

NEARLY BELOVED

A COMEDY IN THREE ACTS

By Donald Payton

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Heuer Publishing LLC, Cedar Rapids, Iowa

ISBN: 978-1-61588-112-3

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PUBLISHED BY

HEUER PUBLISHING LLC

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

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

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SYNOPSIS: The Maxwells have their hands full with their children Caroline and Lucas, but their youngest daughter Courtney has always been a ray of sunshine in a cloudy existence. Courtney has always done well in school and Aunt Mary even calls her "beloved."

Since nothing exciting ever happens to Courtney, she makes up escapades from her vivid imagination to fill her diary full of funny as well as nightmarish stories about her life. All very private until Mr. Maxwell peruses the diary and discovers that his daughter Caroline is about to elope with her boyfriend, Mark, and that Lucas and a friend have become gang members. Finally, it's discovered that the stories are imagined, which is when the table turns and Mr. Maxwell takes the stories and runs with them.

CAST OF CHARACTERS (EIGHT WOMEN, FIVE MEN)

JANET MAXWELLMother, forty or thereabouts. Very attractive.
Hair graying just a little. Dresses casually.
(109 lines)

JOHN MAXWELLFather, in his early forties with graying hair.
He wears glasses, pants and a robe. (153 lines)

CAROLINEThe Maxwells' 17 year-old daughter.
Dressed for a date. (52 lines)

COURTNEYThe Maxwells' 15 year-old daughter. She's
poised, with an incessant smile, except when
her brother is around. (176 lines)

- LUCAS**.....Son, fourteen. He's wearing jeans, a t-shirt, and besides his usual tousled head of hair, he has two black eyes. *(108 lines)*
- HERCULES**.....Lucas' best friend. Fourteen, wears jeans, a beat-up ball cap on sideways, and tennis shoes that are too big for him. *(78 lines)*
- ELIZABETH**.....Courtney's friend. Fifteen. Like Courtney, she has a fantastic imagination. *(45 lines)*
- MARK**.....Caroline's boyfriend. He's eighteen, timid—almost bashful. He's very sincere, and straightforward. Wears slacks, sport coat and sport shirt. *(50 lines)*
- AUNT MARY**.....Mrs. Maxwell's aunt. She's a tiny woman of about sixty, with grey hair and glasses. Wears suit, hat, etc. *(63 lines)*
- MISS MURRAY**.....Courtney's teacher. She's perhaps forty, attractive, wears suit and glasses. *(32 lines)*
- J. C. MALLORY**.....Mr. Maxwell's boss. Fifty-five or thereabouts, wears glasses, a business suit and has a mustache. *(27 lines)*
- THE BOSS**.....A powerful member of the criminal underground in Courtney's mind. He is played by the same actor as Mr. Mallory. *(8 lines)*
- MOLLY**.....About twenty. The "moll" type. Wears a bright blouse, a dark skirt and "heels." She chews gum incessantly. *(15 lines)*

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WOMAN.....An innocent bystander in the Maxwell house mayhem. She is played by the same actor as Molly. (11 lines)

MISS LEWIS.....Mr. Mallory's assistant. About twenty-five. Pretty and likeable. (4 lines)

***NOTE:** All characters and situations herein depicted are purely imaginary. Any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, is a coincidence.*

HAND PROPERTIES

MR. MAXWELL - Blanket, watch, belt, piece of cake.

MRS. MAXWELL - Hammer, sheets of paper.

LUCAS - Coins, report card, boxing glove, sandwich, cake, banana, etc.

HERCULES - Coins, cake.

COURTNEY - Books, diary, fountain pen.

CAROLINE - Report card, raincoat, blanket, nail polish.

MARK - Football helmet, football, suitcase, raincoat, books.

MR. MALLORY - Briefcase, large stack of papers, magazines or paper.

AUNT MARY - Hat with veil, paper.

MISS LEWIS - Pencil and pad, papers.

MOLLY - Chewing gum.

ACT ONE

SETTING:

As curtain opens, the comfortable living room of the MAXWELL home is seen. There are three exits: In the wall right is the front door opening onto the porch, the opening left leads into the dining room and kitchen, and the rest of the house is reached through the rather wide opening center. Above door right is the window with drapes, blinds, etc. At up right is the sofa, with floor lamp behind it. Left of door center is a bookcase and an easy chair is at upper left. Down left is a desk, chair, telephone. Down right is a lounge chair, lamp, magazine rack. Pictures and other accessories may be added as desired.

AT RISE:

JOHN MAXWELL, father, attired in trousers and a robe, is stretched out on sofa. He is in his early forties, wears glasses, his hair is graying just a little about the temples. His house-shoes are in front of the sofa. As the curtain rises, he has his back to the audience and is groaning. The loud strains of a radio or CD player are heard in the background, and rap blares. MR. MAXWELL turns, groans, pushes his head up, glares left, then pulls the cover over his head, his feet sticking out. Then he tosses, groans some more, pushes head up again, rises, starts left - and the music stops. He moves again to sofa stretches out, pulls up cover and has just made himself comfortable when the music starts again.

MR. MAXWELL: *(Shouting.)* Caroline. *(The music goes right on.)* Caroline.

MR. MAXWELL rises again, starts left, has taken a couple of steps when the music stops. He staggers back to sofa, drops onto it with a thud, pulls up cover again and has just made himself comfortable when a loud pounding noise comes from out center. His eyes open, he pushes himself up, listens, then rises and the noise stops. He returns to sofa, stretches out, and the phone rings. He pulls the cover over his head again as the phone continues to ring. Finally he groans, rises, crosses halfway to phone and freezes in his tracks as CAROLINE, daughter, seventeen, bounces in left and grabs the phone. She's a pretty girl. Wears skirt and sweater.

CAROLINE: *(Grabbing phone.)* Hello. *(Melting.)* Oh, hello, Mark.

MR. MAXWELL *turns, goes back to sofa, crawls under blanket.*

CAROLINE: Of course, Mark. Yes, of course. *(Ecstatically.)* Oh, yes, Mark. I'd love to, Mark. So long, Mark, see you in a few minutes. *(MR. MAXWELL has again pushed himself up, glaring at her, as she hangs up and exits left. He slowly lowers his head and the banging center starts again. His eyes open widely. Then he rises, blanket in hand, and glares center until it stops. He turns as MRS. MAXWELL, mother, enters center, carrying a hammer.)*

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MR. MAXWELL: (*Glaring again.*) Janet, for Pete's sake, what's going on?

