

THE BOARDING HOUSE REACH

A COMEDY IN ONE ACT

By Donald Payton

Copyright © MCMXLVIII by Donald Payton

All Rights Reserved

Heuer Publishing LLC, Cedar Rapids, Iowa

Professionals and amateurs are hereby warned that this work is subject to a royalty. Royalty must be paid every time a play is performed whether or not it is presented for profit and whether or not admission is charged. A play is performed any time it is acted before an audience. All rights to this work of any kind including but not limited to professional and amateur stage performing rights are controlled exclusively by Heuer Publishing LLC. Inquiries concerning rights should be addressed to Heuer Publishing LLC.

This work is fully protected by copyright. No part of this work may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without permission of the publisher. Copying (by any means) or performing a copyrighted work without permission constitutes an infringement of copyright.

All organizations receiving permission to produce this work agree to give the author(s) credit in any and all advertisement and publicity relating to the production. The author(s) billing must appear below the title and be at least 50% as large as the title of the Work. All programs, advertisements, and other printed material distributed or published in connection with production of the work must include the following notice: **“Produced by special arrangement with Heuer Publishing LLC of Cedar Rapids, Iowa.”**

There shall be no deletions, alterations, or changes of any kind made to the work, including the changing of character gender, the cutting of dialogue, or the alteration of objectionable language unless directly authorized by the publisher or otherwise allowed in the work’s “Production Notes.” The title of the play shall not be altered.

The right of performance is not transferable and is strictly forbidden in cases where scripts are borrowed or purchased second-hand from a third party. All rights, including but not limited to professional and amateur stage performing, recitation, lecturing, public reading, television, radio, motion picture, video or sound taping, internet streaming or other forms of broadcast as technology progresses, and the rights of translation into foreign languages, are strictly reserved.

COPYING OR REPRODUCING ALL OR ANY PART OF THIS BOOK IN ANY MANNER IS STRICTLY FORBIDDEN BY LAW. One copy for each speaking role must be purchased for production purposes. Single copies of scripts are sold for personal reading or production consideration only.

PUBLISHED BY

HEUER PUBLISHING LLC

P.O. BOX 248 • CEDAR RAPIDS, IOWA 52406

TOLL FREE (800) 950-7529 • FAX (319) 368-8011

CAST OF CHARACTERS

(Seven Men, Nine Women)

LUCAS	Mr. and Mrs. Maxwell's lightning rod of trouble. He's a little more unlucky and a lot more trusting than the rest of us. Fresh, naughty, and bright with a pug nose for trouble. (240 lines)
HERCULES	Lucas' best friend with a nose to match. (103 lines)
COURTNEY	Lucas' fourteen year old sister with little patience and a smart mouth. (121 lines)
CAROLINE	Lucas' seventeen year old sister, more mature than Courtney. (58 lines)
ELIZABETH	Courtney's best friend, prone to gossip. (23 lines)
MRS. MAXWELL	A very kind and understanding mother. (134 lines)
MR. MAXWELL	Optimistic father, pessimistic businessman or vice versa. Rather conservative, but triumphant in the end. (204 lines)
LIMPY	A double-dealing boarding house guest. Looks rough and walks with a slight limp. Carelessly dressed. (59 lines)
NORA	Through thick and thin, Limpy's wife. Dresses in loud street clothes and wears sunglasses in Act One. (46 lines)
AUNT MARY	Mrs. Maxwell's likeable aunt. (45 lines)
HERMAN	Calls himself a boxer, but more of a wannabe. Not too bright, talks in a deep voice. He wears long, baggy trousers in Act One, later a bathrobe, then shorts and a sweatshirt. (33 lines)
RUBY	She is a wrestling champion herself and much more driven than her husband, Herman. Commander-in-chief of just about everything. She wears tight pants and later a housecoat. (34 lines)
MR. PERKINS	A friendly insurance salesman in his early forty's. Wears glasses and a business suit, later a housecoat. (34 lines)
LUCY	An archive of useless facts and trivia. She wears horn-rimmed glasses and carries a book at all times. Wears a tailored dress and later a robe. (26 lines)
MRS. MOTT	A little old lady who never says a word. She seems to take an interest in everything, but always remains silent. She wears a long, plain dress, later a housecoat. (0 lines)
CONNOLLY	An undercover detective with an attitude problem. (29 lines)

THE BOARDING HOUSE REACH

SYNOPSIS OF SCENES

Act One, Scene 1:	A hot, summer afternoon.
Act One, Scene 2:	Six o'clock in the evening on the same day.
Act Two, Scene 1:	Two o'clock in the morning, next day.
Act Two, Scene 2:	Six o'clock (four hours later).
Act Three:	A few hours later.

PROPS

ACT ONE:

Straw Hat, Red Handkerchief (Lucas)
Pad Of Paper And Pencil (Mrs. Maxwell)
Handkerchief, Briefcase, Road Map, Wallet (Mr. Maxwell)
Suitcase (Aunt Mary)
Watch (Courtney)
Apron (Caroline)
Suitcase, Wallet, Money (Mr. Perkins)
Book (Lucy)
Two Suitcases, Money (Limpy)
Telephone
Magazines
Newspaper

ACT TWO:

Sheet, Bathrobe, Blanket, Pillow, Slippers (Mr. Perkins)
Suitcase, Newspaper (Mr. Maxwell)
Cold Cream Or Mask (Mrs. Maxwell)
Money, Badge (Connolly)

\

ACT THREE:

Money (Lucas)
Suitcase (Limpy)
Beanshooter (Hercules)

SOUND EFFECTS

Doorbell
Telephone

SET

The action takes place in the living room of the Maxwell home. The same set is used for all three acts. There are three exits from the living room. The front door, which leads to the front porch, is right. The opening left leads into the dining room and kitchen, and the rest of the house is reached through the large arch, up stage center. Against the back wall of the arch sits a small table with a vase of flowers and a painting.

Up stage right is a window with curtains/shade. Left center is a sofa with pillows and easy chairs are right center and down right. A floor lamp stands on the side of the chair down right and a magazine rack is on the other side. There is a desk and chair down left. A telephone sits on top of the desk. Just up from the door left is another small table with a vase of flowers. Above this table hangs a large mirror. A bookcase is up stage right along with a floor lamp and easy chair. Other pictures and decorations may be added.

In order to meet the new anti-violence standards for public schools, this play was revised with the help of Sandra Rosengrant and the drama students at Elk Lake School District in Dimock, Pennsylvania. Heuer Publishing applauds their literary efforts!

THE BOARDING HOUSE REACH

ACT ONE, SCENE 1

Setting: *The living room in the Maxwell home.*

At Rise: *Courtney Maxwell is seated at the desk, talking on the telephone. She's in jeans. A newspaper is folded neatly on the sofa.*

COURTNEY: *(Talking as the curtain rises.)* Do you think it should be trimmed with red or white, Elizabeth? Personally, I think it should be red. I think red does something to me, don't you, Elizabeth? *(Pause.)* Cynthia Morgan has one trimmed in green? I'll stick to red. You remember when Charlie Stark picked up my headband at the ball game last year? Well, it was red, Elizabeth. The fates had it to be red. So I'm sticking to red. Yes, Elizabeth, I agree with you . . . I'll have it trimmed in red.

Mrs. Maxwell enters left with a pad of paper and pencil.

MRS. MAXWELL: *(Talking to herself as she enters.)* Baking powder . . . a head of lettuce . . . olives - *(Looks up.)* - who are you talking to, dear?

COURTNEY: Elizabeth, Mom. *(Into phone again.)* Personally, I think Charlie Stark would have picked it up if it had been aqua.

MRS. MAXWELL: A loaf of bread. *(She sits, writes on pad.)* A couple cans of cherries. *(Looks up.)* I can't think of anything else.

COURTNEY: He did?

MRS. MAXWELL: Can you think of anything else we need, Courtney?

COURTNEY: *(Still talking into phone.)* That's horrible.

MRS. MAXWELL: *(Rising.)* I know I've forgotten something.

COURTNEY: *(To her mother.)* Charlyne's little brother Hercules fell off his bicycle, Mom. Fell right off it.

MRS. MAXWELL: Was he hurt?

COURTNEY: *(Into phone again.)* Was he hurt, Elizabeth? *(Pauses, then turns to her mother.)* He lost two front teeth.

Caroline Maxwell enters left.

