

MIRIAM & MAIAH

MIRIAM'S CRIME.

A DRAMA IN THREE ACTS.

A Drama,

IN THREE ACTS.

BY H. T. CRAVEN,

(Member of the Dramatic Authors' Society),

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(Member of the Dramatic Authors' Society),

AUTHOR OF

The Post Boy, My Preserver, Bowled Out, Our Nelly, Village Nightingale,
The Chimney Corner, My Daughter's Debut, Tic-Doloreux, Not to be Done,
Done Brown, Tom Smart, Little Nun, Alonzo the Brave (Burlesque), Fellow
Servants, Blechington House, Card Case, &c., &c.

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MIRIAM'S CRIME.

*First performed at the Royal Strand Theatre
(under the management of Mr. W. Swanborough),
On Friday, October 9th, 1863.*

Characters.

HUFFIN (<i>a Lawyer</i>)	Mr. H. J. TURNER.
BERNARD REYNOLDS	Mr. PARSELLE.
BILES (<i>a Lawyer's Clerk</i>)	Mr. GEO. HONEY.
SCUMLEY	Mr. BELFORD.
DANIEL (<i>a Servant</i>)	Mr. DANVERS.
MIRIAM WEST	Miss KATE SAVILLE.
MRS. RABY	Mrs. MANDERS.

ACTS 1 & 2.—Interior of a House in Fitzroy Square.

well lit, especially the rooms in which the scenes are set, and not much used.

ACT 3.—A Lodging House.

Time occupied—Two Weeks.

COSTUMES MODERN.

MIRIAM and BERNARD in deep mourning after Act I.

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MIRIAM'S CRIME.

ACT I.

SCENE FIRST.— *A handsomely furnished Apartment. Fireplace and good fire, L.; large door, c.; and door R. 2 E.; window, L. 3 E.; lady's escritoire, C.; table, R.; chairs, ottoman, C.; on the wall hangs the portrait of a young lady (Miriam).*

As the curtain rises, a double knock heard—pause. Enter MR. HUFFIN, L. C., following DANIEL (a servant in livery).

HUFF. You're a new servant, I see. Do you know me?

DAN. Sure, in coarse, I know ye well.

HUFF. (crosses to R. C.) What's my name?

DAN. (L., back) I disremember that I ever heard it, sir.

HUFF. (R.) Did you ever see me before?

DAN. I can't say that I have.

HUFF. Then how can you know me? You're Irish, are you not?

DAN. No, sir; but I had the misfortin to live in an Irish family, and I tuk the brogue as childer take the maysles.

HUFF. I never saw you before--how long have you lived here?

DAN. Jest a fortnight exactly, barrin' six days.

HUFF. Eight days in fact. What's become of the other man, Davis?

DAN. (coming down, L.) Well, sir, I'm tould he's married the cook and gone off to Australy. I'm here as a substitute, till they find some fellow wid a strong recommendation; but I'll be thinkin' I fit the place like a bung in a whiskey keg, and there's no doubt at all but I'll be the man-to hould the situation in spite of 'em all.

HUFF. But you're Irish—don't deny it, sir; you're Irish. Now look here: my name is Huffin.

DAN. Guffin?

HUFF. Huffin, fellow. I am Mrs. Wilson's solicitor, and what is more, an old friend of hers. How is she this morning?

DAN. She's aslape; and the doctor who was here awhile agone, says the danger's over.

HUFF. I'm glad to hear it: she has had a severe attack.
Where is Miss West?

DAN. She's been sittin' up all night wid Mrs. Wilson, an' I'll be guessin' she's gone to lie down too.

HUFF. Well; don't disturb them.

DAN. I don't mane to.

HUFF. I'm at home.

DAN. Ye mane ye're goin' home.

HUFF. I mean what I say, sir—I'm at home; that is, I can wait and make myself at home till Miss West comes down; and until she wakes I may be of service in receiving any one who may call. By-the-bye, who is that fellow sitting in the hall?

DAN. Don't know in the laste, sir.

HUFF. What does he want?

DAN. He wanted to see Mrs. Wilson.

HUFF. But you know that no stranger can see her in her present state.

DAN. So I tould him: then he said he'd wait till she was awake and send up a message.

HUFF. Dear me; you should never leave a man like that in the hall. There's my great coat there too!—go and look after it, and if he hasn't already walked off with it bring him here to me. *I'll* see him.

DAN. I'll do that same, sir.

Exit, L. C.

HUFF. So, so! My good friend Mrs. Wilson is once more out of danger. I never knew any one have so many warnings. I have known her for—let me see—eleven years, and during the whole of that time she has been subject to these alarming crises. She was remarkably fortunate to meet with so excellent a companion as Miss West.

Enter DANIEL, L. C., followed by SCUMLEY, a middle-aged man, of disreputable appearance, in somewhat of a seaman's costume.

DAN. The gentleman—I mane the man, sir, who's below.

Exit, C. D.

HUFF. (L., with back to fire) Well, sir?

SCUM. (C.) Well!

HUFF. What have you got to say?

SCUM. What have *you* to say: you sent for me, didn't you?

HUFF. Why are you waiting here?

SCUM. To see Mrs. Wilson.

HUFF. What is your business?

SCUM. Are *you* Mrs. Wilson?

HUFF. You're an impudent fellow. Mrs. Wilson is very ill, and there is no likelihood of your seeing her.

SCUM. But I've come some distance.

HUFF. Pooh! what distance?

SCUM. Twenty thousand miles.

HUFF. Eh?

SCUM. Twenty thousand miles.

HUFF. Oh, then you may go back again.

SCUM. Perhaps you'll fork out my passage money?

HUFF. You'd better call me a fool at once. Look here, my fine fellow; from your style and figure, I can reckon you up in a few words: you've come for an answer to some begging letter; now, I take upon myself to say you'll get nothing.

SCUM. That's the way you reckon up, is it? (*sitting, C.*) Now I'll reckon *you* up. You're some done-up old adventurer on the look-out for a rich widow, and I take upon myself to say—you won't get her.

HUFF. Why you—you—you—I'll tell you who I am; I'm a solicitor, and—(*looking through window L. 2. E.*) I can refer you for the truth of this to that upright gentleman in blue over the way.

SCUM. A peeler?

HUFF. As you say, a peeler.

SCUM. Don't wish to mix with your gentlemanly friends: I wish you a good day.

Exit, L. C.

HUFF. (*following to the door and calling*) Paddy, show this fellow out, and d'ye hear? keep an eye on my great coat in the hall. (*coming down*) An impudent rascal—looks more like a ticket-of-leave bird than anything else. The idea of calling me an—an adventurer, looking out for—confound his impudence!

Enter MIRIAM WEST, door R. 2. E.

MIRIAM. Mr. Huffin.

HUFF. Miss West; how d'ye do? (*shaking hands*) I received your note apprising me of the severe illness of our friend, Mrs. Wilson; but I am delighted to hear she is better.

MIRIAM. I hope she is; I earnestly hope so.

HUFF. No doubt you do; she has been a good friend to you.

MIRIAM. A mother, sir; for I cannot imagine a mother's care to exceed her's—and I had no claim on her. She took me as you know, an orphan into her house, to bring me up as a domestic, and promoted me to be her companion.

HUFF. Because you deserved it, my child; the education which she bestowed on you you took readily, and you devoted your youth to the incessant tending of an invalid. If she has been kind, you have always the gratifying consciousness of deserving it.

MIRIAM. I trust I have; but oh, Mr. Huffin, if she should

die what is to become of me? I haven't another friend in the world.

HUFF. Sit down, child. (*they sit*) Do you know that what you allude to has just occurred to me, and I think it my duty to speak to her on the subject. Some provision ought to be made for you in her will.

MIRIAM. I don't mean that: don't think so meanly of me, sir; *that* never entered my mind: I have no claim on her, besides, my vanity tells me I can earn a living. What I would have said is, that in hers I shall lose the only heart that can feel for me, and we all need *one* to sympathize with.

HUFF. So we do, so we do; and you ought to have a husband.

MIRIAM. Pray, sir, don't jest at such a time.

HUFF. My dear, I'm not jesting; I'm one of those rare birds, a plain blunt lawyer—many think that an anomaly, I never found it so. I have a maxim that a man may be a sound jurist and yet speak his mind and the truth; I'm a father, moreover—a widower, and I say the best protector for you would be a husband. This introduces a few more words which I think necessary. It was for some time a favourite idea of Mrs. Wilson that you should marry her nephew Bernard.

MIRIAM. Cease, I beg.

HUFF. Certainly not, because I want to explain the conduct of the poor invalid upstairs. Imagining that Bernard loved you, she felt assured of shortly seeing you united, and therefore when I drew out her will a year ago, everything (without exception) was bequeathed to him; in fact, the will itself was really needless, since Bernard being her nearest, nay, her *only* relative, is heir-at-law. And now having so far betrayed professional confidence, I must tell you another secret. I always strongly opposed her idea of a union between you and Beranrd.

MIRIAM. (*with emotion*) You—you were right, sir. I never was—worthy of him.

HUFF. He never was worthy of you; he's a scamp.

MIRIAM. No, Mr. Huffin, no. His accomplishments, and the frankness of his nature may have betrayed him into indiscretions; but he has a noble heart.

HUFF. Noble fiddlestick! he's an idle spendthrift, and but for the influence which I have exercised over his aunt, on whom he is wholly dependent, his "noble heart" would in all probability, by this time have ruined her. And yet I like the dog, after all—can't help it: he, like you, is an orphan; but he's not the partner for you.

MIRIAM. (*dejectedly*) No.

HUFF. My daughter Judith is the wife for *him*: a woman of masculine resolve—born to govern—to subdue; but you—he'd break your heart in a month.

MIRIAM. Pray sir, speak no more of it.

HUFF. I don't mean to do so : I've spoken my mind and I've done with it.

Enter DANIEL, C. D. R.

DANIEL. The nurse-woman says Misses is awake now, sir, and will see you if you wish it.

