

FINDERS CREEPERS

by Donald Payton



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SYNOPSIS: Hercules Nelson's aunt and uncle invite Hercules and his best friend, Lucas, to spend the weekend with them. With suitcases in hand, the boys arrive at Uncle Bob's to discover that Uncle Bob is a MORTICIAN and there's a funeral scheduled Monday. Well, it's not long before things start happening in ways that would put most brave men to flight. For one thing, the corpse walks, reads the paper, and climbs into bed with Hercules. He gallivants around in a most uncorpus delecti fashion! Needless to say, the boys are terrified until they find out that Mr. Quigley, the corpse, isn't really dead. Someone tried to knock him off while he was sleeping so he devised a plan: he'd make his family think he was dead, then show up at his own funeral and trap the guilty party. No doubt Mr. Quigley had a good plan and no doubt things would have ended peacefully, but there's two things he failed to consider . . . Lucas Maxwell and Hercules Nelson. Fortunately, they all escape with their hides, but not before one of the wildest finishes ever!

CAST OF CHARACTERS*(7 females, 8 males)*

- LUCAS MAXWELL (m) Thirteen, tousle-headed, full of life and action, small for his age, a pocket-sized atomic bomb. *(273 lines)*
- HERCULES NELSON (m)..... Also thirteen, Lucas' best friend. He's also tousle-headed, freckle-faced, most of his clothes are too large and just hang on him. He's small, too, but together, the boys form the epitome of unquenchable chaos. *(242 lines)*
- CELESTE NELSON (f)..... About fourteen, Hercules' cousin. Very cute and sweet and is very much the object of Lucas' affection. *(61 lines)*
- NICHOLLE QUIGLEY (f)..... Thirteen. She, too, is a cute and sweet little girl, and the bright spot in Hercules' usually blackened eye. *(32 lines)*

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- STEVIE NELSON (f)Celeste's little sister, eleven. She's a live-wire, her main love is mystery stories, and she always has one with her. She usually has an answer for everything, and is really quick with the repartee. Hair is in pigtails. (56 lines)
- AUNT MARY (f)Hercules' aunt, about 40 or so. Has her hands full with her brood, and especially with Uncle Bob and Granny. She's the stabilizing factor in the household. Very sensible, sympathetic and understanding. (61 lines)
- UNCLE BOB (m)About 40 or so. Although he's a mortician, he's jovial, and loves a good time and a good joke as well as anyone. His hair is graying just a little around the temples. Wears a business suit. (92 lines)
- GRANNY (f)About 85. Uncle Bob's grandmother. She's really a "ball of fire," full of life and always cracking jokes. Quite a hepcat. She has lovely gray hair, dresses neatly, wears glasses and always has a smile. (32 lines)
- MR. QUIGLEY (m)Over 75. Gray hair, wears glasses, very agile. He, too, is quite a hepcat, and is more concerned about this than the attempt that was made on his life. He spends most of his time in a bright red nightshirt. (57 lines)
- DR. BROWN (m)Middle-aged, hair graying just a trifle. He's an immaculate dresser and has a nice appearance, which nicely matches his winning smile and cordial disposition. (61 lines)

MADELINE (f).....Mr. Quigley's much younger sister. She's austere with penetrating eyes. Her steel gaze is perhaps indicative of her inner self, and she gives off the impression that she's never smiled. She's attired in black throughout the play. She's a tall woman, slender, and walks very straight. (38 lines)

HARRY SCHUSTER (m)The Quigley family lawyer, friend of Madeline. He's a suspicious-looking and acting fellow, about Madeline's age. He's nervous, flighty, fidgety and irritable and is incessantly scratching the corner of his mustache. He also has a monotonous habit of holding his hat in both hands and moving it in a circular fashion. He's wearing a dark business suit. (57 lines)

DAPHNE (f)The maid, probably about 50, but no one knows for sure. She is very quiet, always has a smirk on her face, mixed with a very forlorn look. She dresses very old-fashioned, her costume looks very old, something from 1910-ish. When she does speak, it's a deep and forceful voice. (20 lines)

CLAUDE (m).....The caretaker. About 60. He's strictly of the old rural regime, wears faded overalls, a straw hat, heavy shoes that clump when he walks and a brightly colored shirt. He's very friendly, loves to talk and joke, and is always talking with a high-pitched but slow drawl. (62 lines)

HENRY (m).....The helper. (3 lines)

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

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DURATION: 90 minutes

SETTING: A room in the Nelson home.

TIME: An evening of the present.

SET

There are three entrances leading in to room: one left, leading outside; one center, leading into the Nelson Mortuary; and one right, leading into the rest of the house. There is a lay-back sofa at the upper right corner of the room, flanked by a floor lamp. A desk is at right center. Easy chairs are at down right, in the upper left corner, and may be placed as desired in the room. At down left is a table with chair, telephone, etc. Magazine rack left center, plus other furniture, as desired.

PROPS

ACT ONE

- ☐ Two suitcases (Hercules, Lucas)
- ☐ Letter in pocket (Hercules)
- ☐ Postcard in pocket (Hercules)
- ☐ Mystery magazine (Stevie)
- ☐ Pocket watch on chain (Claude)
- ☐ Sheet-covered figure on stretcher, off left (Cladue/Henry)
- ☐ Armful of blankets, sheets and pillows (Daphne)
- ☐ Money, bills (Mr. Quigley)

ACT TWO

- ☐ Thriller magazines (Stevie)
- ☐ Newspaper, on stage (Mr. Quigley)
- ☐ Dust cloth (Daphne)
- ☐ Black physician's bag (Dr. Brown)
- ☐ Coat, off right (Hercules)
- ☐ Sherlock Holmes attire, with magnifying glasses (Lucas/Hercules)
- ☐ Pad, pencil, on desk (Lucas)
- ☐ Magazine, on sofa (Schuster)

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ACT THREE

- ☐ Mystery book (Stevie)
- ☐ Mrs. Nelson's coat (Daphne)
- ☐ Coats (Celeste/Nicholle)
- ☐ Mystery magazines (Stevie)
- ☐ Black physician's bag (Dr. Brown)
- ☐ Money (Lucas)
- ☐ Watch (Hercules)
- ☐ Blankets, sheets, pillows (Daphne)
- ☐ Gun (Dr. Brown)

ACT ONE

AT RISE: *The doorbell is ringing insistently. After two or three unanswered rings, Hercules Nelson, age thirteen, sticks his tousled head in the door left. Only today you can't tell his head is tousled because of the size-too-large hat that's parked atop it. He enters a couple of steps, carrying two suitcases. He's attired in sport clothes, and they're a trifle large for him, too, giving the impression that he's undoubtedly shrunk a little overnight. He looks around the room.*

HERCULES: *(Calling.)* Hey.

Lucas Maxwell enters left lugging a couple of suitcases. He's wearing a rumpled suit, a dingy white shirt and a tie that's hanging askew.

LUCAS: *(As he pokes his head in.)* Anybody home?

HERCULES: *(Calling, louder.)* Hey. *(To Lucas.)* Don't think so. Don't see no one.

LUCAS: You sure this is the place?

HERCULES: Sure I'm sure this is the place. Didn't I tell the cab driver 1020 Walnut and didn't he let us out here? *(He sets his bags down.)*

LUCAS: *(Standing in the middle of room.)* Don't look like any place I was ever in before. *(And he strolls around, moseying from one thing to another.)* Get a load of these. *(Reading the inscriptions hanging from the walls.)* "Gone but not forgotten." "Rest in Peace." I think we're in the wrong house, Hercules old man.

HERCULES: *(Digging into his pocket and pulling out a rumpled letter.)* Here's the letter Aunt Mary wrote Mom. *(Reading.)* Dear Jenny. *(Looking up.)* That's Mom. *(Reading again.)* We are most happy that Hercules...*(Looking up again.)* That's me... *(Reading again.)* will be able to come and spend the week end with us and we're happy that he can bring his little friend, Lucas Maxwell. *(Looking up.)* That's you. Check?

LUCAS: Check.

HERCULES: (*Reading on.*) We are looking forward to the boys' visit. Our new address is (*Stressing it.*) 1020 Walnut. (*Looking up.*) That's here. (*Reading.*) Bob. (*Looking up.*) That's Uncle Bob... (*Reading again.*) has changed jobs again and we think he's finally found something he likes. Am looking forward to the arrival of the boys. (*Looking up again.*) That's us. (*Reading.*) Your loving sister-in-law, Mary. (*Shoves letter into pocket again.*)

LUCAS: Then I guess this is the place all right. (*Sets bags down.*) Wonder where everyone is?

HERCULES: Probably preparin' for us. Nailin' down the furniture, lockin' up the valuables, vaccinatn' the cats, and things like that.

LUCAS: (*Stretching out on sofa.*) Ahhh, I'm really going to enjoy this weekend. Just going to forget all my troubles. Just going to relax. If I had my way, yes.

HERCULES: Me too. Going to forget everything about school. Today in Math class I says, "Miss Simmons, I ain't concerned about the square root of 625 – hypotenuses don't worry me – and I don't intend to crack a single book this weekend."

LUCAS: Yeah? What'd she say?

HERCULES: Nothin'. She was out of the room at the time.

LUCAS: (*Sitting up.*) Funny, no one's here. What time was we supposed to arrive?

HERCULES: Mom wrote Aunt Mary a card and had me mail it. (*Digging into pocket again.*) I got the card right here. (*Reads.*) Dear Mary – The boys will arrive on the 8:30 train, Friday. Wonder why they weren't there?

LUCAS: (*Rising.*) But you didn't mail it.

HERCULES: Of course I didn't. I ain't crazy. What's the need of mailin' it when I can just give it to her in person.

LUCAS: Hey, that's right. I hadn't thought o' that. I got to hand it to you, Herc, old man. (*He turns, takes a couple of steps, stops doubtfully.*)

HERCULES: Anyway, Mom phoned her last night and said we'd be in on the train. You know something?

LUCAS: What?

HERCULES: (*Worried.*) I betcha we shouldn't a come on the bus. Aunt Mary said in the letter Uncle Bob had a new job. Wonder what he does? He's probably a big business typhoon of some sort. Or a big actor in television. (*Eyes lighting up.*) Hey, that's it. And he had his professional name outside in lights. Mr. Ary.

LUCAS: Ary?

HERCULES: Yeah. Morton Ulysses Ary.

LUCAS: How do you know?

HERCULES: It's bound to be. Didn't you see that big sign outside sayin' Mort U. Ary? (*Stopping, eyes wide, exploding.*) Mortuary?

LUCAS: (*Sputtering.*) Herc, ain't a mortuary, don't they — ain't that a place — (*He stops.*) I'm goin' home.

HERCULES: (*Grabbing bags.*) I'm right behind you, Lucas.

Daphne enters left, takes a couple of steps, stops, folds arms. She stands glaring at the boys, a face of granite.

HERCULES: Grab your bags, Lucas. (*He starts left, freezes when he sees Daphne.*) M-m-m-Lucas.

LUCAS: Huh? (*Picking up suitcases.*)

HERCULES: (*Sputtering.*) D-don't I-look now, b-but I th-think they forgot to nail the lid on the box.

LUCAS: (*Turns, sees Daphne, drops suitcases with thud.*) Great jumpin' ghosts.

HERCULES: (*Looking up at Daphne.*) Hi. (*Her expression doesn't change.*)

LUCAS: Is this our Aunt Mary?

HERCULES: Of course it ain't my Aunt Mary. What kind of aunts do you think I got? Looks more like Uncle Bob. (*He ventures another step toward her.*) Hey.

LUCAS: I don't like it, Hercules. I ain't never visited a mortuary before and if they're filled with people like her I ain't goin' to no more. (*Picking up bags.*) I'm goin' home.

HERCULES: Hold it, Lucas. All a mortuary is a funeral home, ain't it?

LUCAS: Yeah — I think so.

HERCULES: Then what you waitin' for? Let's get out of here. (*He starts center.*)

LUCAS: (*Restraining him.*) Wait a minute, Herc. There's nothin' about a funeral home to be scared of. It's just like any other home except they got bodies and boxes and (*He stops.*) ...when's the next bus?

They start center, just as Claude enters. He appears to be about 60, but is probably much older. He's strictly of the old rural regime, wears faded overalls, a hat with brim down all the way around, heavy shoes that clump when he walks and a brightly-colored shirt. He talks with a drawl, walks with an effort. His voice is high-pitched, and quavers slightly. He's very friendly, loves to talk and joke, but never cracks a smile, thus making him seem overly serious.

CLAUDE: Howdy, son. You Hercules? (*Hercules nods affirmatively.*) Well, then I reckon you must be Lucas. (*Lucas nods.*) Glad to meet you boys. (*Shaking hands with them.*) I'm Claude. Claude, the caretaker. Reckon you've met Daphne here. She's the maid. Say howdy to the boys, Daphne.

DAPHNE: (*Solemnly.*) Howdy.

CLAUDE: Most people don't think Daphne has much to say. But after she gets to know you – she still don't. She makes up for it in actions, though. She's the athletic type. Threw a horseshoe over the peg at ninety feet once. That's pretty good, considerin' the shoe was still on the horse at the time. (*Hands in pockets.*) You boys aimin' on stayin' a while?

