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Dramatic Publishing

THE WIDOW'S PLIGHT

or

VIRTUE VICTORIOUS

A Burlesque Melodrama



The Dramatic Publishing Company

The Widow's Plight or Virtue Victorious

A burlesque melodrama. By Louise Helliwell and Marion H. Willoughby. Cast: 4m., 5w. Your audience will hiss the villain as he steals the papers and will cheer for the valiant Launcelot Blitherington as he defends the swooning widow. The villain is determined to force Araminta to marry him. To do this, he steals her marriage lines. Without them, the plight of the youthful widow is sad indeed. Of course, all ends with virtue victorious! *One int. set.*

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A Burlesque Melodrama in One Act
by
Louise Helliwell and Marion H. Willoughby

The Widow's Plight
or
Virtue Victorious



THE DRAMATIC PUBLISHING COMPANY

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The Widow's Plight

or

Virtue Victorious

A Burlesque Melodrama in One Act

FOR FOUR MEN AND FIVE WOMEN*

CHARACTERS

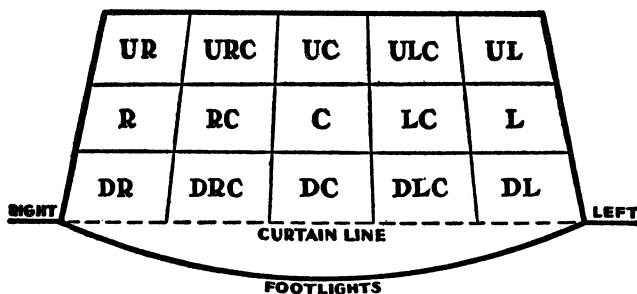
ARAMINTA HEARTENSOLE	<i>a poor young widow</i>
MRS. CROCKETT	<i>her mother</i>
MAZDA	<i>her child, the light of her life</i>
BLUDSOE HEARTENSOLE	<i>her brother-in-law</i>
TOBIAS TROUT (LAUNCELOT BLITHERINGTON)	
.	<i>a young fireman</i>
HERODIOUS BLITHERINGTON	<i>Tobias Trout's father</i>
MRS. SARTIN	<i>Araminta's neighbor</i>
MRS. PERT	<i>another neighbor</i>
A POLICEMAN	<i>himself</i>

PLACE: *The living-room in Mrs. Crockett's humble dwelling at Grandpap's Crossings, Indiana.*

TIME: *Christmas Eve, 1870.*

*NOTE: If desired, all the parts may be taken by women. This play is enhanced by careful authentic costuming, but if such costuming is not obtainable, old-fashioned clothes suggestive of the period may be used successfully. The play should be performed broadly, as a frank burlesque. The make-up, in the main, should be in keeping with the tradition of the period, rather heavy and exaggerated in most cases. *Araminta's* make-up, however, should make her appear delicate and fragile.

CHART OF STAGE POSITIONS



STAGE POSITIONS

Upstage means away from the footlights, *downstage* means toward the footlights, and *right* and *left* are used with reference to the actor as he faces the audience. R means *right*, L means *left*, U means *up*, D means *down*, C means *center*, and these abbreviations are used in combination, as: U R for *up right*, R C for *right center*, D L C for *down left center*, etc. One will note that a position designated on the stage refers to a general territory, rather than to a given point.

NOTE: Before starting rehearsals, chalk off your stage or rehearsal space as indicated above in the *Chart of Stage Positions*. Then teach your actors the meanings and positions of these fundamental terms of stage movement by having them walk from one position to another until they are familiar with them. The use of these abbreviated terms in directing the play saves considerable time, speeds up rehearsals, and reduces the amount of explanation the director has to give to his actors.

The Widow's Plight

or

Virtue Victorious

SCENE: *The living-room of Mrs. Crockett's humble dwelling at Grandpa's Crossings, Indiana. The general impression is one of genteel poverty. A door in the R wall at center leads to the street. In the L wall at center is another door leading to the other rooms of the modest dwelling. Below the door R is a chest of drawers, while above the door R, in the U R corner, is a straight chair. There is an old rocker at L C. A small round table stands against the wall D L. There is a wastebasket downstage of it. In the center of the back wall is a fireplace. Above the fireplace, in a very ornate frame, is a portrait of Araminta's husband. He is a very stern, much be-whiskered gentleman. There are lighted candles on either side of the mantel U C and on the table D L.]*

AT RISE OF CURTAIN: MRS. CROCKETT is seated in the rocker L C, knitting. She is middle-aged, gray-haired, and matronly. Her hair is parted in the center and brought to a knot in the back. She wears a plain old-fashioned dress in gray, brown, or black. She knits in silence for several seconds. Then the door L slowly opens and MAZDA, dressed in a long flannel nightgown and slippers, enters. She is around seven or eight, a plump little girl with golden curls falling over her shoulders. (This part may be taken by an older person impersonating a little girl.) MAZDA carries a rag doll. She trips eagerly to MRS. CROCKETT as she speaks.]

