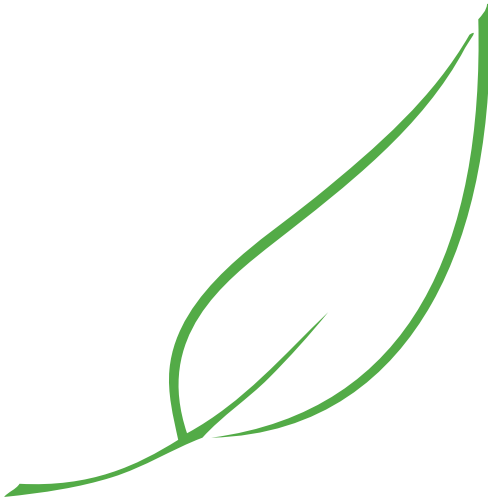


Just Ducky

By Donald Payton



GREEN ROOM PRESS

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SYNOPSIS: The day starts off peacefully for Courtney Maxwell and Elizabeth Smith. Mr. Maxwell has just been chosen as the new Chairman of the Citizen's Committee. But the girls decide to write a letter to Vester Blayne, a lovelorn columnist in the local newspaper. Not suffering from a heavy heart, they fill the letter with a made-up tale of heartache. While the girls wait for the evening paper, Mrs. Blayne calls Mrs. Maxwell and tells her about Courtney's crushing love life. When the Chairman of the Citizen's Committee and a local newspaper reporter show up to interview Mr. Maxwell about his new position, miscommunications and mistaken identities abound, and Courtney is certain that she is going to be arrested. So what to do? Claim insanity. Courtney even attempts to prove that insanity runs in the Maxwell family. All ends well, but not before the audience gets its full measure of uproarious laughter.

CAST OF CHARACTERS

(6 female, 6 male)

MR. MAXWELL (m) The head of the house—or so he thinks.
Middle-aged. He has just been chosen as the head of the Citizen's Committee. He is at first attired in a bathrobe, striped pajamas, and house shoes. He later changes into a business suit. *(251 lines)*

MRS. MAXWELL (f)..... The head of the house—or so she thinks.
She is also middle-aged, but appears to be somewhat younger than her husband. She wears a bathrobe at the beginning of the day, but she changes to a dress. *(192 lines)*

COURTNEY (f)..... Maxwell's fourteen year-old daughter.
She is very cute, but is a great worry to her parents. She also wears a bathrobe at

the beginning of the play, but she
changes to a dress. (148 lines)

ELIZABETH (f)..... Courtney's best friend, also fourteen.
She is very cute and quite effervescent.
Elizabeth wears a dress. (123 lines)

LUCAS (m)..... Maxwell's thirteen year-old atom bomb.
A tousle-haired, robust youngster. He
aspires to be a great writer. At first
attired in very loud pajamas, but is later
seen in a shirt and pants. (97 lines)

HERCULES (m) Lucas' best friend. He is also thirteen,
very much like Lucas, tousle-haired, and
never quiet. He is dressed simply. (50
lines)

CAROLINE (f) Maxwell's seventeen year-old charming
daughter. She is wearing pants in the
beginning, but she changes to a very
beautiful dress. (68 lines)

CRAIG MOORE (m)..... Caroline's boyfriend. A well-mannered,
nice looking young man of nineteen.
Craig wears athletic clothes. (21 lines)

MR. MOORE (m) Craig's father. He is the chairman of the
Citizen's Committee, and drops in with a
newspaper reporter to interview Mr.
Maxwell. He is wearing a business suit.
(64 lines)

DEL MARSHALL (m) A newspaper reporter. A young man
about thirty. Wears a business suit. (33
lines)

AUNT MARY (f)Mrs. Maxwell's aunt. An energetic lady of about sixty. She is gray haired. Attired simply. (110 lines)

MISS BLAYNE (f)The editor of the lovelorn column in the local papers. She thinks that she is perfect and does nothing wrong. Dressed rather fussily, wears a veil on her hat, and is rather old-fashioned. (79 lines)

STAGE PROPERTIES

Sofa
Sofa pillows
Three easy chairs
Two floor lamps
Magazine rack
Desk and chair
Telephone
Two small tables
Two vases of flowers
Pictures
Mirror
Radio
Occasional chair
Bookcase
Rug, etc.

HAND PROPERTIES

Glass of water, Mrs. Maxwell
Newspaper, Mr. Maxwell
Paper, envelope, stamp, Courtney and Elizabeth
Speech on large sheet of paper, Mr. Maxwell
Pitcher of water and glass, Mr. Maxwell
Wrist watch, Mr. Maxwell
Sheets of paper, Lucas and Hercules
Letter in envelope, Miss Blayne
Damp cloth, Miss Blayne
Damp cloth. Miss Blayne
Notebook and fountain pen, Mr. Marshall
Clothes tied in red bandana, Lucas
Pocket knife, Lucas
Baseball bat, Lucas

ACT ONE, SCENE 1**SETTING:**

The Maxwell's living room, early morning. The room is littered with magazines and newspapers. A pair of Lucas' pants are lying in the middle of the floor. There are three exits in the Maxwell living room. The front door, which leads to the front porch, is in the wall right. The opening left leads into the dining room and kitchen, and the rest of the house is reached through the very large arch in the wall, center back. Center back is a small table—with a vase of flowers—and a painting is directly above the vase. In the wall right, up from the door, is a window with drapes, curtains, shades, etc. At the present time, the shade is drawn. At left-center is a sofa with pillows on it. Easy chairs are right-center and down-right. The latter is backed by a floor lamp, and a magazine rack is at the right of the chair. At down-left is a desk, with a chair to match. A telephone is on the top of the desk. Just up from the door, left, is a small table with a vase of flowers. Above this table hangs a large, ornamental mirror. A console model radio is at left-back, toward center, with a chair by it. At right-center-back is a bookcase, and in the right corner, backed by another floor lamp, is an easy chair. Other pictures and decorations may be added.

AT RISE:

There is nobody on the stage, silence reigns supreme. Suddenly, an alarm clock is heard off-center and up-right. The alarm clock is permitted to run down, and all is quiet again. After a few seconds, Mr. Maxwell comes sleepily onto the stage, center. He is wearing a bathrobe over his striped pajamas and is looking VERY droopy. His hair is all disheveled, his shoulders are hunched, and he slowly and sleepily stalks down the stage. He stops, looks very sleepily at his wrist watch, looks closer at it, shakes it, then puts it to his ear to see if it is running.

MR. MAXWELL: *(Sleepily and disgustedly.)* Oh, for Pete's sake! Six-forty-five. I'd just like to get hold of the stupid person that set that dad-blasted alarm clock to go off at the unearthly hour of six-

forty-five. A fine way to treat a fellow. Especially on a rainy Saturday morning.

Mr. Maxwell yawns. Then yawns again, this time putting his hand over his mouth.

MR. MAXWELL: *(Disgustedly.)* Six-forty-five! Brrrr!

He bends over stiffly, trying to touch the tips of his toes with his fingers, but lacking a couple of inches in the attempt. Then he straightens up, tries it again. He lifts his left foot up and touches it with his left hand. Then he slowly lifts up his right foot and touches it with his right hand. Then he stoops over, trying desperately to touch his toes while they are still on the floor.

MR. MAXWELL: *(Painfully.)* OH!

He grabs the small of his back and straightens up slowly. He draws in the small of his back as far as possible, and starts walking slowly around the room in this hideous position. He comes to a stop in front of the sofa. He gazes wistfully at it, yawns again, then drops onto the sofa and is soon snoring peacefully. Mrs. Maxwell enters center. She is attracted by the sound from the sofa, so strolls down to it. She stops at the right end, looking very disgustedly at the sight of her husband.

MRS. MAXWELL: *(Standing with her arms crossed.)* John! *(Louder.)* JOHN! *(Snore.)* I declare . . . that man is worse than a two-year-old child. I've often wondered if there is another man in this whole world that is as completely irresponsible as John. *(Another long snore.)* JOHN! *(Mr. Maxwell turns over and buries his head under a pillow.)* JOHN! *(He kicks with his foot, disgustedly.)* John, if you don't get right up this instant I'm going to get a bucket of ice cold water and pour it all over you until you freeze. The very idea of a man as old as you acting like a little child. JOHN!

MR. MAXWELL: *(Sitting up slowly and scratching his head sleepily.)* Ohhhh!

MRS. MAXWELL: (*Pleadingly.*) John, please get up.

MR. MAXWELL: At this hour of the night?

MRS. MAXWELL: John, it's seven A. M.

MR. MAXWELL: I don't care. You know that I went to the stadium last night, and you know that when I go to a baseball game I don't get to bed as early as I do on other nights. (*Loudly.*) So why in the name of all living creatures did you get me up at the crack of dawn?

MRS. MAXWELL: Because I knew you would get up and just droop around, and be as slow as the seven year itch, that's why. I didn't want you getting to the office late again like you did last Saturday morning.

MR. MAXWELL: Oh for Pete's sake! You probably set that dad-blasted alarm out of pure feminine cruelty. (*Abruptly.*) Is the cat around here?

