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OF PLAYS

THE FINGER OF FATE



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BOSTON

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Price, - - - - 15 cents.

SYNOPSIS.

SCENE.—Dr. Baxter's Office. Mary Ann and the Professor. A scientific breakfast. Patients. A sweet young thing of fifty. Mary Ann romances. The old dude. More patients. A back number. Getting ready for the operation. Roxanna and the Doctor. Greek meets Greek. Electro-motive force *vs.* a female tongue. The "gossimeres." The current begins to work. Woolley has a very strange feeling. Charged with electricity. "I never charge, but take cash down." Filling the cabinets. A little backward in coming forward. Dorothy's shyness. "What, get in there with two men!" Mary Ann sacrificed to propriety. Roxanna and the Doctor again. Getting the mitten. "You press the button, and I'll do the rest." The current full on. Groans of the wounded. After the battle. Old maids and old dudes made new. Roxanna's work undone. "It's a deep laid plot!" Celebrating the event. "The dude who couldn't dance." Mary Ann and "The Irish Jubilee." It is in the air and Roxanna catches it. A terrible catastrophe. The deaf old gentlemen gets overdone. The Professor adopts the old infant. Marrying and giving in marriage. The "invention" pronounced a grand success.

Walter H. Baker & Co., 23 Winter St., Boston.

THE FINGER OF FATE

OR

THE DEATH LETTER

A Melodrama in Three Acts

BY

LEN. ELLSWORTH TILDEN

AUTHOR OF "THE STOLEN WILL," "THE EMIGRANT'S DAUGHTER," ETC.

BOSTON

Walter H. Baker & Co.

1893

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CHARACTERS.

HERBERT GILDER, *struggling with fate.*

BRIGHAM WEBSTER, *a man of plots.*

ASA SKIFF, *a blunt and honest old fisherman.*

LEWIS PROUTY, *a member of the press.*

WILLIAM HARVEY, *the ferryman.*

FIRST OFFICER, *a country constable.*

SECOND OFFICER, *another.*

BOY, *a street urchin.*

IDELL HARVEY, *the pride of the ferry.*

CRAZY MAUD, *the mystery of the woods.*

ADA BROMLEY, *a maiden of love and poetry.*

CITIZENS AND WOODSMEN.

COSTUMES — *Modern and appropriate.*

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THE FINGER OF FATE.

ACT I.

SCENE FIRST.—*Interior of ferryhouse. Door in back at L. ; settee at back, R. ; table at C. ; chair at R. of table and chair at L. WILLIAM HARVEY discovered seated at R. of table reading paper. IDELL HARVEY at L. crocheting.*

HARVEY (*laying paper on table*). Idell!

IDELL. Yes, father.

HARVEY. I called to see the commissioners yesterday concerning the ferry;

IDELL. Yes?

HARVEY. Well, I resigned my position as ferryman. Your coming marriage to Herbert Gilder and the desire of you both to have me live with you in Boston, is the cause. At first I thought I would remain here. Then I thought of my little girl—my all—leaving me, and it was too much. My heart said go, and go I shall. Herbert is a likely young man, faithful and honest. Your choice is a wise one.

IDELL (*getting up, lays down work and kisses him*). Oh, how glad I am to know we are to have you with us. The thought of parting from you was the only regret I had. How happy we shall be in our new home. (*Kisses him again.*) Dear father.

HARVEY. God bless you, Idell. (*Looking at watch.*) It is nearly time for Herbert!

IDELL. Yes.

(*Enter LEWIS PROUTY at door.*)

PROUTY (*bowing*). In me you behold Lewis Prouty, Esq., reporter of the *Northern Daily News*, and correspondent of the *Thompson Review*. Hearing there was to be a wedding here, I thought I would drop in and see if I could get a few lines about it.

HARVEY. No notice is desired.

PROUTY. But seeing you have been ferryman here so long, and so many people are acquainted with you and your daughter, you ought to give the matter to the press.

HARVEY. That is for Mr. Gilder to decide.

IDELL. Herbert will have the minister publish the marriage notices. That is sufficient.

PROUTY. What's the minister's name?

IDELL. Rev. David White.

HARVEY. Mr. Prouty, the wedding does not take place until day after to-morrow. There is nothing to be said.

PROUTY (*going out*). Oh, no; nothing. To-day is Monday, to-morrow Tuesday, and the day after, Wednesday, and Mr. Gilder and Herbert make Herbert Gilder, and the marriage notices are to be written by the minister, and the minister is Rev. David White. (*Bowing to HARVEY, and kissing his hand to IDELL.*) Buy the *News and Review*—a long account of the marriage of the ferryman's daughter. By-by.

(*Exit PROUTY.*)

HARVEY. A long account—

(*Enter ASA SKIFF at door.*)

SKIFF (*taking off his hat*). He'll publish it. Let that ere fellow get a point on a thing, and he always will, and a piece as long as the moral law appears. He beats briers on points.

HARVEY (*shaking hands with SKIFF*). Glad to see you, Asa. Glad to see you.

SKIFF. Same here.

IDELL (*presenting hand*). I echo father's words.

SKIFF (*rubbing his hand on his pants; shakes*). Thank ye, Miss, thank ye.

HARVEY (*offering chair*). Take a seat.

SKIFF. No, I thank ye. To plant yourself is to take things easy, talk about everything and nothing particular. I am on particular business. Yes, siree.

HARVEY. Oh!

SKIFF. Yes; and although I am a fisherman, I won't fish around about it. Yer know I am no great slinger of language, orating being out of my line. (*To IDELL.*) You know it too?

IDELL. You certainly never indulge in idle talk.

SKIFF. Well, to come to the point, the loggers and others round about the ferry have delegated me to attend to matters here a bit (*addressing HARVEY*). Yer gal, Idell, is to be hitched up to Herb Gilder—a square 'un, by the way.

HARVEY. Yes; my daughter is to marry Herbert Gilder.

IDELL. The interest shown is surprising.

SKIFF. Surprising? It's a surprising good couple that is going into wood-lock—no, hang it all, I mean—well, I know, but the word knocks me out. It's a surprising good couple that's going to be hitched; there, that expresses it. (*Aside.*) Now I am a-going it. (*Addressing HARVEY and IDELL.*) The gal is a brick, a trump, an angel. A gal that will go to the loggers' camps, fix up nice things

for the sick 'uns, — that don't consider herself so fine she can't speak to such, — is the gal that wins the respect of honest men. Who was it, when old Ike Thurston fell and broke his leg, up in the camp, that came and made things comfortable like as only a woman can? The ferryman's daughter. Who was it that helped nurse John Teabon through the fever? The ferryman's daughter. Who is it that is always doing good, that the men swear by, and would fight and die for? The ferryman's daughter. They want to remember her, and to have her think of them when she's gone. (*Taking package from his inside breast pocket.*) They have passed the paper, and none was ever better received, and raised two hundred dollars, which they have put into my hands for presentation. (*Giving package to IDELL.*) Here take it (*wiping sweat from his face with red handkerchief*). They wanted to come in a body, but couldn't get away. Furnish some room in yer new home with it, so that when ye occupy it, it will call to mind the men of and about Domeshire Ferry. (*Aside.*) By gosh, I am winded.

IDELL. •I do not deserve this. I have only done what any true woman should and would do. Words fail to express my thanks.

HARVEY. This is a great surprise. God bless the men. This honor and respect shown Idell gives me the greatest pleasure of my life.

SKIFF. Proudest of mine, too. (*Aside.*) Never made a speech before in my life. The all-fired good subject got me through flying.

PROUTY (*putting his head in at the door*). Heard every word of it — full account in the *News and Review*. Order extra copies for your friends.

ALL (*surprised*). The reporter!

SKIFF. I told you he was great on points.

HARVEY. Well, let him report. The papers can say nothing but what will reflect credit. They would have heard all about it any way, so it makes little odds.

SKIFF (*going out at door*). Right ye are. (*Aside.*) Wonder if the reporter got my speech straight.

(*Exit SKIFF.*)

IDELL. Such kindness from the men!

HARVEY. You deserve it. Everything Asa said was the truth. You have been an angel of goodness among the loggers. They may be rough in their ways, but they never forget a good deed.

IDELL (*giving package to HARVEY*). Please keep it for me. It's nearly time for Herbert. (*Going to L. 2 E.*) I will get my hat and jacket and row across the river for him.

(*Exit IDELL.*)

HARVEY. Happy girl! (*Going out at R. 2 E.*) I will place this money where it will be safe.

