

THE KIDNAPPING KRAZE

A COMEDY IN THREE ACTS

By Donald Payton

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Heuer Publishing LLC, Cedar Rapids, Iowa

ISBN: 978-1-61588-117-8

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PUBLISHED BY

HEUER PUBLISHING LLC

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

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

THE KIDNAPPING KRAZE

By Donald Payton

BASED ON THE PLAY *HAPPY DAZE* BY DONALD PAYTON

SYNOPSIS: Courtney Maxwell finds herself in a troubling place in life. Her brother and sister are always crazy busy, but Courtney stays at home, bored out of her mind. Elizabeth, Courtney's best friend, comes up with an idea to end all ideas. If Courtney was kidnapped, she could have her chocolate cake and eat it too. So they put their heads together, write a ransom note, stick it to the wall with an ice-pick, and hide Courtney. Exactly according to plans, the Maxwells are frantic and repeatedly claim that if Courtney returned home safely, they would be oh-so-lenient. In waltz Elmer and Muggsy, a couple of none-too-bright, would-be robbers, rummaging through the house, looking for the ransom money. They take Courtney, then Lucas, but no one believes anything that comes out of Elizabeth's mouth because she's famous for crying wolf, among other things.

CAST OF CHARACTERS

(6 MEN, 6 WOMEN)

MR. MAXWELL.....The head of the household—or at least, he thinks so. Wears business suit except in second scene of Act One. Then, he is attired in pajamas and bathrobe. Later, he changes to hunting clothes. *(128 lines)*

MRS. MAXWELL.....The head of the household—or at least, she thinks so. Dressed casually. *(165 lines)*

LUCAS MAXWELL.....The son of the household, thirteen years of age and full of vim, vigor, and meanness. He wears jeans and a t-shirt or sweatshirt. During the second scene of Act One, he appears in loudly colored pajamas. *(129 lines)*

CAROLINE MAXWELL....One of the two daughters of the household, seventeen years of age. Dressed casually, then dressed for a date. (74 lines)

COURTNEY MAXWELL...The other daughter of the household, age fifteen. Dressed casually. (185 lines)

ELIZABETH SMITH.....Courtney's best friend, age fifteen. Dresses similarly to Courtney. (148 lines)

HERCULES NELSON.....Lucas' best friend, also thirteen. Dresses accordingly. (56 lines)

MRS. BROWN.....Mrs. Maxwell's mother, about sixty-five years of age. (57 lines)

AUNT MARYMrs. Maxwell's aunt, about sixty. (51 lines)

MR. MALLORYMr. Maxwell's boss, about fifty-five or sixty. He wears hunting clothes in Act One, but is later attired in a business suit. (71 lines)

ELMER AND MUGGSY....A couple of none-too-bright would-be kidnappers who come in search of the ransom money. They both are carelessly dressed, wear caps. (ELMER – 92 lines, MUGGSY – 107 lines)

NOTE: All the characters in this play are purely fictional. Any resemblance to persons living or dead is entirely coincidental.

THE KIDNAPPING KRAZE

SET

The action takes place within the living room of the Maxwells' home. There are three openings into the living room: One in the wall right, leading onto the front porch; one in the wall left, leading into the kitchen and dining room; and one in the wall center, leading into the rest of the house. A window with shade and curtains is in the wall right, up from the door. The divan is at left-center, while easy chairs are at right-center and down-right. The latter is backed by a floor lamp, and a magazine rack or end-table is beside it. Another easy chair is in the corner of the room, upper-right. A small table with a table lamp is against the wall, right-center and a bookcase is against the wall, right-center and another bookcase is against the wall left-center. Down-left is a desk with chair to match. The telephone is on this desk. To make the set look complete and home-like, other furniture or decorations may be added.

FURNITURE

Divan

Two easy chairs

Floor lamp

Magazine rack or end table

Small table with lamp

Bookcase

Desk with chair to match

Telephone

Window shade and curtains

Rug, etc.

PROPERTIES

Broom and dustpan, LUCAS

Newspaper, on sofa, used by COURTNEY and MR. MAXWELL

Dust cloth, MRS. MAXWELL

Magazine, in bookcase, used by COURTNEY

Gun, MR. MAXWELL

Camping paraphernalia (*Tackle box, fishing poles, reels, an oar, frying pans, etc.*), littered about stage beginning of Act I, Scene II

Box of lunch, MRS. MAXWELL

Hatchet, MR. MALLORY

Ice pick and note, LUCAS

Baseball bat, on stage beginning of Act II

Handkerchiefs, all the women in Act II

Pajamas, ELIZABETH

Coat and hat, MR. MALLORY

Gum, ELMER

A few sheets of manuscript, HERCULES

Vase, on stage, used by AUNT MARY

THE KIDNAPPING KRAZE

ACT 1

AT RISE:

LUCAS MAXWELL is disgustedly sweeping the living-room floor. He tries to sweep under a chair, has to get down on his knees, then on his stomach, and finally proceeds to sweep under it.

LUCAS: (*Disgustedly.*) Who ever heard of a boy having to sweep before? That's what I'd like to know. (*He rises, leans on the broom handle.*) It wouldn't be so bad if I was the only kid. But there are—there's three of us! Frankly, if the other two were mine, I'd raise 'em different. I'd raise 'em with a broom. I'd raise 'em right off of their leisurely seats and then give 'em the broom and put 'em to work. Sometimes I wonder what this generation is coming to. (*He starts sweeping vigorously.*)

MRS. MAXWELL: (*Calling from off-left.*) Lucas!

LUCAS: (*Going right on with his grumbling and sweeping.*) And due to circumstances beyond my control, it's not like I meant to set fire to . . . well anyway, I have to sweat to death, laborin' over things that was their chore to start with, something they should do because they're older and need to learn some responsibility, but it doesn't matter 'cause they're too busy yappin' to work in the first place. (*He stops, again leans on the broom handle.*)

MRS. MAXWELL: (*Again calling from off-left.*) Lucas!

LUCAS: (*Dropping the broom on the floor.*) I got a right to do what other guys would do, don't I? And any other guy would drop the broom and just walk out.

MRS. MAXWELL: (*Entering, sharply.*) Lucas!

LUCAS: (*Picking up the broom sadly.*) And someday I'll be that guy.

MRS. MAXWELL: (*Strolling over to him, sharply.*) Lucas!

LUCAS: Hello.

MRS. MAXWELL: Lucas, how many times have I told you not to sweep like that? The dust in here is awful.

Lucas starts sweeping oh-so-very-gently, practically prancing about.

MRS. MAXWELL: It's going to be piled up in here an inch thick.

LUCAS: (*Sarcastically.*) I'm just doing it so I can tell where to dust.

MRS. MAXWELL: Well, here's the dust cloth. (*Handing it to him.*)

LUCAS: For cryin' out loud. (*He takes it. Mimicking his mother*) The girls can't dust because their long fingernails scrape all the varnish off the woodwork. (*Muttering darkly.*) It's crummy. (*He starts dusting.*) Courtney dusted that chair just once since we got it and just look at it. Carved up like a totem-pole.

MRS. MAXWELL: (*As she goes out left.*) And please do a good job, dear. You don't want to do it over. (*Exit.*)

LUCAS: (*Leaning on a chair.*) For cryin' out loud. (*He takes the dust cloth and lazily begins to dust.*)

HERCULES NELSON comes bouncing in right.