MRS. MAXWELL: I don't know—

MR. MAXWELL: (*Breaking in suddenly.*) Of course it's not. (*Rises.*) Do you know why?

MRS. MAXWELL: (*Irritably.*) I have no idea.

MR. MAXWELL: Because it's too blamed early, that's why. You've hauled me out of bed before the cat's had time to even think about waking up. (*Dropping weakly on the sofa.*) Oh, this is terrible! (*Grabbing his head.*) Simply terrible!

MRS. MAXWELL: John, please get dressed. (*Mr. Maxwell closes his eyes and sits with his chin in his hands.*) The time is going to pass right by and you'll be late again.

MR. MAXWELL: (*Groaning.*) I've got a headache.

MRS. MAXWELL: (*Going out left.*) Oh, I can fix that.

MR. MAXWELL: (*Sitting with his chin in his hands.*) I don't see why it hurts so much to go to baseball games. We were down by two in the ninth with the bases loaded. The fans were screaming and I joined right in. Then I thought about my wife—my lovely, understanding wife. She didn't care when I got home from the game. She didn't care if I stayed until the final out. She was just happy I was having a good time. And then what happens? I'm hauled out of bed in the wee, wee hours of the morning. Is that justice? (*Mrs. Maxwell re-enters with a glass of water.*)

MRS. MAXWELL: Here, take this.

MR. MAXWELL: (*Hesitantly.*) What is it?

MRS. MAXWELL: Never mind, just take it. (*Mr. Maxwell takes it in a gulp.*)

MRS. MAXWELL: (*Making a horrible face.*) Aaaa! (*He sticks his tongue out.*) Aaaaaaaa!

MRS. MAXWELL: (*Going to the window.*) Now, what do you want for breakfast?

MR. MAXWELL: Nothing!

MRS. MAXWELL: (*Raising the shade. A beam of light comes through.*) Now John, you've got to eat. You can't do a hard day's work without breakfast.

MR. MAXWELL: Or sleep. (*Yawns.*) Especially without sleep. (*He sprawls on the sofa. Yawns again noisily.*)

MRS. MAXWELL: (*Starting out right.*) There's the paper boy. (*She exits, enters immediately with the paper.*)

MR. MAXWELL: (*Sitting up sleepily.*) What's in the news?

MRS. MAXWELL: (*Handing him the paper.*) You can tell me. (*Shaking her head and saying to herself.*) The most helpless creature that ever drew a breath. (*Mr. Maxwell yawns again starts looking at the paper. She sees pants on floor.*) Are these Lucas' pants? Yes, I know they are. (*She picks them up.*) That boy just crawls out of his clothes and lets providence look out for 'em from there. (*She carries them out center, re-enters almost immediately.*) Caroline and Craig went to the game last night, too. Did you see them? (*Starts picking up the magazines and papers.*)

MR. MAXWELL: No. And Caroline wasn't home by the time I got here. Where do you think they were?

MRS. MAXWELL: (*As she works.*) I don't know, John. Perhaps they stopped for a bite to eat.

MR. MAXWELL: At that hour of the night?

MRS. MAXWELL: I don't think it was that late, John, so don't worry.

MR. MAXWELL: How can I help but worry? I don't trust that Craig Moore any farther than I could throw him. (*Leaning back on the sofa.*) And the way I feel this morning, I couldn't throw him very far. (*Starts looking at the paper.*)

MRS. MAXWELL: Craig is a nice boy, John, and you know it. I think he's VERY nice and his father is on the Citizen's Committee.

MRS. MAXWELL: (*Disgustedly.*) I don't care if he's the President, Vice-President, Chairman, and Janitor rolled into one. That doesn't make a bit of difference to me. I'm getting tired of hearing that Citizen's Committee stuff around here. That's all I hear. (*Sarcastically.*) Oh, HE'S the such-and-such on the Citizen's Committee, and HE'S the blob, blob, blob, BLOB on the Citizen's Committee.

MRS. MAXWELL: You're just jealous that you're not on the Citizen's Committee.

MR. MAXWELL: (*Wildly.*) Jealous? I wouldn't be on that moth-eaten, broken down old Citizen's Committee if they came here on bended knees and pleaded with me until their tonsils rolled out on the floor.

MRS. MAXWELL: All right, all right! But I still say that Craig is a nice boy. (*Mr. Maxwell starts reading the paper as Caroline enters center..*)

CAROLINE: What in the world is all the ruckus about?

MRS. MAXWELL: I'm afraid that your father got up on the wrong side of the bed this morning. When he does, he usually lets the entire house know about it.

MR. MAXWELL: (*Rising disgustedly.*) I did NOT get up on the wrong side of the bed this morning. How can a person do such a thing when he doesn't even go to sleep? A nap, that's what I had. A NAP! (*Walking behind the sofa.*) How can I be expected to go out and do an honest day's work with bags under my eyes the size of battleships? Just answer me that. (*He tosses the paper in the chair, right center.*)

CAROLINE: I—

MR. MAXWELL: (*Breaking in suddenly; sternly.*) And another thing, young lady! At what disrespectable hour did you come dragging in last night?

CAROLINE: I—

MR. MAXWELL: (*Again breaking in.*) You'd just as well tell the truth, Missy. I'm in no mood to argue this morning.

CAROLINE: I—

MR. MAXWELL: (*Breaking in.*) You needn't try to apologize for that heel of a guy, Craig Moore. The very idea of keeping you out until—

MRS. MAXWELL: (*Breaking in.*) If you would only let the girl get a word in edgeways, John.

MR. MAXWELL: (*With finality.*) Janet, please stay out of this. I, as father, have been shirking my duty. But now—starting this very minute—I am clamping down. From now on I am going to see that my children are raised properly. Now, why weren't you at home by the time that I was?

CAROLINE: (*Smiling.*) I was, Father. Courtney wouldn't let me sleep in our room last night because she's tired of me turning on the light all the time when I come home, so she locked me out of our room. I slept in the guest room last night.

MR. MAXWELL: (*Embarrassed.*) Oh! (*Dropping in the chair, right center.*) Well, at least I tried—Anyway. (*He starts reading the paper.*)

MRS. MAXWELL: I'm sorry that your Father woke you up, dear. You're bound to be tired.

CAROLINE: Oh, that's all right, Mother. I'll take my beauty nap this afternoon. (*Mr. Maxwell's face is completely hid by the newspaper.*)

MRS. MAXWELL: (*Disgustedly.*) Just look at your father, sitting there behind that paper. He hasn't shaved, combed his hair, dressed, or anything. He's pouting, and he'll probably pout for the next week all because I set the alarm to go off thirty minutes earlier this morning.

CAROLINE: I think it's just the nature of men to pout, don't you, Mother?

MRS. MAXWELL: (*Dropping on the sofa.*) It certainly is your father's. They say there are only three types of men. The one that flies right off the handle, but soon cools off; the one that doesn't fly off, but just pouts and sulks for a couple of weeks; and then the one that does both—flies right off and sulks for weeks, too. The latter of which fits your father to a "T." (*Points to Mr. Maxwell.*) Just look at him sitting there like an ostrich.

CAROLINE: Craig said that his father was going to a Citizen's Committee meeting last night. (*Mr. Maxwell sinks lower in the chair, pulls the paper up closer, and crosses his legs.*) He said they were going to elect someone as the new head. (*Mr. Maxwell sinks lower, again crosses his legs.*)

MRS. MAXWELL: I wonder who they elected?

CAROLINE: I don't have any idea, Mother. But I think that a lot of men had their eyes on it. It IS quite an honor.

MRS. MAXWELL: I imagine so.

CAROLINE: Craig said that his father had a feeling that they might elect him. (*Mr. Maxwell wiggles his feet, again crossing his legs.*) I would just be THRILLED to DEATH if they elected him. (*Dropping into a chair, dreamily.*) When I walk down the street, people would say, "There goes Caroline Maxwell with Craig Moore. HIS father is head of the Citizen's Committee." Just think, I'd be practically famous if I married him.

MR. MAXWELL: (*Rising.*) This has gone far enough. The very idea of you talking about marrying that—that—Craig Moore.

CAROLINE: (*Alarmed.*) Oh Father, don't get me wrong. We're not even close to getting married. In fact, we're not even thinking about it. After all, he IS only nineteen. Anyway, no matter whom a girl goes with, she's going to wonder what kind of a husband he'd make and think about it just a little. It's—well—it's just human nature, Father, and you know it is.

MR. MAXWELL: I don't know any such thing.

MRS. MAXWELL: (*Disgustedly.*) He does too, Caroline. He'd proposed to every girl in the neighborhood by the time he was seventeen years old.

CAROLINE: (*In horror.*) Did you really, Father?