(Enter IDELL at L. 2 E., dressed for out doors, and exit at door in flat.)

HARVEY (entering at R. 2 E.). I have placed the money in my trunk. (Seating himself at the table.) What secrets that trunk contains. Oh, if I only knew what Idell would do if she knew all — knew what a wretch I am, what a wretch I have been. Nevertheless, had I not done it, it might have been worse, been death perhaps.

(Enter BRIGHAM WEBSTER at door in flat.)

WEBSTER. Death!

HARVEY (springing to his feet). John Aldrich!

WEBSTER. Good eyesight.

HARVEY. What brings you here?

WEBSTER. Business.

HARVEY. What business?

WEBSTER. My own.

HARVEY. What do you want?

WEBSTER (looking beyond HARVEY). What? The girl. (HARVEY turns to look, and WEBSTER draws knife and stabs him after a short struggle.) Your life is what I want.

HARVEY (falling to the floor with knife in his breast). My God!

WEBSTER (looking at him, moves him with his foot, decides he is dead, and exit hastily at door). He's settled.

(Water Drop Scene at second).

NOTE. — Have a water strip prepared to lower or run across in front of the scene as it is dropped, with sufficient room between for the boat to be worked.

SCENE SECOND.— Forest Ferry crossing. Horn, to blow for ferry boat, hanging on tree.

(Enter HERBERT GILDER, R.)

GILDER. Three long years have passed since the old ferry greeted my eyes — years of toil made pleasant by the thought that I was making a home for my promised wife, Idell Harvey — the ferryman's daughter. (Blows horn.) There, that will let them know I have arrived. Idell is a regular Grace Darling, and will probably row over for me. (Walks back and forth, waiting for boat.) Why don't they answer back to let me know they heard. I'll try again. (Blows horn and waits.) Can it be they do not hear? I'll try my voice and see the effect. (Puts his hand to his mouth and cries.) Hallo, the ferry — h-a-l-l-o. (Waits.) No answer — what can it

mean? I'll try again. Cross I must, and cross I will. (*Blows horn long and loud; waits.*) It is of no use. The only thing to do is to make my way across down the river, and that I must do quickly, for while standing here the clouds have gathered in inky darkness; the storm will soon break forth.

(*Exit R. ; enter CRAZY MAUD, L.*)

MAUD. The wind is coming up. (*Wind blows mournfully.*) The thunder soon will clash, and the lightning flash forth. (*Thunder and lightning heard.*) The king of storms doth reign. (*Laughs.*) It's music to my ears — sweet music; the music of nature. (*Laughs.*) They call me crazy — Crazy Maud, and the children are hushed by their parents for fear of me. (*Thunder and lightning accompanied by heavy wind.*) Let them talk — it troubles me not, what care I for what they say? My life is wrecked; my past troubles are such that I cannot think of them and be myself. My brain is clear to-day — no, no, no; my head begins to whirl — it's growing cloudy again. (*Laughs.*) Crazy Maud — Maud the crazy.

(*Enter LEWIS PROUTY, L., an umbrella over his head, note-book in hand, writing.*)

PROUTY. (*Thunder and lightning.*) Deuced bad weather for news, bad climate for the constitution. Yes, I — (*Sees MAUD; makes low bow.*) Most happy to meet you, maiden. Allow me to introduce myself. Lewis Prouty, Esq., reporter of the *Northern Daily News* and correspondent of *Thompson's Review*. What may I call you?

MAUD. A woman.

PROUTY. Certainly; your appearance indicates it. Your name, please?

MAUD (*wildly*). My name? I have no name. (*Walking back and forth.*) You ask my name? (*Laughs.*) The world calls me Crazy Maud —

PROUTY (*surprised and writing rapidly*). Crazy Maud — the woman of all women I wish to meet. Madam, I wish to write you up for the press.

MAUD (*laughs*). Write me up?

PROUTY (*writing*). You were born?

MAUD. Of course I was born. (*Wildly.*) Born to a life of misery — born to a life of woe — oh, that I had never been born.

PROUTY (*edging away, still writing*). Wonder if she is dangerous?

MAUD. Born — born! (*Coming toward PROUTY.*) My God! that I had died when a little child!

PROUTY (*making his way toward L., writing*). She roams the forest clad as a wild woman.

MAUD (*wildly*). Young man, may you never see the sorrow Crazy Maud has seen.

PROUTY (*bowing*). Thank you, thank you, Madam; your age?

MAUD. My age? I was born — (*holding hand to her head*) no, no I know not. (*Excited.*) Questions, — questions — (*waving him away*). Away with your questions.

PROUTY (*aside*). She is getting wild, and I am getting no information. It is evident the only thing I can get is to get out. (*Bowing to MAUD.*) Farewell, Madam. (*Going out at L.*) Au revoir.

MAUD (*laughing*). Going to write up Crazy Maud. (*Suddenly looks across river.*) There comes a boat. (*Shades eyes with hand, and looks intently.*) There's a man and woman in it. The woman is asleep. A pretty time to sleep in such a storm as this. (*Suddenly.*) What — the man throws — yes, throws her into the river. He rows rapidly this way. (*Thunder and lightning.*) 'Tis murder! Crazy Maud's boat is up the river. (*Going out at R.*) Crazy Maud and her boat will not let the poor thing die — will not let her drown. (*Thunder and lightning.*)

WEBSTER (*rowing in sight from L.*). It is a nasty day, but a good time for my work. (*Leaves boat.*) Bill Harvey is dead, also the girl, and the future is Brigham Webster's, or rather John Aldrich's. (*Laughs.*) With the ferryman dies the secret. The Buckley estate is mine. (*Boat going out of sight to R.*) No longer a poor man, but a millionaire. (*Exit to L.*)

(*Storm continues; enter ASA SKIFF, R., with fishpole on his shoulder.*)

SKIFF (*shaking himself*). This is one of the storms ye read of in the back part of the spelling book where the leaves are yanked out. Saw Herb Gilder travelling down stream as though the old boy was after him. Couldn't get near enough to say how-de-do, he was going so like streak lightning. Should have liked to have told him about the present. Wonder why he did not cross the ferry and see his gal. Bet I would, had I been gone three years. She's the likeliest piece of calico in these ere diggings, and if I was only a little younger I'd have taken a try at cutting him out. (*Braiding up.*) I used to be quite a ladies' man in my time, I tell ye. Suppose I might as well make a stay of it as long as I have got wet, and see if I can catch something beside water. (*Baiting hook.*) There's a hole out here that one of the boys caught a buster out of the t'other day, and I guess I'll try my luck and see what I can do — rain or no rain.

(*Exit L.; CRAZY MAUD comes in sight at R., rowing boat; IDELL HARVEY lying in bottom.*)

MAUD. The girl is saved, but nearly dead. The man, who is he? The past seems to picture him, yet my memory fails. She belongs over the ferry, methinks; but I'll take her to my home. (*Laughs; boat going out of sight at L.*) No harm will there befall her — no — no — n-o — (*Laughs; exsunt in boat, L.*)

(*Enter, in haste, L., SKIFF.*)

SKIFF. Crazy Maud on the river. (*Thunder and lightning.*)
What's up?

(*Enter L. WEBSTER.*)

WEBSTER (*shaking rain from his hat, speaks aside*). I must cross back to the other side; Herbert Gilder has crossed and will make his way to the ferryhouse. By getting this clodhopper to cross with me, and finding Gilder in the house, the web will be complete. (*To SKIFF.*) Ah, how do you do?

SKIFF. About as I'm a mind to, thank ye.

WEBSTER (*aside*). Mighty sociable kind of a fellow. (*To SKIFF.*) Where's the ferryman? or are you the gentleman?

SKIFF (*aside*). Regular soft soaper. (*To WEBSTER.*) Where he belongs, I suppose. I am a fisherman, sir. (*Casts line into river.*) Asa Skiff, the fisherman.

WEBSTER. Oh — I wish to cross the ferry.

SKIFF. Well, cross then. (*Pulling up line.*) They are commencing to bite. The rain's letting up.

WEBSTER (*aside*). I'd kick the fool if I hadn't use for him. He must row me across. (*To SKIFF.*) There is a boat tied at the bank here at the left — can't you row me across?

SKIFF. What right have I got with the boat? She don't belong to me.

WEBSTER (*aside*). The fool! (*To SKIFF.*) It's a case of life and death; I must cross.

SKIFF (*pulling up a fish*). Pretty tough case?

