

Sample Pages from
Little Nell and the Mortgage Foreclosure

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LITTLE NELL AND THE MORTGAGE FORECLOSURE

A MELODRAMA IN ONE ACT BY
John Donald O'Shea



Little Nell and the Mortgage Foreclosure
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Characters

NELL PUREHEART: The Heroine

AUNT NORA: Nell's Wise Old Auntie

GIDEANN BYBALL: Nell's Hired Hand

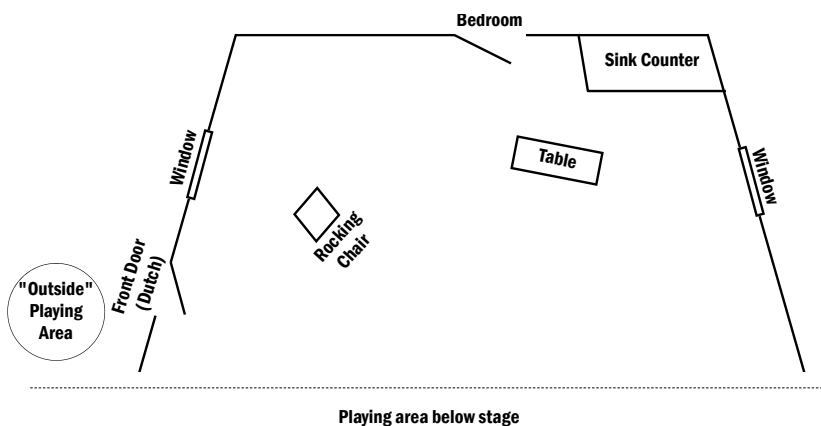
WILEY WHIPLASH: The Villain

CASEY CLEANDEED: The Hero and a Lawyer

Setting

The kitchen of Nell's home.

The time is the present or thereabouts.



Various furniture items can be added to finish off the set.

ACT I - Little Nell and the Mortgage Foreclosure

NELL PUREHEART is in the spacious kitchen of her home. NELL enters with a bouquet of flowers and proceeds to arrange them in a vase on the kitchen table.

NELL: *(to audience)* How I wish that Casey would return from law school. Since the family automobile dealership failed in the face of unscrupulous foreign competition, we have had no income, and our little family has been forced to live off our meagre savings. If Casey were here, I'm certain that he would know what to do. *(NELL crosses to the rocking chair and sits.)* Then too, I miss his sweet voice and gentle smile.

NORA: Did I hear you talking to yourself again, Nell? Still pining for Casey, eh?

NELL: *(crossing to NORA)* Good morning, dear Aunt Nora. *(giving NORA a peck on the cheek)* Did you sleep well?

NORA: As well as an old woman might who fears that she may be evicted from her life-long home at any moment.

NELL: *(crossing to table to arrange flowers further)* Cheer up, Auntie. I am certain Mr. Whiplash will look favourably upon my request for forbearance. *(to audience)* After all, we have been valued customers of his Savings and Loan, and have faithfully paid our mortgage for a good many years before these latest vicissitudes.

GIDEANN BYBALL enters below the stage downstage left. GIDEANN is NELL's loyal hired hand. She never smiles. She is a grump who enjoys being a grump — especially when WILEY WHIPLASH is around. She carries a sign which faces away from the audience and a shovel. She places the sign down carefully as to have quick access. She then starts digging a hole with her shovel.

As GIDEANN digs her hole, WHIPLASH makes his entrance from off downstage right. He is attired in the traditional villain's cape and stovepipe hat. He also wears a moustache, and white socks. If there is a piano, it plays traditional melodramatic "villain entrance" music. During WHIPLASH's entrance, he stops to admire himself and to afford the audience a like opportunity. As WHIPLASH does, GIDEANN holds up her sign for the audience to see. That sign says, "Boo!" and she encourages the audience to do

so. *WHIPLASH* should react with annoyance as if he hears the booing, but as if he isn't quite sure where it is coming from. During *GIDEANN's* next aside, he freezes.

GIDEANN: (to audience) Didn't anybody ever learn you people to read? I don't carry these signs around twenty-four hours a day for nothing. That there vermin is Wiley Whiplash. He's the villain. Never know when I'm gonna bump into that slithering scallywag. In a melodrama, you're supposed to boo the villain. Audience participation. Get it? (a pause) Now, try it again!

WHIPLASH unfreezes and heads to *NELL's* front door. He stops again when he notices *GIDEANN*.

WHIPLASH: Well, if it isn't old Gideann Byball.

GIDEANN: (She looks her own clothes over. Without a hint of a smile.) Well, if it ain't, her clothes sure fit good. (a slight pause)

WHIPLASH: I'm here to see Ms. Pureheart.

GIDEANN: Then why are you bothering me?

WHIPLASH: I was merely inquiring whether Ms. Pureheart was in.

GIDEANN: Do I look like your secretary? Knock on the door and find out.

As soon *WHIPLASH* turns away, *GIDEANN* unveils a second sign that tells the audience to "Hiss." *WHIPLASH* again reacts and then freezes during *GIDEANN's* next speech.