HUFF. I'll come. (*Exit DANIEL, L. C.—aside to MIRIAM*) I'll try and mention that little matter—some provision. *Exit, R. C.*

MIRIAM. She imagined that Bernard loved me ! I thought so once, and felt that in permitting it I deeply wronged him, even when his aunt had told me of her approval. He has seldom been of late ; am I to think that Mr. Huffin's wise opposition has been the cause of this ? Has he been enforced to renounce his regard ? if so he has not suffered more than I have ; but 'tis right ! 'tis right ! Have I, a poor dependent orphan, pretensions to share with him—the only relative of my benefactress, the fortune which must be his ?

Re-enter DANIEL, L. C. showing in CLARKSON BILES.

DANIEL. A gentleman as wants to spake to ye privately all alone by yourself, miss. *Exit L. C.*

BILES. (R.) Miss West—I've once or twice had the pleasure of seeing you two or three times. May I venture to ask after your health ? Health's a blessing ; we ought to be thankful for health.

MIRIAM. (L.) Indeed, sir, I don't remember you.

BILES. You remember Mr. Scrivener ?

MIRIAM. Scrivener—no : unless he was concerned in the purchase of some house property for Mrs. Wilson.

BILES. The same ; a lawyer residing at Walworth. I was his clerk—his managing clerk.

MIRIAM. Possibly.

BILES. You were out of town the last time Mr. Scrivener and I had business with Mrs. Wilson. You and I are alive. We've much to be thankful for. Poor Scrivener, he's dead.

MIRIAM. Indeed ?

BILES. May I sit down and tell you the melancholy history ? Thank you ! (*sits*) Two months ago his premises were burned to the ground—

MIRIAM. Really !

BILES. He was uninsured, and it ruined him. I, at the risk of my life (for my eyebrows were on fire), saved a deed box or two, which I conveyed for safety to my lodgings : all the rest of his papers were consumed ; but, I am happy to inform you that all Mrs. Wilson's leases were in her own possession.

MIRIAM. That was fortunate, sir.

BILES. Most fortunate for *her*; she has much to be thankful for. However, poor Scrivener took the affair to heart, and, being a man of weak mind, died five weeks ago.

MIRIAM. I am sorry for his family.

BILES. He had no family.

MIRIAM. I'm glad of that.

BILES. Yes, he has much to be thankful for. Miss West, I have now an idea of starting in practice as an agent on my own account.

MIRIAM. No doubt you would secure much of your late master's connexion.

BILES. I'd try—I'd try. I feel the elements of success strong within me; but, Miss West, it depends entirely upon you, whether I make up my mind to do this, or embark to-morrow for Queensland.

MIRIAM. On *me*?

BILES. On *you*.

MIRIAM. I am without money, sir; if you have counted on my assistance in that.

BILES. I know it, my dear young lady—I know it. You are of humble birth—so am I; you commenced as a menial—so did I. We have much to be thankful for.

MIRIAM. Sir!

BILES. Don't be offended; I am only explaining the reason which has led me to take the present step.

MIRIAM. Pray, sir, explain your meaning and spare my time, which, through the illness of Mrs. Wilson, is more than usually valuable.

BILES. How long have I been in this room?

MIRIAM. Some ten minutes. Pray proceed, sir.

BILES. Ten minutes? Oh, it will seem too abrupt—too sudden—scarcely delicate.

MIRIAM. Then sir, despairing of understanding you, allow me to wish you good day. (*rising and going, R.*)

BILES. You urge me to it, and I'm thankful. Miss, it isn't much in the way of an articled clerk; but an articled clerk has emotions—I say a clerk has emotions—in corporal sufferings he feels as great a pang as the uneasy head that wears a crown, as the immortal bard has it. Miss West, I love you.

MIRIAM. Sir, you are surely out of your senses!

BILES. I mean honorably; falsehood sits not on Biles's brow. Do you think me worthy of your affection? Will you become the partner of my heart—my prospects—and my name? My name's Biles.

MIRIAM. Preposterous!

BILES. There is nothing preposterous save in the abruptness of the proposal—my devotion is pure.

MIRIAM. Ridiculous!

BILES. You think so? Well, put it in a business way: a girl—that is, a young lady who is dependent, naturally aims at an eligible match. Now you might do worse than accept a professional man, and a man of talent. I have talent: understand me; I'm a man to rise—there's something of the balloon about me.

MIRIAM. To end this insulting interview, sir, allow me to request you to withdraw.

BILES. I'm not a man of family; but no man of family would think of uniting himself to a young woman risen from—

MIRIAM. Go, sir!

BILES. That's very like being turned out. I'm scorned, am I? I've much to be thankful for. Then I'm off to Queensland early to-morrow. Think again.

MIRIAM. Will you force me to ring for assistance?

BILES. Not at all—I'll go. But you must understand, Miss West, I consider I have paid you a great compliment: the offer of marriage from a professional man to a mere promoted domestic is a compliment; and, with that remark, you see the last of Clarkson Biles.

(as BILES is bowing out L. C. he bumps against BERNARD, who enters)

BERNARD. All right—don't apologize.

BILES. I beg your pardon if I did.

Exit, L. C.—MIRIAM crosses to L.

BERNARD. (R.) That's a queer-looking fish: has he been leaving you the first number of an illustrated work, and "call again to-morrow"? Miriam, I'm glad to hear poor old aunty is better.

MIRIAM. (L.) I hope so. Dr. Lambton says that if there is no relapse to day, she may be considered out of danger.

BERNARD. I hope she'll recover suddenly; I want her assistance; for though the dear old soul always lectures me on my extravagance, she never denies me.

MIRIAM. Well, but Bernard, our only thought is now for her recovery.

BERNARD. Yes; I should like to confine my thoughts to that; but some courageous fellows, who have ventured to give me credit, won't let me: yet it makes me feel very like a selfish rascal.

MIRIAM. Bernard; you?

BERNARD. Don't take me too literally; I've got my bright side, for though I know that I shall inherit all the old duchess has, whether she makes a will or dies intestate, yet I would a thousand times rather she lived for many years and doled me out an allowance than place me in comparative opulence by

her death ; she has never been hard upon my waywardness but once—only once.

MIRIAM. Hard upon you, Bernard? so much as she loves you.

BERNARD. Yes, but she touched me on a tender point; I never found her so obstinate before, and that is the reason I have not been here much lately.

MIRIAM. You'll pardon me, Bernard, won't you? but I have thought that unkind—you, the only relative she has in the world.

BERNARD. You're a good sympathizing little creature, and I've a great mind to tell you all about it.

MIRIAM. About what?

BERNARD. I think I ought to tell you, for you have too much good sense to allow it to hurt your feelings. Shall I tell you?

MIRIAM. If it will afford you pleasure.

BERNARD. Pleasure, no! it's a deuced unpleasant subject, but it will ease my mind, for I have been in great doubt whether I have behaved well to you, but if, when you know all, you say I have, why then I shall feel happier; sit down, I'll condense. (*they sit*—BERNARD, R. C., MIRIAM, L. C.) Mind, it's a delicate subject as regards you and me; but we are both strong-minded, giants of intellect, superior to the slaves of mere etiquette. Now first of all, allow me to ask if I have ever made myself too agreeable to you?

MIRIAM. Your question puzzles me.

BERNARD. Of course it does; but you must have perceived, Mirry, that I admired you?

MIRIAM. I—I sometimes thought so.

BERNARD. No doubt about it; I fancied you were rather reserved and cold, but I was resolved to overcome it. I liked your society, it relieved the monotony of tête-à-têtes with my dear old aunt, so I tried to pay you as much attention as possible. Ha, ha, ha! only fancy, the dear foolish old soul set it down in her own mind that I—ha, ha!—that I was in love with you.

MIRIAM. Did—did she tell you so?

BERNARD. That she did.

MIRIAM. And forbade our meeting?

BERNARD. Worse, insisted that I should at once make you my wife; but her arguments were the funniest I ever heard; you'll laugh, I know you will: she declared I was a reckless, extravagant dog, who would never do any good in the world without a guardian angel always at my elbow to rescue me from folly; and you were that guardian angel, in other words, I am a naughty boy, and you were to be my nurse—a good joke, wasn't it?

MIRIAM. (*in a trembling voice, but with an effort at firmness*) Yes, yes—a joke; it was cruel of her to hint a choice of me, a poor friendless dependent, whose office was, as it should be, to submit to gallantries for the pastime of another, who forgot that his experiments were on a girl ignorant of the practices of the world, and who *might* have given them a deeper interpretation.

BERNARD. But you didn't, Mirry, did you? tell me, my dear girl, did you?

MIRIAM. Oh, Bernard, make your mind easy; I know my position, I—

BERNARD. That's enough! my nonsense had no injurious effect—pheu! there's a weight off my mind, yet I'm sorry I went so far as I did, but I was a mere boy then—that's five months ago—maturity has brought wisdom; but to my tale, I frankly told aunt that I *was* in love.

MIRIAM. Bernard!

BERNARD. With another. That caused a commotion, but when I told her it was with Ellen Raby—

MIRIAM. Raby?

BERNARD. Who instructed you in music, the old lady blew a hurricane. "What! degrade myself by marrying a deep, designing girl—the daughter of a lodging-house keeper!" She said that. I couldn't stand *that* you know. I love Ellen, and when one loves, one can't hear things said that touch us to the quick—can one?

MIRIAM. Some are obliged.

BERNARD. She's a girl that any one might love. Why, do you know—now laugh at this—do you know that old Huffin had fallen in love, through seeing her here; he wrote her a note—she returned him an evasive answer. I cut him out, but he doesn't know *that* yet. Ha, ha!—poor old Huffin!

MIRIAM. (*abstractedly*) Miss Raby!

BERNARD. I swore to aunty that she, and none but she should be my wife. The old lady said it was an infatuation that would shortly expire. At last, I perceived that aunty really was making herself ill, and I yielded so far as to promise that I would not marry Ellen while aunty lived. Still I don't wish the old lady dead, for I hope, with your assistance, to get her to set aside this harsh decree.

MIRIAM. Mine!

BERNARD. Yours. You have great influence over my aunt, and, besides, she acted on the supposition that I had gained your affections. Now you've only got to set her right on this point—tell her you don't care a button about me—in fact, tell the truth.

