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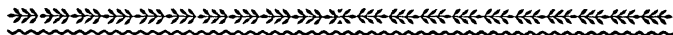
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Dramatic Publishing





Adrift In New York

or

Her First False Step

A Melodrama of the Gay Nineties

By
ADDISON AULGER



THE DRAMATIC PUBLISHING COMPANY



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ADRIET IN NEW YORK

or

Her First False Step

A Melodrama of the Gay Nineties
For Nine Men, Six Women, and Extras*

CHARACTERS

SILAS WESTON. *a New England farmer*
MARTHA WESTON *his elder daughter*
NELLIE WESTON. . *the Flower of the Family*
AUNT SARAH WESTON *a spinster*
JACK MERRIWELL . . . *A Poor but Honest Man*
FRANCIS (DESPERATE) DESMOND.
. . . *an Unscrupulous Villain*
JIM BURKE *of the underworld*
HI PERKINS *a limb of the law*
DAN FOGARTY. *a honkytonk owner*
MAGGIE CLANCY (OLD MAG)
. . . *who has seen better days*
MULLIGAN *a Bowery cop*
SADIE MAY *a variety performer*
MONTY (THE DIP) MORAN
. . . *a honkytonk employee*
SLICK McCOY *a variety performer*
LILLIAN MORRISON*
. . . *the honkytonk prima donna*

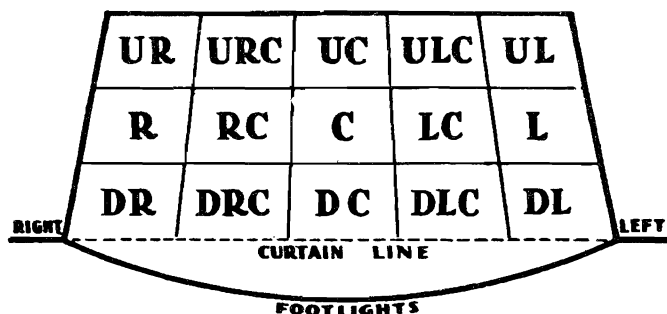
Piano player, customers, other dancers and singers as desired.

Place: *The old homestead, and a Bowery honky-tonk.*

Time: *The Gay Nineties.*

*For notes on doubling, see Production Notes, pages 82-84.

CHART OF STAGE POSITIONS



STAGE POSITIONS

Upstage means away from the footlights, *downstage* means toward the footlights, and *right* and *left* are used with reference to the actor as he faces the audience. R means *right*, L means *left*, U means *up*, D means *down*, C means *center*, and these abbreviations are used in combination, as: UR for *up right*, RC for *right center*, DLC for *down left center*, etc. A territory designated on the stage refers to a general area, rather than to a given point.

NOTE: Before starting rehearsals, chalk off your stage or rehearsal space as indicated above in the *Chart of Stage Positions*. Then teach your actors the meanings and positions of these fundamental terms of stage movement by having them walk from one position to another until they are familiar with them. The use of these abbreviated terms in directing the play saves time, speeds up rehearsals, and reduces the amount of explanation the director has to give to his actors.

ACT ONE

Scene One

SCENE: It is a September morning in the Gay Nineties. The scene is the living room of Silas Weston's New England farm home. The exterior door is UR, the door to the kitchen DR. Doors leading to the bedrooms are at UL and DL. There is a window UC (summer exterior backing) with lace curtains tied back. There is a small table in front of the window, and another small table against the wall L, between the doors. A small box with a hinged lid rests on this table. At DC is a medium-sized table, with a straightback chair on either side. A fireplace is URC, with an oil lamp and a flower vase on the mantel. UR is a hall tree, or clothes hooks on the wall. Other furnishings may be added as desired.

(CURTAIN MUSIC: "The Old Oaken Bucket.")

AT RISE OF CURTAIN: SARAH WESTON is discovered dusting furniture with a feather duster. She is at the table DC when her niece, MARTHA WESTON, enters DR with a letter in her hand.