GIDEANN: (to audience) Had I known ole Wiley was coming, I've have dug more holes. Deep ones. Don't like that fellow very much. Don't trust him. His types steals candy from babies. Why, just the other day, I saw him snatch a Snickers bar from Baby Ruth!

More villain music plays. *WHIPLASH* is still outside the door of *NELL's* house. *GIDEANN* exits downstage left.

WHIPLASH: (to audience) I have no doubt but that you will look unfavourably upon the actions I am about to take. You will undoubtedly conclude that Jimmy Stewart would have acted otherwise. But then he did not invest his Savings and Loan's moneys in oil wells in Texas. What I am about to do, I do to protect the depositors. My actions are noble. I have no ulterior motives, other than maintaining my somewhat lavish lifestyle.

(*peeking in through the window*) Egad, her beauty dazzles me. She must be mine!

WHIPLASH makes a knocking gesture — three quick raps. The sound effect of the knock comes late. He is puzzled. He knocks again twice; again the sound is late, and when it comes there are three knocks.

NORA: Nell, there is someone at the door.

NELL crosses downstage right to the door and opens it.

NELL: (*letting him in*) Good morning, Mr. Whiplash. How kind of you to come.

WHIPLASH: (*crossing downstage center*) Good morning, Miss Pureheart. I was sorely distressed when I read your letter. (*he turns back to NELL*) How can I help you?

NORA: We regret to say, we are two penniless women unable to make even a partial payment on our mortgage. (*sits in rocker*)

WHIPLASH: (*looking to the heavens*) How it rends my heart to hear you say so!

NELL: (*crossing to WHIPLASH*) I'm afraid we must ask forbearance on your part, until such time as I can obtain a suitable position.

WHIPLASH: In the meantime, dear Nell, could you not find work at "Burger Queen?"

NELL: (*shocked deeply*) Indeed not. No Pureheart has ever sunk that low!

WHIPLASH: (*crossing downstage right*) Well then, perhaps, you might work as a menial, or take a minimum wage job? I'm certain I could find suitable work for you at my Savings and Loan.

NELL turns her back to him and becomes rigid.

NELL: You, sir, suggest a fate worse than death.

WHIPLASH: Not as yet, my dear. (*to audience*) That comes later. (*He crosses up behind NELL.*) I don't wish to seem rapacious, my dear, but do you recall the old Jimmy Stewart movie where he explained how a Savings and Loan operates? (*to audience*) How I loan out the moneys that you pay in so your neighbours can build their houses? (*to NELL*) If you do not pay your just debts, I cannot help your neighbours, my dear.

NELL: (to *WHIPLASH*) Oh, what an evil person I am. (to *audience*) By my default, I am undermining the entire economic fabric of our community! (to *NORA*) What shall we do?

NORA: Do you know a good hiding place?

WHIPLASH: (*crossing to NELL*) Nell, dear Nell. Do not reproach yourself. Hear me out.

NELL: (*taking a step back*) What exactly are you proposing, dear Mr. Whiplash?

NORA: (*rising*) Oh, Nell, he's proposing the fate worse than death!

WHIPLASH drops to one knee.

WHIPLASH: I love you, Nell. I have always loved you. (*He rises and moves downstage center to address the audience.*) Especially since my geologist has told me your farm sits atop a pool of oil! (*He quickly tippy toes upstage to NELL and drops to one knee again.*) I propose to marry you, my dear.

NELL: (*drawing back*) But are you also proposing to forgive the mortgage?

WHIPLASH: (*rising*) If you were, my dear, to deed the farm to me, you have my word that I will make your debts my own.

WHIPLASH, NELL and NORA "freeze" during the following.

GIDEANN re-enters downstage left below stage. She carries a potted plant perhaps three feet high, which she obviously intends to plant in the hole she just dug. She stops and turns upstage to set the potted plant down. As she does, she shows us her backside, clearly exposing a "Boo" sign attached either to her fanny or across her back. She then turns her head back to the audience.

GIDEANN: With that Whiplash hanging around, planting trees seems like a perfectly good waste of a lovely hole! (*exits downstage left*)

NELL: (*taking a step to him*) Oh, Mr. Whiplash...

WHIPLASH: (*He takes a step to her with arms extended to embrace her.*) Call me Wiley, my dear.

NELL: (*retreating*) ...Oh, Mr. Wiley.

WHIPLASH: (*not just a little disgusted*) Forget the "Mr."

NELL: (*crossing to him and taking his hand gently*) Wiley Whiplash, your kind proposal has come like a whip — excuse the pun — lashing. May I, good sir, give you my answer tomorrow? I need time to consider.

WHIPLASH: (*to audience, much peeved*) The deadbeats have missed nine months of mortgage payments. But giving a twenty-four hour extension is cheaper than hiring a lawyer. (*to NELL*) Of course, my dear. (*He kisses her hand, and starts to leave.*) Now my dear, if you will excuse me, I must begin foreclosure proceedings against widow Moran and her seven small children. I bid you, good day. (*He exits front downstage right door. From outside NELL's front door, to audience.*) Now I have the proud and haughty beauty in my power. She cannot escape!