MR. MAXWELL: That's besides the point. Another thing, I don't want to hear any more talk about that—that petrified old Citizen's Committee. I don't even want you to think about it. I'm putting my—my foot down right now. (*He stamps his foot on the floor.*) OUCH! (*He sits quickly, grabbing his foot.*)

MRS. MAXWELL: It looks like you put it down too hard. John Maxwell, when on earth are you going to remember to take care of your corns? (*He doesn't say anything. Just sits and holds his toe.*)

CAROLINE: But Father, I still don't see why we can't mention the Citizen's—

MR. MAXWELL: (*Breaking in.*) All right, go ahead and talk about it if you want to. But I can't see for the life of me why you would even want to THINK about that—that old Citizen's Committee. Gossip

mongers, that's all they are over there. Just plain old unadulterated gossip— (*He is interrupted by the telephone.*) I'll get it. (*As he hobbles over to the phone.*) Who in the world could be calling at this forsaken hour of the night? (*Taking the receiver, gruffly.*) HELLO!...HELLO!.... Oh, the Morning Herald...yes...yeah...That's right, John Maxwell, 8976 West—WHAT?...WHAT?...Y—Yes!...All right! (*He hangs up, turns around slowly.*)

MRS. MAXWELL: (*Fearing the worst.*) John, what happened? John! What is it? It's not Mother, is it John? She—she—she—I think I'd better sit down.

CAROLINE: (*Anxiously.*) Well, are you going to tell us or not, Father?

MRS. MAXWELL: I should have known that Mother wasn't—wasn't feeling well.

MR. MAXWELL: Now—now, Janet, don't get excited. The—the Morning Herald just phoned to say—that—

MRS. MAXWELL: (*Sitting up straight.*) —to say what, John?

MR. MAXWELL: That—that I—I—have been chosen as the new—head—of—the—Citizen's Committee.

MRS. MAXWELL and CAROLINE: (*Both rising; together.*) YOU?!!

MR. MAXWELL: (*Beginning to strut around the room.*) Yep, that's what they said. They said I was chosen because I was an outstanding father—and that I had an - uh - outstanding family - and uh—WIFE, and that—well, I'm the new head of the Citizen's Committee. And that's all there is to it.

CAROLINE: Are you going to take it?

MR. MAXWELL: Of course I'm going to take it.

MRS. MAXWELL: But I thought you said something about a petrified—

MR. MAXWELL: (*Breaking in hurriedly.*) WeeeeIIIIII! It might need a little fixing up. But all in all, it is an honor.

CAROLINE: And what about the gossip mongers that—

MR. MAXWELL: (*Breaking in.*) Ohhhh, I think we'll be able to tame down a few of the - more - uh - unruly ones. All they need is a good leader.

MRS. MAXWELL: Oh!

CAROLINE: Did he say you would go to the banquet, Father?

MR. MAXWELL: Tuesday night. And I'm not only going to it, but I'm going to make my acceptance and thank you speech.

CAROLINE: (*Hopefully.*) Are we going?

MR. MAXWELL: (*Nodding.*) Of course, the entire family is going.

CAROLINE: Just wait until Craig hears about this. Will our names be in the paper, Father?

MR. MAXWELL: I imagine so. It was the paper that called and told me about it, so you know they'll have a write-up. (*Caroline snatches the paper, starts looking hurriedly through it.*)

CAROLINE: I always had a feeling I would have my name in the paper.

MR. MAXWELL: (*Strutting around the room.*) Y'know, Janet, I always had a feeling they'd put me in for something-or-other on that Citizen's Committee. It won't be long now until we'll have the BEST citizen's committee in the entire state.

CAROLINE: I don't see anything about it in here.

MRS. MAXWELL: Maybe it will be in the Evening Herald.

MR. MAXWELL: They probably want to interview me first.

CAROLINE: When they do interview you Father, don't forget to mention me.

MR. MAXWELL: I won't Caroline. I'm too much of a family man to leave out anyone. (*Putting his arm around Mrs. Maxwell.*) I'll tell them that most of the credit goes to my wife—or at least—yeah, that's what I'll tell them.

MRS. MAXWELL: (*Going up center.*) I'd better tell the children. (*Calling.*) Lucas! Courtney! Get up! Just wait until you hear what's happened.

COURTNEY: I'll be right down, Mother.

MRS. MAXWELL: (*Louder.*) Lucas! LUCAS!

MR. MAXWELL: (*Shouting very loudly.*) LUCAS!

LUCAS: (*Sleepily from off-center.*) Huh?

MR. MAXWELL: Come down. I've got a surprise for you.

LUCAS: (*Sleepily.*) Huh?

MRS. MAXWELL: He said he had a big surprise for you, dear.

LUCAS: (*Sleepily.*) Uh huh!

MRS. MAXWELL: Are you coming?

LUCAS: (*Sleepily.*) Uh huh!

MRS. MAXWELL: Well, all right. Hurry up. I have some news.

LUCAS: Uh huh!

MR. MAXWELL: Did you say something about breakfast a while ago, Janet?

MRS. MAXWELL: I did, but I thought you said—

MR. MAXWELL: (*Breaking in.*) I guess I've found my appetite. I don't want much, though—some ham, a couple of eggs, a loaf of bread—toasted, maybe a pancake or waffle or two, and a few cups of good, strong coffee.

CAROLINE: (*Starting right.*) I'll work on it, Mother.

MR. MAXWELL: (*Holding out a restraining hand.*) Oh no! I want you to fix it, Janet, because you're the best cook in the entire United States of America and all of its tributaries.

MRS. MAXWELL: All right, dear. Now you should go get ready for work.

MR. MAXWELL: I guess so. You know, it's such a lovely day that I think I'll just walk to work. (*As he strolls out center.*) The new head of the Citizen's Committee. Yes sir! That's me. (*He exits.*)

CAROLINE: Isn't it wonderful, Mother?

MRS. MAXWELL: (*As she strolls out left.*) It's really too good to be true.

Courtney Maxwell enters center.

COURTNEY: (*Excitedly.*) What's happened, Caroline?

CAROLINE: (*Rapidly.*) Father is the new head of the citizen's committee.

COURTNEY: (*Exuberantly.*) REALLY? Oh, that's wonderful.

CAROLINE: We're all going to the banquet Tuesday night, and Father is going to make a speech.

COURTNEY: (*Louder.*) REALLY?

CAROLINE: We're also going to get our names in the paper.

COURTNEY: (*Still louder.*) REALLY? We'll be practically famous.

CAROLINE: Simply wonderful.

COURTNEY: But why did they elect Father?

CAROLINE: I don't know for sure, but I think maybe Craig's father engineered the whole affair. (*Facing up center.*) Lucas!

LUCAS: (*Offstage.*) Huh?

CAROLINE: Lucas, are you coming down?

LUCAS: Uh huh!

CAROLINE: Then hurry up!

LUCAS: Uh huh!

COURTNEY: (*Happily.*) Just wait until Elizabeth hears about this. She'll faint. (*The doorbell rings.*) The doorbell. (*She runs to the window—peers out.*) IT'S ELIZABETH!

CAROLINE: I wonder what she's doing over here this early.

COURTNEY: (*Opening the door, right.*) C'mon in, Elizabeth.

Elizabeth Smith bursts in right. She is wearing an ordinary house dress.

ELIZABETH: (*Breathlessly.*) Hello, Courtney! Hello, Caroline!

COURTNEY: Guess what's happened, Elizabeth.

ELIZABETH: What?

COURTNEY: Father is the new head of the Citizen's Committee.

ELIZABETH: (*Sadly.*) Oh, you've heard about it. (*Sitting.*) That's what I ran all the way over here to tell you. I wanted to be the first one.

CAROLINE: The Morning Herald called Father a few minutes ago and told him.

ELIZABETH: (*Sadly.*) I thought I would be the first one to tell you.

MRS. MAXWELL: (*Offstage right.*) Is Lucas up yet, Caroline?

CAROLINE: No. (*Shouting.*) Lucas! LUCAS!

LUCAS: (*Offstage; sleepily.*) Huh?

CAROLINE: Are you coming?

LUCAS: Uh huh!

CAROLINE: That boy is lazy. (*She exits left.*)

ELIZABETH: (*Sadly.*) Will I still be your best friend, Courtney?

COURTNEY: Of course, Elizabeth. I couldn't ever forget you.

ELIZABETH: (*Brightening.*) Oh, that's just wonderful, Courtney. Simply wonderful.

COURTNEY: I'm still so excited about the whole thing that I'm shaking all over.

ELIZABETH: You can get any boy in town now, Courtney, just any boy in town. But me—I won't be any different than I ever was. Y'know, Courtney, I've been thinking pretty strongly about changing my name.

COURTNEY: Changing your name?

ELIZABETH: (*Sadly.*) Yeah. I'm getting tired of Elizabeth Smith. I think I'll change it to something like Koussevitzky. Elizabeth Koussevitzky.

COURTNEY: What's wrong with Smith?

ELIZABETH: It's so common. When they call my name at school, it's like Mary Brown or Suzy Jones. With a name like Elizabeth Smith, nobody notices. But if I was Elizabeth Koussevitzky, every boy in school would turn around and stare.

COURTNEY: (*Importantly.*) I'll be able to fix things up for you, Elizabeth. I can tell a certain boy to bring—a certain friend. And then certain things—certainly should happen. (*She starts up center.*)

ELIZABETH: (*Excitedly.*) Would you really, Courtney, would you really? (*She also starts up center.*)

COURTNEY: Of course. We ought to have oodles-and-gobs of boyfriends now, Elizabeth. Just oodles-and-gobs.