MARTHA (crossing C with tiny, mincing steps). Mr. Thorn just brought the mail from town, and look, here is another letter for Nellie from that stylish city man, Francis Desmond. (Shows letter to SARAH.) Isn't he a wonderful penman? (Moving a little R.) And he is so handsome. (Emotion--with a broad gesture.)

SARAH. Handsome is as handsome does. (Heroic gesture with duster.) I'm not the one to interfere in family affairs, nor tell any father how to bring up his children; but, if a daughter of mine was carryin' on like Nell Weston, I think I'd put my foot down. (Stamps foot.) If I know anything about worldly goings-on, that young lady is getting just a mite fast. (Crosses DLC.)

MARTHA (crossing C, laying letter on table). Aunt Sarah! You provoke me terribly with your old-fashioned notions. (Crosses LC with mincing steps.) Just because you have never been smitten on a man is no reason Nellie and I should follow in your footsteps.

SARAH. Humph! I have yet to see the man with whom I'd trust my life and name. But, if I were Nellie's age, I'd lose no time in making the best of my chances with Jack Merriwell.

MARTHA (with mock amazement). Why, Aunt Sarah! Are you entertaining evil thoughts?

SARAH (sternly). No! They are entertaining me.

MARTHA (looking down and gesturing both arms). But Jack is a poor man--(Looking up--arms up and out.)--and Mr. Desmond is wealthy!

SARAH. You mark my word. Some day one of Jack's inventions is going to make him rich. And, if Nellie continues to carry on with this good-for-nothing city man, I think it is high time her father knows about it.

SILAS (off R). Thanks for fetchin' the mail, Mr. Thorn. (SARAH and MARTHA, hands cupped to ears, lean R, listening.)

SARAH. Ah! Here he comes now.

(SILAS enters UR, hangs hat on hall tree.)

SILAS (speaking with much concern). Sarah—
Martha--Neighbor Thorn says wealthy old Mr.
Willoughby was robbed and murdered last
night. (Crosses DRC.)

SARAH. Do tell!

MARTHA (taking a little step toward SILAS). What
a shame!

SILAS (moving to chair right of table C). Let us
hope they find the criminal. (Pronounced "crim-
a-nile.")

SARAH. Poor Mr. Willoughby. He was a fine man.
He will be missed in these parts. Many deserv-
ing people would get loans from him who could
not get them at the bank. (Rhythmical gesture
on "at-the-bank.")

MARTHA (sauntering DR--flippantly). Well, he'll
collect no more interest on loans in this world.

SARAH. Martha! I'm surprised at you. (Crosses
DL.) My, my. It's getting so a body can't feel
safe, even in his own home. What is the world
coming to? (Gesturing on "world coming to"
with duster.)

SILAS (sitting right of table). There's no knowin'.
Martha, will you fetch a pail of fresh water
from the spring?

MARTHA. Yes, Father. (Goes out UR.)

SILAS. I should have had some word from the bank
today about the mortgage on the old farm.
(Seeing letter on table.) Oh, here's a letter.
(Picks it up.) Could this be it?

SARAH. That letter is for Nellie.

SILAS. Oh. (Returns letter to table.)

SARAH (crossing to table). Silas Weston, are you
not interested in knowing from whom Nellie
might be receiving letters?

SILAS. Why do you ask that, Sarah?

SARAH (leaning over table from left with duster in

right hand, pointing it back from hips). Look you, Silas Weston. That letter is from Francis Desmond--(Breaking pose.)--and it's not the first one she has received. That man is a rogue and a scoundrel and no fit person to be writing love letters to Nellie.

(WARN MUSIC.)

SILAS. Do you really think so, Sarah?

SARAH. I know so! He's a good-for-nothing villain--(Crossing DL.)--or my name is not Sarah Weston. (Comedy gesture and pose.)

SILAS. Then he's not the man to be sparkin' our Nellie.

