

THEY RUN IN OUR FAMILY

A COMEDY IN THREE ACTS

By Donald Payton

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CAST OF CHARACTERS

(8 MEN, 11 WOMEN)

PEGGY PENNYWINNER.....A typical early teen; cute, perky, but definitely not a sports enthusiast. *(153 lines)*

ALVIN PENNYWINNER.....Like most of the other Pennywinners, consumed by sports. *(42 lines)*

PAT PENNYWINNER.....Oldest daughter. Aspires to be a wrestling champ. Would be very pretty if she was concerned about such manners, but she isn't. *(50 lines)*

BUZZ PENNYWINNER.....Lanky and wiry; looks the part of an athlete. *(46 lines)*

CHESTER MULLINS.....Better known as Spook. Like Buzz, sports consume the lion's share of his daily schedule. *(31 lines)*

AGNES PENNYWINNER.....Although she is often exasperated by her overly energetic brood, she's a patient and understanding mother—to a point. Neat, attractive, pleasant. *(116 lines)*

AUNT ALICE.....Mrs. Pennywinner's aunt. Something of a guardian angel to the Pennywinners. *(72 lines)*

SEYMOUR.....Alvin's good friend who, like Alvin, lives for the day he'll start for the Frogs. (17 lines)

COACH SAM PENNYWINNER...Father and coach of the Central High School Frogs. Sports nut. (256 lines)

MRS. ALONZO SPEEL.....A stiff, haughty, arrogant woman in her late thirties. (23 lines)

JOSIE SPEEL.....Mrs. Speel's daughter who has a penchant for talking. (6 lines)

DIMPLE DILLARD.....Adorable sports editor of the school paper. (6 lines)

MITZI JONES.....(8 lines)

CINDY SANDERS.....Cute as buttons; members of the Frog pep club. (1 line)

DR. HAROLD GILLEY.....Principal at Central High School. Enthusiastic Frog booster and longtime friend of Coach Pennywinner. (36 lines)

ALEXANDER SMITH.....Strong, husky, and handsome; a member of the Northview "team." (46 lines)

DR. PAUL ANDREWS.....A former Frog standout athlete, articulate, and well-dressed. (10 lines)

MIDGE.....Peggy's best friend. (19 lines)

MRS. ALLEN.....A slight woman in her late forties. Gives the appearance of being considerably older. (5 lines)

HAND PROPERTIES

- COACH PENNYWINNERWhistle on string, blanket, clipboard, satchel with bowling ball, football jerseys, helmets, small notebook, handkerchief, letter
- AGNES PENNYWINNERHandkerchief, cake, dessert plate, fork, clothes brush, girls coat, glass of water, bottle of pills, stack of letters
- PEGGYApple, paint brush, paints, school books, magic marker, pencil, paper, telephone book
- PAT Golf bag and clubs
- BUZZ Football helmet
- SPOOKNewspaper
- AUNT ALICE..... Tea cup
- DIMPLE.....Notebook and pencil
- ALEXANDERTelegram, small suitcase, flowers, cardboard box
- DR. ANDREWS Doctor’s bag
- MIDGEMovies, magazines
- MRS. ALLENLetter

DESCRIPTION OF STAGE SET

There is an easy chair down right, a sofa center, a desk with a chair in the corner up left, and an occasional chair down left. End table, lamps, and other accessories tend to give the room a warm look. An opposite effect is created by sports paraphernalia scattered about the room – weights, medicine balls, jump ropes, a football or two, a couple of basketballs, a softball, a baseball, bats, gloves, and other accessories. Adding to the sports motif are plaques hanging on the wall on each side of the sofa, inscribed “Health Makes Wealth,” “Fight Team Fight,” “Good Guys Finish Last,” etc. There is an easel with a half-finished painting up right.

STAGE PROPERTIES

- Easy chair
- Sofa
- Desk with chair
- Occasional chair
- End table
- Lamps
- Various pieces of athletic equipment
- Plaques with sports mottos
- Easel and painting
- Telephone and Telephone book
- Radio
- Stack of letters
- Barbells

DO NOT COPY

ACT ONE

SETTING:

Living room in the PENNYWINNER home. Early evening in late fall.

AT RISE:

PEGGY PENNYWINNER is seated at the easel. She is the typical early teen, her attire and her hair are in the style of the day. She has a sprinkling of freckles and although there is no hint of it, she is every inch a lady. She is munching on an apple and dabbing at her painting. She backs off from the painting, surveys it, returns to it and adds one more dab, triumphantly. Her brother, ALVIN, jogs in right. He is wearing a football helmet, a much-too-large sweatshirt and jeans. He is the typical PENNYWINNER, with sports his main object in life. He jogs around the room, stops, breathes heavily and loudly, then returns to his jogging. After jogging around the room three or four times he drops to the floor, starts doing push-ups, grunting loudly.

PEGGY: *(Glaring.)* Alvin.

There is no response from ALVIN, who is getting louder and louder.

PEGGY: *(Louder.)* Alvin.

ALVIN: *(Without looking up.)* Huh?

PEGGY: What in the world are you doing?

ALVIN: I'm breathing.

PEGGY: You coulda fooled me. I thought you were dying.

ALVIN: *(Sitting up.)* You hoped I was dyin'. For your information, Coach Sam says it takes plenty of wind to run the 100 in ten flat.

PEGGY: Then you should make it. You've got plenty of wind.

ALVIN: *(Returning to push-ups.)* Just go ahead and talk. You'll change your tune when I sign a million dollar pro contract.

