

MAXWELL OFFERS SOME COMMENTS AT HIS FUNERAL ©

A Comedic Stage Play

By

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A COMEDIC PLAY TITLED
MAXWELL OFFERS SOME COMMENTS AT HIS FUNERAL

List of Cast Members In Order Of Appearance

1. Maxwell: 80-year-old deceased lawyer who, as the senior partner of his law firm, practiced law for over 50 years. He recently died.
2. Norman: 70-year-old lawyer who has practiced with Maxwell for over 40 years.
3. Danny: 60-year-old lawyer who has practiced with Maxwell for over 30 years.
4. Phil: 50-year-old lawyer who has practiced with Maxwell for over 20 years.
5. Lorraine: 35-year-old lawyer who only practiced with Maxwell for a year or two.
6. Mabel: Maxwell's 80-year-old loving and loyal widow.
7. Rabbi: Leader of the local Jewish community.
8. Nurse Plunger: A caring and hard-working female nurse.
9. Flandergas: 80-year-old resident at a nursing home – always cranky and agitated.
10. Man With Tool Belt: a repairman working for Bell Telephone installing phones.
11. Emily Teagarden: a 50-year-old no-nonsense prim and proper librarian.
12. Judge Potter: a 60-year-old wise and patient Judge who has seen it all.
13. Prisoner: a know-it-all male inmate who appears in striped jail clothing.
14. Little Old Lady: slightly confused 70-year-old victim of a purse snatching.
15. Orderly Hatchet: can be male or female, this humorless nurse works in a mental ward.
16. Dr. Kryptic: a male psychiatrist who lost his mind years ago, but no one seems to notice.
17. Frankenheimer: a maniac who is being treated in a mental hospital.
18. District Attorney: an inept male bureaucrat who is unprepared for trial.
19. Tootie: the neighborhood prostitute who shares her philosophical insights.
20. Bauerwexel: president of the bar association who presides over the bar meeting.

21. Corrigan: a disbarred attorney imprisoned for defrauding his clients.
22. Receptionist: female employed at Maxwell's law firm.
23. Strudel: a male client in a hurry who just needs one quick question answered.
24. Farmer Jones: A Pennsylvania Dutch farmer with a thick accent but no sense of humor.
25. Matilda Jones: A Pennsylvania Dutch farmer's wife with the same attributes.
26. Henry Klodstopper: a dairy farmer who has no time for love – just time to milk the cows.
27. Lucy Klodstopper: Henry's wife who is unhappy with life on the farm milking cows.
28. Protzki: a domestic relations client, who wants a simple divorce sooner rather than later.
29. Zeek: Farmer Jones greedy son who just inherited half of his father's farm.
30. Zelda: Farmer Jones greedy daughter who just inherited half of her father's farm.
31. Twaddle: The jeweler who sold Maxwell and Mabel an engagement ring.

March 7, 2019 Draft

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SYNOPSIS

Aged Attorney Maxwell Finkel passed away a few days ago after having practiced law in the same small town for over fifty years. The four surviving attorneys who presently serve as his law partners honor Maxwell's memory by gathering together at his open casket viewing at the local funeral home. These loyal partners begin to reminisce regarding the more notable trials in which Maxwell was involved, as they also recall the unusual clients he represented. Inevitably they are also drawn to a discussion of some of Maxwell's rather unique character traits that distinguished him from his fellow man.

As these stories unfold, Maxwell finds that he is unable to remain still as a silent observer, and so he dismounts from his casket and joins his fellow lawyers so that he might correct some of the embellished portions of the stories attributed to him. His law partners are unable to see Maxwell's ghostly presence, nor can they hear his comments as he interjects his recollections of days gone by. His comments, nonetheless, appear to prompt some of their thoughts as his life and its achievements are discussed in detail.

What was the sum and substance of Maxwell's life, and by what measuring rod is the tally to be taken? Did Maxwell's visit upon this planet result in some small way in a perceivable improvement of the human condition? Perhaps a brief review, prior to the closing of the coffin lid, of some of his more memorable encounters while practicing law will lend an answer to the question.

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OPENING SCENE

The curtain rises as the dark stage is slowly illuminated by house lights that focus upon a funeral home viewing. An open casket is positioned mid-stage, and reposing within the casket is deceased elderly Attorney MAXWELL FINKEL, who appears to be “at rest” with eyes closed. There is a single white lily lying on his chest that MAXWELL clutches in his hands. Insipid “funeral home” recorded organ music softly plays in the background. A stained glass window illuminates the background above the casket.

Several simple folding chairs are positioned in a line to the side of the casket. MABEL, MAXWELL’S widow, sits in one of the chairs, occasionally drying her eyes with a handkerchief.

Four well-dressed lawyers enter together from stage left. NORMAN is an older attorney who has practiced with MAXWELL for over thirty years. DANNY is an attorney in his mid-sixties who has practiced with MAXWELL for twenty years. PHIL is an attorney in his mid-fifties who has practiced with MAXWELL for ten years. LORRAINE is an attorney in her mid-thirties who has practiced with MAXWELL for two years.

These four attorneys have come to pay their last respects. Each attorney will in turn first approach the casket to share a private parting comment with deceased MAXWELL. As each does so, MAXWELL will open his eyes, sit up slightly, and respond. None of the four attorneys will hear MAXWELL’S responses, nor will they notice that MAXWELL has shifted his position, but the audience will easily take note. After each conversation takes place, each of the four attorneys will approach MABEL to offer their condolences.

NORMAN is the first to approach the casket alone. He stares at his departed law partner, slowly summoning the strength to address MAXWELL. MABEL is seated too far away to hear NORMAN’S comments or MAXWELL’S responses.

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SCENE ONE – THE FUNERAL PARLOR VIEWING

NORMAN:

“Hi, Maxwell, my old friend.”

MAXWELL:

(Startled, Maxwell sits up slightly in his coffin, still holding the lily.)

“Oh! Hi, Norman. Thanks for coming to my viewing. If there had only been a little more time, I would have sent you a personal note that I had finally dropped dead. After all, it wouldn’t have been much of a viewing if my four partners from the ol’ law firm hadn’t stopped by for a last look-see.”

NORMAN:

(Does not hear Maxwell)

“Maxwell...dear Maxwell...you’ve earned your final reward.”

MAXWELL:

“Reward! If someone had told me this is what an old warrior gets after a lifetime of courtroom confrontations – a cheap casket and a wilted flower or two, I woulda taken an appeal. A lily! (He points) Don’t they grow in frog ponds? I suppose that’s appropriate, since similar to me, frogs have been known on occasion to croak, too. And just look at this excuse for a coffin! I don’t mean to appear ungrateful, or to second guess the undertaker’s suggestion of color schemes. After all, he’s the “pro” who earned an embalming degree at mortuary school. But given the long journey ahead of me, I probably woulda picked a different lining with a more lively pattern. Quite frankly, I’ll be staring at this boring interior scheme...maybe forever. As for comfort, lying in this box is like flying in one of those no frills airlines where you need a shoehorn to wedge your ass into the seat – the same carriers that advertise

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discount tickets and then charge extra if you gotta take a leak at thirty-five thousand feet. This crate wasn't designed with an inch of extra leg room. I just know I'm gonna end up with another one of those awful coffin-induced 'Charlie Horse' cramps."

NORMAN:

"I hope you didn't suffer too much. I sense that your last days at the nursing home were difficult."

MAXWELL:

"Thank you for caring. Frankly, there was nothing to it. When I think back over all the years I agonized about dropping dead, it turns out that those countless anxious thoughts were needless emotional expenditures. Actually, dying is relatively simple. Just about everyone takes the plunge sooner or later."

(Norman walks to a line of chairs on stage intended for mourners, and shakes hands with Mabel as Danny approaches the open casket.)

DANNY:

"Things at the law firm just won't be the same without you, Maxwell."

MAXWELL:

"I know. That's because I'm dead. It's certainly gonna make it harder for clients to consult with me."

DANNY:

"You were a good mentor and teacher. I will forever be in your debt. You taught me that nothing is more important than practicing law with the highest ethical and moral standards."

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MAXWELL:

“How true. How very true, and you were a good student.”

DANNY:

“You stressed that we should always help those in need, to be fair and reasonable, and to never overcharge the client.”