HERCULES: Hi ya, Lucas.

LUCAS: (*Standing up, stretching as if to take out a kink.*) Hi, Hercules.

BY DONALD PAYTON

HERCULES: What're ya' doin'?

LUCAS: (*Picking up the broom.*) Sweepin'—dustin'—servin' time. Don't ever let 'em trick you into sweepin' and cleanin', Hercules. It's worse than a ball and chain. You know, I been in here wonderin', just what's this world coming to?

HERCULES: (*Sitting.*) Whattaya' mean?

LUCAS: (*Holding up the broom.*) This, for instance. You wouldn't have seen boys like me sweepin' back in the pioneer days. (*He starts walking around the room.*) I'd've been out fightin' enemies or bitin' the dust. But now, the only way I can bite the dust is with this blasted broom. Just look at me in these modern times. Sweepin' and my own sisters just—just—heaven knows what they are doing. Well, I do know what Caroline's doin', though.

HERCULES: What?

LUCAS: She's takin' apart the car.

HERCULES: You mean she's a mechanic?

LUCAS: Naw, she's a learnin' to drive. (*He starts sweeping again.*)

HERCULES: (*Admiringly.*) You're gettin' to be a first rate sweeper, Lucas.

LUCAS: (*Dryly.*) Yeah . . . sometimes I think they're raisin' me up to be a janitor.

HERCULES: It's a fine, respectable job.

LUCAS: But I don't want any job.

HERCULES: Looks like you shouldn't've tried setting –

LUCAS: I didn't mean to –

HERCULES: (*Sitting on the arm of a chair, talking over LUCAS.*) At least you'll make some wife a good husband.

LUCAS: Nuh uh, not me. I've made up my mind to just keep being a bachelor.

HERCULES: I've heard my mom say that a bachelor doesn't have a thing to live for.

LUCAS: Maybe so. But I've heard my dad say it was the other way around. My sisters are really a worry to him. They're out of one trial and tribulation into another. But that's girls for you.

A loud crash is heard out right.

HERCULES: (*Bouncing up.*) What was that?

LUCAS: I imagine it's Caroline takin' the front end off of the car. By the time I get old enough to drive, there won't be nothing left but the steering wheel.

HERCULES: Yeah . . . or maybe the exhaust pipe.

LUCAS: (*Peering out the window.*) Nuh uh. It went last week

CAROLINE MAXWELL enters right. She is wearing a coat.

CAROLINE: Is Dad here?

LUCAS: Nope.

CAROLINE: That's a shame. (*She starts removing her coat.*)

LUCAS: What'd you do to it this time?

CAROLINE: The garage door is too narrow.

LUCAS: It's a lot wider than the kitchen door. From the sound of things you tried to bring it in the house. What did you do to it?

CAROLINE: I just mashed the right front fender a little, that's all.

LUCAS: Well, at least the two sides match again.

THE KIDNAPPING KRAZE

CAROLINE: (*Who has crossed to the door, center.*) Oh, Lucas, I have a date with Eddie tonight, and I need you to take my turn doing the dishes. (*She exits center.*)

LUCAS: (*Dropping into a chair.*) If that ain't crummy. (*He sits, chin in hands, staring into space.*)

MRS. MAXWELL: (*Entering left.*) Hello, Hercules.

HERCULES: Hey, Mrs. Maxwell.

MRS. MAXWELL: Lucas. (*No answer.*) Lucas!

LUCAS: (*Sadly.*) Hello.

MRS. MAXWELL: Was that Caroline that just came in?

HERCULES: That's who it was, Mrs. Maxwell.

MRS. MAXWELL: (*Putting her hand on Lucas's shoulder.*) What's wrong, dear?

LUCAS: I don't know why I get shoved around like I do.

MRS. MAXWELL: Now, Lucas, it didn't hurt you to sweep the floor.

LUCAS: Maybe not, but it's the principle of the thing. With three kids, you'd think I wouldn't have to do all the sweeping and dusting and drying the dishes. I tell you, there's poor management around here somewhere.

MRS. MAXWELL: I sent Caroline to the grocery store.

LUCAS: What about Courtney?

MRS. MAXWELL: She wasn't feeling well, so I sent her up to her room. In fact, she's been acting strangely for the past few weeks. I think we'll have to visit the doctor.

LUCAS: (*Rising, dramatically.*) But I can work my feet off clear to my knees and nobody notices me.

MRS. MAXWELL: Are you sick, dear?

LUCAS: Nope.

MRS. MAXWELL: Then what's wrong?

HERCULES: Maybe it's the principle of the thing again.

MRS. MAXWELL: Well, as soon as you recover enough to bring the groceries out of the car, I wish you would.

LUCAS: Why didn't Caroline?

MRS. MAXWELL: She seemed to be in a hurry about something.

LUCAS: Those long fingernails again. Probably rip right through the bags. She's gettin' claws like a hyena.

MRS. MAXWELL: (*At the door, center.*) And after you've carried the groceries in, I wish you would empty the garbage. (*She exits.*)

LUCAS: See there, Hercules. (*He drops into c chair.*) They're just workin' me right down to nothin'.

HERCULES: Have you broached your old man about goin' on that Scout hike next week?

LUCAS: (*Picking up the broom and dustpan, spilling the dirt out of the dustpan, starting left.*) Nope, I haven't asked him yet, but I'll ask when he gets home from work. I don't know if they'll let me, though. They're closin' down on fun like a clam.

COURTNEY MAXWELL enters center. She is pale this evening, and although she is usually full of life, at the present she has the appearance of one who has lost her last friend.

COURTNEY: (*Coughing as she enters.*) The dust in here is thick enough to choke a cow.

LUCAS: Then you better watch out.

COURTNEY: Haven't you dusted yet?

LUCAS: (*As the boys exit left.*) I'm not gonna be a slave to a couple of female girls.

BY DONALD PAYTON

COURTNEY sighs, walks slowly over to the sofa, drops onto it. She picks up the paper, glances at it, and then tosses it onto the floor. She lays her head on the back of the sofa, closes her eyes as MRS. MAXWELL enters center.

MRS. MAXWELL: *(Pausing momentarily inside the door.)* Are you feeling bad, dear?
COURTNEY: No, Mom, I feel fine.

MRS. MAXWELL goes over to her, kisses her, but COURTNEY doesn't move.

MRS. MAXWELL: *(Standing behind the sofa.)* I wish you would tell me what's wrong.
COURTNEY: There's nothing wrong, Mom. Not a thing.
MRS. MAXWELL: *(Worriedly.)* But you've been acting so strangely lately.
COURTNEY: *(Rising.)* Have I? *(Strolling over to the bookcase.)* I haven't noticed.

MRS. MAXWELL stands looking worriedly at her, and then crosses over to her.

MRS. MAXWELL: If there's something worrying you . . . something you would like to talk to me about—*(She stops.)*
COURTNEY: *(Trying to smile.)* No, there isn't . . . really. *(She takes a magazine or book from the bookcase, sits.)*
MRS. MAXWELL: But I feel that there is.
COURTNEY: Don't worry, Mom. I'm all right.
MRS. MAXWELL: If you change your mind, dear, about telling me—

She stops when she sees that COURTNEY is deeply engrossed in her reading.