GIDEANN re-enters from below stage, from left. She now carries a pot with a larger plant. Her "Boo" sign is attached to the side of the tree facing away from the audience. The "Hiss" sign is now attached to her fanny, or written across her back. She turns upstage, and bends over to put the pot down.

WHIPLASH: (*victoriously*) I shall have both her and her farm!

As WHIPLASH starts to exits downstage right, GIDEANN turns the tree, to expose to audience the "Boo" sign attached to plant. WHIPLASH reacts. Then as WHIPLASH resumes his exit, GIDEANN turns to the audience.

GIDEANN: You know, I probably should have mentioned to ole "Worthless" that I've been digging more holes for the new septic tank over that yonder. Terrible shame if he found one.

WHIPLASH: (*Falling into one of GIDEANN's holes, out of view of audience*)
AHHiiiiiiiiieeeee!

GIDEANN: (*pause*) Appears he found one. (*exits left*)

NELL: (*from inside, crossing to NORA, distraught*) Dear Aunt Nora, what shall I do?

NORA: (*rising*) I'll pack the bags!

NELL: (*stopping her*) Dear Aunt, now is not the time for levity.

NORA: I wasn't levitating, Nell. You can't marry Wiley. The man's a cad. He as much as said that all he wants is the deed to the farm. Moreover, do you love him?

NELL: (*stiffly, with absolute certainty*) Indeed not!

NORA: Then you must not marry him. Remember your dear Aunt Matilda's fate, unless you, too, wish to become a bird in a gilded cage!

NELL: Oh, how I wish Casey were here. He'd know what to do!

Hero fanfare plays. Enter CASEY CLEANDEED from downstage right to outside NELL's door. He is heroic, but stiff.

CASEY: (*just outside the door, cupping his ear*) Did I hear someone mention my name?

NELL & NORA: (*hearing him*) Casey!

CASEY: (*cupping his ear again, and poking his head through the top part of the Dutch door*) Did I hear someone mention my name?

NELL & NORA: (*much relieved*) Yes.

NELL opens the bottom half of the door and literally drags him in, slinging him downstage left.

NELL: (*crossing to him*) Casey, do you know what to do?

CASEY: (*pompously*) Of course, I do. I just passed the bar. Now what's the problem?

NORA: We have not paid the mortgage for the last nine months, and we will be evicted unless Nell consents to marry Wiley Whiplash by 9 a.m. tomorrow. We need your help.

CASEY: And you shall have it. (*He gets a pen and paper from his pocket.*) Just sign this contingent fee contract. (*He hands NELL his pen and the contract.*)

NELL: What does it say?

CASEY: It says if I win I get both you and the farm.

NORA: What if you lose?

CASEY: Perish the thought. Casey Cleandeed will protect you against the wiles of Wiley Whiplash! Nell, Darling...

NELL: Are you proposing too?

CASEY crosses to NELL and goes to one knee precisely as WHIPLASH did.

CASEY: I love you, Nell. I have always loved you. I propose to marry you my dear. (*embracing her at a distance*) Will you have me my dear?

NELL: Oh, yes Casey. With all my heart.

They move to kiss. GIDEANN enters from the front door and interrupts them, just as they are about to kiss. She carries a sign under her arm which says "No Kiss Zone." She holds it so audience can see it.

GIDEANN: Pardon me, Miss Nell, but I thought you'd like to know, I just finished planting them plants. Do you still want me to bathe the hogs?

NELL: (*still in a dumbfounded CASEY's arms*) Thank you, Gideann.

NELL, embarrassed, separates from CASEY, and crosses to the upstage sink to get a bottle of bubble bath.

NELL: Yes, I don't like it when they smell like pigs. And be sure to use plenty of bubble bath.

NELL hands the bubble bath to GIDEANN who exits via the front door. NORA crosses to CASEY before he can kiss his intended, and tugs his shoulder.

NORA: Now that you have rescued Nell from the clutches of Wiley Whiplash, how do you propose to save the farm? Casey, do you have any money?

CASEY: (*dumbfounded*) Not a cent.

NORA: And you're up to your eyeballs in unpaid student loans?

CASEY: Yes.

NORA: How then, I repeat, do you propose to bring the mortgage current?

CASEY: Gad, I hadn't thought of that! May I have twenty-four hours?

NELL & NORA: Twenty-three. He gets here at nine for his answer.

All exit. GIDEANN enters from downstage left, below stage to dig some more holes. She stops far left. She again carries a sign and turns it toward the audience. It says, "Tomorrow, 9 AM."

GIDEANN: *(to audience)* This one has nothing to do with Wiley. I've got a fearsome toothache. Dentist wants to do a root canal at 9:30. Told me if I'm late, he'll do it without xylocaine. *(indicating the sign)* Wrote myself a note so I don't forget.

WHIPLASH enters from downstage right and speaks to the audience.

WHIPLASH: A perfect morning, to claim one's bride!