MAXWELL:

“Those have indeed been the foundations of our law practice. However, in retrospect after a lifetime trying to make the weekly office overhead, I’ve concluded that legal fees are a lot like sex. It seems as though everyone was getting more than me, and probably more than they deserved.”

(Danny walks over to Mabel, shakes her hand and takes a seat next to Norman as Phil approaches the casket.)

PHIL:

“I suppose it’s ridiculous for me to pose this question, given the fact you happen to be gone, Maxwell, but ...”

MAXWELL:

“Forgive my interruption, Phil, old boy, but as a point of clarification, while I may be dead, that doesn’t mean my soul has suddenly turned a deaf ear. Each of you folks has voluntarily chosen to start up a coffin side bar conversation with me, and so I’m all ears, the same ears that have been made all the more beautiful with just the right touch of funeral director flesh tone makeup. They even powdered my nose. So don’t hesitate to continue on with your thoughts.”

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PHIL:

“I suppose I should have asked before ...”

MAXWELL: (interrupts)

“It’s never too late, which is rather ironic now that I’ve become the ‘late’ Maxwell...”

PHIL:

“Why did you insist on driving the same used car for twenty-five years straight? You could have bought any car you wanted off the showroom floor with cash.”

MAXWELL:

“Didn’t want something flashy. I was satisfied with my trusty Dodge Dart. When the old interior finally disintegrated, I invested in some really comfortable overstuffed replacement seats. They were so luxurious, I felt like I was sitting in a bucket full of tits.”

PHIL:

“People used to whisper about your crappy car. It was rather embarrassing.”

MAXWELL:

“You just don’t get it do you, Phil? The legal profession and motor vehicles have a special relationship unknown to any other vocation. The car a lawyer drives speaks volumes. Show up at a hearing in some high-priced luxury sedan, and the client will assume he’s about to be overcharged.”

PHIL:

“If you drive something that belongs in a scrapyard, the client will think you’ve never won a case.”

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MAXWELL:

“Drive a junker car and you’ll never receive a complaint about your fees.

Furthermore, the client will feel sorry for you and that will take his mind off his own ridiculous problem. Such an attorney-client relationship, based on mutual concern for each other’s sad state of affairs, is invaluable. You can’t put a price on feeling sorry for each other’s troubles. Even if you lose his case, the client will still wish you well.”

PHIL:

“You would have looked good driving a Mercedes or a Lexus.”

MAXWELL:

“Did I ever tell you about the lawyer afflicted with conspicuous consumption who was driving his Rolls Royce down the road ...”

PHIL:

“Or maybe a Jaguar. You woulda looked good in a Jag.”

MAXWELL:

“As I was sayin’ ... this lawyer’s drivin’ his Rolls down the road when he happens to spot a family of four who were so destitute, they were sitting on the curb relegated to eating mere blades of grass. The lawyer jams on the brakes, skids to a stop, and then makes an inquiry. The father and mother point to their two small impoverished children and explain that they are so poor they have nothing to eat but grass growing along the gutter. The kind-hearted lawyer is touched by their plight and tells them to get into his Rolls Royce. He’s gonna take them home for dinner. They all pile in and he proceeds up a private gated drive to his palatial

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mansion where he announces ‘you’re in for a real treat. It’s the gardener’s day off. The grass in my backyard is at least four inches high’.”

(Phil approaches Mabel and then joins Norman and Danny at the seats set aside for mourners, as Lorraine approaches the open casket.)

LORRAINE:

“Maxwell ... Dear Maxwell! Was it all worth it?”

MAXWELL:

“Was *what* worth it?”

LORRAINE:

“The crazy clients, the inept judges, the pressure-packed litigation, the fifty-hour work weeks? I would have benefited from your insights.”

(Lorraine turns to join Norman, Phil and Danny, as Maxwell attempts to respond.)

MAXWELL:

“Hey, Lorraine! Wait a minute. I’d like to answer your important question. If there’s time tonight before they lower the lid on this stupid coffin, we can discuss the practice of law and the lessons I’ve learned during the last fifty years.”

(Mabel stands and turns to address Norman, Phil, Danny and Lorraine, who also stand up in respect.)

MABEL:

“It’s so gracious of you to have come.”

(The four lawyers take turns addressing Mrs. Finkel.)

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NORMAN:

“Nothing could be more important than honoring Maxwell’s memory, Mrs. Finkel. As the founding senior partner, Maxwell was the catalyst who transformed us into a law firm.”

PHIL:

“He started our partnership from ‘scratch’ and personally hired each one of us right out of law school. He’s the reason we practice law today, serving our community as advocates for those in need of counsel.”

MAXWELL: (Momentary spotlight on the coffin.)

“Shucks, fellas, you’re makin’ me blush, and that’s not so easy once you’ve been embalmed.”

DANNY:

“Maxwell was the beacon of light who taught me what I know today about ethics in the practice of law. He provided a moral compass that gave each of us direction and guidance.”

LORRAINE:

“Maxwell was an unselfish tutor who taught me how to prepare for and ultimately prevail in complex litigation. I would never have become successful in Court had it not been for his unfailing stewardship and sage advice along the way.”

MAXWELL: (Momentary spotlight on the coffin.)

“Isn’t it funny how you gotta drop dead first before finally receiving a compliment or two.”

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MABEL:

“Your kind comments mean more to me than you can possibly imagine. These last eight years have been so difficult, with Maxwell confined to the nursing home and unable to move or speak. I figured no one would remember who he was, much less come to his viewing. But I was wrong ... because here you are ... all four of you!”

NORMAN:

“Is there anything we might do to help?”

MABEL:

“You fellows have done more than enough. Those pension checks the firm mailed us each month were a godsend. We couldn’t have managed without them. But now that Maxwell’s gone, there may no longer be a reason for me to face these cold winters. I’ll probably move down to Florida and live with my sister. She has an extra bedroom and there’s a pharmacy right around the corner from her apartment – walking distance.”

(The four lawyers again shake Mabel’s hand, and transition to seats positioned for mourners. They sit out of hearing distance from Mabel who exits from the stage.)

PHIL: (Addresses his fellow attorneys.)

“That’s the first time in years that I’ve seen Maxwell’s wife.”

NORMAN:

“They say that after Maxwell had his stroke, she never missed a visit at the nursing home, spending several hours each day with him, even though he could hardly speak or move. She’s been a loving and loyal wife.”

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DANNY:

“Do you guys know if they’re planning some type of religious service? Is she Jewish as well?”

LORRAINE:

“Usually the funeral director hands you a little beanie if they’re going to pray in Jewish. You’re supposed to wear a beanie, but not the type the kids have with those miniature spinning propellers on top. If they handed out one of those propeller-driven beanies, I’d feel sorta out of place, like I should prepare for take-off at the airport or something.”

NORMAN: (In a scolding voice)

“They pray in Hebrew – not Jewish. And it’s a yarmulke, counselor – not a ‘beanie’. And the yarmulke doesn’t come with a propeller or even a flight manual.”

PHIL:

“Jews wear beanies out of respect, similar to the head gear worn by the Pope.”

LORRAINE:

“The Pope wears a Jewish beanie?”

NORMAN:

“A yarmulke, when he doesn’t feel like wearing one of those tall white hats that make him look like some head chef serving pierogies at a church social.”

LORRAINE:

“Popes dish out pierogies?”

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NORMAN:

“When the need arises. It’s a Catholic thing. They learn how to prepare them at ‘perogial’ school.”

LORRAINE:

“Any particular reason Jews and Popes wear the same beanies? I didn’t think they had much in common.”

NORMAN: (As if instructing a catechism class)

“Because Jesus started out Jewish for a while before he converted, and Jesus probably wore a beanie, too. It’s somewhere in the Old Testament.”

LORRAINE:

“The Old Testament mentions beanies and Jesus?”

NORMAN:

“Yarmulkes. I think it’s in the Book of Revelations.”

LORRAINE:

“The Book of Revelations is in the Old Testament?”

NORMAN:

“Just as things were starting to look bad, everyone began to wear beanies, so they could protect themselves, in case something fell on their heads, similar to today’s OSHA regulations. But as usual it was simply too late.”

LORRAINE:

“Why?”

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NORMAN:

“The world was coming to an end. So Noah built an ark. Read your Bible. It’s all there in black and white.”

DANNY:

“Is some Rabbi gonna prey over Maxwell? There should be some parting word – a send - off. After all, Max spent almost ninety years on the face of the earth.”