COURTNEY: *(Looking up.)* Where are you and Dad going tonight?
MRS. MAXWELL: The Andersons asked us to go out to dinner.
COURTNEY: Oh. *(Pause.)* And Caroline?
MRS. MAXWELL: She and Eddie are going to a party tonight.
COURTNEY: Are you going to let her go?
MRS. MAXWELL: I suppose so. I hadn't thought anything about it.

COURTNEY rises, starts walking around the room.

MRS. MAXWELL: Why?
COURTNEY: Oh, I just wondered. *(Pause.)* Mom?
MRS. MAXWELL: Yes, dear?
COURTNEY: Could I go skating tonight?
MRS. MAXWELL: Tonight? But do you think you should, dear?
COURTNEY: I don't know why I shouldn't.
MRS. MAXWELL: *(Rising, going over to her.)* You went to the movies last night, dear.
COURTNEY: But they're all going . . . Elizabeth, Nancy—
MRS. MAXWELL: *(Breaking in.)* And I don't think you're feeling like it, dear. I don't think you'd better tonight.
COURTNEY: But Caroline's going to the party with Eddie.

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MRS. MAXWELL: (*Stroking COURTNEY's hair.*) Caroline is two years older than you, dear. When you are her age, you'll get to go more, too. You won't have to be here by yourself, dear. Lucas will be here tonight, too.

COURTNEY: (*Disgustedly.*) Lucas! (*She starts sobbing.*)

MRS. MAXWELL: (*Putting her arm around COURTNEY.*) What in the world is the matter?

MR. MAXWELL enters right. He stands, gazing at them in silence.

MRS. MAXWELL: You know I would like for you to go, darling. But a mother can't let her daughter go out all of the time . . . even if she does want to. It hurts me as much as it does you to see you suffer. (*COURTNEY is still sniffing.*) When you're older, you'll get to go out more, dear. You'll get to go out every bit as much as Caroline.

COURTNEY: (*Turning, starting center.*) I don't know if I will or not. (*She is sobbing as she runs out center.*)

MRS. MAXWELL: (*To herself.*) What did she mean by that?

MR. MAXWELL: I'm sure I don't know . . . What was wrong with her anyway?

MRS. MAXWELL: I'm sure I don't know, either. She's been acting strangely lately. Do you have any idea what it could be?

MR. MAXWELL: Maybe it's just that she can't run her head off, and she thinks if she cries about it we'll give in.

MRS. MAXWELL: I don't think that's it. I think she was serious.

MR. MAXWELL: Well, I certainly don't know what it could be, then. But sometimes I think I hardly know my own children at all. I don't think other kids act like ours.

MRS. MAXWELL: Well, all I know is that it's spoiled my entire evening. And tonight of all nights!

MR. MAXWELL: Why tonight?

MRS. MAXWELL: The Andersons asked us out for dinner.

MR. MAXWELL: (*Sitting, with finality.*) I'm not going.

MRS. MAXWELL: Now John, don't be difficult

MR. MAXWELL: I'm not difficult, I'm tired. Dead tired.

MRS. MAXWELL: When we go with the Andersons, we're always home early. You know they get sleepy by ten o'clock.

MR. MAXWELL: I can't help it. I don't want to go anywhere tonight.

CAROLINE: (*Entering center.*) And why not, Dad? Tonight is a wonderful night.

MR. MAXWELL: Mr. Mallory asked me to go to the mountains with him in the morning.

MRS. MAXWELL: (*Happily.*) You mean your boss?

MR. MAXWELL: Yes, and he—

MRS. MAXWELL: Oh, that's wonderful. You'll get that promotion yet.

CAROLINE: And it's about time, too. (*She sits.*) I've been wondering when I was going to get a new outfit.

MR. MAXWELL: (*Rising.*) Now don't get excited. Just because he asked me to go to the mountains for the weekend is no sign that he's going to promote me.

CAROLINE: (*Sadly.*) No, it might be that he knows you never catch any fish, and he would hate to take someone who could beat him.

MRS. MAXWELL: Just the same, John, I have a feeling. I know you're going to get promoted. And thank heavens! I would hate to start the summer with our refrigerator.

CAROLINE: And my entire wardrobe can stand touching up.

MR. MAXWELL: Looks like I'm the one that's being touched up. Now Janet, don't act like a little child. It's merely a hunting and fishing trip, and that's all. Remind me to get out my gun.

MRS. MAXWELL: Yes, John.

MR. MAXWELL: And we're going to head for the mountains early in the morning. Real early.

CAROLINE: What time, Dad?

MRS. MAXWELL: Probably about noon.

MR. MAXWELL: At daybreak. He's comin' by. That's why I don't want to go anywhere tonight. I'm gonna hit the hay early—real early.

MRS. MAXWELL: But John, the Andersons will be by in a few minutes.

MR. MAXWELL: Well, let 'em. It's the least of my worries.

CAROLINE: Dad's feeling important already, since he got promoted.

MR. MAXWELL: I am not feeling important and I haven't gotten a promotion.

MRS. MAXWELL: Aunt Mary always said if John ever got anything you couldn't touch him with a ten-foot pole.

MR. MAXWELL: (*Angrily.*) Oh she did, did she? All right, I'll go tonight. Even if I have to come right home and get up.

MRS. MAXWELL: We'll be home early, John. I'll promise you that.

MR. MAXWELL: (*Strolling around the room, hands deep in his pockets.*) I'll go even if the bags under my eyes in the morning are like suitcases. And another thing I hate about going to dinner with the Andersons is spaghetti and meatballs. (*He sinks into a chair.*)

MRS. MAXWELL: Order something else, John.

MR. MAXWELL: Yes, and have them stare at you all night. When you go with them, you gotta order what they order and they order spaghetti and meatballs.

MRS. MAXWELL: You'd better be getting ready, John.

MR. MAXWELL: I'm ready. I've got to clean my gun.

MRS. MAXWELL: John, you're not—Oh well, there's no use arguing. (*As she starts center.*) Go looking like a bum if you want to.

MR. MAXWELL: I won't look like a bum, Janet. (*He follows her out center.*)

LUCAS and HERCULES enter left.

LUCAS: Where's Dad?

CAROLINE: He went in to get his gun.

HERCULES: Are you going to plead your case now, Lucas?

LUCAS: Yeah, I'm taking it to the highest court.

MR. MAXWELL enters center, carrying rifle.

LUCAS: Dad? Dad . . .

MR. MAXWELL: (*Sitting.*) No, you can't.

LUCAS: Why can't I?

HERCULES: Yeah, why can't he?

MR. MAXWELL: Why can't he what? (*To himself.*) There's the paper. If I don't read it now, it'll be destroyed. I can clean the gun in the morning. (*He sets the gun against the wall and starts reading the paper.*)

LUCAS: Dad, could I go on the Scout hike next week with the fellows?

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CAROLINE: Why are you always bothering Dad?

LUCAS: What business is it of yours?

HERCULES: It's really gonna be so awesome, Mr. Maxwell. It's gonna be a twenty-mile hike.

MR. MAXWELL: *(Looking up, astonished.)* A twenty-mile hike. No, you certainly cannot go. You'll be worn out.

LUCAS: We're not really gonna walk the whole twenty miles, Dad. The scoutmaster's takin' his station wagon. We're gonna drive the first nineteen miles and then rough it from there.

MR. MAXWELL: Well, I'll think about it.

COURTNEY comes in center, stops at the door.

CAROLINE: Dad, I have a date with Eddie tonight, and he isn't going to get to take his car because his folks are using it. And since, Dad, the Andersons are coming by, Dad, I've been wondering, Dad, are you listening?

