

Suitable For Hanging

By Donald Payton

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CAST OF CHARACTERS
(SIX MEN, SEVEN WOMEN)

CHARLIE HACKLE

A nice looking young man. He is ambitious, neat, intelligent, quite capable, and earnest.

SAM ADAMS

Charlie's roommate and good friend. He's glib, enthusiastic, eager, and a flamboyant wheeler-dealer. He wears bright, flashy clothes.

ABBY

Charlie's pretty, vivacious fiancée. She's a sensible young lady; neat and fashionable.

MRS. RANEY

Abby's mother. An attractive woman in her late forties, fashionably dressed. She's pleasant and very perceptive, Keenly interested in the well-being of her daughter and has a dry wit that on the surface gives the impression of sarcasm.

MOM HACKLE

Charlie's mother. She's middle-aged, neat, well-dressed on the "homey" side. She's a doting, protective "mother hen," but quite likeable and pleasant with a good sense of humor.

FRANK RANEY

Abby's father. He's about 50, a private investigator who dresses rather conservatively.

TINA

A pretty blonde in her early twenties. She's giggly, flirty, cute as a button, but kooky. She's expensively dressed—in red.

HILGA

A sharp brunette in her mid-twenties. A ballerina of foreign extraction, she wears black sequined tights over a leotard and an abundance of makeup.

ANATOLE GRINDSTAFF

The blundering, bungling "body" in the closet. Dresses conservatively.

SUITABLE FOR HANGING

PROFESSOR HANS GRUBER

PROFESSOR BERNARD ZAPOTKA

Two zany little German scientists who are on the brink of the world's greatest discovery. Fifty-something with long, stringy white hair, horned-rim glasses, and are never without their white lab coats.

THE WRENN SISTERS (MINI/MAXI)

Overdressed fraternal twins. Cute, giggly, dumb showgirl types. They wear way too much makeup. They are in their early twenties.

STAGE PROPERTIES

Easy chair	Two stools
Floor lamp	Shirts, slacks, socks
Sofa	Assorted books
Chair	Loaf of bread
Desk and chair	Tennis shoes
Stereo	Magazines
Drapes for windows	Framed pictures
Telephone	Stage jewelry
Doorbell	Play money
Brooms	Red coat
Dust mop	Red shoes
Framed picture of Abby	Newspaper
College diploma, framed	Men's pajamas

HAND PROPERTIES

CHARLIE: Suitcase, beanie, tennis racket, football helmet.

SAM: Note pad, briefcase with papers, milk carton, newspaper, personal cards, wristwatch.

ABBY: Wrapped packages.

MOM HACKLE: Suitcase, serving tray, eight glasses, pitcher of green punch.

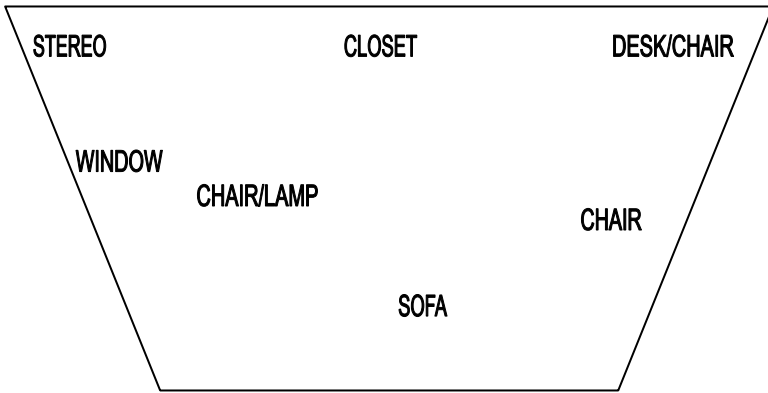
PROFESSORS: Laboratory bottles of various sizes, shapes and colors; two microscopes, test tubes, two large bottles of green liquid, three small drinking glasses, horned-rim glasses, hat, aerosol shave cream.

MRS. RANEY: Wrapped packages, framed painting, coffee maker, toaster.

WRENN SISTERS: Suitcases.

BY DONALD PAYTON

SUGGESTED STAGE SET



STAGE RIGHT

STAGE LEFT

ACT ONE, SCENE 1

PLACE: Charlie and Sam's living room in a modest apartment.

TIME: Early afternoon of the present.

Setting:

The apartment looks lived in—by men. It is usually in a state of disorder and today is no exception. The furniture could best be described as “Early Depression.” There is an easy chair and floor lamp down right, a sofa up center in front of the closet, a chair down left, a table left center, and a stereo right-center. A window with frazzled drapes is up left; a door leading to the kitchen, bedroom, and studio is left and the front door is stage right. There is a shirt on the sofa and a pair of dirty jeans draped over a chair. Assorted objects: socks, pajamas, books, a loaf of bread, tennis shoes, magazines, etc. dot the landscape like over-ripe fruit in some forgotten orchard. Pictures on the wall need straightening, along with Charlie’s college diploma that hangs center. A large portrait of his fiancée, Abby, is on the table, along with a phone. The stereo is jamming a country-western ballad.

At Rise:

The doorbell is ringing insistently. The door, right, opens and Mrs. Raney sticks her head in and looks around.

MRS. RANEY: *(Calling.)* Charlie? Yoo-hoo. Anybody home?
Here we come, ready or not.

Mrs. Raney enters. Her arms are full of wrapped packages along with some framed paintings, a coffee maker, and a toaster. Behind her is her daughter, Abby, who also has her arms full of packages.

ABBY: We can’t just walk in, Mother.