MRS. MAXWELL: I was nailing a shelf in the closet, John.

MR. MAXWELL: Well, you coulda fooled me. I thought you were sandblasting or something.

MRS. MAXWELL: Remember, you said you'd fix the closet on your first day off.

MR. MAXWELL: But that doesn't include a day when I'm sick, Janet. (*He staggers to sofa.*)

MRS. MAXWELL: And you said you'd do some work in the basement, too.

MR. MAXWELL: (*Sitting on sofa.*) Look, Janet, I'm a sick man. This is the first day I've missed in seven years. They won't even let a man die in peace around here.

MRS. MAXWELL: You aren't dying, John.

MR. MAXWELL: I can't even move my leg. (*He holds it.*) Rigor mortis is setting in already.

MRS. MAXWELL: It's stiff from spending the entire day in bed. At nine-thirty this morning, you came home groaning, flopped into bed and have spent the entire day wrapped up in a cocoon. (*He stretches out, moans.*) You even had two doctors. Did they say anything, or just file by and view the remains?

MR. MAXWELL: Dr. Brown said I've been working too hard. Too much nervous tension. I'll feel different after a day at home. He's probably right. (*Pushing himself up.*) I'll crack completely under the strain. (*He lets himself drop again, but pushes right back up as music starts blaring again out left.*) There it goes again. (*Shouting.*) Caroline!

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

MR. MAXWELL: I may have to take off a day to recuperate from my day off. Who ever heard music like that?

MRS. MAXWELL: It's the latest rage, John.

MR. MAXWELL: Well, I can sure as thunder see why it would make a person rage, Janet. It's simply beyond me what this younger generation is coming to.

MRS. MAXWELL: (*Pointing left.*) That's no worse than The Rolling Stones, John Maxwell.

MR. MAXWELL: Well, it isn't just their . . . their rap, it's everything. Have you seen the clothes girls wear now? (*Sinking back on sofa and moaning.*)

MRS. MAXWELL: Not all girls. I think kids today are far more conscientious and determined.

MR. MAXWELL: More determined to make noise. (*The music fades out in background.*)

MRS. MAXWELL: They have more of an idea of the world about them than we did. Think what the Internet and television have brought, John.

MR. MAXWELL: Don't remind me. The bills are due tomorrow.

MRS. MAXWELL: Everything has made the youngster of today more conscious of the world about him.

MR. MAXWELL: No one could listen to music like that and be conscious. What are you doing, Janet, giving an oration or something?

MRS. MAXWELL: In fact, I was asked to make a speech at the next PTA meeting on "Understanding the Effervescent Adolescent." You should be very happy, John.

MR. MAXWELL: I am. I'm happy they called on you instead of me.

MRS. MAXWELL: And you should be proud, too. Proud that I have been called upon by the PTA to discuss the most important thing in our lives. The one thing nearest and dearest to us that upon which we must point with pride.

MR. MAXWELL: How are you going to work hunting and fishing into that?

MRS. MAXWELL: Oh, what's the use? *(She crosses to desk, pulls out a few sheets of paper, starts reading from them.)* Thank you, ladies and gentlemen. Guests. It is indeed an honor to be called upon to discuss with you this afternoon one of the dominating and motivating cogs in our wheel of society, the adolescent. *(MRS. MAXWELL looks up as MR. MAXWELL groans.)* John, why don't you go to your room?

MR. MAXWELL: I've been there all day. It reeks of medicine.

MRS. MAXWELL: It reeks of cigar smoke. If there's anything worse than a man sprawled around the house all day, it's a man sprawled around the house all day pumping the room full of cigar smoke.

MR. MAXWELL: *(Groaning.)* I'm sick, Janet.

MRS. MAXWELL: Sick? It's a miracle to me you're still breathing. *(He continues to moan and she walks around, reading her speech.)* Just what is an adolescent? Webster defines it as a person growing from childhood to maturity; in a state of adolescence. *(She crosses to MR. MAXWELL, looks up.)* I do so want to make a good impression, since this is my first speech for the PTA. I was certainly surprised when they called on me. Miss Murray, the teacher, suggested me because I have teenage children and especially because of Courtney.

MR. MAXWELL: Courtney?

MRS. MAXWELL: Yes, she has her in class and says she's one of the finest students she's ever had, and she considers her a fine, outstanding, upright example of American youth.

MR. MAXWELL: It's a good thing she doesn't have Lucas.

MRS. MAXWELL: By the way, did Lucas bring any books home this evening?

MR. MAXWELL: I haven't even seen him.

MRS. MAXWELL: Well, my goodness, I haven't either. You don't suppose . . . ? He's never this late.

CAROLINE: *(Entering left.)* Guess what, Mother? Mark wants to spend his last evening with me.

MRS. MAXWELL: Last evening?

CAROLINE: Yes, Mother, his semester vacation is over and he goes back to school tomorrow.

MRS. MAXWELL: Dear, you've seen Mark for the past three nights, haven't you?

CAROLINE: Yes, Mother. And of all the girls in the world he chose me for his last evening. *(She sighs.)*

MRS. MAXWELL: Dear, I think you should stay home tonight.

CAROLINE: (*Excitedly.*) You mean I can invite him over here? You and Dad are going out?

MR. MAXWELL: A, we are not going out; and B, you are not inviting him over here. I'm recuperating.

CAROLINE: Oh! Then I guess we'll go out. (*She starts center.*) I'll try and look extra special—since this is his last night—and since he goes back to college tomorrow.

MRS. MAXWELL: I don't think you should go with Mark tonight.

CAROLINE: But, Mother, I've already told him. And it would be too late for him to get another date. And I wouldn't want to spoil his last evening. And I think he'd consider it spoiled if he spent it with any other woman.

MR. MAXWELL: (*Rising, blanket over shoulder.*) Woman?

CAROLINE: YES, Dad, woman.

MR. MAXWELL: At what age exactly, according to Webster, does the female become a woman, Janet?

MRS. MAXWELL: (*As CAROLINE starts out.*) Have you finished the dishes, Caroline?

CAROLINE: Courtney will do them when she gets back from the library. You see, she understands, Mother. We had a long talk about Mark.

MRS. MAXWELL: Has Lucas been home this evening, Caroline?

CAROLINE: You mean my brother Lucas? Come to think of it, I haven't seen Lucas in days and it's been heavenly.

