

SHOCK OF HIS LIFE

A FARCE IN ONE ACT

By Donald Payton

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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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CAST OF CHARACTERS

(THREE MEN, THREE WOMEN)

- MR. MAXWELL (m) Middle-aged father. *(110 lines)*
- MRS. MAXWELL (f) Middle-aged mother. *(73 lines)*
- CAROLINE (f) Oldest daughter. *(28 lines)*
- COURTNEY (f) Fifteen-year old daughter. She wears
pajamas and/or robe. *(24 lines)*
- LUCAS (m) Thirteen-year old (only) son. *(116 lines)*
- HERCULES (m) Lucas' friend. *(32 lines)*

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

PLACE: The Maxwell's living room.

TIME: Evening of the present.

STAGE SET

(Other furnishings may be added as desired)

- ☐ Sofa
- ☐ Large chair
- ☐ Occasional chairs
- ☐ Desk and chair
- ☐ Telephone

PROPS

LUCAS—"The Adventures of Super Human" magazine, Broom, Paper, Pencil, Devil's mask

MRS. MAXWELL—Shopping bag, Sack of groceries, Newspaper, Money

MR. MAXWELL—Money, Watch

HERCULES—Devil's mask

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SETTING: *The attractive and very tidy living room of the Maxwell house. There are three exits. The front door, leading to the front porch, is in the wall right. The opening left leads into the dining room and kitchen, the rest of the house is reached through a door or arch center. In the wall right, up from the door, is a window with drapes, curtains, etc. At left center is the sofa, with easy chairs right center and down right. The latter is backed by a floor lamp. A magazine rack sits by the chair. Down left is a desk with a chair to match. A telephone, a pad and pencil are on this desk. Up left is a table with a lamp and stereo. Another chair is up right by a bookcase. Paintings and pictures are on the walls. Other furniture and decorations may be added.*

AT RISE: *LUCAS Maxwell is discovered reading from a magazine: "The Adventures of Super Human." He is very engrossed in the story and oblivious to the fact that his feet are hooked over the back of the sofa and his head is dangling toward the floor. He starts reading aloud from his book.*

LUCAS: "And with that, Super Human swung from the rafter, dropped onto the carpet, and stealthily made his way across the dark corridor. This was the place, he knew. The place where the Purple Dragon was lurking. The Purple Dragon . . . the most fiendish of all fiends, the most desperate killer of all killers, and a fighter of fighters. This, breathed Super Human, was it. He crept across the room, knowing that at any moment it would happen. The room was pitch black. He couldn't see his hands before his eyes. Why couldn't he?" It wasn't that dark. (*LUCAS whirls around to a sitting position on the sofa.*) "Why couldn't he see his hands before him? (*LUCAS' eyes are wide.*) At last, it dawned upon him! . . . He had his hands in his pockets." (*He mops his brow.*) Whew! What a tale! (*Turns a page.*) Wow! (*Reading.*) "He was creeping along . . . afraid to breathe . . . afraid that even the thump . . . thump . . . thump . . . of his steadily beating heart might echo up and down the room like a drum . . . thump, thump, thump . . ." (*He slumps on the sofa.*) "In this room Super Human knew that Purple

Dragon was lurking. The most feared hombre of all time.” (*Sits bolt upright.*) “And then it happened. Super Human suddenly felt something cold, something hard - hard as steel pressed against him. Was it the gun of the Purple Dragon? . . . No! It was the doorknob. He had just run into the door.” (*Sinks back again.*) Boy, was that ever a close shave!

LUCAS suddenly rises and paces around the room.

LUCAS: “And then, against the wall, he saw the culprit. Like a powerful bulwark of strength, he flung himself at the Purple Dragon, and the fight was on. The Purple Dragon has side-stepped Super Human. What a fight. Around the room they clashed. Super Human knew that the winner would come out alive and that the victim would die a miserable death in this depressing room. Round and round they went.” (*Now moving rapidly.*) “The Purple Dragon broke loose and the chase was on.”

MRS. MAXWELL enters left, carrying a shopping bag. She stops when she sees LUCAS.

LUCAS: “He ran from the room, Super Human hot on his trail. He came to the stairs, rapidly sailed up them, and Super Human was at his heels. They were climbing, climbing . . .” (*He scrambles onto the sofa, feet first.*) “Climbing as high as they could go.” (*LUCAS is now sitting on the back of the sofa.*) “And then, the Purple Dragon whirled around, caught Super Human by the throat.” (*LUCAS swallows hard.*) “He twisted and pulled, and pushed him back farther . . .” (*Still leaning back.*) “and farther . . .” (*He is now leaning back considerably.*) “and still farther until . . .”