HERCULES: Well, we – that is –

CLAUDE: You'll like it. Nice and quiet.

HERCULES: Is – is – Uncle Bob a sure enough undertaker, Claude?

CLAUDE: He's a mortician, son, if that's what you mean. Yep. He's been here about two months, I reckon. (*Lucas and Hercules look at each other, gulp.*) Just make yourselves to home. (*They don't budge.*) Go ahead. (*Hercules looks at Lucas painfully, removes hat, and hesitantly drops hat on desk, right.*)

LUCAS: (*Pointing right.*) Where – does that door go to, Claude?

CLAUDE: Leads into the rest of the house, son. Living room – dining room – kitchen – so forth.

HERCULES: (*Hands behind back.*) If it goes into the rest of the house – and that one there (*Jerking head left.*) goes outside, where does (*Pointing center quickly then hands behind back again.*) that one go to?

CLAUDE: Leads right square into the mortuary, son.

LUCAS: (*Eyes wide.*) You mean... (*Swallowing hard.*) that's where people go after they die?

CLAUDE: Yep. That's the place.

HERCULES: (*Blurting out.*) Gosh, it must be awful hot in there.

CLAUDE: That's just the first stop, son. Well, shore hope you fellers enjoy your stay here. Reckon I'll finish doin' up my work and hit the hay. Yep. Early to bed, early to rise is my motto. Always get up at five o'clock – run around the house till five fifteen – and then eat a hearty breakfast at five thirty.

LUCAS: Why do you do that, Claude?

CLAUDE: Only way I can get back to bed by five forty five. Well, I'll see you. (*He starts left, stops.*) Oh yes, you better heat me my dozen biscuits, Daphne. (*To the boys.*) Just a little something she does fer me ever night. (*Flexes muscles.*) Builds up my muscles.

HERCULES: You eat a dozen biscuits every night?

CLAUDE: Nope – throw 'em at the cats. Well, see you in the morning. (*Starting right again.*) Come along, Daphne. (*Claude and Daphne exit right.*)

LUCAS: I don't like this, Hercules. I never stayed in a funeral home before and I ain't goin' to tonight neither. I'm goin' home. (*He picks up suitcases again.*)

HERCULES: Now wait a minute, Lucas. You can't walk out on me.

LUCAS: Who's walkin'? I'm runnin', boy.

HERCULES: But me and you is best friends, Lucas.

LUCAS: I can see you but I can't hear you.

HERCULES: (*Getting in front of him.*) I asks you to spend a weekend with me at my aunt and uncle's. You accepts. They're expecting you.

LUCAS: Yeah – but I wasn't expecting them to be undertakers. If I had my way, no.

HERCULES: Look Lucas, you can't leave me here by myself. Me and you is pals.

LUCAS: (*Glaring.*) Yeah. Some pal. Bringin' me to a – a mortuary. If you think I'm going to hang around and watch myself get embalmed, you're nuts. Off your rocker. Now get out o' my way.

HERCULES: We've stuck through thick and thin together, Lucas. What did I do the day Eddie Jones jumped on you?

LUCAS: You ran for help.

HERCULES: And what did I do the day Caleb Pierce knocked out your two front teeth?

LUCAS: What?

HERCULES: I put 'em under your pillow, that's what. You can't leave me, Lucas. We've gone through too much together.

LUCAS: Look, Herc. You're my best friend. And we're both each other's best friends. But if you think I'm going to hang around while you visit relatives that are undertakers, you've lost your marbles. (*With finality.*) I'm goin' home.

HERCULES: (*In front of him again.*) But Lucas, what'll I tell 'em?

LUCAS: Tell 'em I dropped dead. On second thought, you better not. They'll have me in there on a slab.

HERCULES: But, Lucas, Uncle Bob's my uncle . . . and Aunt Mary's my aunt. And I didn't know they was undertakers.

LUCAS: (*Seriously.*) I never thought of undertakers havin' relatives before. They just don't strike me as the type.

HERCULES: Me neither. (*Sitting.*) This hits me as quite a shock.

Celeste Nelson, Hercules' cousin, enters right.

LUCAS: I've seen 'em on the streets, boy. And you ain't kiddin' me, they don't have folks. I'm getting' out of here, Hercules, I'm – (*And he stops short when he sees Celeste, drops suitcases.*)

CELESTE: Hi.

LUCAS: (*Eyes lighting up.*) Wow. (*Catching himself.*) I mean hi.

CELESTE: (*Crossing to Hercules.*) We were afraid you weren't coming, Hercules.

LUCAS: I'm Lucas.

CELESTE: We waited and waited at the depot.

LUCAS: I'm Lucas.

HERCULES: We made a mistake, Celeste. Took the bus instead.

LUCAS: I'm Lucas.

CELESTE: I'm just so excited you're here. We've all been looking forward to it.

LUCAS: I'm Lucas.

CELESTE: (*Turning to Lucas.*) And I'll bet this is Lucas.

LUCAS: I'm Lucas. I mean yeah, sure, this is me.

HERCULES: This is my cousin Celeste, Lucas.

LUCAS: (*Astonished.*) Cousin Celeste? You mean your uncle – your aunt - this is their – Where'll I put my suitcases?

CELESTE: We've got a barbecue and lots of things planned. I hope you can stay the whole weekend.

HERCULES: Well I don't know, Celeste, if Lucas leaves, we –

CELESTE: (*Breaking in.*) You weren't planning on leaving before then, were you, Lucas?

LUCAS: Who? Me? I don't even know what he's talkin' about. Like I says to Herc, my old buddy, a few minutes ago, "Herc, I'm glad I was asked to your uncles and I shall consider it a great honor to stay the whole weekend."

CELESTE: We'll have just loads of fun. Lucas, I just never dreamed you'd be so handsome.

LUCAS: (*Pulling at tie.*) I may even have to send home for some more clothes. (*They gaze at each other.*) After all, I just brought seven shirts.

CELESTE: (*To Hercules.*) I guess you were sorta surprised when you found out Daddy was a mortician, weren't you?

HERCULES: Well I – that is – (*He stops.*)

CELESTE: We've just had the funeral home a few weeks. And man, it sorta gave us the creeps at first. Some of the kids are actually scared to come here. Can you imagine that? I'll bet you weren't were you, Lucas?

LUCAS: Me? Scared? Naaaa. (*Strutting around.*) Takes more than that to scare old Lucas. If I had my way, yes. You won't believe this, but one night on Halloween I went to a haunted funeral home. Not just an ordinary funeral home but a haunted one and –

A loud crash is heard off center.

LUCAS: (*Stopping, terrified, eyes wide.*) What was that?

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CELESTE: I don't know. (*Looking center.*) It came from in there.

HERCULES: Isn't that the place – the place – ain't that where – I'm goin' home.

CELESTE: (*As the door opens slowly.*) Someone's opening the door. That's funny, I didn't think there was a living soul in there.

LUCAS: (*Exploding.*) Living soul?

CELESTE: (*Standing by the door.*) Sssshh.

As the door opens, Lucas and Hercules jump behind the sofa. Stevie pokes her head in center. She has a mystery under her arm right now.

STEVIE: Hi.

CELESTE: What in the world are you doing?

STEVIE: I'm playin' follow the leader.

CELESTE: Who with?

STEVIE: Just me. I'm the only one brave enough to follow myself in there.

CELESTE: Lucas and Hercules are here. And I want you to meet Lucas.

STEVIE: (*Turning.*) Hi. (*Looking around.*) Where is he?

LUCAS: (*Standing up behind sofa.*) Hi.

CELESTE: Is something wrong, Lucas?

LUCAS: Wrong? Naw, I – I – (*Looking under sofa.*) just lost something.

STEVIE: Probably his nerve.

CELESTE: Now do try to act decent. Lucas, I want you to meet my little sister.

STEVIE: (*Striding toward him.*) The name's Steve. (*Extending hand, fingers together, thumb sticking up.*) Expand the hand, Sam.

LUCAS: (*As they shake hands.*) Steve?

STEVIE: Yeah. Up to last year they thought I was a boy.

CELESTE: It's really Stevie, you know, short for Stephanie.

HERCULES: (*Standing up sheepishly.*) Hey.

STEVIE: Well if it ain't my old cousin Hercules. Glad to see you, Cous. Pull up a body and sit down.

CELESTE: What were you doing in there?

STEVIE: (*Waving magazine.*) Reading.

LUCAS: (*Reading title.*) “Fantastic Hair-raising and Supernatural Thrillers.” You were reading this in there?

STEVIE: I wasn’t makin’ paper airplanes. Anyway, I like it in there. (*Dramatically.*) I – am going to be an undertaker. I’m following in my father’s footsteps. But it keeps me on my alert. I keep falling into holes. (*She strides out right.*)

CELESTE: (*Walking after her to door.*) Stevie, you promised Mother you’d behave this weekend. (*Coming back to the boys.*) My goodness, but she does humiliate me. There just oughta be some kind of an ordinance against sisters between the ages of ten and twelve. I hope you won’t be scared here, Lucas. Like I say, some of the kids are. There’s really nothing to be afraid of, though. And anyway, it’s empty now.

HERCULES: (*Pointing center.*) You mean there’s no one – no one – that is –

CELESTE: We haven’t had a funeral for three or four days and there’s none in the near future, Hercules. I sure hope you’re comfortable here. Oh by the way, you boys will sleep up in Stevie’s and my room and we’ll sleep in here.

LUCAS: (*Chivalry bursting out.*) You most certainly will not. Me and Hercules will sleep in here. Won’t we, Herc old man?

HERCULES: (*Thrusting out chest.*) We certainly will. (*In a stage whisper.*) She did say there wasn’t anyone in there, didn’t she?

LUCAS: Yeah.

HERCULES: (*Clenching fists, louder.*) We certainly will.

LUCAS: We ain’t going to put no one to any trouble. Are we, Herc.

HERCULES: We certainly ain’t. (*To Lucas again.*) You sure she said it was empty?

LUCAS: Sure I’m sure.

HERCULES: (*Thrusting out chest again.*) We certainly ain’t.

CELESTE: I’m sure glad Hercules brought you, Lucas. You’re such a gentleman.

LUCAS: And I’m glad he asked me to come. If I had my way, yes.

CELESTE: (*As they start right.*) I’ll show you around the house so you can meet everyone and get acquainted. And then we’ll raid the fridge.

HERCULES: Sounds good. We ain’t had nothin’ to eat since we got off the bus fifteen minutes ago. (*They exit right.*)

As they exit, Mrs. Nelson and Granny enter left. Aunt Mary is 35 or so, attractive and very pleasant. She's the one stabilizing factor in the whole household and spends most of her time looking after members of her tumultuous brood, not the least of which is Granny. Granny is Uncle Bob's grandmother, is about 80, and she's really a "ball of fire." She's full of life, is always cracking jokes, and is quite a hepcat. Granny has attractive gray hair, a winning smile, and always dresses neatly.

AUNT MARY: *(As they enter, she's removing her gloves.)* Maybe we should have waited for the next train, Granny.

GRANNY: Nonsense. We waited for three of them. The boys have had time to walk it by now. Anyway, if Hercules is anything like his father, they probably went in the opposite direction.

AUNT MARY: I'm worried. Do you think we should call the police?

GRANNY: Not unless he shows up. Then the whole force should be alerted.

AUNT MARY: *(Laughing.)* Granny, he couldn't be as bad as all that.

GRANNY: Oh couldn't he? My dear, you don't know Hercules.

AUNT MARY: I do. And I think he's a little dear.

GRANNY: Could be. At least that would explain his horns. *(She cackles out.)* I'm only joking, Mary. The boy's just full of life.

AUNT MARY: *(Spotting the suitcases.)* Look. Suitcases. Four of them. Maybe he's here.

GRANNY: If he is he brought his scout troop. I'll see if it's him. *(She peaks in a suitcase.)* It's him.

AUNT MARY: How do you know?

GRANNY: He's in the suitcase. *(Opening a suitcase a crack again.)* No – that's a shoe tree. The pointed head fooled me completely. My goodness, I do believe there's a dead frog in here.

AUNT MARY: *(Laughing.)* Granny, you're not serious.

GRANNY: My mistake, Mary. *(Closing suitcase.)* It's a dead mouse. The frog section is probably in another suitcase.

AUNT MARY: Have you ever met the little Maxwell boy, Granny?

GRANNY: Oh, yes. On my last visit he was over three times – morning, noon, and night. And he's the athletic type, Mary. He ran through everything in the house.

AUNT MARY: (*Apprehensively.*) I was warned to nail all the furniture to the floor.

GRANNY: Oh, he's just like any other boy. Yes, I guess you had better nail down the furniture. But mark my word, the boy'll be a terrific football player someday. One afternoon after school they were playing in the back yard and Lucas got the ball and ran past the others like they weren't even there.

AUNT MARY: My goodness, but he must be athletic.

GRANNY: (*Chuckling.*) He is. And he'd a scored too if I hadn't tackled him on the goal-line.

AUNT MARY: Well, I guess they're around the house somewhere. Shall we go face the charge?

GRANNY: I'm game, Mary. I've been in training for three days. (*She flexes her muscles.*) We'd better tell Bob they're here, hadn't we?

