise.

CRESSPOOLE: Surprise, yes. Delightful, I couldn't disagree more.

PICKENS: (*Offering her the doughnut.*) Doughnut?

CRESSPOOLE: What are you doing on the floor?

PICKENS: Uh, - - dusting for fingerprints. (*He takes a magnifying glass and pretends to examine the floor for fingerprints.*)

CRESSPOOLE: (*Looking around.*) There's so much dust in here you hardly need to add more. There are probably Civil War soldiers' fingerprints preserved in all this filth.

PICKENS: Anyone you recognize?

CRESSPOOLE: (*Glaring at him.*) And just why would you need to dust for fingerprints in your own office?

PICKENS: We've, uh, had a break-in last night. (*He rises and puts the doughnut on the desk.*)

CRESSPOOLE: Not much of a private detective if you can't even protect your own office from break-ins.

PICKENS: Oh, this sort of thing happens from time to time, even to the best of us. Some very valuable items are missing.

CRESSPOOLE: My cat among them?

PICKENS: Oh, no, the search for Prince William continues uninterrupted, I assure you. But, we're making progress. I have an operative working on the case as we speak, and I expect a break-in any minute - -I mean a breakthrough.

CRESSPOOLE: You needn't bother telling me any more preposterous lies, Mr. Pickens. Prince William has been returned, no thanks to you.

PICKENS: What? (*Looking under the desk with his magnifying glass.*) Why, that's imposs - (*Obviously shocked.*) - I mean that's wonderful! (*He continues to look under his desk.*)

CRESSPOOLE: Looking for something? Perhaps the cat you've been hiding under your desk for the past two weeks while I was worried sick about my poor Willy Nilly?

PICKENS: (*Holding the magnifying glass in front of her eye.*) Why, Mrs. Cresspoole, has anyone ever told you what lovely eyes you have? (*She pushes his hand away.*) I'll have you know I've been working day and night, night and day, to recover your Willy Nilly.

CRESSPOOLE: Prince William to you!

PICKENS: I assure you, Mrs. Cresspoole, I've left no stone unturned.

CRESSPOOLE: Speaking of stones, from under which one did you slither?

PICKENS: What?

CRESSPOOLE: And don't try anything with me. I'm armed. *(She pats her purse.)*

PICKENS: *(Frightened.)* Armed?

CRESSPOOLE: You heard me! Armed! *And there are people who know I'm here!*

PICKENS: Mrs. Cresspoole, may I call you Gertrude?

CRESSPOOLE: *You most certainly may not!*

PICKENS: Gertrude! Such a lovely name! Here, please sit down, Gert - - *(She gives him an ugly look.)* I mean, Mrs. Cresspoole. *(He fluffs the pillow, creating a cloud of dust. She backs away from the dust and opens her purse. Thinking she's taking out a gun, he leaps over the sofa and hides behind it. She takes out a handkerchief and sneezes. He slowly peeks up from behind the sofa. Seeing it's safe, he stands up, wipes the sweat from his brow, and brushes himself off.)* Now, Mrs. Cresspoole, there must be some misunderstanding - -

CRESSPOOLE: There is no misunderstanding! You listen to me, you miserable scoundrel. I spoke to the little neighbor boy you hired to find my cat, and he told me everything.

PICKENS: Why that two-timing, little - -

CRESSPOOLE: And it only took a bag of chocolate chip cookies for him to turn you in.

PICKENS: What, you bribed him? I'm shocked! Imagine, a Cresspoole stooping to bribery. Why, Mr. Cresspoole must be rolling over in his grave.

CRESSPOOLE: I'll have you know my husband knew the value of a bribe!

PICKENS: Oh, right, a politician.

CRESSPOOLE: And what I didn't learn from the neighbor boy I got from your secretary.

PICKENS: What! Miss Jessup? And she told me she was on a diet! No wonder she rejected my doughnut! She'd already stuffed her face with your chocolate chips.

CRESSPOOLE: Miss Jessup called me this morning and said she would bring Prince William home. She told me she felt horrible that you've been making me suffer and charging me four hundred dollars a day to search for a cat you've been keeping hidden under your desk for the past two weeks - - bleeding me for money when you had Prince William all along, thanks to little Paulie Perkins.

PICKENS: You can't trust anybody. I should have known. The kid had shifty eyes.

CRESSPOOLE: And what did you pay him for finding my cat?

PICKENS: The standard rate.

CRESSPOOLE: Two bucks.

PICKENS: And let's not forget I bought him a root beer as a bonus.

CRESSPOOLE: I gave your secretary a five hundred dollar bonus for returning Prince William.

PICKENS: *What!*

CRESSPOOLE: And I'm sure she'll make a wonderful witness in court.

PICKENS: Court?

CRESSPOOLE: Thanks to you, Mr. Pickens, Prince William will need extensive therapy with his psychiatrist.

PICKENS: His psychiatrist?

CRESSPOOLE: You are a *crook*, Mr. Pickens, a despicable crook, and I will see to it that you pay for your hideous crimes. And pay dearly!

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