

THE MAN THAT CORRUPTED HADLEYBURG

*Based on a short story by Mark Twain
Dramatized by Dave Brandl*

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DEDICATION

*To Jessica,
Last, but not least.
Dave Brandl, Playwright*

STORY OF THE PLAY

Hadleyburg is world famous for its honesty. But it is a reputation that has never faced real temptation ... until the day a stranger leaves a mysterious bag of gold as a reward for a good deed. Then the true nature of Hadleyburg's citizens is uncovered. The stranger felt slighted on his visit to Hadleyburg. The bag of gold is part of a scheme to corrupt the town whose pride in their honesty borders on hubris. All but one of the town's prominent families become the object of derision as the extent of their greed and dishonesty is publicly revealed.

However, even that one couple is haunted by their dishonesty and in their guilt, misconstrue the generous gesture of another and sabotage their own success. The ironic ending elicits a chuckle as only one of Twain's sardonic wit can.

CAST OF CHARACTERS

(6 M, 9 W, Extras)

“NINETEENERS”

(Some of the 19 prominent citizens of Hadleyburg)

MARY RICHARDS - first to receive the accursed sack of gold.

EDWARD RICHARDS - her husband, finds honesty isn't easy.

MRS. THELMA WILSON - prominent lawyer.

MR. WILSON - her husband.

MS. JANE BILLSON - prime claimant of the gold.

MS. HARKNESS - speculator vying for a seat on the legislature.

MS. PINKERTON - owns town bank.

MINOR CITIZENS

JACK HALLIDAY - town loafer, provides commentary.

REV. MS. BURGESS - the arbiter of the gold reward.

CHARLES COX - owner of local newspaper.

MABEL COX - his wife.

JENNY - Cox employee.

THE ARCHITECT - recently moved into town.

OTHERS

THE STRANGER - plans to destroy those who slighted him.

NEWSPAPER REPORTER - from the Associated Press office.

TIME: A simpler period in this country's history.

PLACE: Various locations around Hadleyburg, USA.

SYNOPSIS OF THE PLAY

ACT I

- Scene 1: On the street in Hadleyburg (in front of curtain).
- Scene 2: The Richards home.
- Scene 3: The Cox home.
- Scene 4: On the street in Hadleyburg (in front of curtain).
- Scene 5: The Richards and Cox homes.
- Scene 6: On the street in Hadleyburg (in front of curtain).
- Scene 7: On the street in Hadleyburg.
- Scene 8: The Richards home.
- Scene 9: On the street in Hadleyburg (in front of curtain).
- Scene 10: On the street in Hadleyburg.

ACT II

- Scene 1: At the town hall.
- Scene 2: On the street in Hadleyburg (in front of curtain).
- Scene 3: The Richards home.
- Scene 4: On the street in Hadleyburg (in front of curtain).
- Scene 5: The Richards home.
- Scene 6: On the street in Hadleyburg (in front of curtain).
- Scene 7: On the street in Hadleyburg.

SETTING

The Richards home requires 2 chairs and a table. The Cox home requires 2 chairs. The town hall requires a minimum of 15 or 16 chairs and a table.

PROPS

Stranger - sack of gold with note attached.
Edward - letter, nightcap, envelope.
Architect - notepaper and pen.
Burgess - 19 envelopes, 2 letters from sack.
Mary - envelope, nightcap.
Mr. and Mrs. Wilson - nightcaps.
Jack - single gold coin.

ACT I
Scene 1

(In front of the CURTAIN: JACK HALLIDAY enters. He is a scruffy man of indeterminate age, dressed in shabby clothes.)