MRS. RANEY: Well, we can’t stand around all afternoon with our arms full. *(She deposits her packages on the sofa, while Abby puts hers in a chair. Mrs. Raney crosses to the stereo and turns it off.)*

MRS. RANEY: That music. One thing about Charlie Hackle is very evident—he has extremely poor taste.

ABBY: *(Smiling.)* That doesn’t say much for your daughter.

MRS. RANEY: In music, dear.

ABBY: *(Calling.)* Charlie. *(She crosses to the door, left.)*
Anybody home?

MRS. RANEY: *(Surveying the room.)* The apartment is small.

ABBY: It’s big enough.

MRS. RANEY: And I wish it was on the first floor instead of the fifth. I worry about fire.

ABBY: It's fireproof, Mother.

MRS. RANEY: I wouldn't bet on it . . . (*As she looks around.*) Or anything else. (*She steps on the floor, rather hard, with her foot.*) The floor gives.

ABBY: (*Looking out the door, left.*) I guess no one's here.

MRS. RANEY: I wonder who lives on the fourth floor?

ABBY: Why?

MRS. RANEY: I have a feeling you may drop in on them at any time.

ABBY: (*Calling left.*) Sam. (*Turning.*) I guess his roommate isn't here, either. (*Mrs. Raney, who has been snooping around, opens the closet door. Brooms and a dust mop fall out.*)

ABBY: I think the apartment needs a woman's touch, Mother. (*She picks up the broom, puts it back in the closet, and starts putting the packages in the closet.*)

MRS. RANEY: I wouldn't touch anything too hard, dear. It might collapse. (*She turns.*) Remind me to call Mr. Wilson at the plant and see if someone can help us move the rest of the wedding presents.

ABBY: Charlie can help us.

MRS. RANEY: He might break something.

ABBY: He's very strong.

MRS. RANEY: That isn't what I mean. The English bone China that your Aunt Margaret gave you is very expensive, to say nothing of the lovely set of glasses the VanGelders sent from Bavaria.

ABBY: We'll manage, Mother.

MRS. RANEY: I don't know why you two couldn't live in one of the newer apartments—like the Manor House.

ABBY: Charlie likes it here.

MRS. RANEY: It figures.

ABBY: Anyway, Charlie and Sam had an agreement. The first one that gets married gets the apartment.

MRS. RANEY: Big deal.

ABBY: (*Looking around.*) We've had some good times in this apartment.

MRS. RANEY: And what, pray tell, does that mean?

ABBY: It means Charlie was living here when we first met. We've had romantic dinners here . . . (*Sighing.*) by candlelight.

MRS. RANEY: Probably because he couldn't pay his electric bill.

ABBY: And soft music.

MRS. RANEY: (*Pointing to stereo.*) Do you call the music he listens to soft?

ABBY: (*Dreamily.*) And he proposed to me in this very apartment.

MRS. RANEY: Proposed what?

ABBY: (*Smiling.*) Marriage, Mother. I'm getting married to Charlie tomorrow, remember?

MRS. RANEY: It reminds me of the first apartment your father and I had.

ABBY: So what's wrong with that?

MRS. RANEY: That was about 30 years ago. Since then they've added a few modern conveniences—such as electricity, running water, and heat.

ABBY: Don't kid me . . . you had a soft spot in your heart for that first apartment.

MRS. RANEY: The only soft spot I had was in my head. (*She starts picking up things, looking at them distastefully.*)

ABBY: (*Watching her, smiling.*) It just looks like someone lives here, Mother.

MRS. RANEY: It looks like someone **died** here. (*Surveying the room.*) Look at it. (*Picking up a sock.*) It reminds me of overripe fruit in some forgotten orchard.

ABBY: (*Holding up a picture against the wall.*) Could this picture go here?

MRS. RANEY: It's better than the one that's already there.

ABBY: This happen to be one of Charlie's favorites.

MRS. RANEY: (*Pointing to the chair down right.*) That chair must go.

ABBY: Charlie likes that chair.

MRS. RANEY: Your great Uncle Philibert has offered to completely furnish the living room. (*Hand on chin.*) I think French Provincial.

ABBY: Charlie thinks early American.

MRS. RANEY: And dear, your Aunt Agatha has painted you a mural for that wall.

ABBY: (*Un-enthused.*) I've seen it. (*She wrinkles her nose.*)

MRS. RANEY: Your Aunt Agatha is in a position to be of great assistance. She's offered Charlie a very good job with the company.

ABBY: (*Quickly.*) He happens to like what he's doing.

MRS. RANEY: It figures.

ABBY: There's nothing wrong with being a lab technician.

MRS. RANEY: But some people get paid to work.

ABBY: It does pay. Not much, but some. As soon as he gets his master's degree he hopes to go into science.

MRS. RANEY: Something in outer space, I hope. I mean, you'd love Houston.

ABBY: He wants to be a chemist.

MRS. RANEY: It figures.

ABBY: He considers himself very fortunate to work for Professor Zapotka and Dr. Gruber. They're on the verge of a giant breakthrough.

MRS. RANEY: (*Stepping on the floor again.*) The way this floor feels, so are we.

ABBY: They're on the brink of a big discovery.

MRS. RANEY: (*Staring at window.*) Those drapes will have to go . . . and the wallpaper.

ABBY: Charlie says it will have world-wide impact.

MRS. RANEY: Why don't I call my decorator? When you return from your honeymoon the apartment will be fumigated and redecorated.

ABBY: Charlie said **we** are going to redecorate. Just the two of us.

MRS. RANEY: (*Shrugging.*) It figures. (*Sam Adams enters right.*)

SAM: (*As he enters.*) Hey . . . look who's here.