MAXWELL: (Momentary spotlight on the coffin.)

“It would be kinda nice if someone said something of a religious nature before I begin the long journey to the big courtroom in the sky.”

NORMAN:

“Good question. See, Maxwell considered himself to be a practicing Jew, but his affiliation with his synagogue may have petered out.”

LORRAINE:

“I don’t quite understand.”

NORMAN:

“It’s the basic difference between Jews and Christians. If you want to be a member of a synagogue – write out a check – a big one – at the beginning of each year. They don’t screw around with weekly donations. Now with Christians, you can simply stop by any church on Easter or Christmas, fake putting a dollar in the collection basket and then with no guilt feelings skate out the door ‘cause sinners are always welcomed. Anyway, as with everything involving Maxwell, it’s a long story.”

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DANNY:

“We’ve probably got time. It looks like we may be the only mourners showing up tonight.”

NORMAN:

“Well, it’s like this: for years, Maxwell was a faithful member of the flock at his synagogue.”

LORRAINE:

“Jews travel in flocks? I thought only Christians did that.”

PHIL:

“All mammals travel in something. Geese in a gaggle, lions in a pride, cub scouts in a pack, photographers in a clique.”

NORMAN:

“In some ways Jews and Christians have more in common than you might think. Beanies and flocks are just a part of it. Anyway, Maxwell attended services every Saturday night, religiously. One day I recall that Maxwell got a call at the law office. His Rabbi was on the phone.”

PHIL:

“Sounds serious. Any time my Monsignor phones me, I drop everything and take the call. What did the Rabbi want?”

NORMAN:

“A pledge on behalf of the United Jewish Appeal. It was time for Maxwell to make his annual contribution. He always came through with a check, but sometimes it took a little extra prodding, since Maxwell could be a little tight with a buck.”

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LORRAINE:

“He was? I had no idea!”

NORMAN:

“That’s understandable. You had only been practicing at our law firm a few months at the time Maxwell had his stroke. The truth is he had a reputation, perhaps deserved, for being quite frugal.”

PHIL:

“You mean ‘cheap’. I wonder if he still has that same set of special tires in his garage?”

MAXWELL:

“Last time I looked, they were still there.”

LORRAINE:

“What special tires?”

NORMAN:

“The set he inherited from his father. Each tire had about an eighth of an inch of tread remaining – just enough to pass the yearly state inspection.”

LORRAINE:

“Why would anyone keep bald tires like that?”

NORMAN:

“Maxwell wasn’t just ‘anyone’. He drove the same goofy beat-up Dodge Dart for a quarter of a century and it had treadless tires from day one. Whenever it was time for the annual state inspection, Maxwell would remove the bald tires and temporarily substitute his father’s heirloom tires, drive to the inspection center, and

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after the car barely passed, he'd put the bald tires back on and store his father's 'good' tires for another year."

DANNY:

"Let's face it. Maxwell was one of the cheapest bastards on the face of the earth. I recall one night in particular when he was working late at the office, as was I. He had to get some last minute letter out the door and into the mail. All the secretaries had left hours before. He started searching for postage, but all he could find was a used five cent stamp somebody had licked before returning it to the bottom of a forgotten drawer. But that didn't deter him from his goal. He stuck the stamp on the envelope and mailed it anyway."

LORRAINE:

"But that was insufficient postage. Didn't the post office return the letter?"

DANNY:

"Yes, but not exactly in the manner you might think. Maxwell addressed the letter to himself and reflected his intended recipient upon the return address in the upper left corner. He figured the letter would be returned to his recipient for insufficient postage, and it was. It arrived on time the next day."

PHIL:

"I recall another way in which Maxwell sometimes saved a penny or two."

LORRAINE:

"How?"

PHIL:

"Garage sales."

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LORRAINE:

“That’s not so remarkable. That’s where the bargains are.”

PHIL:

“You haven’t heard my story yet. He would stop at every garage sale he chanced to pass, but he would only browse for L.L. Bean clothing – shoes, shirts, or jackets, ‘cause back then they had a lifetime guarantee policy. If the product ever wore out, the consumer could return it and L.L. Bean would replace the worn item with a brand new substitute – no questions asked.”

LORRAINE:

“Wait a minute! You’re not going to tell me that Maxwell ...”

PHIL: (Interrupts)

“He would pay no more than a quarter – that was his limit - for a pair of old worn shoes or a ripped shirt. Then he would send what was left back to L.L. Bean and demand that they honor their lifetime warranty. It usually worked like a charm.”

LORRAINE:

“Was there a time when it didn’t?”

PHIL:

“Once he stopped at a garage sale where some lady was selling just one used shoe.”

LORRAINE:

“Why only one?”

PHIL:

“She only had one leg.”

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DANNY:

“But initially she must have bought a pair of shoes. They almost always come in pairs, like breasts.”

PHIL:

“How can you be so sure? Anyway, there was only one shoe. Maxwell generally paid a quarter for two. So he offered ten cents. She wanted twenty. They debated back and forth for about half an hour, and they finally compromised at fifteen cents. After all, he had years of experience in Court settling matters by splitting the difference. He sent the used shoe back to L.L. Bean and demanded a new one. The stamps cost more than the shoe.”

DANNY:

“Not if he used insufficient postage.”

LORRAINE:

“Did L.L. Bean make good on the warranty?”

PHIL:

“They sent him another shoe – just one.”

MAXWELL: (Momentary spotlight on the coffin.)

“It never hurts to have an extra shoe around as an emergency back-up.”

LORRAINE:

“So what does any of this have to do with the Rabbi?”

DANNY:

“Oh yeah – the Rabbi. Well, the annual United Jewish Appeal rolled around, and so the Rabbi telephones Maxwell at our office hoping to secure a contribution.”

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(Spotlight on the coffin, as Maxwell slowly sits up and places the lily to the side. He addresses the four attorneys, who obviously remain unaware of his presence, nor will they, during the entire play, appear to hear what Maxwell says.)

MAXWELL:

“You guys can joke all you want, but I’ve got one of the best collections in town. Forty-three shoes in all. Different sizes, colors, and models. And the shoes all have a lifetime guarantee if ever I wear them out. (Maxwell throws a rope ladder over the side of the coffin as he carefully dismounts, and walks over to the lawyers in order to address them.)

Now I just know you folks are gonna embellish the encounter with the Rabbi, and since this may be the last time we see each other for a while, I wanna set the record straight. I better tell the story, so that it comes direct from the corpse’s mouth. No hearsay. There’s no substitute for accuracy. Just ask any lawyer. Let’s go back to my office for a few minutes.”

(Maxwell walks over to his Spartan law office, comprised of only a simple table, chair, and a black rotary telephone. He sits in his chair as his telephone begins to ring. A second spotlight simultaneously focuses upon the Rabbi wearing a black robe, who is seated in the Rabbi’s office. The Rabbi holds a black rotary telephone in his hand. Maxwell answers his phone.)

Law Offices, Maxwell Finkel speaking.”

RABBI:

“Max! It’s your Rabbi.”

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MAXWELL:

“What a pleasant surprise. Is it the Sabbath already? Did the sun go down again? I better find my beanie.”

RABBI:

“It’s a yarmulke.”

MAXWELL:

“Right you are, Rabbi. It would be a ‘beanie’ if it had a propeller. It’s amazing what you retain years after Bar Mitzvah class. Tell me, how might I be of service?”

RABBI:

“I’m calling to ask a favor of you, Maxwell.”

MAXWELL: (Without hesitation.)

“Then you called the right person. Anything ... I’ll do anything for my Rabbi.”

RABBI:

“That’s very generous of you, dear friend. You see, the annual United Jewish Appeal is drawing to a close, and we haven’t quite reached our local goal yet.”

MAXWELL:

“I certainly intend to give. I usually do, you know.”

RABBI:

“And that’s why I’m calling. Will you make a pledge?”

MAXWELL:

“Of course. Of course. You mentioned a ‘goal’. How much do we need to go over the top?”

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RABBI: (Astonished)

“Maxwell, I could never impose like that!”

MAXWELL:

“How much?”

RABBI: (Cautiously)

“Five ... five thousand dollars.”

MAXWELL: (Without hesitation)

“Consider it done. I’ll send you a check.”

RABBI: (Gushing with emotion)

“Maxwell, your gracious gift is deeply appreciated. I can’t thank you enough.”