MR. MAXWELL: I am.

CAROLINE: And you're concentrating on what I'm saying?

LUCAS: It certainly couldn't be on the paper.

CAROLINE: Well, what I was getting at, Dad, was, um, would you let Eddie and me take our car tonight?

COURTNEY: *(Astounded.)* What?

CAROLINE: Now, this is no business of yours.

LUCAS: No, you cannot take the car. *(Turns to HERCULES.)* How do you like that?

COURTNEY: Don't let her, Dad.

CAROLINE: Don't listen to the children. Make up your own mind.

COURTNEY: Waddya mean, children? Caroline, you're not as big as you think.

MR. MAXWELL: *(Booming.)* Quiet! *(They all stop talking.)* It's getting so a person can't have a bit of peace and contentment in his own home. I can't even read the paper with you children snapping at each other. Sometimes I think we're raising a bunch of turtles.

LUCAS: It's 'cause we take after you, Dad. I've heard Mom say that you're all the time crawling into your shell. *(He and HERCULES start left.)*

MR. MAXWELL: Lucas!

LUCAS: *(Turning around.)* Hello.

MR. MAXWELL: And please stop saying hello every time I call you. I'm going to the mountains tomorrow, and I want you to clean out the garage.

The boys go sadly out left, their heads drooping.

CAROLINE: Dad, you never did say whether Eddie and I could take the car.

COURTNEY: Dad, if you let her take the car I'll—I'll—*(She turns around, starts toward the bookcase.)*

CAROLINE: Running off to cry?

COURTNEY: I am not. If you had the worries I have, you'd be thinking about other things than taking the car.

CAROLINE: Worries. The trouble with you is that you're spoiled rotten.

MRS. MAXWELL enters center. She is dressed to go out.

MRS. MAXWELL: Well, I guess I'm ready. (*To COURTNEY.*) Are you feeling better, dear?

COURTNEY: Yes, Mom. I feel fine. (*She turns and runs out center, sobbing.*) I'd just as well be adopted. (*She stops at the door.*)

CAROLINE: Don't let her worry you. She's just pouting because she wants to go somewhere. And personally I think she goes out too much as it is.

COURTNEY: I'm not pouting, and if you ask me—you're the one that does all of the going out.

MR. MAXWELL: (*Rising disgustedly.*) When I was young, children didn't run around all of the time like a bunch of scared rabbits. These days, they think they'll die if they stay at home one night. They're not even home long enough to eat. (*He starts pacing the floor.*)

COURTNEY: Well, if you ask me, that's all I get to do. Just eat and sleep. (*She goes out center.*) Probably if I were gone you wouldn't even miss me.

MRS. MAXWELL: John, you're simply going to have to talk with that girl.

MR. MAXWELL: Yes, dear. First thing next week.

The doorbell rings.

CAROLINE: (*Bouncing into action.*) That's Eddie.

MRS. MAXWELL: I don't see for the life of me what's wrong with that girl. I'm worried frantic.

MR. MAXWELL: Well, bring him in.

CAROLINE: I'm ready to go . . . and there's no use embarrassing him. Dad, you will let me have the car, won't you?

MR. MAXWELL: Now Caroline, I see no need to overdo the thing.

MRS. MAXWELL: I see no reason why they shouldn't, John. Anyway, it might rain.

Doorbell again.

MR. MAXWELL: Well . . . I . . . all right. Take it. It's insured.

CAROLINE: (*Jubilantly.*) Oh, thank you. (*Kisses him.*) We'll be home early. (*Kisses her.*) Goodbye.

MRS. MAXWELL: Goodnight, dear. Have a good time . . . and be good.

CAROLINE: (*Crossing right.*) Oh, don't worry, Mom. I'm doing the driving. (*And she exits.*) Hi, Eddie. Dad let us have the car. Isn't that great?

MRS. MAXWELL: Yes, dear. (*Worriedly crossing to her.*) I do wish you would stop sulking.

MR. MAXWELL: Do we have any castor oil? That's the quickest way to put life into a drooping girl.

COURTNEY: (*Re-entering the room.*) I do wish you would realize that I am no longer a little child.

MR. MAXWELL: Then that means you can take a larger dose.

MRS. MAXWELL: John!

COURTNEY: I'm every bit as old as Elizabeth Smith. And she is going skating tonight.

THE KIDNAPPING KRAZE

MRS. MAXWELL: But dear. All mothers don't see alike. You know I would like for you to do everything that your heart desires. *(Again putting her arm around her.)* But if we all did that, we soon wouldn't get any enjoyment out of doing anything.

Auto horn off right.

MRS. MAXWELL: There they are. Your coat, John. Your hat. *(They scurry around.)* I do hope you're feeling better in the morning, dear.

COURTNEY sticks out her cheek for MRS. MAXWELL to kiss.

MR. MAXWELL: Do you have any Tums, or Alka Seltzer or something, Janet? Every time the Andersons take us to dinner, I get indigestion.

MR. and MRS. MAXWELL exit right as LUCAS and HERCULES enter left.

LUCAS: Where has everyone evaporated to?

COURTNEY: *(Sighing.)* They're gone for the evening. *(She crosses to the window, looks out.)* Everyone can go out but me. I'm made to stay at home.

LUCAS: I wish you would quit tryin' to act like Dorothy. You look more like Miss Gulch.

COURTNEY: *(Turning around.)* I am not trying to act. A juvenile like you just wouldn't understand. In fact, nobody understands.

LUCAS: Don't let her worry you, Hercules. She's got as much sense as anyone else. She's just tryin' to act dramatic. She thinks maybe she'll get in the movies someday.

COURTNEY crosses over to the sofa, sits, sighs.

LUCAS: Well, I guess since everyone's gone, we can do what we please. I'm tellin' you, Herc, we'll have a regular convention around here tonight.

The boys exit left, COURTNEY continues to look very glum as she sits. The doorbell rings off-right. COURTNEY seems lost in thought. Presently, the doorbell rings again.

COURTNEY: *(Sitting on divan with her chin in her hands, she doesn't look up.)* Come in.

ELIZABETH SMITH, COURTNEY's best friend enters right.

COURTNEY: *(Rises, moves to ELIZABETH, elated.)* Elizabeth! I thought you had gone skating.

ELIZABETH: Not yet. Aren't you coming?

COURTNEY: No.

ELIZABETH: Why not? Can't you go?

COURTNEY: *(Sadly, shaking her head.)* My parents won't let me.

ELIZABETH: Then I won't either.

COURTNEY: *(Pleased, but loyal.)* Now listen, Elizabeth. I'm not going to keep you from going.

ELIZABETH: I'm still your best friend, aren't I?

COURTNEY: Of course, but—

ELIZABETH: (*Moving in and down right.*) And you're my best friend, aren't you?

COURTNEY: (*To back of big chair center.*) Of course, yes, but—

ELIZABETH: (*Again breaking in.*) Then the matter is closed right there.

COURTNEY: Elizabeth. (*Sits on arm of big chair.*) I'm really lucky to have a friend like you.

ELIZABETH: I couldn't enjoy myself, thinking about you being home doing nothing. I'm a big softy. (*Sitting.*) In fact, I'm a sucker that way. But I wouldn't desert a friend.

COURTNEY: (*Appreciative.*) Oh.

ELIZABETH: Why wouldn't they let you go?