PEGGY: You also spend more time flat than anyone I know.

ALVIN: Just go ahead and scoff. *(He bounces up, grabs football.)*
You know what this has got in it?

PEGGY: (*Returns to her easel.*) Air. Like everything else in this house.

ALVIN: Money. It may be brown on the outside, sister, but it's green in the middle. G-R-E-N-E, green. (*PEGGY shrugs with dismay.*) It's filled with green power. (*Crossing to her.*) This, in case you didn't know, is a football.

PEGGY: (*Taking it from him, calmly.*) I realize full well it is a football, Alvin. It's the A-number-one item of importance around this household – unless it's item B . . . (*Picks up a basketball.*)... basketball. And basketball would be number one if it wasn't for item C . . . (*Picks up a baseball.*) . . . baseball. Then . . . (*With a sweeping gesture around the room.*) there's track, tennis, golf, boxing, horseshoes . . . you name it, if you can bounce it, hit it, jump it, throw it, catch it, we've got it.

ALVIN: Is Coach Sam here?

PEGGY: If you mean Dad, he isn't home yet. (*She returns to easel.*)

ALVIN: Still on the practice field, I guess. Getting the Frogs ready for the Nomads. We play the Nomads Friday night, you know.

PEGGY: I realize we play the Nomads Friday night, Alvin.

ALVIN: It's the biggest football game of the year.

PEGGY: I thought every game was the big game.

ALVIN: This is THE game, boy.

PEGGY: And for your information I am not a boy.

ALVIN: Heck, I know you're not a boy. If you were a boy you'd be playin' football. (*Starts jogging again.*)

PEGGY: That's what you think. (*As she dabs at painting.*) For your information, you would be much better off to concentrate more on art and culture and less on junk like football and basketball.

ALVIN: (*Stopping.*) Junk?! (*Crossing to her.*) Football isn't just a game. It's a way of life. (*Dramatically.*) If you dig when you can't dig any deeper, climb when you can't climb any higher, and push when you can't push any harder, you've crossed the goal line. By-George you've made the team.

PEGGY: Alvin Pennywinner. (*Rising.*) It may astonish you to know that life isn't confined to a striped field with goal posts protruding at both ends. Life is much greater, much fuller.

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ALVIN: I'll say it is. There's basketball and baseball and swimming and golf—

PEGGY: *(Breaking in.)* All right, Alvin.

ALVIN: —and tennis and track and soccer and boxing and—

PEGGY: *(Again breaking in.)* Alvin, can't you see I'm doing my homework?

ALVIN: *(Glaring.)* Well I'm studying, too.

PEGGY: *(Returning to her painting.)* For what, recess?

ALVIN: I'm studying the play book that's going to beat Northview Friday night. *(He sits on sofa.)*

PEGGY: *(Without looking up.)* Don't sit on the sofa, Alvin.

ALVIN: Listen sister, this is my house. I live here, too.

PEGGY: Alvin, you do not LIVE anywhere. No one living could possibly look like you do. *(He crosses to chair. Her eyes remain on easel.)* You can't sit there, either.

ALVIN: What's coming off around here?

PEGGY: For one thing, those clothes. Mom said you were not to sit anywhere in the house with your clothes on.

ALVIN: Well, I'm sure not gonna sit around without 'em, I'll tell you that.

PAT PENNYWINNER enters left, a golf bag slung over her shoulder. She is wearing jeans and a sweatshirt. She's a typical PENNYWINNER with a goal to match: wrestling.

PAT: *(As she enters.)* Hi.

PEGGY: Hi, Pat. *(ALVIN returns to his calisthenics.)*

PAT: Coach here yet?

PEGGY: If you mean Dad, no he's not.

PAT: I need some advice. *(She takes an iron from golf bag.)*

PEGGY: *(Hopefully.)* About whether to go to the Sock Hop Friday night.

PAT: About my short game. *(Addresses imaginary ball.)* I think I'm getting too much right hand into my seven iron. *(Swings golf club.)*

PEGGY: Anybody invited you to the Sock Hop?

PAT: In case you didn't know, SHE will be here Friday night.

PEGGY: She who?

PAT: June Smithers, the world's champion female wrestler.

PEGGY: You can't be serious about this, Pat. Girls just don't become wrestlers.

PAT: Wrestling is a highly skilled professional sport.

PEGGY: But gee whiz, Pat, girls meet fellows and get married and wear dresses.

PAT: As long as I'm going to fight I'd just as well get paid for it. Listen, the Y kept me from playing baseball and football just because I was a lousy girl. Well, they can't keep me from winning the wrestling championship, girl or no girl. *(She swings club vigorously.)*

PEGGY shrugs hopelessly, returns to painting.

PAT: I hope Coach can help me with my form.

PEGGY: Your form's pretty good now if you'd give it a chance.

PAT: I'm talking about my golf form. Dad is a coach, you know. He coaches the Central High Frogs.

PEGGY: Yeah, he coaches baseball and softball in the summer; football in the fall; basketball in the winter; track, golf, and tennis in the spring; then he starts in all over again. Mom calls it a vicious circle.

BUZZ PENNYWINNER cartwheels into the room from right. He has on faded jeans, a t-shirt, and tennis shoes. He cartwheels or somersaults around the room, comes to a sitting position.

BUZZ: Hi.

PEGGY: You came that close to hitting my painting, Buzz. *(Measures distance with hands.)* Just what do you think you're doing?

BUZZ: I'm getting in shape for the Northview Nomads. We play 'em Friday night.