GIDEANN, still far downstage left, casually flips the sign, and the sign now says "Boo." This can be done by having two signs with a hinge at the top.

GIDEANN: Speaking of root canals, here come another one — the two-legged variety. *(sarcastically)* This must be my lucky day!

After WHIPLASH does a take to the booing, GIDEANN exits stage left.

WHIPLASH: *(to audience)* I'll bet you thought I was going to tie her to the railroad tracks, didn't you? You tend to think of her as the victim. But in fact, I am the victim. I have loaned her money, and now she has broken her written word to repay it. I have done nothing wrong. I have made her an honourable proposal: If she will become my wife and deed the farm to me, I will cure her defaults. *(with great sincerity)* It is true I am withholding inside information, but I am gambling, too. I may drill for oil and never find it... and Nell may turn out to be a shrew! Or even worse, a Cub fan. *(Insert the name of the most despised local sports team.)*

He knocks. This time it works.

NORA: Come in.

WHIPLASH: *(entering)* Good morning, madam. Where is the fair Nell?

NELL: *(entering from upstage center)* Here I am.

WHIPLASH: I have come for your answer, my dear.

NELL: *(rigidly, in place)* I have decided, sir, to decline your kind offer.

WHIPLASH: *(aside)* How this galls me. *(to NELL)* You will rue the day, my proud and haughty beauty! *(aside)* We villains just love that line. *(to NELL)* I shall commence foreclosure proceedings at once. *(aside)* I'll bet you thought I was going to run her through the sawmill! *(to NELL)* What do you say to that, my pretty?

NELL: Just this.

CASEY enters from the upstage center door.

NELL: (to CASEY) Sue him!

CASEY: I have here legal papers charging you with violations of the Federal Truth in Lending Act, the Iowa Instalment Loan Act and sexual harassment! (*He hands WHIPLASH the complaint and summons.*)

WHIPLASH: (*taking papers, as if they are hot*) Egad, foiled again!

NELL: I'm so happy I could dance!

They dance as WHIPLASH examines the legal papers.

Blackout.

ACT II - Little Nell and the Virtuous Villain

Villain fanfare plays. WHIPLASH enters from off downstage right, outside the door of NELL's house. He carries a travel bag.

GIDEANN enters from stage left, pushing a wheelbarrow. On the downstage side of the wheelbarrow, the "Boo" sign can be seen. She spots WHIPLASH.

GIDEANN: Well, if it isn't my old buddy, Wiley Whiplash.

WHIPLASH: Well if it isn't his clothes sure fit good.

GIDEANN: It's a terrible villainy to steal another body's joke.

WHIPLASH: That's okay. It was a terrible joke. (*he pauses, quite pleased with himself*) But enough of this folderol. I've come to see Miss Pureheart.

GIDEANN: Too bad for her.

WHIPLASH: Can you tell me where she is?

GIDEANN: Sure can.

WHIPLASH: Well?

GIDEANN: Not gonna.

WHIPLASH: In that case, I'll find her myself. Have a nice day, Gideann.

GIDEANN: Same to you, Whiplash. "Break a leg!" (*exits stage left*)

WHIPLASH: *(to audience, alluding to GIDEANN)* I think the old biddy is actually growing rather fond of me. It's my masculine charm. Women find me irresistible. You realize of course, that in the language of the theatre, "break a leg" means "good luck." That's the nicest thing the old hag has ever said to me. *(puzzled, then reconsidering)* Then, of course, we're not in a theatre... In any event, now is the time for Wiley Whiplash to recoup his fortunes. I have been brought to the abyss of poverty by the failure of my Savings and Loan business, and Nell's sexual harassment lawsuit. But if I can lay hands on Nell's farm and the pool of oil under it, I shall be returned to the standard of living to which I had become accustomed... *(he laughs an evil laugh)*

GIDEANN enters downstage left, pushing her wheelbarrow. The wheelbarrow is fuller, and the sign now says "Hiss." She exits.

WHIPLASH removes a razor from his bag and shaves his moustache. He removes his hat and coat, and takes a skimmer hat and a striped sports coat from his case. He puts them on, replacing the "traditional" villain's garb. Lastly, he removes a bible from his bag and carries it in his hand.

WHIPLASH: But first we shall see if clothes do indeed make the man!

As WHIPLASH crosses to knock on the door, GIDEANN re-enters from far downstage left pushing her wheelbarrow, which holds an even larger potted plant. The "Boo" sign faces the audience as she enters. She removes the plant from the wheelbarrow, and exits downstage left. WHIPLASH knocks. But the sound of the knock is late.

NELL is busy in the kitchen.

NELL: Do I hear a knock on the door?

WHIPLASH knocks again. The sound is late again.

NELL: Yes. I do hear a knock on the door. *(She crosses to open the front door.)*

WHIPLASH: *(entering just a step)* Good morning, Miss Pureheart. *(aside)* Note that I've even changed my aftershave.

NELL: Good morning!... gasp! *(aside)* His manly beauty — not to mention his aftershave — quickens my erstwhile placid heart.