WEBSTER (*in a mysterious manner*). I think you will go when you know what it is. It has come to my knowledge that the murder of the old ferryman is contemplated, and I would prevent it. (*Aside.*) Guess that will fetch him.

SKIFF (*throwing down pole*). Why didn't you say so before? Murder contemplated, and ye beating about the bush in this ere way. He may have been murdered a dozen times while ye have been standing around. No time is to be lost. Come along. Murder! by gosh, there will be murder if any one is hanging around the ferry, and I get my claws onto them.

WEBSTER (*aside at exit*). The game plays into my hands. (*Exeunt L.*)

(*Raise Water Drop Scene.*)

SCENE THIRD. — *Same as Scene 1.* — HARVEY lying on floor, as before. He groans once or twice, then raises himself on elbow and pulls the knife from his wound.

HARVEY (*groans*). I am done for, yes, I am dying — dying! Murdered by John Aldrich. Idell must have seen him or heard the struggle. Where can she be? (*Crying in a weak voice.*) Idell!

Idell! It's no use; I cannot make her hear; where can she be? (*Shuddering.*) How awful to die alone like this. With me the secret of Idell's life dies. Dies, did I say? No; it shall not die! I have strength enough left to write a confession, and it shall be done. (*Binds up wound with handkerchief, and staggers to table; sits in chair and takes paper and pen from drawer.*) There's no ink — no pencil. The letter must be written, that justice be done. Ah! I have it. It shall be written with my life's blood. (*Dips pen in wound and writes; business of weakness and pain.*) There, it is done. This makes the mystery clear. (*Staggering to his feet, he falls upon the settee, the letter in his hand, and dies, gasping.*) The death-letter explains all.

(*Enter CRAZY MAUD at door.*)

MAUD. The storm is over; nature smiles again. Here's where lives the girl, but they shall not have her — no — no — no; they'd kill the poor thing. Crazy Maud will guard her with her life. Yes — yes. (*Sees corpse on settee; examines it and clasp hands on her head.*) What! blood! More blood! Murder — murder everywhere! (*Stoops down and takes letter out of HARVEY'S hand and reads it.*) It tells of blood, it's written with blood. (*Laughs in a wild manner, folds letter, puts it in dress pocket, and listens.*) Some one approaches; I must away, ere they arrive. The cuts and turns are known to Maud, who comes and goes, none know how or where. (*Laughs, and puts hand to dress where letter is.*) It's written with blood. It tells of blood.

(*Exit L. 2 E., laughing in a wild manner; enter HERBERT GILDER at door in flat.*)

GILDER. At last, after wading the river, and travelling through brush and swamp, I've reached the old ferryhouse. No one seems to be at home; what can it mean? (*Sees body on settee.*) What! the ferryman asleep; I'll wake him. (*Stoops to do so, and sees that he is dead; becomes greatly excited.*) He is dead — murdered! Who could have done the deed, and what can have become of Idell? (*Walks back and forth in an excited manner.*) If harm has befallen 'Dell, I shall go crazy. (*Sees knife, and picks it up.*) Ah! here's the knife with which the murder was committed.

(*Enter at door in haste, WEBSTER followed by SKIFF and two OFFICERS.*)

WEBSTER. We are too late; the deed is done, and there stands the murderer with the knife in his hand.

GILDER. True, murder has been committed, but by some other hand than mine. I found the ferryman dead, as you see him.

WEBSTER. That's too thin. Why the very knife he holds in his hand I saw in his possession in Boston a week ago.

GILDER. Villain! (*Springing at him with the knife in his hand.*) You lie — you know you do. Take back your words.

WEBSTER (*drawing pistol and aiming at him*). Keep back! Would you add another murder to your list? (*Aside.*) He does not recognize me as the man whom he sent to State Prison by his evidence. John Aldrich, your disguise as Brigham Webster is good. (*To OFFICERS.*) I call on you to arrest this man. I charge him with the murder of William Harvey, the ferryman.

SKIFF (*advancing*). Hold on a bit — don't be in such a hurry. Let's look at things a bit. I admit it's squally for the lad, but I doubt his guilt.

WEBSTER. Doubt?

GILDER. Thank you, Asa — thank you, God knows I am innocent.

WEBSTER. The evidence is complete.

SKIFF. Yer just wait. Circumstances are circumstances, and facts are facts. The fact is, there was no reason for Gilder killing the ferryman. I was here myself this morning, and I know from what was said there was nothing but the best of feeling between 'em.

OFFICER. That may be, but there is no telling what's what.

SKIFF. Yer will find he didn't do it. It a'nt like him.

GILDER. God bless you, Asa.

WEBSTER. Officers, do your duty, and don't mind the clodhopper.

(OFFICERS *advance.*)

SKIFF (*waving his hand to the OFFICERS*). Keep back, I tell you, keep back! I've known this youth ever since he was knee high to a grasshopper, and a more honest boy never drew breath. E'er he is disgraced by arrest, ye shall walk over old Asa's dead body. Circumstances don't go here.

(*Enter PROUTY at door.*)

PROUTY (*advancing, bowing*). There appears to be a disturbance here. As reporter of the *Northern Daily News* and correspondent of the *Thompson Review*, I would investigate. Lewis Prouty, Esq., at your service.

WEBSTER (*aside*). It will now soon be heralded to the world that Herbert Gilder is a murderer.

SKIFF (*aside*). Reporters are goll darned fools. (*Suddenly.*) Say, by gosh, ye were here this morning, wa'n't ye?

PROUTY. Yes.

SKIFF. Ye overheard the talk that was going on?

PROUTY. Yes.

SKIFF. Well, didn't it show kind feelings between Herbert Gilder and William Harvey?

PROUTY. Yes; but it is not a reporter's place to be interviewed. He's the one to do the interviewing. He's a licensed pumper.

SKIFF (*to OFFICERS*). I told ye so. There was no ill-will.

PROUTY. What's the matter?

OFFICER. There has been a murder committed.

PROUTY (*taking out note-book*). Murder — you don't say a murder? William Harvey murdered! (*Writing.*) And the murdered has been caught? What's his name?

WEBSTER. Herbert Gilder. (*Pointing to GILDER.*) There he stands.

SKIFF. Hold on there. Don't ye put his name down as a murderer; he's no such rascal.

PROUTY (*writing*). There are many kinds of rascals, —

“From the seedy tramp to stylish scamp, with hair sublimely curled.
All sections have their share of them, and honest folks bewail,
The shameful fact, so few of them are inmates of the jail.”

SKIFF. Then there would be no newspaper men.

PROUTY (*writing*). The freedom of the press is not to be interfered with. Here's the heading. “Awful murder! William Harvey found dead. Herbert Gilder arrested as the murderer.”

SKIFF. He ain't arrested. (*Shaking his fist at PROUTY.*) I'll put a head on ye.

GILDER. Be calm, Asa. The facts of the case give grounds for the report; but I am as innocent as a babe, circumstances are against me.

WEBSTER. He already shows the white feather.

SKIFF. Ye lie, ye villain.

WEBSTER. Tut — tut, old man.

PROUTY (*aside*). Indications of another murder — more the better. Price for murder — ten dollars a column.

SKIFF. I wish I had been shot before I rowed ye across the ferry. This trouble would never have happened.

PROUTY (*aside; writing*). I'd have had my hands full of news if he'd only got peppered.

WEBSTER. The murderer would have escaped. Would you shield him who takes another's life?

GILDER. Hold! You say I murdered William Harvey. It is false. Hear my story. Three years ago I left this place, Idell Harvey pledged to be my wife. I went away to make a home for her and myself, and to-day I returned to claim my bride. Failing to receive any reply to my hail of the ferry, I made my way down the stream, and —

SKIFF (*excited*). I saw ye going down the river bank. I knew ye were engaged and gone away to make a home for the gal. I'll swear to it. (*To PROUTY, hopping about.*) Put that down, Mr. Newspaper.

PROUTY (*writing*). Certainly.

WEBSTER (*aside*). He's a space writer — nothing will be left unwritten.

GILDER. I crossed the river, and made my way to the ferry-house. Found Idell gone, and her father murdered. I saw the knife on the floor and picked it up as you rushed in. (*Looking toward Heaven.*) So help me God, this is the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth.

PROUTY (*writing; speaks aside*). The girl makes it more interesting. This case is good for five columns, the first send off.

SKIFF (*shaking GILDER's hand*). I believe ye, Herb, I believe ye, I do.

GILDER (*returning the shake*). Thank you, thank you, Asa. But, where is Idell? If we can find her, perhaps the murder may be explained.