COURTNEY: (*Up moving around big chair.*) I don't know. I can't figure it out. (*She stops, turns to ELIZABETH.*) You know something?

ELIZABETH: What?

COURTNEY: I've reached an important crisis in my life.

ELIZABETH: Really?

COURTNEY: Really. And I've reached a decision that may floor you, Elizabeth.

ELIZABETH: (*Getting wide-eyed.*) Really?

COURTNEY: Really, Elizabeth, I—(*Sitting on floor by ELIZABETH.*) I have decided that I'm a—a—adopted.

ELIZABETH: (*Awed.*) Adopted?

COURTNEY: Adopted.

ELIZABETH: What do you mean?

COURTNEY: Just what I said. That I'm adopted. They let Caroline do just about anything that she wants to. And whether she wants to very much or not . . . she does it anyway.

ELIZABETH: (*Wide-eyed.*) Wow.

COURTNEY: (*Disgustedly.*) And Lucas. He can do things that are absolutely ridiculous and get away with them. And if he was a kid of mine, he'd never stop being grounded. But just let me try to do something . . . or go anywhere. Huh uh!

ELIZABETH: Wow!

COURTNEY: They don't even look at me like they do Caroline or Lucas. (*Sniffs.*) I'm an outcast.

ELIZABETH: (*On knees beside her.*) No, you're not, Courtney.

COURTNEY: (*In tears.*) I am too. What's been happening to me lately shouldn't happen to a dog. It's been deplorable.

ELIZABETH: But if you were adopted, your mother would have told my mother, and my mother would have told me, and I would have told you.

COURTNEY: Maybe that's why she hasn't told you.

ELIZABETH: Yeah . . . it might be.

COURTNEY: But I couldn't be any surer than if I'd been told.

ELIZABETH: (*Resumes her place in the chair.*) You might be wrong about it, Courtney.

COURTNEY: (*Rising.*) No, I'm not, Elizabeth. I've been watchin' it for weeks and weeks.

(*Moves to divan.*) And it's reached a point where it's about to get me down. (*She sits.*)

ELIZABETH: (*Rises, crosses to COURTNEY.*) Wow, you do look bad. (*Sits on divan beside her.*)

COURTNEY: I feel faint. (*Rises.*) I don't know what to do. My life has reached a state of misery. (*Moves behind chair, center.*) They let Caroline take the car. She can go out two, three, sometimes four and five nights a week. (*Moving on to chair down-right.*) Lucas is trampling all over the place. And they just tell me my time is coming.

ELIZABETH: (*Rising, snapping her fingers.*) That's it, Courtney. That's it.

THE KIDNAPPING KRAZE

COURTNEY: (*Turning.*) What?

ELIZABETH: (*Going over to her.*) Caroline is older. She can naturally do more than you. And Lucas is just doing the same things he has been doing for the last few years. Isn't that right?

COURTNEY: Yes, but—(*Moving toward ELIZABETH.*)

ELIZABETH: (*Breaking in.*) But are you satisfied to do what you used to do?

COURTNEY: I guess not, Elizabeth.

ELIZABETH: (*Importantly.*) I know not. And that's it, right there.

COURTNEY: (*Not understanding.*) What?

ELIZABETH: You've reached the awkward part of your life. You're right now going through that awkward pause.

COURTNEY: Huh? (*Sitting on arm of chair.*) What do you mean, awkward pause?

ELIZABETH: The stage in your life where you're too old to do what you used to do, but not old enough to do what you want to do.

COURTNEY: Wow, Elizabeth. Do you think so?

ELIZABETH: I know so.

COURTNEY: But I still think I'm adopted. I just know I was left on their doorstep and they had to take me or something.

ELIZABETH: Courtney, quit talking like that.

COURTNEY: (*Strolling around again.*) I was never more serious in my whole life, and you know how serious I really am. (*Sinking into a chair.*) If there were only some way of really knowing.

ELIZABETH: (*Moving around the room behind divan, thinking.*) Well, there's bound to be some way to prove it.

COURTNEY: I hate to think of myself just forced onto them.

ELIZABETH: (*Walking around, frowning.*) I'll think of something. I always do.

COURTNEY: (*Hopelessly. Sits chair center.*) I've just thought and racked my brain and struggled and struggled with it. It's hopeless, Elizabeth.

ELIZABETH: Hmmmmm!

COURTNEY: If they had their way, they'd probably put me right back on the doorstep.

ELIZABETH: (*Sharply.*) Don't say things like that.

COURTNEY: (*In tears again.*) I'm not responsible for a thing I say, Elizabeth. I'm practically distraught!

ELIZABETH: Well, there's bound to be a solution somewhere. In the back of my mind it's there. If I could only pull it to the front.

COURTNEY: (*Rising, pleadingly.*) You've got to pull it, Elizabeth. I can't go through life like this. Think what a happy little thing I used to be. I was mirthful—full of mirth. And now look at me. An empty shell. It would be better off for everyone concerned if I could just show up missing.

Pause.

ELIZABETH: (*Stopping, snapping her fingers.*) That's it!

COURTNEY: What?

ELIZABETH: You will show up missing. Why didn't I think of it sooner?

COURTNEY: Now wait a minute, Elizabeth. If you think I'm—

ELIZABETH: (*Breaking in.*) It's natural.

COURTNEY: Now listen, Elizabeth. I'm not—

ELIZABETH: (*Again breaking in.*) There's nothing can rouse up a family better than a good kidnapping.

COURTNEY: (*Wide-eyed.*) Now listen, Elizabeth. I am not going to be kidnapped. I just won't allow it.

ELIZABETH: (*Behind divan.*) But don't you see? If you were to be kidnapped for just one day, your worries would end right then and there.

COURTNEY: (*Kneeling on divan, facing ELIZABETH.*) Elizabeth! You don't want to get rid of me too, do you?

ELIZABETH: Of course not. If you were to disappear . . . and a note was found in your room telling your parents not to notify the police, they'd be frantic . . . absolutely frantic.

COURTNEY: (*Sitting, beginning to like the idea.*) This might work.

ELIZABETH: (*Moving center.*) They'd naturally think you were kidnapped. Well, you could drop in that night, and when they saw you, they'd be so happy you were okay that you would have free rein.

COURTNEY: And I wouldn't have to worry about being adopted, either.

ELIZABETH: (*Sitting chair center.*) Of course not. After that, you'd get to go out when you wanted to, do what you wanted to do. It just can't miss, Courtney.

COURTNEY: Wow, Elizabeth. You are a genius.

ELIZABETH: Even if I do say so myself, it's a sure thing that can't miss. Your worries will end right there. You'll be the most important person around here, then. I'll spy around and tell you what they say about you.

COURTNEY: (*Excitedly.*) I don't know how you think of such things.

ELIZABETH: (*Sitting.*) This one was tough.

COURTNEY: When do I get kidnapped?

ELIZABETH: The sooner the better. Anyone here tonight?

COURTNEY: Just Lucas . . . and Hercules . . . and you.

ELIZABETH: The perfect time . . . for the perfect crime. (*She laughs.*)

COURTNEY: I'm just so excited I can't take it.

ELIZABETH: (*Rising.*) My folks will be gone tomorrow. You can hide over at my house. And every so often, I'll slip over here and get some of the dirt.

COURTNEY: Wow.

ELIZABETH: Have you got an ice-pick?

COURTNEY: An ice-pick?