ABBY: Hi, Sam. Mother, you know Sam Adams, Charlie's roommate.

MRS. RANEY: (*Dryly.*) Oh yes. (*She looks him up and down.*)

SAM: I'm the best man.

MRS. RANEY: I wouldn't be at all surprised.

SAM: How's the beautiful bride and the beautiful bride's gorgeous mother? No doubt where the bride gets her looks.

ABBY: Don't pay any attention to Sam, Mother. He's in advertising.

MRS. RANEY: (*Impressed.*) Oh, Madison Avenue?

SAM: Well, not quite. Would you believe 1120 Walnut Avenue, Apartment 517?

ABBY: (*Quickly.*) Temporarily.

SAM: Yeah. I'm on my way up. Tomorrow I move to the ninth floor. (*He points up.*)

ABBY: Sam has a home office.

MRS. RANEY: How nice.

SAM: Yeah, except I don't have an office.

ABBY: Have you seen Charlie?

SAM: He's at the lab. Either that or he chickened out and skipped the country. (*Crosses right, turns.*) Hey, guess who's out in the hall? The Wrenn Sisters.

MRS. RANEY: Who?

SUITABLE FOR HANGING

SAM: Sam Adams' latest discovery, that's who. And now, here they are folks, all the way from St. Joe Moe . . . (*Pointing right.*) The Wrenn sisters, Maxine and Minerva.

MAXI: (*Popping her head in the door, right.*) I'm Maxi.

MINI: (*Sticking her head in underneath Maxi's.*) I'm Mini. (*Mrs. Raney stares.*)

SAM: C'mon in. (*He waves them in.*)

They giggle and enter. They're cute and flirty. They're overdressed with an abundance of makeup.

SAM: (*As they enter.*) That's Abby and that's her Mom.

MAXI/MINI: (*Together, as they curtsy.*) Pleased to meetcha.

MINI: We're twins.

MAXI: But not identical. (*They giggle.*)

SAM: Tomorrow Abby takes the big step. She's marryin' my roommate.

MAXI/MINI: (*Together, shivering.*) Groovy.

SAM: (*To Mrs. Raney.*) Those little gals are going places. Vegas. Hollywood. You name it.

The Wrenn sisters strike a pose, one foot forward, hands outstretched.

MAXI/MINI: (*Together, singing.*) "California here we come, right back where we started from."

SAM: (*Breaking in.*) Save it, girls. (*Turning.*) Pretty terrific, huh. All they need is exposure.

MINI: You mean like we had in Sheboygan, Mr. Adams?

SAM: I mean you gotta be seen.

MAXI: They saw a lot of us in Sheboygan. (*They giggle again.*)

SAM: I mean talent scouts, television producers. You gotta be seen and you gotta be heard. We gotta get 'em something local. A benefit . . . anything. (*He stops, turns to Mrs. Raney.*) Hey, you carry a lot of weight.

MRS. RANEY: (*Coldly.*) I beg your pardon.

SAM: I mean you swing with the "in" crowd, jetsetters . . . you got influence.

MRS. RANEY: (*Recovering her composure.*) Oh. I see. Well yes, I do have some influential friends.

SAM: And they'll be at the wedding tomorrow, right? The girls here have a great version of "Oh Promise Me."

MAXI/MINI: (*Striking pose, singing somewhat off key.*) "Oh promise me that someday you and I . . ."

ABBY: (*Breaking in quickly.*) Oh no you don't.

SAM: Well, you can't win 'em all. (*As he crosses to phone.*)

Anyway, I gott'em pegged for the Jim's Biscuits commercials. (*He dials as he talks.*) Remember the name, Mrs. Raney. The Wrenn Sisters. (*They giggle as he speaks into the phone.*) J.T. Farnham, please. (*Hand over mouthpiece.*) J.T. as in James T. as in Jim's Biscuits. (*Into phone again.*) Hello? J.T.? Adams here. (*Pause.*) Adams. Sam Adams. (*He motions for girls to come to phone.*) You know that television spot . . . Jim's Biscuits? Listen to this—

MAXI/MINI: (*Together, singing into the phone as Sam holds it out, to the tune of "A Tisket, A tasket."*) A biscuit, a basket, a basket of Jim's Biscuits; fluffy, light, and golden brown, Jim's biscuits are the best in town."

SAM: (*Into phone.*) How does that grab you, J.T.? Hello . . .

J.T.? (*Hangs up, shrugging.*) Oh well, you can't win 'em all.

MAXI/MINI: (*Together.*) Whatever will be will be, there's lots of other fish in the sea.

SAM: (*Snapping fingers.*) You're right. (*Points finger at them.*)

Tom's Tuna. (*Pecking with one finger on an imaginary piano.*)

There's no tuna, like Tom's Tuna . . . (*Pause, then quickly.*)

It's plump, tender, and light. (*He starts left.*) C'mon, we'll work on it over coffee.

MAXI/MINI: (*As they follow.*) Oooo, groovy. (*Sam turns at door, comes back.*)

SAM: Oh yes . . . (*He takes a notebook from his pocket, glances at it.*) Your plane tickets are in the name of Mr. and Mrs.

Harvey Sloan. He's got connections. You've got reservations

at the Hilton as Mr. and Mrs. George W. Brooks. Your tickets

to the big fight in the Garden are under the name of Homer

Hudsmith, and your theatre tickets are compliments of J.J.

Hottenfeffer Company. (*He turns left, then turns again to*

Abby.) And when you get there, call about your reservations at

Luigi's and tell them you're Clarence Fitch, of Applegate,

Cazmire, Jones, and Fitch. (*He rips off the page and hands it*

to Abby.) Happy honeymoon.