CAROLINE: *(As she enters.)* Did you say two of cinnamon and one of nutmeg, Mother, or two of nutmeg and one of cinnamon?

MRS. MAXWELL: One of each, dear. And did you put in the raisins?

CAROLINE: Yes.

MRS. MAXWELL: And the nuts?

CAROLINE: Everything's in but the nutmeg and cinnamon.

COURTNEY: *(Into phone.)* Caroline's making a cake, Elizabeth. Applesauce.

CAROLINE: Are you still talking to Elizabeth?

COURTNEY: *(Hand over mouthpiece.)* And what if I am?

CAROLINE: *(Shrugging.)* Nothing, but you two would save a lot of time if she just moved over here.

COURTNEY: We thought of that, but then we wouldn't have anyone to talk to on the phone! The telephone does so much for our morale. *(She slides out of the chair, drops onto floor.)* Homer what, Elizabeth?!

MRS. MAXWELL: What else do we need from the store, Caroline?

CAROLINE: Father's pork chops. *(Mrs. Maxwell starts writing.)* Dad would die if you forgot his pork chops. *(She exits left.)* I've got to get back to my cake.

COURTNEY: *(Sitting up straight.)* Not really? *(Pause.)* No. *(Louder.)* No!

MRS. MAXWELL: Where's Lucas, Courtney? Have you seen him?

BETTY: *(Into phone.)* I saw him just last week at the party. Poor guy.

MRS. MAXWELL: Lucas?

COURTNEY: *(To her mother.)* Clifford. *(Into phone again.)* Poor Clifford. And I never believed in those magazine ads before.

MRS. MAXWELL: *(Crossing to Courtney.)* Courtney, have you seen Lucas?

COURTNEY: Hold it a second, Elizabeth. *(Looks up.)* Did you say Lucas, Mom? He's still mowing the lawn. *(Into the phone.)* Yes, Elizabeth.

Lucas Maxwell enters right with a broad-brimmed straw hat pulled down to his ears.

LUCAS: Whew! Did you know it's hot out there? *(He sits.)* I can hardly breathe.

COURTNEY: Well no wonder, with your hat pulled over your nose.

MRS. MAXWELL: Did you finish the yard, Lucas? *(She sits.)*

LUCAS: Well, good grief. That's a big yard. *(Sinks back in chair.)* Whew! It's so hot out there the thermometer's sweatin'.

COURTNEY: *(Into phone again.)* It's Lucas again, Elizabeth. We're having a terrible time getting him to mow the lawn. He's been at it all day.

LUCAS: *(Bouncing up.)* Well, I can't say that you've accomplished much today. Yap, yap, yap. Mom, I been thinkin' while I was workin'.

COURTNEY: *(To Lucas.)* When?

LUCAS: *(Ignoring the remark.)* I was thinkin', Mom. Don't you think I could get a bicycle now?

COURTNEY: *(Rising.)* You certainly cannot have a bicycle.

MRS. MAXWELL: *(Worriedly.)* Lucas, you know how I feel. Hercules Nelson just fell off his bike two hours ago and knocked out two teeth.

LUCAS: Then it was an accident and accidents can happen to anyone.

COURTNEY: Lucas, Hercules is a reckless driver.

LUCAS: *(Sharply.)* Hercules is my best friend and you can stay out of this.

COURTNEY: He's a bad influence. *(Into phone.)* It's still Lucas. He's definitely a problem.

LUCAS: *(Pleadingly.)* Please Mom?

MRS. MAXWELL: Lucas, you'll have to take that up with your father. He told you when you got big enough you could have a bicycle.

LUCAS: But I'm thirteen, Mom. *(He sits again.)* Probably on my twenty-fifth birthday he'll present me with a lovely, SECONDHAND bicycle.

CAROLINE: *(Calling from offstage.)* Mom, could you come here a minute?

LUCAS: *(Mrs. Maxwell starts left.)* I presume I'm gonna get paid for this lawn mowin', right, Mom?

THE BOARDING HOUSE REACH

MRS. MAXWELL: (*Crossing left.*) We'll see, dear. (*She exits.*)

COURTNEY: You should mow your own lawn for nothing.

LUCAS: And you should keep your nose in your own business.

COURTNEY: When are you going to finish the lawn?

LUCAS: Just as soon as I cool off.

COURTNEY: I don't see why you're so hot . . . you haven't even finished the yard.

LUCAS: (*Rising, disgustedly.*) Whattya mean, I haven't finished the yard? If I had it my way, I could cut the grass till I collapsed and fell flat on my face for all you'd care. (*He takes a bright red handkerchief from his back pocket, mops his brow.*) Whew! Did you know it's hot outside? (*Courtney glares at him.*) Well, I'm hittin' the yard. (*He sits.*)

COURTNEY: Well?

LUCAS: Well what, I gotta get my second wind. (*He rises.*) Well, I'm ready for the big push. (*He exits right.*)

COURTNEY: (*Into phone.*) You still there, Elizabeth? Oh, you were listening. Yes, he's a problem all right. The laziest creature that ever drew breath.

LUCAS: (*Entering right.*) I'm back.

COURTNEY: Now what?

LUCAS: I gotta get a drink of water.

COURTNEY: Drink from the hose.

LUCAS: I can't drink that hot stuff out of the hose. I need ice water. I can't work when I'm dyin' of thirst. (*He exits left.*)

COURTNEY: (*Into phone.*) He's pushed the lawn mower from one shade tree to another all day. There's a circle all around every tree in the yard. (*Pause.*) You saw who? (*Loudly.*) Jamie? You don't mean Jamie Burns, the star halfback? (*Ecstatically.*) Ohhhh Elizabeth . . . me too, Elizabeth.

LUCAS: (*Entering and crossing.*) Yes, sir, I'm hittin' the yard. And I don't care if you beg me to stop, I'm gonna push that thing till I collapse.

COURTNEY: He certainly is, Elizabeth. (*Ecstatically.*) The most handsome hunk of man I've seen yet. I get seasick just lookin' at Jamie's hair.

LUCAS: (*Stopping.*) It gives me a stomach ache.

COURTNEY: And those shoulders. Did you ever see such shoulders in your whole life?

LUCAS: (*Grumbling.*) I could have shoulders like that, too, I could. If I didn't work all the meat off 'em.

COURTNEY: (*Sharply.*) Lucas, get to work. (*Into phone.*) Yes, he's still here. (*Sighing.*) He's a pain. (*Sits in chair and sticks her legs straight out.*) You know something, Elizabeth? I just don't know how the boys of this younger generation are going to wind up. They should all be sent to a psychiatrist.

LUCAS: They'll probably wind up with one of you girls of the younger generation and have to be sent to a psychiatrist. Well, I'm hittin' the grass. (*He exits right.*)

COURTNEY: (*Still jabbering into the phone.*) Still here, still obnoxious. I wish Lucas was more like Charlie Stark. Mature . . . (*Pause.*) human.

MRS. MAXWELL: (*As she enters left.*) What time is it dear?

COURTNEY: (*Glancing at her watch.*) About three, Mom.

MRS. MAXWELL: Two hours until your father comes home. (*She sits on sofa, picks up paper.*) I hate for Lucas to have a bicycle.

COURTNEY: (*Into phone again.*) She went with who?

MRS. MAXWELL: I know he wants one more than anything.

COURTNEY: You mean Frank Murphy on State Street? (*Pause.*) No!

MRS. MAXWELL: I hate to keep telling him no. I'll leave it up to his father. John will know what to do.

COURTNEY: George said that?

MRS. MAXWELL: I know he'd use his head if he had one.

COURTNEY: Did Jacob hear it?

MRS. MAXWELL: (*Reading from the paper.*) Listen to this. Two hurt yesterday when bicycle plummets over embankment. Carter Franklin, 233 Pine Street, suffered a broken left arm and multiple face fractures when his bicycle plummeted over Dugan's Hill, as he and George Marshall were racing. The Marshall boy, of 444 State Street, looked back at his partner's accident, failed to note a bend in the road, and slammed into a weeping willow tree. He wasn't injured, only shaken up a bit, but had blowouts on both tires, and busted handlebars. (*She looks up.*) Isn't it terrible?

COURTNEY: Definitely, Elizabeth . . . definitely.

MRS. MAXWELL: And listen to this. (*Reading again.*) Fred Foster, of 201 Elm, was injured yesterday when his bicycle collided with a motorcycle driven by Eddie Pearce. A bystander quoted the little Foster boy as saying, "Look, no hands!" a second or two before he plowed into the motorcycle. (*She looks up.*) I know I'd be worried frantic.