MAXWELL:

“Think nothing of it, Rabbi. After all, it’s for the United Jewish Appeal. It’s hot in Israel. They could probably use some more trees and a new hose to water the saplings.”

(Spotlights dim on Maxwell and the Rabbi, as the spotlights return to the four lawyers at the funeral home.)

DANNY:

“A week goes by, but surprisingly the Rabbi hasn’t received Maxwell’s check. The United Jewish Appeal has concluded, so the Rabbi decides to telephone Max for an update.”

(Spotlights return to Maxwell and the Rabbi as they sit in their respective offices. The Rabbi is holding his telephone to his ear as Maxwell’s telephone rings. Maxwell answers.)

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MAXWELL:

“Law Offices. Maxwell Finkel speaking.”

RABBI:

“Max. It’s your Rabbi. Do you always answer your own phone?”

MAXWELL:

“I don’t have a secretary. Costs too much. Is it the Sabbath already? We’re not supposed to answer the phone on the Sabbath. It’s tough being a Jew.”

RABBI:

“So I’ve been told. Max, did you send me your check?”

MAXWELL:

“What check?”

RABBI:

“For the United Jewish Appeal. Remember?”

MAXWELL:

“The United Jewish ...? Oh, oh yes. I don’t know how I could have forgotten. I’ll put it in the mail today, as soon as I find some stamps.”

RABBI:

“Today, Max. The appeal ended last week, and I must send in the final payments.”

MAXWELL:

“Right. The appeal. Today.”

(Spotlights dim on Maxwell and the Rabbi, as the spotlights return to the four lawyers at the funeral home.)

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DANNY:

“Another week goes by. Guess what?”

PHIL:

“No check?”

DANNY:

“No check. So the Rabbi telephones Maxwell for a third time.”

(Spotlight focuses upon Maxwell and the Rabbi with a phone in his hand. They are seated in their respective offices. Maxwell’s telephone rings and he answers it.)

MAXWELL:

“Law Offices. Maxwell Finkel speaking.”

RABBI:

“Max, it’s your Rabbi. I haven’t received the check. Did you send it?”

MAXWELL:

“The check! Rabbi, I promise it will be in the mail no later than ...”

(The Rabbi interrupts.)

RABBI:

“Max, I’m coming over to your office. Can you have the check ready in half an hour?”

DANNY: (Addresses his fellow lawyers.)

“And then there was this pregnant pause – the kind of hesitation that usually signals an unforeseen problem that requires quick thinking. As usual, Maxwell did not appear to be at a loss for words.”

MAXWELL OFFERS SOME COMMENTS AT HIS FUNERAL

MAXWELL: (Slowly)

“Rabbi, when I told you I’d send over five thousand bucks, how did that make you feel?”

RABBI:

“Ecstatic. You made my day.”

MAXWELL:

“Rabbi?”

RABBI:

“What?”

MAXWELL:

“Isn’t that reward enough?”

(Maxwell hangs up his phone as the Rabbi stares in disbelief at the Rabbi’s phone.

Maxwell approaches the four lawyers in order to offer an explanation. They cannot hear him or see him.)

PHIL:

“Maxwell always had a snappy answer at the ready, no matter what the situation.”

MAXWELL:

“With one memorable exception. A few years ago I decided to take my Mabel out to dinner at the Red Lobster Restaurant. The line of patrons snaked out the door.

The receptionist, a perky young girl, told me the delay to get a table would be about forty-five minutes. I reluctantly agreed, and then asked Mabel ‘What are we going to do for the next forty-five minutes?’ With that, the cute receptionist reached under her podium, produced a circular battery powered device, and handed it to me

MAXWELL OFFERS SOME COMMENTS AT HIS FUNERAL

while proclaiming ‘Here’s your vibrator.’ It was the only time I can recall ever being rendered speechless.

Of course, I was just kidding with the Rabbi. I knew he had a good sense of humor, and I had every intention of writing out that damned check, but as fate would have it, that afternoon I suffered a stroke, and the next thing I knew, they had dumped me off at that depressing nursing home. Eight years of bedpans, and now I’ve been downsized further by reposing in that creepy coffin. (Maxwell points at the coffin.) You just never quite know when you might be relocated to some place you didn’t envision. So many people fail to realize when they’re having a good day.”

PHIL:

“Poor Maxwell ... confined to a nursing home and hardly able to move.”

MAXWELL:

“It could have been worse. At least Mabel was there to protect me. My roommate on the other hand, Mr. Flandergas, he wasn’t so lucky. Even though he could still sorta walk and talk, there were times when he couldn’t fend off unforeseen dangers lurking in the hallway.”

(Spotlight focuses on Mr. Flandergas who is dressed in pajamas, slippers, and is seated in an overstuffed nursing home chair. Kind and thoughtful Nurse Plunger approaches Flandergas with a cup of soup in her outstretched hand.)

NURSE PLUNGER:

(She speaks in a caring sing-song and loving voice.)

“Mr. Flandergas ...”

MAXWELL OFFERS SOME COMMENTS AT HIS FUNERAL

FLANDERGAS:

(He is abrupt, cranky, and obviously would prefer being left alone.)

“What!”

NURSE PLUNGER:

“It’s twelve noon. Would you care for some hot soup?”

FLANDERGAS:

(Speaks with difficulty, having failed to insert his false teeth.)

“No! I don’t want no hot ‘thoop’.”

MAXWELL: (Addresses the four attorneys at the viewing.)

“The caring nurse showed up again around six p.m.”

(Nurse Plunger approaches Flandergas as she carries a cup of soup.)

NURSE PLUNGER:

“Mr. Flandergas ...”

FLANDERGAS: (Still cranky and agitated.)

“Now what?”

NURSE PLUNGER:

“It’s six p.m. Would you care for some hot soup?”

FLANDERGAS:

“No, I don’t want no hot ‘thoop’.”

MAXWELL: (Addresses the four attorney at the viewing.)

“Later that night, about midnight, while Flandergas was sleeping, I saw somebody enter our room and give the old boy an enema. The next morning, Flandergas took the time to call his one and only remaining friend, Bill.”

MAXWELL OFFERS SOME COMMENTS AT HIS FUNERAL

(Flandergas dials his phone and waits for a response.)

FLANDERGAS:

“Bill ... Is that you? Not really. I’ve been better. Listen, I just wanted to tell ya, if you’re ever a patient in a nursing home and they offer you some hot thoop, be sure to take it. Odder-wise, they’ll shove it up your ass in the middle of the night when you’re not lookin’.”

(The four lawyers sit quietly, thinking to themselves.)

NORMAN:

“Maxwell worked at the office for over fifty years. Imagine – half a century.”

MAXWELL:

“I suppose it was time for me to die. You gotta make room for the new crowd of barristers.”

DANNY:

“Just think of the changes in the practice of law during those five decades!”

MAXWELL:

“It’s hard to fathom all the significant unforeseen transformations that have altered the practice of law.”

DANNY:

“When Maxwell started out, a law office and its occupants couldn’t have functioned without a well-stocked library.”

MAXWELL OFFERS SOME COMMENTS AT HIS FUNERAL

MAXWELL:

“Right you are. Hundreds of bound volumes of case law and treatises lined the walls.”

PHIL:

“Book salesmen constantly stopped by to sell copies of the never ending new statutes whenever the old books were suddenly rendered obsolete.”

LORRAINE:

“Now you press a button on the computer, and the newest case is instantly printed with a robotic search, including citations to every other decision in the country that might be relevant.”

MAXWELL:

“Who woulda thought – law offices operating without a single book in sight.”

NORMAN:

“In the good old days, secretaries took dictation, and worked with ‘hunt and peck’ manual typewriters. The desk light and the rotary phone were the only apparatus that required electricity. I doubt a young paralegal today has ever seen a piece of carbon paper.”

MAXWELL:

“Of course, the biggest changes deal with the lawyers themselves. At one time in order to gain valuable courtroom experience, every duckling hatched out of law school and let loose on the unsuspecting citizens of this state was assigned criminal cases by the President Judge of the county. Only by standing in open court could the fledgling lawyer begin to learn how to think on his feet and gain the insight

MAXWELL OFFERS SOME COMMENTS AT HIS FUNERAL

necessary to actually represent some poor soul caught in the grasp of our judicial system.”