ABBY: Thanks, Sam.

SAM: Nothing's too good for my best pal and his gal. (*He starts left, motions for the Wrenns to follow.*) C'mon.

MAXI/MINI: (*As the girls exit left, singing off key.*) "There's no tuna like Tom's tuna."

SAM: (*Following them out.*) We're gonna make tuna a household word.

ABBY: I'd better call and see if Charlie is at the lab.

Crosses to phone.

MRS. RANEY: Abby.

ABBY: (*Stopping, turning.*) Yes, Mother?

MRS. RANEY: Are you sure?

ABBY: Am I sure about what?

MRS. RANEY: Charlie . . . and marriage?

ABBY: I'm sure, Mom. Sure. Positive. Confident. And convinced.

MRS. RANEY: I felt the same when I married your father.

ABBY: Look. I'm sorry things didn't work out for you and Dad.

That doesn't mean they won't work out for Charlie and me.

(*Lifts phone.*)

MRS. RANEY: May I see that list?

ABBY: (*Puts phone back on hook.*) What list?

MRS. RANEY: The one that Sam gave you. (*Abby hands it to her.*) What's wrong with Harvey Sloan . . . or Clarence Fitch.

ABBY: There's nothing wrong with them. I presume all of those men are prominent and very successful.

MRS. RANEY: Exactly. Why Charles Hackle? Why not . . .

(*Selecting one of the names on the list.*) Homer Hudsmith?

ABBY: I don't know Homer Hudsmith.

MRS. RANEY: He's taking you to the fights.

ABBY: (*More than a little exasperated.*) His **company** is taking us. For all I know Homer Hudsmith doesn't exist.

MRS. RANEY: For two years you haven't known whether anyone existed but Charlie Hackle, like those silly girls said, "There's other fish in the sea." The world is filled with eligible, successful bachelors.

ABBY: I know that Charlie is a mere lab technician, but look at it this way . . . he has no way to go but up.

MRS. RANEY: Only if they have an explosion in the laboratory.

ABBY: I get the point, Mother. Thanks. (*Starts dialing.*) But no thanks.

SAM: (*Entering left.*) Those Wrenn Sisters are great little gals, huh? (*Putting hand by neck.*) Talent up to here.

MRS. RANEY: Going which way?

SAM: If you talk to Charlie, tell him I'll pick him up for tonight's rehearsal. *(To Mrs. Raney.)* You know something, that roommate of mine is quite a guy.

ABBY: Yes. That's what Mother was just saying.

SAM: And look at it this way. You're not losing a daughter, you're gaining a son.

MRS. RANEY: Yes Sam. Like you always say, "You can't win 'em all."

BLACKOUT.

ACT ONE, SCENE 2

Setting:

Charlie's living room. Professor Hans Gruber and Dr. Bernard Zapotka are seated at a long desk, which has been moved center front. The two famous German professors are seated on stools with their backs to the audience. Both have long, stringy hair, wear horned-rim glasses, and have on white lab coats. The desk is cluttered with bottles of various sizes, shapes, and colors; a couple of microscopes and test tubes.

At Rise:

The phone rings. The ringing is ignored by the very intense professors. One holds up a test tube of colored water while the other peers into a microscope. The phone is resting in a chair which has been moved from down left to upper left center. Charlie Hackle enters from left. He wears a white lab coat over his street clothes. He crosses to the phone.

CHARLIE: *(Answers phone.)* Hello. Charlie Hackle speaking. Oh, hi Abby. *(In low voice.)* Yeah . . . I noticed you'd been here earlier this afternoon. I musta just missed you. *(Pause.)* Of course I haven't forgotten. How could I forget something as important as my own wedding. *(Looks at professors, then turns away.)* I'll be there as soon as I can. Another hour or two. Yes, Abby, I've talked to the professors. They know the rehearsal is tonight and the wedding is tomorrow afternoon. They're over here now as a matter of fact. Yes, at my place. *(Pause.)* Because the project is top secret so they decided to wind it up here instead of the lab at the university, that's why. No foreign agents or cloaks or daggers or stuff like that there. *(He smiles.)* I'm perfectly safe, Abby. That is, as safe as any

other prospective bridegroom. As soon as we're through here I'll clean up everything and be right over. After the rehearsal, Sam and the boys are throwing a farewell whing-ding for me. *(Pause.)* Yes, I realize "farewell" sounds awfully final. *(Pause.)* Abby, the future bride is not allowed at the bridegroom's bachelor party. I don't know why . . . she just isn't. No, there won't be any girls there. Sorta like a boy scout meeting . . . No, there won't be any den mothers. See you soon. Okay? *(Pause, he looks over at the professors.)* Yes, I do you too. *(Pause again.)* I can't say it here, in front of the professors. I might steam their glasses. *(Grinning.)* See you, honey, bye bye. *(He hangs up the phone, smiles, turns and exits left.)*

Professor Gruber holds up a test tube.

GRUBER: *(Peering at it.)* Incredible.

Dr. Zapotka holds up test tube and turns it sideways in opposite direction of Gruber .

ZAPOTKA: Fantastic.

GRUBER: Fantastically incredible.

ZAPOTKA: Incredibly fantastic.

GRUBER: At last, after all these years, success.

ZAPOTKA: Complete and undeniable success.

GRUBER: *(Whirling around and facing Zapotka.* A remarkable breakthrough.

ZAPOTKA: *(Turning and facing his partner.)* An extraordinary discovery. *(As if dropping a bomb.)* Ve half accomplished der unaccomplishable.