ELIZABETH: That's the best news I've heard in all my born days. (*They exit center.*)

Lucas Maxwell enters center, wearing very loud pajamas. His eyes are practically closed. He stops, yawns, stretches, and goes straight to the sofa—drops on it.

MRS. MAXWELL: (*Still offstage.*) Lucas, are you up yet?

LUCAS: (*Sleepily.*) Uh huh!

MRS. MAXWELL: (*Entering left.*) Your Father is the new head of the Citizen's Committee, Lucas. Isn't that nice? Lucas? LUCAS? (*Sternly.*) Lucas, get up!

Lucas sits up sleepily. His eyes are practically closed. His shoulders are hunched, and he looks very dejected.

MRS. MAXWELL: Did you hear what I said, Lucas? (*Lucas doesn't say anything, but continues to stare into space.*) It's really a lovely day, dear. (*Silence from Lucas.*)

Lucas nods, dips his head forward, starts leaning over, and is practically off of the sofa when his mother grabs him, pulling him back

onto the sofa. Lucas falls over and when his mother pulls him up, he topples over on the sofa again.

MRS. MAXWELL: *(Disgustedly.)* He is the very image of his father. *(She props him up, but he again starts leaning forward.)* Lucas, get up and walk around the room, that will wake you up. *(She pulls him up and starts around the room with him. Lucas' legs are like rubber as he waddles.)* Are you awake now, dear?

LUCAS: *(Sleepily.)* Uh huh. *(They continue around the room, stopping in front of the sofa.)*

MRS. MAXWELL: Are you sure?

LUCAS: Uh huh. *(His eyes are practically closed. He again drops on the sofa.)*

Mr. Maxwell enters center. He is now wearing a business suit.

MR. MAXWELL: Janet, isn't Lucas—

MRS. MAXWELL: *(Breaking in; pointing at Lucas.)* I can't do a thing with the boy, John.

MR. MAXWELL: *(Shaking him.)* Are you awake, Lucas?

LUCAS: Uh huh.

MRS. MAXWELL: *(As she exits left.)* The most contrary child.

LUCAS: Uh huh.

MR. MAXWELL: Lucas, get up! *(Lucas sits up lazily.)* Lucas, due to the fact---. Lucas, are you listening?

LUCAS: *(Sleepily.)* Uh huh.

MR. MAXWELL: *(Strutting around the room.)* Due to the fact that I am now the head of the Citizen's Committee—you knew that I was, didn't you, Lucas?

LUCAS: Uh huh.

MR. MAXWELL: I am going to have to make a speech Tuesday night. Your name might be mentioned, Lucas.

LUCAS: Uh huh.

MR. MAXWELL: Personally, I think I'm a very fitting man for the job. Probably the most qualified in the entire city. That is due to the fact that I have never mingled with the Citizen's Committee before, so I will therefore play no favorites in our fair city.

LUCAS: Uh huh.

MR. MAXWELL: That speech Tuesday night will take a lot of work. I'm going to have to write a powerful speech. (*Striking a speaker's pose.*) Ladies and gentlemen of our fair and wonderful city. It is indeed with great pleasure—and honor—that I stand facing you tonight, endowed with one of the greatest privileges that could ever have befallen ANY man. I— (*As if thinking hard.*) —I am truly thankful to each and every one of you for— (*Talking to himself.*) I think this is a little too dull and flat to give at the Citizen's Committee. So far it's VERY boring.

LUCAS: (*Sleepily.*) Uh huh.

MR. MAXWELL: (*Sternly.*) Lucas, get up. (*Shakes Lucas.*)

LUCAS: (*Sitting up breezily.*) Well, hi ya, dad!

MR. MAXWELL: Are you awake?

LUCAS: Of course, I'm awake. (*Stretches.*) Ahhh, what a beautiful day! WHAT a great day to be alive. Did I spend the night on the sofa, Pop?

MR. MAXWELL: Of course not.

LUCAS: How did I get down here?

MR. MAXWELL: (*Irritably.*) You walked down. Remember?

LUCAS: (*Nods yes, then no.*) Y'know, I had a crazy dream, Pop. I dreamed that you were the new head of the Citizen's Committee—

MR. MAXWELL: (*Breaking in.*) And you were giving one of the worst speeches that I have ever heard.

MR. MAXWELL: For your information, that was not a dream. I AM the new head of the Citizen's Committee.

LUCAS: (*Rising.*) Is that right? May I be the first to congratulate you. (*As he pumps his father's hand.*) Congratulations.

MR. MAXWELL: (*Beaming with pride.*) Thank you, Lucas. Thank you. Do you think that you could—uh—write a speech for me to give at the banquet Tuesday night, Lucas?

LUCAS: (*Excitedly.*) You betcha I could, Pop. I'm an exceptional writer.

MR. MAXWELL: Write down what you think would be good for a speech, then when I get home tonight, we can both go over it together. How does that sound, son?

LUCAS: Perfect, Pop, perfect.

MRS. MAXWELL: (*Off left.*) Your breakfast is ready, John.

LUCAS: And you can count on me to write a creative speech . . . a great speech, Pop. *(Mr. Maxwell exits left.)* Just wait until Hercules hears about this. *(He strolls to the telephone and dials. Lucas sings while he is waiting for an answer.)* Oh, hello, Mrs. Nelson . . . This is Lucas, Hercules'— *(Only Lucas says Herculesees.)* —best friend. Is he home?...okay, I'll wait . . . *(He starts singing again.)*

At this point, Hercules Nelson comes bouncing in right. He is wearing an ordinary pair of pants and shirt. Lucas fails to hear him.

HERCULES: *(As he enters.)* Hey Lucas.

Lucas thinks that the voice is coming from the receiver of the telephone. He slams the receiver to his ear.

LUCAS: Hey yourself, Hercules, old chum, old pal, old boy, old—are you up yet?

HERCULES: Of course I'm up. How could I be over here if I wasn't up?

LUCAS: *(Breezily.)* Boy, your voice really sounds loud this morning. Say something again, Hercules.

HERCULES: Something again.

LUCAS: Yes sir, your voice carries. Sounds like you're standing right next to me.

HERCULES: *(Importantly.)* It's just that I'm growin' up, Lucas. They say your voice gets deep and chesty just before you become a man.

LUCAS: Is that right? Well, wow, if that's the case, you're practically a man, Hercules. How does it feel to be a man?

HERCULES: *(Dropping on the sofa; importantly.)* Ohhh, I can't say I feel any different than I did a couple of days ago. I—I just feel—

LUCAS: *(Breaking in.)* A couple of days older, huh?

HERCULES: You took the words right out of my mouth, Lucas. *(Raring back on the sofa.)* Yessir! It makes a guy feel pretty good to know that he's a man.

LUCAS: Have you shaved yet, Hercules?

HERCULES: Oh, no! That comes later. There's no use rushing things just because I'm a man. But—I'll start shaving any day now. Like the immortal words of the old pronoun, "A stitch in time is worth two in the bush."

LUCAS: You mean proverb.

HERCULES: Noun—verb, they're all the same to me.

LUCAS: Say, Hercules, guess what? Pop's the new head of the Citizen's Committee and he wants me to write a speech. Would you like to help me?

HERCULES: (*Jumping up.*) Would I? Let's get to work.

LUCAS: All right, Hercules, you hurry over and—WHAT? Wh—what did you say Mrs. Nelson, he's not there? But I've been talking to him for the last—

HERCULES: (*Breaking in.*) For Pete's sake don't tell her I'm over here.

Lucas looks up quickly and sees Hercules.

LUCAS: (*Into the phone.*) Goodbye, Mrs. Nelson. (*Hangs up.*) Boy, you're fast, Hercules.

HERCULES: And I'm ready to start on that speech. Can you type?

LUCAS: I can type things like cat and dog and cow. I guess we could just write a speech about animals. (*They exit left.*)

Elizabeth and Courtney enter center.

COURTNEY: (*Happily.*) We should be able to go to every party in town now, Elizabeth.

ELIZABETH: It's just all too good to be true, Courtney. Just TOO good to be true.

COURTNEY: (*Dropping on the sofa.*) Probably everything we do will be on the Society pages. (*Elizabeth also sits on the sofa. Courtney is looking through the pages of the newspaper.*) Do you ever read these letters sent in to Vester Blayne's lovelorn column?

ELIZABETH: (*Leaning over and looking at the paper.*) Oh yes! I read them every day.

COURTNEY: Just listen to this. (*Reading from the paper.*) "Dear Miss Blayne. For many months now I have been contemplating

writing you, but not until things reached the most drastic point did I have nerve to do so. I have a problem for you. I have been married for three years, and all during this time I have not been very happy. My husband blames me for everything and he does nothing to make things better, Miss Blayne. Sometimes, he even picks up a paper and chases me from room to room like a dog. Once he locked me in my room, and last week he even locked me out of the house. He has a terrible temper, and on one occasion forgot the baby in the hardware store. What should I do?"