MRS. MAXWELL: (*Breaking in; unable to control herself any longer.*) Lucas!

LUCAS: (*Startled.*) Yikes! (*He drops his magazine and topples over backwards behind the sofa motionless.*)

MRS. MAXWELL: Lucas, for goodness sakes. *(She picks up his magazine.)* "The Adventures of Super Human." *(Tosses it onto the sofa.)* Where on earth did you get that? I forbid you to read it again. Anyway, dear, you shouldn't take your books to heart. You're going to get hold of one where the hero gets killed and think what kind of a mess you'll be in then. Is your father home from the doctor's office yet? I suppose not. He was probably late for the appointment anyway. It's the same thing every year. We all have to get in the car and drive him down there and he gripes every minute that there's nothing wrong with him. *(She starts right.)* I'm going to run to the store, Lucas. I'll be right back. Tell your father we'll have something good to eat tonight. Are you hungry, dear?

LUCAS' head is now seen as he rises behind the sofa. There is a very disgruntled look on his face.

MRS. MAXWELL: I hope they have some heart at the meat counter. Your father's crazy about heart. And since I made him go to his annual check-up alone this year, it's the least I can do. *(Stops at the door.)* Oh, by the way, dear, I have a little job for you to do. Would you please get the broom and sweep the floor?

LUCAS: *(Astonished.)* Would I what?

MRS. MAXWELL: Sweep the floor, dear.

LUCAS: Well, if I had it my way, Mom, I don't see—

MRS. MAXWELL: *(Breaking in.)* Lucas . . .

LUCAS: —why I have to sweep the blasted floor when it's not my chore.

MRS. MAXWELL: Someday I'm sure we'll figure out just what you think your chores are, but today, Courtney has a very bad cold, dear. And Caroline took the car to a friend's. You can sweep.

LUCAS: *(Sitting.)* If I had it my way.

MRS. MAXWELL: And then you can dust, dear. That won't take a growing boy long. *(And she exits right.)*

LUCAS: A growing boy, ha! It's things like this that makes a fellow stop growing. *(He exits left and returns immediately with a broom.)* If I had it my way. *(He sits in the nearest chair.)*

The telephone rings.

LUCAS: *(Strolling to the phone.)* Hello . . . okay, okay, okay, okay.
(He hangs up, takes the pencil and starts to write on the paper on the desk.)

COURTNEY Maxwell enters center. She is wearing her pajamas and a robe.

COURTNEY: Who called Lucas?

LUCAS: Wouldn't you like to know.

COURTNEY: *(Reprimanding.)* Lucas.

LUCAS: Better not raise your voice. You have a terrible cough.

COURTNEY: Of course I do. *(Coughs.)* The doctor says I might get pneumonia—if I don't stay in bed.

LUCAS: Then why don't you stay in bed?

COURTNEY: What does this mean . . . *(Reading.)* "Heart about gone?"

LUCAS: *(Picks up the broom.)* Just what it says. *(He is walking around the room trying to balance the broom handle in the palm of his hand.)*

COURTNEY: *(Astonished.)* Lucas Maxwell. Just think what kind of a man you'll make.

LUCAS: Whattya mean, "man?" The way I sweep and dust and clean up this place. I doubt if I ever make the cut. *(He starts sweeping viciously.)* Good grief.

COURTNEY: Who's the message from Lucas?

LUCAS: It's from the butcher. He called to say that they got some heart in, but it was about gone.

COURTNEY: Why didn't you write that down then?

LUCAS: Why are you worryin' about it? You better scuttle off to bed before you croak.

COURTNEY: I'll have you know that pneumonia is no laughing matter. If I get pneumonia, I'll get my name in the paper.

LUCAS: Yeah, and if you kick the bucket, you might make the front page, too.

COURTNEY: (*Looking at her watch.*) My goodness, I have to take one of my pills . . . and I'm two minutes late now. (*She exits, coughs a couple of times.*)

LUCAS: Women . . . if I had it my way. Some day they'll pass a law and outlaw females.

MR. MAXWELL enters right.

MR. MAXWELL: (*Happily.*) Hello, Lucas. (*And from his tone, it's evident that tonight MR. MAXWELL is in a good mood.*)

LUCAS: (*Nonchalantly.*) Hello, Pop.