GRUBER: Ve haff conquered der unconquerable.

GRUBER/ZAPOTKA: *(Together, laying test tubes on desk.)* Success.

The two leap to their feet, face the audience, and speak in rhythmic cadence.

GRUBER: Many iss der time ven ve didn't haff a dime but kept working offertime.

GRUBER/ZAPOTKA: *(Together, thrusting a clenched fist in front of them.)* Success!

ZAPOTKA: Often vas der day vot we didn't get no pay but kept working anyway.

GRUBER/ZAPOTKA: (*Together.*) Success.

GRUBER: Now dose barren days of yore are gone for even more

. . .

ZAPOTKA: Und ve're knocking on der door uf . . .

GRUBER/ZAPOTKA: (*Together, clenched fists held high.*)

Success.

ZAPOTKA: Though ve lived with wrath and scorn ve returned
here effry morn . . . till our brain child could be born.

GRUBER/ZAPOTKA: (*Together.*) Success. (*They take a step
forward.*) Ve're flirting with success.

GRUBER: Der famous uff der nation vill join in adulation . . .

ZAPOTKA: Der little and der great vill meet to celebrate . . .

GRUBER: Der vorld vill know our name and ve'll bask in vealth
and fame.

ZAPOTKA: Ve'll be seen in Life und Look und in efer science
book.

GRUBER: They'll see us on TV . . .

ZAPOTKA: They'll know you . . . und they'll know me.

GRUBER/ZAPOTKA: (*Together.*) Royalty vill toast us . . . der
president vill host us . . . und together ve vill rise . . . to accept
der Nobel prize . . .

GRUBER: Und unaccustomed as ve are . . .

ZAPOTKA: (*Dropping to one knee, singing, going from a high
note to a low note at the end.*) Ve may effen buy a car.

GRUBER/ZAPOTKA: (*Together, holding a fist over their heads
and accenting each word.*) Success . . . success . . .
(*Professor Zapotka drops to one knee next to Dr. Gruber.
They extend hands and hit a long, sour musical note.*)
Success. (*They hold pose a moment, then rise.*)

ZAPOTKA: Already it iss starting to go to mine head. I am
starting to feel mine turnips.

GRUBER: Bernard, you mean oats.

ZAPOTKA: No, Hans. Papa vas poor und ve could nefer afford
oats. (*Proudly.*) Imagine. After all der years, you und me,
Hans Gruber and Bernard Zapotka, haff successfully perfected
der formula . . . (*Enunciating it clearly and emphatically.*) G –
E – Four Square – Five – O – P – Q – Two.

GRUBER: (*Finger over mouth.*) Ssshhh. Somebody it iss who
could be eavesdripping. Don't let anyvun hear you say . . . (*In
stage whisper, rapidly.*) G – E – Four Square – Five – O – P – Q
– Two.

ZAPOTKA: Right you are, Hans. Ve don't dare let anyone know. Ve must make double double sure dot vee iss totally und completely along. (*Zapotka takes a step to the left. Gruber to the right and they put hand over eyes, gaze briefly.*) Alone vee is. (*He turns.*)

GRUBER: (*Turning.*) Goot.

ZAPOTKA: A disaster uff national dimension it would be iff somebody swiped der formula.

GRUBER: A catastrostrope it would be if anyvun knew ve are close to haffing it perfected.

ZAPOTKA: Der room would be filled mit foreign spies.

GRUBER: To say nothink uff our blood.

ZAPOTKA: (*Shivering.*) Already enemies uff der United States are vorking on just such a project.

GRUBER: It iss important to national security that only der United States haff access to. (*In stage whisper.*) G – E -Four Square – Five – O – P - Q - Two. Our national survival iss at stake.

ZAPOTKA: Precisely. (*He sits, pours a drop or two from a small bottle into a large bottle of green liquid.*)

GRUBER: (*Rubbing hands together in anticipation.*) Now dot it is perfected, iss ve ready to call in der guinea hog?

ZAPOTKA: (*Rubbing hands together.*) Vee iss ready.

GRUBER: Goot.

ZAPOTKA: Ready ve iss fer our guinea hog.

GRUBER: Ready vee is for Charlie.

Zapotka takes the bottle and puts it in a desk drawer, takes three glasses out of a drawer and sets them on the desk.

ZAPOTKA: Und ready ve iss to celebrate our success.

GRUBER: (*Startled.*) Three goblets, Bernard? You mean dot you und me . . . ?

ZAPOTKA: Uff course not, Hans. Ve ask him to join us in a toast to our great triumph, but only **he**, Charlie, vill actually drink der formula.

GRUBER: (*As the light dawns.*) Very goot, Bernard. Charlie vill take vun little swig for man und a giant gulp for science.

ZAPOTKA: Exactly. Iss you ready, Hans?

GRUBER: I is ready, Bernard. (*He turns left, calls.*) Charlie?

Would you step into our parlor? (*Catching himself.*) I mean . . . vee iss needing you, Charlie. (*Charlie enters from left.*) Ahhh, dere you iss, Charlie.

CHARLIE: You all finished? (*Zapotka rises.*)

ZAPOTKA: Mine boy . . . (*Puts hand on Charlie's shoulder.*) Vee iss indeed.

CHARLIE: Good. I'll clean up and be on my way.

GRUBER: (*Pushing him onto a stool.*) Sit down, Charlie.

ZAPOTKA: During der two years you haff been vith us in der laboratory, ve haff been vorking on a classified, top secret project. (*Gruber nods.*)

CHARLIE: Yes sir. I sorta suspicioned.