AUNT MARY: I rather doubt if he's back yet. The ambulance wasn't in the garage, so he was evidently called out suddenly. (*As they cross right.*) My goodness, I did hope we wouldn't have anything to do this weekend. (*They exit.*)

Claude enters center. He's now minus his shirt, but still has his hat parked atop his head.

CLAUDE: (*As he enters, blinking, tugs on a rope key chain and drags out a pocket watch.*) Nine thirty. Gettin' so they drag a person out of bed all hours of the night. (*Yawning.*) Reckon I oughta be used to it by now. (*Falls into a chair.*) Gettin' so they don't have any respect for the living.

Mr. Nelson enters left. He's about forty or so, and although he's a mortician, he's a jovial family man and loves a good time, too. His hair is graying just a little about the temples. He is wearing a business suit.

UNCLE BOB: Good evening, Claude.

CLAUDE: (*Dismally.*) Evenin', Mr. Nelson. (*Yawns again.*)

UNCLE BOB: Sleepy?

CLAUDE: Yep.

UNCLE BOB: Better run around the house a couple of times.

CLAUDE: Did. Tuckered me out so I fell asleep. Who's the new tenant?

UNCLE BOB: Jason T. Quigley, Claude.

CLAUDE: Quigley-Claude. *(Scratching head.)* No wonder he died. That name'd kill anyone.

UNCLE BOB: *(Enunciating it.)* Quigley. The Jason T. Quigley, by the way.

CLAUDE: You mean the one that owns the Quigley building?

UNCLE BOB: That did own it.

CLAUDE: And amassed such a fortune?

UNCLE BOB: The very one.

CLAUDE: And is richer than anyone in town?

UNCLE BOB: None other.

CLAUDE: *(Simply.)* Never heard of him. *(Yawning again.)*

UNCLE BOB: Then it's high time you two got acquainted. Get some of the boys to help you bring him in. *(He crosses to phone.)*

CLAUDE: *(Rising.)* Mr. Quigley, huh. And him with all that money. I remember my old Uncle Jim always said, "Son, you can't take it with you." He was the bright one of the family. But Uncle Jim did.

UNCLE BOB: He took it with him?

CLAUDE: Yep. He got his head caught in the printing press and we couldn't get him loose. Came as quite a shock to Aunt Maud. He was printing her monthly allowance at the time. Sorta cut off her circulation. Come to think of it, it cut off Uncle Jim's circulation, too. *(Strolling left.)* Well, I reckon I'll wheel in the remains. *(Exits.)*

UNCLE BOB: *(Into phone.)* Coroner's office, please. *(He whistles for a few seconds, then stops.)* Hello. George? This is Bob Nelson. Yeah. Jason Quigley. That's right, George, Jason T. Quigley. Oh, it's routine enough. His heart. After all, the old boy's speedometer was practically registering in the three brackets. Funeral will be sometime next week, I guess. Closest relative was his younger sister, and then he had a granddaughter, I think.

Claude and Henry, the helper, enter left, carrying a sheet-covered figure on a stretcher.

CLAUDE: Yep. Reckon he's dead all right. I mentioned taxes, smog and women drivers and he just smiled back at me. *(They go out center.)*

UNCLE BOB: *(Still talking on phone.)* Why you suspicious and sanguinary old so and so. I hate to disappoint you, old man, but it all seems quite on the up and up. Sorry to disturb your checker game. Goodnight George. *(He hangs up.)*

Henry, the helper, comes back out center.

HENRY: Is that all, Mr. Nelson?

UNCLE BOB: All for tonight, Henry. See you in the morning.

HENRY: Okay. Goodnight.

UNCLE BOB: Goodnight.

HENRY: *(At door left.)* Someone's coming up the walk, Mr. Nelson.

UNCLE BOB: *(Crossing left.)* Thank you, Henry.

Henry exits left, and Madeline Quigley enters with Mr. Schuster. Madeline is Mr. Quigley's sister. She's about forty-five or thereabouts, walks very straight. She's austere, with very penetrating eyes. Her steel gaze is perhaps indicative of her inner self, and she gives one the impression that she's never even as much as smiled. She's attired in black, and dabs occasionally at her eyes with a handkerchief. Her companion, Mr. Schuster, is the family lawyer. He's a suspicious-looking and acting little fellow of about her age. He's nervous, flighty, fidgety and irritable and is incessantly scratching the corner of his mustache. He has a monotonous habit of holding his hat in both hands and moving it in a circular motion, increasing the pace as the tension increases inside him.

MR. SCHUSTER: How do you do. I'm Mr. Schuster, lawyer for Jason T. Quigley. This is his sister, Madeline Quigley.

UNCLE BOB: How do you do. *(She nods slightly.)*

MR. SCHUSTER: You are Mr. Nelson, I presume?

UNCLE BOB: *(Engrossed with the hat's movement.)* Huh? *(Catching himself.)* Oh yes. Yes.

MR. SCHUSTER: Our visit pertains to the funeral, Mr. Nelson. I understand everything is to be in your hands.

UNCLE BOB: That's the arrangements, I believe.

MR. SCHUSTER: Yes. (*Scratching mustache.*) Madeline – Miss Quigley – prefers to have the funeral just as soon as possible. Isn't that correct, my dear?

MADELINE: Yes. (*Sniffing, dabbing at her eyes.*) Poor Jason.

MR. SCHUSTER: We would prefer to have it (*Twirling hat again.*) Monday?

UNCLE BOB: Well that's rather sudden and –

MR. SCHUSTER: (*Breaking in sharply.*) My dear fellow, that's three days. I hardly think it necessary to proclaim a "Bury Jason Quigley" week.

MADELINE: Harry, must you speak in such a vulgar fashion? After all – (*Sniffing again.*) Poor Jason.

MR. SCHUSTER: I'm sorry my dear. It's just that we'd rather get it all over with as soon as possible. Madeline's rather sickly and any prolongation would no doubt aggravate her condition.

MADELINE: You're so kind to think of me, Harry.

UNCLE BOB: But would that give us ample time to notify all the family?

MR. SCHUSTER: The only other living relative is a granddaughter – Nicholle – she lived with him, and Madeline.

UNCLE BOB: What about her parents?

MR. SCHUSTER: They're deceased. An accident a couple of years ago.

UNCLE BOB: I see. I'm terribly sorry, I –

MR. SCHUSTER: (*Breaking in again, curtly.*) You needn't be. She's well taken care of. And she shall continue to be. Shan't she Madeline?

MADELINE: Of course, Harry. (*Dabs at eyes again.*)

MR. SCHUSTER: Then I presume it's all settled. The funeral will be Monday.

UNCLE BOB: Well, I –

MR. SCHUSTER: (*Again breaking in, quickly.*) Monday morning. (*Mr. Nelson opens mouth, starts to speak, but is again cut off.*) Early.

MADELINE: He had a new gray suit. We'll bury him in that. Jason always looked so nice in gray.

MR. SCHUSTER: (*His arm about her.*) You must be strong, Madeline. After all – don't forget your condition.

MADELINE: I'll try, Harry. But it's all so terribly, terribly sudden.

UNCLE BOB: (*Reluctantly.*) Well, if you insist, we'll have the funeral in the chapel at 10:00 Monday morning.

MR. SCHUSTER: Thank you, Mr. Nelson. It's better this way, as we've lots of papers to go over and things to straighten out. (*Pause.*) The – will, you know. (*Puts hat on.*)

UNCLE BOB: The little girl. You say she's here?

MADELINE: At the house. Yes. The poor dear was asleep and she doesn't know about it yet. (*Mr. Schuster removes hat again.*) I do so dread telling her.

MR. SCHUSTER: I'll inform her in the morning, Madeline.

MADELINE: Thank you, Harry. You're so understanding.

MR. SCHUSTER: (*Parking hat atop head again.*) Well – (*Scratching corner of mustache again.*) We'll be off. (*Extending hand to Mr. Nelson.*) I'll call you in the morning, Nelson, and make further arrangements.

MADELINE: Goodnight. (*As she turns.*) Poor, poor Jason.

MR. SCHUSTER: (*His arm around her as they go out left.*) Now, now, my dear. We must be strong.

They exit, with Mr. Nelson looking after them, hand on chin thoughtfully.

UNCLE BOB: (*Thoughtfully.*) There's something there somewhere that just doesn't quite add up. (*He thrusts hands in pockets, paces studiously.*)

AUNT MARY: (*Entering right.*) What doesn't add up, dear?

UNCLE BOB: What? (*Looking up.*) Oh, nothing, Mary. I was just thinking out loud, I guess.

AUNT MARY: The boys are here, Bob.

UNCLE BOB: Fine.

AUNT MARY: Daphne will make the bed for them in here. I insisted that we sleep in here – and the girls insisted they sleep in here – and they insisted they would sleep in here. So that's the way it'll be. Grab a couple of suitcases, dear; we'll take them into the other room.

They each take a suitcase in each hand.

AUNT MARY: You'll really get a big bang out of Lucas. And he and Celeste are hitting it off in a big way.

UNCLE BOB: *(Smiling.)* Fine. I was hoping I could take the boys rabbit hunting tomorrow. Now I don't know whether we'll make it or not.

Daphne enters right, her arms piled high with blankets, sheets, and a couple of pillows.

DAPHNE: The stuff, Mrs. Nelson.

AUNT MARY: All right, Daphne. You may make their bed any time.
(She and Uncle Bob exit right.)

Daphne pulls out the bed part of the sofa, and starts spreading sheets, blankets, etc. Claude comes sauntering in center.

CLAUDE: Howdy. *(She doesn't answer. He plants himself in front of her.)*

DAPHNE: *(Glaring at him.)* Ain't you gone to bed yet?

CLAUDE: Yep. But had to get right back up. The call came. Had to bring in Mr. Quigley. Whatcha doin' Daphne?

DAPHNE: What do you think I'm doing? I'm putting up a Christmas tree. *(Spreading sheet.)* Grab hold of that other end. *(He bends over, starts to smooth sheet.)*

CLAUDE: *(As he stoops.)* Ouch. *(He grabs back.)* Reckon my days are numbered, Daphne. *(He walks around room holding back.)*

DAPHNE: You ain't foolin' nobody.

CLAUDE: You mean everyone knows I'm just workin' my way through here?

DAPHNE: Every one knows when there's work to do you start ailin'. Now come over here and grab. *(He mosies over.)*

CLAUDE: You know what I need more than anything in the world, Daphne? *(He sits on edge of bed.)*

DAPHNE: *(Throwing a pillow at him.)* Get off o' the bed.

CLAUDE: *(Rising.)* I need love – understanding – sympathy.
(Sitting again.)

DAPHNE: *(Glaring.)* Get off o' the bed.

CLAUDE: *(Rising again, following her around the bed as she smooths blanket.)* Nothin' would give me greater pleasure than to take you fer dead or worse, Daphne.

DAPHNE: *(Glaring at him, hands on hips, holding pillow.)* What are you drivin' at? *(Squints at him suspiciously.)*

CLAUDE: *(Turning back to her, bashfully.)* I was just thinkin' it would look sorta nice seein' my shovel standin' next to your broom.

She raises the pillow high over her head with both hands, and then really lets Claude have it, right on the noggin. Then she goes right on making the bed. He edges to bed again and sits.

CLAUDE: *(Painfully.)* Ain't you got anything to say, Daphne?

DAPHNE: *(barking.)* Yeah. Get off o' the bed.

He rises, chagrined, his hands buried deep in his pockets.

CLAUDE: Well, reckon I'll take a last look around and then – drag myself dismal-like to bed. *(He turns at door center, sadly.)* Once I had the purtiest little old gal in the country. Thought a lot of her. Reckon she did o' me, too. One day I asked her to be mine. *(Dismally.)* She accepted.

DAPHNE: *(Looking up from her work.)* What happened?

CLAUDE: *(Sadly.)* Nothin'. We was only three years old at the time.
(He exits center.)

Daphne, singing a forlorn little ditty, puts the finishing touches to the boys' bed and exits. As she does, Lucas and Hercules come in right, with Celeste. The boys are attired in very loud pajamas.

CELESTE: I hope you'll be comfortable.

LUCAS: If I had my way yes, we'll be comfortable. Don't you worry about us, Celeste.

HERCULES: *(Bouncing onto the bed with his feet.)* Wow, no. *(And he bounces across the bed, then onto the floor again.)*

CELESTE: Well, I'll see you in the morning.

LUCAS: Yeah.

CELESTE: Real early.

LUCAS: (*Melting.*) Yeah.

CELESTE: Well, goodnight.

LUCAS: Goodnight.

Hercules hops into bed – pulls up cover, turning back to audience.

CELESTE: (*Turning at door, right.*) If you need anything just whistle.

LUCAS: Yeah.

CELESTE: Well, goodnight, Lucas.

LUCAS: Goodnight. (*And she exits right. He sits on edge of bed.*)

How did a rascal like you ever have a cousin like her? She's really nice. If I had my way yes. And so's her Mom and her Pop. I'm really glad I came.

HERCULES: Yeah – me too.

Lucas crawls into bed, lies on back with hands under head, continues jabbering.

