

DIRTY WORK AFOOT

-Or-

How to Dig Your Fortune in Ten Easy Lessons

By Sherry Roseberry

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STORY OF THE PLAY

Villainous Bernard Blackburn is in debt up to his dark moustache but with the help of a crooked insurance agent, Godfrey Patterson, he plans to marry innocent and lovely Polly Goodson. She believes she is penniless, but actually her late father's insurance policy is very valuable.

Blackburn is somewhat daunted when he meets Polly's family, including her crazy Grandfather who believes he's still in the calvary; her book-reading, gum-chewing sister who's obsessed about Amazons; and her sling-shot toting brother who leaves his fishing worms on the sofa. On top of it all, there's John Trueheart, Polly's fine, upstanding (but poor!) neighbor for whom she feels great affection. Blackburn convinces Trueheart to go off to make a fortune before he asks Miss Polly for her hand in marriage.

In the meantime, Blackburn and Patterson get their accomplice, Freeda Pane, installed as a boarder in Miss Polly's house. When Freeda tries to further Blackburn's case, comedy takes the high road as the disapproving maid interferes by dusting and polishing everywhere Freeda sits.

Luckily, Trueheart finds his fortune in a diamond mine and in a final hilarious blackout scene, everyone gets their just rewards.

A man-hungry neighbor lady, a stage hand with an attitude, and a flirtatious Card Carrier who announces olio acts, all add to the fun of this show.

CAST OF CHARACTERS

5 M, 6 W, 3 Flexible

CARD CARRIER: Female, somewhat a flirt
BERNARD BLACKBURN: The villain
GODFREY PATTERSON: His inebriated accomplice
POLLY GOODSON: The heroine.
JUNIOR (or SISSY): Polly's mischievous sibling.
GRANDPA GOODSON: Daft, but harmless Grandpa.
ELLA GOODSON: Polly's liberated sister.
JOHN TRUEHEART: The hero.
STAGE HAND: Played by male or female.
HORTENSE: The Goodson's opinionated neighbor.
FREEDA PANE: The villainess.
MAID JENKINS: The Goodson's snooty maid.
SHERIFF LONG: The town sheriff.
DEPUTY TOWERS: The deputy - male or female.
EXTRA: Gentleman planted in audience who flirts with Card Carrier.

Playing Time: With olio acts and intermission, about 2 hours.

SYNOPSIS

Act I, Scene 1: A summer's day, Patterson's office

Act I, Scene 2: Hour later, Miss Polly's living room

Act I, Scene 3: A short time later

Act II, Scene 1: The next day, Patterson's office

Act II, Scene 2: Later that afternoon, living room

Act III, Scene 1: Several days later, living room

Act III, Scene 2: Later that day, living room

Act III, Scene 3: Still later, in a dark cave

OLIOS/MUSIC

In DIRTY WORK AFOOT, we suggest olios between scenes and acts. In theatre, olio means almost everything except the play itself - a miscellany of musical pieces, minute-long skits, animal acts, acrobats, strongmen, clowns, pantomimes, burlesque lectures, stand-up comic routines, juggling, whistling, solos, duets, trios and quartets on the banjo, trombone, bones, and snare drum.

Olios can set a tone or they can sometimes make a contrasting statement. In addition to their entertainment value, they give the stage crew time to change sets. For further olio ideas and songs for melodrama, we suggest the book, BETWEEN HISSES, available through Eldridge Publishing.

SETTING

There are three scene changes: Patterson's office, Miss Polly's living room, and the cave.

Patterson's office has a desk with papers on it, a couple of chairs, and a picture of the late Senior Patterson hanging on the wall behind the desk. It is hung loosely so it can fall.

Polly Goodson's living room has a sofa with extra pillows, a couple of chairs, and an end table. The front door is USL. The door to the veranda is CSR. The garden is beyond that. The kitchen is USR. Bedrooms CSL.

The cave features diamonds painted in white to show up in black light. There are a couple of wooden crates, a pick ax and shovels.

ACT I
Scene 1

(AT RISE: GODFREY PATTERSON sits at his desk. With each scene he's in, he's a little more tipsy. His nose turns redder and redder. BLACKBURN, in hat and cape, is pacing. PIANO music.)

BLACKBURN: Are you sure about that insurance policy?

PATTERSON: Yes, quite sure. I have it right here in my papers. *(Shuffles through papers.)* Ah, somewhere.

BLACKBURN: My whole future depends on the policy. With my debts the way they are, it won't be long before the authorities come after me.