JACK: Hello. I'm Jack. Jack Halliday. I live here in Hadleyburg. Some folks call me a loafer. Some call me no-account. The nicer ones just say I'm good-natured. I'll tell you what I do ... I notice things. Everything. And most of the time, I make fun of the things I notice. Especially around Hadleyburg. You see, Hadleyburg was the most honest and upright town in all these parts. Been that way for three generations. Hadleyburg was so proud of its reputation, and so eager to keep it, that it began to teach the principles of honest dealings to the babies in the cradle, and made such teachings the staple of education. Temptations were kept out of the way of the young people, so their honesty could have every chance to harden ... and solidify ... and become a part of their very bones. Neighboring towns were jealous and sneered at Hadleyburg's pride, calling it vanity. But all the same, they had to admit that Hadleyburg was really an incorruptible town. And if you really pressed the fact, they would also admit that the mere fact a young person came from Hadleyburg was all the recommendation needed to secure responsible employment.

Now, you've probably noticed I'm speaking in the past tense. Hadleyburg "was" the most honest and upright town in all these parts. But alas, it had the bad luck to offend a passing stranger ... possibly without knowing it ... certainly without caring. Hadleyburg kept to itself, and didn't care for strangers or their opinions. Still, it would have been well to make an exception in this one case, for he was a bitter and vengeful man. For a whole year he tried to invent a satisfactory revenge. He contrived many plans, and all of them were good, but none of them was quite sweeping enough.

JACK: *(Cont'd.)* The poorest plan would hurt a great many individuals, but what he wanted was the plan that would damage the entire town.

At last he had an idea, and when it fell into his brain, it lit up his whole head with an evil joy.

STRANGER: *(Offstage.)* I know what I will do. I will corrupt the town.

JACK: So, one night, about 10:00, the stranger arrived at the house of Edward Richards, and his wife, Mary. Edward was the old cashier at the Hadleyburg bank.

(BLACKOUT.)

End of Scene 1

Scene 2

(AT RISE: The living room of MARY and EDWARD RICHARDS, on left half of stage. MARY, an old woman, is sitting in one of the chairs, reading. There is a KNOCK at the door.)

MARY: Come in.

STRANGER: *(Staggers in with a large, heavy sack over HIS shoulder.)* Please don't get up, madam. I won't disturb you. *(HE sets the sack between the empty chairs.)* There. It is pretty well concealed. One would hardly know it was there. May I see your husband for a moment?

MARY: He ... he's not here. He's gone to Brixton, and may not return before morning.

STRANGER: Very well, madam. It is no matter. I merely wanted to leave that sack in his care, to be delivered to the rightful owner when the person is found. I am merely passing through the town tonight to complete a matter that has long been on my mind. My errand is now completed, and I shall go, pleased and a little proud. You will not see me again. Attached to the sack is a paper that will explain everything. Good night, madam. *(HE exits.)*

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(MARY looks after HIM. She moves to the sack and takes the paper. She reads it.)

MARY: Oh, mercy! And the door not locked!

(EDWARD enters. He is as old as Mary.)

EDWARD: Home, Mary. I'm finally home.

MARY: Oh, Edward!

EDWARD: I'm so tired, Mary. Tired clear out. It's dreadful to be poor, and have to make these dismal journeys at my age.

MARY: But, Edward -

EDWARD: Always at the grind, grind, grind on a salary.

MARY: Edward, listen to me -

EDWARD: Another person's slave, and them sitting at home in slippers, rich and comfortable.

MARY: I'm so sorry for you, Edward, you know that. But be comforted. We have our livelihood. We have our good name. And listen to this -

EDWARD: Yes, Mary. Our good name. And that's all. Don't mind my talk. It's just a moment's irritation and doesn't mean anything. Kiss me. *(THEY kiss.)*

MARY: Oh, Edward

EDWARD: There. It's all gone now and I'm not complaining anymore. I just need to rest a bit in my chair. What have you been doing? What's in the sack?

MARY: Oh, Edward, it's too dreadful.

EDWARD: What is?

MARY: That sack. It contains gold coins. One hundred sixty pounds of gold coins!

EDWARD: What??

MARY: Here. Read this.

EDWARD: "To be published, or the right person found by private inquiry. Either way will work. This sack contains gold coins weighing one hundred sixty pounds, four ounces ..." A hundred and sixty pounds? Why, Mary, that's ... FOR-TY THOU-SAND DOL-LARS!

MARY: Forty thousand?

End of Freeview

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