MIRIAM. Yes—the truth.

BERNARD. Think of me bathed in tears of joy—think of my dear Ellen throwing herself at your feet in a transport of gratitude—think of our children, yet unborn, lisping the name of the pioneer to the happiness of the authors of their being—

Enter HUFFIN, R. C.

HUFF. (R.) Ah, Berny, my lad—glad to see you.

BERNARD. (C.) Same to you. Lord, how sleek and well you look. The world is a macadamized road for you, my favoured one: *you* nestle in the well-feathered nest, and shew a benignant frontispiece to the world—whilst I, studying the difficult problem of how to make both ends meet, smile with an aching heart. Well, so much the more merit to me.

HUFF. My dear boy, whatever I possess, I earned; d'ye understand?—*earned it*—and, therefore, I enjoy it with a gusto unknown to you: there's energy about me. I'm one of the old school, but still I advance with the rest of the world.

BERNARD. I see, you're a complete *file of the Times*.

HUFF. Well, I hope you'll never have to refer to me. I recommend you not to expect me to recommend you—certainly not as a painter. You profess to be an artist—now look at that daub! (*pointing to the portrait of MIRIAM*) That effigy of my little friend Miriam, who might have inspired a sign painter. Did one ever see such a thing? Look at the—in fact—the *tout ensemble*. You've wronged her, sir—wronged her.

BERNARD. Who ever heard of a lawyer being an art critic? *Ne sutor ultra crepidam*—

HUFF. "The cobbler shouldn't go beyond his last." It's evident that ought to be your last. (*pointing to picture*) But a truce to jest, (*crossing L. C.*) Miriam, don't look so pale and sad. Mrs. Wilson is certainly better; but I have had no opportunity yet of speaking to her on the subject proposed.

MIRIAM. (L.) Pray do not, sir; I don't wish it.

HUFF. (L. C.) Oh! but I must. I'll tell Berny: I do nothing under-handed, though I am a lawyer; I'm sure he'll see the justice of it. Your aunt ought to make some little provision in her will for this child—don't you think so?

BERNARD. (R.) Undoubtedly; for though I will take deuced good care she shall never want a home, yet she ought to be independent of me. I judge by my own feelings. I'd sooner be smothered in liabilities, than indebted to another for a gift which ought to have been mine by right. That's *my spirit*!

MIRIAM. Let me beg of you to avoid this subject at such a time.

HUFF. My dear, this is the time. Though my friend is now better, yet hers being a heart disease, her life is never safe for

an hour, Let us go to her, Bernard, and see if she is now able to converse. (*to MIRIAM*) Cheer up, little one; you must not look so depressed. *Exit with BERNARD, R. C.*

MIRIAM. (*in a burst of emotion*) The dream is over—over! He loves me not! How have I persuaded myself that it could not—should not be; and yet now that I know the justness of my reasoning, I am wicked enough to feel wronged. My heart has deceived my conscience, and is humbled at the discovery of its own falsehood; but only to myself is known the humiliating truth—I love him! I would have died for him! I know it now that I am scorned—now he has confessed that I was a toy to him; but my secret he—he knows it not—nor ever shall! that pain—that shame at least is spared me. (*throws herself on sofa*) Oh, I was mad—mad to dream it! but my life was so dreary; and his presence seemed like a spring sun, which lifted me from torpor to life. He will be happy with another; happy, there's comfort in that. (*weeping*)

Re-enter HUFFIN, R. C.

HUFF. (*in agitation*) My dear Miss West, that poor lady is evidently far from so improving as we thought. I see you are in tears, and now I fear you have cause; she has had another severe attack: all we can understand from her is that she wishes to speak to you, and alone.

MIRIAM. (*L.*) Oh, sir, do you—do you think she is in danger? Are our hopes destroyed? I will go to her—my kind, my only friend! (*going c.*)

HUFF. Ask Bernard to step down to me immediately. (*Exit MIRIAM, R. C.*) It is my impression my friend is not destined to see another day dawn. Dear me—dear me! nothing can be done in the way of sending for any one; for she is in the singular position of having but one relative—her nephew; besides myself, I don't think she had even a friend.

Enter BERNARD, R. C.

Bernard, your aunt is very bad.

BERNARD. (*C.*) I fear so.

HUFF. (*L.*) The doctor should be brought without a moment's delay.

BERNARD. You're right. My poor aunt! I will go myself.

HUFF. Do so, my dear boy. Lambton is the nearest; but if he is from home, Bainbridge—a man of repute—lives four doors from him.

BERNARD. I will fly, and bring what medical assistance I can, though I fear it is in vain. *Exit L. C.*

HUFF. It has been my task to attend many death-beds; and it's a remarkable thing that most of the poor creatures have

left something to be done which disturbs their last moments: the invalid above is evidently troubled about some affair which she wishes Miriam to undertake.

Re-enter MIRIAM, hastily, R. C.

MIRIAM. Mr. Huffin, pray remain with Mrs. Wilson for a few minutes, till I can return to her. Oh, sir, I fear the worst.

HUFF. To say truth, so do I. Bernard is gone for the physician, and I am sure will return directly. *Exit, R. C.*

MIRIAM. (*sinks down on a seat and bursts into tears*) To love and part—the destiny of life! I know I am about to lose the only one on earth by whom I am loved. I shall be cast back into the friendless state in which she found me—oh, self! self! self! all self!—her sufferings and awful moments are mingled in my mind with selfish plaints; I am forgetting her request—this key—this key which she drew from under her pillow opens yonder desk. I am to destroy a packet of letters instantly; she does not wish them seen when she is gone. (*opens the escritoire*) Here is one—no, she said a packet with colonial post marks. (*with surprise*) This one is addressed to *me*, and her handwriting. (*opens letter*) What can it be? (*reads*) "My darling Miriam; you will read this when I am no more, and it will be an explanation of the course which I have adopted in bequeathing all I die possessed of (with the exception of a small annuity for Bernard) to you." To me! To me! All to me! (*reads*) "I once told you, my dear child, how my heart was set on a union between you and Bernard; and I have taken this step in the hope that when I am gone, it will be the means of bringing you together. In saving him from an unwise match which he contemplates, you would also save him from ruin." All left to me! Oh, never, never! Did he not just now say he would die rather than be indebted to me for a gift which ought to have been his by right? Is this the will? (*takes out a parchment from the desk*) "Last Will and Testament of Elizabeth Wilson," yes. (*opens it*) "Two hundred per annum to Bernard Reynolds—residue in freeholds, leaseholds, and real property to Miriam West." No! no! this must not be! forced to marry one whom he despises. Stay—did not Mr. Huffin say, if there was no will Bernard would inherit all? This will is wrong—wrong, though well meant. This is my duty to him, and may heaven bless him though he loves me not. (*puts the will on the fire*) There; something tells me that the secret which those flames make patent to my own breast, will never rankle there in the shape of regret: I shall know that he will enjoy his own. (*watching the flame*) 'Tis ashes now—ashes! 'Tis done, and surely her spirit will approve my disobedience. (*locks the desk*) And this

too must be destroyed. (*casts the letter on to the fire*) My lot—my pride shall be to earn what I require. Little will suffice.

Enter BERNARD, R. C.

BERNARD. I have brought Dr. Lambton; shall I take him instantly to my aunt?

HUFFIN *appears* R. C.

HUFFIN. Too late—too late! Mrs. Wilson is no more!

(*MIRIAM overcome, falls into a chair—BERNARD runs to her assistance.—Picture.*)

END OF ACT FIRST.

Twelve days are supposed to have elapsed.

A C T I I.

SCENE—*Same as Act I. The furniture rather differently arranged—papers, &c., scattered about.*

HUFFIN and BERNARD discovered. HUFFIN examining papers L. C.—newspaper lying on the table, R., back.

HUFF. (L.) There; the search is over; 'tis no use. Every nook—every corner in the house has now been examined, and there is no will.

BERNARD. (c.) Strange! and yet you say you drew out one a year ago? Are you quite certain you did?

HUFF. Certain? You'd better call me a fool at once. Why, I was left sole executor; and I need scarcely tell you that the will was entirely in your favour—entirely.

BERNARD. Well, Huffin, I have left it to you to examine the papers, and I am sure you have done so thoroughly. I suppose it only remains for me now to administer as heir-at-law; and though the will must have been destroyed by my aunt, any legacy that was named as a recompense for the duties of executorship, I shall feel proud in placing to your account.

HUFF. Stop, stop! In the first place you'll have to establish your identity; for having been born in the colonies—

BERNARD. I may not be myself—pshaw! there must be some easy clue to that fact; you lawyers are always so fertile in supposititious possibilities and actual six-and-eightpences.

HUFF. Bernard, my dear boy, I have now a painful—most painful duty to perform.

BERNARD. What do you mean?

HUFF. In anticipation still of being able to find the will I have withheld something which—

BERNARD. No mystery, old fellow. You don't mean to deny the fact that I am now my aunt's heir?

HUFF. Are you sure of it?

BERNARD. Hang it! I'm nephew, am I not?

HUFF. We have always supposed so: but are you sure there is no other near relative?

BERNARD. Quite. Mrs. Wilson had a brother and a sister. The sister was my mother. At nine years of age I was left an orphan.

HUFF. But the brother—

BERNARD. Was a sailor, or something of that sort. He died when I was an infant—met, I imagine, some dreadful fate, for neither my parents nor my aunt would ever allude to the subject; but I have often heard them remark on the singularity of our having no other relatives.

HUFF. Suppose your uncle is still living?

BERNARD. What? Is—is *that* your secret?

HUFF. No; I don't know that he lives.

BERNARD. Then you're supposing for supposing's sake?

HUFF. You'd better call me a fool at once. He was living eleven years ago.

BERNARD. Huffin, I desire you to tell me instantly what you know. Recollect that your words threaten me not with beggary alone, but with loss of liberty perhaps. I am in debt.

HUFF. That's nothing new to you. But a brother, after all, can but claim half if there is a nephew.

BERNARD. If there is a nephew. Well, there is a nephew; the "if" only applies to the brother—get on.