PATTERSON: *(Still looking, holds up slip of paper.)* I knew I would find it sometime.

BLACKBURN: The policy?

PATTERSON: No, the grocery list that the Misses gave me last week.

BLACKBURN: *(Explodes, hits desk with fist.)* I don't care about your grocery list, what about the policy?

PATTERSON: Yes, yes of course. I should have it right here-

BLACKBURN: *(To audience.)* It seems so utterly ridiculous that he is an influential insurance agent, *(Smiles to SELF.)* but then again, with his brains maybe I can con him out of his share.

PATTERSON: Ah, here it is. It was in the papers that Miss Polly brought over. *(Walks around desk to show BLACKBURN.)*

BLACKBURN: Are you sure that Miss Goodson knows nothing of its value?

PATTERSON: Quite sure. After Mr. Goodson was accidentally killed, she said she found these papers in a small box, but she said she didn't understand them. Since I had handled their insurance, she wanted me to take care of them.

BLACKBURN: *(Rubbing hands in expectation.)* Good, good and Miss Goodson believes she is penniless?

PATTERSON: Yes, she is very distressed. The creditors will be howling at her door.

BLACKBURN: Are you sure you checked over everything?

PATTERSON: Quite sure. I'll stake my reputation on it.

BLACKBURN: Your reputation? Why, right now you're so crooked you wouldn't know up from down.

PATTERSON: Crooked? My dear sir, if I am the teeniest bit inebriated, may my illustrious Grandfather Patterson turn over in his grave. *(Extends arm to picture on wall.)*

(BLACKBURN looks at picture just as it turns upside down. PATTERSON is startled, and Blackburn is shocked. They both stare at picture-count of 1 - then at each other - count 1-2-3 - then at the audience - pause. Blackburn is dumfounded, Patterson shrugs shoulders.)

PATTERSON: I think I'd better see Miss Polly and tell her about an old friend of mine who will be pleased to make her acquaintance. *(Exit USL.)*

BLACKBURN: *(To audience.)* If things go according to plan, I will make Miss Polly my loving wife *(Laughs.)* and under the law, everything that she owns will become mine. *(Pause.)* Egad! What if the future Mrs. Bernard Blackburn is lacking somewhat in her appearance, else why is she still unmarried? *(Chuckles.)* No matter, any young damsel is instantly beautiful with the tune of one hundred thousand dollars. Bernard, my boy, when it seems that the chips are down, luck would have it the other way. *(Sigh.)* I guess that's what comes from living right.

(Instantly the picture of SENIOR PATTERSON crashes to the floor. Spooked, BLACKBURN makes a rather hasty retreat USL.)

CURTAIN

(PIANO MUSIC. CARD CARRIER announces olio act and next scene.)

Scene 2

(AT RISE: POLLY GOODSON'S living room. PIANO music. CARD CARRIER brings out "AH" sign. POLLY freezes, then she paces.)

POLLY: What am I to do? We have no money left, and I have to pay the creditors. I am tired of all this responsibility. (*Hands on hips, faces audience.*) For once I would like to be looked after, and have someone help with Grandpa Goodson, Ella and Junior. If only John would ask me to marry him. (*Paces.*) I know how he feels about me. I would be proud to be his wife. We wouldn't have much money, but oh, we would be happy. (*Hand to ear, leans towards door.*) I think someone is at the door. (*LOUD KNOCK. SHE smiles at audience.*) See. (*POLLY answers to admit PATTERSON.*) Good afternoon, Mr. Patterson, what brings you out this day? (*Hopefully.*) Did you find something in Father's papers that would solve our problems? (*THEY cross to DSC.*)

PATTERSON: Mostly, I've come on a social call, but since you've asked, you can expect very little from your father's policies. (*POLLY reacts.*) Your only hope is to stall the creditors until you decide what you will do with the monies you'll receive. (*Casually.*) Who knows, maybe someone will ask for your hand in marriage.

POLLY: I know of no one except John Trueheart, and he seems too shy to ask me.

PATTERSON: Wonderful! (*Sharp look from POLLY.*) That is to say, John Trueheart, would be ah-a wonderful ah-husband. But since nothing is definite, may I take the liberty of introducing you to an old friend of mine? (*Grabs hold of HIS lapel, practiced speech.*) He has spent many years seeking his fortune and using every opportunity to ah-help his fellow man. But he came to me only this morning, grievous of the fact he has no lady friends. Of course, I thought of you and that you were not spoken for - as yet. I hope you do not mind, but I encouraged him to visit.

End of Freeview

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