PEGGY: I'm aware of the fact that **we** play the Nomads Friday night. How could I forget?

BUZZ: Coach said I might start.

PEGGY: Buzz, you shouldn't dwell on football. YOU'VE got to think of other things occasionally.

BUZZ: I do.

PEGGY/BUZZ: *(Together.)* Baseball, basketball, track—

BUZZ: That must be Spook.

PEGGY: *(Dryly.)* The great Spook Mullins.

BUZZ: Come in Spook old fullback.

CHESTER MULLINS, better known as SPOOK, bounces in. He's the star fullback for the Frogs – if they have a star, that is. He's wearing jeans, a loud shirt, and letter jacket. Like BUZZ, sports consume the lion's share of his daily schedule. In fact, the newspaper he carries is opened to the sports page. He and BUZZ greet by bumping shoulders, football style.

BUZZ: Say hi to Spook Mullins, sis, the big football hero.

PEGGY: *(Without looking up from painting.)* Hi.

BUZZ: She doesn't like football.

SPOOK: A freak, huh?

PEGGY: Or basketball or anything else filled with air. No offense intended.

BUZZ: You may not realize it, but you may be looking at the greatest player ever to wear the old maroon and white. *(Or use colors of the local school team if preferred.)*

SPOOK: *(Crosses to her.)* Coach says I'm the roughest, toughest fullback he's ever had. *(Tosses paper on sofa.)*

PEGGY: *(As she makes three strokes on the canvas.)* Rah, rah, rah.

SPOOK: *(Thrusting stomach forward.)* You wanna hit me in the stomach, go ahead.

BUZZ: *(Picking up paper, reading.)* The Northview Nomads, victorious in 40 straight games, go after number 41 against the Central High Frogs at the stadium Friday night.

SPOOK: *(Reading over his shoulder.)* The Nomads boast a huge line, tremendous depth, and Alexander the Great, the greatest high school player in the state. They are heavy favorites to hand the Frogs their 25th straight loss.

BUZZ: (*Reading.*) But all is not gloom in the Frog camp. Coach Pennywinner says the Frogs have no way to jump but up.

SPOOK: And get a load of this. (*Pointing, reading.*) It's rumored that Coach Pennywinner has come up with a new triple-threat to unleash against the Nomads—his son, Buzz.

BUZZ: Wow, I didn't dream they'd be writing about me. After all, I've only been in one game.

PEGGY: Did they mention the fact that you carried the ball just one time—and lost 40 yards?

BUZZ: (*Glaring.*) It's no disgrace to be tackled by Baumgartner. He's the best in the business. Anyway, you won't be talkin' so big Friday night – when we clobber the Nomads.

SPOOK and BUZZ start tossing a medicine ball. PAT jumps rope. ALVIN, who has been engrossed in the preceding conversation, starts exercising with gusto. AGNES PENNYWINNER, mother, enters left. She is slim, trim, and attractive. Although she is often exasperated by her overly energetic brood, she's still a patient and understanding mother. When the others see her they abruptly stop, look around sheepishly, respond with "Hi Mom," etc.

BUZZ: We were . . . uh . . . just sorta brushin' off some rough edges, Mom.

AGNES: I see. Don't you think you could brush them off just as well in the basement?

PAT: Sure. Only let me know the second Dad gets here. I want to ask him about a new hold.

AGNES: Pat, you can't be serious about this – this wrestling?

PAT: And why not. I'm a lead pipe cinch to go right to the top with the training Dad's given me. (*She starts left.*)

AGNES: Oh Pat, didn't I read that the annual Sock Hop is being held after the game Friday night?

PAT: Could be. Why?

AGNES: Have any of the boys asked you for a date?

PAT: I'm in training, Mom. Early to bed, early to rise.

AGNES: You're 18, dear. I think an occasional date would be nice.

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PAT: Who wants to go to a lousy dance and hear the lousy guys brag about all their lousy accomplishments. Someday I'll do the bragging – when I dethrone June Smithers. *(She exits left.)*

BUZZ: We'll be headin' to the basement, too. *(Holds arm.)* Can't let the old soupbone get cold. Tell us the second Coach Sam gets here.

AGNES: Can't you refer to your father some other way, Buzz?

BUZZ: You mean like they do down at the drug store? Not me, I'm not gonna get my mouth washed out with soap.

AGNES: By the way, how was school today?

BUZZ: Great. We had the best workout we've had all year. Plenty of blocking and head-rattling sacks.

AGNES: Those English classes must be a little more rigorous than when I went to school.

SPOOK: He's talkin' about our football scrimmage, Mrs. Pennywinner. The big game with Northview is Friday night, you know.

AGNES: By the way, Buzz, how is your geometry? It's important for anyone who's going to be an engineer.

BUZZ: I may not be an engineer after all, Mom. Spook and I are sorta eyein' a career in pro football.

AGNES: And when did you decide this?

BUZZ: Coach Pop . . .

SPOOK: That is, Coach Sam . . .

BUZZ: Coach would be pretty proud of me. Like he says, every father's ambition is to have a son in pro football.

AGNES: I see.

AUNT ALICE: *(Sticking her head in the door, right.)* Anybody home?

AUNT ALICE enters carrying a cup. She is something of a guardian angel for the PENNYWINNERS. With no family of her own, she endeavors to keep her finger in the PENNYWINNER pie. This she succeeds in doing most of the time. Though "old maidish" she hasn't given up the thought of someday crossing her number one goal line – matrimony. She is dressed as desired.

AGNES: Come in, Aunt Alice.