CAROLINE: (*Entering left.*) Well, it's in.

MRS. MAXWELL: Do you think Lucas is old enough for a bicycle, Caroline?

CAROLINE: It's not his age that counts, Mom, it's whether or not he can control the bike.

COURTNEY: Which is exactly why Lucas should not have a bicycle. (*Into phone again.*) The bicycle, Elizabeth. Lucas' been griping for a bike ever since he got out of diapers.

LUCAS: (*Entering right.*) I need more ice water.

COURTNEY: Are you back again?

LUCAS: Well whattya think I am, a camel?

COURTNEY: I thought you got a drink a minute ago.

LUCAS: It's gone.

COURTNEY: (*Into phone.*) Yes, Elizabeth. He's back, we better hope for a drought or we're going to be wading through grass and weeds all summer.

LUCAS: (*Sitting, fanning himself with his hat.*) Whew! Did you know it's hot outside? Caroline, will you make us a big pitcher of lemonade?

CAROLINE: Make it yourself.

LUCAS: (*Rising, shoving his hat down on his head.*) Okay, I guess I'm man enough to put the squeeze on a couple of lemons.

CAROLINE: Oh no, you don't. I've got a cake in the oven and you're not going to tramp around in there and make it fall.

LUCAS: (*Dropping into a chair disgustedly.*) Fine.

COURTNEY: Lucas, outside, mow, now!

THE BOARDING HOUSE REACH

LUCAS: Geez, I can't mow the lawn when I'm croaking for water. What do you expect me to do, drill a well? Women! Someday you'll wish I was around to drink water, you will. *(He rises.)* I'm gonna tough it out though. I'm gonna cut that grass even if I have a sunstroke and fall flat on your petunias. *(He stops at door, right, looks out.)* There goes Johnny Johnson on his bicycle, with Bob Graham right on his back tire. *(As he exits.)* I wish I had a bicycle. *(Exits.)*

MRS. MAXWELL: He's old enough for a bicycle. And I think he'd use his head.

CAROLINE: If you reasoned with him, Mom, I think he would too.

COURTNEY: *(Looking up.)* Have you ever met anyone that could reason with Lucas Maxwell?

The doorbell rings.

MRS. MAXWELL: *(Rising.)* Someone's at the door. *(Crosses to door right.)*

CAROLINE: It's probably Aunt Mary. She said was coming over today. Courtney, hang up, company.

COURTNEY: *(Into phone.)* I gotta hang up, Elizabeth, we've got company. *(Hand over mouthpiece.)* She's gonna wait and see who it is.

Mrs. Maxwell enters right with Aunt Mary.

MRS. MAXWELL: *(As they enter.)* It's Aunt Mary.

CAROLINE: Hello, Aunt Mary.

AUNT MARY: Hi, girls.

COURTNEY: Hello, Aunt Mary. *(Into phone.)* It's Aunt Mary, Elizabeth.

AUNT MARY: *(Sitting.)* My gracious, but it's hot. *(Sighs.)* I tinkered around in the garden this morning and now I'm exhausted. Picked twelve quarts of beans, Janet. Frank thought that was pretty good for an old broad like me.

COURTNEY: I gotta go, Elizabeth. I'll see you, call me later. *(As she hangs up.)* Bye.

AUNT MARY: Frank said he could remember when I picked enough for twenty-five quarts and didn't even complain about my back. I was a spry codger back then on the farm.

LUCAS: *(Entering right.)* I think it's getting hotter.

COURTNEY: Are you back?

LUCAS: Well . . . I had to come in and say hello to Aunt Mary. Hello, Aunt Mary.

AUNT MARY: *(Flattered, beaming.)* Hello, Lucas. Has the little man been working?

LUCAS: *(Takes off hat and runs hand through his hair.)* That's right. I'm gettin' to be a regular laborer. May have to join the grass cutters' union any time now.

AUNT MARY: *(Beaming.)* I'll bet you folks wouldn't take anything for that boy.

COURTNEY: You're so right, Aunt Mary. We'd give him away.

LUCAS: (*Sitting.*) Well, back to the grass. (*Looks around.*) It always gets hotter this time of day. Whew! (*Fans himself with his hat.*) Well, I'm getting' back.

CAROLINE: Well?

LUCAS: Well, I gotta cool off. (*Looking from one to the other as he talks.*) I mowed the ears off of a green worm awhile ago. Cut the tail off of a lizard, too. Did you know that we have frogs in the backyard? Little frogs, big frogs, small frogs, tiny frogs, leap frogs, bull frogs.

MRS. MAXWELL: Lucas, finish the yard.

LUCAS: (*Rambling on, first to one and then another.*) Mama frogs, papa frogs, little boy and girl frogs, grandpa frogs, grandma frogs, green frogs, brown frogs, striped frogs, toad frogs.

COURTNEY: Lucas!

LUCAS: (*Rising.*) I'm goin'. (*He starts right.*) We got a complete menagerie out there. (*He looks out the window.*) There goes Pete on his bike. And he's just eleven years old. Well, I'm gonna hit the hay out there. (*He exits right.*)

MRS. MAXWELL: Lucas has his mind set on a new bike.

AUNT MARY: And I think he should have one, Janet. After all, he'll be fourteen one of these days.

COURTNEY: He will if he doesn't get a bike. Otherwise, he'll never make it.

LUCAS and HERCULES NELSON, his best friend, enter right.

LUCAS: (*As they enter.*) I got company. Hercules Nelson, my best friend.

HERCULES: Hey, everybody, hey. (*As he opens his mouth, it can plainly be seen that two of his front teeth are missing. Black wax may be used to black out the teeth.*)

MRS. MAXWELL: It looks like you've had an accident, Hercules.

HERCULES: (*Opening his mouth widely.*) You mean this? I was zig-zaggin' down the street on me bicycle and I guess I zipped when I should zagged.

LUCAS: Hercules is gonna spend the afternoon with me. It's great to have friends.

COURTNEY: Especially when there's grass to be cut.

LUCAS: Especially any time. Ain't that right, Herc old boy?

HERCULES: That's right, Lucas, old chum. (*They start center.*) Have you broached the subject of bicycles to your dad yet, Lucas?

LUCAS: Not yet. (*As they exit center.*) But I'm gonna pop it to him just as soon as he gets home. (*Exit.*)

CAROLINE: I'd better see about my cake. (*She rises, crosses, and exits left. Courtney takes a magazine from the bookcase or magazine rack, sits, reads.*)

AUNT MARY: Have you heard from your mother, Janet?

MRS. MAXWELL: Not for some time, Aunt Mary, and I'm beginning to worry.

AUNT MARY: She'll call.

MRS. MAXWELL: (*Rising.*) Was that a car door slamming out front? (*Goes to window.*)

AUNT MARY: I didn't hear a thing, Janet.

MRS. MAXWELL: (*Surprised.*) It's John. (*Worriedly.*) What in the world is he doing home at this hour?

THE BOARDING HOUSE REACH

COURTNEY: (*Blowing up.*) Did you say Dad, Mom?

MRS. MAXWELL: (*Starts right, stops dead in tracks.*) It's Mother . . . he's heard from Mother. I know it. I think I'm going to faint.

AUNT MARY: (*Crossing to her.*) Janet, control yourself. (*Moves to door.*)

MRS. MAXWELL: (*Braces herself.*) Something's bound to be wrong. (*Mr. Maxwell enters right.*)

MRS. MAXWELL: (*Weakly.*) John, what's wrong?

MR. MAXWELL: Pack my suitcase, Janet. Just as fast as you can.

MRS. MAXWELL: (*Terrified.*) Is it Mother, John?

MR. MAXWELL: No, Janet, I –

MRS. MAXWELL: (*Breaking in.*) Then it's your mother.

MR. MAXWELL: Nothing's wrong, Janet. In fact, things were never better in my whole life. Everything's wonderful.

CAROLINE: (*Entering.*) What's wonderful, Dad?

MR. MAXWELL: Mr. Mallory, my boss, is sending me on an important business trip. Can you imagine that?

COURTNEY: (*Happily.*) Dad, that's terrific.

MR. MAXWELL: With all expenses paid. Of all the men at the office . . . important men . . . men he's had longer than me . . . and he chose me to swing the deal.