MR. MAXWELL: How's the man of the house tonight? (*LUCAS doesn't answer, but starts to sweep.*) Has Dr. Brown called yet?

LUCAS: Nope.

MR. MAXWELL: He said he'd call and give me his verdict. I had a physical today. Just a routine matter . . . nothing wrong with me . . . (*Flexes his muscles.*) Never felt better in my life. Just look at those muscles. I hate to brag, but I think I'm the strongest man in town. I'm healthier this year than I was last year. I even hated to bother the doctor, but you know women. If you don't, you will soon enough. There was just no stopping Janet. "Now, John, you never can tell. . . There's a thousand ways of catching this and a thousand ways of catching that." Don't forget, son. Always get plenty of exercise, drink plenty of water . . . and drink milk. Nothing like a good strong body to build a man's morale. (*He starts left.*) Think I'll take a shower. (*As he exits.*) Where's your mother, Lucas?

LUCAS: She went to the store.

MR. MAXWELL: When she gets back, tell her to listen, I'll be singing in the shower. Don't forget what I said, son. Nothing can boost a man's morale like a bundle of happy corpuscles. No, sir! (*Exits left.*)

LUCAS: Happy corpuscles . . . if I had it my way. And I get my exercise from sweeping. Three kids in this family and I'm the one that always has to sweep. Me, a growin' boy full of vim, vigor and activity. And I have to sweep the floor. *(He absently pushes the broom along on the floor with one hand, while he reclines on the sofa.)*

LUCAS' friend, HERCULES Nelson, bounces in right.

HERCULES: Hey, Lucas, hey.

LUCAS: Hey yourself, Hercules.

HERCULES: Watcha doin'?

LUCAS: Thirteen years of solitary confinement. That's what I'm doin'. *(He rises and starts sweeping.)* Me, a growin' man, sweepin' the floor. *(He leans on the broom handle.)* Sometimes I think they're raisin' me up to be a janitor.

HERCULES: Might not be so bad, Lucas. Janitors really clean up. *(He chuckles.)*

LUCAS: Just go ahead and make fun, Hercules. But it ain't very funny to me. If I had it my way. Not even my chore and I have to sweep. I just wish I'd been born a long time ago . . . boys didn't have to sweep then. *(Circling around the room with the broom.)* Heck, no. They got to fight outlaws, ride horses, and bite the dust. I bite the dust with a blasted broom. *(Comes over to HERCULES.)* And right now, Caroline is having the time of her life over at a friend's house. By the time I'm old enough to drive, there won't be nothin' left of the car but the carburetor. *(Sitting.)* And it'll probably be blown or something.

Loud crash off right.

LUCAS: *(Jumping up.)* What in the world was that?

HERCULES: *(At the window.)* Caroline's back

LUCAS: I should have known. Do you know what would happen if I did that, Hercules.

CAROLINE: *(As she enters.)* Father isn't here, is he?

LUCAS: Yeah, he's hiding behind the sofa. He thought you were going to park the car in the kitchen like you did last week.

CAROLINE: He's back from the doctor's office? What did the doctor say?

LUCAS: *(Still at the window.)* What did you do to it this time?

CAROLINE: I merely crumpled the right fender.

LUCAS: Oh great, at least the two sides match again.

HERCULES: *(Moving to down-right chair.)* Female drivers! Nuts!

CAROLINE: *(Taking off her gloves.)* I merely started to drive into the garage and –

LUCAS: *(Breaking in.)* And you certainly did just that. *(Moving downstage. Sarcastically.)* But she's improving, Hercules. Last week she tried to bring it into the kitchen.

CAROLINE: For the last time, Lucas, what did the doctor say?

LUCAS: He told Pop he'd call him as soon as he checked-up. Pop's up taking a shower.

HERCULES: *(Sits in chair. Throws one leg over chair arm.)* Personally, I don't think females should be allowed behind a wheel.

LUCAS: Oh, that wouldn't make any difference to Caroline. She never drives behind the wheel anyway.

CAROLINE: *(Moving to center door.)* How's Courtney?

LUCAS: *(Returning to window. Holds back curtain.)* Our car really looks snazzy. The body's green and the fenders are black and blue.

CAROLINE: *(Pausing, .)* Lucas, how is Courtney?

LUCAS: *(Pointing.)* She's in there taking a pill. Right through that door.