AUNT ALICE: Just dropped in to borrow something, Agnes.

AGNES: What do you need?

AUNT ALICE: I don't care. What have you got?

BUZZ: Aunt Alice, this is Chester Mullins, our star football player.

SPOOK: The gann calls me Spook.

AUNT ALICE: Well, what's one voice against the multitude? Put'er there, Spook. *(They shake hands, her knees buckle as she writhes in pain.)* Ouch. *(To BUZZ.)* Don't you have any friends that play Parcheesi?

BUZZ: Spook's our star fullback. He's rough . . . and tough.

SPOOK: Yeah—you wanna hit me in the stomach?

AUNT ALICE: *(Holding up limp hand.)* Not me. I figure I'm lucky to be alive.

BUZZ: We'll be workin' out, Mom. Whistle when Coach Pop gets here. *(They exit left as ALVIN starts tip-toeing right.)*

AGNES: *(Turning.)* And where do you think you're going?

ALVIN: Well, I, that is, well Coach figures I'll take my place in the lineup in a couple of years and—

AGNES: *(Breaking in.)* You haven't thought about taking your place in the den, have you, to study?

ALVIN: *(Freezing.)* Study?!

AGNES: Your history?

ALVIN: *(Louder.)* History.

SEYMOUR, ALVIN's crony, bounces in right. He's attired in a much-too-large sweatshirt, raveled football pants, a battered helmet, and three-sizes-too-big tennis shoes.

SEYMOUR: Hi, Alvin.

ALVIN: Hi, there, old pal Seymour.

AGNES: How nice. He can help you with your history.

SEYMOUR: *(Screeching to a halt.)* History? *(Starting right.)* So long, old pal Alvin.

ALVIN: *(Getting between him and the door.)* Seymour, you're not gonna chicken out on me, are you?

SEYMOUR: I'm not gonna hang around and be a dead duck, I'll tell you that.

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AGNES: I had a long talk with your history teacher, Alvin. She said there's only one student in the whole class lower than you are.

SEYMOUR: (*Sheepishly.*) I've been sick.

ALVIN: It's just that we're not as interested in the past as we are the future, Mom, especially on the field of athletic combat.

SEYMOUR: He means football, Mrs. Pennywinner.

ALVIN: (*To AUNT ALICE.*) You may not realize it, Aunt Alice, but my pal Seymour here is a future Frog.

AUNT ALICE: That I believe. But what in the world is he now?

ALVIN: He's the greatest triple-threat on the block, that's all. We're gonna be in the starting lineup in two years. Coach says all you gotta do is keep your eye on the goal, your feet on the ground, your nose to the grindstone and your hand on the throttle.

SEYMOUR: (*As they start left.*) I know a guy that tried that once.

ALVIN: Yeah, what happened?

SEYMOUR: Nobody knows. They ain't got him untangled yet. (*They exit.*)

As PEGGY paints, AUNT ALICE stands behind her and observes, approvingly.

AGNES: (*Surveying the room.*) Footballs, baseballs, basketballs. Sometimes I think it would be easier if we just moved into the YMCA. I tell you it's more than the average wife and mother would tolerate. (*Starts tidying up the room.*) When I married Sam, do you know where we went on our honeymoon? To the ball park. The only sweet-nothings he uttered were "Need some new glasses, ump?" and "Sock the apple, slugger," and when I tried to hold his hand he objected – on the grounds he might miss a foul ball.

AUNT ALICE: (*SymPAThetically.*) Now, now Agnes.

AGNES: And if it isn't baseball, it's basketball and if it isn't basketball it's football. If we're not playin' it we're watching it on TV – seven days a week, four weeks a month, twelve months a year.

AUNT ALICE: (*An arm around her shoulder.*) Now dear, things will get better.

AGNES: When you live in a world where 22 numbskulls kick a windbag back and forth between two snow drifts, it can't get much better. I'm his wife. A wife is supposed to be proud of her husband. But last winter, when basketball season started, what did he say? By George, Agnes, after 20 years we're gonna win the championship. And what happened? The Frogs finished so far in the cellar nobody showed up for the last five games.

AUNT ALICE: He said he was building character, remember?

AGNES: And last summer in baseball . . . "By George, Agnes, after 20 seasons, this is the year. We'll sack up the marbles in the city league, sack up the marbles in the district tournament and grab the marbles in the state." They were so busy losing their marbles they forgot baseball and didn't win a single game.

AUNT ALICE: But you must admit he built character.

AGNES: And now – football. What did he say when practice started? "By George, Agnes, this is the year." Last week Centerville beat us 59-0—our eighth defeat this season and 25th loss in a row, and we sat through it in a snowstorm.

AUNT ALICE: You married him for better or worse, remember?

AGNES: That's right, Aunt Alice. But nothing could be worse than pneumonia.

AUNT ALICE: (*Crossing to PEGGY.*) How's the art show progressing?

PEGGY: Great. Miss Perkins says a couple of my paintings might make it.

AUNT ALICE: At least one of the clan isn't always doing pushups and hanging from the chandelier. (*To AGNES.*) Has Sam mentioned anything about this being a special day?

AGNES: What do you mean, Alice?

AUNT ALICE: I happen to know it's your wedding anniversary.

AGNES: He's got other things on his mind. You know, the game with Northview and ticket sales and – and things like that.

PEGGY: (*Crushed.*) Golly, Mom, he couldn't forget that, could he?