ZAPOTKA: A project uff great importance to der security and vell-being uff der nation.

CHARLIE: (*Impressed.*) Yes sir.

ZAPOTKA: You haff been loyal, obedient, and trustworthy.

CHARLIE: Thank you, sir.

ZAPOTKA: Therefore, it iss our vish, mine and Hans, dot you be der first to know dot der midnight oil hass not burned in vain. (*Gruber nods.*) Vee haff perfected a scientific discovery of profound magnitide.

CHARLIE: You don't mean . . . G - E - Four Square—

GRUBER: Ssshhh!

CHARLIE: (*In stage whisper.*) Five – O – P – Q - Two.

ZAPOTKA: Precisely.

CHARLIE: (*Standing bolt up right.*) Wow!

GRUBER: (*Pushing him down.*) Sit down, Charlie.

ZAPOTKA: Since you haff been our assistant during der long months uff research und frustration, ve vish dot you join us in a toast. (*He takes a container out of the desk, one that looks exactly like the one he put in earlier. However, it's filled with a punch the same color as the formula.*) A toast to der success uff our experiment . . . und to der knowledge dot der world vill be a better place. (*He pours three glasses full.*)

CHARLIE: (*Takes glass from Gruber.*) Yes sir. I'll drink to that.

ZAPOTKA: (*Taking glass.*) Un' to der fact dot you, Charlie Hackle, iss about to take a giant step. (*Hands other glass to Gruber.*)

CHARLIE: Yes sir. At two o'clock tomorrow afternoon.

GRUBER: Iff not sooner.

CHARLIE: Abby wanted to have the wedding in the morning, but Mom's plane doesn't get in that early.

ZAPOTKA: (*Raising glass.*) To G - E - Four Square – Five - O - P - Q – Two . . . down der hatch.

Zapotka and Gruber put the glasses to their lips, then lower them and watch Charlie intently as he drains his glass to the bottom. As he finishes, the professors put their glasses on the desk and each grab Charlie by an arm.

ZAPOTKA: Now, Charlie, you run along und don't vorry about a thing.

CHARLIE: What about cleaning up?

GRUBER: Ve'll take care of it.

CHARLIE: Hey, that's great. You'll be hearing from me. *(He exits left.)*

ZAPOTKA: *(Gazing after him.)* Indeed ve vill, Charlie, indeed ve will.

GRUBER: There goes our guinea hog, Bernard.

ZAPOTKA: Der world's vun und only **completely honest man**. If der formula vorks as ve expect he will be incapable of telling anythink but der truth.

GRUBER: *(Triumphantly.)* Ve haff achieved der greatest discovery since der beginning uff mankind. Honesty.

ZAPOTKA: Truth.

GRUBER: Principle.

ZAPOTKA: Loyalty.

ZAPOTKA/GRUBER: *(Together, excitedly.)* And success!

ZAPOTKA: *(Loudly.)* Ve vill be famous.

GRUBER: *(Louder.)* Rich.

ZAPOTKA: *(Caught up in the frenzy of the moment.)* Ve drink a toast. *(He grabs one of the full glasses.)*

GRUBER: *(Grabs the other one.)* To us.

They quickly tip the glasses and swallow the contents. Then, they look at each other, astonished, as it dawns on them what they've done.

GRUBER: *(Sheepishly.)* Bernard?

ZAPOTKA: Vot iss it Hans?

GRUBER: I t'ink ve haff just added two more guinea hogs.

ZAPOTKA: *(Walking away, then turning.)* Bernard . . . ve t'ink we know what der serum vill do.

GRUBER: Right. It will make us tell der truth.

ZAPOTKA: Vot ve don't know iss vot it von't do.

GRUBER: Go on, explain.

ZAPOTKA: Dere may be side effects. *(Hand on chin.)* Someone who takes der serum may haff no control o'er his emotions.

He may be so uncontrollably honest dot he vill say exactly vot he t'inks und do exactly vot he wants to do.

GRUBER: Oh well, v'll see. Enough for today. Iss time to go home. *(He takes his hat from inside desk and puts it on.)* See you tomorrow, Bernard old friend.

ZAPOTKA: Ya. See you tomorrow, Hans old chum. *(His back to Gruber.)* You know, I vas jus' t'inking. You and I haff vorked together, side by side, day in, month out, for almost forty years.

Gruber takes an aerosol shave cream can from desk, looks at it, then at Zapotka, wild eyed.

ZAPOTKA: *(Rambling on.)* Neffer a cross verd . . . neffer an argument. Although I haff much der superior intellect. Although I haff much der superior intellect, I never once let on. Always I treated you as equal. *(Gruber starts tiptoeing toward Zapotka.)* Und you Hans have accepted this subordinate role mittout as much as a single complaint, neffer a whimper, not effen a peep.

GRUBER: *(Standing behind him.)* Bernard.

ZAPOTKA: *(Turning.)* You haff been humble, modest, meek.

Hans proceeds to spray the contents of the can on Zapotka—on his hair, face, ears, inside his shirt collar, and finally all over him.

ZAPOTKA: *(Without changing expression or tone.)* Dedicated, faithful, trustworthy, und staunch. Though there haff been times ven you no doubt felt resentment you neffer vavered, und neffer veered.

Zapotka, arms folded, patiently waits until Gruber is finished then reaches up and with a jerk yanks Gruber's hat down over his eyes, brushes off his hands, turns, and strolls out right.

GRUBER: *(Terrified.)* Bernard. About der side effects. You is right. I'm blind as a bat.

BLACKOUT.