CAROLINE glares at LUCAS a moment and then goes out left.

LUCAS: *(Moving down-center.)* Last week she lost the tailpipe . . . day before yesterday she pulled off the gearshift.

HERCULES: By the time you're old enough to drive, there won't be anything left but the horn.

LUCAS: Uh-uh . . . it went last week. (*Sitting on sofa.*) Somehow she got the horn stuck and it tooted up and down Main Street for thirty minutes.

HERCULES: (*Moves over to sofa and sits with LUCAS.*) Watcha goin' to wear tonight, Lucas?

LUCAS: What are you?

HERCULES: I don't know. It's been so long since I've been to a masquerade party.

LUCAS: I think I'll go dressed up as some kind of a hero or something—with muscles.

HERCULES: (*Rising quickly.*) Lucas, what happened to those red costumes you had with horns and tails?

LUCAS: You mean the devil suits?

HERCULES: Yeah.

LUCAS: They're upstairs, somewhere.

HERCULES: Why don't we wear them?

LUCAS: Say, that's a great idea. Why didn't I think of that myself.

The telephone rings.

LUCAS: (*Lifts receiver.*) Hello. Yep . . . yep . . . yep . . . okay. (*He hangs up.*)

HERCULES: Who was it?

LUCAS: Dr. Brown. He said to tell Dad he'll stop by at 7:30. I better write that down. (*Picks up pencil; scrolls on paper.*) Will . . . stop . . . at . . . 7:30, Dr. Brown. They giving any prizes for the best costume, Hercules?

HERCULES: I think the winner gets a bag of tootsie rolls.

COURTNEY enters left.

COURTNEY: Hello, Hercules.

LUCAS: Beware of dog.

HERCULES: Hey, Courtney.

COURTNEY: Did someone call for me?

LUCAS: Nope, ta-ta.

COURTNEY: Dr. Patterson, the school doctor, is going to call about my cough.

LUCAS: Okay, when he calls, I'll answer it. Back to bed, o' sick one.

COURTNEY: I'm going.

LUCAS: Me and Hercules are goin' to the masquerade party tonight.

HERCULES: We're goin' as devils.

COURTNEY: I thought you said it was a masquerade party. *(She starts center.)* If there are any calls for me, let me know. *(Exits.)*

HERCULES: You got any pitchforks or something we can carry?

LUCAS: No, but I might be able to sneak a fork out of the kitchen.

The telephone rings again.

LUCAS: *(Answers phone.)* The Maxwell house . . . Lucas Maxwell speakin' . . . Oh, hello, Dr. Patterson. *(To HERCULES.)* It's Dr. Patterson. *(Into phone again.)* Huh? . . . Okay . . . okay. *(He hangs up.)*

HERCULES: What'd he say?

LUCAS: He called to talk to Mom about Courtney's cough. He said if she took the medicine as prescribed, her cough should be over by 7:45. I better write that down. *(Picks up pencil.)* Coughin' should be over by 7:45. How do you spell coughin', Herc?

HERCULES: Coughin'. C-O-F-F-I-N . . . Coughin'.

LUCAS: That's what I thought. *(Writing.)* C-O-F-F-I-N. Coughin' should be over by 7:45. I'll have to tell Mom about that just as soon as she gets home.

CAROLINE: *(Entering left.)* Was that Phillip?

LUCAS: No, it wasn't Phillip.

CAROLINE: Well, he was going tonight and—

LUCAS: Believe me, it wasn't Phillip. If I had it my way.

CAROLINE: If I miss a date tonight because of you, I'll —

LUCAS: *(Breaking in.)* Are you goin' out again tonight?

CAROLINE: If Phillip calls me, yes. *(She exits center.)*

LUCAS: See that, Hercules. I think it's terrible what this female generation is coming to.

HERCULES: We better go find our costumes or we won't make it to the party on time.

LUCAS: *(Starting center.)* Yeah, we better get on the ball. Did you see the way Caroline snapped at me, Herc. *(As they exit.)* Some day there's gonna be a union for fellas like me and we won't get pushed around by females, then. *(Exit.)*

MRS. MAXWELL enters right. She is carrying a sack of groceries. She sets them on the sofa and looks in the sack as MR. MAXWELL enters center. He is wearing a bathrobe.

MRS. MAXWELL: *(Looking over her shoulder.)* You home already, John?

MR. MAXWELL: *(Kissing her on the forehead.)* No point in spending the entire day with the doctor.