CAROLINE: That's wonderful.

MR. MAXWELL: (*Coming over, hugs his wife.*) What do you say, Janet?

MRS. MAXWELL: John, (*Smiling.*) I'm so happy I don't know what to say.

MR. MAXWELL: It's the break I've been waiting for. All these years I've been waiting for this kind of opportunity. Now's my big chance.

AUNT MARY: Frank always said you'd go right to the top, John. Step by step, row by row. Frank always said that and he was right.

MR. MAXWELL: So I can't fail on this. I've got to do it right. I've got to do it just right. (*He starts walking around the room, the others gazing in admiration.*) Just thirty minutes ago I was sitting in the office, buried deep in papers, when he buzzed me. When he called me to the office, I'll admit I was shaking. And then it happened. "Maxwell," he said, "I have a big deal on the fire with Johnson and Sons of Milwaukee. I've got to send somebody to meet them. Somebody with brains, with determination, with horse sense, with the good of the company at heart. Maxwell, my boy, you're the man." He pounded me on the shoulder, (*He drops into chair.*) shook my hand, gave me a cigar, wished me luck, and here I am. (*Bouncing up.*) I'll leave as soon as my suitcase is packed.

CAROLINE: (*Happily.*) That's great.

MR. MAXWELL: He said he was putting the responsibility of the entire company on my shoulders. Putting all his eggs in my basket. My basket, Janet. (*He comes over and kisses her.*) My basket.

MRS. MAXWELL: How long will you be gone?

MR. MAXWELL: (*Taking his handkerchief and mopping his brow.*) At least a week. It's going to be a long conference. They'll be tough nuts to crack, but I'll crack 'em Janet, I'll crack 'em.

MRS. MAXWELL: (*To the girls.*) Did his white shirts get back from the dry cleaners?

COURTNEY: Yeah, they dropped them off this morning.

MRS. MAXWELL: Go get the suitcase, Caroline.

CAROLINE: You bet. *(She crosses and goes out center.)*

AUNT MARY: What can I do to help?

MR. MAXWELL: Johnson and Sons of Milwaukee.

AUNT MARY: What time does your plane leave, John?

MR. MAXWELL: I'm going to drive, Aunt Mary. There's no plane out of here until eight tonight and I'll be halfway there by then. Plan on drivin' all night.

MRS. MAXWELL: I'll hurry and pack your stuff. *(She turns.)* Why in the world didn't you call us?

MR. MAXWELL: I tried, Janet, for the last thirty minutes. Somebody was on the line.

COURTNEY: *(Mother glares at Courtney.)* I'll help you, Mom. *(And Mrs. Maxwell, Courtney, and Aunt Mary exit center.)*

MR. MAXWELL: How do you do, Mr. Johnson. *(He shakes hands with an imaginary Mr. Johnson.)* Yes sir, Mr. Johnson. I agree with you completely, Mr. Johnson. Now to get down to business. I represent Mr. J.C. Mallory, Mr. Johnson. I have the papers right here. *(He stops suddenly.)* The papers? Where in the world are the papers? *(Calling.)* Janet. *(He goes to desk.)* Did I leave my papers in here? Janet, have you seen them? *(He looks up.)* The car . . . maybe they're in the car. *(He crosses right and exits.)* They gotta be in the car.

CAROLINE enters center, followed by LUCAS and HERCULES.

LUCAS: *(Following Caroline into the room.)* You mean he's actually sending Pop? My pop?

CAROLINE: Yes, Lucas.

LUCAS: And he's leaving in a few minutes?

CAROLINE: *(Crossing left.)* Yes, Lucas, and please stop pestering me. I'm in a hurry. *(She exits left.)*

LUCAS: Imagine that? You know something, Herc, this is the the perfect, psychological moment to spring bicycles on him.

HERCULES: You can't miss, Lucas.

MR. MAXWELL enters carrying a briefcase.

MR. MAXWELL: Whew! That had me worried. *(He crosses and puts it on desk.)* Gotta be careful with these papers . . . mighty important.

LUCAS: *(Crosses to his father.)* Pop, I been doin' some serious thinkin' lately and –

MR. MAXWELL: *(Breaking in.)* Glad to hear that, son. Glad to see any young fellow think things out for himself . . . make his own decisions . . . put a little thought behind them. Take me for instance. When I was your age, I used to solve problems for the whole neighborhood.

LUCAS: Like I was sayin', Pop, I been puttin' some serious thinkin' into –

THE BOARDING HOUSE REACH

MR. MAXWELL: (*Again breaking in.*) Yes sir, that was where I got my start. That was where I first got ahead. And I not only got ahead, I learned to use the one I already had. (*Aside.*) Hmh, not bad.

LUCAS: I been doin' some serious thinkin' and –

MR. MAXWELL: (*Breaking in.*) I think that I owe my whole success to the fact that I reasoned things out, son. Got to the bottom of things. Learned to make my own decisions. And that's the reason that what happened today happened to me, and not to somebody else. Remember that, son.

LUCAS: Yes sir, I –

MR. MAXWELL: (*Again breaking in.*) And you too, Hercules. Don't forget it.

HERCULES: No sir, Mr. Maxwell, I won't Mr. Maxwell.

LUCAS: Like I was sayin', Pop, I –

MR. MAXWELL: (*Again breaking in.*) They told you what happened, didn't they?

LUCAS: Yes sir.

MR. MAXWELL: (*Strutting around.*) And I won't let Mr. Mallory down. I'll bring that contract home signed, sealed, and secure.

LUCAS: Yes sir, Pop. Now as I started to say, Pop, I been thinkin' things out and I think I got a really brilliant future.

MR. MAXWELL: Let's see. (*He looks in wallet.*) I got my cash, got the car filled with gas.

LUCAS: And the other day I was thinkin' of all the things I could do – in the way of earnin' money and stuff – doin' errands – if I only had a bicycle.

MR. MAXWELL: Had the oil changed.

LUCAS: (*Rambling on.*) Bicycles can play a really big important part in the life of a boy. Especially if he's old enough to have one – and especially if he's thirteen.

MR. MAXWELL: (*Walking around the room, Lucas and Hercules following.*) Got my hotel reservation.

LUCAS: And thirteen is a mighty important age. Don't you agree, Pop?

MR. MAXWELL: (*Absently.*) Yes, Lucas. (*To himself.*) I guess that is everything.

LUCAS: (*Persistently.*) And I'm thirteen.

MR. MAXWELL: I can't think of anything I missed.

LUCAS: So I've come to the conclusion that I'm old enough for a bicycle.

MR. MAXWELL: (*Suddenly.*) A road map . . . I almost forgot a road map. (*Crosses to desk, the boys following.*)

LUCAS: I decided that now was the time, Pop, for you to jar down and purchase me a bike.

MR. MAXWELL: (*Looking in drawer of desk.*) Oughta be in here somewhere. (*Pulling out a road map.*) Here it is. (*He spreads it out on the desk over the briefcase.*)

LUCAS: Don't you think I could have one now, Pop?

MR. MAXWELL: Highway 64 to Canyon Creek, then North on 51 to Lakeside.

LUCAS: Can I have one, Pop?

MR. MAXWELL: (*Absently.*) Yes, Lucas. A hundred and twenty miles on –

LUCAS: (*Breaking in excitedly.*) I can, Pop, I can?

MR. MAXWELL: (*Looking up blankly.*) You can what?

LUCAS: I can have a bicycle?!

MR. MAXWELL: (*Looking at map again.*) I wouldn't say for sure, Lucas.

LUCAS: (*Pained.*) But you just did.

MR. MAXWELL: (*Sharply.*) Lucas, we will discuss the bicycle subject some other time.

LUCAS: (*Wailing.*) But wow and if I had it my way, Pop, if we wait much longer, I'm gonna be an old man.

MR. MAXWELL: (*Returning to his business.*) Then you won't need a bike.

LUCAS: (*Turning to Hercules, exasperated.*) See there, Hercules. That's what happens to me, that's why I'm a nervous wreck. And that's why I age five years every day. They keep puttin' me off like a railroad bum. I cringe every time I come in for a drink of water. I'm abused.

MR. MAXWELL: (*Leaning over map.*) A hundred and twenty miles on 32, and then when I reach 49, I'll be practically there.

LUCAS: (*Poutingly.*) When I'm forty-nine, I'll still be pleadin' for a bicycle, rattlin' my tongue, beatin' my teeth, exercisin' my tonsils. I'll drop dead in my socks some day and I'll still be pleadin'.