MAZDA. Where is my sweet mother, Grandmother?

MRS. CROCKETT [*motioning toward the door R*]. She has gone out, my pet. [*She lifts MAZDA to her lap.*]

MAZDA. That I know, but where has she gone? Do not spare my childish ears. I insist upon knowing.

MRS. CROCKETT [*dolefully*]. She has gone to pick up coal along the railroad tracks, my darling, to keep your precious feet warm. [*And she squeezes the little feet.*]

MAZDA. Oh, Grandmother, on Christmas Eve? I cannot bear the thought! Is not the wind cold? Is it not storming? [*She strains her ear toward the door R.*]

[*No sound, however, of any sort comes from offstage R.*]

MRS. CROCKETT. Indeed, it is a bitter night! But what will not mother-love do for the object of its affections! Come, little one, it is time to say your prayers.

MAZDA [*hopping down, kneeling left of MRS. CROCKETT, mumbling*].

"Now I lay me down to sleep.
I pray the Lord my soul to keep.
If I should die before I wake,
I pray the Lord my soul to take."

[*She mumbles these four lines so that they are practically inaudible; then she continues loudly.*] God bless my dear mother, my granny, and my poor dead pap, wherever he may be.

MRS. CROCKETT [*devoutly*]. Amen. Amen.

[*MAZDA rises. MRS. CROCKETT kisses her, and MAZDA runs off to bed, out L. MRS. CROCKETT sits back, shaking her head sadly as she continues to knit.*]

MRS. CROCKETT. Ah, the poor little innocent thing! What does the future hold in store for our pet? [*Rising and throwing her hands upward, knitting and all.*] Heaven look down and pity us! [*Walking from L to R stage in anxiety.*] No food in the house, no coal—and no beer! And that villain, Bludsoe Heartensole, making our days horrible with his importunate demands! . . . What a night! How the wind howls and groans.

[MRS. CROCKETT *pauses in her pacing and looks expectantly toward the door R. Nothing happens for a moment, and then she repeats her line.*]

MRS. CROCKETT [*insistently*]. How the wind howls and groans!

[*There is a sudden sound of the wind howling offstage R. MRS. CROCKETT, with a relieved look, resumes her pacing.*]

MRS. CROCKETT. Where can my daughter be? It is time she were home. Perhaps she has fallen among evil men! Perchance that wretch Bludsoe has again waylaid her! Oh, how anxious I am! [*She goes to the door R, opens it, and peers out.*] How it snows! [*She waits; no snow appears. She speaks again, insistently.*] How it snows, I say! [*She waits again; still no snow. Then she speaks louder, with determination.*] Indeed, it snows fiercely!

[*A small handful of paper snow is thrown in the door, in her face. MRS. CROCKETT coughs and chokes a bit, but manages to speak with satisfaction.*]

MRS. CROCKETT. At last, it *does* snow! [*She shuts the door and wanders disconsolately back to the rocker.*] Heaven pity all wanderers on a night like this! [*She sits.*]

[MRS. CROCKETT *starts to knit again, when suddenly the door R flies open. There is a terrific howling of the wind accompanied by another handful of snow as ARAMINTA enters. She is young, pretty, graceful, and ingenuous. She wears a black dress with a basque and a very full skirt. She also wears a black shawl or a cape. Her hair is piled high; her make-up is delicate and fragile looking. She closes the door behind her with effort; then she leans against it, momentarily exhausted. She carries a tiny basket of coal over one arm.*]

MRS. CROCKETT [*rising, crossing to her, and helping her to remove her shawl or cape*]. Ah, my poor daughter! You are wet with snow. How have you fared, my child? [*She turns*

D R *and hangs the shawl nonchalantly on a hand which comes out from beyond the wings* D R.]

ARAMINTA [*crossing to C stage*]. Oh, what a time I had!

[*ARAMINTA holds out the basket of coal. MRS. CROCKETT crosses to her and takes it.*]

ARAMINTA. As I plucked these poor little pieces of coal by the tracks, three ugly men came upon me—fierce railroad men. They brutally made sport of my toil; they insulted and mocked my industry. You will not believe me when I tell you. One said, "She's not a bad-looking dame, eh?" and another cried, "Going my way, Babe?" Oh, the shame of it! [*She brings the back of her hand to her forehead and turns away toward L stage, weeping.*]

MRS. CROCKETT [*putting a comforting arm about her*]. The lot of the widow, my dear.