AGNES: The game with Northview is very important. They're our big rival. At least, they've been mine for 20 years along with Centerville and every other school in the state. *(She sniffs. Embarrassed, she quickly turns to plaques on wall.)* Wouldn't you know it, he's turned those pictures again. *(She turns the plaques over. There are "homey" paintings or decoupages on the reverse sides. As she does* COACH SAM PENNYWINNER *come charging in right. He is enthusiastic almost to the point of being rambunctious – especially where sports are concerned. He wears a battered baseball cap. Like an oak tree is recognized by its leaves. COACH PENNYWINNER is known by his baseball pants, oversized sweat shirt, tennis shoes, whistle on a string that dangles from his neck, and a weather-beaten clipboard which he always carries. This time he is also carrying a rather heavy satchel.*

COACH: *(As he enters, exuberantly.)* What a day. What a by-George-day.

AGNES: Hello, Sam. *(He pecks her methodically on cheek.)*

AUNT ALICE: Good evening, Sam.

PEGGY: Hi, Dad.

COACH: By George we've got 'em. We've got those Nomads right where we want 'em.

AGNES: Aren't you going to speak to Aunt Alice, Sam?

COACH: Hello, Aunt Alice. What a scrimmage. The guards are guarding, the tackles were tackling. I tell you, Agnes, we're gonna hamstring the Nomads.

PEGGY: I got an "A" in art today, Dad.

COACH: *(Facing.)* They've got a one-man team. Stop their big star, Alexander the Great, and they've had it.

PEGGY: Miss Perkins said I might make the art festival.

COACH: *(Rambling on.)* And he can be stopped. He can run, pass, and kick. Take those away from him and he's just another player.

AGNES: Sam, your daughter – your young, impressionable, teenage daughter – is speaking to you.

COACH: Yes Peggy, what is it?

PEGGY: Nothing, Dad. (*Dejected.*) Only we had the first round of eliminations in the auditorium sixth period. I hoped you might stop by.

COACH: You know I have chalk talk sixth period, Peggy.

AGNES: Sam, your daughter is interested in art.

COACH: (*Blinking.*) Art who, Agnes? What does he play?

AGNES: She's interested in painting.

COACH: (*Brightening.*) Oh good, she can start in on the garage next summer.

AUNT ALICE: Sam, do you know what day this is?

COACH: Sure. It's Monday.

AGNES: What Monday?

COACH: The Monday before the big game with Northview.

PEGGY: Do you remember what happened 20 years ago today, Dad?

COACH: Twenty years? Let's see, that must have been the year the Packers met the Colts in the playoffs. And Notre Dame finished unbeaten by clouting Army. Sure. I remember now.

AGNES: Yes, Sam?

COACH: State scored two touchdowns in the last quarter and went on to win the championship. How could a man forget something that important.

AGNES sits, sniffs into handkerchief.

COACH: (*Rambling on.*) Yes sir, that's the year I made my first big decision. And I haven't regretted it to this day.

AGNES: (*Sitting up, hopefully.*) You mean . . . (*As PEGGY and AUNT ALICE lean forward.*)

COACH: That was the year I decided to become a coach. You know, as I look back, I wouldn't have had it any other way. The smell of fall in the air, those crisp October nights, the band, and the coin toss. And then winter, and basketball. Then, spring, and track, and the sap running. Then the good old American pastime, baseball. No sir, I wouldn't have had it any other way. (*AGNES sniffs.*) Are you sniffing? Well, let me tell you it affects me the same way. (*Hand on chest.*) By George, it gets you right here. (*Picks up football.*) Yes sir, and Friday we clobber Northview.

AGNES: Sam, you've been saying that for years.

COACH: Where's the old confidence. (*He sits beside her.*) A winner never quits and a quitter never wins. That's pretty good. Remind me to hang that one on the wall in the morning. (*Looks at pictures.*) Somebody turned those pictures again. (*He hops up, crosses to pictures and turns them over.*)

AGNES: Sam, I think it's time for a showdown. (*She rises.*)

COACH: Precisely, Agnes. And come Friday there'll be one.

AGNES: There'll be one tonight.

COACH: Tonight? Oh yeah, Monday night football.

AGNES: This is on a foreign field, Sam.

COACH: Oh, well I don't know too much about those games they play in Europe.

AGNES: You should know that Buzz isn't interested in his geometry – or engineering.

COACH: He's at that age. (*Takes whistle from around neck puts it on table.*)

AGNES: (*Following him.*) He's always been at that age. And Alvin thinks of nothing that concerns school. Just football – or basketball.

COACH: Don't overlook baseball, Agnes. The boy's got a crafty curve ball and a fast one that amazes people.

AGNES: And Pat, heaven forbid, says she's going to be a professional wrestler.

COACH: She'll be a dandy. Despite the fact she's a girl. She'll make something of herself anyway.

AGNES: (*Arms akimbo.*) You mean you approve?

COACH: Sports keep your youngsters off the streets, Agnes. It's the answer to half the problems that face our young people today. When the bases are loaded and the count's 3 and 2 on the batter, no boy's gonna be thinking about getting into trouble. It's the same when you're two yards from paydirt, or a bucket behind with 30 seconds to go. *(He stops, sniffs.)* What's that smell? *(Moving left.)* By George, is that potroast? *(He exits.)*

AGNES: *(Slumping into chair.)* I'm at my wit's end. To him, life is just one big game and responsibilities are little matters we take care of at halftime.

AUNT ALICE: He didn't even remember your anniversary.

AGNES: All he ever remembers happened in athletic contests. When Pat was born he was snowbound at a basketball tournament. When Buzz came along he was at spring training with the Eagles. Alvin was born during a football game. Peggy, bless her, happened on Christmas day.