WEBSTER. Find her! Probably you have killed her, too. I presume she lies dead at the bottom of the river. It had better be dragged.

GILDER (*springing at WEBSTER*). Scoundrel!

WEBSTER (*presenting pistol*). Keep back!

GILDER. I believe you are the murderer. I believe you know where Idell is, and this is a game of yours to throw the guilt off your own shoulders.

SKIFF. So do I. By gosh, I do.

WEBSTER (*aside*). Close shooting this; mighty close. (*To GILDER.*) That's a pretty story. You were found with the knife in your hand, bending over the murdered man, and the murder was committed with the knife. The evidence will convict in any court in the land. (*To OFFICERS.*) Officers, I again call on you to arrest this man. There's been fooling enough.

SKIFF (*excited*). Don't you touch him — he's innocent.

(OFFICERS *advance.*)

OFFICERS. We must do our duty — the case demands it.

SKIFF (*greatly excited*). There's no must to it.

GILDER. It is better I submit to arrest, and wait developments. Time will make all things right. Officers, I submit to my fate. If you can, please spare me the disgrace of the handcuffs; I will go quietly and pledge you my word of honor not to escape.

SKIFF (*pleadingly*). Don't shackle him; he'll do as he says.

WEBSTER. Handcuff him! What does the word of a murderer amount to?

OFFICER. We can attend to our own business.

SKIFF (*shaking his fist at WEBSTER*). And I'll attend to ye — ye pirate.

WEBSTER. Go slow, old man, go slow.

PROUTY (*going out at door, writing*). "Awful murder! William Harvey found murdered! Herbert Gilder arrested as the murderer. Found with the knife in his hand. He strongly maintains his innocence. A firm friend in Asa Skiff. Mysterious disappearance of Idell Harvey, the murdered man's daughter and the

betrothed wife of the murderer. What can it mean? Full details of the murder." (*Disappearing.*) There's a heading for you.

SKIFF (*looking after him*). He is a regular eight-day clock, that fellow is.

OFFICER. We will take the prisoner to jail, and return with the coroner, leaving you gentlemen in charge. (*OFFICERS go out at door, leading GILDER by the arm.*) We will soon return.

GILDER (*to ASA as they go out*). Leave no stone unturned to find Idell. I shall grow crazy if she is not discovered.

WEBSTER (*aside*). You'll go crazy then, sure.

SKIFF. I'll clear ye, and find the gal. (*To WEBSTER.*) Yer a pretty man to accuse one of murder just because, because -

WEBSTER. Because what?

SKIFF. He ain't guilty, anyhow, that's what.

WEBSTER (*laughing*). There is no getting out of it; your friend must be the murderer.

SKIFF. Well, if he is, I'd rather have him for a friend than ye.

WEBSTER (*sneering*). Every one to his choice.

SKIFF (*going out, slamming door*). To the old boy with ye — keep yerself company.

WEBSTER. The old lunatic. The game is mine. The old man and girl are out of the way, and Herbert Gilder is as good as proved a murderer. Everything worked to a charm, and no suspicion rests on me. (*Looking at corpse; shudders.*) Not very agreeable company. Wish the old fishmonger had stayed, spite of his talk. (*Listens.*) What's that? Is he coming back? Thought I heard some one step.

(*Enter IDELL HARVEY, at door.*)

WEBSTER (*springing to L. 2 E.*). It's — it's — yes, it is Idell Harvey. So water will not kill her. I'd try the effects of lead, if I knew the fisherman wasn't within hearing distance. (*Withdraws.*)

IDELL. Rescued from drowning only to fall into the hands of Crazy Maud. She left me, thinking I was too weak to stir, but I managed to get back to the ferry in her boat. Where can father be? (*Sees him on settee.*) Why, there he is, and asleep — what can it mean? (*Bends over him, and places hand on his forehead.*) How cold. (*Gently shaking him.*) Father! Father! wake up. (*Pause; sees wound.*) My God! he's dead! He's murdered! What shall I do? Who could have done the deed? (*Raising hand to Heaven and looking up.*) Oh, Father, Ruler of all, have mercy on me. Bring the murderer to justice. (*Falls upon knees and weeps over body.*) Dead! murdered! God have pity on me!

WEBSTER (*aside*). So she escaped through Crazy Maud. Blast it! She takes the old man's death to heart fearfully. (*Drawing knife from his pocket.*) Well, I'll soon relieve her of her misery. Die she must, for the fortune shall be mine. There has been too much plotting to stop now. (*Springs forward and*

catches IDELL by the arm, holding knife in striking position.)
Farewell to earth! Here's relief for your misery.

IDELL (*struggling*). What mean you?

WEBSTER. You will not live to remember, should I explain.

IDELL (*still struggling*). Villain! why would you murder me? Why did you murder father; for now I know you must be the assassin.

WEBSTER. Your lover is arrested for the murder. He will hang for it, too.

(*IDELL screams and struggles.*)

WEBSTER. Struggle away. You are like the mouse in the jaws of a cat. (*Striking at her with knife.*) Die!

(*Enter CRAZY MAUD at door, in haste.*)

MAUD. (*catching arm of WEBSTER*). Hold!

IDELL. Saved!

(*CRAZY MAUD, exit at door with IDELL.*)

WEBSTER. The devil!

CURTAIN.

ACT II.

SCENE FIRST. — *Forest. Enter BRIGHAM WEBSTER, L.*

WEBSTER. The inquest is over. Herbert Gilder is committed for the murder of William Harvey. Were it not for this Crazy Maud, everything would be all right. A moment more, and it would have been Idell Harvey's last; but as it is, thanks to this old hag, who is concealing her, the girl is considered dead—murdered by Gilder. Let me but find Crazy Maud, and she will be so in fact. As it is, I am liable to change places with Gilder at any moment. The hag dens somewhere in this section, where, I will know before I leave these woods. Then—what! old Skiff! (*Looking out at L.*) He follows me like a dog. The old curmudgeon mistrusts, I believe. I've a mind to shoot him. (*Draws pistol.*) No, no! it won't do. We have already had words, and I would be suspected. (*Returns pistol to place.*) It won't be healthy, though, for him to interfere with me too much, the old sinner.

(*Enter SKIFF, L.*)

WEBSTER (*turning savagely upon him*). Well, what do you want?
SKIFF. None of your darn business, as I know of.

WEBSTER. You are following me.

SKIFF. Who said I was?

WEBSTER. I say you are.

SKIFF. Shoo!

WEBSTER (*rage increasing*). What are you looking at me in that way for?

SKIFF. Ha'n't a cat got a right to look at a king?

WEBSTER. There is a difference between a cat and a skunk.

SKIFF. And between a king and a rascal.

(*Both glare at each other.*)

SKIFF. Skunk, eh? Well, look out that the skunk don't make things stink for yer.

WEBSTER (*aside*). Curse him! He has upset my plans for the present. (*To SKIFF.*) I'm going back to the village — going to dinner. Hadn't you better come to watch me?

SKIFF. I'll watch you in prison yet.

WEBSTER (*exit R., laughing*). With your friend, Herbert Gilder?

SKIFF. The villain! He knows I am watching him, and I wa'n't going to dispute it. Poor Herb! How he felt, being taken through his native place to jail. He was completely broken down when I overtook him and the officers after leaving the ferryhouse, but he took courage at my presence. I was proud to walk by his side, showing myself his friend. He's innocent, and to prove it to the world, I'd die, gladly die. Oh! that I could find Idell. Her evidence might clear him. (*CRAZY MAUD laughs outside at L.*) Crazy Maud blows at starboard! (*Looking out at L.*) The cutter comes this way.

(*Enter MAUD, L.*)

MAUD. It's written with blood; it tells of blood.

SKIFF. What does?

MAUD (*startled*). The Bible tells of blood.

SKIFF. But it is not written with blood.

MAUD. And there shall be war and rumors of war. For behold! the Lord cometh out of his place to punish the inhabitants of the earth for their iniquity. The earth also shall disclose her blood, and shall no more cover her stain.

SKIFF. Plague take ye and yer crazy gab. Go join the Salvation Army. (*Aside.*) I was a fool for speaking to her, but she excited my curiosity with her "It is written in blood." This murder has given me blood on the brain.

MAUD. Gab, crazy gab. (*Laughing wildly, exit at R., dropping letter.*)

SKIFF (*picking up letter*). Tarnation! A letter. (*Opens it.*) Gracious! it's Bill Harvey's handwriting!