ARAMINTA [*turning to her again, speaking tragically*]. Ah, but I have not told you *all!*

MRS. CROCKETT [*springing away from her with a gasp*]. No?

ARAMINTA. No.

MRS. CROCKETT [*in a trembling voice*]. What else, my child?

ARAMINTA. As I bent beneath my shame, I heard a shout! I raised my head, thus! [*She raises her head high.*] I looked! [*She illustrates by bringing her hand to her eyes and staring hard out front.*] I saw——

MRS. CROCKETT [*breathing the word, as she strains forward herself*]. What?

ARAMINTA [*quickly*]. A protector!

MRS. CROCKETT. Ah-h-h!

ARAMINTA [*growing more dramatic every moment, acting out the tale and impersonating the characters*]. Yes, a heaven-sent protector. By my side stood a noble fire-laddie. "Desist!" he cried. "For shame! Lay off this lady, youse lugs." He was beside himself with chivalrous anger. Then he turned to me. [*She bows low.*] "I trust you will pardon me for addressing you, a stranger, madam," he said—and, oh, what a world of

respect there was in his manly tones—"but perhaps the exigencies of the moment will help to justify this untoward familiarity."

MRS. CROCKETT [*hanging on her every word*]. And you?

ARAMINTA. What could I do, defenseless and alone?

MRS. CROCKETT. True, true, my darling.

ARAMINTA. So I bowed my head and blushed. [*She bows her head and acts embarrassed.*]

MRS. CROCKETT [*nodding her head*]. Quite properly.

ARAMINTA. And he continued: "Permit me to see you safely to your home and the sheltering bosom of your family." I was moved. I took his arm.

[*ARAMINTA takes MRS. CROCKETT'S arm, and they move downstage, D R, to the footlights. A lilting ditty is played as they stroll D R.*]

ARAMINTA. Together we advanced through the storm, he carrying my burden. Thus was I brought safely home.

MRS. CROCKETT [*in a matter-of-fact tone*]. Nice going, dearie. Will you see him again?

ARAMINTA [*tragically*]. Mother, what are men to me! [*She moves upstage to gaze at her husband's portrait above the fireplace U C.*] I laid my heart in the grave beside that of my dear husband. There it moulders, under the cold snows.

MRS. CROCKETT [*matter-of-factly*]. Oh, yes, I forgot that! Well, that's just too bad! A man would come in handy right now. Bludsoe, your rapacious brother-in-law, has been here again in your absence!

ARAMINTA [*registering fear, turning abruptly, bringing her hand to her cheek*]. Oh, say not so!

MRS. CROCKETT. Indeed, I would spare you if I could, but alas, my child, Heaven tries its dear ones. . . . [*She crosses up to her.*] He swears he will wed you.

ARAMINTA [*firmly, standing straight, head raised high*]. Never! Though I and my child beg through the streets, I will never consent to marry him—my own husband's brother. But alas,

how different! How unlike my dear noble husband is this brute. I am still my husband's wife!

[*There is a dramatic pause as she raises high her right arm. A heavy knocking is heard at the door R.*]

MRS. CROCKETT. Hark. Do I not hear a knock?

[*ARAMINTA and MRS. CROCKETT listen in fear. The knocking continues violently.*]

ARAMINTA. Yes, I believe you are right. [*She starts toward the door R.*]

MRS. CROCKETT. Oh, do not venture to open it! It may be Bludsoe.

ARAMINTA [*courageously*]. I will go! What have I to fear? Heaven will protect the poor widow.

[*Just then the door R is thrown open and BLUDSOE HEARTENSOLE stalks in, leering broadly. The villain motif is played as he enters. BLUDSOE is the typical villain of the old-time melodrama, tall and dark, with a long curled black mustache. He wears a frock coat, dark trousers, boots, long black cape, dark slouch hat, and a black ascot tie. ARAMINTA and MRS. CROCKETT start back in terror.*]

BLUDSOE. Ah-hah, me beauty! [*He approaches ARAMINTA, who shrinks back.*] Come, come, my dear, give me a sisterly kiss!

ARAMINTA [*her hand up, palm facing him*]. Do not insult me, sir!

BLUDSOE [*laughing*]. The chit is pleased to be distant. Never mind, the day will come when I shall call you mine!

