

**THE VEXATIONS OF VERITY
OR WILL VIRTUE PREVAIL?
A MELODRAMATIC FARCE**

**Presented at the Centre County Historical Society, Pennsylvania
July 4, 1988**

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NARRATOR

Good evening – and a beneficent Fourth of July to you all. Tonight we offer an event of wondrous theatricality for your entertainment and pleasure. We have called upon the dramatic muse and will produce for you a melodrama – guaranteed to move your heart to fear, and empathy, and joyous exaltation at the triumph of virtue and justice. As playwright Cornelius Logan wrote, “The Stage paints Virtue in her holiday garments, and though storms sometimes gather around her radiant head, the countenance of the heavenly maid, resigned, serene, and meek, beams forth after a season of partial suffering with ineffable refulgence.

Tonight, on this very stage, the mansion players will present THE VEXATIONS OF VERITY, OR WILL VIRTUE PREVAIL? Join me to see if Virtue, with or without holiday garments and refulgence, does in fact conquer the consuming forces of evil. The characters in tonight’s drama are three: the virtuous, if slightly vacuous, Miss Kate Verity; her bold, if longwinded lover, Dudley Fairbrother; and, of course, Mathias Thorndyke – a man whose soul is so evil that he squints in the sunlight. The players ask for your support, but vocally rather than physically. Please abandon yourself to the pleasures of hissing Mr. Thorndyke, or cheering Mr. Fairbrother, but we ask that you refrain from joining them on stage.

Thank you.

As our drama opens, our two lovers are deep in conversation – Dudley Fairbrother is about to tell Miss Verity that he is going to depart on an adventure, perhaps forever, much to Miss Verity’s dismay. Let us turn our attention now to the stage.

(THE CURTAIN OPENS TO REVEAL THE TWO LOVERS SEATED TOGETHER
ON A SMALL LOVESEAT.)

DUDLEY

The day has dawned that I must go – to seek the edges of the world – out of the confines of this tiny forgotten valley – away from what is known, and staid...

KATE

(aside)

Oh, Dudley, my poor heart shivers and contracts at these words.

DUDLEY

(continues – unheeding)

It is time to seek the wild joys of the heaving open sea.

(becomes entranced by his vision)

The lash of rain against my face in a storm...

KATE

Oh, Dudley.

DUDLEY

The chill of the salt wind whipping through me...

KATE

Oh, Dudley.

DUDLEY

Riding high upon the riggings, seagulls circling around, shrieking – seeing the sun as it eases up from the eastern rim of the world, or the moon sailing high above in the sky, her face mirrored by a becalmed sea...

KATE

(exasperated)

Oh, DUDLEY!

DUDLEY

What?

KATE

(regaining her delicacy)

What visions are these, of glory farm removed from this gentle valley, far from the call of home, family, and hearth –

DUDLEY

Great visions indeed! I go to seek my fortune as a sailor. Oh, Kate, is it not fantastic?

KATE

(fishing)

Will you not be lonely when you leave?

DUDLEY

(oblivious)

Lonely? Hah! What is loneliness to adventurer? Did Columbus cry when he left the shores of Spain? Did Sir Walter Raleigh weep when the mists closed over his homeland? No! The Sea is mother to those who sail her with courage – and she soothes the traveler's heart.

KATE

(wails)

Oh, DUDLEY!

DUDLEY

What is it now?

KATE

Oh, Dudley, the modesty of a maiden's heart denies her the opportunity to speak as she truly feels...will you not miss *me* when you are gone?

DUDLEY

Well, I, uh...of course I will, sweet Kate. Perhaps I shall even write.

KATE

(aside)

Oh, what mockery he makes of our love. But not through malice – he just remains untouched by Cupid now – through ignorance he is safe from the arrows of desire.

DUDLEY

(finally awakening to the fact that maybe something is wrong) ^

Why, Kate, you look quite distressed. Fear not for my safety.

KATE

Oh, no, dear Dudley. I have much faith in your strength and abilities.
I do not fear for you.

DUDLEY

Then what is it that you fear?

KATE

It is nothing. I do not want to disturb you with trifles on the eve of your departure.

DUDLEY

I shall not hear of this, Kate. Tell me what has creased the porcelain beauty of your brow.

KATE

(aside)

I would not faint in the face of his masculinity!

(to Dudley)

There is a man...

DUDLEY

What man?

KATE

The man from whom I rent my small apartment since my poor Mama died. The man who was my Papa's solicitor – and who, I fear, stole money in my Papa's name, leaving him to die of a broken heart at the accusations of dishonesty leveled at him.

DUDLEY

You don't mean...

KATE

(Shivering with fear.)

Yes. Mathias Thorndyke.