MRS. MAXWELL: Dear, weren't report cards due today? Courtney gave me hers.

CAROLINE: Report cards? (*Laughs faintly.*) Oh yes. (*Turning.*) Well, I'll see you. (*MRS. MAXWELL crosses to her, holds out hand. CAROLINE looks from one to the other, crosses to notebook on bookcase, takes out report card and hands it to her mother.*)

CAROLINE: Well, I'll start getting ready. (*She darts out center.*)

MRS. MAXWELL: (*Looking at card, astonished.*) John, look at this. She's dropped in everything. She can't be concentrating on her schoolwork at all.

MR. MAXWELL: She's a second semester senior, Janet. I remember when I was a second semester senior. (*He sits in chair.*)

MRS. MAXWELL: I'd hoped she'd be valedictorian.

MR. MAXWELL: That's what my parents hoped, too. Then at the end, they started hoping I'd be able to graduate. But of course, I was of a different age. The fact that we used scrolls instead of books and hunted with bows and arrows made a difference.

MRS. MAXWELL: John, I'm beginning to worry about Lucas. Do you think we should call the police?

MR. MAXWELL: If he doesn't show up in two weeks, all right.

MRS. MAXWELL: He's growing up just like a little animal, John, just like a little animal. After all, you're his father. You should do something about taming him.

MR. MAXWELL: I try, Janet. But even an animal trainer can do just so much.

MRS. MAXWELL: Why couldn't he be like Courtney?

MR. MAXWELL: Well, that's a thought. Of course he'd have to give up Boy Scouts.

MRS. MAXWELL: John Maxwell, you're not trying to help a bit. I merely meant that she's much easier to raise than Lucas. And Caroline, too, for that matter. In fact, everyone's always commenting on Courtney.

MR. MAXWELL: I've heard a few comments on Lucas too, Janet.

MRS. MAXWELL: True, John. And you always try to cover them up by saying boys will be boys.

AUNT MARY, MRS. MAXWELL's aunt, sticks her head in door right.

AUNT MARY: (*As she sticks head in.*) Yoo, hoo, anybody home?

MRS. MAXWELL: (*Cordially.*) Aunt Mary, come in. Look who's here, John. (*He crosses to sofa, moaning, flops on it.*)

AUNT MARY: What's wrong with you, John? Are you sick? (*MRS. MAXWELL is reading her speech silently.*)

MR. MAXWELL: If I'm lucky, I might pull through. You see, it all started this morning about nine when I got a pain in my –

AUNT MARY: (*Turning to JANET, breaking in.*) I just came from Mrs. Davis' and she told me the news. I think it's wonderful, Janet, simply wonderful. (*She takes off her hat, puts hat and purse on desk.*) Just think of it. Making a speech at the district PTA meeting.

MR. MAXWELL: Mr. Mallory said, "John, if you've got a pain in your—"

AUNT MARY: (*Again breaking in.*) And I heard it all stemmed from Courtney. Everyone's so proud of her. She's simply a dream. So sweet and understanding. And so thoughtful of others. A top student. Well, I could just go on and on. She isn't a bit like Lucas.

MR. MAXWELL: He'll change completely when he gets older.

AUNT MARY: John, nobody could live that long. Of course, Caroline is a fine girl, too, but not like Courtney. I tell you, she's going to do so well for herself.

MR. MAXWELL: (*Walking around, blanket around his shoulders.*) Mr. Mallory was quite decent about the whole thing. "John," he said, "go home. Take the day off. It'll do you good. That sounds bad. Lots of serious things can start with a pain in your—"

AUNT MARY: She's practically beloved. I think that's just the way I'd sum her up. Beloved.

MRS. MAXWELL: John, when Lucas comes in, I think you'd better have a talk with him.

MR. MAXWELL: Yes, Janet. I'll read up on Space Cadets and inter-planetary communication so we can converse together intelligently.

AUNT MARY: (*Rambling right on.*) Oh, Mrs. Davis had a lot to say about Courtney. She said Miss Murray said she was one of the finest students she's ever had. She thinks Courtney is practically beloved, too.

MR. MAXWELL: And I think Mr. Mallory was right. People go too fast. Man's like a jet propulsion. He reaches the other end of the line sooner now than ever but

goes so fast he misses the scenic and beautiful things of life along the way. Yes, sir. Now here's all this talk about my daughter, Courtney. My own offspring. It's slowly dawning on me that I hardly know her. Oh, I know her, of course. I say good morning, Courtney, and good evening, Courtney, and she says good morning, Dad, and good evening, Dad, but I don't really know her. I'm going to really know my family. Yes sir, it's funny what can stem from a pain in the head.

AUNT MARY: Well, all I can say, John Maxwell, is if you don't know Courtney, you're surely in for a treat.

COURTNEY enters right,

COURTNEY: (*As she enters.*) Hi!

AUNT MARY: (*Melting.*) Courtney—dear.

COURTNEY: How are you feeling now, Dad? I've been thinking the whole thing over, and I've decided you've been working too hard providing for us. I'll go out next week and look for a part-time job.

AUNT MARY: (*Eyes shining, hands enfolded.*) My goodness.

COURTNEY: It's just no more than right. Here I am fifteen, rapidly approaching sixteen, which is just shy of seventeen. Why, I could be practically earning my own sustenance.

MRS. MAXWELL: We'll talk about that later, dear.

COURTNEY: Is Caroline here?

MRS. MAXWELL: She's going out again with Mark.

COURTNEY: (*Sighing.*) Then that means she probably didn't get to the dishes. (*Starting right.*) I'll do them right now.

MRS. MAXWELL: No, dear. I'll do them tonight. Don't you need to study?

COURTNEY: Well, there is a chapter to read in history and my project in English, but I—

AUNT MARY: (*Breaking in.*) I'll help. You just sit right down here and read. (*She leads her to a chair. MRS. MAXWELL brings some books from off bookcase.*)

MR. MAXWELL: (*Rising.*) I'll try to eat a bite. Haven't had a thing since morning.

MRS. MAXWELL: (*Glaring at him.*) Since when? What about that whole roast that disappeared this afternoon?

MR. MAXWELL: What roast? Anyway, Lucas and his little carnivorous friends probably pilfered it.