HUFF. In searching for the will, I examined the papers in that desk (where I had reason to know she had placed it) and there I found a packet of letters from Hobart Town, with the inscription, in her writing, "*To be destroyed*," and I was about to obey, when a sentence caught my eye and arrested my hand. I read the letters and found they were from Mrs. Wilson's brother—the last dated eleven years back, which was the time when your aunt came from India, on the loss of her husband.

BERNARD. Bringing me with her.

HUFF. He may be dead: let us hope so.

BERNARD. Poor fellow!—hope so?

HUFF. I say it advisedly; for by his letters I find he had disgraced his family, and was paying the penalty of the law.

BERNARD. Do you mean to say—

HUFF. I do. 'Tis a painful thing, but this is not a time to

conceal such a fact, therefore we must ascertain if he still lives.

BERNARD. Certainly; but as you say, let us hope he's been hanged.

HUFF. I said no such thing.

BERNARD. Well, let my uncle's ghost arise from its penal settlement, and take his moiety.

HUFF. I must tell you, my dear boy, (though I place little reliance on the fellow's words) in the letter which I alluded to, he seems to infer that you are not the nephew of the deceased.

BERNARD. But *you* know my aunt always said I was.

HUFF. At least she never said you were *not*; but in the will which I drew out, though she left everything to you, I now recollect she avoided designating you as a relative; but that says nothing.

BERNARD. And your mare's nest will prove to be nothing; if it does not, I don't disguise the fact, I shall be the most miserable dog in existence. I shall lose Ellen, perhaps.

HUFF. Ellen! what Ellen?

BERNARD. Never mind what Ellen—that's my business.

Enter DANIEL, L. C.

HUFF. Irishman, come here.

DANIEL. I'm not an Irish.

HUFF. Aint you? you'd better call me a ——look here, do know of any nook or corner, which I have not examined, in which your late mistress was likely to keep a document?

DANIEL. (c.) What's a document—a toasting fork?

HUFF. (L.) A testament?

DAN. Oh, to be surely—in the book rack.

HUFF. No! no!—a paper.

DAN. There's the dust-hole.

HUFF. Pooh! not a very likely place to find a will.

DAN. Is it the will of her ye havent found yet? Why three days agone ye'd given it up for lost, as I tould the gentleman as enquired.

HUFF. Who enquired?

DAN. A mighty quare looking sort of gentleman, as came to see Miss West, all alone, the day as Misses died, faix did she. (*wipes his eyes*)

BERNARD. What is his name?

DAN. I don't know at all, but he's been several times and crass-questioned me on the area steps about whether ye'd found the will.

HUFF. That's strange. Observe me, Irishman; never answer any impertinent questions of that kind. If any one comes again on such business show him up.

DAN. That will I, in his true colours, the blackguard !
Exit, C. R.

Enter MIRIAM from door, R. 2 E., attired in mourning.

BERNARD. (R.) Ah, Miriam ! I am glad to find you can leave your chamber; are you better ?

MIRIAM. (C.) Yes, yes ; I am better, Mr. Reynolds.

BERNARD. Mr. Reynolds ? Why not Bernard, as you used to call me ? Our loss should cement friendship.

MIRIAM. Friendship ! Oh, I have no friend now.

HUFF. (L.) That's wrong, Miss West. As long as you are a good girl, you will not want a friend. Though I have asked the question before, allow me to repeat it : do you know anything of a will Mrs. Wilson has made ?

MIRIAM. I—sir—I—was not in her confidence to that extent.

HUFFIN. You never saw one ?

BERNARD. Every place, Miriam, has been searched, and though we know one had been executed, it is not to be found.

MIRIAM. Then, Bernard, you—you are master of all ? Your bereavement forbids me to congratulate you ; but I pray you may be happy.

HUFFIN. These letters (*producing a packet*) make it doubtful whether he will inherit a penny.

MIRIAM. (*aside*) Ah ! those letters I was to have destroyed ; her last request, and I forgot it. (*sits at table, R.*)

HUFFIN. What agitates you ?

Re-enter DANIEL, L. C.

DANIEL. Here's another rapparee about the will business ; he axed me the same question, and I've brought him up : t'other fellow is with him.

Enter SCUMLEY, followed by BILES, L. C.—Exit DANIEL,

HUFF. This fellow again ! what do you want ? Mrs. Wilson is dead.

SCUM. (R. C.) I know it ; we know it, eh, what's your name ? (*nudges BILES*) She's dead and buried, so I can't see her ; and I don't want to see her, that's more—do we ? (*to BILES*)

BILES. (L.) No ; she's defunct : that's fact, number one. How d'y'e do, Miss West ?

HUFF. (R. C.) Oh, you know Miss West ?

BILES. Don't you see I do ?

HUFF. (*to SCUMLEY*) Allow me to ask a question before I order you out.

SCUM. Allow me to ask a question before I kick you out.

BERNARD. (R.) Impertinent ruf—

SCUM. I'm not speaking to you : you're a mere boy ; I ask this hoary adventurer, has Mrs. Wilson died intestate ?

HUFF. Why you—you—you imp——

SCUM. Don't prevaricate—I know she *has* ; and I beg to inform you that I, being her only brother, proclaim myself her heir—eh, what's your name ? (*to BILES*)

BILES. Biles. There's no denying it.

MIRIAM. (*R., aside—horrified*) Am I in a hideous dream ?

BERNARD. You, my uncle !

SCUM. Well, never mind that ; I don't want to be bothered with any relations just now. Eh, what's-your-name ? (*to BILES*)

BILES. Biles. No, certainly not.

HUFF. You, her brother ! Look you, my fine fellow, this kind of imposition is not at all uncommon ; any one might walk in, as you have done, and make such an absurd assertion ; —any one.

SCUM. But any one couldn't bring in his pocket, such things as certificates of birth—letters from the deceased, and other proofs which will stop your mouth in ten minutes, my fine fellow. Eh, what's-your-name ? (*to BILES*)

BILES. Biles. That's a fact.

BERNARD. Out with your proofs.

SCUM. H'sh ! old wide-awake's going to speak.

HUFF. Wide-awake, sir ! I say, supposing it turns out that you are the veritable Richard Scumley, it is no credit to you ; for of all the——

SCUM. Scoundrels, he's going to say. You're a jocular old Joe Miller, you are ; however, it seems you heard of me, eh ? I see you have expected me—that's comfortable ; don't like taking people by surprise. Eh, what's-your-name ? (*to BILES*)

BILES. Biles. Certainly not ?

SCUM. (*introducing*) Mr. Biles, my legal adviser. (*to HUFF.*) After that pleasant interview with you a fortnight ago, I repaired to the tavern at the corner, and there I made the acquaintance of my legal friend here ; I found him rather the worse for liquor, and——

BILES. Pardon me ; I found you in a state of disgusting inebriation, proclaiming, to the people at the bar, that you were Mrs. Wilson's brother, and that some old fogey had threatened you with the police.

HUFF. Very creditable indeed.

SCUM. It was more than creditable—it was credible ; and it was this gentleman who traced me out afterwards, to give me the agreeable intelligence that there's no will to be found.

MIRIAM. (*aside*) Unhappy girl that I am. What have I done ? (*retires in agitation, and sits at table*).

SCUM. Now, look here ; we're standing and chatting as if it

was a matter of no importance. Sit down—*(to BILES)* sit down, what's-your-name? you're welcome.

BILES. Biles. Thank you.

(SCUMLEY and BILES sit in the centre—BERNARD and HUFFIN stand on each side of them—MIRIAM with her face buried in her hands, at the table)

HUFF. (R.) Then you proclaim yourself a returned—that is, your banishment is ended. You are—

SCUM. Exactly—a purified lag. I don't mean to deny that, because it is principally through the records of the police court, that I can prove my identity. But what of that? I've known many state prisoners highly respectable; one smudge doesn't make a sweep. Eh, what's-your-name? *(to BILES)*

BILES. Biles. Certainly not.

SCUM. To prevent any further allusions of that kind, I'll just run through my history. As a boy I was remarkably clever.

HUFF. I should say so.

SCUM. I evidently ought to have been an engineer: the mechanical skill I used to display in analyzing my sister's money box without ever being found out was incredible.

HUFF. I can believe it.

SCUM. That sister eventually married a certain John Wilson—a fellow with some property, and of a vicious, unforgiving, disposition; he never pardoned a little practical joke I played upon him. Amongst other accomplishments, I was clever with my pen, and I tricked his bankers so completely that they actually paid a cheque for eight hundred pounds that wasn't his.

BERNARD. (L.) Forgery!

SCUM. Your sagacity is tremendous. Now, you wouldn't believe it—my own brother-in-law prosecuted me; he said it was the third time I had served him the same trick, and, though the unnatural vagabond had married my own sister, he gave me fourteen years in Norfolk Island; all this happened in Portsmouth, from which place I have this morning received a certificate of the register of my birth.

HUFF. *(aside)* The fellow's made me quite sick with disgust. *(to SCUMLEY)* One may easily guess what your future career will be.

SCUM. Mr.—whatever your name is—Mr. Whitehead, we'll say, I've done with practical jokes for ever—I'm cured! Never let me hear you again allude to my misfortune. Look how retribution has followed the barbarous act of my brother-in-law—he goes to India—amasses money—croaks; so does his widow, and the victim—that's me—the victim walks into all. My life would make a capital novel, eh, what's your name? *(to BILES)*

BILES. Biles. Capital; call it the loss of *liberty* through practising *equality* on one's *fraternity*.

HUEF. (*to SCUMLEY*) Why, man, supposing it at all feasible that you, or anyone else, were Mrs. Wilson's brother; here (*pointing to BERNARD*) is a nephew, who has an equal claim. What do you mean by "the whole," and such rubbish as that? There stands the son of Mrs. Reynolds.

SCUM. And a good looking fellow too; look, what's your name—(*to BILES*) there stands the son of Mrs. Reynolds; I don't deny the fact!

HUFF. (*rubbing his hands*) Oh, you don't?

BERNARD. I should think not indeed.

SCUM. Not at all; but thereby hangs a tale: Reynolds had two wives.

BERNARD. Slanderer!

