

# SIDE - BURGESS 1

AUDIO DRAMA - 10 PLAYS FOR RADIO AND PODCAST

**HARRIET:** And I suppose that while they were engaged in this, their wives were equally busy spending the forty thousand dollars.

**MARK TWAIN:** Of course. An architect and builder from the next State had recently set up shop in Hadleyburg, but so far he'd had not a single client. All of a sudden his fortunes took a turn for the better. First one lady, then another, then another ventured into his premises to say: "Come round to my house on Monday week, but please not a word to anyone. We're thinking of building." By the end of the day he had six new clients.

**HARRIET:** Why "Monday week"?

**MARK TWAIN:** Because the Sunday night had already been chosen for the public meeting at the town hall under the chairmanship of the Reverend Nicholas Burgess. Remember, the original letter had said that any claimant had to provide Burgess, in a sealed envelope, with the helpful remark made to the stranger. Burgess was then to break the seal at the neck of the sack, and inside he'd find an envelope containing the exact words. The person providing the correct remark must be handed all the contents of the sack.

(MIX TO LARGE CROWD CHATTERING. GAVEL BANGS SEVERAL TIMES)

[Note: This scene needs to be punctuated by appropriate crowd reactions]

THE MAN THAT CORRUPTED HADLEYBURG

## START

**BURGESS:** *(shouts)* Silence! Quiet, everyone!

(CROWD CHATTER FADES)

Do calm down, everybody. Now I know most of Hadleyburg is gathered here in the town hall...

~~**WILSON:** *(...???)* Plus half the county, and a word of repentance.~~

**BURGESS:** Just so, Mr Wilson. But a large crowd shouldn't mean chaos. I think we need to conduct this evening's affair in a spirit of decorum.

~~**WILSON:** *(...???)* Just like in church, Reverend Burgess?~~

(RAUCOUS LAUGHTER FROM CROWD)

**BURGESS:** Precisely, Mr Wilson. Just like in church. Now, if I can have your attention everybody. You all know something of the reasons I've been asked to chair this extraordinary meeting of the citizens of Hadleyburg. It's all in connection with that sack there - a sack filled to the top, we've been told, with gold coins. By now everyone knows the strange story of how that sack arrived in Hadleyburg and why we need to assemble this evening. A stranger deposited it one evening in the house of Mr and Mrs Richards here. He said he was acting on behalf of someone who was eternally grateful to one of our fellow-citizens - a generously-spirited man who had taken pity on him many years ago, and handed him no less than twenty dollars to relieve

his distress. That sum set him on his feet, and he went on to make his fortune. Now he wished to repay his benefactor. To prove his *bona fides*, any claimant was asked to provide the exact words he uttered as he handed his twenty dollars to the stranger. Those exact words, sealed in an envelope, had to be passed to me in time for this evening's meeting, and I was to check their accuracy by unsealing the neck of this sack, where I understand I will find the exact words used.

**WELSON:** ~~(Call) Will, please with it.~~

~~(CROWD LAUGHTER)~~

**BURGESS:** All in good time, Mr Wilson. But I have something more to say. I have to report that I have received not one, but a number of sealed envelopes.

(OOHS AND AAHS FROM THE CROWD)

Yes, ladies and gentlemen. It would seem that quite a few of our upright and honest fellow citizens claim to have handed that twenty dollars to the stranger, to remember what was said to him, and thus to be eligible to receive this sack of gold. *(Calls)* And here are the envelopes. I propose to open the first. Here we go!

(ENVELOPE TEARING)

I will now read out what is here before me: "The remark I made to the stranger in distress was this:

'You are very far from being a bad man. Go and reform.' " This letter is signed. Will the person who sent me this letter please rise.

(CROWD REACTION OF OOH'S AND AAH'S)

This is most puzzling. No less than ... one, two, three...six of our fellow citizens have risen to their feet.

END

~~**WELSON:** *(Call)* Pinkerton, I sent you the letter, Mr Burgess.~~

~~**BURGESS:** It is certainly your signature, Mr Will.~~

**MAN#1** }

**MAN#2** } But so did I. I signed my letter. So did I.

**MAN#3** }

**BURGESS:** I think I should perhaps open the other letters before breaking the seal on this sack. Now...

(ENVELOPE TEARING)

This is signed by Mr William Pinkerton, our esteemed bank manager. It reads: "The remark I made to the stranger in distress was this: 'You are very far from being a bad man. Go and reform.'"