ELIZABETH: You know, I always did want to send a letter to her.

COURTNEY: (*Leaning over toward Elizabeth; in a low voice.*) Do you have a problem, Elizabeth?

ELIZABETH: (*In horror.*) Oh NO! I mean to just make one up. You know.

COURTNEY: (*Interestedly.*) Oh, I'll bet that would be fun. Would they print it?

ELIZABETH: Of course they'd print it. They wouldn't know whether or not it was true.

COURTNEY: (*Jumping up.*) Then let's write one.

ELIZABETH: Now?

COURTNEY: Sure. (*Goes to the desk.*) We'll mail it this morning—

ELIZABETH: (*Breaking in; excitedly.*) And it will appear in the evening paper. Good idea, Courtney. Simply WONDERFUL. (*Courtney takes pen and paper from a drawer of the desk. Elizabeth watches intently over her shoulder.*) What'll we write?

COURTNEY: (*Thinking hard.*) Ohhh . . . Just anything!

ELIZABETH: Just so it has a lot of tragedy in it. The more tears and heartaches the better.

COURTNEY: (*Talking as she writes.*) Oh, of course! We want a good, solid tearjerker. (*Surveying her work.*) Dear Miss Blayne. How does that sound?

ELIZABETH: PERFECT, Courtney, just PERFECT!

COURTNEY: Do think we ought to make it by a single girl or a married woman, Elizabeth?

ELIZABETH: How about a fourteen year old girl just like us, Courtney.

COURTNEY: That's wonderful, Elizabeth. Written by a fourteen year old girl. Dear Miss Blayne. (*To Elizabeth again.*) What'll it be?

ELIZABETH: (*Talking slowly as she thinks.*) It—could—be—that—
(*Now talking rapidly.*) she's in love with a man—

COURTNEY: (*Breaking in suddenly.*) Who has a wife and three children—

ELIZABETH: (*Excitedly.*) And the man wants to leave his family for her.

COURTNEY: (*Breaking in.*) And the girl wants to come to him, and she says life without him, life isn't worth living. In fact she's already losing her health.

ELIZABETH: (*Breaking in.*) And she knows she can't live another day.

COURTNEY: (*Excitedly.*) Oh, that's wonderful, Elizabeth, just WONDERFUL. That last part completely did the job. (*Starts writing.*) And, of course, she's writing to ask advice, and—

ELIZABETH: (*Breaking in.*) The whole thing sounds just PERFECT to me, Courtney. Just PERFECT!

COURTNEY: (*Talking as she writes.*) I just can't wait to read it in the paper, Elizabeth. Do you really think they'll publish it?

ELIZABETH: Of course, they'll publish it. They publish all of 'em.

COURTNEY: (*Happily.*) This is really the best idea we've had yet. And we have certainly had a lot of ideas.

ELIZABETH: (*Still looking over her shoulder.*) Put a little more sad stuff in it, Courtney. Some tear jerking stuff. Oh, that's wonderful.

COURTNEY: I just know I'll cry when I read this in the paper.

ELIZABETH: I will too, Courtney. In fact, I'm practically crying now.

COURTNEY: (*Pointing to a partition of the desk.*) Get an envelope and a stamp out of there, Elizabeth. (*Elizabeth obliges.*) Well, I guess that does it. (*She licks the stamp and places it on the envelope.*)

ELIZABETH: How did you sign it?

COURTNEY: I didn't. Do I have to?

ELIZABETH: Oh, yes! They won't publish it if you don't sign something. You know, like "Sad Sister," or Petrified Petunia," or "Just Frantic," or just—anything. They have something like that on all of them.

COURTNEY: I think I'll sign it "Sad Sarah."

ELIZABETH: Oh, that would be just ducky, Courtney, just ducky!

COURTNEY: (*Excitedly.*) That's it, Elizabeth, that's the one we want.
JUST DUCKY!

ELIZABETH: You mean it?

COURTNEY: (*As she writes it and then seals the letter.*) Uh huh.

ELIZABETH: (*Happily.*) Really? I just KNEW I'd think of a good one. Just Ducky! (*Courtney addresses the envelope.*) Did you put a return address on the outside?

COURTNEY: Oh no! (*After a pause.*) Do I have to?

ELIZABETH: Oh yes. You have to send in your complete address, or they won't use it. But it's all right. They guarantee NOT to mention your name.

COURTNEY: Weeell, all right. But I hope you're sure.

Mr. Maxwell enters left, starts center.

COURTNEY: Where are you going, Father?

MR. MAXWELL: To work.

COURTNEY: Would you mail this letter for us?

MR. MAXWELL: (*Smiling.*) Why of course. (*He puts it in his jacket pocket.*)

COURTNEY: Goodbye, Father.

ELIZABETH: (*On the spoken cue of "goodbye".*) Goodbye, Mr. Maxwell.

MR. MAXWELL: Goodbye, girls. (*He exits right.*)

ELIZABETH: I just can't wait for the evening paper, Courtney. I just CAN'T WAIT.

CURTAIN.

ACT ONE, SCENE 2

AT RISE:

Mr. Maxwell is standing in front of the mirror reading his speech in silence. It is written on a large sheet of paper, which he holds in front of him. He looks at the speech, then the mirror. He paces around the room swinging his arms. At intervals he stops, "bugging out" his eyes, then he returns to the mirror. He again stands in front of it, gesticulating. Every few seconds he visits the pitcher of water and glass that are on the radio, and after taking a drink of water, returns to the mirror. He is putting in very much facial expression as Courtney enters left.

COURTNEY: Has the paper come yet, Father? *(No answer.)* Father? *(Still no answer.)* I don't guess it has. *(She looks around the room.)* When it comes, I wish you would let me know, will you, Father? *(No answer.)* FATHER!

MR. MAXWELL: *(Turning around; disgustedly.)* Don't bother me now, Courtney. Can't you see that I'm busy?

COURTNEY: Yes, Father. But will you let me know? *(Mr. Maxwell has returned to his speech.)* I'm just dying to see the evening paper. *(As she drops on to the sofa.)* I'm just DYING to.

MR. MAXWELL: *(Clearing throat.)* Fellow citizens! *(He goes up to the radio, takes drink of water, and clears his throat again.)* Fellow citizens.

COURTNEY: Did Lucas really write your speech, Father? *(No answer.)* Father?

MR. MAXWELL: *(Now pacing around the room.)* He wrote the first and the last.

COURTNEY: The first and the last? What was it, Father? Father?

MR. MAXWELL: *(Without looking up.)* He wrote, "Fellow Citizens' and "Thank you." I—put in the rest when I got home.

COURTNEY: *(Peering out of the window.)* I'm afraid the paper won't come.

MR. MAXWELL: *(Clears his throat.)* Fellow citizens! I—

COURTNEY: *(Breaking in.)* Do you think it will come, Father?

MR. MAXWELL: I am deeply—

COURTNEY: *(Again breaking in.)* Father?

MR. MAXWELL: (*Disgustedly.*) Of course the paper will come, Courtney. Doesn't it always come? But there won't be anything in it about us. They haven't seen me—as yet. But I'm sure that they will. (*Clears throat again.*) Fellow citizens!

COURTNEY: (*Dropping into the chair by the window.*) I'm just dying to see it, anyway. Maybe the paper boys went on a strike. Do you think that they might have, Father?

Caroline enters center. She is wearing a very cute and becoming dress.

CAROLINE: Have you got your speech yet, Father?

MR. MAXWELL: (*Taking another drink of water.*) I think so.

CAROLINE: Why the pitcher of water?

MR. MAXWELL: All great speakers have pitchers of water, and they all drink at certain intervals. So I just have my intervals written into my speech.

COURTNEY: I think he spends all of his time at the water pitcher, and just speaks at intervals.

Mr. Maxwell again stands in front of the mirror, reading his speech in pantomime.

COURTNEY: Where are you going, Caroline?

CAROLINE: What makes you think I'm going somewhere?

COURTNEY: Well, you're all dressed up and—I'll bet Craig is—

CAROLINE: (*Putting her fingers to her lips to silence Courtney.*) Shhhh!

COURTNEY: (*Nods her head understandingly.*) Oh!

MR. MAXWELL: (*Turning around.*) What?

CAROLINE: (*Quickly.*) Nothing, Father! Nothing at all.

MR. MAXWELL: Is that Craig Moore coming over here?

CAROLINE: He—

MR. MAXWELL: (*Breaking in; sternly.*) You are not going with that Craig Moore again tonight.

CAROLINE: We—

MR. MAXWELL: (*Again breaking in.*) You were with him last night.

CAROLINE: We're just going to the new restaurant to try it out, Father. That's all. And anyway, Mother said we could go.

MR. MAXWELL: (*Facing the mirror again.*) I suppose there is nothing more to say. (*Grumbling.*) Some day I'm going to form a union with all fathers in this city, and I'll be darned if we'll be pushed around then. (*He slams his left hand on the table.*)
FELLOW CITIZENS! (*He suddenly puts his wristwatch to his ear—then shakes it.*) Hmmmm! (*He shakes it again and then puts it once more to his ear.*) Hmmm!