SCUM. I don't mean two at once—oh, dear no; he was a widower with a baby when he married my sister: the dear babe was you, my fine lad.

BERNARD. It bears falsehood on the face of it!

SCUM. The grown-up babe, or my tale?

HUFF. Go on, fellow.

SCUM. My sister, Fanny Reynolds, (who never had a child) proclaimed you as her own—you were such an engaging little cherub—

BERNARD. I don't believe it!

BILES. Oh, but you were—a perfect duck, and when Mrs. Reynolds was dying, she made a solemn request to sister Wilson, that, if possible, you should never know but that you were really her son.

MIRIAM. (*at back*) Ruined!

BERNARD. But all this talk is no proof—proof, sir, is what we want.

SCUM. (*rising*) It strikes me that proof is what *you don't want*; for I won't be long before I make a clear house of this. If I accept my sister's fortune I'm not bound to adopt her pensioners.

BERNARD. Insolent scoundrel!

SCUM. (*to BERNARD*) Why, you half-fledged vulture, baulked in your prey, you thought you were quietly going to walk into the whole heap, did you? Grief for the loss of a supposed relative would better become you than mercenary spleen—look at me! (*takes out his handkerchief and affects to shed tears*) Eh, what's your name?

BILES. Biles. Poor dear woman! (*weeps*)

HUFF. Proof of your identity, sir—proof! I demand proof!

SCUM. (*shewing papers*) I'll allow you to read these documents, and I've also a witness downstairs to throw some light on that dear boy's history.

HUFF. Then come into the parlour. Bernard, come with us ; we'll look well into this.

BERNARD. (*aside*) I anticipate the worst—poor Ellen !

SCUM. It's a heart-rending duty for me, but I'll soon prove that I'm the unfortunate heir to the whole lump. Eh, what's your name ? (*to BILES*)

BILES. Biles. The whole lump.

HUFF. This way, sir. (*going*)

SCUM. Innocence and right will triumph ; I shall very soon be monarch of all I survey, my right none will dare to dispute, eh, what's your name ?

BILES. Biles. Cowper.

Exeunt HUFFIN, BERNARD, SCUMLEY and BILES, L. C.

MIRIAM. Ruined him ! utterly ruined him I thought to serve. Wretched wicked girl that I am ; the secret on which I prided myself as the sole guardian struggles for release, and if I confess it, will they believe me—will the confession right him ? It cannot ! My guilty love has been turned into a weapon of destruction, and I endure all the maddening remorse of guilt. The man whose lightest word was a charm, will hate —will curse me. Had I only concealed the will—but 'tis destroyed—destroyed for ever—no hope ! Too late I know the crime of rashness, and dare not even seek for counsel. (*in despair—wringing her hands*) I'd pray to die, but could not die in peace, knowing the fatal injury I'd done him. What should I do ? What should I do ? The offended spirit of my lost benefactress has pronounced a malediction on my disobedience ; poor Bernard !

Re-enter BERNARD, L. C.

BERNARD. 'Tis too true : question it as we will, I see 'tis true, and I am a begger ! (*throws himself into a chair, R.*)

MIRIAM. (*L. C., after a pause*) Bernard !

BERNARD. Miriam, my dear girl, we can sympathize with each other now ; we are equally poor and friendless.

MIRIAM. Bernard !

BERNARD. Yet no ; there is no comparison in our wretchedness : you expected nothing ; and you—you do not love ! You don't know what it is to be thwarted in the wish to bestow happiness on one who is dear to you.

MIRIAM. Ah ! do I not ?

BERNARD. You have talents by which you may gain a livelihood—I have none. I would emigrate, but I cannot leave her ! Oh, aunt ! or you whom, at least, I regarded as my aunt, if you had only secured me against absolute want—

MIRIAM. Bernard, your words will drive me mad !

BERNARD. True ; I have no right to distress you : you have

always been a good, kind girl, and go wherever you will, I trust you will be happy.

MARIAM. Don't—don't say that! I never ought—I never can be happy again. Bernard, do not curse me: I will confess all:—I—I destroyed the will!

BERNARD. (*starting up*) What?

MARIAM. (*falling at his feet*) Burned it! I found it in that desk a few minutes before Mrs. Wilson's death. She had left all to me—except a small annuity for you. I thought, indeed I did, Bernard, that if no will were found, *you* would inherit all, and I thrust it in the flames—alas! I have ruined both you and myself—don't forgive me; I couldn't bear it, but tell me if I can do anything, even to the sacrifice of my life, to repair the dreadful wrong.

BERNARD. I can scarce credit my hearing—*you* burned the will, that I might inherit all?

MIRIAM. Can anything be done?

BERNARD. Miriam; if you speak truth, (and I have never had reason to doubt your lightest word)—if you speak truth, and wish this secret to die with us, as sure as we stand here, I will never utter a word of it from this time; but what can be done to remedy the error, I know not. Huffin only could instruct us.

MIRIAM. Then tell him—tell him; don't spare me! To make some atonement, and see you no more is all I pray for.

BERNARD. Huffin is coming. Think again, my girl. May I tell him?

MIRIAM. Yes! Yes!

Enter HUFFIN, L. C.

HUFFIN. (L.) I fear there is no doubt of the unfortunate identity, or of the circumstances of your birth. I really do not feel justified in turning the fellow out of the house.

BERNARD. (*crosses to c.*) Huffin, there was a will.

HUFFIN. I know it; but if it is not forthcoming, it might just as well have never existed.

BERNARD. There was a will of which you knew nothing, leaving all to Miriam; she—she destroyed it, thinking by that act to make me the heir.

HUFFIN. Absurd! preposterous! what rigmarole is this? You had better call me a fool at once.

MIRIAM. (*crossing to c.*) Oh, 'tis true, sir; I took it from that desk.

HUFF. (L.) Eh! Who were the attestors to the will?

MIRIAM. (C.) I don't know.

HUFF. Who was the appointed executor?

MIRIAM. I didn't notice.

HUFF. What was the solicitor's name?

MIRIAM. I never looked; I burned it as soon as I discovered the import.

HUFF. Miss West; pardon me if I disbelieve the whole of your statement; the tale is most improbable. If you have been guilty—aye, *criminally* guilty enough to destroy a will, I doubt not it must have been that drawn out by myself. What your motive could have been, I don't know; but you have placed yourself in a most serious position.

MIRIAM. Oh, sir! I have told the truth. I also found a letter addressed to myself, which determined me upon the rash act.

BERNARD. (R.) A letter from my—from Mrs. Wilson.

HUFF. What were its contents?

MIRIAM. I—I cannot tell you; don't ask me.

HUFF. Then again I say, I doubt you; excuse me—I always come straight to the point.

BERNARD. If 'twas the will named by Huffin which you destroyed—

MIRIAM. And *you* too! You doubt me? Oh, Bernard—Bernard! is not my punishment in seeing this sad result heavy enough, but I must bear the imputation of such dreadful motives? I have no convincing words—they fail me at my utmost need. You look upon me—both, yes *both*—you look upon me as a plausible adept in falsehood—worse; as one who has perpetrated a crime for some wicked purpose—do you not, Bernard, do you not?

HUFF. You were acquainted with this officious fellow who is with Scumley, wern't you? Why was he in private conference with you on the day of Mrs. Wilson's death?

MIRIAM. He forced himself into my presence. I scarcely ever recollect to have seen him before.

HUFF. Why did he come?

MIRIAM. He professed regard for me; I rejected him.

HUFF. All this you know is very suspicious; and when you assert there was a letter addressed to you by Mrs. Wilson, which you cannot produce—

MIRIAM. I burned that too.

HUFF. Indeed! And you refuse to name the contents?

MIRIAM. No! though 'tis painful I see I must disclose them. Mrs. Wilson stated that she bequeathed her property to me, thinking that it might lead to a union between me and Bernard.

HUFF. And you objected to that?

MIRIAM. Yes, sir.

HUFF. But it was not compulsory?

MIRIAM. No!

HUFF. Then, in the name of merest probability, why destroy

the will, eh? I am sorry that the good opinion I have always entertained should be so suddenly reversed; but I cannot possibly credit your statement.

BERNARD. But *I* do; I have some reason to see the probability.

HUFF. (*to MIRIAM*) Then what was your *real* motive in burning it? Now that's coming straight to the point. As for the desire of making Bernard the heir, that's a stretch of magnanimity beyond my comprehension. You could not have done more if you had loved him.

MIRIAM. (*with eyes averted—after a pause*) *I did!*

BERNARD. Miriam!

MIRIAM. Had I yesterday been offered the option of death or this avowal I would have preferred death; but the suspicion of having wilfully ruined him is more than I can bear, and it is in utter desperation that I cast aside the modesty of concealment, and brave the shame of my secret.

HUFF. I begin to understand. Then you thought this was a surer way to secure his hand, than by adopting Mrs. Wilson's scheme?

MIRIAM. Sir, sir, you wrong me more than ever! Deal with me now as you will, I have nothing more to disclose; but do me the mere justice to believe I would sooner have married the poorest, all forsaken wretch—aye, even my greatest enemy, than Bernard Reynolds.

HUFF. Why so? why so, eh?

MIRIAM. He loves another. (*BERNARD crosses at back to R.*)

HUFF. But here you had the opportunity of taking him away from—

MIRIAM. Mr. Huffin, as you are a father, don't insult me! Had I not heard my own heart tell me it is less unlikely that the sun should shine at midnight, than that under this condition I would ever become Bernard's, do you think I would in his presence, have now scandalized my sex, and confessed my weakness?

BERNARD. (*coming down L.*) Or do you think, Mr. Huffin, that I—I, Bernard Reynolds, own so despicable a spirit, that I would have abandoned a girl I love for a lure in the shape of competence. Suspicion may be carried too far; absurdly so.

HUFF. Heyday! I've got you both on my shoulders now, have I? you'd better call me a fool at once. I have expressed my opinion of matters, and I feel that I have no right here as affairs now stand. As to this myth of a will, I don't believe Mrs. Wilson was even acquainted with a solicitor besides myself; but if—I say *if*, there was one employed, no particulars can be learned until he, or the witnesses are discovered; and with that information (for which I make no charge) I bid you good-bye, and go home.