SARAH (crossing DR). I hope, brother Silas, that a word to the wise--(Turning to SILAS at door --gesturing.)--is sufficient! (She goes out DR.)

(MUSIC: "In The Gloaming.")

(NELLIE, entering UL, crosses quietly above SILAS C and puts her hands over his eyes.)

SILAS. Nellie!

NELLIE (stepping to right of SILAS--caressingly). My dear--good--father.

SILAS (rising, crossing below NELLIE to her right and turning). Nellie, I want to have a little talk with you.

NELLIE. Why, Father! Your brow is wrought with worry and anxious contemplation. What can be troubling you?

SILAS (indicating chair right of table). Sit here, my child, while I speak. (NELLIE sits right of table.) Nellie, since your mother died, I have tried to take her place in this great cruel world. (Broad gesture.)

NELLIE. Yes, Father, you have. Poor, dear

Mother. (Deep sigh.) But, Father, what is it? Speak--else I perish of anxiety.

SILAS. This letter--(Handing letter to NELLIE.) --from that city man, Francis Desmond. He's not our kind, Nellie. I'm thinkin' he's a man with a past. And before I'd see you throw yourself away on a man of his stripe, I'd sooner see you sleepin' beside your dear, dead mother--(Full arm gesture off R.)--out yonder, back of the orchard.

NELLIE (rising and crossing L). Father, you are unjust. (Turning to SILAS.) I know he is a gentleman and he has offered to take me to New York City and make of me, a great singer. (Broad gesture.)

SILAS (crossing L to NELLIE). Why, Nellie, surely you don't mean to say you would go. This man is scarcely more than a mere acquaintance.

NELLIE. But, Father, it seems I have known him, always. (Ecstasy gesture.)

SILAS. I'm a-fearin' for you, Nellie--and remember--counsel after action is like rain after harvest. If you go through with this wild "i-dee," it's goin' to be heartbreakin' to all of us and a powerful blow to Jack Merriwell. A powerful hard blow. (He strikes palm of hand with fist on the word "hard.")

JACK (off UR). O-h! N-e-l-l-i-e!

SILAS (crossing DR). Ah, here he comes now. The finest boy in these parts. (NELLIE crosses up to window C--back to audience--looking off L.)

(WARN MUSIC.)

SILAS (at extreme R). Think well, my child, and

remember--the coat does not make the man.

(MUSIC: "Billy Boy.")

(JACK enters UR, starts toward NELLIE UC. He has a small bouquet of wild flowers. He stops, puts the flowers in a vase on the mantel and speaks to SILAS as he turns and hangs hat on hall tree.)

JACK. Good morning, Mr. Weston. (Crosses extreme DL and strikes pose--right hand in pants pocket. His walk is always plodding, broad strides. Serious comedy.)

SILAS (as JACK is crossing DL). Good morning, Jack--and welcome. (Pausing to look from JACK to NELLIE.) Nellie, we have a caller. (He goes out DR. NELLIE comes RC.)

JACK (taking a step toward NELLIE). Why this silence, Nellie? Would you rather I had not come?

NELLIE. Of course not, Jack. Why do you ask?

JACK. For the past month I have noticed a great change in your feelings toward me. Have I done something that has offended you, Nellie?

NELLIE. No, Jack. It is a foolish fancy that has obsessed you. You have never offended me.

JACK. Why did you not come to singing school last night as you promised?

NELLIE. Why--I--(Bows head.)

JACK. I waited until nine o'clock. I knew you would not come after that late hour. As I passed your house on my way home, I saw a light burning in this room. I could not resist coming to that window. (Indicating window C.)

(MUSIC: "Hearts And Flowers.")

JACK. You were writing a letter. After you had sealed the envelope, you held it to your heaving bosom--(Imitating her actions.)--and then you picked up a photograph of Francis Desmond and kissed it. At that moment the whole world turned dark.

NELLIE (turning from JACK on cue, "heaving bosom"). Oh!