LUCAS: Yessir, her Pop's really nice. He's just like anyone else's Pop. I'm really glad I came.

HERCULES: Yeah – me too.

LUCAS: You know, when I found out he was a mortician I figured he'd talk like that undertaker on the radio and be dressed in black and stuff like that. I'm really glad I came.

HERCULES: Yeah – me too.

LUCAS: (*Up on one elbow.*) And I figured the place would be really scary with bodies leanin' in the corners and stretched out on slabs and stuff like that. I just never figured undertakers could be such fine fellows. Never figured they had daughters like Celeste, either. I'm really glad I came.

HERCULES: (*Mumbling.*) Yeah – me too.

LUCAS: No sir, there ain't nothin' to be scared of, Hercules old man. (*He clambers out of bed.*) I'll turn out the light.

HERCULES: Yeah – me too. (*Snores.*)

Claude enters center.

CLAUDE: *(As he enters.)* Howdy, son.

LUCAS: Hi, Claude. I thought you was in bed.

CLAUDE: Nope – on my way now, son. Had to take care of some business.

LUCAS: I was just fixin' to turn out the light. *(He crosses to switch by door, center.)*

CLAUDE: Had to bring in Mr. Quigley. Poor old boy ran out of gas.

LUCAS: Ran out of gas, huh?

CLAUDE: Yep. So I carried in the body. He's in the next room now. Funeral's going to be next week. Goodnight, son.

LUCAS: Goodnight, Claude.

Claude exits left.

LUCAS: *(Hand on light switch.)* Ran out of gas. Huh. *(Absently.)* Carried the body into the next room. Things is tough all over these days and – *(He stops, becomes suddenly rigid, eyes get wide, explodes.)* Body? *(His teeth start to chatter.)* Her–Her–Hercules. *(Hercules answers by a long snore.)* H-H-H-Hercules, w-w-wake up. *(He shakes him.)*

HERCULES: *(Mumbling.)* Yeah. Me too. *(He turns over sleepily, facing audience.)*

LUCAS: *(Trembling, terrified.)* Th-th-there's a body in the next room, Hercules.

HERCULES: *(Drowsily.)* Shut up and go to sleep.

LUCAS: Th-th-there's a – they've brought in a – *(Pointing center.)* There's a body in there, Herc.

HERCULES: *(Pushing himself up, blinking.)* Quit shoutin'. What do I care if there's a body in there. *(He lies down again, then stands bolt upright in bed, shouting.)* A body?

LUCAS: *(Nodding quickly.)* Claude just brought him in. He's in there.

HERCULES: *(Jumping over back of sofa, grabbing hat, pulling it down over his ears.)* I'm goin' home. *(And he starts left.)*

LUCAS: *(Grabbing hold of Hercules' pajama top.)* You can't run out, Herc.

HERCULES: Well I ain't gonna hang around and be carried out, I'll tell you that right now. I'm goin' home.

LUCAS: But what'll you say to your uncle?

HERCULES: I'll tell him to ship home my suitcase. *(Starts left again, with Lucas still tugging at him.)*

LUCAS: Wait a minute, Herc. *(Hercules stops.)* Let's be brave about this. How old are you, Hercules old man?

HERCULES: I'm thirteen.

LUCAS: And what are you goin' on?

HERCULES: The train. *(Starts left again.)* So long, Lucas.

LUCAS: You're practically a man. Fourteen. Men don't get scared of – of things like that. They'd analyze it from a distance.

HERCULES: That's what I'm going to do – from a hundred mile distance.

LUCAS: They'd realize there's absolutely nothing to be afraid of. Herc old man, the thing for you to remember is that that man stretched out on a slab is dead.

HERCULES: Well, that's not for me. Goodbye. *(Tries to pull away from Lucas.)*

LUCAS: *(Holding fast to Hercules' pajamas.)* Therefore he can't possibly hurt us. Be broadminded – sensible – you ain't a little kid no more. Face it.

HERCULES: Yeah, I'm brave – I'm a man – I'm – goin' home. *(And he starts left again. Then he stops, turns.)* You're right, Lucas. I – just lost control for a second. Don't squeal on me.

LUCAS: I was a little scared at first myself. Come on. Let's hit the sack.

They cross to bed again. Hercules tosses hat on desk again, and then they crawl into bed, pulling up the cover as they talk.

HERCULES: After all, there's nothing to be afraid of. It's when people are alive you have to fear 'em. Right?

LUCAS: Right.

They turn over, prepare to sleep. Hercules pushes himself up on his elbow.

HERCULES: Turn out the light, Lucas.

LUCAS: (*Pushing himself up.*) You're closer than I am. You turn it out.

The door center opens a crack, a hand reaches out, fingers groping for the light switch

HERCULES: (*Glaring at Lucas.*) You're scared.

LUCAS: (*Glaring right back.*) Who's scared?

HERCULES: You are, that's who. After all, there's nothin' to be afraid of.

LUCAS: (*Clambering out of bed.*) I'll show you whether I'm scared or not.

He starts center. Just before he reaches the door, the hand finds the switch, flips it, and the room is plunged into darkness.

HERCULES: You know something, Lucas. I didn't think you'd have the nerve to do it. Guess you're braver than I gave you credit for.

No response – all is quiet.

HERCULES: Scoot over, Lucas. You're crowdin' me, Lucas. Move your cold feet. Wow, they're just like ice. Move over, Lucas, before I kick you out of bed.

LUCAS: (*From another part of the room.*) Her-Her-Hercules. I-I-I got news for you.

HERCULES: Whazzat?

LUCAS: I ain't in bed. And I didn't turn out the light, either.

HERCULES: (*Gulping.*) Then who did? (*Louder.*) And who's this in bed with me? Answer me, Lucas. Speak to me, Lucas.

LUCAS: I'm lookin' for the light switch.

He finds it – flips on the light. A figure is lying in bed where Lucas was, the sheet pulled over his face.

HERCULES: *(As lights come on, spotting figure.)* Yikes. *(And he jumps over back of sofa again.)* Lucas. *(He runs to him, leaps up into his arms, points.)* There's someone in bed.

LUCAS: *(Dropping him.)* You're out o' your head. *(He crosses to bed, peers under sheet, then stands bolt up right, terrified.)* Yikes. *(And he jumps into Hercules' arms.)*

HERCULES: *(Dropping him.)* I'm getting' out of here. *(Crosses, puts on his hat again.)* Things like this just don't happen, boy. Who – who is it?

LUCAS: *(Numbed.)* I never saw him before. Or no one that looked like him. I think it's the fellow that was *(Pointing center quickly.)* in there.

HERCULES: Then how'd he get in here? And in our bed?

LUCAS: Stop talkin' and start runnin', Herc.

HERCULES: *(Pointing.)* L-I-look – he's movin'. *(An arm drops out from under the sheet, dangles toward the floor.)*

LUCAS: *(Eyes wide.)* Great gallopin' ghosts.

They creep toward sofa cautiously as the figure stirs, pushes himself up, blinks. It's Mr. Quigley, the one and the same whom Claude carried in – the one Mr. Nelson referred to as his speedometer registering in the three brackets – and who was the richest man in the whole town. He's attired in a bright red nightshirt.

MR. QUIGLEY: *(Blinking.)* Evenin'.

And the boys jump behind sofa, a chair, etc.

MR. QUIGLEY: Who turned on the light?

Lucas peers over back of sofa.

LUCAS: I-I did. Who turned it off?

MR. QUIGLEY: I did. I can't sleep with an infernal light in my eyes. Now turn it off. *(Snapping fingers.)* Don't just stand there. Turn it off.

HERCULES: *(His eyes popping from his head.)* Who – who are you?

MR. QUIGLEY: My name is Quigley. Jason T. Quigley.

LUCAS: (*Exploding.*) Quigley?

MR. QUIGLEY: My card. (*He reaches inside nightshirt.*) Oh, I just remembered – left them in my coat pocket.

LUCAS: But Mr. Quigley, you're – you're –

MR. QUIGLEY: Dead? Precisely. (*Stretching out again.*) Can't live forever, you know.

LUCAS: (*Coming around sofa.*) But you're supposed to be in (*Pointing center.*) there.

MR. QUIGLEY: Over my dead body. Those dad-blamed marble slabs are just too hard. (*He bounces up and down on bed.*) Now this is more like it.

HERCULES: (*Shaking a fist at him from behind chair.*) You get out of our bed.

MR. QUIGLEY: Your bed? (*Louder.*) Your bed? (*He rises, struts around in his nightshirt.*) Do you live here? (*Hercules shakes his head negatively.*) You payin' to stay here? (*He shakes head again.*) Then stop your gripin' and turn out the light. (*Sits on bed again.*)

LUCAS: Nothin' doin', boy. Hercules' Uncle Bob owns this place and we're visitin' for the weekend and that's our bed and (*The clincher.*) I'm Lucas Maxwell.

MR. QUIGLEY: Visitin' for the weekend, huh? (*He rises. Hercules ventures out from behind chair.*) Well, in that case I guess I'll have to give you your bed back. So you're Lucas and Hercules? (*The boys nod affirmatively.*) Glad to know you, boys. (*He extends hand, they leap back.*) Oh me, I keep forgetting I'm dead. (*Perplexed.*) People always have respect for the dead and are real quiet around 'em, but they refuse to shake hands with 'em. Here, take your bed. I'll – go back in there. I do wish they had better accommodations at these places.

The boys stare after him in open-mouthed awe as he starts center, reaches door, turns.

MR. QUIGLEY: (*Scratching chin.*) By the way, I'll have some orange juice for breakfast – bread toasted on one side – two slices of crisp bacon – and scrambled eggs. Cup of steaming coffee, too. (*He takes a large roll of bills out of his nightshirt pocket.*) Here's something for your trouble. (*Tosses each a bill.*) Oh yes – don't let anyone see you bringin' in my breakfast – or lunch – or dinner.

LUCAS: Lunch and dinner?

MR. QUIGLEY: I get hungry just layin' around not doin' anything. (*He goes out center. The boys pick up the money.*)

HERCULES: (*Whistling.*) Fifty bucks.

LUCAS: Yeah. This is too. We must be losin' our marbles.

HERCULES: Either that or goin' off our rockers. Things like this just don't happen.

LUCAS: I'll say they don't. Not unless he's going to be buried alive or something. I've read of that.

HERCULES: Buried alive? (*Eyes wide.*) You don't think Uncle Bob – Uncle Bob? (*He stops.*)

Mr. Nelson enters right – he is now wearing bathrobe.

UNCLE BOB: Hey, are you fellows still up? I thought I heard voices in here. (*The boys stand at rigid attention.*)

HERCULES: We're – we're – (*Swallowing hard.*) going to bed right now.

LUCAS: Yeah – right now, Mr. Nelson. (*They hop in – pull cover up.*)

UNCLE BOB: Fine. Big day ahead of us tomorrow. See you in the morning, boys. (*He starts right.*)

HERCULES: Uncle Bob.

UNCLE BOB: (*Turning.*) Yes?

HERCULES: Do – do – people walk around after they're dead?

UNCLE BOB: (*Surprised.*) Do they what? Of course they don't.

LUCAS: And eat scrambled eggs – or bread toasted on one side?

UNCLE BOB: You boys have been reading too many thrillers or listening to too many scary radio shows. (*Cordially.*) Now go to sleep.

HERCULES: Yes sir.

LUCAS: Yes sir.

Uncle Bob exits right. Lucas and Hercules look at each other, eyes wide.

LUCAS: Go-go-goodnight, Hercules.

HERCULES: *(Terrified.)* G-g-g-goodnight. Lucas.

They pull cover far over their heads, leaving feet sticking out.
CURTAIN.

ACT TWO

SETTING: *The same; the next evening.*

AT RISE: *Lucas and Hercules, attired as they were in Act One – except Lucas has a clean shirt and is minus tie – are sitting rigidly on sofa, one at each end. Their eyes are wide as they stare into space. Outside it's thundering and lightning. At each roll of thunder the boys look at each other fearfully. Stevie is sitting in chair, reading another fantastic story.*

HERCULES: *(Fearfully.)* It's thundering, Lucas.

LUCAS: *(Shivering.)* Yeah.

STEVIE: *(Excitedly.)* Wow. This is the most exciting story I've ever read. It's about a fellow that was hung up by his hair for five days. It's called "The Case of the Bald Bandit" or "Hair Today and Gone Tomorrow." The one I just finished was about a ghoul who wouldn't stay dead – kept pushin' the lid off the box. *(Tossing it toward Hercules.)* You wanta read it? *(Hercules scoots toward Lucas at far right end.)*

HERCULES: Don't get that thing near me.

STEVIE: Go ahead. Read it. People that don't read ain't educated. They ain't got the remotest reception of what's goin' on in the world. Now take me. I read. I know what's goin' on, Clyde. *(Rambling on.)* Did you know there's a fellow over in Paris that's got three heads?

HERCULES: *(Scooting closer to Lucas.)* I feel ill.

STEVIE: *(Bouncing up.)* You wanta read one, Lucas?

LUCAS: No thank you – I'll stay ignorant.

STEVIE: I read one last week about four bodies comin' back to life at a mortuary and playin' Canasta. After one hand, they dropped dead again. It's called "The Morgue the Merrier."