WHIPLASH: May I come in? (*aside*) Note the deeper, more resonant masculine voice.

NELL: Why, yes... (*aside*) How deep and resonant his voice is! (*to WHIPLASH*) By all means. (*aside*) And yet... I am certain I have heard it before... under more sinister circumstances.

WHIPLASH: Do you not recognize me, Nell?

NELL: (*turning to face him*) Why, no, Sir... Should I?

WHIPLASH: It is I, Nell... Wiley Whiplash.

NELL: (*She recoils a step. Aside.*) Has he come for revenge? (*to him*) Wiley Whiplash? (*aside*) Why do my thoughts suddenly recur to the old saw mill along the river? (*to him*) I did not recognize you. (*aside*) How he is transfigured. I wonder if he's single?

WHIPLASH: How are you?... How's Casey?

NELL: Casey? Casey who?... But where is your moustache? Your cape? Your stovepipe hat? Your white socks?

WHIPLASH: Gone, Nell. Gone forever. I have reformed.

NELL: Reformed? (*aside*) How I am forever drawn to virtue.

WHIPLASH: When I lost the Savings and Loan, I befriended John Barleycorn.

NELL: How splendid! In a time of troubles, we all need good friends.

WHIPLASH: You misunderstand, dear lady. When I say "I befriended John Barleycorn," I am reproving myself. I am admitting that I turned to whiskey. Demon rum!

NELL: You became a drunkard, all because of my sexual harassment suit? (*aside*) How I reproach myself for being the cause of suffering to a fellow human being.

WHIPLASH: Actually, I limited myself to one beer per night. (*aside*) To do our most nefarious scheming, we villains must stay sober. (*to her*) But I had started down the slippery slope.

NELL: What called you back?

WHIPLASH: You, Nell. (*crossing to NELL*) Your fair face and your sweet voice beckoned me back through the dark of night.

NELL: How I applaud myself for being the beacon that beckoned you back from the brink of blackness.

WHIPLASH: Then, too, I was haunted by the thought of you wasting yourself on that prosaic Casey Cleandeded.

NELL: Take care, Sir, that you do not disparage my fiancée. (*aside*) And yet he speaks the truth. Shall I reprove him for that? (*to him*) Kindly state your business, Sir. (*aside*) You may take all the time you need.

NORA enters from the upstage center door. She startles and gestures wildly.

NORA: Who are you talking to, Nell? Wiley Whiplash... gasp...! What are you doing here?

WHIPLASH: I have taken a position with the Salvation Army... selling bibles. (*He hands NORA the bible he has been carrying.*)

NORA: Is that so? (*looking him in eye*) I still don't trust you. (*crossing to NELL*) If you ask me, he is still a wolf — or perhaps a skunk — in sheep's clothing.

WHIPLASH: You wrong me, madam.

NELL: Dear Aunt Nora, would you not agree with Shakespeare that "An old cloak makes a new jerkin."

NORA: Old jerkins, new jerkins, phooey! "Once a jerkin always a jerkin!"

NELL: Dear Aunt! (*taking WHIPLASH's hand*) What of Christian charity? Surely, our upbringing requires us to believe sinners can change for the better.

NORA: Sinners, maybe. Snakes, never. Bible salesman, Humbug!

NORA deposits the bible on the kitchen table, and disgustedly exits through up center door.

NELL: Dear Mr. Whiplash, you must excuse my Aunt. She's lost all faith in men ever since the Congress taxed her Social Security benefits.

WHIPLASH: Say no more, dear Nell. In truth, I do not believe the change myself. (*aside*) Note that when I say "I don't believe the change myself," I am telling the absolute truth.

NELL: Please, let me get you a cup of tea.

As NELL crosses to get the tea, she trips on the hem of her dress, and falls. WHIPLASH catches her.

WHIPLASH: *(aside)* Eureka!... a penny from Heaven!

NELL: *(in his arms)* Oh... How clumsy of me. *(aside)* I feel so helpless, like a baby in his arms.

WHIPLASH: Nell...

NELL: Please, Mr. Whiplash. I am pledged to another. *(She resists, but only slightly.)*

WHIPLASH: I love you.

WHIPLASH moves to kiss her. Before he can, he is interrupted by CASEY's untimely entrance. CASEY enters without knocking, totally oblivious to all that is happening.

CASEY: 'Morning, Nell. 'Morning, Wiley.

CASEY notices nothing amiss as he crosses past them to get a cup of coffee at the counter. WHIPLASH and NELL break. NELL is embarrassed, WHIPLASH is annoyed.

WHIPLASH: Oh, it's you.

NELL crosses up to CASEY and kisses him on the cheek. WHIPLASH counters, moving downstage right.

NELL: Good morning, Darling.

CASEY: *(turning to her)* Nell dear, I have wonderful news!

NELL: Yes, Casey?

CASEY: *(crossing downstage center, to audience)* I've decided to run for Vice President of the United States.

NORA enters from the upstage center door.

NORA: That you, Casey? *(to WHIPLASH)* You still here?