(*Enter MAUD, R., in haste.*)

MAUD (*snatches letter and exit at R.*). It's written with blood, and it tells of blood.

SKIFF (*surprised*). Well, I'll be blowed! This beats fishing for bullfrogs. That's Bill's fist, sure as preaching. Didn't have time to make out the writing. It was in red ink — that's what she means by, "It's written with blood, it tells of blood." She was on the river the time of the murder — I saw her. Two to one she possesses the key to the mystery! (*Starts out at R., in haste, runs into WEBSTER, who enters, and falls down.*) Gosh all fish-hook! (*Getting up.*) Got yer dinner mighty quick. (*Aside.*) Always turning up when he ain't wanted.

WEBSTER. I was so taken up with the scenery abou there, I concluded to let it go.

SKIFF (*aside*). Ye'll be taken up by an officer about here before I get through with ye. (*To WEBSTER.*) I never knew ye to do as ye said.

WEBSTER. Be careful. Your "sass" is about played out, do you hear?

SKIFF. I ain't deaf.

WEBSTER (*aside*). I heard Crazy Maud's laugh. Wonder if he saw her. I half think he's looking for the hag. (*To SKIFF.*) You want to remember what I say.

SKIFF. You don't say so?

WEBSTER (*aside*). His impertinence is past limit. (*Draws knife and turns on SKIFF, stabbing at him.*) Take that!

SKIFF (*catching knife and taking it away*). And so you would kill me? And with a knife, as the ferryman was murdered? (*Struggling with WEBSTER.*) This goes to show ye are the murderer. I know well enough ye are.

WEBSTER (*struggling*). Know what ye are a mind to; you can't prove anything.

SKIFF (*throwing WEBSTER*). Ye wait and see. Enough will be proved to hang ye. (*Getting knife away from WEBSTER, holds it off.*) So ye would let daylight into me with this knife?

WEBSTER (*cries loudly*). Help! Help! Murder!

SKIFF. Yer coward! Do you think I would take yer miserable life?

OFFICER (*rushing in at R.*). What's this? Attempted murder? (*Pulls SKIFF off of WEBSTER.*) What! Brigham Webster and Asa Skiff?

WEBSTER. He attempted my life. He is angered because I testified against his friend Herbert Gilder at the Harvey inquest.

SKIFF. Liar! I never attempted to murder ye. Ye sprang on me and attempted to kill me with this knife. I throwed ye, and took it away. (*To OFFICER.*) This is the gospel truth.

(*Enter PROUTY, R.*)

PROUTY. More news!

OFFICER. Well, it may be, but I must arrest you. (*Puts hand on SKIFF'S shoulder.*) Come with me; you were found with the

knife in your hand down on the man. The law holds you, under the circumstances.

SKIFF. To the old boy with the law! It lets the guilty go free, and holds the innocent.

WEBSTER (*aside*). He hits the nail on the head. I've got no reason to complain though. His arrest takes him out of my way. Couldn't have been better had I planned it.

PROUTY (*to OFFICER*). Just give me the facts in the case.

(OFFICER and PROUTY talk together, PROUTY taking notes in his book during the time. SKIFF makes faces and shakes fist at WEBSTER, who lights cigar, smiling at him mockingly.)

SKIFF (*shaking his fist at WEBSTER*). Darn ye!

WEBSTER. Ha — ha!

OFFICER (*pulling SKIFF by the shoulder*). Come along.

WEBSTER. Suppose you want me to swear out the charge.

OFFICER. Yes.

SKIFF (*to WEBSTER*). Ye'll have a charge to answer yet. It won't always be cat fish and no bait.

(*Exit OFFICER with SKIFF, followed by WEBSTER, L.*)

PROUTY. Following the officer on the quiet, I found he was searching for the body of Idell Harvey. Then this occurs. Another chapter in the Harvey case. More sensation. (*Going out at L.*) A clear scoop on the other papers.

(*Enter MAUD, R., leading IDELL HARVEY by the arm.*)

IDELL. Woman, you know not what you do. Give me my liberty — let go my arm.

MAUD. No, no; they'll kill you. I'll guard you.

IDELL. Let go, I implore you; why did you hold the pistol to my head to keep me from crying out at the unjust arrest? 'Twas the innocent who was arrested.

MAUD. They would kill you. Maud knows.

(*Enter WEBSTER, L., looking on the ground as though searching for something.*)

WEBSTER (*aside*). I lost my watch here somewhere in the struggle. (*Sees IDELL and MAUD and dodges to one side unnoticed.*) Ah!

IDELL (*aside*). Fate is against me. She overtook me here. and at such a time. (*Struggling.*) In the name of justice, give me my liberty. This mad freak of yours is punishing the innocent, while the guilty go free. It is worse than madness to think I will be murdered.

MAUD. Guard you I must and shall.

IDELL. No, no! (*Aside.*) I must escape. (*Gives a sudden pull*

and push, sending MAUD down among the rocks at R. wing, so she falls off stage.) Free! But I fear I have injured the poor woman badly. (Looking down among the rocks.) No, she is only stunned. (Starts to exit at L.) Now to explain all.

WEBSTER (springing and catching her by the arm). At last — (IDELL screams and faints, noise of breaking brush outside at R.)

WEBSTER (going out at L. carrying IDELL in his arms). Some one approaches; I must out of this in haste.

(Raise Forest Drop Scene.)

SCENE SECOND.— Office, desk at C.; chairs at R. and L. of desk, which is littered with papers. Mantel bed at back. Enter LEWIS PROUTY at door.

PROUTY (taking off hat and gloves). News — news of every description. The papers want to pay me a regular salary, instead of "space rates;" I am making too much to suit them. (Sits down in chair at desk, and quickly jumps up — holding a letter file in his hand.) Gracious! that's a "scare head." (Putting file on table, sits down again.) I like to get things down to a point, but I don't like to sit on them. It is too much of a "fat take." (Writing.) Speaking of points, reminds me that the last time I called on my tailor for credit, he pointed me to the door. I pointed for another establishment to try my luck, but it was no go. The points I have written up in the Harvey case have brought my debts to a point where I have paid them. Now the point is, can I get trusted again. (Rap outside.) Come in. (Lays down pen. Enter ADA BROMLEY at door. PROUTY offers her a chair, bowing low.) Be seated, madam. (She sits down.) To whom do I owe the honor of this call?

ADA (presenting card). Miss Ada Bromley.

PROUTY (sitting down). Ah! Miss Bromley, I am most happy to meet you. Your business — what is it?

ADA. You are a reporter, and a literary critic.

PROUTY. These pursuits provide for my existence.

ADA. I have a poem.

PROUTY. One of your own composition?

ADA. Yes, sir.

PROUTY (aside). Probably it is Beautiful Spring. (To ADA.) Well?

ADA. I fail to make some of the lines rhyme, so I called to see if you would help me correct them, knowing your ability.

PROUTY (aside). Ability! (To ADA.) I shall be pleased to aid you, if possible.

ADA. Thank you. The poem is entitled "A Maiden's Love." (Taking MSS. from pocket.) It is the last lines that trouble me; if you will be so kind as to suggest something that will rhyme, I shall be greatly obliged.

PROUTY. It will be a pleasure, I assure you. (*Aside.*) "A Maiden's Love." Wonder if it is a poodle or a pug.

ADA. I will read it. The first verse runs —

PROUTY (*aside*). Don't let it run away.

ADA (*reads*):—

"How softly sweet the Autumn air,
The dying woodland fills,
And nature turns from restful care"—

PROUTY. "To anti-bilious pills."

ADA. Isn't that going from the sublime to the ridiculous?

PROUTY. It's just the thing. Such passages are what make poems popular. Pills rhyme with fills. Fills — pills. See?

ADA. Perhaps you are right; you ought to know. The second verse reads (*reading*):—

"The dove-eyed kine upon the moor—
Look tender, meek and sad—
While from the valley comes the roar"—

PROUTY. "Of the matchless liver pad."

ADA. You must remember this is a sentimental poem.

PROUTY. Certainly. Pad ends with ad, the same as sad — and thus the second and fourth lines coincide. Then again there is nothing like ending a verse up lively. See?

ADA. Oh! This is my first attempt, you see, hence I do not understand the rules well.

PROUTY (*aside*). A maiden's first poem on a maiden's love. (*To ADA.*) You do yourself credit.