DANNY:

“Didn’t Maxwell begin his career representing criminal defendants?”

MAXWELL:

“I remember the very first case ever assigned to me. Even though this criminal proceeding occurred over fifty years ago, my heart still begins to pound whenever I think back to my very first client and my very first courtroom experience. The same could probably also be said of the accused. This would be her first appearance in court as well.” (Maxwell stands and walks to his Spartan law office, which consists of two chairs, a table, and a black rotary telephone.)

PHIL:

“I think Maxwell set up his first office in his parents’ garage.”

MAXWELL:

“That was all I could afford. Luckily my folks graciously agreed not to charge me any rent. I met my first client in these rather simple surroundings. (Maxwell points at the table and chairs.) I didn’t even know what criminal charge had been filed against this potentially dangerous defendant. Was she a felon like Bonnie of Clyde fame? Did she carry a machine gun, too? I was only minutes away from learning the answers to these and my other pertinent questions, when suddenly there was a knock at the garage door. (There is an off-stage knocking sound.) I decided I better look like a busy lawyer, so I picked up the phone and made believe I was talking to another client.”

MAXWELL OFFERS SOME COMMENTS AT HIS FUNERAL

MAN WITH TOOL BELT:

“Hello. Does this garage also double as some lawyer’s office?”

MAXWELL: (He ignores the inquiry as he speaks into his phone.)

“Yes Mrs. McGillicutty. I’ll have your petition completed by tomorrow before the end of business. (Maxwell triumphantly hangs up the phone and turns to address the man with the tool belt.) Now, sir, what can I do for you?”

MAN WITH TOOL BELT:

“Nothin’, pal. I’m from Bell Tel. I’m here to connect your phone. Just want ya to know I’ll be working out back. You and Mrs. McGillicutty should have phone service in about fifteen minutes.” (The man exists the stage.)

MAXWELL:

“I wasn’t sure how to respond, when suddenly, there was a second knock at my door. (Off – stage knocking sound.) Enter! (Maxwell addresses the four lawyers.) I was about to engage in my very first client interview.”

End of Scene One.

MAXWELL OFFERS SOME COMMENTS AT HIS FUNERAL

SCENE TWO – THE STOP SIGN

(The stage lights go up. Maxwell is standing in his Spartan office, prepared to meet his new client. The four attorneys are still seated at stage left in the funeral parlor. The new client, Miss Emily Teagarden, enters from center stage or stage right. Maxwell turns to address the four attorneys.)

MAXWELL:

“This had to be my client, since with the exception of imaginary Mrs. McGillicutty I didn’t have any others. I began to count my blessings. This potential felon did not appear to be carrying a machine gun. I could not contain myself. Was this broad facing heavy hitter charges, like murder, burglary, perhaps bank robbery?”

(Maxwell turns to address his new client.) **Good afternoon. Maxwell Finkel at your service.”**

TEAGARDEN:

“Emily Teagarden.”

(Teagarden is a “prim and proper” fifty-year old spinster who has never told a joke nor smiled after hearing one. She has found life to be a serious undertaking. Maxwell reaches for a pad of paper and a pen in order to take notes. They both take seats at the conference table.)

MAXWELL:

“It’s nice to make your acquaintance, Ms. Teagarden.” (He stretches out his hand as she tentatively touches the tips of his fingers.)

TEAGARDEN: (She corrects Maxwell.)

“Miss. Miss Emily Teagarden.”

MAXWELL OFFERS SOME COMMENTS AT HIS FUNERAL

MAXWELL: (Admonished, he withdraws his outstretched hand.)

“Miss Teagarden.”

TEAGARDEN:

“Now here’s my story, believe it or not!”

MAXWELL:

“I believe every one of my clients’ stories.”

TEAGARDEN:

“Quite so. I was driving along in my Buick Skylark in total compliance with the motor vehicle rules of the road applicable to this jurisdiction. Are you with me so far?”

MAXWELL: (He looks up from his note taking.)

“Buick Skylark ... in this jurisdiction.”

TEAGARDEN:

“I was approaching the four-way stop sign at the intersection of Main and Linden Streets. And that’s when it happened!” (Teagarden stops her narrative to see if Maxwell is still paying attention. Maxwell stops taking notes and looks up.)

MAXWELL:

“That’s when it happened ... what happened?”

TEAGARDEN:

“This officer of the law happened!”

MAXWELL:

“No!”

MAXWELL OFFERS SOME COMMENTS AT HIS FUNERAL

TEAGARDEN:

“Yes! This six foot two state trooper appeared out of nowhere with patrol car lights flashing, and pulls me over ...”

MAXWELL:

“No!”

TEAGARDEN:

“Yes! And proclaims in his assertive state trooper voice that I had failed to come to a complete stop. He cited me for a stop sign violation! Me! ”

MAXWELL:

“You?”

TEAGARDEN:

“Me! Until that very moment, I had never been arrested in my entire life!”

MAXWELL: (Maxwell stops taking notes and looks up.)

“No prior felonies. Got it all here in black and white.” (Maxwell points to his notepad.)

TEAGARDEN:

“Of course, the trooper was obviously mistaken. I have never disregarded a stop sign. He probably mistook me for some other operator of some other Buick Skylark.”

MAXWELL:

“That’s possible.”

MAXWELL OFFERS SOME COMMENTS AT HIS FUNERAL

TEAGARDEN:

“So I pled ‘not guilty’ and appeared before the local magistrate to prove my innocence. (She stands and raises her right hand heavenward while making a proclamation.) I sought Justice!”

MAXWELL:

“Justice? Did you find any?”

TEAGARDEN:

“You may not believe this, but - ”

MAXWELL: (He interrupts.)

“The magistrate found you guilty?”

TEAGARDEN:

“How did you know? Did it make the headlines? I don’t get the paper.”

MAXWELL:

“Just a hunch.”

TEAGARDEN:

“So I’m here to retain your services. I want to appeal. I demand Truth, Justice and the American way. You see, counselor, it’s ...” (She begins to raise her right hand as Maxwell interrupts.)

MAXWELL: (He stands.)

“Pardon me for just a moment, Miss Teagarden. I’ll be right back. (Maxwell walks over to the four attorneys and addresses them.) There comes that recurring point in time, usually about once a month, during every lawyer’s career when the next client to step up to bat decides to utilize the phrase ‘It’s the principle of the thing’ as if no

MAXWELL OFFERS SOME COMMENTS AT HIS FUNERAL

one else on the face of the earth presently, or during recorded past history or into the interstellar future has ever suffered an ignominious injustice of similar magnitude. They don't teach you this shit in law school, but the astute attorney soon becomes sensitive to when the phrase is about to be employed and can sense its impending approach similar to a lemon pie thrown by one of the Three Stooges during a high-society dance. (Maxwell returns to the awaiting Miss Teagarden.) Please forgive that interruption."

TEAGARDEN:

"You see, counselor, at this point *It's The Principle Of The Thing!* I refuse to pay the twenty-five dollar fine."

MAXWELL:

"Miss Teagarden – you don't want to take an appeal."

TEAGARDEN:

"Yes ... yes I really do."

MAXWELL:

"Actually, you don't. See, the court costs to file an appeal are one hundred fifty dollars. Then there's my fee – two hundred. If the judge finds you guilty, add on another twenty-five, for a total of three hundred and seventy five dollars."

TEAGARDEN:

"But I'm innocent and I want Justice!"

MAXWELL OFFERS SOME COMMENTS AT HIS FUNERAL

MAXWELL:

“That’s a rather elusive commodity, Miss Teagarden. It occurs with about the same frequency as a solar eclipse. Do you know why the statue of Justice standing above the door at the courthouse is blindfolded?”

TEAGARDEN:

“I’ve never given it much thought.”

MAXWELL:

“Because similar to an eclipse, she’s also operating in the dark. The chance of her locating some ‘Justice’ is about the same as somebody’s kid paying off a college tuition loan on time without parental assistance.”

TEAGARDEN:

“But that’s the judge’s job – to hear my appeal!”

MAXWELL:

“I suppose so. But in actuality the judges are so over-burdened with complex cases, they may not have time to adequately deal with a stop sign appeal. I fear you may not get a very warm or patient reception from the Court. Worse yet, the judge may only give your case a brief review, which might prove disconcerting, given the money you’d spend.”