WHIPLASH: As a matter a fact, I must be going. I must bring the salvation to other sinners. *(He exits through downstage right door. Aside.)* Did you see that? A shave, a change of clothes, and a little earnest wooing and the haughty beauty all but throws herself into my arms.

GIDEANN re-enters to turn her tree, and as she turns it, she exposes the "Hiss" sign. She steps back to admire her work.

WHIPLASH: So much for railroad tracks. Now to back to the office from whence I shall send another five hundred letters to that simple-minded Cleandeed, urging him to begin instantly his campaign for the Vice Presidency! But first, I must purchase more perfume.

Just as WHIPLASH finishes, GIDEANN, dissatisfied with how the tree is facing, again turns the tree to show the "Boo" sign. She again backs off to check how the tree looks.

WHIPLASH: You did see how she nearly kissed me, didn't you? She is in my power. She cannot escape. I shall have both her and the farm!

GIDEANN turns the plant back to "Hiss."

GIDEANN: It almost appears that ole Wiley's taken up residence here. Guess I'm going to need more signs. *(she exits)*

NELL: Auntie, Casey has decided to run for Vice President of the United States!

NORA: What on earth for?

CASEY: Because the people urge me to do so.

NORA: Wherever did you get that foolish notion?

CASEY: From women. They've been sending me perfumed letters urging me to seek the Vice Presidency. It all began right after I won Nell's sexual harassment suit against Wiley. Why I'll bet I've already received five hundred or more!

NORA: So, when are you going to start?

CASEY: This afternoon.

NORA: This afternoon? But I thought you were going to marry Nell.

CASEY: Nell, who? *(They glare at him.)* Oh, this Nell! *(He turns away from NELL and crosses downstage left.)* I know that this campaign must seem like a dark cloud in an otherwise azure sky, but it will pass. *(he turns to face NELL)* You will wait for me, won't you, Nell? It will be a mere three years. I promise, I'll write.

NELL: *(nobly)* How could I do otherwise? The good of the country must come first!

NORA: Why don't you two get married before Casey leaves?

NELL: (*crossing in-between NORA and CASEY*) No, no! The country must come first! I can wait.

CASEY: (*taking her hands*) Nell, dear. You're so good; so understanding. And, please, don't be downcast. (*He exits through the front door. Then from outside the front door he continues.*) I am indeed the luckiest man in the world! I have Nell's love. I have my law license. And I have an adoring public! (*He exits downstage right.*)

NORA: (*to audience*) Now how do you like that? Well, I guess I'd better go out and pluck a chicken for dinner. (*She exists downstage right.*)

NELL: I fear I am a shameless hussy. Here I am engaged to marry Casey, and yet I am suddenly deeply attracted to Wiley. And why did I not protest Casey's plan to postpone our wedding three years? Am I truly that patriotic? (*She starts to exit upstage center, but stops.*) Why do I suddenly feel so evil? And why does the thought of a near kiss in the kitchen evoke thoughts of another kiss in the moonlight from a man who only recently... (*She exits upstage center*)

NORA: (*re-entering from front door*) My bunions are killing me. That normally means rain... or that that scallywag Whiplash is up to his usual no good. (*looking out the window, just upstage of the front door*) And there's not a cloud in the sky. And now, when Nell needs him most, Casey gets urgings from over five hundred of our neighbours here in the county to go off and run for office. You'll probably think me a suspicious old biddy, but I smell a skunk, and the only one I've seen around here lately is that worthless Whiplash! Five hundred letters! Wait a minute!... I reckon there aren't more than three hundred voters in the whole county and half of them are men. I think it's time for dear old Aunt Nora to play detective. (*She exits upstage center.*)

Villain fanfare plays as WHIPLASH appears off downstage right. As WHIPLASH enters from stage right, GIDEANN enters below stage left. She carries a long shovel over her shoulder. On one face of the shovel, a sign says "Boo." On the other side, a second sign says "Hiss." Immediately after the villain fanfare, GIDEANN assumes a "Grant Wood" farmer pose and displays the "Boo" side.

WHIPLASH: By now dear old Casey should be off on the hustings. And my pretty plum should be ripe for plucking. Let's just hope that Aunt Nora is off somewhere haunting a house.

GIDEANN rotates her shovel to show "Hiss."

WHIPLASH: I want you to take special note of how I disarm the virtuous Nell and make her mine. To put it simply, there must be variety even in virtue — evidence Casey's falling star!

GIDEANN rotates the shovel quickly back to say "Boo." Then, to "Hiss." WHIPLASH starts to knock, but NELL opens the door and he nearly knocks on NELL's forehead instead. She has seen him coming through the window, but she acts as if surprised.

NELL: Oh! Good afternoon, Mr. Whiplash.

WHIPLASH: *(taking one step in)* Good afternoon, dear Nell. I'm sorry to intrude, but I believe I left one of my bibles here this morning. *(aside)* Notice that the professional villain leaves nothing to chance!

NELL: Why, yes... there it is. *(She gets it from table and hands it to him.)*

WHIPLASH: *(moving his arms from the bible to NELL)* I have a confession to make.