MRS. MAXWELL: What did he think, John?

MR. MAXWELL: I imagine he thought it was the silliest thing in the world. A man as strong as I am.

MRS. MAXWELL: Just the same, we're not going to take any chances.

MR. MAXWELL: I didn't know I was such a specimen of manhood, Janet. I think I'm the healthiest man in town. Guess I take after my father. My dad is the strongest man in thirteen counties. Always has been.

MRS. MAXWELL: *(Again investigating the sack.)* What did the doctor say?

MR. MAXWELL: He didn't. He's going to call or stop by later. I could tell though. He was very pleased.

MRS. MAXWELL: *(Picking up the groceries.)* I'm glad. I couldn't help but worry a little. You've been looking peaked lately.

MR. MAXWELL: Which only goes to prove that you women worry too much. But I guess it's only natural. Women are born to worry.

MRS. MAXWELL: *(Crosses left with the groceries.)* We're born to worry, all right. But it's your fault we worry. *(Exit left.)*

MR. MAXWELL: *(Standing in the middle of the room.)* No sir, there's nothing like being strong and robust. I might play a little ball next summer. *(Flexing his right arm.)* I bet I could throw a pretty good fastball - and throw it right past them. *(He strikes the pose of a pitcher, winds up, kicks one leg in the air, and proceeds to throw a "sizzler" right through the "heart of the plate.")* Yes, sir! *(He struts around the room.)* Plenty light on my toes to make a good prize-fighter, too. *(He strikes a pugilistic attitude, doubles up his fist, and dances around the room on tip-toe, dodging and "throwing leather.")* Ought to have the best one-two in town. *(He dances around the room, stops by the telephone.)* Wonder what this is . . . looks like it's from Dr. Brown. *(He starts reading.)* Heart about gone . . . *(Grabs his heart.)* Oh, no. It can't be. Heart about gone . . . Will stop at 7:30, Dr. Brown. Oh no! It . . . it just can't be. *(He starts slowly toward a chair now groping like an old man.)* It just can't. *(Leaning on a chair.)* He's foolin' around . . . I know he is. *(Looking sick.)* Still, *(Puts hand on heart.)* I did feel funny when I woke up this morning. And I felt funny one day last week. And twice last month. *(He gropes around the chair and drops into it.)* Will stop at 7:30 . . . just a few more minutes. Oh, this is terrible. *(Reads again.)* Heart about gone . . . Will stop at 7:30, Dr. Brown. *(Squinting.)* Coffin should be over by 7:45. *(Standing bolt upright.)* My coffin?!

He starts beating a path around the room.

MR. MAXWELL: My own coffin. I won't look at it, they can't make me look at it. They can't even force me to. This is terrible . . . and I'm so young. And there's so little time. *(Puts hand on heart again.)* And what will Janet do. This is terrible. *(He sits.)* So much to do and so little time to do it in. *(Reads paper again.)* Heart about gone . . . Will stop at 7:30 . . . Coffin should be over by . . . *(And he slumps in the chair.)* Oh, no! My wife, my family . . . *(Now with chin in his hands.)* 7:30. In just a few more minutes I'll be dead—deader than a mackerel.

MRS. MAXWELL enters.

MRS. MAXWELL: It's terrible how high prices are these days. (*Taking out some change.*) This is all I have left out of a fifty-dollar bill. (*She is standing at the table.*) Is something wrong, John? John? John!

MR. MAXWELL: No, Janet, everything's just ducky.

MRS. MAXWELL: And you saw the little bit of groceries I bought. If you don't get a raise, we won't be able to do a thing or save a thing. But it could be worse, I suppose. (*She looks at him, no answer.*) We should be thankful you have a job. (*Puts money back in her purse.*) I hate to think of what we'd do without it.

MR. MAXWELL: (*Hand on heart.*) Ohhhh.

MRS. MAXWELL: Did you say something John? (*Louder.*) John? (*He shakes his head, rubs his hand over his body.*) Now, John. (*irate.*) There's no use pouting . . . we have to eat. I can't help it if groceries are so high. I swear, every time I mention money, you pout. (*She whirls around and starts left.*)

MR. MAXWELL: (*Half rising.*) Janet, I . . .

MRS. MAXWELL: (*Turning.*) Yes . . .

MR. MAXWELL: Janet, I . . . I . . . (*He sniffs, then collapses in the chair again.*) Nothing.