MR. MAXWELL: (*Looking up.*) You know I'm in a hurry.

LUCAS: But it wouldn't take but a second to say yes. I've really given the matter a lot of serious thinkin'. Even been savin' money.

MR. MAXWELL: (*Sincerely.*) Well, I'm glad to hear that, son.

LUCAS: I'll pay my share for the bike.

MR. MAXWELL: (*Proudly.*) That's really an important step, Lucas. How much do you have?

LUCAS: Well, countin' the ten bucks I'm gonna get for mowin' the lawn . . . and five bucks for my allowance -

MR. MAXWELL: Yes?

LUCAS: (*Turning his back.*) I'm thirty-three cents in the hole. (*He turns again.*) But I really have a brilliant future.

COURTNEY: (*Entering.*) How many ties do you need and how many socks?

LUCAS: So between the two of us, Pop, I could get the bike today.

COURTNEY: Do you want your yellow tie, Dad?

CAROLINE: (*Entering.*) Is he packed, Courtney?

COURTNEY: Practically. Dad is about ready to be launched.

LUCAS: A bike doesn't cost so much, Pop. (*He sits, stares into space.*)

COURTNEY: Are you still harpin' on a new bike?

MR. MAXWELL: Lucas, son, (*Puts his hand on Lucas' shoulder.*) Did you ever think about the many wonderful things we have in life that – that are free – all of the things – things that we have but seldom appreciate? Things that we have all around us, every day? Lucas, the big things, and the important things in life, we get for nothing. Remember son, you can't build happiness with money.

LUCAS: For cryin' out loud. Get out your pennies, Hercules. Pop's gonna pass the plate.

MR. MAXWELL: Many things in this world are cheap.

LUCAS: And I got one of 'em for a father.

MR. MAXWELL: Think of all the things you have, son. A nice home, plenty to eat. And think of all the things around you, things to appreciate. The sun . . .

THE BOARDING HOUSE REACH

the trees . . . flowers and grass. What do you think of when you look at the green grass, Lucas?

COURTNEY: A drink of water.

LUCAS: (*Chin in hands.*) If I had it my way.

MR. MAXWELL: And the wonderful fresh air. Go over and take a deep breath, Lucas.

LUCAS: (*Poutingly.*) I don't see what this has to do with a new bike.

MR. MAXWELL: I'm trying to prove to you, son, that there are other things and other people in the world beside you and that we should always, no matter what happens, make the most of everything and always control our desires.

LUCAS: (*Sinking back in the chair.*) For Pete's sake.

MR. MAXWELL: And our tempers. Now, take a deep breath, Lucas. (*Lucas looks around, disgustedly takes a deep breath, turns to his father.*) What do you think now, son?

LUCAS: I think I smell something burning.

CAROLINE: My cake! (*And she runs out left.*)

MR. MAXWELL: And think of the wonderful things we have to look at. We see them every day but fail to appreciate their beauty. Look out the window, son. Go ahead. Look out. (*Lucas rises slowly, turns to Hercules, shrugs his shoulders and hopelessly, shuffles to window, looks out.*) Now, what do you see?

LUCAS: Eddie Brown ridin' his bike.

MR. MAXWELL: I mean besides that?

LUCAS: A flat on your right front tire.

MR. MAXWELL: (*Exploding.*) A flat? (*He runs to window.*) No, it can't be. (*He looks out.*) Oh no! (*Puts hands to side of his head, wails.*) Not at a time like this. I'm ruined. I won't make it on time. (*He sinks into chair.*)

LUCAS: Remember, Pop, old man, no matter what happens, always make the most of it. And don't forget the green grass, you've always got that to fall back on. Who knows, you might even try eatin' it – that is if you get fired.

MR. MAXWELL: (*Sits up.*) If I hurry, though, I oughta make it.

MRS. MAXWELL: (*Entering center with Aunt Mary. She is carrying a suitcase.*) Here it is, John, and I put in your yellow tie.

MR. MAXWELL: (*Rising.*) Well, I'll just have to change it.

MRS. MAXWELL: Why do you have to change it?

MR. MAXWELL: It's flat.

MRS. MAXWELL: It's no flatter than all the others.

MR. MAXWELL: (*Sitting suddenly.*) Good grief, don't tell me they're all down.

COURTNEY: Mom's talking about your tie, Dad.

MR. MAXWELL: My tie?

MRS. MAXWELL: If I'd put in the blue one, you'd have wanted the red, and if I'd put in the red one you'd have wanted it yellow.

AUNT MARY: That's just like Frank. He's always griped about every tie I ever got him. One of these days I'm gonna whale the stars out of him, then give him one to match his complexion – black and blue.

MR. MAXWELL: I'm talking about the tire on the car, Janet. It's flat and I've got to change it before I can go.

AUNT MARY: Then you'll have time to pack your things and go with him, Janet.

MRS. MAXWELL: What do you mean, Aunt Mary?

AUNT MARY: Just exactly what I said. Pack your stuff and go with him, Janet.
You haven't been away from the children in seventeen years and it'll do you good.

CAROLINE: (*Excitedly, as she enters.*) Mom, that's a wonderful idea.

MRS. MAXWELL: (*Sitting.*) No, I couldn't do that.

COURTNEY: Of course you could, Mom.

AUNT MARY: Why not, Janet?

MRS. MAXWELL: I . . . I just couldn't.

LUCAS: I could take care of things around here.

CAROLINE: It's just what you need, Mom.

COURTNEY: Why couldn't you Mom?

MRS. MAXWELL: Because your father wouldn't want me to.

COURTNEY: Of course he would. (*Turning to her father.*) Wouldn't you, Dad?

MR. MAXWELL: Of course I would, Janet, and you know it. (*He crosses to her.*) You know I want you to.

MRS. MAXWELL: You certainly don't sound like it.

MR. MAXWELL: How do you want me to sound?

MRS. MAXWELL: Like you mean it.

MR. MAXWELL: Good grief.

MRS. MAXWELL: If he'd have wanted me to go he'd have asked me.

MR. MAXWELL: Janet, please get ready and go with me.

MRS. MAXWELL: (*Thinking.*) I don't know whether I should or not.

AUNT MARY: The trip would do you good, Janet.

CAROLINE: Just what you need . . . you should go.

MR. MAXWELL: Of course you should.

MRS. MAXWELL: (*Rising.*) I hate to do things on the spur of the moment, but I think I will go.

COURTNEY: You'll have a wonderful time.

MR. MAXWELL: (*He starts right.*) Hurry up and get packed, Janet, and I'll change the tire.

MRS. MAXWELL: John (*He turns, she sits.*) I'm not going.

MR. MAXWELL: Janet.

MRS. MAXWELL: I don't think you want me to.

MR. MAXWELL: (*Walks toward her, disgustedly.*) Janet, for Pete's sake.

MRS. MAXWELL: Now John, don't raise your voice.

MR. MAXWELL: (*Louder than before.*) I'm not raising my voice.

MRS. MAXWELL: I can tell he doesn't want me to go.

CAROLINE: Yes he does!

MR. MAXWELL: Of course I do.

MRS. MAXWELL: I don't want to intrude.

AUNT MARY: I'd go whether he wanted me to or not.

MR. MAXWELL: You are not intruding, Janet.

MRS. MAXWELL: Now John, don't shout.

MR. MAXWELL: (*Standing beside her, trying to be calm.*) All right. Be sensible. I want you to come, I'm begging you to come and I think it would be fun. Let's go!

MRS. MAXWELL: I would like to, John. (*She smiles.*) I guess I will.

THE BOARDING HOUSE REACH

MR. MAXWELL: (*Starts right.*) I'll go change the tire.

MRS. MAXWELL: I've changed my mind. (*He comes to a halt at door.*) I'm not going.

MR. MAXWELL: Janet . . . (*He turns.*) Be sensible.

MRS. MAXWELL: I am, John. Any person with any sense at all would know that you don't want me to go.

CAROLINE: (*As her father drops in chair, right.*) Of course he does, Mom.

MR. MAXWELL: I've done all I can. What do you want me to do, crawl?

MRS. MAXWELL: John, don't get nasty.

CAROLINE: He wants you to go and it's just what you need. Both of you should get away from us for awhile and this is your chance.

COURTNEY: You haven't been away from us for seventeen years.

