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Norman Maine Publishing

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Norman Maine Publishing
P.O. Box 1400
Tallevast, FL 34270

"I shoul da stayed
in the well."

– Hardrock flint

The Well-Digger's Daughter Or, She Found Herself In Deep Water

MELODRAMA. Caution: The humor in this play may be a bit *dry*. Set in Tarantula, TX at the turn of the century, a humble well-digger, Hardrock Flint, and his soon-to-be son-in-law, Gus, have set out to strike it rich by digging wells, but all they've found so far is a lot of dirt. Meanwhile, the exceptionally evil Sly Snookerall has hatched a heartless scheme to steal the well-digger's homestead, send him to the poorhouse, and then marry his beautiful daughter, Dolly. Hardrock better find a way to dig himself out of this one, or he's going to end up at the Last Roundup Retirement Home!

Performance Time: Approximately 30 minutes.

Characters

(3 m, 3 f)

DOLLY FLINT: Lovely young heroine; wears an old tattered dress.

AUGUSTUS (GUS) EVERWORTHY: Stalwart young hero; wears dirty work clothes.

HARDROCK (H.R.) FLINT: Dolly's well-digger father; wears dirty work clothes.

SLY SNOOKERALL: Villainous mortgage-holder; wears clothes suitable for a villain.

FLO GENTLEE: Sly's attractive apprentice; wears a long cloak and dancehall outfit.

HORTENSE EVERWORTHY: Gus's fussy mother.

Setting

A cold day in January 1899. Living room of an old house in Tarantula, Texas. Door R leads to outside, door L to backyard, door UL to bedroom.

Synopsis of Scenes

Scene 1: Living room.

Scene 2: Ten minutes later.

Props

Drinking glasses
Water pitcher
Lunch basket
Gun
Arm sling
2 Living room chairs

Sound Effects

Gunshots

Scene 1

(AT RISE: Living room of an old house in Tarantula, TX, on a cold day in January 1899. Dolly, wearing a tattered old dress, is pacing the floor in anguish. After a pause, she addresses the audience.)

DOLLY: Even though I am by nature a very happy young person, my present condition is one of deep concern. My dear father is a hard-working well-digger, but without monetary success, I regret to say. He's always in the hole. And I, his only daughter, am so poor I don't even have a decent dress to my name, which is Dolly. And yet I am to be married in a month. *(Knock on door R.)* Come in.

(Gus enters, wearing work clothes.)

GUS: Dolly, my love, it is I, the man you will marry in February.

DOLLY: *(Aside.)* Which makes this January. *(To Gus.)* Dear Augustus, or Gus, as you prefer.

GUS: You may call me anything, as long as you call me yours.

DOLLY: Is it very cold outside?

GUS: As cold as a well-digger's bucket. But in here with you, I feel warm indeed.

(Gus starts to embrace her, but she steps away.)

DOLLY: Beware the deed that makes you warm.

GUS: May I at least plant my lips upon your beautiful brow?

DOLLY: Father wouldn't like it.

GUS: I wouldn't do it to your father.

DOLLY: Everyone knows that two young people do not touch each other until they are married. But I'm flattered you would come to see me in the middle of your work day.

GUS: Actually...I just came in to get a drink of water.

The Well-Digger's Daughter
9

DOLLY: Oh. I see.

GUS: Working for your father is a thirsty business, since there's no water in the well. So I excused myself to get a drink.

DOLLY: Did he excuse you, also?

GUS: He graciously told me to go hydrate myself.

DOLLY: How do you like working for Father? *(Pours a glass of water from a pitcher.)*

GUS: Best boss I ever had.

DOLLY: You told me this was your first job.

GUS: And a very good one...these last two months working alongside a real professional. *(Aside.)* He says he'll start paying me next week.

DOLLY: *(Hands him the water.)* Here you are, dearest.

(H.R. enters door R, dressed in work clothes.)

H.R.: *(To Gus.)* Ain't you through drinkin' yet?

GUS: Just about.

H.R.: Though I figured it wasn't just water you came looking for. *(Winks at Dolly.)*

DOLLY: *(Blushes.)* Father, really...I never.