MRS. MAXWELL: John, if you have anything to say, please say it now instead of waiting until the children are present. You know how I feel about that. (*She comes back.*)

MR. MAXWELL just stares at **MRS. MAXWELL**.

MRS. MAXWELL: John, for heaven's sake.

They glare at each other a moment and MRS. MAXWELL turns, goes to a chair, picks up the paper, and sits.

MRS. MAXWELL: (*Looking at the paper.*) Oh, this poor woman. Just listen to this, John. (*Reading.*) Mrs. Arnold Smith of 445 E. Charles reports that her husband has disappeared, leaving her with four children. Although it's possible that he may have been hurt or injured somewhere, it is evident that the wife thinks he has left her, and the four children. The wife, it is known, was wondering just how she will support herself—and four young children. (*Looking up.*) I'd hate to think what I'd do if I were in that woman's shoes. (*Reading again.*) The woman—

MR. MAXWELL: (*Interrupts when he can't stand it any longer.*) Janet, I . . . (*She stops reading.*) Nothing. (*He rises and walks slowly around the room, his hands deep in his pockets.*)

MRS. MAXWELL: (*Reading again.*) The woman, who at seven o'clock this morning—

MR. MAXWELL: (*Breaking in again.*) Janet, do you have to read that thing. It . . . it . . .

MRS. MAXWELL: (*Rising, hotly.*) Well, John Maxwell, if it's come to the point where you can't even listen to your own wife. (*She throws down the paper and starts left.*)

MR. MAXWELL: (*Frantically.*) But, Janet, I love you . . . (*Following her across the room.*) I love you more than anything in the world. (*As she exits left.*) More than . . . (*And he stops.*) More than . . . (*Sadly.*) Anything . . . in . . . the (*And he drops into a chair.*) . . . world. (*Head in his hands.*) Only a few more minutes. (*Looks at watch.*) I have a family, I love my family, and I'll spend these last few remaining minutes with them. (*He puts his hand on his heart, starts to rise.*)

CAROLINE enters center.

CAROLINE: Did I hear Mom, Dad? (*MR. MAXWELL nods affirmatively.*) I've got to see her about tonight. (*She starts left.*)

MR. MAXWELL: Tonight? (*Rises.*)

CAROLINE: Yes, Dad. I'm expecting a call from Phillip anytime moment now saying he has the car.

MR. MAXWELL: Caroline, would it be too much if I asked you to stay at home tonight?

CAROLINE: *(Eyes getting wide.)* But, Father, I –

MR. MAXWELL: *(Breaking in.)* Just this once, Caroline. *(Sniffs.)*
For my sake?

CAROLINE: *(Frantically.)* But, Father, I –

MR. MAXWELL: *(Again breaking in.)* Caroline, I'm asking you to
stay at home tonight . . . just this once. Believe me . . . *(Choke.)* I
won't ask you to anymore.

MRS. MAXWELL: *(Calling from offstage.)* Is that you Caroline?

CAROLINE: That's Mom, Dad. *(And she exits left.)*

MR. MAXWELL: *(Coming over and sitting again.)* They probably
won't even miss me. *(He sniffs again.)* My own family. Maybe I
should have told her to go on . . . to go on and enjoy herself.
She'll only live once. *(He looks at his watch.)* Only five minutes
more at the most. *(Sinks back in the chair.)* This is terrible.
(Hand on heart suddenly.) My heart . . . I think it just missed a
beat. *(Eyes wide.)* I'm sure it did. *(Starts pounding on his heart.)*

LUCAS enters.

LUCAS: You got a pitchfork, Dad?

MR. MAXWELL: *(Rising, gazing at him rapturously.)* Lucas, my son
. . . my only son.

LUCAS: *(Blankly.)* Huh?

MR. MAXWELL: You're my own flesh and blood. My own little
offspring.

LUCAS: *(Squinting his eyes.)* Huh?

MR. MAXWELL: *(Putting his hands on LUCAS' shoulders.)* I can
remember the day you were born . . . the very day. I looked down
at your little, pink face and . . . and . . . *(Turns his face away.)* I
just can't talk about it.

LUCAS: Wow, did I look that bad?

MR. MAXWELL: *(Staring into space.)* And I said to myself, this child
is the very image of his father.

LUCAS: *(Turning away.)* Then that explains it . . . no wonder you
couldn't look at me.

MR. MAXWELL: *(Sitting.)* I'm afraid I haven't been a very good
father, son.

