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BA(English)
Part 2
Paper second

She Stoops to Conquer, written by Oliver Goldsmith, is a five-act comedic play with a prologue and an epilogue first performed in 1773 in London. The prologue begins with Mr. Woodward, known to Goldsmith's contemporaries as a comic actor—weeping because comedy is supposedly dead. He hopes that Goldsmith's play will make him laugh, thereby bringing the comic arts back to life. It's important to note that this prologue was written by David Garrick who was an actor and producer in the 1770s.

Act 1, begins with the character Mr. Hardcastle. He has chosen a husband for his daughter, Kate, whom neither of them have met. Kate's husband-to-be is a reserved man of good looks, and the son of Mr. Hardcastle's old friend Sir Charles Marlow. In the second scene, Tony Lumpkin, Hardcastle's stepson, is enjoying a reverie at the Three Pigeons Tavern. Two gentlemen arrive, named Marlow and Hastings, and report that they are lost. They are looking for Hardcastle's house. Tony decides to play a joke on them, and gives them directions, but describes his stepfather's house as an inn. He tells them it's run by an eccentric man who thinks himself a gentleman.

In Act 2, Hardcastle gathers his servants, who are farmhands, and explains that he's expecting a visit from his future son-in-law, Marlow. He tells the servants that they must behave like the servants of a gentleman, which confuses them. Meanwhile, on the way to Hardcastle's house, which he thinks is an inn, Marlow confesses to Hastings that proper ladies make him feel shy. When they arrive at Hardcastle's home, Marlow and Hastings are rude to him because they think him to be the innkeeper. Hastings meets Miss Constance Neville, who is Mrs. Hardcastle's niece. She tells him they're not at an inn, but rather at Hardcastle's house. His response is to try to get her to elope with him. However, she doesn't want to abandon her inheritance. The two devise a plan to get her jewels so that they can elope. Hastings decides not to tell Marlow he's not at an inn, because then Marlow would become embarrassed and ruin Hastings' and Constance's plans.

Hastings introduces Marlow to both Constance and Kate Hardcastle, with whom Marlow is exceedingly shy. Kate finds his reticence off-putting, despite his handsome features, and wonders if she can be happy as his wife. Mrs. Hardcastle arrives, and Hastings teases her lack of connection to London and the fashionable society there. Then, while talking to Tony, Hastings discovers that Tony's mother is pressing him to marry Constance, to keep Constance's inheritance in the family. Tony hates the idea, so he promises to help Hastings not only recover Constance's inheritance, but also to elope with her.

Act 3, once again opens with Hardcastle, who is confused as to why his friend, Sir Marlow, would recommend his son for Kate, since he finds young Marlow to be rude. Kate and her father discuss Marlow as though he's two different people, since Marlow treats Hardcastle rudely, as he would an innkeeper, and is reserved and shy around Kate because he knows her to be a lady. Meanwhile, Tony sends Constance's jewels to Hastings. Without knowing of their plan, Constance asks Mrs. Hardcastle if she can wear her jewels, intent on taking them with her when she elopes. Tony tells his mother to tell Constance that the jewels are lost, which she does.

Kate finds out about the joke Tony has been playing on Marlow and Hastings by telling them the house is an inn. She doesn't reveal the deception, but instead insists on perpetuating it. Marlow mistakes Kate for a barmaid, and flirts with her. Hardcastle catches them flirting and Marlow runs off, but Kate, who now likes Marlow, is certain she can prove he is respectable.

In Act 4, Constance informs Hastings that they're expecting Sir Marlow to visit. Hastings, meanwhile, has sent Constance's jewels to Marlow for safekeeping, but without any instructions, so Marlow gives them to one of the servants, thinking her the landlady of the inn. The servant brings the jewels to Mrs. Hardcastle. Marlow is in the midst of telling Hastings about the barmaid he fancies—who is actually Kate—when Hastings asks about the jewels. Marlow answers that he returned them to the landlady. Hastings decides that he and Constance will have to elope without the jewels.

Marlow finally realizes the house is not an inn after Hardcastle gets upset that Marlow has encouraged the servants to get drunk. Kate confirms this, but continues to pretend she is a barmaid. Marlow tells her that he would marry her if society and his father allowed it, but he says this is unlikely. Meanwhile, Mrs. Hardcastle, who now has Constance's jewels again, presses Tony to marry Constance. However, Tony has already prepared horses for Constance to elope with Hastings. Mrs. Hardcastle finds out about the elopement and whisks Constance away to her Aunt Pedigree's home. Marlow becomes angry with Hastings for not telling him the home was not, in fact, an inn. Hastings is angry with Marlow for returning the jewels to Mrs. Hardcastle. With Constance gone, there seems little hope, but Tony comes up with another plan.

In Act 5, Sir Marlow and Hardcastle discuss Marlow and Kate's marriage. Tony, meanwhile, doesn't take Mrs. Hardcastle and Constance to Aunt Pedigree's, as he is supposed to. Instead, he ultimately leads them back to where they started. Constance decides not to elope, but hopes that the Hardcastles will give their approval and her inheritance so that she can honorably marry Hastings. Marlow learns Kate's true identity. The play ends with both couples marrying.

In the Epilogue, Goldsmith summarizes the play, and how Kate stooped in her rank to conquer the difficulties put upon the characters by society.