AUNT MARY: (*As MR. MAXWELL exits left.*) My, she's just like Joan of Arc. (*They exit left.*)

COURTNEY: (*Looking up from her reading, thoughtfully.*) Of course, I'm old enough to get a job. Surely someone in town would hire me. Especially if Dad got real sick and couldn't go back to work. (*She stares, wide-eyed.*) My goodness, surely it isn't anything like that. Someone would have to support Caroline and Lucas and Mother and—my goodness. (*She continues to stare and CAROLINE enters center.*)

CAROLINE: Have you seen that pink nail polish of mine, Courtney? *(No answer.)* Courtney. *(Calling loudly.)* Hey! *(COURTNEY jumps turns.)* Are you daydreaming again? You spend more time with your pipe dreams and wild imagination than anyone I know.

COURTNEY: I was just thinking, Caroline.

CAROLINE: Yeah, thinking. *(Sarcastically.)* Last night, Jake took me to the ball. We arrived in his yellow convertible at exactly nine, and I stepped forth in my white formal and beautiful ermine wrap. *(COURTNEY rises, turns her back.)* The only ball Jake knows anything about is the one he hit through the drugstore window, and as for a convertible, the only thing he has without a top is his neck.

COURTNEY: You stay away from my diary, Caroline Maxwell.

CAROLINE: Why anyone would sit around imagining things like you do and then writing them all in a make-believe diary, I'll never know! *(She shakes her head, shrugs. She takes fingernail polish from desk, crosses center.)* You better watch this daydreaming, kid, it'll drive you loony. *(She exits center.)*

COURTNEY: *(Crossing to desk, sitting.)* Of course, someone would hire me. Maybe even poor Dad's boss, especially if poor Dad was unable to continue. *(She looks right front, wide-eyed.)* Poor Dad. Poor, poor Dad. *(She shakes her head.)*

Her eyes get wider and she leans forward as if seeing something. The lights slowly go down until COURTNEY is barely visible. Stepping to the front of the stage and walking across is a man who looks just like MR. MALLORY, MR. MAXWELL's boss. He's followed by his assistant, MISS LEWIS, who is taking dictation. COURTNEY, still wide-eyed, rises slowly as they enter.

COURTNEY: My goodness.

THE BOSS: *(Softly.)* Take a letter, Miss Lewis, to Wilson and Wilson of Sheboygan. Dear Mr. Wilson. *(COURTNEY crosses to them slowly, wide-eyed. The assistant takes down everything THE BOSS says on a pad.)*

THE BOSS: It has recently been called to my attention . . . that due to an extreme oversight on the part of someone or other, several very important . . . *(COURTNEY stands gazing at them wide-eyed, and she puts out a hand, speaks softly, almost timidly.)*

COURTNEY: I beg your pardon.

THE BOSS: And I beg your pardon, Miss.

COURTNEY: Are you—the boss?

THE BOSS: I am. Did you wish to see me?

COURTNEY: Oh yes. You see, I'm—I'm looking for a job.

THE BOSS: I see. Your name, please.

COURTNEY: *(Hands behind her back.)* Courtney Maxwell.

THE BOSS: *(Lifting eyebrows.)* You're not the daughter of John Maxwell? *(She nods.)* You poor child. *(The ASSISTANT takes out her handkerchief, bows her nose quietly, sniffs.)*

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COURTNEY: You see, he came home from work one morning—ill—and he never went back.

THE BOSS: I always wondered what happened to him. Miss Jones . . . *(He turns.)* Would it be asking too much? *(She hangs her head. THE BOSS puts his hand on her shoulder.)* Just finish this letter to Wilson and Wilson and pick up your check at the door. *(She turns and exits, sniffing.)*

COURTNEY: But I—

THE BOSS: *(Raising his hand.)* Now, now. Don't worry, my dear. Just go over and rest. Conserve your strength. You must—be brave.

She crosses to the same chair she was sitting in when her dream started. THE BOSS slowly fades out, continuing across the stage and out right. The lights come up full. COURTNEY continues to stare into space. MR. MAXWELL enters left, eating a piece of cake.

COURTNEY: Oh, Dad. *(And she runs to him.)* I'll stick by you, Dad.

MR. MAXWELL: *(His arms around her.)* Well, thank you, Courtney.

COURTNEY: *(Looking at him fearfully.)* Dad . . . are you planning on going back to work in the near foreseeable future?

MR. MAXWELL: Well, no sooner than in the morning, of course.

COURTNEY: *(Pleasantly surprised.)* In the morning?

MR. MAXWELL: Well, we're closed nights, you know. *(He starts center, turns.)* Why?

COURTNEY: *(Happily.)* Oh, no reason. No reason at all. *(As she exits, she crosses to the chair and drops into it, picks up book.)*

HERCULES NELSON, fourteen, sticks his head in door, right, looks all around, doesn't see COURTNEY.

HERCULES: *(Sticking head in.)* C'mon in, Lucas. I don't see anything of your parents, do you? *(HERCULES and LUCAS enter. HERCULES is attired in jeans, a beat-up ball cap on sideways, and tennis shoes that are a couple sizes too big for him. LUCAS, also fourteen, is wearing jeans, t-shirt, and besides his usual tousled head of hair, has two black eyes.)*

LUCAS: *(As HERCULES leads him in.)* I don't see anything period, Hercules.

HERCULES: Here, Lucas, I'll lead you to a chair.

COURTNEY, seeing LUCAS' condition, looks on horrified.

LUCAS: Thanks, Herc. Is it turnin' black? *(He sits.)*

HERCULES: Turnin'? Boy, it's already that way. Your kisser looks like the coal cellar at midnight.

LUCAS: I wonder what I did wrong?

HERCULES: I think it all started when you said, (*In a tough voice.*) "Yeah?" And then it didn't help none when you said, (*Tougher.*) "Yeah? You and who else?" But the real clincher came on. (*Making a terrible face.*) "Yeah? Then take this."

LUCAS: Then what'd I say, Herc?

HERCULES: Come to think of it, I don't remember anything else. I was too busy getting' outta the way.

LUCAS: Herc, if they discover this, I'm done for. Why can't we go over to your house?

HERCULES: I keep tellin' you, Lucas. On report card day. I never get near the place. I always just mail it home. I wish I coulda lived durin' the Pony Express days. (*He sits.*) Service was slower then.

LUCAS: If they find out about this, my chances of survival are worse than a mouse's in a cat factory. After giving a logical explanation for this—which there ain't—I'll have to give one for my report card, too. I don't know which is worse, the eyes on my face or the D's on my report card. (*He rises.*) I'll think of somethin', boy, I'll keep it from 'em someway, I'll – (*He turns, spots COURTNEY, squints.*) Herc, old bosom companion.