PEGGY: You mean Dad was there?

AGNES: I tricked him. I took all of his presents to the hospital. What am I going to do, Aunt Alice?

AUNT ALICE: It's time you have a heart to heart talk with him.

AGNES: How? All he can talk about is football and Friday night's game.

AUNT ALICE: Talk to him in a language he'll understand. *(Facing front.)* Sam, there comes a time in every man's life when he must change his course. A successful coach must be able to change his offense, switch his defense, send in new plays at a moment's notice. Sometimes we don't finish a game, Sam, just the way we had originally hoped to play it. That's life, and that's the way the old ball bounces. *(Turns to AGNES.)* Then . . . *(Fist clenched.)* drive over for the touchdown.

AGNES: It might work. I'll try it.

COACH: *(Entering left.)* Yes sir, something tells me we're gonna clobber Northview. *(Hand on stomach.)* There's a feeling here I've never had before.

AUNT ALICE: Good grief, he's been in the potroast. *(To AGNES.)* I'll be headin' to the bench, skipper. Remember, I'll be keepin' warm in the bull pen.

PEGGY: Yeah, me too, Mom. (*PEGGY and AUNT ALICE exit left.*)

COACH: If we could just find some way to stop Alexander the Great.

AGNES: (*Standing erect.*) Sam, there comes a time in every man's life . . .

COACH: Yes sir, stop him and you stop the whole team. (*He paces.*)

AGNES: When he must change his course. A successful coach—

She is interrupted by the ringing of the doorbell.

COACH: Probably one of the boys dropping by for a pep talk. (*He crosses to door.*)

MRS. ALONZO SPEEL and her daughter, JOSIE, enter right. MRS. SPEEL is a stiff, haughty, arrogant woman. She is president of the Central High Alumni Association. JOSIE wears pigtails and horn-rimmed glasses. Both are dressed as desired.

MRS. SPEEL: (*Leading JOSIE by the hand.*) How do you do. I am Mrs. Speel. Mrs. Alonzo G. Speel, president of the Central High Alumni Association. This is my daughter, Josie.

JOSIE: Is this the funny little man they're saying all those nasty things about, Mummy?

MRS. SPEEL: Watch where you walk, Josie. You might trip over some of these horrid obstacles.

AGNES: Please excuse our living room, Mrs. Speel. You see, our family is rather sports minded and —

MRS. SPEEL: (*Breaking in abruptly as she sits.*) Rather like the Alumni. To be perfectly blunt, Mr. Pennywinner, the Alumni is debating what course to take if the Frogs don't, shall we say, fare too well against the Nomads. Frankly, they had a better winter at Valley Forge than we've had.

JOSIE: What does it mean to ride someone out of town on a rail, Mummy?

MRS. SPEEL: Frankly, Mr. Pennywinner, I care not one whit whether we have a football program. To me, it's a bore. However, since he have football, and since I have been chosen to represent our alumni, I am here to make one thing perfectly clear . . . 25 straight losses tell a pretty grim story.

COACH: Spoken like a true-blue booster, Mrs. Speel.

MRS. SPEEL: The alumni intends for us to have a few things we haven't had in recent years – a victory, or perhaps an occasional touch down.

COACH: You're right, Mrs. Speel. I want to win. The boys want to win. But ultimately, whether it's on the field of athletic combat or on the gridiron of life, it matters not whether we win or lose but how we play the game.

MRS. SPEEL: (*Rising.*) Speaking not only for myself but for the Alumni Association and Booster Brigade – balderdash, Mr. Pennywinner, poppy-cock, and bologna.

COACH: Mrs. Speel, may I assure you that we are building strong minds and bodies, and at the same time seeking a well-molded football team.

MRS. SPEEL: Then seek no longer. It's already the moldiest team in the long and absurd history of football.

COACH: Rest assured, Mrs. Speel, that although fate hasn't smiled on us the past couple of years, sooner or later we'll beat Northview.

MRS. SPEEL: The way I understand it, if you don't beat them sooner, you won't be around much later.

AGNES: You mean he may be replaced?

MRS. SPEEL: Fired, I believe, is the correct term. The handwriting is on the wall, Mr. Pennywinner. I only hope you can read better than you can coach football. Come along, Josie. (*Grabs her hand.*)

JOSIE: What's a stumblebum, Mommy?

MRS. SPEEL: (*Dragging her right.*) Come along.

JOSIE: (*Pointing to plaques on wall.*) Look, Mommy.

MRS. SPEEL: How utterly horrid. (*They exit.*)

AGNES: Well, I have never. And you just stood there and took it.

COACH: They criticized Christopher Columbus, Agnes. But he stuck to his course and crossed the ocean blue in fourteen-hundred-ninety-two. I'm in the same boat he was.

AGNES: Sam, if you were in the same boat with Columbus it would sink in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean—the Nina, the Pinta, **and** the Santa Maria. (*Points to sofa.*) Come over here and sit down. I want to talk to you. And after **that** you should be willing to listen.

COACH: Is something wrong, Agnes.

AGNES: Wrong? I don't know one thing that's right. (*He sits.*) Sam, there comes a time in every man's life when he must alter his course. A successful coach must be able to change his offense, switch his defense –

PAT: (*Bouncing in left.*) Hi, Coach.

COACH: (*Bouncing up.*) Pat. How's my lady grappler?

PAT: Every day in every way I'm getting better and better, Coach.