HERCULES: *(Eyes wide.)* Do – *(Gulping.)* Do you believe bodies could come back to life, Stevie?

STEVIE: Sure. Why not. Anyway, that's what the story said. If you ain't going to believe what's in books, you're lost, Buster.

HERCULES: *(Rising, looking straight out front.)* I'm goin' home.

CELESTE: *(Entering right.)* Hi.

LUCAS: *(Rising, melting again.)* Hi, Celeste.

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CELESTE: *(To Stevie.)* Mother said for you to go in and get ready, Stevie. *(To Boys.)* We may all go to the movies.

HERCULES: That's a good idea.

CELESTE: You'll be crazy about this one. It's a thriller mystery.

HERCULES: I'd rather see Bugs Bunny.

CELESTE: Come along, Stevie. Isn't it terrible. I personally have to hold her under the shower.

LUCAS: That's nothin'. Sometimes it takes four of us to hold Pop under.

CELESTE: Come along and take your shower, Stevie. *(Starts right.)*

STEVIE: *(Sulking.)* Wow, Celeste, it makes the print run.

CELESTE: *(Grabbing magazine.)* And leave that magazine here. *(She tosses it on sofa, then exits with Stevie.)*

Thunder rolls again.

HERCULES: *(Shivering.)* I wish it would stop thunderin', Lucas. I'm scared.

LUCAS: Scared? What you scared of, Hercules? Just cause we're in a funeral home and there's a-a body in there and he gets up and walks around and it's thunderin' ain't no reason - reason *(He swallows hard.)* - I know what you mean.

HERCULES: *(Sitting again.)* I don't get it, Lucas. I may be dumb and lack marbles but things like *(Pointing center.)* just don't happen.

LUCAS: *(Pacing.)* You're right, Herc.

HERCULES: People don't jump off of marble slabs and order scrambled eggs.

LUCAS: You're right, Herc.

HERCULES: Corpses don't trot all over the place in their nightshirts. They stay put.

LUCAS: You're right Herc.

HERCULES: And anybody that says he's seen it happen has got a hole in his head.

LUCAS: You're right, Herc.

HERCULES: *(Rising.)* Hold it, Lucas. Just watch what you say.

LUCAS: *(Sitting, perplexed.)* The thing is we saw it with our own eyes. In our own room. *(Hands clasped between knees.)* I just don't get it. *(Brightening.)* Maybe we didn't see it, Herc. Maybe it was just an optical delusion.

HERCULES: Yeah. We just imagined he turned out the lights - and we just imagined he was talking to us - and we just imagined *(He stops.)* It ain't going to work, Lucas. Them icy feet of his in my back proves that.

LUCAS: Yeah. And them fifty dollar bills.

HERCULES: I just don't get it. *(Pacing.)* Things like that can't happen. Bodies can't come back to life.

Mr. Quigley enters center. He's still attired in the red nightshirt.

HERCULES: And they can't crawl in bed with you - and they can't order scrambled eggs - and they can't - *(Spotting Mr. Quigley, eyes getting wide, freezing.)* I'm goin' home.

LUCAS: *(Standing bolt-up-right.)* What's wrong, Herc? Speak to me, Herc. *(Fearing to look.)*

MR. QUIGLEY: Evenin', gents.

LUCAS: *(Whirling.)* Mr. Quigley. *(Swallowing hard.)*

MR. QUIGLEY: Looks like we might get some rain. Always liked the rain. Used to go walking in it...when I was alive. *(Boys look at each other fearfully; Mr. Quigley stretches.)* Ahhhh, sure feels good to stretch. Gets stiff in there on that slab. You know where the evening paper is?

The boys stand frozen. Lucas tries to pull arm from side, and does after considerable effort, pointing to paper lying on sofa.

MR. QUIGLEY: *(Picks up paper.)* Ah hah---front page. Aged Philanthropist dies suddenly.

LUCAS: *(Whispering.)* He was a philanthropist.

HERCULES: *(Whispering.)* Is that somethin' like a Methodist?

MR. QUIGLEY: (*Reading.*) Jason T. Quigley, one of the city's oldest and most-honored citizens, passed away last night at his home. Death was attributed to natural causes. (*Slamming paper to floor.*) Natural causes? (*Crossing to boys.*) Natural causes? They say it was my heart. But it wasn't my heart. You boys wanta know something? (*Squinting.*) I'd just gone to bed - couldn't sleep - I called for a glass of milk - (*As if exploding a bomb.*) And there was something in that milk.

LUCAS: (*Eyes wide.*) You mean you were—were---

HERCULES: (*Gulping.*) Man.

MR. QUIGLEY: (*Pacing.*) Some one in that house. Someone. But who? And why? (*Crosses to Hercules.*) It couldn't have been my granddaughter, Nicholle. But why would Madeline? Or my lawyer, Mr. Schuster? Why would they do it?

HERCULES: I don't know, Mr. Quigley. I never met 'em.

MR. QUIGLEY: (*Pacing again.*) Yet, who else could it have been Madeline's always treated me kindly. She's cared for me---stayed with me. And Harry Schuster, my lawyer, I've paid him well. (*Crossing to Hercules again.*) Why would he do it?

HERCULES: Don't ask me, Mr. Quigley. I don't know.

MR. QUIGLEY: (*Falling into a chair.*) I don't understand it. (*Head in hands.*) I just don't understand it.

HERCULES: I'm goin' home.

LUCAS: (*Impressed.*) Wow, that's just like the kind of stuff you read in books, Mr. Quigley. If I had my way yes.

HERCULES: I'm goin' home.

LUCAS: In a glass of milk, huh? (*Triumphantly.*) I always figured that stuff'd get a person eventually. That and spinach.

HERCULES: So long, Lucas. (*And he goes out right.*)

LUCAS: (*Rambling on.*) Yessir, that's really exciting. You know something, a good detective - (*He stops, looks around.*) Herc. Where are you, Herc old man? (*Looking under chair, behind sofa.*) Speak to me, Herc. (*He exits right.*)

Mr. Quigley is sitting, chin in hands. Mr. Nelson enters left.

UNCLE BOB: (*As he enters.*) Looks like we might have a little rain.

MR. QUIGLEY: (*Looking up suddenly.*) Huh? Oh, good evening, Mr. Nelson.

UNCLE BOB: Been reading about it in the paper, have you?

MR. QUIGLEY: (*Picking up the paper.*) Yeah. They've got quite a spread about me. I didn't know the funeral was to be Monday.

UNCLE BOB: I didn't either until last night. Your lawyer informed me.

MR. QUIGLEY: (*Rising worried.*) His actions have been quite suspicious. Wonder why he's in such a hurry? Tuesday or Wednesday would have been soon enough. And if we're rushed too much, we'll miss the boat completely.

UNCLE BOB: Yeah. And if we delay it we'll arouse their suspicions completely, too. After all, we can't expect people to keep believing you're dead. It's bound to get out one way or the other. We have to be very careful, Mr. Quigley.

MR. QUIGLEY: I don't know who tried to murder me, Mr. Nelson. Or why. Frankly, it has me baffled. As far as I knew, I had no enemies.

UNCLE BOB: It is quite puzzling. (*Hands in pockets.*) Tell me the whole thing from the first, and perhaps we'll uncover some shred of evidence.

MR. QUIGLEY: (*Walking back and forth, the paper rolled up in his hands.*) Well - I retired last night about nine - couldn't sleep - was restless - my doctor told me a glass of milk before retiring would help me to sleep, so I called for my little granddaughter Nicholle. She brought me the milk.

UNCLE BOB: Had she done this before?

MR. QUIGLEY: Oh yes. Every evening. Well, she brought in the glass of milk - kissed me goodnight - and left. I usually drank the milk down without stopping, but last night took just sip or two and set it on my dresser. Then I felt two acute pains in my stomach.

UNCLE BOB: How soon did you notice these pains?

MR. QUIGLEY: Almost immediately. I suspected then it was poison. Then I remembered Agnes.

UNCLE BOB: Agnes?

MR. QUIGLEY: A mouse that had been spending the nights scampering about my room. So I evolved a plan. I poured some of the milk in an ash tray, set it on the floor, and waited - for Agnes.

UNCLE BOB: Was it a clean ash tray?

MR. QUIGLEY: Oh yes. Well, I waited a few minutes, and Agnes came moseying out. She frolicked about the room, spotted the ash tray of milk, approached it, took a few swallows, and collapsed. Then she pushed herself up - tried desperately to retreat - but collapsed again and arose no more. Agnes was dead

UNCLE BOB: I see. Then what happened?

MR. QUIGLEY: Well, I knew then someone wanted me out of the way. So if that was the case, okay, I'd play along - make everyone think I was dead - and then show up as a spectator at my funeral. So next came my death scene. Did I ever wow 'em. And I might say I was quite realistic, too. Played the lead in my high school play once. Well, just before gasping my last gasp, I had them call you. It was on the way to the hospital that I first told you of my plan.

UNCLE BOB: (*Frowning.*) I'm still not convinced we're doing the right thing.

MR. QUIGLEY: There's nothing illegal about it. You have my permission. After all, I'm really not dead. In fact, I was never so alive in my life. (*Laughing.*) Always did like a good mystery. (*Rubbing hands together enthusiastically.*) And just wait'll I meet the culprit face to face. Someone's going to hit the ceiling.

UNCLE BOB: Rather imagine that would come as quite a shock.

MR. QUIGLEY: Shock? (*Laughs again.*) I'll scare the socks off of 'em. We haven't too much time though, Mr. Nelson. And we can't fail. Our only real weapon is the element of surprise.

UNCLE BOB: That's why you've got to stay in there. We can't have you wandering all over the house. If too many people know you're alive, the word will soon leak out.

MR. QUIGLEY: Okay. But it's quite morbid in there. Anyway, I keep hoping I'll get another glimpse of that lovely woman I saw with Mrs. Nelson.

UNCLE BOB: You mean Granny?

MR. QUIGLEY: (*Exuberantly.*) My goodness but she's a knockout. (He whistles.) And can she jitterbug. (*He kicks a couple of times, makes a clicking sound with tongue.*)

UNCLE BOB: Jitterbug? (*Mr. Quigley nods, puts hands on hips, wiggles a few steps, kicks again.*) You two jitterbugged? (*Mr. Nelson is following Mr. Quigley, who nods, kicks again.*) Where?

MR. QUIGLEY: (*Pointing center.*) In there. What a woman. She's a real gone gal. I think I'm blindly in love with her, every time I see her, my glasses steam over.

UNCLE BOB: (*Smiling.*) Well, you'd better get back to your roost or your plan will not only steam over, it'll burn through. (*He leads him to door center, hand on his shoulder. Mrs. Nelson and Granny enter right.*)

GRANNY: Oh, there you are, Jason.

MR. QUIGLEY: (*Melting.*) Amy.

UNCLE BOB: Mary, I think we're going to have to do something with these two. Since he met Granny, we can't keep Mr. Quigley on his slab. (*They laugh.*) These two have been jitterbugging, Mary.

AUNT MARY: (*Astonished.*) Jitterbugging. (*Granny and Mr. Quigley bend over, clap hands in rhythm a couple of times, then he twirls her once.*)

UNCLE BOB: All right, all right. Granny, I'm afraid you're going to have to keep away from Mr. Quigley.

GRANNY: Nonsense. I know what he's up to. He told me all about it.

UNCLE BOB: Who else knows about it?

MR. QUIGLEY: Just Lucas and Hercules.

UNCLE BOB: You mean they know you're still alive?

MR. QUIGLEY: Oh no. Quite the opposite. They think I'm dead. I believe I scared the living daylight out of them. (*Slyly.*) Regretfully, of course.

AUNT MARY: The poor dears. Then that explains their peculiar behavior.

GRANNY: Thanks heavens for that. The way Hercules was shaking, I thought he had St. Vitus dance.

UNCLE BOB: Okay. Time's up, Mr. Quigley.

MR. QUIGLEY: If you say so, Mr. Nelson. My arm, Amy.

GRANNY: (*Curtsyng.*) Why thank you, Sir Jason.

UNCLE BOB: *(In front of them.)* Oh no, you don't. Not this time. There's business to be done.

GRANNY: Of course there is. And we mean business, don't we, Jason?

MR. QUIGLEY: And how. *(He whistles, kicks one foot in the air.)*

AUNT MARY: Granny.

GRANNY: Oh, all right.

MR. QUIGLEY: *(At door center.)* You know somethin', folks. Looks like I died and found an angel. *(He winks at her, whistles again, and then exits center.)*

AUNT MARY: Granny, just how did you and Mr. Quigley become such good friends?

GRANNY: Well, it's a long story. *(Sitting.)* So I'll tell it. It all really started when I was two years old.

AUNT MARY: Two years old?

GRANNY: Yep. That's when I first found out there was little boys. I probably wouldn't a thought nothin' about it then but one afternoon me and little Albert were playin' house. I remember it as plain as if it were seventy years ago. I was the Mama - he was the Papa - and there was my little doll, Sadie. I remember I turned about, looked at Albert, and it hit me.

AUNT MARY: Love?

GRANNY: No - Sadie. He banged me over the head with her.