LUCAS: Well, I have to admit you don't run the place like I would, Dad, but all in all it's not so bad.

MR. MAXWELL: *(Through tear-dimmed eyes.)* Just remember one thing, Lucas. That your father . . . *(Sniffs.)* that your father . . . *(Choke.)* loves you, Lucas.

LUCAS: *(Doubtfully.)* Huh?

MR. MAXWELL: *(Rising and moving to LUCAS again.)* And that you're my pride and joy. *(Choke.)* When I look at you I . . . *(He turns to LUCAS, but then jerks back; biting his lip.)* No, I just can't do it.

LUCAS: You mean my looks haven't changed in thirteen years?

MR. MAXWELL: Tell me, son. Is there anything you . . . you want to ask me?

LUCAS: *(Thinking.)* Well-I-I-I . . . yes.

MR. MAXWELL: *(Putting his hands on his shoulders again.)* Yes, Lucas?

LUCAS: *(After a pause, then blurting it out.)* Could I have a couple bucks, Dad?

MR. MAXWELL: *(Gazing at him.)* Of course you can, Lucas. But why just a couple? *(He sniffs.)* I know I've always seemed a bit stingy, but just forget that, son. Here . . . *(Digs into his pocket.)* Here's a ten.

LUCAS: *(Takes the ten dollar bill.)* Well, wow, thanks, Dad. You must have a fever. *(Pockets the money.)* What time do you have, Dad?

MR. MAXWELL: *(Looking at his watch.)* It's . . . *(Choke.)* about . . . 7:30.

LUCAS: *(Starts center.)* Golly, I gotta be goin'. Herc is waitin' upstairs.

MR. MAXWELL: Lucas.

LUCAS: *(Turning.)* Huh?

MR. MAXWELL: Before you go, son . . . *(Swallows hard.)* If there's anything you want to tell me, well, tell me.

LUCAS: I don't know what I could tell you except that me and Herc are going to a masquerade party tonight.

MR. MAXWELL: Tonight?

LUCAS: You betcha. We're gonna get first prize.

MR. MAXWELL: Lucas, if . . . if your father asked you not to go tonight, you wouldn't want to, would you?

LUCAS: You mean . . . (*Wailing.*) If I had it my way, Dad.

MR. MAXWELL: (*Sitting.*) Come here, Lucas. I—I guess there's something I've got to tell you. (*LUCAS sits on the arm of the chair, MR. MAXWELL puts his arm around him.*) Lucas, son. Sometimes young men . . . very young men . . . are called upon to support a family . . . to take the horse by the reins. But the American boy, no matter what his age, pitches in with drive and determination to see it through. The American boy is equal to the test, and Lucas, you . . . (*Choke.*) are no exception. (*LUCAS looks at him blankly, chewing on his gum.*) Do you follow me?

LUCAS: I think I missed the bus completely, Dad.

MR. MAXWELL: (*Shifting his weight.*) I'll put it this way. Lucas, when you hear someone mention the head of a house, what is the first thing you think of?

LUCAS: (*Brightly.*) The front porch?

MR. MAXWELL: I want to ask you something, Lucas.

LUCAS: (*Still chomping on his gum.*) Yeah?

MR. MAXWELL: Lucas . . . (*Sharply.*) will you please quit chewing your gum like that?

LUCAS: I'm done with it anyway. It's lost most of the flavor it had last Tuesday.

MR. MAXWELL: I'll put it this way. Mortals here on Earth . . . could be compared to a ship. We sail the waters for many years, we sail through storms, calm waters, sunny skies, and black clouds until—until the day comes . . . to sail our last sail. You follow me?

LUCAS: I think I'm getting the drift.

MR. MAXWELL: On that day, we sail up stream and never return. Lucas, I . . . I . . . I'm going . . . going . . . up, up, the stream.

LUCAS: (*His eyes popping.*) You mean—you mean . . .

MR. MAXWELL: Up the river of golden dreams.

LUCAS: (*Jumping up.*) Up the river?

MR. MAXWELL: And there's no escaping . . . no turning back . . . it's as certain as . . . as taxes.

LUCAS: (*Wide-eyed.*) Oh, Dad, this is terrible.

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MR. MAXWELL: *(Putting his arm around him.)* I'm so glad you understand.

LUCAS: *(Staring into space.)* Up the river.

MR. MAXWELL: Just promise me you won't tell anyone.

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