ELIZABETH: Yeah . . . for the ransom note. We'll write something like "Don't call the police . . . stand by" and nail it to the wall with the ice-pick.

COURTNEY: Won't that be awfully gruesome?

ELIZABETH: The more gruesome the better. This is a surefire thing that can't miss, Courtney. By the time this is over, you'll have the whole family right where you want them. And you can go skating just anytime.

COURTNEY: What can I say, Elizabeth? You are a genius.

The girls start shaking hands as there is a quick CURTAIN.

THE KIDNAPPING KRAZE

ACT ONE, SCENE 2

THE TIME: About seven o'clock the next morning. MR. MAXWELL is sitting on the sofa in his bathrobe, cleaning his gun. His camping paraphernalia is littered about the room: tackle boxes, blankets, fishing poles, reels, an oar, frying pans and numerous other boxes that go to make up the equipment of a fisherman.

MRS. MAXWELL: (*Entering left.*) John, I do wish you would hurry and get dressed. Mr. Mallory will be here in no time.

MR. MAXWELL: Now Janet, I've just got to get this gun cleaned.

MRS. MAXWELL: Every time you get ready to go somewhere, it worries me frantic. Absolutely frantic. (*She scurries around, putting his equipment together.*) You usually have the entire family in an uproar by the time you ever get going!

MR. MAXWELL: I wouldn't have had to clean this gun this morning if it hadn't been for that blasted dinner last night. Why in the name of heaven do they always feed us spaghetti and meat balls . . . that's what I'd like to know. They're more like golf balls than meatballs. (*He rises, leans the gun against the wall.*) Ohhh. (*He grabs his stomach.*) And petrified golf balls at that.

MRS. MAXWELL: (*Frantically.*) John, please hurry.

MR. MAXWELL: I'll have plenty of time. J.C. probably isn't even up yet.

MRS. MAXWELL: But you could at least be ready. I don't know why you're like you are. I think if a man knows he is worrying his wife, he's satisfied. (*MR. MAXWELL yawns.*) And you know you're not sleepy. You had as much sleep as I did.

MR. MAXWELL: Well, after that spaghetti and golf balls, I don't know who could sleep. I felt like a little man inside of me spent the entire night shootin' pool with those meatballs.

MRS. MAXWELL: (*Looking in a large box.*) Do you want me to put in a pound of bacon, John?

MR. MAXWELL: Don't put in a thing. We'll catch fish.

MRS. MAXWELL: I've heard you say that before and you came back starved. (*Going out left.*) So I'll put in the bacon. And a can of spam won't hurt. (*Exits left.*)

LUCAS: Mornin' Dad. Where you headin'?

MR. MAXWELL: Mr. Mallory and I are going up to the mountains.

LUCAS: Can I go up to the mountains next summer, Dad?

MR. MAXWELL: We'll see. Summer is a long time away.

MRS. MAXWELL: (*Coming to the door.*) How many eggs do you want to take, John?

MR. MAXWELL: We don't need any eggs.

LUCAS: Naw . . . they're goin' back to nature. Let 'em rob the birds.

MRS. MAXWELL: (*Going back out left.*) I'll put in a dozen.

MR. MAXWELL: There's plenty of game up there, Janet.

LUCAS: Yeah . . . and it'll be there when you get back, too. (*Strolling around the room.*) I don't know why I don't get to go to the mountains. Fathers are supposed to take their sons fishing.

MR. MAXWELL: You know I would, son. But Mr. Mallory just invited me. He may want to spring a big deal.

LUCAS: Yeah, and he may want to push you over the bluff, too. You better watch him. Executives get funny ideas sometimes. (*He sits, starts looking at the paper.*)

BY DONALD PAYTON

MRS. MAXWELL enters left, carrying a rather large box.

MRS. MAXWELL: Here's enough to keep you for awhile. *(She sets it by his equipment.)*

And John, please be careful with your blankets. The last time you went camping, you burned one to a crisp.

MR. MAXWELL: *(Defensively.)* Now, Janet, I—

MRS. MAXWELL: *(Breaking in.)* And please watch about walking in your sleep.

MR. MAXWELL: *(Irritably.)* Janet, I'm old enough to take care of myself.

CAROLINE enters center. She is wearing a very becoming housecoat.

CAROLINE: Good morning, Mom . . . Dad.

MRS. MAXWELL: Good morning, dear. John, I do wish you would get your clothes on.

You don't want him to wait on you do you?

MR. MAXWELL: It'll do him good. I have to wait on him hand and foot every day.

LUCAS: They found a bullet-riddled body in Lakeside Park last night.

MR. MAXWELL: Anyway, if I made him wait, maybe he wouldn't feel so blasted independent. *(He strolls out center.)*

MRS. MAXWELL: *(Calling after him.)* And don't forget your long underwear. It gets cold up there at night. *(She sits.)* Your father gets so excited when he gets ready to go that he loses every bit of sense he ever did have.

CAROLINE: Do you think Dad will get a promotion, Mom?

MRS. MAXWELL: You know as much about it as I do. *(She rises, starts looking through his equipment.)*

LUCAS: They said a fourteen-year old boy was cutting the grass and discovered the body in a slump of bushes. Some people get all the breaks.

CAROLINE: All of the girls had new dresses last night but me. I could have died then and there.

MRS. MAXWELL: Nothing makes me as nervous as sending your dad off somewhere.

LUCAS: Something like that couldn't happen to me. Huh uh. Imagine that. Just mowin' the grass and comin' across a—

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

LUCAS: Hello.

MRS. MAXWELL: Please stop worrying me with things like that.

LUCAS: Well, it just don't seem fair. The only things I come across when I mow lawns are toads and thousand-legged worms.

CAROLINE: Isn't Courtney up yet?

MRS. MAXWELL: No, she isn't. I don't know what has been wrong with her lately, do you?

LUCAS: I did cut the head off of a lizard once.

CAROLINE: Frankly, I imagine she is trying to get out of her chores.

MRS. MAXWELL: I think it's deeper than that, dear.

CAROLINE: Yes . . . she may want out of the dishes, too.

LUCAS: *(Again reading.)* Huh, can you imagine that.

CAROLINE: *(Shouting.)* Didn't you hear what Mom said, Courtney? *(To MRS. MAXWELL.)* It's a terrible thing to think that someone would act that way.

LUCAS: It was the fifth murder this month.

THE KIDNAPPING KRAZE

MRS. MAXWELL: (*Out of patience.*) Lucas, will you please read something else? Turn to the comics.

LUCAS: Not them . . . they're gettin' too gruesome.

MRS. MAXWELL: (*Calling louder.*) Courtney, are you coming or not?

CAROLINE: I demand to see something done to that girl.

The doorbell is heard off-right.

CAROLINE: There's the doorbell. (*Goes up t the window, peeps out.*) It's Mr. Mallory.

MRS. MAXWELL: Oh, good heavens. (*Goes up to the door, center.*) John, he's here.

The doorbell rings again.

CAROLINE: Shall I let him in?

MRS. MAXWELL: Of course.

CAROLINE goes to the door, admits MR. MALLORY. He is a rather fat man in his early fifties, with his hair turning to grey. He is wearing a hunting cap, pants, shirt, and a rather heavy jacket.

MR. MALLORY: (*In a booming voice.*) Hello, Caroline. Good morning, Mrs. Maxwell.

CAROLINE: Good morning, Mr. Mallory.

MRS. MAXWELL: Good morning.