HERCULES: What is it, Lucas?

LUCAS: (*Pointing.*) Is that object over there what I think that object is?

HERCULES: You mean that what's just to the right of the bookcase . . . (*Lucas nods.*) But just to the left of the door? (*He nods again.*) It's just what you think it is. Especially if you think it's your sister.

LUCAS: I think I'm a dead biscuit.

COURTNEY: (*Rising.*) Lucas Maxwell, were you fighting on the way home from school?

LUCAS: I never was any good at rememberin' directions.

COURTNEY: Look me in the eye and say you weren't fighting.

LUCAS: I don't think I could even look you in the eye.

COURTNEY: I'll bet you couldn't. What about, Lucas?

LUCAS: Well, that depends.

COURTNEY: Depends on what?

LUCAS: Depends on whether you mean before he swung or after.

COURTNEY: Did you put him up to it, Hercules?

HERCULES: Oh no, Courtney. I might have picked him up a couple of times, but I didn't put him up to anything. Except to his bicycle seat when we started home.

COURTNEY: That's terrible. Horrible. I hope Dad grounds you for a month. (*She turns and exits center.*)

LUCAS: (*Sinking into chair.*) It's a cold, cruel world. I'll get grounded for fightin' and I'll get it for bringin' home this report card. Sometimes I wish I was twins so some of this agony could be divided.

HERCULES: (*Looking at his report card.*) This is worse than I got when I was in third grade—all four years.

LUCAS: If I stay here tonight, I'll be annihilated. (*He rises.*) I've made up my mind. We're goin' to your house.

HERCULES: (*Terrified.*) My house? I wouldn't go near that place for five root beer floats.

LUCAS: Then we'll do it fair and square, loser pays. I'm thinkin' of a number between one and five thousand.

HERCULES: One hundred and seventy-three.

LUCAS: (*Astonished.*) A hundred and seventy-three? Let's try something else. We'll match for it, Herc.

They pull out coins toss them in air, catch them, smack them on back of their hands and stand with them covered. MR. MAXWELL enters center.

HERCULES: Well, I guess you lose, Lucas.

LUCAS: Whadaya mean, lose? I haven't even looked yet.

HERCULES: Then I'd advise you to start lookin'. Behind you.

LUCAS: (*Fearing the worst.*) You don't mean . . . that is . . .

HERCULES: Hey, Mr. Maxwell. (*LUCAS freezes.*)

MR. MAXWELL: Lucas, I presume you're aware of the fact that you're three hours late? This wouldn't have anything to do with your report card, would it?

LUCAS: I wouldn't say so, no. That is, I wouldn't come right out and say it.

MR. MAXWELL: (*Thrusting hand forward.*) Your report card, Lucas.

LUCAS: (*Painfully.*) My report card? (*Turning to HERCULES.*) Looks like we're just skippin' the preliminaries and gettin' right to the main event. (*LUCAS, keeping head turned away, hands him his card.*)

MR. MAXWELL: (*Taking it.*) I presume you got nothing but low marks today.

HERCULES: Oh no, Mr. Maxwell. He got a couple of high ones, too. Only they're really not marks. They're more like bruises. I mean—

MR. MAXWELL: (*Looking at card.*) English, math, everything. Son, I—I don't know what to say. (*He sits.*) You don't seem to be able to grasp anything.

LUCAS: You know the old saying, Dad. Like father, like son.

HERCULES: You should have seen him grasp Henry Jones, Mr. Maxwell.

MR. MAXWELL: Tell me, son, have you cracked a book all year?

LUCAS: Of course I have, Dad. Especially if you count the one I hit Jake Ambrose over the head with.

MR. MAXWELL: This is terrible. I can't imagine anything in this world that could possible be worse.

LUCAS: Well, just stick around, Dad.

MR. MAXWELL: (*Walking away from him.*) I don't really feel that you're trying, Lucas. That you're giving your best at all times. (*He turns.*) Are you? Look at me, Lucas.

LUCAS: Did you say look at you Dad?

MR. MAXWELL: I did.

HERCULES: Uh, oh. Round two. (*He spots AUNT MARY's hat on desk, snaps fingers.*) Hey, Lucas.

MR. MAXWELL: (*His back turned again.*) I've tried, son. Your Mother's tried.

LUCAS: (*As HERCULES beckons him over and gestures that LUCAS should put it on.*) Yeah—it's got a veil and everything.

MR. MAXWELL: We have reasoned and pleaded and worked with you, Lucas.

HERCULES: Keep it low, Lucas. (*LUCAS puts hat on, pulls veil low, and they start creeping right. MR. MAXWELL has back turned at bookcase.*)

MR. MAXWELL: We kept hoping against hope you'd get better, son.

MRS. MAXWELL and AUNT MARY enter left.

AUNT MARY: (*As they enter.*) And so I said to Frank . . . (*She sees LUCAS, screams.*)

LUCAS: (*Gasping.*) They got me, Hercules.

HERCULES: (*His arm around him holding him up.*) It was a good fight, pardner. But you drowned in sight of dry land.

MRS. MAXWELL: Lucas, take off Aunt Mary's hat.

LUCAS: You did say take it off? (*He turns to HERCULES; they shake hands and AUNT MARY crosses to him. He hands her the hat.*)

AUNT MARY: (*Taking it coldly.*) Thank you, Lucas. And from now on— (*She looks at him, screams puts hand over mouth, points.*) Janet!

MRS. MAXWELL: (*Crossing to LUCAS, astonished.*) John!

MR. MAXWELL: (*Looking, shouting.*) Lucas!

LUCAS: (*Looking from one to another, trembling.*) Hercules!

HERCULES: So long, Lucas. (*He starts right, then turns.*) No, I won't run out on you. Somebody has to stay and identify the remains.

AUNT MARY: (*Right in his face.*) The boy's been clobbered.

MRS. MAXWELL: Look at those eyes. (*Sobbing.*) And his face and hair.

MR. MAXWELL: And what does the other boy look like, Lucas?

LUCAS: He's ten feet tall with arms like a blacksmith and –

MR. MAXWELL: (*Sadly.*) In other words, you lost. Is that right, Hercules?

HERCULES: Well, speaking impartially—and from an unbiased viewpoint—and just as a spectator—in the words of President McKinley when they asked him if the battleship Maine had just been sunk— (*Pause.*) Yes.