AUNT MARY: Granny, what about you and Mr. Quigley?

GRANNY: I'm coming to that. Well, when I was three I met Chester.

AUNT MARY: Granny.

GRANNY: *(Rising.)* Oh all right. It all started when I dropped my tea towel this afternoon.

UNCLE BOB: Your tea towel?

GRANNY: Dropped it out of the upstairs window.

AUNT MARY: *(Astonished.)* And he picked it up?

GRANNY: Nope - picked me up.

AUNT MARY: *(Astonished.)* He picked you up?

GRANNY: Yep, I parachuted down in it.

AUNT MARY: Granny, you didn't!

GRANNY: *(Smiling, slyly.)* Of course I didn't. But it sounds like fun, doesn't it? *(She exits right.)*

AUNT MARY: *(Shrugging.)* For heaven's sakes. *(Seriously.)* Bob, I don't like this at all. This - this business of having Mr. Quigley here like this. It just doesn't seem right.

UNCLE BOB: Now don't worry, Mary. Everything will come out all right and we'll get enough publicity to stay in business for years.

AUNT MARY: *(Sitting, wearily.)* Well, we can certainly use the money all right. After all, I'd like to build a home away from here. Some of the girls' friends won't visit because it's a - a mortuary. And I hate having company sleep in here, too.

UNCLE BOB: Well we won't have to long, dear. You'll have your new home, you bet you will.

AUNT MARY: *(Rising.)* If you say so, Bob. *(She smiles.)* But if I didn't have so much confidence in you, I'd be about ready to pull my hair out - *(As they start right, their arms around each other.)* and yours, too.

UNCLE BOB: Pull yours out, my dear, but I don't have any to spare.

They exit right.

Daphne, enters left, with dust cap on and she's carrying a dust cloth. She's still singing her mournful refrain. She's dusting down left as Claude pokes his head in right, still wearing overalls. He looks around the room, shading his eyes from an imaginary light. Then his eyes light up and a look of glee engulfs his face as he spots Daphne. He tip-toes to the chair right, crouches behind it, then tip-toes behind the sofa, crouches, then tip-toes quickly to chair left, gets behind it, removes hat, and peers over back at Daphne. Continuing her dusting, she moves to chair, hums, dusts, then absently starts dusting his head, looking out front. Her expression changes to one of doubt, she stops, rubs again slowly, turns, glares at Claude.

CLAUDE: *(Peering over back of chair.)* Howdy.

Daphne quickly pops him over the head with the dust cloth, glares, turns, crosses right, turns and glares some more, then exits, with Claude looking at her, rubbing the top of his head. He rises, shrugs hopelessly, thrusts hands deep into pockets, strolls out center.

Dr. Brown enters left, with Nicholle, Mr. Quigley's granddaughter. He's middle aged, hair graying just a trifle. Nicholle is a very cute little girl of about thirteen, Dr. Brown is carrying a black bag.

NICHOLLE: Is this the place, Dr. Brown?

DR. BROWN: This is it, Nicholle.

NICHOLLE: Do I get to see my grandfather now?

DR. BROWN: Soon, dear.

NICHOLLE: I'll miss him awfully, you know. He was the third best person to me in the world. The first two were my mother and father. And now that Grandfather's gone too, that just about makes three strikes on me, doesn't it.

DR. BROWN: Now don't worry, Nicholle. Madeline and Mr. Schuster will take good care of you.

NICHOLLE: *(Sadly.)* Oh sure - I know that, I guess. But a person wants more than just to be taken care of, Dr. Brown. They want someone to talk to and trust and believe in and things like that. Grandfather understood all my problems. Do I get to see him now?

DR. BROWN: *(His hand on her shoulder.)* Soon, Nicholle.

Lucas and Hercules enter right, with Hercules carrying two suitcases. He's wearing his coat.

HERCULES: *(As he enters.)* I don't care what you say, I'm goin' home.

LUCAS: But Hercules.

HERCULES: I ain't hangin' around here another minute, I ain't *(They stop in center of room - not noticing Dr. Brown and Nicholle.)* You can plead with me till your tonsils roll out on the floor. You can't change my mind, boy. I'm a man of decision. When I decide on somethin', that's it.

NICHOLLE: Hi.

HERCULES: *(Eyes wide, dropping suitcases.)* That's it.

NICHOLLE: I'm Nicholle.

HERCULES: You mean you're Mr. Quigley's granddaughter? (*She nods.*) Wow, I've heard about you. You gonna be around for awhile? (*She nods again. He turns to Lucas.*) Well, don't just stand there, boy pick up my bags. (*Lucas glares. Hercules snaps his fingers.*) Go ahead, boy. Step on it, boy.

LUCAS: (*Glaring daggers.*) I'll step on you in a minute, boy.

CELESTE: (*Entering right.*) Nicholle. (*Happily surprised.*)

NICHOLLE: Celeste.

HERCULES: You girls know each other?

CELESTE: We go to the same school. My goodness, I'm glad you dropped in, Nicholle, I –

NICHOLLE: (*Breaking in, sadly.*) It isn't a social call, Celeste. You see, my grandfather, Mr. Quigley, he's - he's – (*She sniffs, stops.*)

CELESTE: (*Sympathetically.*) Oh, I'm sorry. Anyway, you will come on in, won't you?

NICHOLLE: Well, I don't know, I (*She looks at Dr. Brown.*)

DR. BROWN: Go ahead, Nicholle. Trot right along.

NICHOLLE: Thank you, Dr. Brown. Oh by the way, Celeste, this is Dr. Brown. Celeste Nelson.

CELESTE: How do you do. And this is my cousin Hercules Nelson.

HERCULES: Hey.

CELESTE: And his pal, Lucas Maxwell.

LUCAS: Glad to know you.

CELESTE: If you'll excuse us, Dr. Brown.

DR. BROWN: Surely. By the way, is Mr. Nelson here?

CELESTE: I think so. (*Calling.*) Daddy. (*To Hercules.*) What are your suitcases doing in here?

HERCULES: Oh, I drag 'em around to improve my muscles. Yeah.

LUCAS: (*As they start right – he's carrying the bags.*) Then you oughta carry 'em on top of your head – that's where your muscles are.

CELESTE: (*As Mr. Nelson enters.*) Here's Dr. Brown, Father. (*The young folks exit right.*)

UNCLE BOB: Oh, how do you do, Doctor?

DR. BROWN: (*As they shake hands.*) Glad to meet you, Nelson. I was Mr. Quigley's physician.

UNCLE BOB: Yes – he told me about you. Sit down.

DR. BROWN: (*As they sit.*) Nothing derogatory, I hope.

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UNCLE BOB: Oh no – he had implicit faith in you.

DR. BROWN: (*Seriously.*) Nelson, I don't want to shock you, but you haven't discovered anything that would lead you to believe – believe – that would make you suspect – foul play?

UNCLE BOB: What do you mean, Doctor?

DR. BROWN: (*Rising.*) Well, from what I've gathered – you know, bits here and snatches there – things haven't been too tranquil at the Quigley household. (*Pacing slowly, emphasizing points.*) His sister Madeline and his lawyer – some fellow named Schuster – are just like (*Holding up two fingers together.*) that. And for the past few years they've had designs on his entire estate. And I dare say would have gotten it, too – until Nicholle came along.

UNCLE BOB: Oh, I see.

DR. BROWN: She took up with the old man in a big way. They were great pals. Went everywhere together. She was the greatest thing that happened to him since vitamins. Well, naturally, he decided to make a few changes in his will. That was to have been done today. It's superfluous to add that it wasn't.

UNCLE BOB: (*Thoughtfully.*) Well, things are starting to add up.

DR. BROWN: What?

UNCLE BOB: (*Rising.*) Nothing. Nothing at all. I was just mumbling, Doctor.

DR. BROWN: That's why I asked you if there were any signs of foul play. That he died on the eve of the changing of the will seems just a little more than coincidence.

UNCLE BOB: Yes. Well, you may be assured I'll give it plenty of thought, Doctor.

DR. BROWN: That paper said it was his heart. (*A pause.*) Was it his heart, Nelson?

UNCLE BOB: Well, I – I –

DR. BROWN: (*Breaking in, quickly.*) Mind if I see the death certificate?

UNCLE BOB: The death certificate? (*Turning head away suddenly.*) Well, I – that is –

DR. BROWN: *(Hand on his shoulder.)* That's all right, Nelson. I'm sorry I brought it up at all. I realize this has overwhelmed you as it has me, and left you just a little befuddled. I may be wrong about the whole thing. And again – I may not be. Mind if I – take a look around?

UNCLE BOB: Why – why no, Doctor. Not at all. Feel free to roam about at your discretion.

DR. BROWN: *(Cordially.)* Thank you, Nelson. *(He takes black bag and exits left.)*

Mr. Nelson puts hand on chin thoughtfully, then seems to reach a decision. He turns and goes out center. Lucas and Hercules enter right, now attired as detectives. They each have on a hunting cap – backwards. Lucas is wearing one of Uncle Bob's plaid jackets, colored glasses, and is carrying a magnifying glass. Hercules is wearing one of his uncles' rain coats, and it more than drags the floor. He has the collar pulled up high, the cap pulled down low, and is carrying a mirror from a dresser set. He's also wearing colored glasses. Lucas sticks head in door, peers around room, jerks head in a "come on" motion and he and Hercules enter.

LUCAS: *(Jerking head.)* C'mon in.

HERCULES: Yes, Lucas.

LUCAS: And stop calling me Lucas. From now on I'm incognito.

HERCULES: *(Thrusting out hand.)* I'm Hercules.

LUCAS: *(Pushing hand away.)* Incognito means goin' under an assumed name. All us detectives do that. From now on I'm Sherlock Maxwell.

HERCULES: Then I'll be Hercules Spade. What are we lookin' for, Sherlock old chap?

LUCAS: For clues, clues, and more clues. *(Pacing.)* Like I says to you in there, there's somethin' mighty funny goin' on around here.

HERCULES: Yeah. Only to my way of thinkin' it ain't very funny. Maybe I got a distorted sense of humor, boy, but I never did find it amusin' watchin' dead bodies walkin' around. Never thought of Frankenstein as just bein' real hilarious, myself.

LUCAS: What I mean is, there's somethin' fishy goin' on. And we're going to find out what it is.

HERCULES: I'd rather stay in and talk to Nicholle. She's just about the most luscious thing that's come along since root beer floats.

LUCAS: Outside of Celeste that is. (*Gazing into space.*) What a female.

HERCULES: I hate to see a wonderful girl like Nicholle have somethin' like this happen to her. You know something, she thought a lot of her grandfather.

LUCAS: That's why we're bein' detectives, Herc. That's why we've got on this stuff of your uncle's. There's somethin' might peculiar goin' on. We're going to find out what it is. We know stiffs can't walk around. Check?

HERCULES: Check.

LUCAS: And we know there's bound to be somethin' haywire somewhere. Check?

HERCULES: Check.

LUCAS: We'll find what it is or my name ain't - Sherlock Maxwell. I don't think he's dead. Things like that might happen in movies or books like Stevie reads, but it don't happen in real life. And if we untangle all this, you'd really rate as far as Nicholle's concerned.

HERCULES: (*Liking that idea.*) Yeah.

LUCAS: And I'd rate with Celeste, too.

HERCULES: You're right, Lucas old Sherlock. Girls want a man with brains, too. (*Strutting around.*) Just good looks ain't enough.

LUCAS: We'll get to the bottom of this - just for them. Check?

HERCULES: (*Pumping Lucas' hand.*) Check.

LUCAS: All through history women have inspired great men to do great deeds and great actions. If I had my way, yes. Who inspired Sampson?

HERCULES: Hedy Lamarr?

LUCAS: And what drove Napoleon halfway across the world?

HERCULES: A Greyhound bus?

LUCAS: And who was responsible for Julius Caesar's every move?

HERCULES: The rent collector?

LUCAS: It was a woman in every case, Hercules. All through history, wherever you find men – you find women.

HERCULES: That figures. Except in the locker room.

LUCAS: And we're going to crack this case. You got your magnifyin' glass? (*Hercules nods affirmatively.*) Then start lookin' for clues. (*Lucas looks at right of room, peering through the glass. Hercules crosses left, hauls out mirror, peers into it.*)

HERCULES: (*Terrifies.*) Lucas. I've found somethin'. It's real horrible lookin' – with shaggy hair and long teeth.

LUCAS: (*Crossing.*) Where?

HERCULES: In this magnifyin' glass.

LUCAS: Hold it right where it is. Lemme look. (*He takes mirror, peers into it.*) Holy smoke, you're right. Let's get out of here, boy, it – (*He stops, glares at Hercules.*) This is a mirror, stupid. (*Stopping, listening.*) Somebody's comin'. Get behind somethin', Herc.

Lucas hops behind sofa, Hercules behind chair left, as Mr. Nelson enters center. He paces a few steps, deep in thought. Mrs. Nelson enters right.

AUNT MARY: (*As she enters.*) Bob, you're awfully serious. Is anything wrong?

UNCLE BOB: Wrong? Why – why no, not at all, Mary.

AUNT MARY: (*Her arm around him as he sits in chair, and she on the arm.*) Come on, Bob. 'Fess up. What is it?