MR. MALLORY: And Lucas. (*He beams at him.*)

LUCAS: (*Nonchalantly.*) Morin', J. C.

MRS. MAXWELL and CAROLINE exchange astonished glances.

MR. MALLORY: And where's John?

MRS. MAXWELL: He'll be in a moment. You know how slow he is in the morning.

MR. MALLORY: Yes . . . I know too well.

MRS. MAXWELL: Lucas, I wish you would get your sister out of bed.

LUCAS: Okay. (*He starts lazily toward center.*) I just wish that something exciting could happen to me. I still can't get over the kid faintin' at just the sight of a—(*He goes out center.*)

MR. MALLORY: What's troubling the boy?

CAROLINE: I think he's wanting to be a detective.

MR. MAXWELL enters center. He is wearing a hunting cap, tan pants and a shirt. He is wearing boots and a hunting knife and holster hanging from his belt. In his hand, he is carrying a hatchet.

MR. MAXWELL: (*As he enters.*) Morning J. C.

MR. MALLORY: Greetings, Maxwell.

MR. MAXWELL: Ready and rarin' to go, are you?

MR. MALLORY: Well, I don't know. My lumbago and rheumatism are literally killing me.

MR. MAXWELL: That crisp mountain air will take it out of you, J. C. It'll make a new man of you.

BY DONALD PAYTON

MR. MALLORY: Well, shall we head for the hills?

MR. MAXWELL: No sooner said than done. I'm rarin' to go. *(He starts picking up the things.)*

MRS. MAXWELL: Do you have everything there, John?

MR. MAXWELL: I have, Janet. I know right where it all is. *(He stoops.)* Where's my stringer? My stringer.

MRS. MAXWELL: Now John, don't get excited.

They all start looking.

MR. MAXWELL: I'm not excited. I'm worried. I've got to find that stringer.

CAROLINE: Here it is, Dad. *(She holds it up.)*

MR. MAXWELL: Good. Now, I guess we're ready. My knife. Have any of you seen my knife? *(He starts looking again.)* Janet, where's my knife?

MRS. MAXWELL: *(Calmly.)* It's on your belt, John.

MR. MAXWELL: Oh. *(He starts picking up his equipment.)* Help me load this stuff.

They start picking it up, handing it to him. He has it over his shoulder, under his arms, some on his back.

MRS. MAXWELL: John, why don't you just make two trips?

MR. MAXWELL: Nope, gotta save time.

He is now completely loaded down. It is all that he can possibly carry and more. It looks like it will all fall at any time.

MR. MAXWELL: Well, J. C. Let's go. If you find me, Janet, you can kiss me goodbye.

Careful for the tin cup there, Janet. You'll kiss the wrong mug.

She kisses him, and the two men start for the door.

MRS. MAXWELL: Your gun, John.

CAROLINE: *(As she starts toward the gun.)* I'll get it.

As she starts up-stage, LUCAS enters center. He is carrying the ice-pick, on which the note is still sticking. He is gazing into space, his eyes very wide.

CAROLINE: Is she getting up, Lucas? *(No answer.)* Lucas! *(He continues to walk down-stage.)*

MRS. MAXWELL: Lucas, what's wrong?

CAROLINE: Lucas!

MRS. MAXWELL: He doesn't act like he hears a word we're saying.

MR. MAXWELL: *(Sharply.)* If this is a joke, Son, it certainly isn't very amusing.

MR. MALLORY: What is he holding?

MR. MAXWELL: Great Scott! It's an ice-pick.

MRS. MAXWELL: *(Astonished.)* An ice-pick?

MR. MALLORY: With a note on it.

THE KIDNAPPING KRAZE

CAROLINE: A note? *(They all crowd around LUCAS; MR. MALLORY takes the ice-pick and note.)*

MR. MALLORY: It says . . . you'd better sit down, Mrs. Maxwell. *(She gropes for a chair and drops into it.)*

MR. MAXWELL: For Pete's sake read, J. C.

MR. MALLORY: It says . . . Your daughter is all right . . . don't call the police . . . stand by.

CAROLINE: Wh . . . wh . . . what does that . . . mean?

MR. MALLORY: That she's been kidnapped.

MR. MAXWELL drops everything that he is holding. It comes crashing to the floor.

LUCAS: Kidnapped. *(He falls head-first onto the floor.)*

MR. MALLORY: *(His hand on MR. MAXWELL's shoulder.)* Steady, Maxwell. Steady.

ACT TWO

AT RISE:

The stage is empty of people. There is a chair propped against the front door and a baseball bat is leaning against the wall, left. The lights in the living room are all off, but a light comes in from the kitchen. The lights are on just enough to make everything discernable.

As the curtain rises, the window right is slowly being raised, and ELIZABETH pops her head into the room. She gazes around, eyes wide, and then crawls through the window into the room. She starts creeping stealthily across the room, peers out center, crosses left, peers out the door, and then motions for COURTNEY to enter. As COURTNEY crawls in, ELIZABETH crosses over to her. Both girls are now wearing slacks.

ELIZABETH: *(In a stage whisper.)* The coast is clear.

COURTNEY: Are you sure?

ELIZABETH: Sure I'm sure. As least I think so.

COURTNEY: No one saw me come in here, did they?

ELIZABETH: Of course not.

COURTNEY: Wow, Elizabeth. This is the most super spectacular idea ever.

ELIZABETH: And by the time tonight is over, you'll be the crown princess around here. I just wish something like this could happen to me.

COURTNEY: Wow.

ELIZABETH: We'll let 'em worry about you the rest of the night. And then when you make your dramatic entrance tomorrow morning, your worries will be over for life.

COURTNEY: I'm just anxious to hear what they say.

ELIZABETH: Well, we'll find out right now. *(Looking around the room.)* Where' a good place to hide?

COURTNEY: *(Crossing to the chair, upper-right corner.)* How's this?

ELIZABETH: Perfect, Courtney, perfect. Just get behind there and I'll start the ball to rolling.

Courtney pulls out the chair, gets behind it.

BY DONALD PAYTON

COURTNEY: I'm just so excited goose pimples are hanging out all over.

ELIZABETH: Well, push'em back in. You can't afford to be seen. Are you ready?

COURTNEY: I guess so.

ELIZABETH: Okay, here goes. *(She pushes the chair back in its original position, with COURTNEY crouching behind it. ELIZABETH starts tip-toeing to the window.)*

COURTNEY: *(Sticking up her head.)* You sure they won't find me?

ELIZABETH: Of course I'm sure. Just stay down. I'll go and ring the doorbell.

COURTNEY: O.K., Elizabeth.

She again ducks behind the chair. ELIZABETH crawls out of the window, lowers it, then starts ringing the doorbell. LUCAS sticks his head in left, crosses the room on tip-toe. When the doorbell rings again, he suddenly remembers something. He goes back, picks up the baseball bat and again starts creeping across the room. He takes the chairs away from in front of the door, opens it, and stands back with the ball bat raised menacingly over his head as ELIZABETH enters.

ELIZABETH: Hello, Lucas.

LUCAS: *(Sadly.)* Oh . . . Elizabeth. What a let down.

ELIZABETH: You expecting someone?

LUCAS: I just thought maybe it was gonna be Jack the Ripper or somebody else cool like that.

ELIZABETH: Why the bat?

LUCAS: I was gonna beat his head off. It's a wonder I didn't knock you out. My trigger finger is really itchin' tonight.