MRS. MAXWELL: (*Sitting, heartbroken.*) My own son, fighting in the streets like a little delinquent.

LUCAS: (*Crossing to her.*) But Mom, it's the principle that's involved.

MRS. MAXWELL: (*Looking up, blinking.*) The principle?

HERCULES: Yeah—we see him tomorrow. (*She wails.*)

MR. MAXWELL: (*Removing belt.*) Come over here, Lucas. (*To HERCULES.*) I hate to punish you in front of your friend Hercules.

LUCAS: (*Standing in center of room, eyes closed.*) My eyes are swelling shut. I'm blacking out.

HERCULES: I won't desert you, Lucas. I'll be your seeing-eye dog.

LUCAS: Thank you, Rover—I mean, Hercules. (*He puts hands before him.*)

HERCULES: Turn a little, Lucas. *(He turns toward door right.)* That's it. Now start walking. Just keep going. A little more. A little more. *(LUCAS, eyes closed and hands outstretched, walks out door.)* That's it.

MR. MAXWELL: *(Astonished.)* Lucas, come back here. *(He exits right, as does HERCULES.)*

AUNT MARY: *(As MRS. MAXWELL sniffs.)* Now, now, Janet, you've got to be strong.

COURTNEY: *(Entering center.)* What's wrong, Mom? Is it Caroline or Lucas or both?

MRS. MAXWELL: It's Lucas this time. He should have lived during the Stone Age. I never dreamed my little son would turn into a caveman.

Doorbell rings. COURTNEY crosses to door right, opens it, and admits MARK JONES. He's timid, almost bashful. He's very conscientious, and always strives to please in his sincere, straightforward manner. He's eighteen, wears slacks, sport coat and sport shirt.

MARK: *(As he enters.)* Hello, Courtney. Hello, Mrs. Maxwell.

MRS. MAXWELL: Hello, Mark. Have you met Aunt Mary?

MARK: How do you do?

AUNT MARY: Hello, Mark. You're the young man who's in college, aren't you?

MARK: Yeah. I mean, yes. I mean, yes ma'am. *(He smiles, looks all around, sits, clears throat. Then he stands immediately as CAROLINE enters center, dressed to go out.)* Hi, Caroline. It's good to see you.

CAROLINE: *(Ecstatically.)* Hello, Mark. Well, I guess I'm ready.

MARK: It was nice meeting you, Aunt Mary, I mean—well, so long.

MRS. MAXWELL: Goodbye, Mark.

CAROLINE: Don't wait up for me, Mom. *(She kisses her on cheek, she and MARK exit right.)*

MRS. MAXWELL: Don't wait up for me, she said. She never said that before in her life. I—I think I'd better go up and lie down a second, Aunt Mary. *(As they start center.)* First it's Lucas, then it's Caroline.

AUNT MARY: *(Her arm around her.)* Now, now, Janet, everything's going to be all right. *(They exit. Phone rings.)*

COURTNEY: *(Answering it.)* Hello. *(Brightening.)* Oh, hello, Elizabeth. Not a thing. Caroline just left with Mark. *(Sighing.)* It's his last night. He goes back to college tomorrow. Yeah. *(Drooling.)* Just think, his last night. I simply love goodbyes, don't you, Elizabeth? They're so romantic. Ian said goodbye to me this afternoon. Only it wasn't very romantic. I happened to be walking out of chemistry the same time he was, and as we bumped into each other, I said, "See you tomorrow, Ian," and he said "Yeah!" *(Pause.)* What? You say what happened next? Oh, he met Melanie Wilson and they left together. Why don't you come over, Elizabeth? *(Excitedly.)* You will? Fine. See you soon. *(She hangs up, sighs, sits with chin in hands.)* Hmmm, Mark's last night. *(Her eyes*

slowly get wide, she sits up, staring into space. She stares right front as the lights go down again. All's quiet for a second and then MARK walks across front of curtains on apron of stage, takes a couple of steps, stops. He's now wearing a football helmet and sweat shirt and is carrying a football.)

COURTNEY: *(Rising, unsteadily.)* Mark. *(She slowly crosses to him.)*

MARK: Hi, Courtney.

COURTNEY: I—thought you'd left for school.

MARK: I—I had to come back. Courtney—*(Nervously fidgeting with football.)*
There's something I had to say to you.

COURTNEY: *(Taking another step toward him.)* Yes, Mark?

MARK: Courtney . . . *(He swallows.)* For the past week, I've been seeing quite a bit of Caroline. I suppose you've been aware of this.

COURTNEY: *(Turning head away.)* Oh? I hadn't noticed.

MARK: Although I've spent my time with her, it's you I've been thinking about. *(She turns to him again.)* Night and day. Day and night. Even in between times. When I'm out on the football field. In scrimmage. Or in the heat of interscholastic combat. And when I look down at the ball just before I kick the winning point, it's you I always see. I can't get you out of my mind.

COURTNEY: Oh, my! *(Hand to mouth.)* My goodness. I didn't know.

MARK: Courtney, you—you will write me?

COURTNEY: *(Excitedly.)* Oh yes, Mark. *(Seriously again.)* But what will Caroline say?

MARK: We'll think of something. Goodbye, Courtney.

COURTNEY: Goodbye, Mark. *(He bends over, kisses her gently on the cheek.)*

Oh! My goodness. (She puts her hand slowly to her cheek. He starts backing away, then turns, crosses in front of the curtains and disappears. She goes back down stage, still holding cheek, then sits again in chair at desk, and starts staring into space. The lights come up full again. She sighs twice, turns, gets a book out of the desk, takes a pen and starts writing in the book.) Dear Diary. Tonight Mark kissed me.

AUNT MARY: *(As she and MRS. MAXWELL enter center.)* Now, Janet, you've got to calm down.

MRS. MAXWELL: The thought of a son that brawls about the neighborhood is just too much.

AUNT MARY: Boys will be boys.

MRS. MAXWELL: Don't start talking like John. We'll just have to take corrective measures of some sort or the boy will turn into a little delinquent.

COURTNEY: *(Looking up.)* Lucas? A delinquent? My goodness!

MRS. MAXWELL: If we don't do something he'll wind up just like thousands of other little boys. *(She collapses into a chair.)* The thought is just too much.

AUNT MARY: Now, now, Janet, you've been a good mother. He's had the guidance and understanding that will make him a pillar of strength in the community. Some day you'll look upon him with pride, press John's arm and say, "There

goes our son, John.” Even Seabiscuit, one of the mightiest horses of all time, was once a frisky colt.