UNCLE BOB: It's just that, well, I don't know if we're doing the right thing or not, Mary. I mean about Mr. Quigley. After all, he isn't dead and this – this pretense that he is, just doesn't seem right. Even if someone did try to murder him, that's not for us to worry about. That's a matter for the police.

AUNT MARY: Frankly I'm just a little frightened, Bob. I'm afraid we've bitten off more than we can chew.

UNCLE BOB: (*Rising.*) Well, we're in it now. I just hope it's all over soon, Mary. (*Lucas peers over sofa.*)

AUNT MARY: (*As they start right.*) Come along, dear. I'll make you some coffee. And if things don't straighten out soon – we'd better call the police.

UNCLE BOB: A bargain's a bargain, Mary. I gave him my word – and he's going to give me a check for twenty thousand dollars.

AUNT MARY: Twenty thousand? *(She stops.)* I just hope we're alive to spend it. *(They go out right.)*

HERCULES: *(Sticking head over back of chair.)* Did you hear what I heard, Sherlock?

LUCAS: If I had my way, yes, I heard it. *(As they clamber out.)* Just as we figured. He ain't dead.

HERCULES: Yeah – we ain't so dumb.

LUCAS: And someone tried to do him in. Wow. Yessir, if we get to the bottom of this we'll straighten things out for Nicholle and Celeste's folks and everyone.

HERCULES: Yeah – and if things don't turn out right, we'll be straightened out, boy, right in there on a slab.

LUCAS: There ain't nothin' to worry about, Herc. Big detectives always win out in the end. Look at Dick Tracy – Philo Vance – Ellery Queen – just when things look the darkest – and they're about to be done in – they solve the case.

HERCULES: You're right. We ain't got a thing to worry about.

LUCAS: We got to find some clues. You go out to the garage and see if you can find anything.

HERCULES: *(Fearfully.)* The garage? You mean outside?

LUCAS: *(Pushing him left.)* Sure.

HERCULES: In the dark? *(Lucas continues to push him.)* By myself? Well okay, Chief. And if I find anything that even remotely looks like a clue or a murder – I'll call you from home. *(Lucas pushes him out left.)*

LUCAS: Got to find some clues. *(He crawls around on hands and knees, peering through the glass.)*

CLAUDE: *(Entering center.)* Howdy son.

LUCAS: Oh, hi Claude.

CLAUDE: Whatcha doin'?

LUCAS: Lookin' for clues. *(He crosses to desk, starts flinging papers, moves to sofa, throwing cushions across the room.)* I'm going to be a big detective someday. I'm good at figurin' things out.

CLAUDE: *(Following him around.)* Yeah, me too, son. I've figured out everything there is but one – women. Can't be done, son. Now take Daphne fer instance. There's a woman of mystery.

LUCAS: You been havin' words with Daphne, Claude?

CLAUDE: Nope – never have words with her. She don't say nothin' – just stands there and glares at me.

LUCAS: You have a hard winter, don't you, Claude?

CLAUDE: Yep. Spring, summer and fall ain't much better, neither. I've tried everything. Once I proposed. Got down on my knees, son, said "Daphne, old gal, I want you to be my wife...say the two words that'll put me at peace with the world."

LUCAS: What'd she say?

CLAUDE: *(Sinking into a chair.)* Drop dead.

LUCAS: Why don't you just play hard to get awhile. Do you think you could just completely ignore her?

CLAUDE: Reckon so. It ain't as hard as it sounds.

LUCAS: Then that's it. Try that and she'll be eatin' out of your hand.

CLAUDE: Could be, son. *(Hercules enters left.)*

HERCULES: Hey.

LUCAS: Here's Hercules. *(To Claude.)* I sent him out to the garage for clues. You find anything, Herc?

HERCULES: I didn't even find the garage.

LUCAS: Did you see anything that looked like murder?

HERCULES: Yeah – Daphne, the maid.

CLAUDE: *(Rising.)* Reckon she's emptyin' the garbage. Guess I'll take your advice, son. I'm going to just go stand out there and ignore her. *(He exits left.)*

LUCAS: The only thing we've found out yet we found out by hidin', Herc. *(He crosses to desk, gets pad, pencil.)* You hide behind here *(Meaning the sofa.)* and everything of importance that anyone says – write it down.

HERCULES: Gotcha Lucas – uh - Sherlock.

LUCAS: Anything significant – or worthwhile – write it down.

HERCULES: Gotcha Sherlock.

LUCAS: I'm going to look around outside. *(Extending hand.)* See you, Spade.

HERCULES: See, Sherlock. *(They shake, Lucas turns importantly and swaggers to door left, turns.)* I'll see if I can dig something up. *(Exits.)*

Nicholle and Celeste enter right.

NICHOLLE: Hi Hercules. That is you, isn't it?

HERCULES: *(Melting.)* Hi Nicholle. Yep. This is me.

CELESTE: I'm going to take Nicholle in where her grandfather is. She thought an awful lot of him and wants to see him.

NICHOLLE: He was better to me than anyone's been for a long, long time. And now I'm all alone. You won't think I'm a sissy if I cry just a little will you?

HERCULES: There really ain't no need to cry, Nicholle.

NICHOLLE: *(Sniffing.)* But he was so good to me. Now I won't have anyone at all.

HERCULES: But Nicholle – *(Bashfully putting an arm around her, then pulling it back.)* Nicholle – *(Exploding his bomb.)* Your grandfather isn't really dead.

NICHOLLE: All I had and *(She stops sniffing, looks up.)* He what?

HERCULES: He isn't really dead,

CELESTE: *(Sharply.)* If this is your idea of a gag, Hercules Nelson, you'd –

HERCULES: *(Breaking in.)* But it isn't. Me and Lucas saw him and talked to him with our own eyes.

NICHOLLE: *(Hopefully.)* Honest Hercules?

HERCULES: Honest. *(Raises hand as if taking oath.)* Me and Lucas' really smart and we're workin' on the case and that's why we're rigged up like decka-tectives cause someone tried to murder him and he's makin' people think he's dead so they can catch the person what did it. See?

CELESTE: *(Impressed.)* My goodness, you boys are smart.

HERCULES: *(Importantly.)* Yeah. You girls better scram out of here now cause I'm workin' on the case and you might get sucked under by the current. It's plenty dangerous, see. There'll probably be gun play later on.

NICHOLLE: *(Hand on arm.)* Don't let anything happen to you, Hercules.

HERCULES: *(Importantly.)* Don't worry about me. I mean, go ahead and worry about me if you want, Nicholle. You girls better scram now. Come back later and I'll see if I can fix it so you can talk to your Grandpop.

CELESTE: Where's Lucas?

HERCULES: He's outside workin' in and I'm inside workin' out.
We're playin' both ends against the middle.

CELESTE: (*Impressed.*) My goodness.

HERCULES: Better get along now. (*He pushes them out right.*)
Let's see – I'm to write down everything important. Yessir.
(*Climbing over sofa.*) Hercules Spade. I may change that to
Hercules Ellery Whistler Spade. (*He ducks out of sight.*)

Madeline and Mr. Schuster enter left, attired as they were in Act One.

MADELINE: What's the big idea draggin' me here at this hour,
Harry?

MR. SCHUSTER: Stop your gripin', Madeline. You haven't done
anything but gripe for the past two days. Just gripe and growl.

MADELINE: I'm sorry, Harry. I guess my nerves are on edge. After
all, poor Jason's death has been a terrible shock.

MR. SCHUSTER: Oh, I'm sorry, my dear. (*Laughing.*) Terribly sorry.
(*Sarcastically.*) How clumsy of me. I should have known. I'll send
you a wreath tomorrow. I'll send a wreath that floats, so you won't
drown in all those crocodile tears. (*Laughing again.*)

MADELINE: (*Sharply.*) Stop it, Harry. Have you no respect at all?

MR. SCHUSTER: You mean for the dead? Surely not. After all, he's
better off where he is, my dear. He had a nice round full life. It's a
shame he had to leave all that money, though. But we'll spend it
wisely, won't we, my dear?

MADELINE: (*smirking.*) Poor, poor distraught Harry. You remind
me of a gopher who suddenly found he owned every gopher hole
in Minnesota.

MR. SCHUSTER: (*Sarcastically.*) I remind you of a gopher, huh?
My, my, I must look at myself in the mirror.

MADELINE: I'm sorry, Harry. I didn't mean it like that. It's just that
I'm so terribly upset. (*Sitting.*) It's been quite a shock to me.

MR. SCHUSTER: (*Crossing to her.*) It would no doubt have been
more of a shock if he'd changed the will.

MADELINE: How can you say that, Harry?

MR. SCHUSTER: Which he was going to do Saturday. Today, my
dear. The little girl would have gotten everything.

MADELINE: If that's the way he wanted it, then that's the way it should have been.

MR. SCHUSTER: Now the estate goes to you, Madeline. It's all in your hands – in your beautiful, smooth and dainty hands.

MADELINE: You're a sadist if I ever saw one.

MR. SCHUSTER: I'm a realist, my dear. Look at it intelligently. He lived a full life. He enjoyed it. He ate his fill. And should we wail if he leaves a few morsels at the banquet table for us, too? In a few days you'll be singing like a canary.

MADELINE: (*Sniffing.*) Don't Harry. Please don't

MR. SCHUSTER: (*Hands in pockets, seriously.*) All right, Madeline. I'm sorry. Forgive me, my dear.

MADELINE: (*Rising.*) After all, he's bound to have meant a lot to you, too. He's been good to you. He's made you what you are today.

MR. SCHUSTER: Well that's fine. Fine and dandy. Especially if one's fond of gophers. But few people take to the little rascals.

MADELINE: (*Sharply.*) I said I'm sorry, Harry.

MR. SCHUSTER: All right, Madeline, all right. Don't bite my head off. After all, my dear, the more I think about it the more I'm inclined to agree with you. You should grieve, my dear. You should mourn a lot. You should keep wearing black. (*With emphasis.*) And you should be extra good to the little girl. Build up her confidence. Make it look good – for the public – and the press.

MADELINE: (*Astonished.*) Harry, how can you say such things? I couldn't hurt Nicholle like that. She has feelings. And I won't keep wearing black, either, just to make impressions. I'd as soon do that as walk down main street wearing a bikini bathing suit.

MR. SCHUSTER: (*Looking her up and down.*) In your case my dear – I'd rather you did as well.

MADELINE: (*Astonished.*) Harry.

MR. SCHUSTER: Sorry, my dear. Just a little retribution, that's all. (*He smiles an exaggerated, teathy smile.*)

Dr. Brown enters left.

MADELINE: All right, we're even now. Let's keep our senses, Harry.
After all, there's a lot ahead of us.

MR. SCHUSTER: You're putting it mildly, my dear. I'd say there's an awfully awfully lot ahead of us.

Dr. Brown clears his throat.

MADELINE: *(As she and Mr. Schuster whirl in surprise.)* Dr. Brown.
We – we didn't see you.

DR. BROWN: May I come in?

MR. SCHUSTER: As far as we're concerned, you may, Doctor. I suppose funeral homes aren't off limits for doctors. Sorta like an art gallery where the artist comes to view his finished product. Right, Doctor?

DR. BROWN: *(Calmly.)* What a cryptic display of wit. *(To Madeline.)*
Did Mr. Schuster by any chance study abroad?

MADELINE: I don't know, Doctor.

MR. SCHUSTER: Very flattering, Doctor. Does it sound to you like I studied in Italy – or would you say France?

DR. BROWN: Neither. I was thinking of the Bihiji Islands. *(Quickly.)*
Quite shocking about Mr. Quigley. So sudden.

MR. SCHUSTER: *(Crossing picking up magazine from off sofa, thumbing through it.)* Yes – terribly sudden.

DR. BROWN: *(Watching him closely.)* I hear there may be an – autopsy.

MADELINE: An autopsy?

DR. BROWN: Yes.

MR. SCHUSTER: *(Calmly.)* Whatever for, Doctor?

DR. BROWN: Oh nothing really. Some silly notion or something about a – poisoning.

Mr. Schuster drops magazine suddenly.

MADELINE: A poisoning?

DR. BROWN: Something to that effect. I didn't pry into it. *(Madeline sits suddenly.)* Figured you two knew all about it – the autopsy, that is. *(Picks up magazine, hands it to Mr. Schuster.)* Your magazine, I believe.

NICHOLLE: *(Entering right.)* Hi.

MADELINE: *(Rising.)* Nicholle. How nice to see you, dear.

NICHOLLE: I've got just the best news ever. Guess what?

MADELINE: I have no idea, dear. What?

NICHOLLE: Grandfather isn't dead at all. Can you imagine that? He's been alive all the time. *(Mr. Schuster looks at Madeline quickly – then at Dr. Brown. The latter is watching the others keenly.)*

MR. SCHUSTER: What – did you say?

NICHOLLE: I said grandfather isn't dead. Isn't it wonderful? You see, they think someone tried to – to –

MADELINE: Tried to what, dear?

DR. BROWN: Murder him?

NICHOLLE: *(Nodding, shivering.)* Yeah. They're trying to track down who did it.

MADELINE: Where is your grandfather now, Nicholle?