JACK. I retraced my steps to the little red school house where we had spent so many happy hours together. I remained there till midnight--(Turns head looking L.)--alone--with my grief. (Quick drop of the head on the word "grief." Nellie's reaction to Jack's speech is very important.)

NELLIE (turning to JACK). You have taken an unfair advantage, Jack, and I do not thank you for spying on me at that hour of the night. (She turns from JACK.)

JACK. I ask your forgiveness, Nellie. It was rude of me and I have received my punishment. But why torture me further in this manner? If you have ceased to care for me--if your love has turned to--I cannot say it, Nellie. (Turning L, head bowed.) I cannot say it.

(AUDIENCE PLANT: Go on, Jack, say it.)

NELLIE. I know what you mean, Jack. I can never hate you. On the contrary, I shall love you--always. (Arms outstretched to JACK.)

JACK (starting to NELLIE). My Nellie.

NELLIE (holding up restraining hand). But perhaps not the kind of love that would make you happy.

JACK. But, your promise to me. We have been sweethearts since childhood.

NELLIE. I do not wish to hurt you, Jack. But my career comes first.

JACK. Career?

NELLIE. Mr. Desmond is going to arrange for me to sing in one of the fine music halls of New York. (Ecstasy gesture. She takes a step up-stage.)

JACK (crossing to extreme R). I understand. (NELLIE crosses below table to L.C.) I know now it is all over between us. Therefore I will speak my mind freely. (Showing anger.) Nellie, I do not like that man Desmond with his high-toned manners and his smooth, unprincipled ways.

NELLIE. Do not allow your emotions to be swayed --(Swaying gesture with both hands.)--by jealousy, Jack. He is an honorable man, I assure you.

JACK. Perhaps. But if any harm should come to you through him, he shall answer to me. (Striking chest a hard blow with his fist on the word "me," he faces audience--coughs twice.)

MARTHA (off DR). Oh, Nellie. (JACK crosses UR with his back to audience.)

(MARTHA enters DR and crosses C. She is much elated.)

MARTHA. Nellie, there is a carriage coming into our yard drawn by a pair of prancing black horses. And I think one of the men in the carriage is Mr. Desmond. (NELLIE, crossing up to window C on first part of Martha's speech, looks off R. JACK registers concern--then crosses DR. MARTHA turns, sees JACK and crosses to him.) Good morning, Jack. I did not know you were here.

JACK. It--might have--been--better--had--I--not --come. (He paces heavily for seven steps to extreme L--starting with left foot on "might

have" and finishing with left foot on "come".)
NELLIE (crossing to LC). Do not say that, Jack.
You are always welcome. (Arms extended--
palms up.)

(SARAH enters DR, crosses to C above table.)

SARAH. Nellie, I think you have a caller.

NELLIE. Thank you, Aunt Sarah. It is perhaps
Mr. Desmond.

SARAH. Yes, I am sure it is. I got a glimpse of
his horns and I heard the rustle of his wings.

NELLIE. Aunt Sarah, I do not admire your choice
of remarks. (Crosses UC, back to SARAH.)

SARAH. None are so blind as those who will not
see. (DESMOND at door UR gives five distinct
loud knocks.)

(VILLAIN MUSIC.)

MARTHA (crossing to door UR and opening it).
Oh! Mr. Desmond! Come in.

(DESMOND enters and poses.)

(MUSIC STOPS--after audience reaction.)

DESMOND (placing hat on mantel and crossing to
NELLIE UC). Good morning, Nellie.
(He takes her hand and kisses it.)

SARAH. Well! Of all the cheek. (Crosses DLC
to right of JACK, a little above him.)

DESMOND (turning to MARTHA URC). And--your
charming sister. Glad to see you once again.
(Addressing SARAH DL.) Ah! And last, but
by no means least, of this delightful household,

Miss Sarah--cordial and beaming as always.
(Low bow.)