MRS. MAXWELL: And I've read stories about little tame horses that leaped the fence, ran wild and never got back into the fold again. I just know Lucas will leap the fence.

COURTNEY: He'll have to change, Mom. He never could even jump a rope.

MRS. MAXWELL: We're speaking hypothetically, dear.

COURTNEY: Just the same, Mom, I don't think he could get that high.

MRS. MAXWELL: And then there's Caroline. I see the handwriting on the wall, Aunt Mary, and it's written in red ink—for a warning.

AUNT MARY: The thing to do is just sit down sometime with John and have a long talk. Now relax, Janet. Here, read the paper. *(She hands it to her.)*

MRS. MAXWELL: *(Looking at front page.)* My goodness. Here's a story where two little boys started taking things from their own garage and selling them. This went on for five months before they were caught. Seems the father got suspicious when the car disappeared. You just never know.

COURTNEY: *(Looking up, wide-eyed.)* My goodness, surely Lucas wouldn't—

MRS. MAXWELL: Oh, my. *(Louder.)* Oh, my. Here's a story about a girl that left with her boyfriend for the movies and didn't come back. They eloped. He was a college boy and her folks didn't like him and—and—did Caroline say where they were going?

AUNT MARY: Janet, maybe you'd better put the paper up. All of this about Lucas and Caroline is just your imagination. Come take an aspirin.

MRS. MAXWELL: *(As they start left.)* I've tried to raise them right, Aunt Mary. *(They exit.)*

COURTNEY: *(Staring into space again.)* Wow. Surely nothing like that would happen. Not Caroline and Lucas. At least not Caroline. At least—my goodness.

The lights go down again, as COURTNEY stares wide-eyed. A girl, perhaps twenty or so, comes walking out right in front of the curtains. She has on a bright blouse and dark skirt and is wearing heels. COURTNEY rises as the girl stops, hands on hips, crosses to her doubtfully.

MOLLY: Hi, sister.

COURTNEY: *(In soft voice.)* You can't just walk in like that. This is my home. And don't call me sister. I'm no relative of yours.

MOLLY: Button your lip, sister. My name's Molly. *(Meaningfully.)* Conrad sent me.

COURTNEY: Conrad?

MOLLY: Yeah—he wants to see Lucas. Wants to see him real bad like. Conrad's unhappy.

COURTNEY: Who's—Conrad?

MOLLY: Conrad's the big cheese, the top brass, the boss. And he wants to see Lucas—in a hurry. And his friend, Hercules. Where are they?

COURTNEY: Well, I—I—that is—they're not here.

MOLLY: Then I'll wait. *(She sits in chair down right, crosses leg, swings it, chomps on gum.)*

COURTNEY: *(Wide-eyed.)* Is Lucas—in trouble?

MOLLY: *(Throws back head and laughs. Then squints at COURTNEY.)* Listen, sister, anybody who double-crosses Conrad is in trouble. If you don't shoot straight with Conrad . . . *(She shrugs.)* He turns the other cheek and shoots straight with you. *(Leaning forward.)* Shoots a hole straight through you. *(COURTNEY shudders.)*

COURTNEY: Well, Lucas and Hercules aren't here. Why don't you try somewhere else? Spain or Mexico or somewhere.

MOLLY: I'll wait. *(She chomps gum vigorously.)*

MARK comes out in front of curtain right, stands on apron of stage. He's wearing a raincoat and cap pulled low and is carrying a suitcase.

COURTNEY: *(Surprised.)* Mark.

MARK: Hello, Courtney. *(He puts suitcase on floor, paces.)*

COURTNEY: You're—you're worried, Mark.

MARK: Courtney, you're good. You're decent. You're the finest, most wonderful person I've ever known. That's why—why—this is goodbye.

COURTNEY: *(Doubtfully.)* Goodbye? I—I don't understand.

MARK: *(Hand in pockets.)* I'm not much for making speeches, Courtney, but, well, life's a game—a game of chance. You choose a number. You lay it. After you've made your choice, you can't go back. Well, I—I've chosen my number. I shall play it out.

CAROLINE enters from right, crossing in front of curtains. She also is wearing a raincoat.

CAROLINE: Hello, Mark. *(She looks at floor.)*

MARK: *(Matter-of-factly.)* Hello, Caroline. Are you ready?

CAROLINE: I'm ready. It's funny, isn't it? Funny, but no one's laughing. I never thought before that I would ever—elope.

COURTNEY: *(Astonished.)* Elope?

CAROLINE: *(Turning away as COURTNEY runs to her.)* Mom dreamed of a church wedding. Dad always wanted a big spread on the society page. But fate has ruled otherwise. *(She turns to MARK.)* I shall expect you—at midnight. *(She turns and goes out left, exiting in front of curtains.)*

COURTNEY: *(Bewildered.)* But—

MARK: *(Breaking in.)* Like I said, Courtney, you're too good for me. You're too splendidly perfect. I would have preferred you, as would every other red-blooded American boy. Goodbye—and good luck. *(He picks up his suitcase, turns on his heel and exits right, in front of curtains.)*

COURTNEY: (*Looking after him, hand on chin.*) Oh my, this is terrible. (*She turns left, wrings hands, as LUCAS and HERCULES come in from right. They, too, cross in front of curtain. They're both wearing heavy coats. HERCULES' practically drags the floor.*)

HERCULES: (*As they enter.*) Hey.

COURTNEY: (*Whirling, fearfully.*) Hercules. And Lucas. Is that you? (*MOLLY rises.*)

LUCAS: Yes, it's me. Who did you think it was, the big bad wolf?

HERCULES: (*In tough voice.*) I'm Hercules Nelson. (*He growls.*) I'm tough. (*He beats his chest.*) I'm rough. (*Beats it again.*) I'm—(*He turns, sees MOLLY who's now standing beside him.*) goin' home.

MOLLY: Conrad wants to see you.

HERCULES: (*Trembling.*) Conrad?

COURTNEY: Do you think there'll be any blood spilled?

HERCULES: (*Shaking like a leaf.*) There might be if I don't stop shaking.

LUCAS: (*In tough voice.*) Tell Conrad we just left the country.

MOLLY: But you haven't left the country.

LUCAS: (*Shaking.*) We will have by the time you talk to him.