ACT ONE, SCENE 3

Setting:

The desk has been returned to its original position along with the phone and Abby's picture. The chair has been moved back, down left. There is no evidence of the bottles, test tubes, etc.

At Rise:

The time is early morning. Sam enters with Mini and Maxi. The girls are attired in bright, gaudy, but contrasting outfits. Sam is neatly attired in a business suit and tie. He has a briefcase in one hand, carton of milk under one arm, and a newspaper under his chin. Charlie's suitcase is down right by the chair.

SAM: Come on in, gals. Make yourself at home. *(He sets down his briefcase and milk carton.)* Have a seat. *(The girls sit.)* I'll put on some coffee, if there is any. Here's the morning paper. *(He tosses it to Maxi, looks at his watch.)* It's 7:30. We've got about an hour.

MAXI: I'm hungry.

MINI: Yeah. When's breakfast?

SAM: I'll make some coffee.

MAXI: Coffee? I want something to eat.

MINI: Yeah.

SAM: How in the world can you think of food?

MAXI: Maybe cause we're hungry.

SAM: *(Opens briefcase and takes out some papers.)* We'll eat breakfast after the audition. Now, run over your lines, one more time.

MINI: That's what you told us forty times ago. *(Sam gives them each a script.)*

SAM: Look, do you girls want to make the big-time or dontcha? *(No answer.)* Then hit it again . . . from the top. And remember, don't be nervous. Just look straight into the camera . . . and sing.

MINI: What camera?

SAM: Okay. *(He moves a chair to the middle of the room.)* This is a camera.

MAXI: *(Giggling.)* Silly, that's a chair.

SAM: Of course it's a chair. *(Looks at ceiling.)* Use your imagination. This is a TV studio. *(Points to lamp.)* That is a klieg light. *(Points to chair.)* This is a camera.

MINI: I get it. Everything's make believe.

MAXI: Yeah . . . including breakfast.

SAM: Don't worry about anything. Just sing naturally.

MAXI/MINI: *(Together, shrilly and off key, to the tune of "Pack Up Your Troubles.")* "Pick up a can of Mother's home baked beans and eat, eat, eat."

SAM: Is that natural? *(They nod. He again looks at ceiling.)*
Okay. Go on.

MAXI/MINI: *(Together, taking up where they left off.)* "Chock full of bacon and molasses, too, a treat that can't be beat." *(Mini wails.)*

SAM: What's wrong?

MINI: It makes me hungry.

SAM: We shoulda done a lousy soap commercial.

MAXI: We already did - in Sheboygan.

MINI: Yeah. The man said it was the lousiest soap commercial he ever heard.

Sam exits left. Off right, Charlie is heard whistling a romantic, popular song of the day. He enters, whistling and jogging, attired in sweat clothes. He jogs around the room, keeping in step with the tune. He doesn't see the girls who are watching him intently. He jogs around a couple times, comes to a stop at Abby's picture, picks it up and talks to it.

CHARLIE: *(Breezily.)* Good morning, Abby. *(He gives the picture a quick kiss—a brief, loud smack.)* Today's the day. You lucky girl. At two o'clock this afternoon you'll be Mrs. Charlie Hackle. *(Standing straight, in deep voice.)* By the power vested in me, I now pronounce you man and wife. Charlie Hackle, you may now kiss the bride. *(He holds the picture at arm's length. The girls clear their throats. He turns, surprised.)*

MAXI/MINI: *(Together.)* Hi.

MINI: Sorry we don't have any rice.

MAXI: Naw, if we did, we'd eat it.

MINI: *(Pointing.)* You're Charlie. Sam's roommate.

MAXI: We're the Wrenn sisters. We're twins.

MINI: Yeah. But not identical. *(She giggles.)*

CHARLIE: Pleased to meetcha.

MAXI: Sam's out in the kitchen.

MINI: He's gonna take us to the top.

CHARLIE: You mean all the way up to the ninth floor?

MAXI: In show biz, silly.

CHARLIE: Oh, I get it. *(He sits in chair.)*

MINI: Hey, you're sittin on the camera.

CHARLIE: (*Rising quickly.*) The what?

MINI: The camera. (*They giggle.*) We're rehearsin' a TV spot.

MAXI: Yeah. Today's a big day for the Wrenn sisters.

CHARLIE: It's a big day for Charlie Hackle, too. Fact is, I been up since four o'clock. Couldn't sleep. (*He crosses to the window and looks out as Sam enters left.*) Happy's the bride the sun shines on.

SAM: (*Sharply.*) Charlie.

CHARLIE: (*Turns, extends hand, starts toward Sam.*) Hi Sam old buddy boy old best man friend.

SAM: (*Glaring, ignoring Charlie's outstretched hand.*) Don't you buddy boy old best man friend me. Where have you been?

CHARLIE: Out jogging.

SAM: This is no time for fun and games.

CHARLIE: Ten times around the park is no fun and no game, believe me.

SAM: I'm disappointed in you, Charlie.

CHARLIE: Well, it might not be a world record but it's a pretty good start. (*Jogging briskly.*) I may be one part antelope.

SAM: Yeah. And nine parts skunk. (*Charlie stops abruptly, crosses to him.*)

CHARLIE: Look . . . you're talking to your friend and pal.

SAM: (*Glaring.*) You're no friend and no pal.

CHARLIE: Just because you have to move out of the apartment.

SAM: I'm not thinking of moving out of the apartment.

CHARLIE: Well, you're not gonna stay with Abby and me, I'll tell you that. A bargain's a bargain.

SAM: Look who's talkin'. You no-good weasel.

CHARLIE: (*Shocked.*) Sam. You're the best man.