MRS. MAXWELL: (*Entering left.*) Is your father in here raving again?

MR. MAXWELL: I was merely going over my speech for Tuesday night. It's too bad a person can't do a little something around here. I think I'll go to the basement and work on this in peace. (*As an after thought.*) If there is such a thing around this madhouse. (*He goes out left.*)

CAROLINE: Have you noticed dad acting strangely, Mother?

MRS. MAXWELL: I think it's because he has so much on his mind, dear.

CAROLINE: (*Worriedly.*) Craig should be here by now. It's really getting late.

COURTNEY: (*Again peering out the window.*) What about the evening paper? It's never been this late before.

MRS. MAXWELL: Are you still worrying about the paper, dear? I'm sure it will come.

At this point, Lucas and Hercules enter right. Lucas is wearing an ordinary pair of pants and a shirt. Both of the boys are carrying a sheet of paper with writing on it.

LUCAS: (*Breezily.*) Hello, Mom.

HERCULES: Hello, Mrs. Maxwell.

MRS. MAXWELL: Where in the world have you been?

LUCAS: (*Importantly.*) Oh, we've been over to Hercules' writin' plays.

COURTNEY: Writing plays?

LUCAS: You betcha! Ever since Pap asked us to write his speech, we just decided we'd go into the play writin' and play producin' business.

HERCULES: And there ain't nothin' to it, either.

LUCAS: We've decided to take it up for an occupation.

HERCULES: We're right in the middle of a rip-roaring one now called "For Whom the Oil Boils."

LUCAS: (*Holding up the script and reading in a very expressionless tone of voice.*) Ahhh, mine sweet maiden. (*To Mrs. Maxwell.*) It's a GRIPPING love story, filled with romance and suspense and heartaches—

HERCULES: (*Breaking in.*) And cowboys. It's really a "gripping drammar."

LUCAS: (*Reading from the script; very expressionless.*) "Ahhhh, mine sweet maiden. Wouldst thou permit me to hold thy grizzly hand?"

HERCULES: (*Singing his lines in a very feminine voice.*) "Wouldst?"

LUCAS: (*Very expressionless.*) "Wouldst thou permit me to put mine arms around try lovely shoulders?"

HERCULES: (*Singing his lines in a very feminine voice.*) "Wouldst?"

LUCAS: (*Very expressionless.*) "Wouldst thou permit me to stroke thy bilious hair?"

CAROLINE: (*Astonished.*) "BILIOUS?"

LUCAS: That's what it says here.

CAROLINE: (*Looking at the script.*) That's "BILLOWY."

LUCAS: Oh. Well, it's an excusable mistake. It could happen to anyone. "Wouldst thou permit me to stroke thy billowy hair?"

HERCULES: (*In a feminine voice.*) "Wouldst?"

LUCAS: "Tell me, gumdrop of my dreams, and popsicle of mine affections, what doest thou see when thou gazes deeply into mine eyes?"

HERCULES: (*Singing the line.*) "Nothing."

LUCAS: "Why doest thou see nothing?"

HERCULES: "I left mine glasses with grandma."

LUCAS: (*To his mother.*) You know, this is strictly high-class stuff.

HERCULES: (*As the boys start up center.*) You know, Lucas, old boy, it wouldn't surprise me in the least if we'd win the academy award sometime. (*They exit center.*)

MRS. MAXWELL: (*Laughingly.*) I'll swear to goodness there's no telling what those boys will try next.

MR. MAXWELL: (*Barging in left.*) Well, I've got the entire speech memorized. Yes sir, got it from "A" to "Z," and it's all right up here. (*He taps his forehead.*) I might add that I'm pretty proud of the whole thing. You know, I think I'd better say it again, so I can brush up on my voice, articulation, and posture, and—

COURTNEY: (*Breaking in; rising.*) I think I'd better go.

MR. MAXWELL: Oh, no, you don't. You're going to listen to this speech. After all, this is the first one that I've written—and given—and I want it to be PERFECT. (*He slams his foot down suddenly and then jumps around in pain.*)

MRS. MAXWELL: (*Reprimandingly*) John, PLEASE remember your corn. (*Courtney sits – not happy about the situation at all.*)

MR. MAXWELL: (*Striking a speaker's pose; raring back importantly.*) Fellow citizens of our fair and wonderful city. (*He is talking in a very loud voice.*) Tonight, there has been bestowed upon me one of the greatest, if not THE greatest, honor, that could ever be bestowed upon ANY man. Whether he be rich, whether poor, or whether he just strikes the happy medium. (*In a dry and flat laugh.*) Huh, huh, huh.

CAROLINE: (*Wrinkling up her nose in distaste.*) Does that "huh, huh, huh" have to be in there?

MR. MAXWELL: I don't guess it does. I'll leave that out. (*Beginning again.*) The happy medium—yes. I am greatly flattered—and very proud—that the citizen's committee has chosen me as their new leader. And I want to take THIS opportunity to say that I will do all within my power for our truly wonderful city, and truly MARVELOUS citizen's committee. There comes a time, in every man's life—

Elizabeth comes in Right, carrying the evening paper. She interrupts Mr. Maxwell on the spoken cue of "life." Elizabeth is wearing the same that she did in the first scene.

ELIZABETH: (*Breaking in; sadly.*) Hello, Courtney.

COURTNEY: (*Excitedly.*) ELIZABETH!

ELIZABETH: (*Holding up the paper, sadly.*) It's not in here, Courtney.

COURTNEY: (*Sadly going over to read the paper over Elizabeth's shoulder.*) It's not? Are you sure?

ELIZABETH: Sure I'm sure.

Elizabeth starts looking through the paper hurriedly. Mr. Maxwell stands by, a little disgruntled, as she does.

MR. MAXWELL: (*Looks around; clears throat.*) There comes a time—in every man's life—

COURTNEY: (*Breaking in.*) I think that's a really dirty deal.

Mr. Maxwell stands by with his hands on his hips, looking very bewildered.

ELIZABETH: It is a dirty deal. (*As she waves a page of the paper under Courtney's nose.*) There you are, you can see for yourself.

COURTNEY: And that's the way it goes. (*They start left.*) I'll bet they're not even written by real people at all.

ELIZABETH: (*As the two girls exit left.*) You're right, I bet they are all fake..

CAROLINE: What's wrong with them, Mother?

MRS. MAXWELL: I'm sure I've no idea.

MR. MAXWELL: (*Thinking.*) Let's see, where was I? Hmmmmm! (*Pause.*) Oh yes! And I want to take this opportunity to say that I will do everything within my power for our truly wonderful city, and truly MAGNIFICENT citizen's committee. (*Loudly.*) There comes a time—in every man's life—

Doorbell rings off right.

CAROLINE: (*Breaking in on cue of "life".*) Was that the doorbell?

MR. MAXWELL: I didn't hear anything. (*Clears his throat.*) There comes a time, in every man's life-- (*Doorbell rings again.*)

CAROLINE: (*Breaking in again; hopping up.*) It IS the doorbell. (*Caroline goes out right.*)

Mr. Maxwell is now sitting in a chair, his chin in his hands, as Caroline enters right with Craig, who is dressed nicely for the evening.

CAROLINE: *(Announcing at the door.)* It's Craig.

CRAIG: Hello, Mrs. Maxwell. And Mr. Maxwell.

MR. MAXWELL: *(Without looking up.)* Uh huh. *(Caroline and Craig exit right.)*

MRS. MAXWELL: *(In a low voice.)* John, I DO wish that you'd treat Craig a little more civilly.

MR. MAXWELL: *(With finality.)* I can't help it, Janet. I don't like the boy and that's all there is to it.

MRS. MAXWELL: What would you have thought if Father had treated you that way?

MR. MAXWELL: *(Rising.)* I IMAGINE I'd have thought that I wasn't wanted. Now let's see, where was I? *(Starts walking around the room.)* Oh yes, I remember now. A truly wonderful and magnificent citizen's committee. There comes a time in every man's life—*(The doorbell rings. Mr. Maxwell stops. Then starts talking again.)* In every man's life—*(He is interrupted by the doorbell again.)* That dad-blasted doorbell again. We're having more traffic around here than a meat market on Saturday afternoon. *(Shouting.)* Come in!

MRS. MAXWELL: John, please try to be a little more polite.

MR. MAXWELL: *(Wildly.)* How in the world can you expect me to be polite with people stampeding in and out of here like a horse barn!

Aunt Mary enters right.

MRS. MAXWELL: *(Rising.)* Well, well, if it isn't Aunt Mary. *(Giving Mr. Maxwell a stern look.)* AREN'T you so GLAD to see Aunt Mary, JOHN!

MR. MAXWELL: Oh—yes.

AUNT MARY: I only dropped over for a little while, so don't let me stop whatever you were doing. *(She sits in chair, right center.)*

MRS. MAXWELL: Oh, John was just going over his citizen's committee address.

AUNT MARY: Oh, yes, I was so glad to hear about that, John. I always did say to Frank that John Maxwell would make something

of himself, someday. It is good to see that, that day may have finally arrived.