Exit, L. C.

MIRIAM. What is to be done?

BERNARD. Surely we can discover the solicitor. I will advertize.

Enter DANIEL, L. C.

DANIEL. If ye plase am I to obey them rapparees below? and are they my masters, or are you, sir? they sent me awhile ago for a bottle of brandy—sorra's the drop they give me—and now they want me to get another. I'm thinking there's one on 'em got the liquid squint in his eye already.

BERNARD. I must go to this Scumley and see if I can get him out of the house.

Exit, L. C.

DANIEL. (*calling after him*) If I'm going to have the likes o' them for my masters, I give you a month's notice that I'll lave immadately—that will I!

Exit, L. C.

MIRIAM. He does not hate me for the past: generous Bernard! Could I do some service to his cause, I'd ask no other happiness; but now, degraded as I am in his sight (for I have at once confessed my crime and my love), I would that oceans were between us.

Enter BILES, rather tipsy, L. C.

BILES. Can I come in? Biles 'specfully asks if he can come in, on business; I'm going to make an invention—I mean an inventory—begin with this room. If you've got any personal property, Miss West, point it out; Biles says, "point it out." (*taking out book and pencil*) One table, one scoal cuttle—

MIRIAM. (R.) Oh! do not proceed with this at present.

BILES. (L.) I must, for the scurity of my employer, the heir—ha, ha! 'scuse my being joc'lar in business, but "the heir!" who'd have thought it? I say, allow me to thank you, my lady, for 'fusing my hand; I should have been 'stensively taken in; I thought you would have a fortune. By-the-bye, 'tween ourselves, when did mother Wilson 'stroy that will?

MIRIAM. What will?

BILES. Why, the will leaving you everything.

MIRIAM. How came you to know of it?

BILES. That's a good 'un! why I and Davis were witnesses; my master, now defunct, drew it; I 'gross'd it.

MIRIAM. Ah! what was his name?

BILES. Don't trouble yourself, he's dead. It was at the time when Mother Wilson sent you down to Brighton for the benefit of your health. My master called upon Mrs. W. specting a house purchase, and she asked him if he was ca'ble of drawing out a will; he did it—firsrate. I rec'lect all the circ'stances: the old will was given to me to go down stairs and burn, because there was no fire here, and—(*aside*) Hold on,

hold on, Biles, my boy! when you've had a drop of brandy you're so 'fernally talkative; it's unfessional, sir—hold your tongue! (*writes*) Six writing desks and one chair.

Enter BERNARD and SCUMLEY, L. C.

SCUM. What do you mean? I—I, the lawful heir to every thing, leave this house? No, sir, eject me as you can; here I remain. I shall see an inventory made of everything; though I dare say you've made away with a pretty good lot already: but here I remain to keep watch and ward over my own. You can remain too, if you like, 'till I have administered; but no one else: as for that girl, I'll bundle her out in less than an hour; *she* has no right here.

BERNARD. (R.) You surely are not such an unmitigated brute—

SCUM. (L.C.) Ain't I? (*to MIRIAM*) Now, madam, put up your traps, and call a cab. (*goes up to BILES*)

MIRIAM. (R. C.) Where am I to go? I haven't a friend in the world.

BERNARD. (*aside to her*) Yes, you have. You must not remain in this house with these ruffians; you must take a lodging, Miriam, 'till something is done.

MIRIAM. I know of no one who will receive me.

BERNARD. (*giving her a card*) Here is the address of Mrs. Raby—a good, kind soul as ever lived.

MIRIAM. No, no, Bernard, not there!

BERNARD. Ah, I forgot; but I fear I know of no one else.

MIRIAM. (*aside*) Why should I not go there; am I so weak? (*to BERNARD*) Bernard, forgive me; I will go to Mrs. Raby's.

BERNARD. I have not behaved well to you, Miriam; I know it now. But come, I will assist you at once to leave this ill-tenanted house. (*going*)

BILES. (*up c.—to BERNARD*) If you have any inclinashe to that young lady, un'stand me, you're perfec' welcome. Biles gives her up.

BERNARD. (*flinging him aside*) Keep your place, dog!

Exit with MIRIAM, L. C.

BILES. (*reeling against SCUMLEY, who pushes him off*) That's polite. Gov'nor, did you notice that 'sault?

SCUM. (L.) Bah! served you right.

BILES. (C.) Well, I shall 'spöne you. A 'spectable witness goes a great way.

SCUM. I won't go a step for such tomfoolery.

BILES. I said 'spectable witness.

SCUM. I shall get a respectable solicitor to transact my business; not a drunken pettifogger's fag, like you. When you've made an inventory, I shall pay and discharge you.

BILES. Why, you ungra'ful fellow; didn't Biles' look up this luck for you?

SCUM. Shouldn't I have heard of it in due time without any of Biles's officiousness? Don't dare to bandy words with me.

BILES. Now my monkey's up—Biles's monkey's up! I can be ill-tempered as well as you, and say things quite as unpleashant.

SCUM. You! fool; what can *you* say?

BILES. I can say this, that unless you share half of everything with me, you shan't be in possession a month; what d'ye think o' that? You'll find Biles diff'cult to get rid of.

SCUM. What? You contemptible scarecrow, who's to put me out of it?

BILES. This child—Biles! Nobody can do it but Biles.

SCUM. Then I'll soon make that all right! (*seizes him by the throat*) You scoundrel!

BILES. Murder!

SCUM. (*releasing him*) Ah, true; there's some law against that. (*BILES places the table and chairs between them,, R.*)

BILES. (R.) This is your gratude, is it? Now, look here; there's a will in 'zistence giving all to Bernard Reynolds; I know where to put my hand upon it!

SCUM. You're lying; you know you are, and I've a great mind to—

BILES. Ah, would you? lying am I? we shall see. Now, look you, I didn't mean to tell you so soon; but as we've begun, it's as well now as any other time. The whole of the property must be valued, and I must have fifty pounds down, and a legal 'signment of one half of all the rest, or I'll make the best bargain I can with Reynolds. What d'ye say to Biles; yes or no?

SCUM. No, you infernal raven—no!

BILES. Very well; tha's un'stood.

Enter BERNARD, L. C.

BERNARD. (L.) What's this uproar? Are you not ashamed of such indecent conduct?

BILES. (C.) Mr. Reynolds, a word with you! What would you give—

SCUM. (*to BILES—drawing him across to R.*) It's all right, you fool; I was only joking with you.

BILES. (R.) Your joking is so like choking. You agree?

SCUM. (C.) Of course I do. Come, let us be friends: after all you're a man I respect, for you are really respectable; you're one of my sort—shake hands!

BERNARD. (*aside*) There's some villainy here!

SCUM. (*aside*) Let me get hold of the will (if there is one).

and I'll cut his throat before he shall have the money. (*turns to BILES*) All right ! we're men of honour, my boy, and will act as such : shake hands, what's your name ?

BILES. Biles ! (*SCUMLEY shakes his hand extravagantly*)

END OF THE SECOND ACT.

A C T III.

SCENE.—*A neat but humble Apartment in a lodging house ; door in flat, L. ; a practicable window, R. 2 E. (backing represents roofs of opposite houses) ; fire-place, c. flat ; table, R. ; chairs distributed, on which are bandboxes ; in the corner of the room, R., are a trunk and a large japanned deed box, which latter is almost hidden by Miriam's bonnet and mantle.*

Sofa, c., on which MIRIAM is discovered seated.

MIRIAM. On the world ! how terrible a sentence to the weak-spirited : how trivial to the self-reliant—"on the world!" Heed not the straws which float by in your struggle through life's troubled waters—expect no aid ; believe in your own strength, and swim on !

Enter MRS. RABY, door in flat, c.

MRS. R. Good morning, Miss West, have you slept well ?

MIRIAM. I have not slept.

MRS. R. I am sorry for that ; I know these apartments are not what you would like, but you took me by surprise ; tomorrow you can sleep in my daughter's room, she has left town.

MIRIAM. Thank you, Mrs. Raby, my apartment is well enough ; it was not that disturbed my rest, but I had many thoughts which—

MRS. R. To be sure, to be sure, miss ; the loss of your kind friend Mrs. Wilson must have been a great trial to you. And it's quite true I suppose, that Bernard Reynolds won't get a shilling ; what will become of him ? As I told Ellen, I'm quite sure he can't earn a living for himself, and with his extravagant habits—

MIRIAM. But he has accomplishments, talents which—but pardon me, 'tis not my place to talk of him.

MRS. R. He said he should be here this morning : I may be out of the way ; will you kindly give him this note ? (*hands a note to MIRIAM*) Ellen left it for him.

MIRIAM. I—give it to him? Yes, place it on the table, if you please. (MRS. RABY puts note on the table, r.)

MRS. R. Of course you'll have to get your own living now, miss; well, all I can say is, don't take to letting lodgings, or you'll get let in for it. Why, the scamp as those two boxes (*pointing*) belong to owes me forty pound, and he was recommended to me by Scrivener, my lawyer, who's dead and gone, and I've no redress; but he shan't have his boxes till he has paid me. I dare say they're not worth, with all that's in 'em, five pound, but that's neither here nor there; he doesn't have 'em. I'll take them out of this room by-and-bye, miss, if they're in your way.

MIRIAM. No; not at all.

MRS. R. Well, as I was saying—don't let lodgings and don't take to teaching music as my Ellen does; it's poor work for any one as has been brought up a lady and known better days, which my daughter has—which you well know, miss; and as for figure, why there's a great sculptor as is doing her bust—(*a knock at street door*) There's a double knock. (*listening*) My girl never hears the door. (*Exit at door in flat, calling as she goes*) Bridget, don't you hear the door? You always give me the trouble of coming down when I'm, &c. &c. (*voice dying away in the distance*)

MIRIAM. I must rouse myself from this lethargy—exertion! exertion! I must not be a burden to any one. If I could forget the ill I've done no task would daunt me; one waking remorseful dream has haunted me the whole night—poor Bernard! (*a tap at door*) Come in.

Enter BERNARD at door in flat.