H.R.: And you better keep it that way.

GUS: Would you like some water, Mr. Flint?

H.R.: Of course I'd like some water. I'm a well-digger, ain't I?

DOLLY: Are things going well at the well site?

H.R.: That's what I came to tell you. I struck mud!

GUS: Hooray!

DOLLY: Let's go see!

H.R.: You young folks run along. I'll meet you at the bottom of the hill.

(Dolly and Gus exit quickly door R, with H.R. exiting more slowly. After a pause, Sly and Flo enter from door L. Sly is dressed like a typical villain. Flo wears a long cloak.)

SLY: Here we are! Be it ever so humble... *(Looks around.)*
...and brother, is this humble.

FLO: Why did you bring me to this miserable old house in the middle of nowhere?

SLY: Don't be so choosy. It's better than the tent show you are so recustomed to.

(Flo removes her cloak. She is dressed like a dancehall girl.)

FLO: Yes, at least I can thank you for taking me away from that life.

SLY: *(Prompting.)* So?

FLO: Thank you for taking me away from that life.

SLY: And now if you're through yapping—and even if you aren't—shut up and listen.

FLO: Look. I'm sewing my mouth shut. *(Mimes sewing her mouth shut, then shouts.)* Ouch!

SLY: What's the matter?

FLO: I stuck myself with the needle.

SLY: You said you wanted to learn the real estate business. Lesson number one: It's not about the house, it's about the land.

FLO: Land is just dirt.

SLY: It's a dirty business. Lesson number two: It's not just about selling the land. It's about collecting most of the payments, then repossessing it so you can sell it all over again. *(Evil laugh.)*

FLO: How did you get so low-down, mean, and despicable?

SLY: Practice, my dear. Practice!

(Flo looks around.)

FLO: Where can I go to freshen up?

SLY: You're fresh enough already. But if you must, there's a privy in the backyard. *(Points to door L.)*

FLO: I just want to powder my nose.

The Well-Digger's Daughter

11

SLY: (*Points UL.*) You can do that in there. (*As Flo exits door UL.*) But don't use gunpowder, or you'll blow your nose! (*Laughs.*) Hah! Gunpowder! A master of humor, that's what I am. Blow your nose! (*Hortense, carrying a lunch basket, barges in from door L.*) Who are you?

HORTENSE: I might ask you the same question. And as a matter of fact, I do!

SLY: I am Sly Snookerall, the owner of this valuable property.

HORTENSE: It don't appear so valuable to me.

SLY: How would you know?

HORTENSE: I ain't as dumb as I look.

SLY: You couldn't be.

HORTENSE: Never judge a bed by its cover. I know something about property values. And with you around, they just dropped.

SLY: I'll have you know, I'm a real estate typhoon.

HORTENSE: Big shot, are you? Say, are you my son's boss?

SLY: If I am, he's fired. And I'm the one asking the questions around here. To repeat myself, who are you?

HORTENSE: I am widow Hortense Everworthy, the sainted mother of Augustus Everworthy.

SLY: Never heard of him. And obviously saints aren't what they used to be. What are you doing here?

HORTENSE: I've brought something for my boy. (*Indicates basket.*)

SLY: Oh, yeah? What's in there?

HORTENSE: Some wholesome vittles. My boy ain't been eating proper, seein' as how that well-digger, Hardrock Flint, hasn't paid him.

SLY: No money, huh? Reckon he'll have to dig a little deeper for it, if you know what I mean.

HORTENSE: I don't know what you mean.

SLY: If brains were shoes, you'd be running barefoot.

HORTENSE: I don't get it.

SLY: Exactly. Now you'll have to run along so I can confer with my confederate.

The Well-Digger's Daughter

12

HORTENSE: Southern boy, is he?

SLY: He's not a boy at all. He's a she.

HORTENSE: Well...I guess that's his business. I'm not one to judge.

SLY: You dimwit! She's always been a she! *(As Flo enters from door UL.)* See! A she!

(Hortense looks her up and down.)

HORTENSE: I reckon that's right.

SLY: This is Flo Gentle, my able assistant.

HORTENSE: What's she able to assist you with?