MR. MAXWELL: Thank you, Aunt Mary. (*Turning away from her.*)
You old goat!

AUNT MARY: What did you say, John?

MR. MAXWELL: (*Turning again to Aunt Mary.*) I said—uh—just said that —uh—you have a nice coat.

AUNT MARY: (*Very flattered.*) Ohhh. Thank you, John. On rare occasions, you can be very nice.

MR. MAXWELL: (*Growling and turning away again.*) You old bat!

AUNT MARY: What?

MR. MAXWELL: Oh, I—uh—just said that it—matched your hat.

AUNT MARY: Oh, thank you John. I was just telling Frank the other day how good you were to notice things.

MR. MAXWELL: (*Trying to smile at Aunt Mary.*) Why, yes it is good of me.

AUNT MARY: Now, why don't you continue with your speech, John?

MRS. MAXWELL: There's no need. He can practice it any time.

AUNT MARY: Nonsense. I'm just dying to hear it.

MR. MAXWELL: Weeell, if you insist. I'll start in where I left off.

AUNT MARY: Oh, that's fine, John. Just fine.

MR. MAXWELL: (*Clearing his throat. He goes upstage and takes a drink of water. Then clears his throat again.*) There comes a time, in every man's life, that—that—I think I've forgotten it. What could it be? What COULD it be?

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

MRS. MAXWELL: No, I haven't. And I'm beginning to worry.

MR. MAXWELL: (*Thinking hard.*) In every man's life.

AUNT MARY: Of course, she always was always bad at keeping in touch. She's been that way as far back as I can remember.

MRS. MAXWELL: And Father never would at all.

MR. MAXWELL: In every man's life, that—(*Snapping his fingers.*)—
I've got it. All right, I'm starting in now. (*Clears throat again.*)
There comes a time, in every man's life—(*He is interrupted by the long ringing of the doorbell.*)

AUNT MARY: There's the doorbell, Janet.

Mrs. Maxwell exits right.

MR. MAXWELL: That does it. That does it! I'm going to lock myself in the basement, and if anyone DARES to stick their head in that basement door, I'll—I'll have their head. *(He storms out left.)*

Mrs. Maxwell enters with Vester Blayne.

MISS BLAYNE: You're Mrs. Maxwell, I presume?

MRS. MAXWELL: *(Cordially.)* That's right. Won't you sit down?

MISS BLAYNE: Thank you. *(She sits on the right cushion of the sofa, and Mrs. Maxwell sits on the left.)* I am Vester Blayne, from the Morning and Evening Herald.

AUNT MARY: You mean the one that answers all the letters?

MISS BLAYNE: *(Nodding.)* Yes, ma'am!

MRS. MAXWELL: Well, this is certainly nice. And I want you to know that I agree with you thoroughly.

AUNT MARY: I do too, Janet. I always say to Frank, "Frank, that Vester Blayne certainly knows human nature." I think your advice is just PERFECT.

MISS BLAYNE: Thank you, ladies. Mrs. Maxwell, I'm here to—is it all right to discuss very personal things with—uh—*(She pauses.)*

MRS. MAXWELL: With Aunt Mary? Oh, goodness me yes! She's part of the family.

AUNT MARY: *(Leaning over intently.)* Oh, goodness! Don't mind me in the least. I'm just—*(Laughs enthusiastically.)*—part of the family.

MISS BLAYNE: Mrs. Maxwell, do you have a daughter fourteen years old?

MRS. MAXWELL: Why yes—Courtney.

MISS BLAYNE: *(Nodding.)* Uh huh!

MRS. MAXWELL: *(Worriedly.)* Is there anything wrong?

MISS BLAYNE: I'm coming to that, Mrs. Maxwell. Have you ever had any trouble with her?

MRS. MAXWELL: *(Shaking her head.)* Why no. None in the least.

AUNT MARY: I just told Frank the other day that a sweeter girl than Courtney never drew breath.

MISS BLAYNE: And she has always been quite normal? I mean as normal as possible for a fourteen year old girl?

MRS. MAXWELL: (*Nodding.*) Why yes.

AUNT MARY: A more normal girl never drew breath.

MISS BLAYNE: Did you ever hear of her having any kind of an—uh—affair with a—MAN?

MRS. MAXWELL: (*Seriously.*) She has NEVER had an affair with a man, Miss Blayne.

AUNT MARY: (*Sharply.*) Certainly not! A better little girl than Courtney never walked the face of this earth.

MISS BLAYNE: I—

AUNT MARY: (*Breaking in sharply.*) And Frank says so, too.

MISS BLAYNE: (*Taking a letter from her purse.*) I have a letter here that I would like to read to you. It arrived in the mail this morning. (*She opens it as she talks.*) I thought it so extremely pathetic that I decided NOT to publish it, but to come over and do my utmost to help. Of course, I've never done this before, but I thought I would come and offer my services to you. And I'll do everything within my power to help.

MRS. MAXWELL: (*Worriedly.*) The letter, Miss Blayne.

MISS BLAYNE: (*Reading from the letter.*) "Dear Miss Blayne. I am writing to you, hoping that you can solve my heart-splitting problem. I am a young girl, just blossoming into the flower of womanhood. Fourteen years old. I am pretty—and I might add that I have been classed as beautiful. Everything is just lovely except one thing. I am desperately in love with an older man. I love this man dearly, although he has a wife and three children—fourteen, fifteen and nineteen. I know that I would be a DARLING wife, and a loving mother for his children—fourteen, fifteen, and nineteen. Please tell me what I should do. I am frantic and at my wits' end. I cannot live without him. I eagerly await an answer. I always read your column—between tears. Signed—Just Ducky.

MRS. MAXWELL: Just Ducky?

AUNT MARY: Who in the world could that be? We don't know any people named Ducky.

MISS BLAYNE: And the return address is—Courtney Maxwell, 8976 West—

MRS. MAXWELL: (*Breaking in.*) Whhatt??!! Ohhhhh! (*She faints over the left arm of the sofa, her head and arms extending toward the floor.*)

AUNT MARY: *(Jumping up; with astonishment.)* Good heavens.
She FAINTED!

Aunt Mary and Miss Blayne rush to her as there is a quick CURTAIN.

END OF ACT ONE

ACT TWO, SCENE 1**SETTING:**

The same, a few minutes later.

AT RISE:

Mrs. Maxwell is sprawled out on the sofa, still unconscious. Miss Blayne is sitting on the sofa, while Aunt Mary is looking on intently. Miss Blayne has a damp cloth, which she is holding on Mrs. Maxwell's forehead.

AUNT MARY: Did she blink her eyes or was it just my imagination?

MISS BLAYNE: I don't think she moved.

AUNT MARY: I guess it was just spots in front of my eyes. I told Frank the other day that I've been seeing spots lately, but he blamed it on my biscuits. Personally, I don't think I'm that bad a cook.

MISS BLAYNE: She should be coming around soon. It's been at least three or four minutes.

AUNT MARY: (*Breezily.*) Frank had an uncle that fainted and was out cold for over three hours, but we never knew for sure whether he was just "out" or whether he was just too bloomin' lazy to open his eyes. I never saw such a lazy tribe as his family in all of my born days. Laziness just lurks in their family.

MISS BLAYNE: (*Looking up, worriedly.*) Maybe we should call a doctor.

AUNT MARY: I don't think there's any need. She'll be around in a minute. Poor little thing. This has certainly been a shock to her.

MISS BLAYNE: It certainly has.

AUNT MARY: (*Rambling on.*) It's really terrible about Courtney. Goodness! I would never have dreamed it of her. It's a cinch she doesn't get it from her mother's side of the family. But Frank always did say that there was bad blood in John Maxwell. I think John is all right, but Frank says that his great-great-great uncle Casper was a disgrace to the whole family. Personally, I wouldn't repeat it myself, but there's just no stopping Frank.

MISS BLAYNE: I think she IS blinking her eyes.

AUNT MARY: (*Very much relieved.*) I knew my biscuits couldn't be that bad.

Mrs. Maxwell sits up slowly; shaking her head as if to clear it.

MRS. MAXWELL: (*Drowsily.*) Who—What---Who are you?

MISS BLAYNE: (*Pleasantly.*) I'm Miss Blayne from the paper, remember?

MRS. MAXWELL: (*Putting her hand to her forehead.*) I—I don't believe I do.

AUNT MARY: She came here to tell you about Courtney, Janet. Don't you remember?

MRS. MAXWELL: (*As she faints again.*) Ohhhh!

AUNT MARY: Well, what do you know about that? She fainted again.

MISS BLAYNE: (*Shaking Mrs. Maxwell.*) Mrs. Maxwell! Mrs. Maxwell!

AUNT MARY: (*Sharply.*) Janet! (*To Miss Blayne.*) Is she coming to?

MISS BLAYNE: (*Without looking up.*) I think that she is. (*Mrs. Maxwell again sits up, drowsily.*) How are you feeling now, Mrs. Maxwell?

MRS. MAXWELL: (*Weakly.*) Not very well. (*Leaning back on her elbow.*) I—I just can't bear to think about Courtney. It's—it's just beyond words.