NELL: Yes?

WHIPLASH: Nell, I didn't leave the bible here accidentally. I wanted an excuse to return.

NELL: *(aside)* How I am attracted by his candor. *(to him)* Why, Mr. Whiplash, I hardly know what to say. *(aside)* I never knew being naughty could feel so nice.

WHIPLASH: *(crossing past NELL)* And I have second confession to make! I wrote all those letters to Casey. I wanted him out of the way so I could have you all to myself. I love you, Nell. I have always loved you. I want to marry you.

NELL holds him off.

NELL: Oh, Mr. Whiplash...

WHIPLASH: Call me Wiley, my dear.

NELL: Oh, Wiley, my dear...

WHIPLASH: And Nell I have a third confession to make!

NELL: *(aside)* How virtuous he's become; why even the most devout Catholics rarely make more than two a year. *(She silences him, by placing her fingers before his mouth.)* But wait, I too have a confession to make!

WHIPLASH: Yes, Nell?

NELL: I love you, too. *(She moves to kiss him.)*

GIDEANN enters from front door and crosses in front of them just as they are about to kiss. She blocks the audience's view with a large sign which says "PG 13 Kiss."

GIDEANN: *(to audience)* We're missing a chicken. Thought I'd better check and see if he wandered in here. *(She looks around and calls, still holding up the sign.)* Homer! *(The chicken doesn't appear.)* Guess he's not here.

The kiss ends. GIDEANN removes the sign and exits. WHIPLASH looks offstage as if to say "what just happened?" As soon as she's gone, but before the embrace ends, NORA enters from the downstage right door and sees NELL in WHIPLASH's arms. She carries a plucked (rubber) chicken.

NORA: Unhand that girl you beast! *(She hits him on back with the rubber chicken.)*

WHIPLASH: *(trying to run away)* Ouch, ouch, that hurts!

NELL: *(trying to stop NORA)* Stop, dear Aunt Nora. Stop! I love him!

NORA: *(still whacking WHIPLASH)* Fiddlesticks. What about Casey?

NELL: Casey? Casey who?

NORA: *(turning to face NELL)* Casey Cleandeed, your fiancée!

NELL: *(suddenly remembering)* Oh, that Casey.

NORA: Yes. That Casey. Have you lost your mind, girl? *(pointing)* That's Wiley Whiplash you were kissing. *(aside)* True, all the eligible men have avoided her like the plague since she sued him for sexual harassment, but this is ridiculous!

NELL crosses past NORA to WHIPLASH.

NELL: Yes, Auntie. I have lost my mind. I'm in love with Wiley! And I may marry him!

WHIPLASH: Eureka! *(aside)* Nell, the farm and the oil are mine, all mine! *(He laughs a villain's laugh.)*

NORA: *(staggering downstage right)* The fate worse than death! *(aside)* How I wish Casey were here! He'd know what to do.

Hero fanfare plays as CASEY comes from off downstage right.

CASEY: (*heroically*) Did I hear someone mention my name???

More hero fanfare plays.

ALL: Casey???

CASEY: (*just outside of door*) Did I hear someone mention my name?

NORA crosses to door, opens it and drags him in.

NORA: Yes. Get in here, you simpleton. Nell's going to marry Whiplash.

CASEY: But she can't do that; she's going to marry me. It's a criminal offence to marry two husbands at one time. We learned that in law school. Why, why, it's burglary!

NORA: She's only planning to marry one, and it's him!

WHIPLASH: (*aside*) I thought I got rid of him! (*crosses past NELL toward CASEY*) What are you doing here?

CASEY: I missed my train.

WHIPLASH: (*distraught*) I sent you airline tickets.

NORA: I could feel it in my bones! You were behind all this! (*putting it together*) It was you who wrote all those letters!

WHIPLASH: (*à la George Washington*) I cannot tell a lie... Indeed, I did.

NORA: Nell, did you hear that? Did you hear the scoundrel confess?

NELL: Wiley has already told me everything. He did it to save me from Casey.

CASEY: (*staggered*) I don't understand. How can you waste yourself, dear Nell, on this blackguard? I must say, I find your conduct shocking. Shocking!

NORA moves downstage center to CASEY.

NORA: Casey, if you truly love her, forbear.

CASEY crosses stage left to NELL.

CASEY: But I do love you, Nell.

NORA: Then quit talking; do something!

CASEY: There! (*He pecks NELL on the cheek.*)

NORA: That's not how you do it. What did they teach you in law school, anyway?

CASEY: (*to audience*) Ah... Civil Procedure, Torts, Federal Taxation...

NORA: I see the problem! Quick, do something else!

CASEY: (*thinking for a second*) I got it. I'll sue him for alienation of affections. (*NORA gives him a disgusted look.*) Maybe I should send roses???

NORA: (*aside*) Good grief... Are all lawyers this romantically inept? (*to him*) I've got a better idea. I'll rent some Humphrey Bogart movies — with Lauren Bacall and Kate Hepburn. You watch them. Then we'll beat Wiley at his own game. Come on.