NARRATOR

Enter Mathias Thorndyke, a man to whom evil is inherent, all consuming, sublime. A man to whom the innocence of women and children is tantalizing ground for destruction.

A man to whom pain and suffering and vice are exquisite.

In short, a man whom even his dog hates.

(MATHIAS THORNDYKE ENTERS ON THE BALCONY – RUBBING HIS HANDS TOGETHER AND BEING GENERALLY VILLAINOUS. DUDLEY AND KATE DO NOT SEE HIM.)

DUDLEY

But, Kate, what can you possibly fear from him now? There is nothing tht he can do to you without your just recourse from the law.

KATE

(giving him up as a lost cause on this count)

No, Dudley, perhaps you are right. It is only my foolishness.

DUDLEY

Well, I'm lad to hear that. Ah, well, Kate, the hour of my departure is drawing nigh...

KATE

(mastering herself)

Goodbye, dear Dudley. And Godspeed.

DUDLEY

Goodbye!

(DUDLEY EXITS.)

KATE

Oh, my heart, it breaks! In vain with tears I may deplore my loss, in vain look back to what I was before. My love has left me, never more to return.

THORNDYKE

(to audience)

I understand robbery, murder, and plunder of all kinds. I can, in the darkness of night, strangle footmen, jailors, soldiers, anything. But sooner than repent, I had rather the dogs should gnaw upon my skull at the foot of a pillory!

KATE

(looking up to see who is there)

Mathias Thorndyke!

(THORNDYKE EXITS BALCONY.)

KATE

I tremble when I see that horrid man – he carries on his brow the badge of vice. That unshaven cheek, that keen, but sunken eye, that thundering brow, all denote the villain. His scowl is dreadful as a winter's blast, his hate is deadly – oh, beware that man! Oh, what shall I do? I have no one to turn to in my hour of need. I am alone, forsaken, and can not defend my honor on my own. Oh, Dudley, if only you had not felt the call of adventure! If only you had reconciled yourself to our love – then I would be safe in your arms. But, alas, it is no longer possible. Now I can only wait patiently for the storm to burst upon my head and trust to heaven for my deliverance.

(THORNDYKE RE-ENTERS DOWNSTAGE.)

NARRATOR

Little does the virtuous Miss Verity realize what is in store for her. The storm about to burst will shake the very earth beneath her feet. Her mettle and faith will be tested to the utmost – but wait – Mr. Thorndyke has joined us once again.

THORNDYKE

(with exaggerated and insincere courtesy)

Why, it is my lovely tenant, Miss Verity. I hope that the day sees you well.

KATE

(recoiling)

Why, yes, thank you, Mr. Thorndyke.

(she turns away, a gesture of dismissal)

THORNDYKE

I do not suppose that you have thought much as to why I have troubled you at your charming abode, Miss Verity.

KATE

(with a show of spirit)

No, sir, indeed I have not.

THORNDYKE

I trust that you recall, Miss Verity, what day it is today, what event of importance is to happen today.

KATE

(hedging)

It's the Day of Independence, Mr. Thorndyke.

THORNDYKE

How droll! What an ironic occurrence – I had quite forgotten that it was that holiday. Perhaps that shall be as you remember it in the future, Miss Verity.

KATE

What exactly are you attempting to imply?

THORNDYKE

(smiling)

What I am implying, Miss Verity, is that we have a situation – not a serious one, so do not look so alarmed, I beg of you – but a slight problem that needs to be rectified.

KATE

Yes?

THORNDYKE

In reviewing your dossier today, in looking over the estate of your poor, departed father, God rest his soul, I have noticed that there is a slight – it saddens me to have offend your delicacy and mention such a morbid and mundane matter – but it seems that, well, you no longer have any assets.

KATE

What?! You scoundrel! My father left me an entire trust fund!

THORNDYKE

Ah, Miss Verity, I am quite at a loss how to explain to you – you see, my dear, that expenses are so very high these days – well, I was forced to draw your rent from your assts in my care – you had not been matching the rise of cost in your payments.

KATE

Oh, you villain!

THORNDYKE

And, unfortunately, today, besides being Independence Day, is also rent day. Miss Verity, I must demand that you immediately surrender me this month's rent, or I shall be forced to – how shall I say this – discuss the matter with the local constabulary.

KATE

I cannot believe your nerve! First you destroy my father, then you rob me of all my possessions, and now you are demanding more!

THORNDYKE

Really, Miss Verity. You must pay the rent.

KATE

But I can't pay the rent!

THORNDYKE

You must pay the rent!

KATE

I can't pay the rent!

THORNDYKE

Then I shall be forced to go to the police.

KATE

Oh, what is going to become of me?! Heaven protect thy fainting supplicant!

(**KATE COLLAPSES ON THE SOFA IN A SWOON.**)

THORNDYKE

There is, of course, another recourse, Miss Verity.