ADA. Thank you. The third verse is — (*reading*):—

"How sadly droops the dying day,
As night springs from the glen,
And evening twilight seems to say"—

PROUTY. "The old man's drunk again." No, that won't hardly do. It is too old altogether. This is better—

"How sadly droops the dying day,
As night springs from the glens,
And evening twilight seems to say;—
Let's skip away like hens."

There, that's just the thing. Every one feels like skipping by twilight. (*Aside.*) I've had to skip at night to get rid of my board-bill. (*To ADA.*) Twilight is nature's balm of peace. The verse will be the poem's gem.

ADA. What an ear you do have for metre.

PROUTY (*aside*). Yes I'm always sure to meet her, — the washerwoman with my wash bill, — if I don't dodge lively. (*To ADA.*) It's nothing compared to your genius. If I was only such

a starter of poetry as you, I would make my fortune. I am no good on the start. Continue.

ADA (*reading*): —

“ The merry milk-maid’s sombre song,
Re-echoes from the rocks :
As silently she trips along ” —

PROUTY. “ With holes in both her socks.”

ADA. That will never do.

PROUTY. Why yes, it will, too. It will give the poem the appearance of truth. For ten to one it is the truth, and facts are what the public demand. Then again, socks and rocks rhyme beautifully.

ADA. Well, it shall be as you say. The next verse is as follows. (*Reading*). —

“ And close behind the farmer’s boy
Trills forth his simple tunes,
As he slips behind the maidens cry ” —

PROUTY. “ In his shirt and pantaloons.”

(*Sound of fire-bells outside; cries of “ Fire — fire — the jail is on fire.”*)

PROUTY (*jumping up*). The jail on fire! Good Heaven! it is full of prisoners.

ADA (*getting up*). You are not going?

PROUTY (*surprised*). Not going?

ADA. I have not finished the poem.

PROUTY. Poem — I am a reporter, and a reporter’s place is where there is danger — to report. (*Starts for door and stops, speaking aside.*) Hang it all! it is not right to leave her like this. This comes with fooling with sentimental woman. Ah, I have it. (*To ADA.*) Will you accompany me to witness the fire?

ADA. And we will finish the poem when we come back. I shall be pleased to go.

PROUTY (*offers his arm, which she takes*). We will away at once. (*Outside, cries of “ fire ” repeated.*)

PROUTY (*running across stage to door, dragging ADA with him*). The jail on fire, and the reporter of the *Northern Daily News* and correspondent of *Thompson Review* not on the spot!

ADA (*frustrated*). Oh! oh! look out. Be careful, you’ll surely break my neck. (*Going out at door.*) Oh! oh! stop!

(*Exeunt ADA and PROUTY; after a pause, enter WEBSTER.*)

WEBSTER (*entering at door*). Here’s just the place to keep myself until after the fire. The reporter will not put in his appearance until he has learned the last fact. Then I have just arrived, and called to learn the particulars relative to the fire. If there is any suspicion, this will throw it off. My firing the jail will never be

known. No one saw me near it. Gilder and Skiff will perish in the flames. Rescue is impossible from their cells. Now no testimony will be required of me in the Harvey case. The girl must marry me. Marriage will answer all purposes, and make the Buckley estate doubly mine.

ADA (*entering at door*). Reporters are so queer. But Prouty is real nice, though; he thinks "A Maiden's Love" just delightful.

WEBSTER. So do I.

ADA (*startled*). How you frightened me! I did not notice you. Business called me here.

WEBSTER. I called to learn about the fire, knowing Reporter Prouty would have all the facts.

ADA. He will be able to tell you all about it. He is at the fire.

WEBSTER (*aside*). I wish the deuce had her. Suppose I must make myself agreeable to her. (*To ADA*.) Whom may I call you?

ADA (*presenting card*). Miss Ada Bromley.

WEBSTER (*takes a card and writes his name and presents it*). Please accept mine.

ADA (*reading*.) Brigham Webster. (*Aside*.) I wonder if he likes poetry. I rather admire him. He must be poetical. (*To WEBSTER, placing card in her pocket and taking out MSS*.) A Maiden's Love is —

WEBSTER. A splendid thing.

ADA. No, no; you are too hasty in catching my meaning. (*Aside*.) I almost believe he is taken with my appearance. (*To WEBSTER*.) "A Maiden's Love" is a poem. (*Aside*.) I wonder if my hair is all right in the back. (*Looking over shoulder*.) It must be. (*To WEBSTER*.) "A Maiden's Love" was composed by me.

WEBSTER (*aside*). That's it. I knew there was something wrong with her. (*To ADA*.) Indeed!

(*Enter PROUTY at door, face covered with streaks of crock.*)

PROUTY (*writing*). "Terrible fire! The County Jail destroyed! Prisoners Burned Alive! Herbert Gilder and Asa Skiff among the Dead! The Bodies in Ashes! Cause of Fire Unknown!"

WEBSTER (*aside*). My plans were well laid.

ADA. "A Maiden's Love" —

PROUTY (*interrupting*). What! Miss Bromley and Mr. Webster?

WEBSTER. The fire — what are the full details?

ADA. My poem — "A Maiden's Love" —

PROUTY (*hanging up hat*). Excuse me; I cannot attend to anything at present. (*Sitting down at desk*.) Must write out the fire in full at once, so as to get it into the afternoon edition. (*Writing*.) Call again.

WEBSTER (*aside*). Quite satisfactory to me. I have shown myself and learned the result. Rather tough on the girl. (*To PROUTY*). You are excusable.

ADA (*aside*). He might hear the rest of the poem. Could it be he was a mind to. (*To PROUTY.*) A Maiden's Love —

PROUTY (*writing*). Nice poem — call again.

WEBSTER (*aside*). Suppose I might as well play the escort out. Seen on the street, the supposition will be that I have been calling with her. Another point to throw off suspicion. (*Offers arm.*) Will you accept my arm?

ADA. Thank you. (*Takes arm; aside.*) He is much more gallant than Mr. Prouty.

WEBSTER. Good-day.

PROUTY. Good-day.

ADA. A Maiden's Love is —

(WEBSTER and ADA *exunt at door.*)

(*Drop Forest Scene.*)

SCENE THIRD. — *Forest.* Enter L. ASA SKIFF, *steadying and leading* HERBERT GILDER; *clothing of both burnt and torn, and general appearance pitiful.*

GILDER. Fire! fire! How it burns. The flames lick the cell windows. Asa is in the next cell. He, too, will be burned alive. My God! this is terrible! Falsely accused — cast into prison — dying by inches — burning to death. Idell, Idell my darling! They have taken her from me. They say I murdered her. Liars! (*Moans and then suddenly continues.*) Hark! What's that? The cell door opens. Asa, Asa, it's Asa! (*Moans.*) How the fire burns. Burn, burn, burn! (*Raising hands toward Heaven, and looking up.*) Soon it will be Heaven.

SKIFF. Poor Herb! His mind wanders. He thinks he's in the cell, and the jail afire. He only remembers my breaking in the door. The flames would soon have done their work. I was not a moment too soon. It is thought we perished; well, let 'em think so. As soon as Herb is himself again, we will show the world what's what. Brigham Webster will receive his deserts. Thinking us dead, we can work our plans without interference.

GILDER. Water, water! I'm burning up!

SKIFF. He grows worse. What shall I do.

GILDER. Water, water! I say, water!

SKIFF. My boy, ye shall have water. (*Takes off coat and makes pillow, laying GILDER down with his head on it.*) Poor fellow! He must have a doctor. (*Exitca.*) No, no! it cannot be. A doctor would bring the bloodhounds of the law upon us. To be cast back into prison would be sure death. Rather than that, it is better that he should die beneath the clear blue sky, with the green boughs of the forest for his death-bed, and no one near to close his eyes but old Asa Skiff.

GILDER. Water — water!

SKIFF. The boy crying for water, and I standing idle. Heaven forgive me. There must be a spring near by. (*Going out at R.*) He must have water at once.

GILDER (*moaning*). Idell! Idell. My betrothed, charged with the murder of her — her father. (*Rising up, excited.*) 'Tis false! They lie — they know they lie. They say I murdered Idell too. Liars! liars! (*Falls back exhausted.*) Water — water! I'm dying for water. Asa — where is Asa? Water — water! I say water.

(*Enter SKIFF with water in a birch bark drinking-dish.*)

SKIFF (*stooping down, raises GILDER'S head and holds water to his mouth*). There, there; here's water.

GILDER (*drinking*). Water — fresh, cold water. How good it is.