BERNARD. Well, Miriam, we know the worst now—all is verified. Fortune, like a skilful pugilist, instantly follows one severe blow by another. (*sits c.*) I'm down.

MIRIAM. (R. C.) Don't look so wretched, Bernard; I can't bear to see it. (*takes letter*) Here is something may cheer you. I know 'twill please you.

BERNARD. (*looking at it*) Oh, here it is! I had a message last night which prepared me for it. (*reads the letter*) Just so. Miriam, I always used to make you my confidante: read that letter, (*hands her the letter—MIRIAM is reading it*) and tell me what you think of your sex. There's a good deal of the tennis ball about me—lots of reaction and all that; but that's calculated to take the rise out of me, isn't it?

MIRIAM. She discards you because you have not inherited your aunt's property.

BERNARD. That's what it means evidently. I'm thrown off like a split glove.

MIRIAM. And this too is my doing; a curse must have been on me, Bernard.

BERNARD. No—no! I don't see it in that light. I needn't tell you, that after receiving a significant rebuff last night, I didn't sleep a wink.

MIRIAM. I am your bane.

BERNARD. Nothing of the sort. I couldn't sleep, but I thought a good deal, Miriam. I reflected whether the girl's love was really worth possessing, which was too evidently built upon worldly interest; then I thought of *you*—

MIRIAM. To hate me.

BERNARD. Not in the least—to contrast what (with such a nature as yours) your conduct would have been under such circumstances; and I came to this conclusion, that had you been in her position poverty would not have made you desert me—would it?

MIRIAM. I don't know; I seem to myself to be all that's wicked.

BERNARD. (*taking her hand*) I am sure you would not: so you see the cruelty of one has not made me a woman-hater; but I feel it—I feel it.

MIRIAM. Cruel girl!

BERNARD. She is. Well, I went on thinking and thinking, and I think came to a most singular way of thinking; for what do you think I thought?

MIRIAM. I cannot tell; but I judge from your sad look.

BERNARD. Sad look—nonsense! It's a change that's coming over me; I'm in a transition state. This is the conclusion I came to, Miriam, that in all probability I shall see, when a few years have passed over, that all things have happened for the best.

MIRIAM. Impossible, Bernard!

BERNARD. Had I married this girl, and afterwards discovered—as I should have done—that my prospects had been the temptation, I should have bade farewell to domestic happiness for ever; consequently I wrestle with my infatuation, and when I have conquered it, I've no doubt I shall find I've had—yes, I won't mince it—a *lucky escape*.

MIRIAM. And you have the courage to think so?

BERNARD. Oh, I'm a greater hero than I thought myself. Listen, "Now," thought I, "this would have been number one of the consequences of my coming into property: number two would probably be that I should have squandered it, and soon have been no better off than I was before." And then I began to reflect what a locust in the land I have been, waiting for the death of a good old soul to give me the means of livelihood; the idea of a man going through life without

being able to fight his own way—disgraceful! But look you, Miriam, I'll do it! *She* shall see me competent to achieve competence yet: I'm no longer Bernard Reynolds, the spendthrift; I'll be an R.A., or go to China and give lessons in perspective to the native artists; bring out an improved edition of the willow-pattern plate; something I'll do. I'm glad I'm penniless, but I won't be a beggar for all that. I'm stimulated. (*crosses to R.*)

MIRIAM. Bless you, Bernard; you give me comfort, indeed, to hear your words.

BERNARD. (R. C.) But I must not forget *you*, Miriam. I've done you a great wrong, and my mind will not be easy until I can do you some service.

MIRIAM. (L. C.) Done *me* wrong?

BERNARD. Yes, I trifled with your affection in mere wantonness: I misled you. As a lover I should have been unworthy, but I'll be a friend, Miriam; by Appelles and Sir Joshua, I'll be a friend: I'll never lose sight of you.

MIRIAM. No, Bernard; I cannot imagine the space so great that I would not wish between us. I alone have been to blame, but my humiliation has been deep. I cannot—I ought not to speak more on this subject; let us regard it as a dream from which I have awokened to blush at and forget.

BERNARD. Mirry, you're a good girl—and I hate that old croaker, Huffin, for doubting it.

MIRIAM. Don't blame him. Appearances are overwhelmingly against me; even you perhaps—

BERNARD. If I for a moment doubted you, 'twas but for a moment, and I shall never forgive myself for the paltry suspicion. No; I believe you endeavoured to make a sacrifice for me which no one else on earth would have done. It was an error, but that can't be helped. Now I'll step downstairs and see Mrs. Raby on the subject of this note. Bless you, my girl. Come, cheer up; we are both young, and youth is not the season for despair. Look at me—here's a specimen of twenty-two and fortitude.

Exit, gaily, door in flat.

MIRIAM. Generous Bernard; your kindness in reality wounds me more than would your anger. And can I do nothing to rectify the effect of my folly? I'll go to Huffin and tell him what that man said of having been witness to the will. (*going for her bonnet and taking it off the box*) perhaps he—(*the name on the box attracts her eye*) Ah! that name! can it be? Is he then the owner of these boxes? A strange thought takes possession of me; I now recall that he once said he saved some papers of his master's from the fire: he did not say he destroyed the original will—if it should be *there!* but no! no! the idea is one of despair which clings for hope to

impossibilities. (*sits down and looks at box*) Something there might be—but him I have made my enemy; no succour can be anticipated there. (*pause*) Would it be very wicked to try and open that other box which looks like one in which deeds would be kept? no—'tis wrong; I will not think of it. (*going to door with bonnet and mantle on, reaches door, and turns irresolutely*) Yet surely it is my duty to dare any thing in *his*, in Bernard's cause. I will! I will! I'll try my keys. (*takes a bunch of keys out of her pocket and essays to open the box*) Too small—this other! Ah, no! this one. (*tries*) Yes, I think—'tis opened. (*looks in*) Yes writings—deeds—(*takes out bundles of papers*) I fear detection—I'll put them back: at night I'll search. (*as she hastily replaces them, a will drops on the floor, which she does not observe*) The hope no doubt is idle, but still it is a hope. (*locks the box*) I'll go and—what is this? (*picks up the will at her feet*) "Will and Testament of Elizabeth Wilson!" Ah! am I dreaming? this is too good a fortune to be real: 'twill kill me if untrue. (*opens it and glances at a sentance*) "Bernard Reynolds residuary legatee—executor John Huffin" I'm sick and overpowered, yet I dare not call for help. (*sinks on the floor*) Oh, this is folly—Bernard is here! I must not delay his happiness for a moment. (*rings bell*) I choke! I suffocate—if I could but weep! The prayers of my sad sleepless night have been heard, and all is accomplished by a miracle—'tis nothing less!

Enter MRS. RABY, door in flat.

Ask Bern—Mr. Bernard Reynolds to come up immediately.

MRS. R. He's just this moment gone, miss; can't have got farther than the corner. I had a certain party in my back parlour to speak to me, so Mr. Reynolds went away, and said he'd call in an hour.

MIRIAM. I'll overtake him; which way did he turn?

MRS. R. Either to the right or to the left; no, I think he went down the street opposite.

MIRIAM. Not a moment is to be lost.

Exit, hurriedly, door in flat.

MRS. R. Something important, by the hurry. It strikes me somehow she has a sneaking regard for him. Well, she's welcome to him if she can get him. My daughter, I'm happy to say, has washed her hands of the young gentleman, and what's more, taken my advice and written to accept Mr. Huffin's offer, which he made a month ago. A well-to-do old man must be better than a penniless boy, and my Ellen is a lady fit for any society.

Enter BILES door in flat.

BILES. (L.) Mrs. R., I've been waiting very patiently to

speak to you. I'm tired of paring my nails in your back parlour, and as I've heard people go out, I conclude by this time you are disengaged.

MRS. R. (R. C.) Well, Mr. Biles, what have you to say to me? Have you brought me any money? You've kept me out of it long enough, and remember full half of it was borrowed. Shame on you to rob a poor lone widow.

BILES. Mrs. Raby, keep a guard over that libellous tongue of yours; "rob" is a significant word—hurtful to the feelings of an honest man. Biles doesn't relish it: Biles can't allow it. If Biles had the misfortune to get into your debt, he left security in your hands which—

MRS. R. Security! Two trumpery boxes, containing, I dare say, nothing but old trowsers and waste papers, and as to misfortune—intemperance is *your* misfortune; you might have done well enough if you hadn't been addicted to such habits.

BILES. Such reproaches cannot be allowed from the kettle to the pot.

MRS. R. How sir, you infer—

BILES. Infernal what? Don't descend to abuse, Mrs. R. I wish to take away one or two of the waste papers, and I'll just open one of the boxes in your presence.

MRS. R. No, you don't. You don't touch one till I've had my money—forty-three pound five shillings.

BILES. I see the boxes there. You can't prevent me.

MRS. RABY. Can't I? I'm a poor lone woman; but I'm a lady bred and born, and you shall find I can take my own part if I'm put to it. Don't attempt to move one step towards them.

BILES. (*aside*) She's a tigress when she's up; I know her of old. Well, Mrs. R., I came to offer you ten pounds on account; here it is. (*offering bank notes*)

MRS. R. If there's any thing in those boxes worth ten pound, I'll risk it, and keep them as they are till I get my forty-three pound five shilling.

BILES. You're acting illegally; allow me to explain the law.

MRS. R. Do! and I'll explain possession—which is nine points of it!

BILES. I'll give you twenty pounds if you'll allow me to open one of them.

MRS. R. Now I'm sure they're worth my money: forty-three pound five shillings.

BILES. Now, Mrs. R., you're a woman of uncommon sense, and know there's no getting blood out of a stone.

MRS. R. My common sense tells me that if the stone will bleed at all, it will bleed a good deal. Forty-three pound five shillings, if you please, Mr. Stone.

BILES. Well, I've no time to waste. There you hard-hearted, man-eating, lodging-house keeper ; there's your money, and mind you prepare a proper stamped receipt for it while Clarkson Biles opens his chest.

MRS. R. Clarkson Biles is a nice article to make so many bones about paying a poor lone widow her due, when he'd got it in his pocket all the time. I'll give you your receipt as you come down : you must make haste, for my lodger may be coming back directly.