NICHOLLE: He's in here. C'mon. I'll show you.

Mr. Schuster and Madeline register quick glances, follow Nicholle out center. Dr. Brown exits after them. Lucas enters left quietly, sticks head in.

LUCAS: *(In hushed tones.)* Herc? You got anything? *(Louder.)* Herc. *(He crosses to sofa, peers over back, and Hercules lets go with a long snore. He's asleep.)* Herc. *(Lucas disgustedly reaches over, gets him by collar and pulls him up. He falls over back of sofa and hangs there, arms dangling.)* Wake up, Herc. What happened?

HERCULES: *(Drowsily.)* Huh? *(He's now minus his glasses.)*

LUCAS: Wake up. *(Hercules peers at him through drooping eyelids.)* You was supposed to write down everything important that was said.

HERCULES: *(Clambering over sofa.)* Oh, yeah. Got it right here. *(Hauling out pad.)* Listen to this, boy. Nicholle Quigley is the sweetest and cutest and nicest girl in three states and her boy friend is Hercules Nelson.

LUCAS: Who said that?

HERCULES: I did. I was talkin' to myself.

LUCAS: Is that all you got?

HERCULES: Wow, no. Listen to this. “O Father I see a gleaming light, O say what may it be? But the father answered never a word – a frozen corpse was he.”

LUCAS: (, *disgustedly.*) Who said that?

HERCULES: Longfellow. It’s from the “Wreck of the Hesperus.” I’m memorizin’ it for English.

LUCAS: And that’s important.

HERCULES: I guess it must be. At least to Longfellow. Is to my English teacher, too. She says we can’t graduate till we learn it. That’s what she told us five years ago. I never cared for Longfellow.

LUCAS: You got anything else?

HERCULES: Sure I got anything else. I got plenty from that lawyer and Madeline, boy. Feast your ears on this. Item one. (*As if exploding a bomb.*) All the gopher holes in Minnesota.

LUCAS: Who said that?

HERCULES: She did.

LUCAS: Hercules, gopher holes ain’t important.

HERCULES: They are to gophers.

LUCAS: If I had my way.

HERCULES: Item two. Mr. Schuster says, “You’ll be singing like a canary.”

LUCAS: Canaries aren’t important, either.

HERCULES: I guess they are to other canaries. And just wait’ll you hear item three.

LUCAS: (*Disgustedly.*) The suspense is killing me.

HERCULES: Item three. Walkin’ down Main Street in a bikini bathing suit. (*Looking up.*) I guess you think bikini bathing suits ain’t important.

LUCAS: Of course, they aren’t.

HERCULES: (*Sniffing.*) It’s sure going to be tough, Lucas.

LUCAS: What’s going to be tough?

HERCULES: Breakin’ the news to your folks. You’re dead and don’t know it.

LUCAS: Did you get anything at all that pertains to Mr. Quigley bein’ rubbed out?

HERCULES: Yeah. Item four. Dr. Brown says to them that Mr. Quigley might have been poisoned. And Mr. Schuster dropped his magazine.

LUCAS: Dropped his magazine?

HERCULES: Yeah – it must have been a dull story.

LUCAS: Then what happened?

HERCULES: That's when I went to sleep.

LUCAS: If I had it my way. (*Pacing, hands buried in pockets.*) We're right back where we started from. Only more so. We don't have a thing to go on.

Mr. Schuster comes charging in center, followed by Madeline, Dr. Brown, and Nicholle.

MR. SCHUSTER: (*Calling as he enters.*) Mr. Nelson.

DR. BROWN: I don't understand it. It doesn't add up.

MR. SCHUSTER: I'll say it doesn't. Not unless two and two is four it doesn't. (*Shouting.*) Mr. Nelson.

LUCAS: Something wrong?

MADELINE: Maybe he isn't here?

MR. SCHUSTER: Then we'll wait till he gets back. (*Shouting again.*) Nelson!

LUCAS: Something wrong?

Mr. and Mrs. Nelson enter right.

UNCLE BOB: Oh, Mr. Schuster. How do you do.

MR. SCHUSTER: (*Glaring.*) Don't you how-do-you-do me. Just what do you think you're up to, Nelson?

UNCLE BOB: I'm afraid I don't know what you mean, Schuster.

MR. SCHUSTER: Oh you don't. It looks like we're going to have to refresh your memory.

MRS. NELSON: (*Her hand tightening on his arm.*) Bob.

MADELINE: Mr. Nelson, Nicholle tells us that her grandfather is not dead. Is this true?

UNCLE BOB: Well, I – I –

MR. SCHUSTER: Answer yes or no.

LUCAS: Is something wrong?

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MADELINE: Hercules here told Nicholle he talked to Mr. Quigley. And that he's alive. (*Whirling to Hercules.*) Is he alive? Did you talk to him?

UNCLE BOB: Don't lie about it, Hercules. (*Sadly.*) Tell the truth.

HERCULES: Sure I talked to him.

MR. SCHUSTER: I presume you're aware that this can be pretty serious, Nelson. Mighty serious indeed. After all, you were making plans to inter a man that's been seen alive after you declared him dead. After you named Monday as the day of the funeral.

UNCLE BOB: But it can all be explained. Mr. Quigley will explain everything.

LUCAS: Something wrong?

UNCLE BOB: You see, he thought he was being plotted against and—

MR. SCHUSTER: (*Breaking in.*) Oh he did! You might be interested in knowing that he's had these delusions for years. And they even thought for a while he'd have to be declared mentally incompetent. Isn't that right, Doctor?

DR. BROWN: Well, I – (*He stops.*)

MR. SCHUSTER: (*Quickly.*) Isn't that what you told us?

DR. BROWN: (*Helplessly.*) Yes. I did tell you that, Mr. Schuster, but that has nothing to do with this.

MR. SCHUSTER: The law won't agree. By the way, Mr. Nelson. Just where is Mr. Quigley?

UNCLE BOB: Why he's in there. (*Motions center.*)

MR. SCHUSTER: (*Shaking head negatively.*) Huh uh.

UNCLE BOB: What do you mean?

MR. SCHUSTER: I mean huh uh, he isn't in there.

UNCLE BOB: He's bound to be. (*Mrs. Nelson goes out center.*)

MR. SCHUSTER: He isn't there for one good reason. You want to make sure he'll never be seen alive again. After all, you need the money for the funeral. And even if he is found alive, you'll be prosecuted to the full limit of the law. And if there's any strings attached – they'll be around your neck.

UNCLE BOB: (*As Mrs. Nelson re-enters.*) He's in there isn't he, Mary? (*No answer.*) Mary?

AUNT MARY: No Bob. (*Sadly.*) He isn't.

UNCLE BOB: I don't get it unless – unless – (*He looks at Mr. Schuster.*)

MR. SCHUSTER: (*His toothy grin flashing.*) Unless what? Unless he's getting out while getting's good. Come along, Nelson. You're going with us.

AUNT MARY: Where to?

MR. SCHUSTER: To the police station, my dear. (*Snarling.*) And you better bring an extra shirt, too, Nelson.

UNCLE BOB: I'll say goodbye to the children. (*Starting right.*)

MR. SCHUSTER: Then we'll all say goodbye to the children.

Mr. and Mrs. Nelson cross left, led by Mr. Schuster, and followed by Madeline, Dr. Brown and Nicholle.

MR. SCHUSTER: (*Stopping at door.*) By the way, Mr. Nelson. If you're lucky, perhaps the Nelson funeral home will be able to take care of all your arrangements. You know – sorta boost sales. (*Laughs again, and they all exit left.*)

HERCULES: (*Looking after them.*) You know what I think, Lucas?

LUCAS: What?

HERCULES: I think something is wrong.

CURTAIN.

ACT THREE

SCENE: *The same, an hour or so later.*

AT RISE: *Nicholle and Celeste are sitting on sofa, watching Mrs. Nelson pace back and forth. Stevie is deeply engrossed in a book she's reading, and she's curled up in a chair.*

AUNT MARY: I just don't see any way out. It looks like they have us right where they want us.

NICHOLLE: I'm awfully sorry, Mrs. Nelson. I didn't dream I was doing anything wrong.

AUNT MARY: You didn't do anything wrong, dear. You loved your grandfather. And you were overjoyed when you found he was still alive. I would have done the same thing.

NICHOLLE: *(Seriously.)* I guess I talk too much. *(She rises, crosses to Mrs. Nelson.)*

AUNT MARY: *(Walking with arm around her.)* It isn't your fault, Nicholle. And it's not Hercules' fault for telling you, either. He thought he was doing the right thing. He didn't want to see you suffer. He's a little gentleman – and very sympathetic.

CELESTE: *(Chin in hands.)* Yeah. He thinks it's all his fault. That's why he locked himself upstairs in the bathroom.

STEVIE: *(Looking up.)* He's a creep. A murderous, lecherous creep.

AUNT MARY: *(Astonished.)* Stevie, you should be ashamed. Hercules is a sweet little boy.

STEVIE: Hercules? I'm talkin' about this creep in the book. He was in this twenty-story building, see, and he pushes three women straight out the window, see. Luckily for them, he was in the basement at the time.

AUNT MARY: It's amazing how quickly things can happen. Everything looked so bright yesterday. And now – today – everything's lost.

NICHOLLE: *(Hopefully.)* Maybe it isn't, Mrs. Nelson. Things looked dark for me yesterday, but not now, because my grandfather might still be alive. Maybe your sun will be shining again tomorrow. I hope so.

CELESTE: Well, what did father do wrong, Mother?

AUNT MARY: He didn't do anything wrong, dear. But it appears that way. He was merely trying to do a good turn. To help Mr. Quigley. He let him stay here and they appeared to be making plans for his funeral. Mr. Quigley was supposed to be dead.. He thinks someone tried to – tried to – (*Looks at Nicholle, then to Celeste.*) You wouldn't understand, dear. Just – don't worry about it.

STEVIE: (*Looking up again.*) This really comes to me as a shock.

CELESTE: (*Rising.*) It's a shock to all of us, Stevie.

STEVIE: (*Shrugging.*) I just can't figure it out. After all, I thought sure it was the butler that did it. (*She rises.*)

AUNT MARY: Now even Mr. Quigley's disappeared. Even if he is – is still alive, that won't help Bob too much. If they don't convict him of murder they can still ruin us. He'll never be able to get a job here in town – or any other town.

NICHOLLE: Man, Mrs. Nelson.

STEVIE: You mean somebody's got to take the rap for somebody else and Pop's the fall guy, Mom?

AUNT MARY: Roughly speaking, that's about it.

STEVIE: They'll throw the book at him. They threw the book at a fellow in this story. They'd ruined him, too, if it hadn't been a condensed pocket-size version.

AUNT MARY: If we could only prove some way that an attempt was made on Mr. Quigley's life. But now – (*She shrugs hopelessly.*) whoever did it is fully aware of the situation and will be doubly careful.

STEVIE: Are they giving Pop the third degree now, Mom?

AUNT MARY: I don't know what they're doing dear.

STEVIE: If they're giving him the third degree they'll throw lights in his face and threaten him and stuff like that. I read all about it in "The Viper's Valiant Vigil" or "Get that Light Out of My Eyes, Mother, I Came in Here to Sleep."

AUNT MARY: (*Worriedly.*) He hasn't even called me. I haven't heard a word since he left two hours ago.

Lucas enters right, minus the detective guise. His hands are thrust deep into his pockets and he enters slowly and sadly.

LUCAS: (*Morosely.*) Hi.

CELESTE: (*Thick with gloom.*) Hi Lucas.

AUNT MARY: Where's Hercules, Lucas?

LUCAS: (*Pointing up, gloomily.*) He's still up there in the bathroom.

STEVIE: Yeah? And Pop thinks I'm slow. He oughta get a load of him.

LUCAS: (*Glaring.*) He locked himself in.

STEVIE: Well I don't take a bubble bath with the door open, Clyde.

AUNT MARY: The poor dear. He feels it's all his fault.

NICHOLLE: But it isn't. It's really my fault.

Daphne enters right.

DAPHNE: Anything else tonight, Mrs. Nelson?

AUNT MARY: Get my coat, Daphne. I'm going to the police station.

DAPHNE: Take my advice and plead innocent, Mrs. Nelson. No matter what they accuse you of, plead innocent.

AUNT MARY: Mr. Nelson's there, Daphne. Now hurry up.

DAPHNE: Yes Ma'am. (*She starts right, turns.*) They accused my uncle of stealin' a horse once and was going to give him the chair. So he pleaded innocent. So they didn't electrocute him – they hung him instead.

STEVIE: (*All eyes.*) Hung him?

DAPHNE: Yeah – that's the only way they could get him off o' the horse. (*She exits right.*)

NICHOLLE: I want to go with you, Mrs. Nelson.

CELESTE: Me too, Mother.

NICHOLLE: I want to be in on everything that happens. After all, maybe I can help someday. Please let me go with you.

AUNT MARY: All right. Get your coats.

CELESTE: (*As they go out right.*) Thank you, Mother. (*Girls exit.*)

LUCAS: Looks like me and Hercules kinda got things all messed up, don't it?

AUNT MARY: You most certainly didn't, dear. You two have behaved admirably.



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