SKIFF (*bathes his head with the rest of the water*). He's better now, thank Heaven. (*Noise outside at L.; SKIFF holds his hands over his eyes and looks.*) Some one is coming this way. If discovered, all is lost. (*Gently shaking GILDER.*) Herb! Herb! wake up! (*GILDER starts.*) There is some one approaching.

GILDER (*staggering to his feet*). I will not be taken. They shall not get us. No — no — fire — fire — fire!

SKIFF. His mind wanders, but he understands the danger. (*Steadying him by the arm.*) Rest on me. (*Going out at R.*) To Rocky Lake, and my old cave. No one will disturb us there. (*Exeunt R.*)

(*Enter, L., wood-choppers, singing some woodman's song; axes over shoulders, and dinner-pails in hand. Pass out at R., as scene closes.*)

(*Raise Forest Drop Scene.*)

SCENE FOURTH. — PROUTY'S office, same as scene second. PROUTY sitting in chair with his feet on the table, smoking a cigarette.

PROUTY. Well, the Harvey case is gone up. Gilder is burnt to ashes. The Skiff case is played out also. Skiff is burned to death with Gilder. Two interesting trials prevented. This knocks me out of a pile of money. Wish I was on a regular salary now. (*Pauses and lights another cigarette.*) Well, the question — was the jail set on fire, and who set it, still remains for discussion. I can make a good story of that. (*Rap outside.*) Come in. (*Takes feet down from table and throws away cigarette.*) Walk right in.

(*Enter ADA BROMLEY.*)

ADA. I am sorry to disturb you so soon again.

PROUTY (*aside*). I am sorry, very sorry to have you.

ADA (*sitting down*). But I called on Rev. E. W. Bemis to consult him about "A Maiden's Love," you being so busy you couldn't hear me further with it at the time. I wished to get it completed so as to send it away for publication at once. I read him the verses we had corrected. He was highly indignant; said the poem was shocking, making particular mention of the lines you suggested. He bowed me out of his study, saying no such poetry was ever published or heard of before. (PROUTY *puts handkerchief to his mouth to keep from laughing*.) He insulted me. I want you to report him.

PROUTY. I do not know about that.

ADA. Why?

PROUTY (*aside*). Because I think he was justified. (*To ADA*.) He is pastor of the leading church of the place. Have to be careful what you say about ministers.

ADA. Well, that gives him no right to declare "A Maiden's Love" absurd, and to bow me out of his study.

PROUTY. He was probably very busy.

ADA. He — he — (*Bursts out crying*.) Must my poetical feelings be imposed upon without resentment?

PROUTY (*aside*). I wish I had never heard of the poem. I fear I went a little too far in the matter. (*To ADA*.) Why, I am surprised, Miss Bromley. Don't cry. The poem is all right.

ADA (*crying louder*). He said the last lines were the worst. (*Crying harder*.) You suggested them. I thought they did not seem proper. You spoiled the poem.

BOY (*opening door*). Mister! Crazy Maud has fallen in a fit on the street. The doctor says she can't live. Your place is the nearest. Can they bring her in?

PROUTY. Certainly. (*Puts on hat*.) I will help them. (*Going out*.) There's news in this.

ADA (*takes down mantel bed, fixes it*). Poor thing! I will make it as comfortable as possible for her. (*Pauses*.) I do not know what to think about this poetry. Is Mr. Prouty imposing upon me — making fun at my expense?

(*Enter PROUTY and OFFICERS at door, carrying CRAZY MAUD. They put her on the bed, several people press in at door.*)

OFFICER (*driving them back*). Keep back, you can do no good. Your presence will disturb her. The doctor said — "Let no one in."

PROUTY. That's right. Keep them back. The room is not large enough.

OFFICER (*going out*). I'll see they are kept quiet.

ADA (*bending over MAUD*). Where's the doctor?

PROUTY. He could not stop. Was on his way to see a patient demanding his immediate attention. (*Speaks low*.) He says he could do no good. That she will only live a few minutes. She has ruptured a blood vessel, and is bleeding to death internally.

ADA (*smoothing MAUD's hair*). Poor thing!

PROUTY. The ambulance has been sent for, and will take her to the hospital as soon as possible. She has no home — no friends.

MAUD (*moaning*). Everything is bright, so bright. (*Partly rising up*.) I see a cloud — a cloud of silver lined with gold and diamonds bright. Beyond is a beautiful river — Jordan's waters — The ship of life is on the shore ready for Paradise. It is waiting — it's waiting for me.

ADA (*fanning MAUD*). My poor woman, be calm, lie still and rest.

MAUD. Be calm — rest! Where is there rest this side the grave? No — no! Misery and woe — sorrow and remorse. (*Suddenly rises up, letters falling out of dress*.) I see — yes, I see angels in the air. (*Falling back*.) They are calling me, — I hear their voices, voices sweet.

PROUTY (*picking up papers*). The doctor was right in saying she could not live, that his presence was needless. The hand of death is upon her brow. (*Reading papers*.) What are these papers?

ADA (*fanning MAUD*). She is quietly sinking to rest.

PROUTY (*reading*). A history of the crazy creature's life previous to her insanity. (*Holding up the death letter*.) And this? (*Opening it*.) Nothing but a blank sheet, what does it mean?

MAUD (*rising up*). Mean? Mean? It means volumes.

PROUTY (*perplexed*). Volumes!

MAUD (*falling back*). It's written with blood — it tells of blood. (*Dies*.)

ADA. Dead! Her troubled spirit is at rest.

PROUTY. Peace to her ashes. (*Holding paper at arm's length, and looking at it intently*.) A Mystery!

(*Positions. ADA bending over MAUD, covering the face with a handkerchief. PROUTY at C., holding letter as stated.*)

CURTAIN.

ACT III.

SCENE FIRST. — *Rocky Lake, surrounded by rocks and trees. Sound of team in the distance. ASA SKIFF puts his head out from cave in the ground.*

SKIFF (*looking about*). What's that? (*Getting out of cave*.) A team on the old sled road. (*Looking out at L*.) Hardly ever knew of any one driving on the road before. The old Lake House

that hasn't been occupied these twenty years is the only house anywhere near here. That's haunted, and no one goes near it. The team can't be going there. Perhaps it is crazy Maud out with a hitch-up. If it is, I will have that letter she has got or "bust."

GILDER (*getting out of cave*). What is it, Asa?

SKIFF (*cautioning him by a gesture to speak low*). A team.

GILDER (*surprised*). A team — who's with it? (*Both look anxiously.*)

SKIFF. I think it's crazy Maud that I was telling you about. It is either a lunatic or a rascal.

GILDER. You are right. Neither a sane nor an honest person would drive on such a road.

(*A whip snaps outside, and there is a cry of "Get up" — "Go long." Whip cracks again.*)

SKIFF. Here comes the team around the bend. It is a covered carriage.

GILDER (*excited*). Brigham Webster is driving.

SKIFF (*excited*). Jumping bullfrogs, you are right!

GILDER. He's alone — something is up.

SKIFF. Wish it was himself, hanging up to a tree. Ah, he is going by us.

GILDER (*going out at L.*). We must follow him. There is no telling what might result. The team must not be lost sight of for an instant.

SKIFF (*going out at L.*). Not for the wiggle of a "jollywog's tail." We'll spear the sucker.

(*Enter PROUTY, R., followed by two OFFICERS.*)

PROUTY. This way — the game is right ahead.

OFFICER. You are sure we are on the right track.

PROUTY. As sure as I am reporter of the *Northern Daily News* and correspondent of the *Thompson Review*.

OFFICER. We are all right.

(*All exeunt at L.*)

(*Raise Lake Scene.*)

SCENE SECOND. — *Old-fashioned chamber. Tables at R. Chair L. of table. IDELL HARVEY seated at table, her head resting on her arms on the table.*

IDELL (*raising her head*). Tears will do no good. (*Wiping eyes with handkerchief.*) My lot is hard and bitter, but I must keep my courage. Had I only reached the village, all would have been explained. Herbert and the fisherman would have escaped

their awful fate, and Brigham Webster would have been in their place. How triumphant he looked when he brought me the paper with the account of the fire and their death. The villain! Oh, that I had the strength to strangle him. Crazy Maud in her madness was right to guard me, but I might as well be dead as held a prisoner here. Were it not for the faint hope of escape, I would take my life. All that were dear to me are dead—at rest in Heaven. All I have to live for is to expose this most cursed of conspiracies. (*Crying and resting head on table.*) God grant me this, and I am willing to die.

(*Enter WEBSTER at door with key.*)

WEBSTER (*locking door behind him*). Hello there?