MR. MAXWELL: That makes sense, Janet.

AUNT MARY: I'll see that the kids are looked after. I'll be over every day.

MR. MAXWELL: It's an ideal time, Janet. We'll have a second honeymoon.

MRS. MAXWELL: (*Rising, happily.*) John, are you sure?

MR. MAXWELL: (*Also rising.*) Of course I'm sure.

MRS. MAXWELL: (*Starting center.*) I'll be ready to go in three minutes. Should I change my dress, John?

MR. MAXWELL: No you look fine. I'll fix the tire. (*Exit right.*)

CAROLINE: We'll help you pack, Mom.

CAROLINE, COURTNEY, MRS. MAXWELL, and AUNT MARY exit center, jabbering.

LUCAS: (*Banging his hands against his sides.*) How do you like that?

HERCULES: Do you think you'll get the bike, Lucas?

LUCAS: Heck no I won't get it. Pop keeps sayin' we'll discuss it later. He's been sayin' that for thirteen years and he'll be sayin' it for the next thirteen. There just ain't no way out. I can see the writin' on the wall.

HERCULES: (*Sinking into a chair.*) Think of those rides we planned in the woods . . . roughin' it.

LUCAS: (*Hands deep in pockets.*) Yeah. It's a sad sack. But I ain't givin' up. I'm gonna keep savin' till I have the money for the bike.

HERCULES: How you gonna get it, Lucas?

LUCAS: I'm gonna earn it. (*He starts walking around the room, Hercules following.*) There's lots of ways an ingenious young fellow like me can draw in the dough.

HERCULES: I got a little book called "How to Lift Money From your Family."

LUCAS: You do, Hercules?

HERCULES: Wow, yes. It tells how to lift money from your dad, your uncle, your sisters, anybody in the family. A great book.

LUCAS: (*Thinking.*) There oughta be a good job out there for an enterprising young man with ambition.

HERCULES: (*Still following Lucas.*) I bought it for a dollar and two Frosted Flakes box tops and in less than twenty-five words I had to tell 'em why I thought Frosted Flakes' competitors made the louziest cereal on the market. You could lift at least twenty bucks.

LUCAS: I might try prize fightin'. (*He spars around with an imaginary foe, swings wildly, viciously, ducks and pounds.*)

HERCULES: Here's what you're supposed to spring on your dad. You tell him you know what time he got in last Saturday night, see. Then he says to you he says that he doesn't follow you, and then you come right back and say "Last Saturday night, Pop, you couldn't follow me." And then he pays off. The book says so. Ten bucks.

LUCAS: (*Stops boxing, turns.*) But I'm out for big money, Herc. I gotta have at least two hundred.

HERCULES: You might look at some want ads in the paper.

LUCAS: You read me some while I concentrate.

HERCULES: (*Takes paper, sits, thumbs through to want ads. Lucas paces the floor.*) Here they are, Lucas. Wanted. Young fellow with ambition to drive a truck. Can you drive a truck?

LUCAS: I've never tried, but I've got ambition.

HERCULES: Here's another one for a young fellow with ambition . . . to wash dishes at Joe's Place. (*Looks up.*) Whattya think?

LUCAS: I think I ain't got that much ambition.

HERCULES: The pickin's is mighty poor, Lucas.

LUCAS: I might go out in the back yard and dig for oil.

HERCULES: It's a cold, cruel world. Everythin's tough.

LUCAS: Might even grubstake myself and look for gold.

HERCULES: (*Looking at paper.*) This don't sound too bad. Smith's boarding house . . . fifty dollars a week. That's not bad pay, Lucas. Two hundred a month.

LUCAS: Lemme see that. (*Comes over, takes paper.*) Boarding house . . . fifty a week, excellent food. Sounds like a good racket, Herc. Wait a minute. This is a boarding house and they're rentin' to people for fifty a week. We must be pretty dumb. (*Hands paper to Hercules, then takes it back.*) Wait a minute, I just got a great idea. What's seven or eight times fifty, Herc?

HERCULES: It's, lessee . . . seven times zero . . . x squared . . . eight cubed . . . three to carry . . . four . . . times two . . . comes to exactly three hundred and fifty dollars. Watacha thinkin', Lucas, watcha thinkin'?

LUCAS: (*Sits importantly.*) I think I'm goin' into business, Hercules. Big business. Mom and Pop's leavin' for a whole week and think of all the space in this house goin' to waste. You follow me?

HERCULES: (*Bouncing over, excitedly.*) Heck yes, Lucas, and I might be even a step ahead. Your expenses will be so low that you can easily clear a bike.

LUCAS: Maybe two bikes, Herc. I can rent all of our spare rooms out for one week, pay the girls a little to cook and stuff, and I can boss the thing. I'll be making money hand over fist. It's a sure-fire plan. (*Thinking.*) My expenses shouldn't be over a hundred dollars, Herc. Subtract a hundred from three hundred and fifty. Might even make that eighty dollars for expenses.

HERCULES: (*Figuring.*) Zero minus zero . . . five . . . eight. I got it.

LUCAS: What does it figure out?

HERCULES: One bicycle and a hundred banana splits.

LUCAS: (*Jumping up.*) That's great, Herc. (*Walks around.*) Yes sir, I'll probably be president some day if I keep makin' big money like this. (*He sits*

THE BOARDING HOUSE REACH

again, sticks feet straight out.) Sure feels great to be in the chips. You know, I think I'll make you vice-president of my boarding house.

HERCULES: (*Happily.*) Wow thanks, Lucas. That's big of you.

LUCAS: Yes sir, I'll phone this into the paper as soon as they get gone. Then, when the folks come back at the end of the week, the boarders will be gone, everything will be just dandy, and I'll be peddling my new bike. How does that sound, Herc?

HERCULES: Great, Lucas!

MRS. MAXWELL: (*As she enters center, followed by the others.*) Be good, Lucas, mind your manners. (*She has her suitcase.*)

LUCAS: You pulling out, Ma?

MRS. MAXWELL: Yes dear. (*She kisses him.*) Be a good boy, and I'll see you in a week. (*She starts right, followed by the others.*) Caroline, be careful in the kitchen, and Courtney, keep the basement door locked and please watch the . . . (*And they exit right.*)

LUCAS: Yes sir, now for my call. (*Into phone.*) Daily Blast, please. Herc, I'm full of great ideas.

ACT ONE, SCENE 2

Setting: The same as SCENE 1.

At Rise: The doorbell rings off right. COURTNEY enters left, crosses right to door, and ELIZABETH SMITH enters.

ELIZABETH: (*As she enters.*) I got your message and came right over, Courtney.

COURTNEY: (*Wailing, tearfully.*) Oh Elizabeth, (*She throws her arms around her.*) It's terrible . . . simply terrible.

ELIZABETH: What are you going to do about it?

COURTNEY: There's nothing we can do about it. They're crawling all over the place and there's more to come. (*Starts wailing loudly.*) They're in every room.

ELIZABETH: You better sit down before you fall down, Courtney. (*She leads her to the sofa, they both sit.*)

COURTNEY: Poor Caroline. He has her in there cooking for them. She took it pretty good, though. She said she had to learn to cook sometime. (*She puckers up again.*) And I've got to do dishes . . . all those thousands of dishes.

ELIZABETH: I looked in the paper . . . it's there all right. Maxwell's Boarding House . . . (*Courtney wails again.*) Where people in the best circles get three squares.

COURTNEY: We're ruined, Elizabeth. Simply ruined. Think what all my friends will say about this. (*She wails.*) Maxwell's Boarding House. Charlie Stark never will look in my direction again.

ELIZABETH: Not unless he wants three squares.

COURTNEY: And think about Jacob. (*She sinks back on sofa.*) I'll never live

this down. I'm branded. Elizabeth, branded like a criminal. (*Wails as she talks.*) They'll call me Hash House Hanna.

ELIZABETH: But it's not your fault, Courtney.

COURTNEY: But Caroline and I will be labeled. It's not the poor innocent little child's fault when their father beats their mother, but it's the little ones that suffer. (*Sadly.*) And I'm suffering. (*Sniffs.*) I had everything planned for a great week, Elizabeth. Picnics and movies and more movies and then – I heard the doorbell, I answered it. (*Sinks back on sofa.*) It's just too dreadful to think about. (*She rises.*) All evening long they've been ringing the doorbell. People have been carrying suitcases in and out of here like it's Union Station. (*Moves to Elizabeth.*) Do you know who's in my room?