They exit, with NORA dragging CASEY out the front door.

NELL: We seem to be all alone. What would you like to do?

WHIPLASH: Let's get out of here before they come back.

NELL: And where and what do you have in mind??

WHIPLASH: Come, Nell, I know an old justice of the peace, just a few miles from here. Let's go there. Marry me tonight.

NELL: (*holding back*) Wiley, dear, could we not wait until tomorrow? I'd like to invite dear Aunt Nora and Casey.

WHIPLASH: (*aside*) Curses! A delay may be fatal! But what choice do I have? (*to NELL, sweetly*) Of course, my dear. I may even ask Casey to be best man.

Blackout.

ACT III - Little Nell and Virtue Revisited

NORA is in the kitchen. It is the next day.

NORA: How I long for those now distant days when we were a duo of destitute damsels in dire distress, and when that worthless Wiley Whiplash crassly contrived to lay his greedy hands on our happy homestead. The prosperity that has come in the wake of Nell's sexual harassment lawsuit against Wiley, seems to have addled the girl's brain. Rather than marrying the prosaic Casey, her dearest friend and childhood sweetheart, she discards her virtue,

and indeed is on the verge of wasting away her entire self on that utter scoundrel.

Nell's infatuation with that blackguard is bizarre. She is noble, forthright and good. He is venal, base and false. But as inexplicable as Nell's fascination with Wiley may be, Wiley's attachment to her is even more grotesque.

It cannot be love. His Machiavellian mind could never be satisfied with her simple Iowa virtue.

NORA crosses to the table to set it. CASEY enters without knocking. He is carrying two VCR tapes.

CASEY: Good morning, dear Aunt Nora.

NORA: 'Morning Casey. Learn anything from those Bogart movies?

CASEY: (*crossing to NORA*) Indeed I did. I learned how with a couple of old oxygen tanks, I can construct torpedoes. (*He gives her the movies.*)

NORA: Oh, goodie! If we ever have to sink "African Queen" here in the cornfields of Iowa, you'll be of great assistance. (*She crosses up left of the table and puts the movies on the counter.*)

CASEY: Do I, dear Aunt Nora, detect a modicum of sarcasm in your words?

NORA: (*crossing to table to finish setting*) Casey, I had you watch those movies so you could see how Bogart wooed his leading ladies. I was hoping you might pick up something that you could use to win back Nell's affection.

CASEY: Ohhhh! (*the light dawns*) Maybe I should watch them again?

NORA: You can do that tonight. Right now you've got to help me figure out what Wiley's up to.

CASEY: That's easy. He's in love with Nell and wants to marry her. (*Noting that his shoes have left black marks on the carpet.*) Oops! It seems I've tracked mud on the carpet.

NORA: Casey, we haven't had rain in a month and we've had the hottest July on record. Where on earth did you find mud? (*She crosses up to the sink to get a rag.*)

CASEY: I came over along the creek.

NORA crosses to the spot on the carpet, getting down to wipe it up.

NORA: It won't come up. *(She rubs her finger in the 'mud' and smells it.)*
Casey, this isn't mud; it's oil!

CASEY: Gee, Auntie, I'm really sorry.

NORA: It's all right. It was an accident. Just don't do it... *(Suddenly the light dawns.)* Land o' Goshen, Casey! That's it! Don't you see?

CASEY: *(still focused on the spot on the floor)* No, I think you got it all up.

NORA: Casey, if you stepped in oil, there's got to be oil under this farm. Don't you understand?

CASEY heroically crosses downstage center.

CASEY: If someone's been polluting, I'll put a stop to it.

NORA: It's the oil that Wiley's after. It's not Nell. It's the oil he wants. Don't you see?

CASEY: *(Still to the audience, and still clueless.)* Of course, I do. *(turns to NORA)* But why would anyone want goeey old oil when he could have Nell? *(Still not putting two and two together.)* No, I don't.

NORA: *(crossing downstage right, thinking)* There's oil under this farm. That's why Whiplash tried to foreclose the mortgage. Marrying Nell is just a stratagem to lay hands on the oil. Once she won the lawsuit, we were financially independent and Wiley was ruined. *(She turns back to CASEY.)* Wiley has decided to recoup his losses the only way he could.

CASEY: By reforming his life, and working hard!

NORA: No, by pretending to reform, and by gulling Nell into marrying him. Once he has his hands on her, he figures he will also have his hands on this farm and the oil.

CASEY: *(He staggers back. The day finally breaks for him.)* Gadzooks! The man's a cad. *(to NORA)* He must be stopped!... But how?

NORA: *(disgusted)* Why ask me? You're the lawyer!

CASEY: Gad, I had forgotten! Excuse me, dear Auntie. I must consult my law books, and re-examine my old briefs! *(He exits downstage right.)*

NORA: Something tells me that I should have been the lawyer. I think I'll just mosey on down by the creek, just to double-check my hypothesis. Then if I find evidence of oil, I'll consult with Basil T. Shale, our local geologist. *(She grabs her shawl, and exits downstage right.)*



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