SARAH (showing marked reaction to Desmond's speech, crossing to door DR). Silence is the best reply--(Turning to DESMOND at door DR.)--to the ignorant. (She goes out DR.)

DESMOND (chuckling). Miss Sarah will have her little joke.

MARTHA. Jack, you and Mr. Desmond have met, have you not?

JACK. Why, yes--I----

DESMOND. Oh, hello, Merriwell. How is our flannel-shirted inventor this morning?

JACK. Mr. Desmond, I'll have you know that beneath this flannel shirt there beats an honest heart. (Putting hand to heart.)

DESMOND. Oh, indeed? And who does not know the great inventive genius? (He laughs loudly.)

JACK (crossing R to DESMOND, C). I will ask you to explain that laugh. (NELLIE crosses DRC.)

(WARN MUSIC.)

DESMOND. I have no explanation to make to you, Jack Merriwell, and, if you will excuse me, I prefer to speak to Nellie--alone. (Snapping fingers in Jack's face on word "alone.")

JACK. I fear for her if she is left alone--with you. (Snapping fingers in Desmond's face on word "you.")

(HURRY MUSIC.)

DESMOND. W-h-y, y-o-u! (On the line "why, you" DESMOND and JACK buckle up to each other, chest to chest, standing at full height. They hold, chest to chest, while both stoop

low and come up to full height. This is done three times. DESMOND snarls all through this.)

NELLIE (coming between them after third dip, placing her hand on each chest). Jack! Mr. Desmond!

DESMOND. I ask your pardon, Nellie. I will not say more.

(SARAH appears in door DR.)

SARAH. Jack, Mr. Weston desires to converse-- with you. (Gesturing on words "with you," she withdraws DR.)

JACK (crossing to door DR, turning). I am sorry, Nellie. (He goes out DR.)

NELLIE (starting for door UL, turning). I pray you will excuse me a moment, Mr. Desmond.

DESMOND (crossing L to NELLIE). Fair one, I shall count the seconds till you return. (Low bow. NELLIE goes out UL.)

MARTHA (crossing C to DESMOND). I am sorry you and Jack Merriwell have had words. We like you both, very much.

DESMOND. Do not let it fret your pretty head, Miss Martha. It is of no consequence.

MARTHA. Mr. Desmond, did you hear about Mr. Willoughby being robbed and murdered last night?

DESMOND. Yes, there is considerable talk about it in town. It seems they have a clue that will lead to the arrest of the murderer--one who had been refused a loan by Willoughby.

MARTHA (crossing to door DR). I must tell Father. He will be interested in hearing the news. (She goes out DR. DESMOND, losing the suavity and style of the polished actor at

this point, plays the following scene--until Burke's entrance--as the typical melodramatic villain.)

DESMOND (crossing R with broad strides, looking toward door DR). Y-e-s, they have a clue--the poor deluded fools! (Giving villain laugh, he crosses DC--then reads to audience.) Thanks to my cleverness--this crime will be fastened on our rural hero, Jack Merriwell. (Giving villain laugh, he crosses L.) This game is for high stakes--and I shall win! (He gives heroic gesture--then reads directly to audience.) They shall never outwit Francis Desmond--N-E-V-E-R! (Looking cautiously about, he walks sneakingly to window UC, waves to Burke, looking off R.)

(VILLAIN MUSIC: starts when he starts with up-stage foot.)

(DESMOND takes five strides to door DR in tempo with music and listens with hand cupped to ear. Same business at door DL.)

(BURKE enters UR, pauses in door. He speaks with a rather strong voice.)

BURKE. Are you alone?

DESMOND (showing fright, turning quickly). Sh--! Yes, Burke, come in.

BURKE (crossing down to right of table). Have you had a talk with the old farmer?

DESMOND. Not as yet. I think it best not to deal with him at present. I have other plans. (Sitting left of table.)

BURKE. What? (Sitting right of table.)

DESMOND. You know he has a beautiful and charming young daughter.