SLY: Whatever I tell her.

HORTENSE: Honey, you got a long row to hoe.

FLO: Pardon me?

HORTENSE: I won't ask what for.

SLY: Leave, old lady! If you want to get any older. *(Points to door L.)*

HORTENSE: Well, I like that!

SLY: I kind of liked it myself.

HORTENSE: I might could take offense, the way you talk to me.

SLY: Then take it and go. Can't you obey orders?

HORTENSE: I know plenty about obeying orders, and disobeying them, too. My only son, Gus, who I had big dreams for, is planning to marry the well-digger's daughter against my wishes.

SLY: That's your problem. *(Aside.)* But if she's young and bootiful, I'll make her my problem! *(To Hortense.)* Now don't let the door hit you on your way out.

HORTENSE: I've heard that one before.

SLY: I'm sure you have.

(Hortense exits door L in a huff.)

FLO: Now that I've freshened up, I look 100 percent better.

SLY: You look 100 percent the same.
FLO: You always have to insult me.
SLY: I don't have to. It's just that it's so much fun.
FLO: Is that why you insulted the old lady and sent her away?
SLY: I sent her away because I don't need a witness when I
conduct bidness, which in this case includes... (*Looks
around, then with a voice of doom.*) Foreclosure!
FLO: Snow again. I didn't get your drift.
SLY: Do I have to spell it out for you?
FLO: You can spell?
SLY: I'm evicting the not-so-well-digger! That deadbeat Flint
is several months in arrears.
FLO: And that's where you aim to kick him.
SLY: I'll kick him right out of this shanty and off my property.
FLO: What about his daughter?
SLY: I'll know what to do with her once I lay eyes on her.
FLO: What about me?
SLY: I'll know what to do with you once I lay eyes on her.
FLO: You promised to marry me and make me your
apprentice real estate companion for life.
SLY: And I'll keep that promise the same as I keep all my
promises. (*Aside.*) Never!
FLO: So when are we getting married?
SLY: When some real estate I know freezes over. Now shut
up and join me in a glass of water. (*Pours a glass.*)
FLO: You think there's room for both of us?
SLY: (*Looks skyward.*) Why did God make women so dumb?
FLO: So they would marry men?

(*Hortense enters from door L, shivering.*)

HORTENSE: Can I come in now?
FLO: Poor thing, you're shivering, and your teeth are
chattering, and your legs are shaking.
SLY: With all that exercise, how can you be cold? And what
happened to that basket of vittles?

The Well-Digger's Daughter
14

HORTENSE: I ate 'em to keep warm.

SLY: And let your son starve! Have you no feelings, woman?

FLO: You talk about feelings, after double-dealing me the way you do, not to mention plotting to evict the well-digger.

HORTENSE: You can't do that. My son won't never get paid!

SLY: You obviously misunderstood me. I'm not evicting the well-digger. Not right away. Not until he brings in that well! That'll make the property more valuable!

HORTENSE: I'm gonna tell my son, and he'll tell the well-digger! *(Starts toward door R.)*

SLY: Stop where you are! Nobody's telling nobody about nothing!

HORTENSE: It's the honest thing to do.

SLY: What kind of reason is that?

FLO: She's right. I'm going with her.

SLY: You're not going nowhere!

(Sly runs around in front of them.)

FLO: I'd like to see you try and stop me.

SLY: *(Aside.)* I was hoping she'd say that. *(Pulls a gun.)*

HORTENSE: What's that for?!

SLY: For shooting people, you idiot! The bullets come out here... *(Points to barrel.)* ...and they go in there. *(Points to both women.)*

HORTENSE: You don't mean that!

FLO: Oh, yes, he does! This way! Hurry!

(Flo grabs Hortense and they dash toward door L.)

HORTENSE: *(Running.)* Don't shoot! Don't shoot! We won't talk!

(As they run out, Sly follows with a gleefully evil laugh and stops at the open doorway.)

The Well-Digger's Daughter

15

SLY: There's only one way to keep a woman from talking!
(*Shoots out the doorway twice.*) I hope they didn't hurt
themselves when they hit the ground! (*Laughs loudly.*) Hurt
themselves! When they hit the ground! (*More laughter.*
Blackout.)