ARAMINTA [*standing straight and firm*]. I will starve first!

BLUDSOE [*laughing wickedly, twirling his mustache*]. Well, you'll starve anyway. But enough of that—this time I have come only to relieve you of some of that insurance.

ARAMINTA. It is gone! The last penny went this very morning to buy a crust of bread and a sup of milk for my poor innocent toddler.

BLUDSOE. Do you expect me to believe that? [*Seizing her by the wrist.*] Come, out with it!

MRS. CROCKETT [*coming toward them*]. Indeed, it is the truth.

BLUDSOE [*releasing her roughly*]. Very well—we shall see whether you are lying. [*He crosses D L, whirls, and faces them as he speaks.*] Where are your marriage lines?

ARAMINTA [*astonished*]. In my bureau drawer!

BLUDSOE [*twirling his mustache*]. You are sure?

ARAMINTA. Of course, I'm sure. [*She runs to the chest of drawers. Then she begins flinging things wildly to the floor. She is not a perfect housekeeper, and a weird assortment of articles comes to light. Among other things, she pulls out a pair of long black cotton stockings, a batch of long newspaper clippings (which she hastily glances over and sighs), a switch of hair, ostrich plumes, a fancy garter, odds and ends of ribbon and lace, a man's fancy vest (which she holds at arm's length and then kisses), and a mouse trap with a dead mouse, which she throws, screaming, from her. But no marriage lines are there. She turns, horrified, to MRS. CROCKETT.*]

ARAMINTA. GONE!

MRS. CROCKETT. GONE?

BLUDSOE. But perfectly safe, my dear!

ARAMINTA [*looking over at him with horrid suspicion*]. What do you mean?

BLUDSOE. Would you really like to know? [*He comes to c stage.*]

ARAMINTA. Pray, sir, do not torture me! The proof of my purity, the token of my wifeness! [*Still on her knees, clasping her hands, and crawling to him at c.*] Put yourself in my place, and have pity. Where are my marriage lines?

BLUDSOE [*leeringly, as he draws the paper slowly from his pocket*]. Here, my haughty beauty, here in my keeping.

MRS. CROCKETT [*shrieking*]. Oh, horrible!

ARAMINTA [*jumping up*]. Give them back, you wretched man!

[Both ARAMINTA and MRS. CROCKETT reach wildly but unsuccessfully for the paper, MRS. CROCKETT from behind.]

BLUDSOE. Ah-hah, I thought that would bring you to time. [He holds the paper safely out of reach.]

ARAMINTA. Pray, pray, sir—return them to me.

BLUDSOE [laughing cruelly]. When I have the money, my sweet!

ARAMINTA. I have no money—I have told you the truth. [She kneels again, carefully adjusting her skirt to cover her ankles before going on with her speech.] Oh, sir, on my knees I plead with you! Give them back to me.

[As ARAMINTA kneels, heart-rending music is played touchingly. Then MAZDA runs in L and catches BLUDSOE by the left arm.]

MAZDA. Naughty man, what are you doing to my mamma?

BLUDSOE. Look, look at your defenseless child! Her name is *Mud!*

MAZDA [kneeling, left of him, clinging to his trouser leg]. Please, man, be kind to my mamma!

BLUDSOE [throwing MAZDA roughly aside, so that she falls to the floor]. Out of my way!

[MRS. CROCKETT goes to pick up MAZDA. BLUDSOE strides D R, holding the paper above his head. ARAMINTA runs to MAZDA, clasps her to her breast, and sobs noisily.]

BLUDSOE. Weep, weep! Much good it will do you! With these in my possession, who will believe your story?

ARAMINTA [catching her breath]. Surely you cannot do that to me!

BLUDSOE. Oh, no? Everyone shall know of this. Within an hour, the whole town will be talking of it. NOW WHERE IS YOUR GOOD NAME?

[MRS. CROCKETT hastily sends little MAZDA from the room, out L, lest the child hear these dreadful things.]

ARAMINTA [*falling back, her hand at her breast*]. Great Heavens!

BLUDSOE. NOW—will you marry me?

ARAMINTA [*with noble and womanly defiance, the right arm upraised*]. Never!

BLUDSOE. Very well, stubborn wench! But remember, I have you in my power.

[BLUDSOE *flings himself out the door R as the villain motif is played.*]

ARAMINTA [*sadly*]. It is disaster!

MRS. CROCKETT [*a little stronger*]. It is catastrophe!

ARAMINTA [*building it*]. It is stupendous!

MRS. CROCKETT [*achieving the climax*]. It is colossal!