TEAGARDEN:

“Counselor, nothing can dissuade me from my foreordained meeting with destiny. Not you, the judge, nor the tall state trooper shall stand between me and Justice. (Teagarden points her right hand upward.) File the appeal!”

(Maxwell leaves the conference room and approaches the four attorneys.)

MAXWELL OFFERS SOME COMMENTS AT HIS FUNERAL

MAXWELL:

“And that’s just what I did. If Teagarden wanted to present a defense, then I was just the guy to assure that her noble quest would become a reality. We were about to stand together on the bridge of the Titanic with an unobstructed view of approaching icebergs. On the designated day and hour, we appeared as scheduled before His Honor, Clinton Budd Potter. The Judge, much to my surprise, appeared to be in a rather pleasant, almost jovial mood, which is unusual for most occupiers of the bench. Generally, a judge need only possess two attributes to serve with distinction: gray hair to look distinguished, and hemorrhoids to appear concerned. A pleasant personality is not a prerequisite for judicial service. Yet, there sat congenial Judge Potter as he welcomed us, similar to a spider beckoning a fly, ready to hear the presentation of our defense, if indeed we chanced to have one. (Maxwell and Teagarden walk across the stage and stand before Judge Potter who sits on the bench presiding over his courtroom.)

The state trooper testified that the defendant, Miss Teagarden, had failed to come to a full stop at the intersection in question. Miss Teagarden disagreed, and advised patient and wise Judge Potter under oath that she was a safe driver, who had ceased all forward movement at the intersection in question.

Perceptive Judge Potter was aware that Miss Teagarden had paid a considerable quantity of money to secure her pursuit of Justice. The Judge was also cognizant that this hearing, perhaps of little consequence to the casual observer, constituted one of the most significant events in the life of the accused. Therefore Judge Potter decided to give Miss Teagarden, the seeker of Justice, her money’s

MAXWELL OFFERS SOME COMMENTS AT HIS FUNERAL

worth. This was to become arguably the most memorable adventure of Teagarden's lifetime, if only she were capable of surviving the next ten minutes."

JUDGE POTTER:

"If that concludes today's testimony, the Court is prepared to render its verdict."

MAXWELL:

"We have presented our entire case, Your Honor."

JUDGE POTTER:

"Very well. The Court finds in Commonwealth of Pennsylvania versus Miss Emily Teagarden, criminal docket number 1974 dash 87, that the Defendant is guilty as charged."

TEAGARDEN: (Shocked)

"Oh dear! I wasn't expecting that!"

JUDGE POTTER:

"What were you expecting?"

TEAGARDEN: (Humbled, deflated, and struggling to speak)

"Justice".

JUDGE POTTER:

"There isn't as much of that around here as you might think."

TEAGARDEN: (Her faith now shaken)

"So it would appear."

JUDGE POTTER:

"The Court is now prepared to pass sentence. Attorney Finkel, would you agree that there is no need for a pre-sentence investigation?"

MAXWELL OFFERS SOME COMMENTS AT HIS FUNERAL

MAXWELL: (Maxwell turns to address the four attorneys)

“It was becoming clear that Judge Potter was, unbeknown to my stunned client, in a playful mood. Pre-sentence investigations are only required in major felony cases. The Judge had just sent me a signal, similar to a finesse in a bridge card game, that something out of the ordinary was about to occur. (Maxwell turns to address the Judge.) No need, Your Honor.”

JUDGE POTTER:

“Very well. Things are moving right along. The sentence of the Court is ... pardon me, I seem to have misplaced the ‘Sentencing Code’ ... that treatise must be around here somewhere ... Miss Teagarden, have you seen where I might have put the ‘Sentencing Code’? I’m forever misplacing that book just when I most need it.”

(Potter begins to look about for a book that does not actually exist.)

TEAGARDEN: (Horried)

“The ‘Sentencing Code’? I thought I only faced a twenty-five dollar fine!”

JUDGE POTTER:

“Possibly, if you hadn’t taken an appeal. But you took an appeal. Didn’t Finkel here explain the big chance you took? It’s called ‘exponential liability’.”

TEAGARDEN:

“Oh my God! (She turns to Maxwell) Did we discuss that?”

MAXWELL: (Shrugs his shoulders)

“I thought we did.”

MAXWELL OFFERS SOME COMMENTS AT HIS FUNERAL

JUDGE POTTER:

“Well, it doesn’t matter now. Oh, I believe I’ve found it. (Potter extracts some book from a nearby shelf, and begins to page through it.) **Murder ... rape ... armed robbery ... stop signs ... four way... Here it is. I’m sorry for the delay. Now let’s see ... pursuant to the mandatory requirements of the sentencing code ... I order that you pay a fine of twenty-five dollars, and that you be taken from this Hall of Justice forthwith to the state penitentiary to begin serving a life sentence at hard labor without the possibility of parole while subsisting entirely on bread and water.** (Potter closes the book) **I believe that brings these proceedings to a conclusion, unless the Defendant has any questions.”**

TEAGARDEN:

“Life! In the penitentiary!”

JUDGE POTTER:

“Don’t forget – at hard labor – bread and water. (Potter calls out to an unseen off-stage sheriff’s deputy) **Sheriff: get the ball and chain, and not the sissy-la-la small set with the little fifty pound ball. I want the big ball so this prisoner is precluded from ever again going through another stop sign.”**

TEAGARDEN:

“Life! That’s a long time!”

JUDGE POTTER:

“Well, do the best you can. (Potter begins to stand.) **I’m hungry. Court is in recess.”**

MAXWELL OFFERS SOME COMMENTS AT HIS FUNERAL

TEAGARDEN: (Begging)

“Please, Judge, give me another chance! If I had only known I could get life in prison, I would have paid the twenty-five dollars and not have taken an appeal.”

JUDGE POTTER: (He sits back down.)

“Hindsight is 20 – 20. Unfortunately, the Sentencing Code *is* the Sentencing Code. Rarely are there any exceptions. Wouldn’t you agree, Finkel? After all, if I recall correctly the last five stop sign violators you represented, counselor, all ended up doing time on the rock pile.”

TEAGARDEN: (Horried by this revelation.)

“They did? If I had only known! (She turns to Maxwell) You might have said something!”

MAXWELL:

“I’d give her another chance, Judge. I don’t believe she’ll be a recidivist stop sign offender like the others. They were all hard core. Teagarden here is soft core.”

TEAGARDEN:

“Soft Core. Soft Core.”

JUDGE POTTER:

“You’re very convincing, Counselor. Don’t you think so, Teagarden?”

TEAGARDEN:

“Yes. And I brought the twenty-five dollars, just in case.”

MAXWELL OFFERS SOME COMMENTS AT HIS FUNERAL

JUDGE POTTER:

“OK, Miss Teagarden. Based upon your attorney’s innovative summation, I’ll let you go this time, but you don’t want to come back here again. If you do, you would be well advised to bring your jammies and a toothbrush.”

MAXWELL:

“Judge Potter, what about the fine and points? Might you be inclined to dismiss them as well, Your Honor?”

JUDGE POTTER (Agitated):

“You’re pushing your luck, Counselor.”

TEAGARDEN:

“Oh my God, Finkel! Don’t look a ‘gift judge’ in the mouth! Let’s get outta here before he changes his mind and directs the sheriff to bring out the big ball!”

(Potter bangs his gavel as he waves goodbye. Teagarden hurries off stage as Maxwell turns to address the four attorneys.)

MAXWELL:

“I love happy endings – don’t you? Teagarden couldn’t thank me enough. She said I was the most brilliant attorney to have ever addressed a sitting judge. I couldn’t disagree. And I learned something important from that hearing: Justice is elusive and should be savored on those rare occasions when it is achieved, even if the Judge doesn’t drop the points.”

End of Scene Two.

MAXWELL OFFERS SOME COMMENTS AT HIS FUNERAL

SCENE THREE – THE PRACTICE OF CRIMINAL LAW

(Stage lights illuminate Maxwell standing in the funeral home viewing room. He addresses the four attorneys.)

MAXWELL:

“With time, my reputation as a criminal defense lawyer began to develop. My...my, how times have changed. Back when I started to practice, representing some felon was actually quite simple. Time was when your standard run-of-the-mill criminal still had a chance in court. Sometimes you won, sometimes you lost. Your client might be charged with ‘breaking and entering’, or maybe a simple car theft. It didn’t much matter since the initial interview in prison always went about the same.”