Scene 2

(AT RISE: Ten minutes later. The living room is vacant. Sly enters from door L, dusting his hands.)

SLY: I feel naked without my gun.

H.R.: *(Offstage, gasping.)* I ain't as young...as I used to be.

SLY: Uh-oh, here comes someone.

(Gus and Dolly, supporting H.R., enter door R.)

H.R.: *(Gasping for breath.)* That was...the longest...quarter mile...I ever run.

DOLLY: Take a deep breath, dear Father.

H.R.: Why didn't I think of that?

GUS: You'll be okay in a minute.

(Gus lowers H.R. into a chair.)

H.R.: That's what you said a minute ago.

DOLLY: Don't exert yourself.

GUS: Take another deep breath.

H.R.: I'll take any kinda breath I want! Stop babying me!

SLY: What's going on? Is the old geezer sick?

DOLLY: *(Startled.)* Oh! Who are you?

GUS: And how did you get in here?

SLY: I walked in—what do you think?

H.R.: That's Mr. Snookerall. I'm buying the property from him.

SLY: You mean you're supposed to be buying it. All you're doing now is owing on it.

DOLLY: Do you know anything about the gunshots?

SLY: *(Innocently.)* Gunshots?

GUS: When we heard two gunshots, we ran up the hill.

H.R.: It nearly done me in.

SLY: (*Aside.*) With any luck, he'll have a heart attack. (*To Dolly.*) Oh, those gunshots! Yes, I do know something about them.

GUS: Where were you when they were fired?

SLY: I was right here in this disputable room.

DOLLY: You mean disreputable. (*Aside.*) Which it isn't.

SLY: First I heard the voices of two angry women in the backyard. Then I heard two shots.

GUS: Who were these women?

SLY: "Were" is the proper term for them, for they "are" no more.

H.R.: What do you mean?

SLY: Alas, one has shot the other and then turned the gun on herself.

GUS: Who were these women?

SLY: You'll find the gun still clutched in her murderous hand.

DOLLY: How do you know?

SLY: I peeked.

GUS: Who were these women?

SLY: You seem stuck on that question.

H.R.: But it's a good one.

SLY: I have no earthy idea who they were. Their identities remain to be seen.

GUS: Then we should see the remains.

DOLLY: I am much too delicate to view such carnage. You two gentlemen go, while I stay here and tend to Father.

H.R.: I don't need no tendin' to—and I don't see no gentlemen here. Just one rapsallion and a young fool.

GUS: (*Looks at Dolly.*) A fool for love.

DOLLY: (*Blushing.*) Augustus.

SLY: Let me tell you something, young man. A woman leads only to trouble. Let me take you outside and show you the proof.

(*Sly and Gus exit door L.*)

DOLLY: Dear Father, are you feeling better?

H.R.: Better than what? Oh...yeah, better than I was.

DOLLY: Then please allow me to burden you with a question.

What is Mr. Snookerall doing here?

H.R.: Sorry to say, I figure he's here to foreclose on our humble home and property.

DOLLY: But what if you were to strike water before he has a chance to serve his foreclosure papers?

H.R.: Then we could sell the water to all the dusty farmers in this dried-up valley. The money would come flooding in, and we could pay off that underhanded, back-stabbing Snookerall.

DOLLY: But if that doesn't happen? What then?

H.R.: You'll marry that young dolt.

DOLLY: Which I would do anyway. *(Aside.)* Not that he's a dolt. *(To H.R.)* And what of you, Father?

H.R.: I reckon I'll go over the hill to the poorhouse.

DOLLY: No, no, a multitudinous times no! *(Starts to cry.)* I cannot allow you to spend your waning days in such terrible, tragic, merciless, and heartbreaking surroundings!

H.R.: *(Aside.)* Now I'm really looking forward to it.

(Gus and Sly enter door L. They are carrying Hortense, who has one hand on her chest and is holding Sly's gun.)

GUS: *(Anguished.)* It is my dear and sainted mother!

DOLLY: How distressing! I'm going to faint!

