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One Day More

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CHARACTERS

Captain Hagberd (a retired coasting skipper).

Josiah Carvil (formerly a shipbuilder--a widower--blind).

Harry Hagberd (son of Captain Hagberd, who as a boy ran away from home).

A Lamplighter.

Bessie Carvil (daughter of Josiah Carvil).

SCENE

A small sea port.

To rights two yellow brick cottages belonging to Captain Hagberd, one inhabited by himself the other by the Carvils. A lamp-post in front. The red roofs of the town in the background. A sea-wall to left.

Time: The present-early autumn, towards dusk.

ONE DAY MORE

SCENE I.

CURTAIN RISES DISCLOSING CARVIL and Bessie moving away from sea-wall. Bessie about twenty-five. Black dress; black straw hat. A lot of mahogany-coloured hair loosely done up. Pale face. Full figure. Very quiet. Carvil, blind, unwieldy. Reddish whiskers; slow, deep voice produced without effort. Immovable, big face.

Carvil (Hanging heavily on Bessie's arm). Careful! Go slow! (Stops; Bessie waits patiently.) Want your poor blind father to break his neck? (Shuffles on.) In a hurry to get home and start that everlasting yarn with your chum the lunatic?

Bessie. I am not in a hurry to get home, father.

Carvil. Well, then, go steady with a poor blind man. Blind! Helpless! (Strikes the ground with his stick.) Never mind! I've had time to make enough money to have ham and eggs for breakfast every morning--thank God! And thank God, too, for it, girl. You haven't known a single hardship in all the days of your idle life. Unless you think that a blind, helpless father-----

Bessie. What is there for me to be in a hurry for?

Carvil. What did you say?

Bessie. I said there was nothing for me to hurry home for.

Carvil. There is, tho'. To yarn with a lunatic. Anything to get away from your duty.

Bessie. Captain Hagberd's talk never hurt you or anybody else.

Carvil. Go on. Stick up for your only friend.

Bessie. Is it my fault that I haven't another soul to speak to?

Carvil (Snarls). It's mine, perhaps. Can I help being blind? You fret because you want to be gadding about--with a helpless man left all alone at home. Your own father too.

Bessie. I haven't been away from you half a day since mother died.

Carvil (Viciously). He's a lunatic, our landlord is. That's what he is. Has been for years--long before those damned doctors destroyed my sight for me. (Growls angrily, then sighs.)

Bessie. Perhaps Captain Hagberd is not so mad as the town takes him for.

Carvil. (Grimly). Don't everybody know how he came here from the North to wait till his missing son turns up--here--of all places in the world. His boy that ran away to sea sixteen years ago and never did give a sign of life since! Don't I remember seeing people dodge round corners out of his way when he came along High Street. Seeing him, I tell you. (Groan.) He bothered everybody so with his silly talk of his son being sure to come back home--next year--next spring--next month----- . What is it by this time, hey?

Bessie. Why talk about it? He bothers no one now.

Carvil. No. They've grown too fly. You've got only to pass a remark on his sail-cloth coat to make him shut up. All the town knows it. But he's got you to listen to his crazy talk whenever he chooses. Don't I hear you two at it, jabber, jabber, mumble, mumble-----

Bessie. What is there so mad in keeping up hope?

Carvil (Scathing scorn). Not mad! Starving himself to lay money by--for that son. Filling his house with furniture he won't let anyone see--for that son. Advertising in the papers every week, these sixteen years--for that son. Not mad! Boy, he calls him. Boy Harry. His boy Harry. His lost boy Harry. Yah! Let him lose his sight to know what real trouble means. And the boy--the man, I should say--must 've been put away safe in Davy Jones's locker for many a year--drowned--food for fishes--dead.... Stands to reason, or he would have been here before, smelling around the old fool's money. (Shakes Bessie's arm slightly.) Hey?

Bessie. I don't know. May be.

Carvil (Bursting out). Damme if I don't think he ever had a son.

Bessie. Poor man. Perhaps he never had.

Carvil. Ain't that mad enough for you? But I suppose you think it sensible.

Bessie. What does it matter? His talk keeps him up.

Carvil. Aye! And it pleases you. Anything to get away from your poor blind

father.... Jabber, jabber--mumble, mumble--till I begin to think you must be as crazy as he is. What do you find to talk about, you two? What's your game?

(During the scene Carvil and Bessie have crossed stage from L. to R. slowly with stoppages.)

Bessie. It's warm. Will you sit out for a while?

Carvil (Viciously). Yes, I will sit out. (Insistent.) But what can be your game? What are you up to? (They pass through garden gate.) Because if it's his money you are after-----

Bessie. Father! How can you!

Carvil (Disregarding her). To make you independent of your poor blind father, then you are a fool. (Drops heavily on seat.) He's too much of a miser to ever make a will--even if he weren't mad.

Bessie. Oh! It never entered my head. I swear it never did.

Carvil. Never did. Hey! Then you are a still bigger fool.... I want to go to sleep! (Takes off his hat, drops it on ground, and leans his head back against the wall.)

Bessie. And I have been a good daughter to you. Won't you say that for me?

Carvil (Very distinctly). I want--to--go--to--sleep. I'm tired. (Closes his eyes.)

(During that scene Captain Hagberd has been seen hesitating at the back of stage, then running quickly to the door of his cottage. He puts inside a tin kettle (from under his coat) and comes down to the railing between the two gardens stealthily).