ELIZABETH: Who?

COURTNEY: Ninety-Volt Jones.

ELIZABETH: (*Sitting up.*) Who?

COURTNEY: Ninety-Volt Jones . . . a broken down prize fighter who ducks every time he walks. He's been beat up so much that every time he hears the doorbell ring he falls flat on his face and hollers, "The bell, the bell." And he's in my room . . . him and his wife. And she used to be a wrestler. Can you believe that, Elizabeth? A female wrestler in **my** room.

ELIZABETH: Oh no, Courtney, they sweat a lot.

COURTNEY: Why couldn't Lucas have been born into another family? Did you ever hear of such? A boarding house right in our own home.

ELIZABETH: You can stay at my house until it dies down.

COURTNEY: You mean till it falls down. The house will be flat on the ground when Mom and Dad get home. (*Disgustedly.*) Lucas' been struttin' around here like an ambassador or something all day, and Hercules Nelson has been tagging his heels like a pup. My whole world is crumbling around me. (*She comes over to Elizabeth.*) Did you know that from 1930 to 1940 the population of Toledo, Ohio decreased 8,369? And did you know that the Franco-Prussian war was fought in 1871? (*Elizabeth looks at her.*) It's a fact . . . so says Lucy Burns.

ELIZABETH: Who's Lucy Burns?

COURTNEY: Lucy Burns . . . (*Points center and up.*) is up in our guest room at the moment. And did you know that hogs actually kill and eat rattlesnakes?

ELIZABETH: No, I didn't know.

COURTNEY: Well, if you were around Lucy you would know. And you'd soon know everything else, too. She's a walking encyclopedia. And there's another character around here that doesn't say anything. Just walks in, sits down, gets up and walks out. That's Mrs. Mott. The whole place is in turmoil.

ELIZABETH: You can stay with me tonight, Courtney.

COURTNEY: It's either that or sleep in the closet. Lucas kicked me out of my own room. I went up there this afternoon to get a dress and there was this – this female wrestler –

ELIZABETH: sweating?

COURTNEY: Yeah, with a toe-hold on her husband and he was beatin' his fist up and down on the wall hollerin' like an idiot. When Dad gets home and hears about this Lucas' grounded for life.

THE BOARDING HOUSE REACH

MRS. MOTT, an elderly little woman wearing a very long dress, comes in center, crosses to chair down right, sits, and stares at the girls.

ELIZABETH: *(Jerking her head.)* Is that . . . *(She stops.)*

COURTNEY: *(Nodding.)* Mrs. Mott.

ELIZABETH: *(Going up to her.)* How do you do, Mrs. Mott. *(No answer.)* How are you feeling, Mrs. Mott? *(Still no answer.)* How do you like the weather, Mrs. Mott? *(No answer, she turns to Courtney.)* At least she doesn't bite.

They continue to return stares with Mrs. Mott. They are interrupted by the ringing of the telephone.

COURTNEY: The phone . . . here we go again. *(She starts for the phone, Lucas enters left, followed by Hercules, and grabs the phone.)*

LUCAS: *(Into phone, importantly.)* Maxwell's Boarding House. M. Maxwell speaking.

COURTNEY: M. Maxwell . . . oh my!

LUCAS: Only one room left. Yes sir, I guess I could let you have it. That's right . . . one double room. Yes sir, just knock on the door and ask for M. Maxwell. *(He hangs up.)* Well, there goes the last room.

COURTNEY: Lucas, you didn't rent Mom and Dad's room, did you?

LUCAS: It's to a nice couple.

COURTNEY: *(Iratly.)* Lucas, what's wrong with your head?

LUCAS: I don't see what you're gripin' about . . . you're getting your share. I'm even payin' Hercules. You want a job, Elizabeth?

ELIZABETH: A job?

LUCAS: Yes, a job. I'll pay you to help Courtney with the laundry and stuff. Hurry up, yes or no . . . speak your peace . . . I'm a busy executive with responsibilities.

COURTNEY: You'll be busy with something else when Dad gets home. Probably pickin' splinters out of the seat of your pants.

ELIZABETH: Should I take the job, Courtney?

COURTNEY: You might as well, Elizabeth. I was gonna pay you myself, but if Lucas wants to pay you, that's his hard luck.

ELIZABETH: I'll take the job.

LUCAS: Then you girls had better get on the ball. Caroline needs help in the kitchen.

COURTNEY: *(Starting left.)* Come on, Elizabeth. Let's go put some soap in the sauerkraut. *(The girls exit left.)*

LUCAS: *(Walking around the room.)* Let's see . . . what else do I need? People in business . . . big business – like me – have lots of things to worry about . . . like what's for dinner. I'm hungry.

MRS. MOTT rises, circles the sofa, and exits center.

HERCULES: You know something, Lucas, I ain't exactly figured her out . . . but she's definitely the quiet type.

LUCAS: (*As the doorbell rings.*) The door. You know something, Herc, it's a shame I didn't have this idea a long time ago. (*He crosses to the door.*) We coulda had two bikes apiece by now. (*He opens the door.*)

MR. PERKINS, a middle-aged man, his hair graying a bit, enters. He is wearing a business suit and carrying a suitcase.

MR. PERKINS: (*Setting his suitcase on the floor.*) How do you do? Is this the Maxwell residence?

LUCAS: Yes sir, it sure is.

MR. PERKINS: I read your ad in the paper . . . sounded like just the place for me. (*He smiles.*)

LUCAS: Well, I sold out the last room not five minutes ago. (*He rubs his hair.*) But I hate to refuse fifty bucks. That is, you and the fifty bucks. (*Perkins nods, smiles.*) Oughta be some place for you.

MR. PERKINS: Is your father here?

LUCAS: Oh no . . . he and my mother have both left. I'm the head guy.

MR. PERKINS: (*Astonished.*) You mean . . . your parents left you?

LUCAS: Pulled right out. I'm taking care of my sisters though.

MR. PERKINS: That's quite a responsibility for a lad your size. Your sisters young, too?

LUCAS: (*Importantly.*) One is fourteen and the other's seventeen. They don't do much though. They're at that age.

MR. PERKINS: (*Moving on down stage.*) Yes sir, I certainly like to see a young fellow like you . . . shouldering the responsibility of the whole family. Boys like you are a blessing to mankind, I say. (*Lucas swells up.*) It does the masculine gender proud to see young men like you take the bull by the horns. (*Shakes his head.*) It's a shame . . . sure is. Some parents are like that, though. Bring children into the world and then leave them to rustle for themselves like wild animals. You havin' a hard time, son?

LUCAS: Nope . . . I'm makin' it just fine.

MR. PERKINS: I'll tell you, son, I can sleep just anywhere. (*He goes over to sofa, sits, bounces up and down, lies on it. Bounces up, sits on sofa.*) I gotta spend the night somewhere and I could just sleep on this sofa here. I suppose you could use the money.

LUCAS: You bet I could, Mr . . . Mr . . .

MR. PERKINS: (*Rising, extending his hand.*) Perkins's the name, Clinton Perkins.

LUCAS: (*Shaking hands.*) Glad to know you, Mr. Perkins. I'm Lucas. . . Lucas Maxwell. And this is Hercules Nelson, my buzzom pal.

MR. PERKINS: (*Smiling.*) How do you do, Hercules.

HERCULES: (*As he pumps Perkins's hand.*) Hey, Mr. Perkins, Hey.

MR. PERKINS: I'm with the Honesty Insurance Company . . . been travelin' all my life. Left home at an early age. (*Looking at Lucas, sincerely.*) Yes, sir, son, I'm glad to see a young fellow like you makin' an honest living. And to think that just this afternoon the First National Bank was robbed by some dirty thieves who didn't have gumption enough to do what a small boy was doin' . .

THE BOARDING HOUSE REACH

. to work for their living. Got to hand it to you, son. *(He takes out his wallet.)*
I suppose it's okay to stay?

LUCAS: I'm afraid that's a hard bed, Mr. Perkins.

MR. PERKINS: Nonsense, son . . . I've slept on harder beds than this. Fifty dollars the rate?

LUCAS: For one week.

MR. PERKINS: *(Handing him a bill.)* I may not be here that long, but you can keep it all anyway.

LUCAS: Well geez thanks Mr. Perkins. Do you want me to show you the house?

MR. PERKINS: Sure.