(*IDELL pays no attention.*)

WEBSTER. Hello, I say!

(*IDELL makes no reply.*)

WEBSTER. Sulky, eh. Well, you will feel better soon. I'm going to New York.

IDELL (*aside*). Will feel better—going to New York? Can this mean my liberty? (*To WEBSTER, getting up.*) What do you mean?

WEBSTER. Found your tongue, have you? Well, I'm glad of it. You go to New York with me.

IDELL (*surprised*). I go to New York.

WEBSTER. Yes. In New York you are to marry me.

IDELL. Marry you! You monster—you murderer. I will die first.

WEBSTER. No; you will marry me first, you can die then if you want to. (*Aside.*) I will help you, too. The property shall be twice mine.

IDELL. That you should dare to mention marriage to me. No minister will ever perform the ceremony.

WEBSTER. I have a friend in the city who is a minister. He will do anything for money.

IDELL. Such a minister must be a friend of yours. You can never take me to New York. I will expose you to the first person we meet.

WEBSTER. Little good that will do. You are insane.

IDELL. Insane?

WEBSTER. Yes. (*Taking paper out of pocket.*) Yes, here are the papers properly made out to prove it.

IDELL (*reading*). This says Idell Webster.

WEBSTER. Meaning my sister. That's you for the occasion.

IDELL. How could such a paper be procured?

WEBSTER. A girl named Ada Bromley rode out with me. She

is a would-be poet, slightly deranged at the best. Taking dinner at a town we drove to, where she wished to see a publisher of whom she had heard, I administered Cannabis Indica to her in some wine. While insane from its effects, she was examined by two doctors of the place, as my sister. This paper was given to commit her to a New York asylum. I then drove away with the girl, and the effect of the drug soon wore off. I informed her that she fainted at the table as the result of too much brain work. All was satisfactory.

IDELL. Wretch!

WEBSTER. You will now take her place. Frequent administrations of the drug will produce all that is desired. Such you shall receive until after the marriage ceremony.

IDELL. I will never take it.

WEBSTER. Easy to say, but impossible to prevent.

IDELL. You can never get me to New York, can never take me from here without my being recognized by some one in this vicinity.

WEBSTER. I have a team, and shall drive across country and take a train at a distant station. Then again, the change I shall make in your appearance will prevent recognition. (*Taking shears from inside pocket, catches her by the arm.*) Off comes your hair, to begin with.

(*IDELL screams. Door breaks open and HERBERT GILDER rushes in, followed by ASA SKIFF.*)

GILDER (*knocking WEBSTER down*). Idell! Idell!

IDELL. Herbert!

(*Clasp each other in their arms.*)

SKIFF (*greatly excited*). Glory hallelujah!

GILDER (*kissing IDELL*). Darling!

IDELL (*kissing GILDER*). Alive — not dead!

SKIFF (*aside*). Pretty live kiss for a dead man.

IDELL. I read that both you and Asa perished in the fire.

GILDER. And it was said that I had murdered you.

(*WEBSTER gets partly up.*)

SKIFF (*knocking him down*). No, ye don't. Lay there (*putting his foot on him*), blast ye — lay there.

GILDER. You are getting excited, Asa. Guard him, but treat him as a human being.

SKIFF. There ain't nothing human to him.

IDELL. How did you find me?

SKIFF (*aside*). How did she get here? Where has she been all this time? (*Putting his foot on WEBSTER'S neck.*) I'll choke it out of him.

GILDER. It is a long story. To cut it short for now, we escaped from the fire through Asa's bravery, took refuge in a cave, dis-

covered Webster with a team, and followed him here as fast as possible. Now, how came you here?

IDELL. Brigham Webster brought me. He proposed to make me his wife. He said I should marry him.

SKIFF. Skinning alive is too good for him.

GILDER. Now we will face the public. (*Suddenly.*) Idell — do you know I am charged with the murder of your father? (*Putting her from him.*) The coroner's jury found me guilty.

IDELL (*placing her hand on his shoulder*). I know all and believe you innocent.

(*GILDER embraces her.*)

SKIFF (*aside*). That's the stuff!

GILDER. Now I will give myself up to await my trial.

(*Enter PROUTY at door, followed by OFFICERS.*)

PROUTY. No, you won't. All is known. Brigham Webster is the murderer of William Harvey.

SKIFF (*excited*). Hurrah! Herb's clear! Glory hallelujah! I always said it was Webster.

WEBSTER (*springing up*). 'Tis a lie! 'tis false!

OFFICER. The evidence is complete. (*Taking him by the arm.*) I arrest you for murder.

SECOND OFFICER (*taking WEBSTER by other arm*). John Aldrich, you have come to the end of your rope.

WEBSTER. John Aldrich?

OFFICER. Yes; you are known at last.

WEBSTER (*defiantly*). My name is Brigham Webster. You cannot prove the Harvey murder against me.

PROUTY. Do not be too sure.

GILDER. The proof —

IDELL. Yes, the proof —

SKIFF. Let it drive.

PROUTY. You know crazy Maud?

OMNES. Yes.

PROUTY. She died in my office from the rupture of a blood-vessel. In her possession I found two papers — one a history of her life previous to her insanity, and the other a paper that appeared to be blank. Close examination showed it had been written upon at some time. In dying Crazy Maud cried — "It is written with blood — it tells of blood." Tests proved her strange saying to be true, and showed Brigham Webster, alias John Aldrich, to be the murderer of the ferryman.

IDELL. Crazy Maud dead! Poor women!

WEBSTER. A ridiculous, cock-and-bull story. Blood cannot be brought out after it has faded, providing anything should be written with it.

PROUTY. Yes it can. The blank page under chemical treat-

ment revealed a letter—a letter written by William Harvey, the ferryman, with his death blood.

IDELL. A letter of blood! Father's dying act!

PROUTY (*taking paper from pocket*). Here is a copy of the letter.

WEBSTER. Where is the original? None of your trumped-up cases on me.

PROUTY. In the keeping of an eminent specialist of Boston, who performed the test. There is no half-way business to this.

WEBSTER. You can prove nothing. I defy the whole of you.

PROUTY. We can prove everything. Here is the letter. (*Reads.*) "I, William Harvey, am dying, murdered by George Buckley, alias John Aldrich, alias Brigham Webster. Idell Harvey is not my daughter, but the only child of Lord Henry Buckley, now dead. There are documents in my trunk to prove it. Signed, William Harvey."

IDELL. Not his daughter! I never should have dreamed it; he was so kind.

SKIFF. Yer a Lord's daughter. (*Bowing.*) My lady, I always knew there was a little something extra to ye. (*Aside.*) This will make Herb a step-lord.

GILDER. Continue—give us all the facts.

PROUTY. The documents mentioned in the death letter were found, and afford ample proof of this man's motive to the crime. Idell Harvey, or Idell Buckley as she has the right to be known, is this scoundrel's cousin (*indicating WEBSTER*), and the only life between him and the Buckley estate to which she is sole heiress. With William Harvey alone rested this secret, which, thank God, he has bequeathed to the girl whom crime first placed in his keeping, but whose love made of him a better man, in his death letter.

WEBSTER (*breaking away from officers, snatches pistol from his belt, shoots himself and falls to stage*). You have got the call on me. I throw up the game. (*Raising partly up.*) Idell, Idell Buckley.

IDELL (*bending over him*). Yes—

WEBSTER (*gasping*). Can you forgive me my sin? I know I have done wrong. It was the one object of my life to possess the Buckley estate as well as the title at whatever cost. Oh, what a villain I have been! (*Pleadingly.*) Can you—will you forgive me?

IDELL. God judges all. May he be merciful to you.

WEBSTER (*falling back, dead*). Even to me!

IDELL. Misguided man! He is dead.

OFFICER (*aside to other OFFICER*). The hangman's lost a job.

PROUTY (*aside*). Not a cent to be made by a trial. (*To party.*) This beats all my experience as reporter of the *Northern Daily News* and correspondent of *Thompson's Review*.

SKIFF. It beats horn-pouting—horn-pouting in a boat.

IDELL. How strange.

GILDER. Right is bound to triumph over wrong.

SKIFF (*suddenly stepping up to IDELL and GILDER and clasping their right hands together*). Righted and united.

PROUTY. Full account in the *News and Review*. Order extra copies for your friends.

POSITION.

(IDELL and GILDER clasped hands, with SKIFF behind them at R. WEBSTER on floor at C. OFFICERS in background. PROUTY at L.)

CURTAIN.

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