[MRS. CROCKETT and ARAMINTA *fall into each other's arms, weeping.*]

[*The curtain falls to denote a lapse of time. It is appropriate to have one or more members of the cast come out in front of the curtain and sing between scenes. Any numbers popular at that time will make effective and hilarious entr'acte entertainment.*]

AT RISE OF CURTAIN: *The scene is the same. It is one hour later. ARAMINTA is discovered D R, returning the last of the articles to the chest of drawers. A knock is heard at the door R, and ARAMINTA answers it. TOBIAS TROUT enters. TOBIAS is young, manly, and noble in bearing. He has an excellent figure, and his chest is always expanded to its fullest. Preferably, he should be fair-haired to contrast with BLUDSOE. He wears sideburns, a small mustache, a freeman's uniform, and a cap.*

TOBIAS [*taking off his cap*]. What have I heard? Is it true?

ARAMINTA. Why, what do you mean, sir?

TOBIAS [*acting like an embarrassed child, turning away, bang-*

ing his head, and digging one foot into the floor]. I—cannot repeat it. [*He gives a silly giggle.*]

ARAMINTA [*striking her breast*]. Bludsoe? [*With wild distress.*] So soon—

TOBIAS [*bowing his head*]. True. . . .

ARAMINTA. Surely you do not believe this infamous lie?

TOBIAS. Prove it is a lie—I am only too willing to believe!

ARAMINTA [*wildly*]. But how can I?

TOBIAS. Show me your marriage lines, and I shall cast the lie in his teeth!

[*ARAMINTA hangs her head in despair. TOBIAS gazes at her in incredulous sorrow.*]

TOBIAS. You cannot?

[*ARAMINTA shakes her head dumbly.*]

TOBIAS. You have destroyed my faith in womanhood. I shall never see you again. Farewell.

[*TOBIAS goes out R, cap in hand, head sadly averted, his feet dragging. ARAMINTA returns to the chest of drawers in deep dejection, wiping her eyes on any handy garment as she returns it to a drawer. There is another knock on the door R. ARAMINTA, in her sorrow, ignores it. The knock is repeated. MRS. CROCKETT enters L to answer it. MRS. SARTIN and MRS. PERT enter R and cross to C stage with MRS. CROCKETT. MRS. SARTIN carries a very small pumpkin. MRS. SARTIN and MRS. PERT are typical small-town gossips, snippy-looking, and about middle age. MRS. SARTIN is dumpy as to figure, deceptively sweet as to manner. MRS. PERT is thin, angular, sharp-tongued. Her disposition is decidedly acid. She wears glasses perched on her nose; she peers through them in a snoop manner. Both women wear funny old-fashioned clothes suitable for winter weather.*]

MRS. SARTIN. Seeing as how you're hard up, we thought we'd drop in with a pumpkin for your Christmas dinner.

MRS. PERT. Seeing as how we have so many of 'em.

MRS. SARTIN. Just met your handsome brother-in-law. Said he'd been to see you. My—seems like he's here a lot!

[A pregnant silence follows this speech.]

MRS. SARTIN. How long has your husband been dead, anyhow?

ARAMINTA. Two years—*[She pauses, as if thinking, and then finishes briskly.]*—and four days, next Tuesday.

MRS. PERT *[acidly]*. Scarce cold in his grave, is he?

[MRS. PERT and MRS. SARTIN grow more and more suspicious and accusing under their very charitable exterior.]

MRS. SARTIN. I hear you met him in the city—

MRS. PERT. It's funny he never came home to meet your folks.

ARAMINTA *[rising with exaggerated grace and drifting to L stage, speaking with great feeling]*. How often since have I regretted that! Those six sweet years are but a dream of happiness, but, thank Heaven, the cruel fate that struck him down—*[In a perfectly lucid explanatory tone, she interpolates.]*—it was a horse car—left me my little Mazda, the pledge of his affection, of his noble devotion. *[She touches her lips delicately with her handkerchief.]*

MRS. PERT. Did you sue?

ARAMINTA *[coming out of her daze]*. I beg your pardon?

MRS. SARTIN *[as practical as MRS. PERT]*. Did you collect any damages?

MRS. CROCKETT. He had a bit of insurance; but alas, that is gone long since.

[MRS. PERT and MRS. SARTIN look meaningfully at each other.]

MRS. SARTIN *[nodding toward the picture over the mantel]*. Is that him? Him and Bludsoe didn't look much alike, did they? Hardly know they was brothers.

ARAMINTA. Bludsoe featured his mother's side, the Gumpels. *[With pride.]* All the *Heartensoles* are handsome.