ELIZABETH: Why tonight?

LUCAS: *(Replacing the ball bat.)* Somethin' happened around this place.

ELIZABETH: It did?

LUCAS: Yeah. Somethin' really excitin'.

ELIZABETH: *(Crossing to him.)* What was it, Lucas?

LUCAS: Can't tell you.

He turns on the table lamp. As he does, all of the lights are flashed on.

ELIZABETH: *(Following him.)* Please, Lucas. *(No answer.)* Won't you tell me what it was?

LUCAS: Nope.

ELIZABETH: Why?

LUCAS: Can't.

ELIZABETH: Why?

COURTNEY peeps over the chair top. After a second or two she again ducks behind it.

LUCAS: They told me not to. And I'm not going to.

ELIZABETH: Oh.

LUCAS: It's too important.

ELIZABETH: *(Raising her eyebrows.)* Oh?

LUCAS: Might mean life or death.

ELIZABETH: *(More emphatic.)* Oh!

THE KIDNAPPING KRAZE

LUCAS: Maybe both. You'd fall over if you knew. You'd faint flat on your kisser.

ELIZABETH: (*Eyes very wide, excitedly.*) Really, Lucas?

LUCAS: Yessir.

ELIZABETH: And it's really important?

LUCAS: (*Importantly.*) It's so important that Grandma came here early this morning—all the way from Ashtabula. And Aunt Mary is here too.

ELIZABETH: (*Coaxingly.*) Won't you just give me a hint, Lucas?

LUCAS: I'd like to, Elizabeth. But I can't—and I won't—'cause I got too strong a will-power. Sometimes I think it's too strong for my own good. (*LUCAS sits.*) We'll miss her, too.

ELIZABETH: Who, Lucas?

LUCAS: She was a fine girl. (*He again rises.*)

ELIZABETH: (*Following him.*) Who was a fine girl?

LUCAS: Just—she.

ELIZABETH: Who, Lucas, who?

LUCAS: (*Sitting on the divan.*) Elizabeth, you'd just as well quit askin' questions 'cause I ain't gonna answer. (*Pause, he sits with his chin in his hands.*) She may be dead.

ELIZABETH: (*Crossing over behind the divan.*) Who, Lucas?

LUCAS: (*Importantly.*) Well, I guess you deserve to know. But keep it quiet.

COURTNEY again peeps over the back of the chair.

ELIZABETH: Oh, I will.

LUCAS: (*Dryly.*) It's Courtney.

ELIZABETH: (*Faking anxiety, moving around divan.*) What, Lucas, what?

LUCAS: Kidnapped . . . kidnapped.

ELIZABETH: (*Shouting dramatically.*) Kidnapped? (*She fakes a faint and falls on divan.*)

LUCAS: Oh, come on!

MRS. MAXWELL: (*Calling from off-left.*) Who was that talking in there, Lucas?

COURTNEY immediately ducks out of sight as MRS. MAXWELL enters left, followed by MRS. BROWN, AUNT MARY and CAROLINE.

LUCAS: It's Elizabeth . . . she just fainted.

MRS. MAXWELL: Oh, the poor little thing.

MRS. BROWN: Who is it, Janet?

MRS. MAXWELL: (*As they go over to ELIZABETH.*) It's Elizabeth Smith.

CAROLINE: Courtney's best friend.

MRS. BROWN: Oh . . . the poor girl.

MRS. MAXWELL: (*Sitting chair center.*) These two were unseparable. Together day and night. Practically like . . . (*Sniffs*) . . . sisters.

MRS. BROWN: (*By chair center, patting MRS. MAXWELL on the back.*) There . . . there . . . Janet.

AUNT MARY: It's a terrible thing. My, my.

CAROLINE: I think she's blinking her eyes.

AUNT MARY: The poor little thing.

MRS. MAXWELL: (*Rises and leans over ELIZABETH.*) How are you feeling, honey?

ELIZABETH: (*Whimpering.*) I don't know. My stomach feels like a merry-go-round. (*She looks around.*) Hello, Caroline . . . hello, Mrs. Maxwell. Where's Courtney? (*The women exchange glances.*)

LUCAS: (*Disgustedly.*) I told you, Elizabeth. She's been kidnapped.

ELIZABETH, *really capitalizing on the situation, again fakes a faint.*

LUCAS: Come on!

MRS. MAXWELL: (*Sharply.*) Lucas, please go into the other room!

LUCAS: (*He turns and starts left.*) Women are really weak creatures. Especially the female ones. (*He exits left.*)

AUNT MARY: (*Looking at ELIZABETH and shaking her head sadly.*) The poor little dear.

CAROLINE: Maybe after she lies here a moment she'll feel better.

MRS. BROWN: (*Moving to chair down-right.*) The poor little thing.

ELIZABETH: (*Raising up on one elbow, weakly.*) Where—where am I?

MRS. MAXWELL: (*Rubbing her forehead.*) Everything's all right, honey. You're over at the Maxwells.

ELIZABETH: Oh. (*She lies back down, groans.*) Where did you say Courtney was?

AUNT MARY: Now you'll have to get a firm grip on yourself, Elizabeth.

MRS. BROWN: Yes, dear. Just . . . grit your teeth.

ELIZABETH: (*Weakly.*) Your eyes are red, Mrs. Maxwell. Did you get soap in them?

MRS. MAXWELL: (*Smiling bravely.*) No, dear. (*She sniffs.*) You'd better tell her.

AUNT MARY: Well, Courtney has . . . has . . . has been . . . (*She also breaks into tears. She turns away from ELIZABETH, moves to back of chair center.*)

ELIZABETH: (*Sitting bolt up-right.*) Oh, goodness. I remember now. She was kidnapped. (*She rises.*) She was a fine girl . . . a *fine* girl. My one true friend . . . my best friend . . . and my foremost incentive for living. (*She dabs at her eyes with her handkerchief, starts pacing the room.*)

All of the others sniff and they also dab at their eyes with their handkerchiefs.

ELIZABETH: (*Very tragically.*) You can't imagine what she meant to me. I loved her like I love myself, as remarkable as it may seem.

MRS. MAXWELL: I think I'm going to faint.

MRS. BROWN: Steady, Janet.

AUNT MARY: (*Taking MRS. MAXWELL by the arm.*) You'd better go up and get some rest.

CAROLINE: Yes. This day has been a terrible strain on you.

ELIZABETH: It's a strain on me now. It's taking fifty years right off of my life.

MRS. BROWN: (*Up and exit center.*) Come along, Janet. You've got to rest.

ELIZABETH: (*Tearfully.*) I have absolutely nothing to live for.

CAROLINE: (*Putting her arm around her, soothingly.*) Don't give up hope, Elizabeth. I think we'll be hearing something before long.

ELIZABETH: Yes, you'll hear my breaking spirit collapse from under me.

AUNT MARY: You'll feel better in the morning, Elizabeth. And as soon as we find something out, we'll call you.

ELIZABETH: (*Trying to smile.*) Thank you. Now I'll stagger home and cry myself to sleep.

AUNT MARY: (*As all but ELIZABETH start center.*) It's just too terrible dreadful for words.

THE KIDNAPPING KRAZE

MRS. MAXWELL: The poor little thing. Oh, why didn't I let her go skating last night?
(They exit center.)

ELIZABETH: *(After making sure that they're gone, she strolls over to COURTNEY.)* Well, how was I?

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