(Sly drops Hortense's legs and rushes over to catch Dolly.)

SLY: There, there, little lady. You're in good hands now. *(Aside.)* And busy hands they are! *(Places her in a chair.)* Here we go, sweet morsel.

(Gus eases Hortense to the floor and takes the gun.)

GUS: Mother! Dear Mother! If only you could speak!

(Hortense moans.)

H.R.: She's alive!

SLY: She is?! *(Aside.)* Drat!

H.R.: Looks like the bullet only grazed her head.

GUS: Mother, talk to me! Say something! Anything!

(Long pause.)

HORTENSE: *(Speaks weakly.)* Don't marry Dolly!

GUS: Say something else.

DOLLY: *(Reviving.)* I heard what she said. It saddens me greatly. And I was already pretty darn sad.

GUS: Pay her no mind, darling. She will come to love you...someday.

SLY: *(Aside.)* I'm willing to love her right now!

(H.R. bends over Hortense.)

H.R.: She's coming to. Looks like she'll be all right.

GUS: Mother...do you remember what happened?

SLY: *(To Hortense.)* Yes, what do you remember?

HORTENSE: *(Groggy, confused.)* I...I don't remember a thing. My head hurts.

GUS: Would you like to lie down?

HORTENSE: I'm already lying down. Ouch! Now the pain has gone to my face.

SLY: You call that a face?

DOLLY: *(To Gus.)* I'll help you walk her into the bedroom.

SLY: The bedroom? I'll go with you.

DOLLY: Thank you, but we can manage.

(Dolly and Gus walk Hortense out door UL.)

The Well-Digger's Daughter
20

H.R.: So what are you doing here, Snookerall? As if I didn't know.

SLY: My well-digger friend, I have bad news for you.

H.R.: To go with my bad health and bad luck.

SLY: *(Aside.)* And his bad breath. *(To H.R.)* You're all done here. Time for you to pack up and move out.

H.R.: That's it, then. Off to the poorhouse I go.

SLY: In that case, I may have good news for you. I own the Last Roundup Retirement Home. I can get you a discount on a room with your own personal sink.

H.R.: First I have to get my daughter settled.

SLY: Maybe I could help with that, too. You mustn't let her marry that assistant dry-well-digger. She'd be much better off with someone well-to-do. In short, I propose that I propose.

H.R.: Hmmm. Could be Gus isn't so bad after all. He's even had a year at M.I.T.

SLY: *(Impressed.)* M.I.T.?

H.R.: Mining Institute of Texas.

SLY: Eddication's all well and good, if you want to read the sports page or count up your bar tab. But money talks, and my money says she should marry me. I offer my hand on it.

H.R.: What's in your other hand?

SLY: The foreclosure papers, you imbecile! But to show you what a good heart I have, I'll hold off on the foreclosure... *(Aside.)* ...another day or two... *(To H.R.)* ...if you give your consent for me to wed your lovely daughter, uh...your daughter... *(Struggles for her name.)*

H.R.: Dolly.

SLY: Yes...Dolly! We'll go away on a brief honeymoon and come back for a big wedding. Upon my honor!

(Dolly, crying, enters with Gus from door UL. Gus has Sly's gun in his belt.)

DOLLY: *(To Gus.)* Why does your mother hate me so?

GUS: Just because she called you all those scurrilous names and ordered me not to marry you, that doesn't mean she hates you. Besides, she's still out of her mind from the head wound.

SLY: She'll be in an even bigger fix once she's arrested for the cold-blooded murder of that wayward dancehall girl.

GUS: What dancehall girl?

SLY: What do you mean, "what dancehall girl"? The one lying beyond where your mother lay.

GUS: There was nobody else out there.

SLY: Are you mad, sir? (*Strides to door L, flings it open.*) Just look out yonder at...at... Uh-oh. But I saw her! She was there! She must have crawled away. I'll find her and finish— That is to say, I'll see if the poor unfortunate survived. (*Exits quickly door L.*)

H.R.: And I'm going back down to the well.

DOLLY: Now? What for?

H.R.: To throw myself in. (*Exits door R.*)

[End of Freeview]