COACH: That's the spirit. (*Walks around her.*) You gotta build up those back and shoulder muscles. (*He picks up a shotput from floor.*) See that this goes wherever you go.

PAT: You bet, Coach. (*She walks around room, raising shotput up and down.*)

AGNES: (*Crossing to him.*) Now listen, Sam, there comes a time –

ALVIN: (*As he and SEYMOUR enter.*) Hi Coach.

COACH: Alvin . . . and Seymour. How's it goin', men?

SEYMOUR: Great, Coach.

COACH: (*Hand raised, as if leading cheer.*) And what's the Frogs' creed, men?

ALVIN/SEYMOUR: (*Together.*) I eat my toasties every morn; potatoes, carrots, meat, and corn; a quart of milk, some good fresh fruit; will help me fill my football suit. (*They flex muscles.*)

AGNES: Good grief, Sam.

COACH: (*Hitting SEYMOUR on the back.*) Way to go, men. You'll be in that lineup in a couple of years. But you gotta spend more time on those weights. (*They grab weights, start working out vigorously.*)

AGNES: (*Sharply.*) Sam, there comes a time, in every coach's life, when –

BUZZ: *(As he and SPOOK enter.)* We're ready for the opening whistle, Coach.

COACH: There they are, Agnes. The Frog's one-two punch. We were sharp in today's scrimmage, men. But you need to hit 'em harder – and lower. Get that shoulder down and let 'em have it. *(He demonstrates, dumping BUZZ on the floor with a thud.)*

BUZZ: *(Hopping up.)* Yes sir, Coach. *(He runs around room, flexing shoulders in a crouched position.)*

COACH: *(Grabbing football.)* And Spook . . .

SPOOK: *(Standing erect.)* Yes sir, Coach.

COACH: You gotta hide the ball. *(COACH slams football against SPOOK's stomach.)* That's better. *(SPOOK grunts, doubles over in agony, staggers around room holding stomach.)* If you're gonna execute the flea flicker . . . or the cherry picker . . . or the naked reverse . . . you gotta hide that ball.

BUZZ: I think we just executed Spook, Coach.

COACH: Now, everybody ready?

PAT: Ready, Coach.

COACH: Then let's hit it.

All but AGNES drop to the floor. She stares, arms akimbo.

COACH: Altogether now. One, two, one, two.

They start doing pushups, counting in unison with COACH.

COACH: *(As the others count.)* All the way up, Pat. Hit it, Alvin.

AGNES: Sam.

COACH: Okay, gang, everybody up.

They hop up, go immediately into jumping jacks, bouncing in a rhythmic motion. This is repeated rapidly as they all count together. AGNES inserts an occasional "SAM." AUNT ALICE and PEGGY enter, glance at AGNES, who shrugs hopelessly.

AGNES: Sam. (*Louder.*) Sam. (*She crosses to whistle, blows it shrilly. They all stop.*) All right, this has gone far enough. GO somewhere else, children. Your father and I have something to discuss.

ALVIN: Aw gee, Mom.

PAT: I'll be in the basement if you want me, Dad. (*She exits left.*)

BUZZ: Yeah, just yell when you're ready, Coach. I mean Coach Dad. I mean Dad.

He and SPOOK exit left.

ALVIN: Seymour and me will be outside, Coach.

AUNT ALICE: Seymour and I will be outside, Alvin.

ALVIN: Okay, Aunt Alice, if you want to get your face whomped. 'Cause we're gonna be scrimmagin'. (*He and SEYMOUR exit, right.*)

AGNES: Sit down, Sam. (*He does.*) All right, Sam, I've got something to say and you're going to sit there and listen. For the past 20 years, athletics have dominated this household. We eat, sleep, drink, talk, and breathe nothing but sports. Well, Sam, there comes a time in every man's life when he must change his course. A successful coach must be able to change his offense, switch his defense, send in a whole new pattern of plays at a moment's notice. Sometimes we don't finish a game just the way we originally intended to play it. We –

COACH: (*Rising, breaking in.*) You're right, Agnes. We'll change our offense, switch our defense, send in a new pattern of plays. Northview will be caught by surprise. (*She sits, stunned.*) Yes sir, I'll work out a new set of plays tonight. (*He starts left, turns at door.*) By George, I almost forgot. I've got something for you, Agnes. Bet you thought I'd forget our anniversary.

AGNES: (*Melting.*) Sam.

COACH: (*Crossing to satchel.*) I couldn't forget something like that. Twenty years. Twenty-by-George wonderful fun-filled years. (*With back to audience he opens satchel.*) For you, Agnes. (*He turns, hands her a bowling ball.*) Happy Anniversary.

AUNT ALICE: A bowling ball?!

COACH crosses left as AGNES attempts to hold the bowling ball, looking at AUNT ALICE, dismayed. CURTAIN.

ACT TWO

SETTING:

Same as ACT ONE. Two evenings later.

AT RISE:

MITZI JONES, DIMPLE DILLARD, and CINDY SANDERS are sitting on the sofa staring straight ahead. DIMPLE is the Sports Editor of the Weekly Croak, the school newspaper; MITZI and CINDY are members of the pep club. AUNT ALICE sticks her head in the door, right.

AUNT ALICE: Yoo hoo, anybody home? (No response.) Yoo hoo. It's me, Aunt Alice. (She enters.) Agnes? Peggy? (Spots girls.) Oh, hello, girls. (Still no response.) Yoo hoo, girls. (She crosses to them, moves hand back and forth in front of their faces. Still no response.) Good heavens.