SAM: (*Removing his coat and rolling up his sleeves.*) You bet I am. And if you have any doubts I'll despell 'em right now.

CHARLIE: (*Flabbergasted.*) I don't get it.

SAM: (*Striking a pugilistic pose.*) You're going to. Right in the kisser. (*Turns to the girls.*) Look, if you girls don't like the sight of blood, I suggest you scoot into the kitchen. (*They gasp, retreat a couple of steps, turn, and run out left.*) Okay, Charlie, put up your dukes.

CHARLIE: What is this? At least I deserve an explanation.

SAM: (*Sarcastically.*) You deserve an explanation.

CHARLIE: What about Abby?

SAM: I'm talking about you standing her up at the altar.

CHARLIE: She's perfectly capable of standing up by herself.

SAM: Look, wise guy, I'm referring to you not showing up for the wedding.

CHARLIE: Oh I'll be there . . . today at 2.

SAM: (*Driving home the point.*) Charlie, the wedding was yesterday at 2.

CHARLIE: You're crazy.

SAM: Or rather it was supposed to be. There was just one little thing missing . . . the groom. (*He again strikes a pugilistic pose and heads for Charlie.*)

CHARLIE: (*Picking up a chair and holding it in front of him.*) Now wait a minute, Sam. This morning you want to kill me and last night you had a party for me.

SAM: (*Stopping.*) Last night? That party was two nights ago.

CHARLIE: It was right after the rehearsal.

SAM: That's what I said. Two nights ago.

CHARLIE: This is Friday, isn't it?

SAM: No, it isn't Friday, Charlie. It's Saturday.

CHARLIE: (*Exploding.*) Saturday? (*Staring out front.*) It couldn't be Saturday. (*Turning.*) Look, are you trying to tell me yesterday didn't happen?

SAM: Yesterday happened, Charlie. Apparently you didn't.

CHARLIE: (*Snapping his fingers.*) The plane tickets. Flight 587. (*He runs to phone.*) They'll verify my reservations.

SAM: That flight was yesterday, Charlie, as scheduled. (*He makes motion of plane taking off as Charlie dials frantically.*) Thuuuum.

CHARLIE: H-H-Hello. I want to confirm my reservations please. (*Hand over phone.*) I don't know what you're trying to pull. Sam, but it's about as funny as a toothache. (*Into phone again.*) Yes. Reservations for two on this afternoon's flight to the coast, 587. What do you mean there's no such flight? (*Subdued.*) Oh, I see. (*He hangs up.*) They don't have that flight on Saturday. (*Quickly, hopefully.*) The big fight at the Garden. I've got two tickets for tonight.

SAM: (*Handing him the paper.*) Turn to the sports page, Charlie. (*Charlie turns nervously, quickly, to sports section.*) Read it.

CHARLIE: (*Astonished, reading.*) With a crowd of 17,000 looking on Friday night at the Garden, and another 20 million watching on closed circuit TV . . . (*Names current heavyweight boxing champion.*) scored a unanimous and decisive . . . (*His voice trails off.*) Fifteen round decision. (*He drops paper, walks down front.*) I don't believe it. I just don't believe it. I lost a day—a whole day—smack out of the middle of my life.

SAM: That isn't all you lost, Charlie. You lost two roommates . . . your once *(Points to himself.)* and your future . . . *(Points to picture of Abby, turns and walks out left.)*

CHARLIE: No. Things like this don't happen. *(He takes his windbreaker, walks to closet, opens door while in deep thought. A man whom we will later know as Grindstaff is standing inside the closet, his eyes wide and expressionless. Charlie stands there a moment, still in thought, a hand on one hip. He closes door, walks down stage.)*

CHARLIE: There has to be an explanation. A simple, plausible explanation. You don't just lose a day especially your wedding day.

He shrugs, returns to closet, opens it, stands with hand on knob, shakes head as if to clear it, pops hand on ear, then pushes door shut.

CHARLIE: *(Walking slowly to chair.)* I got home from work on Thursday, went to the rehearsal . . . then to Sam's party . . . and the next thing I know it's Saturday.

He returns to closet, opens door and stands with one leg crossed over the other, in deep thought. As he does, the man slowly falls face forward and drapes himself over the back of the sofa. As the man falls, Charlie turns away, walks in front of the sofa, still in thought, and sits on sofa.

CHARLIE: Well, whatever it is, Abby will understand. We'll go on with the wedding . . . *(Shrugging.)* . . . and live happily ever after. *(He crosses leg, throws arm over the back of the sofa and over the slumped figure. His eyes become wide as saucers as he slowly, cautiously feels the shoulders, arms, then head of Grindstaff.)*

CHARLIE: *(Terrified, almost inaudibly.)* S-S-S-Sam. *(Louder.)* S-S-S-Sam. *(Charlie forces himself to turn, slowly, and look at Grindstaff. He stands bolt up-right.)*

CHARLIE: *(Shouting.)* Sam!

Sam enters left, carrying a tea towel.

SAM: *(As he enters.)* What now, Charlie? *(Charlie points. Sam emits a surprised whistle.)* Who's that?

CHARLIE: I don't know. I never saw him before in my life.

SAM: He couldn't have just come out of the blue.

CHARLIE: No. I think he came out of the closet. (*Pointing.*) And . . . (*He gulps.*) And look closely at his red shirt.

SAM: What about it?

CHARLIE: I . . . I think it used to be white. (*Swallowing hard.*)

You - you know that day I lost? (*Sam nods.*) Something tells me I may have just found it. (*They stare at Grindstaff, astonished, as there is a quick curtain. Curtain.*)

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