BILES. Let him come ; Biles knows how to apologize like a gentleman. Now, you be off!

MRS. R. (*aside, as she goes out*) Well, this is a windfall ; I never expected to get this. *Exit door in flat.*

BILES (R.) All goes on swimmingly ; but I must be cautious—as cunning as a fox ; that fellow Scumley is a queer customer to deal with, and if he were once to get this will in his hands before I get my share of the estate secured, I might whistle for my chance ; lor' bless me, he'd destroy it in a moment ; but I haven't allowed him to get the smallest scent of the place where I've got the document, and I'll make it secure enough now. Now for it. (*takes out a key and opens the box*) Here's a lot of rubbish ! (*bundling out papers*) It was a lucky thing for me that I didn't destroy that will—I don't know why the deuce I didn't—and it was a lucky thing for me I saved this identical box from the fire ; I don't know why the deuce I did : it was fate ! Fate had predestined Biles to be a capitalist—where the devil is it ? I thought it was at the top—no, it must be at the bottom ; Mother Raby has been tossing this box about ; everything's reversed.

Enter SCUMLEY, silently, door in flat—leans over the back of arm chair, c., and watches.

Ha, ha ! if that rascal Scumley had only known where I had it, he'd have been here before me, and— Oh ! what do you want here ?

SCUM. (C.) Why, considering that you got fifty pounds out of me, and not having much opinion of the honesty or honour of the world in general, I kept my eye upon you ; in other words, I dodged you to this house, and not seeing you come out of it, I introduced myself to the landlady as your elder brother, and the good soul sent me up to assist you.

BILES. (R.) Well, then, you may go down again ; the will's not here.

SCUM. What are all those papers ?

BILES. Nothing at all to do with your business ; be kind enough to leave me : I can't attend to you just now.

SCUM. Well, I'm glad to see there's some appearance of your

not having deceived me. The will is amongst those papers ; now don't deny it, because you'll only force me to come and search them myself.

BILES. (*barricading himself with the table and chairs*) If you come near, I'll open the window and shout for the constabulary. (*takes his keys and quickly opens the other box*) Look here—yes, this is what I wanted. (*takes out a large horse pistol*) This is what we used to keep in our strong room at the office ; I used to sleep there when there was any property to protect. I know it's charged, I loaded it myself four years ago. Now I'll look over the papers, but you keep where you are, or I shall be compelled to pick you off. Do we understand each other ?

SCUM. Do you take me for a rogue ?

BILES. I see we understand each other, so I'll go on with my job. (*searches*) I've examined those—not there, nor there. (*taking all out*) 'Tisn't here ! it's gone—gone—gone !

SCUM. What's that ?

BILES. It's not here, I tell you !

SCUM. So you said before. None of your tricks upon me, or I'll—

BILES. Can't you see I am in earnest ? I'm robbed—I'm robbed ! it's gone !

SCUM. (*leaps over the table and seizes him*) You scoundrel ! will you dare to play upon me ? I'll—

BILES. Don't, don't ! I'm in earnest ; I—I can't find it—I'm ruined ! Give me time to think ; I'll swear it was there.

SCUM. I'll look myself. (*searching papers*)

BILES. I hope you may find it. (*a pause*)

SCUM. No—no—

Enter MIRIAM, door in flat—BILES seeing her utters an exclamation ; rushes across and places himself between MIRIAM and the door, as she is about to retreat.

MIRIAM. (C.) What are you doing in my apartment ?

BILES. (up, L.) Ah ! you hear ? Her apartment—she has it ; she has taken it !

SCUM. (R.) Bolt the door ! (*BILES bolts it*) Have you opened this box ?

MIRIAM. Why should you think so ?

SCUM. Have you opened this box ?

MIRIAM. Why, sir—do—you—ask ?

SCUM. Oh, prevarication ! You have, it's plain—

BILES. As the nose on my face.

SCUM. Where's the paper you took out of it ?

BILES. Where is my paper that you've stolen ?

SCUM. Give it up !

BILES. To me ! to me, mind ! Give it me, or—

MIRIAM. You terrify me ; I haven't got it.

SCUM. I see by your manner you have taken it. I am not a man to be trifled with ! (*takes up the pistol*) Give up that paper this instant, or I'll blow you into eternity !

MIRIAM. (*falling on her knees*) Don't murder me !

BILES. Search her, search her ; search everywhere ! (*they each seize her, she screams*)

BERNARD. (*without*) Open the door !

BILES. Who's that ? (*MIRIAM again screams, the door is broken open*)

Enter BERNARD, followed by HUFFIN—BERNARD rushes to SCUMLEY and throws him off—HUFFIN tackles BILES—MRS. RABY appears at back.

BERNARD. You cowardly vagabonds !

MRS. R. (*at back, c.*) What a disreputable scene in a reputable house.

SCUM. (*L.*) She has robbed this man ; picked his lock.

BILES. (*C.*) I had a will in that box, which I intended to take this morning to Mr. Reynolds, for I knew he'd reward me handsomely ; and my friend there got exasperated when he found the girl had taken it away, and it was all that I could do to protect her from his violence.

HUFF. (*R. c.*) You expect me to believe that ? You'd better call me a fool at once.

SCUM. (*aside*) There's a lying rascal ; I'll owe him a turn. (*aloud*) I believe that will to have been a forgery.

HUFF. I must be a fool if I can't swear to my own signature.

BILES. Oh, then you have got it ?

HUFF. Yes, sir, Mr. Reynolds met me and placed it in my hands ; and your friend may get back to Norfolk Island as soon as he likes.

SCUM. Nothing of the sort ; I'm no canting ticket-of-leave-man. I've served my time, and my character is now unimpeachable, you old fool !

HUFF. He's done it—he's called me a fool at once !

MRS. R. (*R. c.*) About this will—who comes into the property then ?

BILES. (*C.*) What's that to you ? Keep your place, woman.

HUFF. (*crossing to BILES*) This lady will be my mother, fellow, and I'll thank you to address her respectfully.

BERNARD. (*L. C.*) Oh ! indeed ?

Exit MRS. RABY, with dignity, door in flat.

SCUM. (*L.*) I'll have this will affair thoroughly looked into.

HUFF. We'll take care of that.

BILES. Yes, we'll take care of that. I can prove how and

when I saved it from the flames on purpose to serve Mr. Bernard, knowing he would reward me liberally.

HUFF. Hold your tongue, sir.

SCUM. Come I don't want to put you to expense in contesting this; if Mr. Reynolds will give me three thousand, I'll relinquish all claim.

HUFF. And *I* his lawyer! you'd better call me a—oh, I forgot; you did. Not a penny piece will you get from us, you unprincipled disgrace to the family. You have no claim.

BILES. My learned brother is right; you have no claim.

SCUM. I shall claim the right of knocking you down, if you interfere between me and my relations. You have swindled me out of fifty pounds. (*BILES gets behind the door*)

HUFF. Which you raised on certain chattels from Mrs. Wilson's estate, and for which, if you shew your nose there again, we shall claim restitution.

SCUM. I shall go and place my case in the hands of some respectable solicitor.

HUFF. Do, some Old Bailey lawyer.

SCUM. I feel that I am wasting my time in talking to such an old ass. At any rate, if my half-nephew does not behave handsomely, I'll publish our relationship, and my antecedents; what d'ye say to that? Good day. (*as SCUMLEY is going out, he sees BILES through a crevice in the door, which opens on to the stage, he returns and gives him a blow on the head—exit SCUMLEY, door in flat*)

BILES. He's gone; I've much to be thankful for.

HUFF. Miss West, I must ask your pardon for my suspicions.

MIRIAM. No, sir; all seemed to confirm them.

HUFF. Possibly, Mrs. Wilson might have made a will in your favour.

BILES. That she did; my late employer, Mr. Scrivener, drew it out, and I was one of the witnesses; I hope you'll remember that fact; a little liberality on your parts would be the making of Biles.

BERNARD. I know you to be a rogue; but still as this circumstance has proved so fortunate, I shan't forget you.

HUFF. Nor must you forget to do something for this girl; she must not be cast upon the world without a shilling.

BERNARD. I owe all to her; and if she will accept the love—for I do love her now, of one, who will no longer be the worthless unthrift he has been, it will be the festival day of my life, when, as my wife, she consents to share with me the property, which has been so unexpectedly recovered.

HUFF. Stop, stop, stop! I hope that Miriam has too much good sense to allow you to marry her.

MIRIAM. Let no gratitude for questionable heroism be mistaken, Bernard, for love ; if I ever on false grounds, indulged in a hope, I have bitterly felt the humiliation and punishment. Live wisely and happily, and all that is past will be forgotten in the one joy of seeing that accomplished for which I rashly ventured so much.

BERNARD. Dear Miriam, the humiliation is mine ; but as sure as I believe in the solemn record of a vow—I love you. I can have no happiness unless you consent to be mine.

HUFF. She won't, she won't ; or I know nothing of her character.

MIRIAM. If I again err, may forgiveness follow, as it has done my other faults. Bernard, I do consent.

HUFF. You do ? Then you've made a fool of me at once. (*to BERNARD*) Upon my word, I must question the respectability of your connexion : decided dark coloured sheep. Your putative uncle is a returned convict, and your wife will be a lady who does not hesitate to destroy a will—

BILES. Or pick a lock. Excuse me ; it's only our fun. Biles and his learned brother (*pointing to HUFFIN*) are humorous fellows, but the right sort.

BERNARD. Miriam's were innocent crimes, and bless her for them..

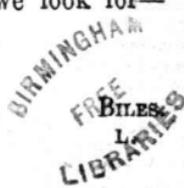
MIRIAM. Will all look upon me with the lenient eye that you do ? (*to Audience*) Can a right motive justify a wrong act ? Dare you say "no !" you, who in your kindness so over slow to censure—so ever quick to encourage, give such an example ? Our immortal bard has taught how few of us can escape in the mere course of justice. Mercy we look for—and at your hands.

HUFFIN.

R.

MIRIAM.

BERNARD.



Curtain.