PEGGY enters left, carrying some books. She is wearing school clothes.

PEGGY: Hi, Aunt Alice.

AUNT ALICE: Oh, thank goodness. I thought for a minute I was in a wax museum.

PEGGY: (Pointing to girls.) That's Mitzi Jones, Dimple Dillard, and Cindy Sanders.

AUNT ALICE: Oh. Nice to meet you, girls. (No response.)

PEGGY: Dimple is the sports editor of our school paper, the "Weekly Croak." Mitzi and Cindy aren't much with pen and ink . . . they're more interested in pursuing the finer things in life . . . such as tight ends and the entire offensive line.

The three sigh, continue to stare into space.

AUNT ALICE: *(In stage whisper.)* What gives?

PEGGY: You don't need to whisper. They're on a very high frequency. They only intercept certain delicate sound waves.

AUNT ALICE: *(Awed.)* I see.

PEGGY: Watch. *(She crosses to them, in high, musical tones.)* Cashmere sweaters. *(No response.)* Super deluxe cheeseburgers on sesame buns. *(Still no response.)* Football players. *(They sigh loudly.)*

AGNES enters left, wearing a housedress. She has a piece of cake on a dessert plate with a fork.

AGNES: *(As she enters.)* Hi, Aunt Alice. You're just in time to sample my cake.

AUNT ALICE: Good. Figured I'd time it about right. *(Takes plate.)* The rain let up a bit and I hopped right over. *(She takes bite.)* Mmmmm . . . delicious. Sam and the boys will love it.

AGNES: Sam and the boys won't even know what they're eating. They never do two nights before a *(Looking at girls.)* G-A-M-E. *(Spelling it.)*

AUNT ALICE: How's the . . . *(Looks at girls.)* G-A-M-E with North shaping up?

AGNES: I'm sorry you asked. Never in my entire existence have I experienced such a week. It just isn't natural. Grown, mature human beings can't just concentrate on **football**. *(The girls sigh, loudly.)*

AUNT ALICE: I knew a woman once who threw her son's football in a passing freight car and it wound up somewhere in Maine. The moral of the story is, a little football can go a long, long way. Football. *(Girls sigh louder.)* Oh be quiet.

AGNES: *(Crossing to window right and peering out.)* Here it is almost seven o'clock and Sam isn't home yet. He practices every night 'til dark, then he stands in front of the blackboard for hours – changing his offense and switching his defense. Frankly, I'd go home to Mother if it wasn't for one thing.

AUNT ALICE: What's that?

AGNES: Father. He's taken up fishing and they say that's even worse.

AUNT ALICE: *(Sitting.)* Once and for all I'd lay down the law, Agnes. While the iron's hot, I'd **strike**. *(Girls sigh.)*

AGNES: They like baseball, too.

COACH SAM, attired as he was in ACT ONE, bursts in right, wearing raincoat. His cap is dripping with water. It's evident he's been out in the rain for some time. He's still carrying his proverbial clipboard.

COACH: *(As he enters.)* What a practice. What a by-George practice.

AGNES: *(Disgustedly, arm akimbo.)* Sam.

GIRLS: *(Rising together.)* Yeah Coach, yeah Sam, yeah, yeah, Coach Sam. *(They sit.)*

COACH: Listen to that, Agnes. It brings a lump to my throat.

AUNT ALICE: I hope it matches the one on your head, Sam. No one in his right mind would stand out in the rain all afternoon – just to practice football.

COACH: *(Bending over her.)* Just to practice football? Are you aware of the fact that we play Northview Friday night?

AGNES: And are you aware of the fact that you are dripping water all over Aunt Alice?

AUNT ALICE: *(Rising, brushing herself off.)* Those boys may be frogs, Sam, but I'm not.

GIRLS: *(Rising again, together.)* Rah, rah, zip boom bah, go Frogs go, rah, rah, rah. *(They sit, continue to stare into space.)*

AGNES: Let's go into the kitchen, Aunt Alice. I'm putting the finishing touches on dinner.

AUNT ALICE: Gladly. *(Turning.)* And Sam, take my advice and put on some dry clothes before you **kick off**. *(The girls sigh again.)* Good grief, I did it again. *(They start left.)*

PEGGY: *(Following them out.)* I'll set the table. *(They exit.)*

DIMPLE: *(Rising, crossing to COACH.)* As sports editor of the "Weekly Croak," could I talk to you about the big game, Coach.

COACH: Talk away.

DIMPLE: Could you give me a quote on our prospects, Coach?

COACH: As a matter of fact, you can quote me that prospects never looked brighter. (*Pacing.*) We're planning to surprise them with a secret weapon . . . our own answer to Alexander the Great. (*She writes, excitedly.*) I can't tell you his name, but his initials are Buzz Pennywinner.

DIMPLE: (*Excitedly.*) Buzz? Wow.

COACH: And I rather imagine that right now, at this very moment, Buzz is going over our new plays – down in the basement.

MITZI and CINDY rise, silently say the word "basement," look at DIMPLE. The three cross left and exit as COACH, front stage, moves right, not knowing he's been deserted.

COACH: (*Rambling on.*) Fact is, we had him in for one play last week – as a decoy. He was tackled by Baumgartner for a 30-yard loss – a purposely baited trap.

PRINCIPAL GILLEY, Central High principal, enters right. He is an enthusiastic Frog booster, and a longtime friend of SAM's. He wears glasses and a business suit. He enters, sees SAM, looks around to see who he's talking to. COACH SAM doesn't see him so rambles on with his interview.

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