(CROWD REACTION OF OOOH. ENVELOPE TEARING)



# SIDE - BURGESS 2

AUDIO DRAMA - 10 PLAYS FOR RADIO AND PODCAST

THE MAN THAT CORRUPTED HADLEYBURG

## START

leading citizens in Hadleyburg. But if you count in the Richards, he ought to have received seven.

MARK TWAIN:

And of course he did. Let me explain. In the first instance, the Richards, although well known in the town, were very poor. They knew their place. Ed Richards certainly wasn't going to stand up in public and challenge the most prominent men in the community. He stayed in his seat and kept his head well down. But in the second, Burgess owned Edward Richards a debt of gratitude - a debt he'd never really repaid. Ed had saved him from being hounded out of town back in the past, and he'd never forgotten it. Once he realized that six leading figures in the town were somehow involved in what looked like a fraud, he decided to say nothing about the letter he'd received from Ed Richards. This was his chance of exchanging one good deed for another.

(UP CROWD BACKGROUND)

BURGESS:

I am now about to slice off the seal holding the neck of this sack. There we go.

MAN#1

}

MAN#2

}

MAN#3

} The document! Read the document! What does it say?

BURGESS:

Yes, there is a paper here.

WILSON:

(calls) Well, read it out, then.

(CROWD)

BURGESS:

"Citizens of Hadleyburg -- I regret to inform you that you have all been the subject of a hoax."

(CROWD)

~~MAN#1~~

~~MAN#2~~

~~MAN#3~~

~~} What? How dare he! What does he  
} say?~~

BURGESS:

Quiet! Let me proceed. "There wasn't any pauper stranger. Nor any twenty dollar handout. Nor any test remark. These are all inventions."

(CROWD)

Quiet please, everybody. Quiet! There's a good deal more. Just look how much there is. It goes on: "These are the facts. Some years ago I passed through your renowned Hadleyburg, and received a deep offence for no reason whatsoever. I was shaken to my core by the insult. And I made up my mind to teach this town of yours, with its reputation for virtue and honesty - a reputation of which you were inordinately proud - a lesson it would never forget. I would teach you that you people of Hadleyburg were far from as pure as you thought you were. You - all of you - were just as corruptible as anyone else. The plan I devised could not work while Barclay Goodson was still alive. Everyone would assume that he was the beneficent citizen who had handed out twenty dollars to an indigent stranger. But as soon as I learned that Barclay Goodson had passed away,

I knew my time had come. So I set my trap and baited it. I may not catch all the men to whom I mailed the pretended test secret, but I shall catch most of them. I hope the result of my little hoax will squelch your vanity and give Hadleyburg a new reputation less to your liking. If I have succeeded, please open the sack and reveal its contents."

~~(CROWD)~~

~~MAN#1~~

~~MAN#2~~

~~MAN#3~~

BURGESS:

Right. Here we go.

(RIPPING FOLLOWED BY TUMBLING COINS)

(calls) But this isn't gold, Friends, these coins are lead - gilded lead. They're nearly worthless.

END

~~MAN#1~~

~~Mr. Chairman, I suggest you award the gold  
out of this lead piece, and I suggest you award  
to someone among us who would benefit from  
this.~~

~~MAN#2~~

I propose the proceeds go to one man not tainted by this shameful episode - Mr Edward Richards.

~~MAN#3~~

Yes, Ed Richards. He could certainly do with the money.

(CROWD "RICHARDS! ED RICHARDS!")

EDWARD:

(whispers) Oh Mary, can we allow this. How can we? Hadn't I better stand up and admit... Oh Mary, what shall I do?

BURGESS:

Right, I open the bidding at fifteen dollars. Who will give me fifteen dollars for all the contents of this sack. Fifteen dollars? You sir? Thank you. Fifteen - twenty? Twenty. Thank you. Twenty-five? Thirty?

MAN#1:

(calls) Forty!

BURGESS:

Forty dollars. Very generous.

MAN#2:

(calls) Fifty. I bid fifty dollars.

BURGESS:

Thank you. Keep it rolling gentlemen. It's a worthy cause. Hadleyburg's reputation is at stake.

MAN#3:

(calls) One hundred dollars.

BURGESS:

A hundred is bid. One twenty? Thank you sir. One fifty?

(VOLUME DOWN ON BIDDING WHICH GOES ON BENEATH FOLLOWING)

MARY:

(whispers) Edward, I'm all in a tremble. This can't be right.

EDWARD:

(whispers) It's not right, Mary. I'm just as guilty as the rest of them. I should be in the dock with the