KATE

(snapping to and sitting up hopefully)
oh, please, tell me – what? Anything!

THORNDYKE

You could become my wife!

KATE

No! Never!

THORNDYKE

I will have you!

(**THORNDYKE GRABS KATE AND PULLS HER FROM THE COUCH TOWARDS THE DOOR.**)

KATE

Oh, Dear Heavens, no! Oh, Dudley!

(**THEY DISAPPEAR THROUGH THE DOORWAY.**)

NARRATOR

It has come to this, then. The storm has burst; the floodgates open wide. Is there no hope? Will Miss Verity be damned to unholy matrimony with this devil? Will she be forced, year after year, to submit to the fiend – until her once-rosy cheeks are sunken, her once-sparkling eyes dull with fear?

(**LO AND BEHOLD, DUDLEY ENTERS.**)

DUDLEY

Kate! Kate! I have returned.

(to audience)

The lure of the salt spray deadened in my heart as I drew farther away from Kate. No longer do far off isles, breaching whales, or chests of Spanish gold excited me. What are these without HER? Sudden clouds dimmed the summer skies when I was not near her; but then the true radiance swept down from above – for then I realized, it's Love! I am a slave to passion! I lay myself at her feet! Speaking of which, where are they? Where is she? Oh, Kate! It's Dudley – I have come home – do not be angry that I left, sweet Kate... Oh, where could she be? Would that I had not left, perhaps I have missed the one chance for my heart's true happiness! Oh, Kate!

(**DURING ALL OF THIS, THORNDYKE HAS BROUGHT KATE OUT ONTO THE BALCONY AND HAS TIED HER TO THE POSTS. WHEN DUDLEY CRIES HIS LAST 'OH, KATE!' SHE RAISES HER HEAD FROM THE FAINT THAT SHE HAS BEEN IN.**)

KATE

Ooooooh, Dudley!

DUDLEY

Kate!

THORNDYKE

Ha! Ha! Ha!

KATE

Dudley!

DUDLEY

Kate!

THORNDYKE

Ha! Ha! Ha! How I banquet on every sigh; each tear is nectar to my soul!

KATE

Oh, Dudley! Save me from this horrible man!

DUDLEY

You fiend! Thorndyke, prepare to meet your maker!

THORNDYKE

Ha! Ha! Ha!

(THORNDYKE EXITS.)

DUDLEY

Have courage, my love!

(DUDLEY EXITS.)

KATE

He called me his love! Oh, arrows of desire!

NARRATOR

What shall happen now? The bright flame of pure and virtuous love is pitted against the smoldering embers of malevolent lust. Will virtue prevail? Will justice triumph?

(THE NEXT SCENE IS A CHASE SCENE ALL OVER THE SCENERY, INTERSPERSED WITH VARIOUS 'KATE!'S, 'DUDLEY!'S, AND 'HA! HA! HA!'S – AT SOME POINT REVERSED SUCH THAT THE WRONG CHARACTER SAYS THE WRONG THING. THE ACTION STOPS EVENTUALLY – THEY ARE IN A STANDOFF.)

DUDLEY

To love is the hero's privilege; and his first duty to protect the helpless!

THORNDYKE

Away with conscience – justice – all the checks that lie upon my path! The way to rise is to forego all that is good!

DUDLEY

How can you so unfeelingly contemplate the ruin of an artless girl?

THORNDYKE

My heart is marble that cannot be softened!

DUDLEY

Then I shall soften it for you through death!

KATE

(you guessed it)
Oh, DUDLEY!!

DUDLEY

Thorndyke! I give you one last chance to save yourself! Repent and flee, and all will be forgiven!

THORNDYKE

HA! HA! HA! My soul shall burn forever e'er I beg for forgiveness!

(A SHOT RINGS OUT, **THORNDYKE** CLUTCHES HIS CHEST. **DUDLEY** EXITS.)

THORNDYKE

Death and furies! Foiled! Hell and Confusion! Foiled Again! Betrayed, my schemes annihilated – myself undone, my enemies triumphant – lost – lost – all is destroyed – all – all – *(falls)* – Is all hope excluded? Slaves of guilt! Votaries of passion! See what recompense awaits you. Auuuggghh! I DIE!

(**THORNDYKE** KEELS OVER.)

NARRATOR

What price is paid for villainy? Virtue rises, like the phoenix from the ashes. Vice is dashed upon the rocks.

(**DUDLEY** RE-ENTERS ON THE BALCONY NEXT TO **KATE**.)

DUDLEY

Oh, Kate!

KATE

Oh, Dudley.

(THEY EMBRACE, **KATE** PULLING FREE FROM HER BONDS.)

KATE

My HERO!

THE END.