(A prisoner dressed in prison clothing steps onto the stage. He addresses Maxwell.)

PRISONER:

“I didn’t do it.”

MAXWELL:

“Do what?”

PRISONER:

“Whatever they said I done, ‘cause I’m innocent as the new driven snow. I swear on my dead cat’s grave. Innocent, and that’s a fact. I demand a trial of my peers, ‘cause I want my fair share of Truth....Justice...and the American way.” (The prisoner steps to the side as the spotlight returns to Maxwell and the four lawyers.)

MAXWELL OFFERS SOME COMMENTS AT HIS FUNERAL

MAXWELL:

“That was good enough for me. After all, what client would dare lie to his lawyer? But then something I hadn’t counted on occurred. Before you could say ‘sputnik’, hundreds of satellites began to circle the earth. Obviously, no self-respecting criminal could possibly commit a crime without having a cellphone or two handy. That’s when the prison interviews began to change.”

(The spotlight returns to the same prisoner, who addresses Maxwell.)

PRISONER:

“I didn’t rob no bank. I ain’t never even been near that savings and loan, and that’s a fact.”

MAXWELL:

“Possibly. On the other hand, your cellphone signal was traced to the inside of the bank vault just about the same time you text messaged your girlfriend during the stick-up that you had just come into a large quantity of money.”

PRISONER:

“That ain’t fair. I need that phone with me all the time. Otherwise, I might miss a call or somethin’.” (The prisoner exits the stage.)

MAXWELL:

“Satellites aren’t the only new technology to have caused criminals to become even more stupid than usual. I represented some bum who shoplifted a pair of expensive running shoes, put them on, and then disappeared into a dark woods, thinking he would not been seen. Unfortunately, he wasn’t very hard to find. The shoes he stole had little lights that activated every time he took a step.

MAXWELL OFFERS SOME COMMENTS AT HIS FUNERAL

In the good ‘ol days, more often than not I could base a plausible criminal defense upon the usual witness inconsistencies and potential for mistaken identity. Probable doubt and one stubborn juror went a long way. I remember one case in particular. I represented some bum accused of ‘purse snatching’. Actually, he had trained his innocent dog to grab the purses of defenseless little old ladies. I didn’t care if he wound up in jail. But the dog, who had been charged as a co-conspirator, that pooch deserved a vigorous defense.”

(A little old lady appears on stage. She is carrying a broken purse strap.)

LITTLE OLD LADY:

“I was standing on the corner, waitin’ for the bus. All of a sudden this dog sashays up to me just as brazen as you please and grabs ahold of my purse! Next thing I know the strap broke and the mutt runs off with everything I own – my makeup, my tissues, even my bus pass.”

MAXWELL:

“There was only one thing to do. Thank God I had paid close attention in law school. I demanded a doggie line-up, since the little old lady claimed she would never forget the canine snatcher’s face and wet nose. But what type of participants would best comprise a neutral group of suspects without being unduly suggestive? My client was a beagle. If the cops only put beagles on display, the victim was sure to pick out that breed. And as anyone knows from prior line-up experience, beagles always look suspicious, given their natural ‘hang-dog’ appearance. It’s those floppy ears. On the other hand, a line-up with wide ranging diversity could be equally

MAXWELL OFFERS SOME COMMENTS AT HIS FUNERAL

prejudicial if only one beagle made an appearance. Ultimately, the district attorney and I agreed on a veritable menagerie.

They brought the little old lady into the line-up room to face her possible attacker. ‘Don’t worry’ they told her. ‘You can see the perpetrator, but he can’t see you through the one-way mirror’. The little old lady began to study a great dane, a St. Bernard, a greyhound, a beagle, and a chihuahua. Each dog wore a number for identification purposes, even though my client answered to the name of ‘Fido’. Actually, he preferred the French spelling P-H-Y-D-E-A-U-X.”

LITTLE OLD LADY:

“Could you have each suspect take one step forward, then turn to the left, then to the right, and growl a little. I’d remember his sinister voice anywhere.”

MAXWELL:

“Each dog did as commanded, as if they were visiting their proctologist and had been asked to cough. The little old lady picked out the great dane with no hesitation, even though that beast proved to have an air-tight alibi. Ultimately, my beagle scampered out of the police station, a free dog.

My vast experience dealing with stop sign violations and doggie identification line-ups had given me the necessary expertise to take on even more complex criminal cases. Soon I had graduated to representing individuals whose state of mental health at time of the alleged crime had been called into question. I was assigned as defense counsel at time of the mental health hearings.”

(Maxwell walks across stage to a hearing room at the state mental hospital, where Judge Potter, accompanied by psychiatrist Dr. Ismael Kryptic, and Orderly Hatchet await him.

MAXWELL OFFERS SOME COMMENTS AT HIS FUNERAL

Judge Potter, a competent and capable jurist, is dressed in a black judicial robe. Dr. Kryptic, dressed in a white laboratory coat, probably lost his mind several years ago and gives the appearance of a maniac who recently conducted an unauthorized autopsy in a Frankenstein movie. Orderly Hatchet, wearing either scrubs or white shirt and pants, gives the appearance of a prison guard, rather than a hospital attendant. Judge Potter speaks patiently, professionally, and calmly, as he effortlessly maintains control of the proceedings.)

JUDGE POTTER:

“Are we ready for the next hearing?”

ORDERLY HATCHET:

(He snaps to attention.) **“Yes, Judge Potter!”**

JUDGE POTTER:

“What is the patient’s name?”

ORDERLY HATCHET:

(He pages through documents attached to his clipboard.) **“Stanley. Stanley Frankheimer.”**

JUDGE POTTER:

“Please bring him in.

(Orderly Hatchet momentarily disappears, and reappears pushing a wheelchair in which sits hospital patient Stanley Frankheimer. He is wearing hospital pajamas and bunny slippers. His arms, chest, and legs are shackled to the wheelchair by restrictive chains, and his mouth is taped shut. He is unable to move or speak.)

MAXWELL OFFERS SOME COMMENTS AT HIS FUNERAL

Let the record reflect that Mr. Frankheimer has joined us in court, along with his public defender, Maxwell Finkel. Doctor, please place on the record why the patient may be in need of further involuntary psychiatric evaluation."

DR. KRYPTIC:

(The doctor speaks in a strange accent that is neither recognizable nor understandable.)

"Because he's nutz. And I should know, 'cause I'm a doctor!"

JUDGE POTTER:

"Thank you for your insightful medical analysis. Do you believe Mr. Frankheimer should continue to be involuntarily committed?"

DR. KRYPTIC:

"Yes, he's quaakkers, and I say dat vit reasonable 'medicinal' certain-aeity."

(Frankheimer tries to move despite his restraints.)

JUDGE POTTER:

"It appears the patient may wish to make a statement on the record. Orderly Hatchet, please remove the tape from the patient's mouth."

(Orderly Hatchet grabs the tape, and forcefully rips it from Frankheimer's face, as if he also had intended to remove Frankheimer's lips. A 'ripping' sound effect is heard by the audience. Frankheimer shakes his head from side-to-side as he recovers, but proceeds to speak in a normal and coherent manner.)

FRANKENHEIMER:

"That's much better. Thank you."

JUDGE POTTER:

"Is there something you wish to place on the record, Mr. Frankheimer?"

MAXWELL OFFERS SOME COMMENTS AT HIS FUNERAL

FRANKENHEIMER:

“Actually, there is. (He motions with a nod of his head toward Maxwell). See this here pubic suspender?”

MAXWELL: (Interrupts with a correction)

“Public Defender.”

FRANKENHEIMER:

“Whatever. Nothin’ is what I paid him, and nothin’s what I got for a defense. I could have received better representation from a trained chimpanzee.”

JUDGE POTTER:

“Is that all you wish to say?”

FRANKENHEIMER:

“I suppose so. Don’t you find, Judge, that sometimes brief testimony is much more effective?”

JUDGE POTTER:

“Quite so. Based solely upon the patient’s insightful remarks, I may have to release Mr. Frankenheimer. He sounds sane to me. On the other hand, I may wish to keep Dr. Kryptic and Orderly Hatchet here for an indefinite period of involuntary observation.”

FRANKENHEIMER:

“By the way, Judge, what’s your name? I may want to pay you a little visit if I ever get outta here.”