MISS BLAYNE: I know, Mrs. Maxwell, but you've just got to get hold of yourself. I'm here to help you, and I'm sure that we can straighten her out.

MRS. MAXWELL: It's just the most utterly horrible thing that could have ever happened to me—or to Courtney.

MISS BLAYNE: (*Sympathetically.*) I know, Mrs. Maxwell.

MRS. MAXWELL: (*Weakly.*) She's so young—and I thought so innocent. (*Sitting up, wide-eyed.*) Oh! The neighbors. Think what they could make out of a story like this.

AUNT MARY: Oh, good grief! Horrible thought!

MISS BLAYNE: (*Calmly and reassuringly.*) There's no reason for it to get any farther than it already is, Mrs. Maxwell. I see no reason for anyone to know about this other than we three.

MRS. MAXWELL: (*Uncertainly.*) You mean, not even Mr. Maxwell.

MISS BLAYNE: I see no reason. He might do something drastic. We'll be just as nice and sweet to her as possible, and sympathetic. I think if we use psychology, we'll get to the bottom of things faster and with better results.

AUNT MARY: (*Positively.*) I agree with you one hundred percent, Miss Blayne. Psychology is the only thing for us to use.

MISS BLAYNE: I pride myself on my knowledge of children. I know them from "A" to "Z," Mrs. Maxwell. I know what makes them tick. I understand their moods, their whims, and their certain little characteristics that are found only in the age of adolescence. So I'm sure that we have nothing to worry about.

MRS. MAXWELL: (*Trying to smile.*) I only hope that you're right, Miss Blayne.

MISS BLAYNE: I've written my column for tomorrow, Mrs. Maxwell, both the morning and the evening. So if you want me to help you, I can be available for most of the day tomorrow, as well as all night tonight.

MRS. MAXWELL: That's very kind of you, Miss Blayne. I don't know how I'll ever thank you enough.

MISS BLAYNE: The thanks will come when we succeed in our job. That's thanks enough for anyone, especially if they can get one little girl to see her mistake while there is still time.

MRS. MAXWELL: Could you stay here with us tonight, Miss Blayne?

MISS BLAYNE: Why yes! I would be glad to.

AUNT MARY: (*Wisely.*) But, what will we tell everyone? You know they'll be suspicious. We'll certainly have to make something up.

MISS BLAYNE: No, we won't make up anything. I believe in telling the truth at all times.

AUNT MARY: Oh! (*Sadly.*) That's too bad.

MRS. MAXWELL: We could tell them that you're an old friend of Aunt Mary's.

MISS BLAYNE: But I've known her for only five minutes.

AUNT MARY: Well, a lot of things can get mighty old in five minutes.

MISS BLAYNE: (*Rising; condescendingly.*) W-w-e-l-l, all right. (*She starts pacing around the room.*) Now, Mrs. Maxwell, about your daughter. Have you ever had any trouble with her before?

MRS. MAXWELL: Not in the least.

- MISS BLAYNE:** (*Walking around with her hands behind her back.*)
Do you have any idea who this man could be?
- MRS. MAXWELL:** (*Shaking her head.*) No.
- MISS BLAYNE:** (*After a pause.*) And you have no idea what would make her suddenly take an interest in married men?
- MRS. MAXWELL:** (*Again shaking her head.*) No.
- AUNT MARY:** (*Enthusiastically.*) Well, that's at least a beginning.
- MISS BLAYNE:** It is?
- AUNT MARY:** Well sure. We don't know why she would fall for a married man, and we don't know who the man could be. So you see, we're definitely making progress.
- MISS BLAYNE:** (*Continuing to walk about the room.*) Pardon my pacing the floor this way, but I always meditate over my deep problems in this fashion. (*After a pause.*) I can readily see that this will be a very difficult problem. Probably with many angles. (*She suddenly stops.*) Does your daughter see many movies?
- MRS. MAXWELL:** Oh, yes.
- MISS BLAYNE:** Uh huh! Angle number one. Love stories?
- MRS. MAXWELL:** I—I guess so.
- MISS BLAYNE:** (*Starting to pace the floor again.*) Uh huh! Angle number two. And does she read many books?
- MRS. MAXWELL:** Quite a few, I think.
- AUNT MARY:** Uh huh! Angle number three. (*She also starts pacing the floor, walking in the opposite direction of Miss Blayne.*)
- MRS. MAXWELL:** But could that possibly have an effect on Courtney?
- MISS BLAYNE:** I don't know. It's too early for us to formulate our opinions at this time. I must first talk to the girl. I imagine there's also something sadly lacking in her home life. Just what it is, of course, I can't at the moment say. But I'm sure that we can uncover that, too.
- MRS. MAXWELL:** (*Rising weakly; holding on to the sofa.*) Do you mean that I—I have failed as a mother?
- MISS BLAYNE:** (*Still walking.*) Not necessarily that.
- AUNT MARY:** Just the other day Frank said the he didn't think a better mother than Janet ever walked the face of the earth.

MISS BLAYNE: Now don't get me wrong, Mrs. Maxwell. I know nothing at all about it at the present time. You see, it could all be the father's fault.

MRS. MAXWELL: Well, heaven knows John doesn't take as much interest in the children like he should. He even said so this morning.

AUNT MARY: (*Positively.*) Frank always did say that it was as much the father's responsibility as the mother's. And I agree with him.

MISS BLAYNE: (*Thinking deeply.*) Or it could be a mixture of the two. (*Suddenly.*) Do you have any other children, Mrs. Maxwell?

MRS. MAXWELL: (*Dropping once again onto the sofa.*) Yes! (*Sobbing.*) A boy—(*Sniffs.*) And a girl.

MISS BLAYNE: And they are--? (*She stops.*)

MRS. MAXWELL: Quite normal—I think. (*Tearfully.*) I have always feared that I might—might raise a—(*Loudly crying.*) delinquent!

MISS BLAYNE: (*Sitting by Mrs. Maxwell; reassuringly.*) Now, now, Mrs. Maxwell. I'm sure we can straighten this whole thing out. I'll talk to the girl, and I'm sure I can get to the bottom of things. It may take a little time, but it can be worked out.

MRS. MAXWELL: Are you going to let her know that we know about her—her (*crying again*) affair?

MISS BLAYNE: Oh no! Above all she must not find out that we know. That would, I'm afraid, spoil the whole thing. And she might be so shocked that—well you know what she said about not being able to “live” without him.

MRS. MAXWELL: (*Weakly.*) Oh, good heavens. I'll just never be the same as long as I live. (*Lying on the sofa.*) The—the shock has just un-nerved me so that—that—

MISS BLAYNE: (*Breaking in; reassuringly.*) I know, Mrs. Maxwell, but don't worry. Everything will come out all right.

Elizabeth and Courtney enter left.

COURTNEY: (*As they enter.*) Mother, can we—(*She stops.*) Oh!

MRS. MAXWELL: (*Sitting up, trying to act as calm as possible.*) I want you to meet an old friend of Aunt Mary's, girls. This is Miss Vester. My daughter,—(*Sniffles.*) Courtney.

COURTNEY: How-do-you-do!

MRS. MAXWELL: (*Sniffles again.*) And her friend, Elizabeth Smith.

ELIZABETH: (*Bowing.*) Likewise.

COURTNEY: Are you sniffing, Mother?

MRS. MAXWELL: Oh my no, I just have a cold, and a headache, dear. I'll be all right.

COURTNEY: Mother, there's a top-notch picture showing at the Orpheum tonight, and we—

MRS. MAXWELL: (*Breaking in.*) I don't think you'd better go, dear.

COURTNEY: We can't?

ELIZABETH: We can't, Mrs. Maxwell?

MRS. MAXWELL: No, I'd rather you didn't.

COURTNEY: But what can we do, Mother? We can't just sit around and twiddle our thumbs.

ELIZABETH: (*Starting left.*) We can always find something to do, Courtney. Let's go to down in the basement and rummage.

COURTNEY: (*Following her out left.*) Oh, that would be just ducky, Elizabeth, just ducky!

MRS. MAXWELL: (*Slumping down in another faint.*) Ohhhh!

AUNT MARY: (*Running over to her; excitedly.*) Well, what do you know, she fainted again?

MISS BLAYNE: I think we'd better take her to her room. She certainly needs rest. (*She pulls Mrs. Maxwell up to a sitting position.*) The girl certainly looked all right to me. (*Mrs. Maxwell's head is dipping forward.*)

AUNT MARY: She does to me, too. But Frank said that John's Uncle Casper was one of the finest looking men in three counties, and he said that you'd never know by looking at him that he was a little touched.

MISS BLAYNE: I think she's revived again. (*They pull her to her feet.*)

AUNT MARY: Her room's up this way. (*They start toward center.*)

MRS. MAXWELL: Where—are—you taking me?

AUNT MARY: To your room, Janet, you've just got to get some rest.

MRS. MAXWELL: I never felt so terrible in all my life. This is the most terrible thing that could ever happen to any mother. Ohhh, my poor little daughter.

MISS BLAYNE: Now don't worry, Mrs. Maxwell. I know I can straighten everything out all right. I'll come right back down and



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