LUCAS: Thanks for offerin' to let me keep the rest of the fifty, but you tell me when you're leavin' and I'll give you what I owe you.

MR. PERKINS: *(Following Lucas and Hercules up stage. Lucas has motioned for Hercules to take suitcase.)* You wouldn't have to, son. But if you want to, that's what I want you to do. Always play fair with everybody, boy. Like the slogan of the Honesty Insurance Company, "Honesty is the best policy." Right?

LUCAS/HERCULES: *(Together.)* Right.

They exit center, AUNT MARY sticks her head in, right, then enters. She is wearing the same outfit as in SCENE 1.

AUNT MARY: *(Calling.)* Ahoy. . . anybody home? Caroline . . . Courtney . . . Lucas? Ahoy. Hmmmmm. Anybody home?

LUCY BURNS enters center. She is a small little lady, wears horn-rimmed glasses, and is very serious all of the time. She always carries a little book with her, which she now has under her arm.

LUCY: *(As she enters.)* I thought I heard somebody call.

AUNT MARY: *(Jumping.)* Ohh . . . you startled me.

LUCY: Nice day, isn't it?

AUNT MARY: *(Looking at her.)* Yes . . . a little warm though. *(Sizes her up.)*
Are you a friend of . . . the family?

LUCY: Oh no . . . I just live here.

AUNT MARY: Oh, I thought maybe you . . . *(Stopping, exploding.)* You what?

LUCY: I live here. *(She sits in chair, smiles at Aunt Mary.)*

AUNT MARY: Oh. *(A quick, weak smile that fades immediately.)* You just live here. *(Lucy nods, Aunt Mary glares at her.)*

LUCY: I'm Lucy Burns. *(Aunt Mary gives a short smile again.)* Did you know that dolphins sleep with one eye open? *(Aunt Mary stares at her as she drops onto sofa.)* They do.

AUNT MARY: *(Still staring at her.)* That's good to know. *(She looks around uneasily, swallows hard.)*

LUCY: And did you know that camels have eyelashes? *(Aunt Mary shakes her head negatively.)* They do. It keeps the sand out of their eyes. *(She leans*

forward.) I'll bet you didn't know that elephants and humans are the only animals to stand on their heads.

AUNT MARY: Well, of course, I've never given the matter much thought.

MRS. MOTT enters center, stands in front of door. AUNT MARY looks all around, then behind her. She literally jumps out of her seat when she spots Mrs. Mott. Mrs. Mott comes downstage, sits, stares at Aunt Mary, who stares back..

AUNT MARY: Does she . . . uh . . . live here, too?

LUCY: Oh yes . . . right across from me.

AUNT MARY: *(Weakly.)* Well, that's nice. *(Swallows hard.)*

LUCY: Did you know that Hoover Dam is 726 feet above bedrock?

AUNT MARY: You don't say? *(She continues to glare at Mrs. Mott.)*

LUCY: I would think it would be closer to 740 feet, wouldn't you?

AUNT MARY: *(Jumping.)* Huh?

LUCY: Hoover Dam.

AUNT MARY: Oh yes . . . Hoover Dam. *(Looks at Mrs. Mott again.)*

AUNT MARY is looking from one to the other as HERMAN "NINETY VOLT" JONES enters center with his wife, ROUGHHOUSE RUBY. Herman is a small beat-up pug, who looks like he's seen better days. He talks in a deep guttural voice and lacks brain power. His wife, Roughhouse Ruby, is taller than her husband and wears a ton of makeup. She wears tight pants while he wears baggy trousers that are at least two inches too long.

RUBY: *(As they enter.)* Escuze pleeze for the intrusion. I'm Roughhouse Ruby, wrestlin' champeen of the east, and this is my husband, Hoiman "Ninety-Volt" Jones. We call him that cause he goes out like a light ever oncet to while, but when he connects, they go stiff all over. Take a bow, Hoiman Jones, one hunnert fifty-foive pounds from Taskahatchie. *(Herman raises his hands above his head, clasps them together in the typical prize fighting fashion, bows to the ladies.)* He's gonna foight Killer McCoy at the Audit-torum next week.

HERMAN: *(Talking in a deep, guttural voice.)* I'm gonna knock his block off.

RUBY: The odds is 8-5 that Killer knocks poor Hoiman out in four rounds. He ain't gonna do it, is he, Hoiman?

HERMAN: Naw. . . I oughta last to the fifth, anyhow. And somewhere in there I'm gonna cave his teeth in.

MRS. MOTT rises, circles the sofa, and exits center.

RUBY: What's the matter with her . . . don't she like our company? *(Aunt Mary's eyes are now practically popping from their sockets.)* You better come along for your road work, Hoiman. You gotta put strenth in those legs.

HERMAN: Just as youse say, Lovey-Dove. *(As they exit right.)* You know what I'm gonna do, Sugar Bun? I'm gonna knock his block off. *(Exit.)*

AUNT MARY: *(Fearing the worst.)* I suppose they live right across from you, too?

THE BOARDING HOUSE REACH

LUCY: Oh no . . . (*Aunt Mary sighs with relief, sinks back on sofa.*) They live in another part of the house. (*Aunt Mary sits bolt upright.*) If you'll excuse me . . . (*Rising.*) I've got to get an aspirin for my headache. Did you know that Americans use 16,000 tons of aspirin a year. It's a fact. (*She exits center, Aunt Mary rising and looking after her.*)

AUNT MARY: (*Leaning on the sofa.*) Good grief. (*Calling.*) Courtney . . . Caroline.

CAROLINE: (*Entering left, she now has an apron on over dress.*) Aunt Mary, what's the matter?

AUNT MARY: (*Leaning unsteadily on sofa.*) I think I'm going crazy, child. I just had an hallucination, and I think I'm going to faint. Maybe I've already fainted . . . I saw funny little people.

CAROLINE: (*Matter of factly.*) Oh, them. They live here. (*Aunt Mary groans, falls over in a faint, with Caroline catching her and pulling her out left.*)

LIMPY McGUIRE enters right, carrying two suitcases. He is followed by his wife, Nora, who is sleek, tall, and slender and hides behind dark sunglasses. Limpy walks with a pronounced limp. They enter, he sets the suitcases down.

LIMPY: (*Looking around.*) This is the place, all right.

NORA: (*In a low voice.*) I still don't like it, Limpy.

LIMPY: (*Walks around room, moves over to her.*) This is the best place to stay till the heat dies down. They'll never look for us here. The kid said to ask for M. Maxwell. But I just came in and made myself at home. Limpy McGuire always makes himself at home. (*Walks around room.*)

NORA: (*Following him, worriedly.*) What about those marked bills?

LIMPY: (*Calmly.*) That's what I say . . . what about 'em? We're safe here, Nora. By the time we pull out, that bank robbery will be forgotten.

LUCAS and HERCULES enter.

NORA: (*Clears throat, jerks her head toward the boys.*) Ahhem.

LIMPY: How do you do. Where's M. Maxwell?

LUCAS: Right here. You Mr. McGuire?

LIMPY: That's right, kid. (*He digs into pocket, hands three bills to Lucas.*) Here's your cash. (*He picks up bags, walks by Nora, talks out of corner of his mouth.*) This is gonna be easier than I thought. (*Lucas and Hercules start to follow them.*) Never mind, kid, we'll find it. Save yourself the trouble. (*Limpy and Nora exit center.*)

LUCAS: (*Calls after them.*) Wow thanks. Mr. McGuire. (*Hands Herc some money.*) Here Herc . . . blow yourself to a soda.

HERCULES: Well thanks, Lucas old pal, old boy, old chum, old man. You're a great guy.

LUCAS: If I had it my way, yes. You know something, Herc, I oughta be president 'fore too long and my first job's gonna be by appointin' you vice-president.

HERCULES: Well golly gosh, Lucas, that's really big of you. You're a good friend.

BY DONALD PAYTON

Lucas and Hercules beam at each other, shake hands. Mrs. Mott enters, circles the sofa, and then heads left as there is a quick curtain.

*Thank you for reading this free excerpt from THE BOARDING HOUSE
REACH by Donald Payton. For performance rights and/or a
complete copy of the script, please contact us at:*

Heuer Publishing LLC

P.O. Box 248 • Cedar Rapids, Iowa 52406

Toll Free: 1-800-950-7529 • Fax (319) 368-8011

HITPLAYS.COM

Perusal Only
Do Not Copy