MOLLY: (*Crossing to him.*) Conrad wants to see you. If you don't see him, he's comin' to see you. You can look for him—at midnight.

HERCULES: Midnight? Lucas, old brass-knuckled cohort, I was afraid it'd wind up like this.

LUCAS: This is our last night on Earth. (*They have their hands on each others shoulders.*) We'll spend it close to what we love most. How much money you got?

HERCULES: (*Dragging change out of pocket.*) Buck twenty-five.

LUCAS: I've got a couple bucks. We'll get a root beer float and two straws. (*They exit in front of curtains right.*)

COURTNEY: (*Calling after them.*) Lucas . . . Hercules. (*She turns to MOLLY.*) How did they ever—ever—get in with—Conrad?

MOLLY: It was simple. They're weak-willed, easily swayed—even more so than most men. It all stemmed from a fight Lucas had at school.

COURTNEY: Oh, my. My goodness. (*She turns, looks up, folds hands.*) I've got to save them. (*She takes a step sideways.*) The steps I take tonight may shape my destiny. Don't lose faith in me, Mom. I go to whatever fate awaits me, taking a course I chose not because I want or desire it, but because it is my duty. (*She turns to MOLLY.*) Molly.

MOLLY: Yes?

COURTNEY: (*Sauntering to her, hands on hips.*) Tell Conrad—I want—to see him.

MOLLY: (*Backing right.*) Yes, ma'am. (*Staring at her wide-eyed.*) Yes, ma'am. (*She exits in front of curtain, right.*)

COURTNEY crosses to desk, sits, stares wide-eyed as the lights are brought up full. She continues to stare for an instant, then shakes head, her eyes fall on diary, and she takes pen, starts writing.

COURTNEY: Dear Diary, something most exciting and dreadful happened to me this evening. I shall start at the beginning and relate it just as the exciting details unfolded. *(She's now writing vigorously.)*

ELIZABETH enters right.

ELIZABETH: Hi, Courtney, hi!

COURTNEY: *(Looking up, then back to her work.)* Hello, Elizabeth.

ELIZABETH: Whatcha doin'?

COURTNEY: Writing in my diary.

ELIZABETH: *(Crossing to her.)* You mean your real diary or your make-believe diary?

COURTNEY: Oh, my make-believe diary, of course. Nothing worthwhile or exciting actually ever happens to me. But my make-believe diary is utterly heartbreaking, Elizabeth.

ELIZABETH: Yeah, so's mine. Tonight, my dream man took me to a gorgeous formal dance and everyone kept cutting in all night. And then my other dream man swaggered in and they had a fight and he carried me off on a white horse. *(She sighs, reads over COURTNEY's shoulder as she writes.)* Tonight the clay of fortune shaped my future. My destiny was etched by the pen of fate but I knew I acted unselfishly, thinking not for an instant of myself, but only of my loved ones. For it was tonight that I first met Conrad. *(She looks up, enthralled.)* Wow, Courtney, this does sound exciting. *(Reading again.)* It all began with Molly . . . and when I found out that tonight Mark is eloping with Caroline, not because of a tenderness for her, but because of his mad desire for me. *(Eyes wide.)* This is terrific, Courtney. You might even send it to a magazine.

COURTNEY: I've already thought of that, Elizabeth. Isn't it simply captivating?

ELIZABETH: *(Bubbling over.)* I'm speechless. *(Reading some more.)* I definitely decided to forsake myself for the cause, because Lucas and Hercules have become entangled in the deadly clutches of Conrad. *(Looking up again.)* Wow! I may have to go home and rewrite mine completely. I was going to read it to you, but it's Little Red Riding Hood compared to this. What's going to happen in the next chapter?

COURTNEY: How do I know? I'll just have to wait and experience it.

ELIZABETH: I can hardly wait. Who is this Conrad, anyway?

COURTNEY: He's tall, dark and handsome and daring and is a cross between a Johnny Depp and Frankie Muniz.

ELIZABETH: Just what I've always dreamed of . . . a beautiful man who's young at heart. *(COURTNEY closes diary.)* Let's go see a movie, Courtney. We might get some more good ideas. I always get ideas when I see a movie.

COURTNEY: *(As they cross center.)* We'll look in the paper and see what's showing. *(They exit.)*

MR. MAXWELL: *(As he enters with LUCAS and HERCULES.)* And may that be a lesson to you, son.

LUCAS: I think that's just what I needed, Dad.

MR. MAXWELL: I know it is. Has it started to show?

HERCULES: Turn around, Mr. Maxwell. *(He turns to audience. His eye is faintly black.)* Just a little. It'll be beautiful in the morning.

LUCAS: Dad, I didn't mean to—

MR. MAXWELL: That's all right, Lucas. I was giving you a lesson in self-defense and just dropped my guard for a second, that's all. Don't forget, if that rowdy tries anything again, swing with the left. *(He does.)* Then counter with the right. *(He does.)* And then one to the stomach. *(He punches with left again.)* And that's it. *(Brushes off hands.)*

LUCAS: Thank you, Dad. I'll think of you the first time I have to take care of things. *(He and HERCULES exit center.)*

MR. MAXWELL: Yes sir, a parent should take more of an interest in his offspring. He should know more about them. Find out what makes them tick. Yes sir, I'm going to know my children better. *(He walks around, hands in pockets. His vision falls on COURTNEY's diary.)* Hmm, what's this? Diary of a Darling Daughter, by Courtney Maxwell. *(Eyes wide.)* Darling daughter? How else could a parent better learn about his child than from her own personal diary? Of course she wouldn't mind. After all, I am her father. *(He sits, opens it, reads.)* Un huh. *(He turns a page.)* Un huh. *(Turns another.)* Un huh. Un . . . *(He stops.)* Huh? *(He stands bolt upright.)* What? Oh, no! No, it can't be! *(He reads some more, eyes getting wider.)* Oh, no! Conrad? Molly? Mark and Caroline. *(Exploding.)* Eloping? *(He holds diary in front of him, parades around the room.)*

AUNT MARY: *(Entering.)* John, are you feeling any better since—since—*(She looks at him wide-eyed.)* Good grief.

MR. MAXWELL: Oh no. Not my son Lucas . . . not my daughter Courtney. Oh, no! *(He sinks into chair, puts hands on top of head, sticks legs straight out.)* Oh, no!

AUNT MARY: *(Starting left.)* Janet, call the doctor. I think John's control tower just went on the blink.

CURTAIN.

BY DONALD PAYTON

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