MAXWELL OFFERS SOME COMMENTS AT HIS FUNERAL

JUDGE POTTER: (Without hesitation)

“Judge Irving D. Grifo. I’m in the book. Look me up any time at all. Orderly, return the patient to his room. These proceedings are over.” (Judge Potter bangs his gavel. Orderly Hatchet pushes Frankenheimer’s wheelchair off stage, as Dr. Kryptic similarly exits, leaving only Judge Potter and Maxwell on stage.)

MAXWELL: (Concerned)

“Your Honor, you just gave that crazy loon Judge Grifo’s name. You may have placed a fellow judge in harm’s way.”

JUDGE POTTER: (calmly and rationally)

“Which loon – the doctor or his patient? By the way, there’s no need to worry about Judge Grifo. He doesn’t know that Frankenheimer may someday come calling, so there’s no need for him to be prematurely concerned. No harm – no foul. What’s more, Grifo has probably engaged in the same playful stunt and sent some courtroom wackos my way. Every judge learns that little slight-of-hand maneuver after just a week or so on the bench. It’s like the two Russian villages that were so broke they did each other’s laundry to make money. One way or another, it all comes out in the wash.”

(Maxwell walks back to the funeral home viewing.)

MAXWELL:

“Perhaps my most memorable appearance before Judge Potter occurred during an unusual murder trial. I represented the only witness to the homicide, Ms. Tootie LaRue. She was a ‘lady of the evening’. A cheating husband for whom she was momentarily providing services had been shot dead by the cheater’s distraught wife

MAXWELL OFFERS SOME COMMENTS AT HIS FUNERAL

after the wife unexpectedly burst into a hotel room where Tootie and the husband were engaged in some rather intimate activity. Tootie insisted that she never actually saw the unfaithful spouse get shot, because Tootie, who was under the covers, was drunk at the time and had occasionally lapsed in and out of consciousness. The District Attorney decided he ought to clarify this point for the jury.”

(Stage lights illuminate the courtroom. Judge Potter presides from his seat on the bench. Tootie is seated on the witness stand. Maxwell takes a seat at counsel table. The District Attorney, nervous and unprepared, stands ready to examine Tootie, who is obviously a prostitute, as reflected by her dress or lack thereof. She wears excessive make-up, excessive jewelry, and a provocative hat from which protrude ostrich feathers.)

DISTRICT ATTORNEY:

“Ms. LaRue, at the time of the shooting, were you engaged in an intimate act with the deceased victim?”

TOOTIE:

“He wasn’t deceased when we first began doing it. I ain’t that type of girl. He only became deceased after he got shot.”

DISTRICT ATTORNEY:

“So you were engaged in an intimate act?”

TOOTIE:

“I think so.”

DISTRICT ATTORNEY:

“Why aren’t you sure?”

MAXWELL OFFERS SOME COMMENTS AT HIS FUNERAL

TOOTIE:

“I may have fallen asleep right after we started. In my line of work, I’ve found that it’s not necessary to pay that much attention. Some of my clients are self-starters who get underway without much encouragement from me.”

DISTRICT ATTORNEY:

“When, exactly, did you wake up?”

TOOTIE:

“I’m not sure. I wasn’t wearing a watch and he wasn’t being timed. He might have thought he was a stallion at the starting gate, but as it turned out he wasn’t no Seabiscuit.”

DISTRICT ATTORNEY:

“Did you regain consciousness when there were three inches of penetration?”

(Tootie studiously considers the question as she begins to slowly count with the assistance of her fingers.)

TOOTIE:

“One...Two...Three...No, three inches wouldn’t have caught my attention. See, sex is a lot like an approaching snow storm. They might promise you six inches, but things usually peter out after three.”

DISTRICT ATTORNEY: (Growing flustered.)

“Did you regain consciousness when there were six inches of penetration?”

(Tootie once again begins to slowly and methodically count on her fingers.)

MAXWELL OFFERS SOME COMMENTS AT HIS FUNERAL

TOOTIE:

“Now let’s see...One...Two...Three...Four...Five...Six... I was probably still in dreamland at that time, too.”

(The District Attorney becomes more flustered with each stupid question, but can’t figure a way out of the trap he has laid for himself.)

DISTRICT ATTORNEY:

“Did you regain consciousness when there were nine inches of penetration?”

TOOTIE:

(Tootie continues to slowly, methodically, count on her fingers.) **“You said nine inches?”**

DISTRICT ATTORNEY: (Flustered.)

“Yes, nine inches.”

TOOTIE:

“Nine inches. Now let’s see...One...Two...Three...Four...Five...Six...Seven... Eight...Nine... Yes, I probably woke up when there were nine inches of penetration. After all, wouldn’t you?”

(Judge Potter finds this response to be of significance as he faces Tootie with his own observation.)

JUDGE POTTER:

“Ms. LaRue...”

TOOTIE:

“Yes, Your Honor...”

MAXWELL OFFERS SOME COMMENTS AT HIS FUNERAL

JUDGE POTTER:

“I sure hope you’re not planning to fall asleep now. I doubt there’s a man in this courtroom who could wake you up.”

(The stage lights are extinguished on the courtroom. Maxwell returns to address the four lawyers at the funeral home.)

MAXWELL:

“After the trial concluded for the day, Tootie asked if I would give her a lift back to town. It’s the rare prostitute who owns a car. They all seem to do a great deal of walking. At any rate, I was happy to provide transportation. (Maxwell joins Tootie as they walk together.) So we proceeded to the courthouse parking lot where my beat-up Dodge patiently waited. Tootie took one look at my car, and could not refrain from a comment or two.”

TOOTIE:

(Tootie points at the car.) **“This broken down rusting hulk is your car?”**

MAXWELL:

(Apologetically) **“It beats walking.”**

TOOTIE:

“I thought you were a successful lawyer! Aren’t you embarrassed driving such a wreck? You should increase your fees.”

(Maxwell turns to the four lawyers as he addresses them.)

MAXWELL OFFERS SOME COMMENTS AT HIS FUNERAL

MAXWELL:

“I appreciated her obvious concern, and suddenly unexpectedly Tootie gave me a compliment that would prove to brighten my entire day. In fact, whenever I think about it, her insightful words continue even now to dispel the darkest of clouds. Judge Potter may have had his doubts regarding the anatomical measurements of the men seated in his courtroom, but Tootie was a professional in that department, and she had no hesitation drawing her own conclusion about me.”

TOOTIE:

“Of course, it’s true what they say...”

MAXWELL:

“About what?”

TOOTIE:

“Guys who drive them big muscle cars do so to overcompensate for their microscopic dicks – the ones that require a tweezer to locate. On the other hand, I’ve found without exception from my vast personal experience that men who drive underpowered junker cars don’t need to prove a thing. They come equipped with what really matters under the hood. Studs like you are generally endowed with the horsepower to prove it.”

MAXWELL:

(Addresses the four attorneys.) “I drove home with a smile on my face. There would be no reason to ever question Tootie’s testimony either in or out of court. She obviously knew exactly what she was talking about.”

(Stage lights extinguished.) End of Scene Three.

MAXWELL OFFERS SOME COMMENTS AT HIS FUNERAL

End of Act I

Intermission

SCENE FOUR – JOINING THE BAR ASSOCIATION

(The four lawyers sit at the funeral viewing, as they continue to reminisce about Maxwell, who joins them quietly, as they each recall Maxwell and his many accomplishments.)

DANNY:

“Maxwell had to be one of the oldest members of our county bar association.”

MAXWELL:

“I saw a lot of water go under the dam. The practice of criminal law wasn’t the only thing that changed over the years.”

NORMAN:

“When Maxwell first joined the local bar association, there were only about forty members.”

MAXWELL:

“And not a single woman, black, Asian, or Latino member. They were just starting to reluctantly let Jews come on board. It’s funny. When I went to law school, there were two-hundred and fifty students in my class. Only three were women. Now over half of all law students are female.”

PHIL:

“When Maxwell first became a lawyer, every lawyer knew every other lawyer in the county by name. Now there are five hundred of us, and we are, for the most part, strangers in a crowd.”

MAXWELL OFFERS SOME COMMENTS AT HIS FUNERAL

LORRAINE:

“When Maxwell opened his first office, if the electricity went out, no one noticed. There were no copy machines, no computers, no air conditioning, no nothing.”

MAXWELL:

“You make me sound like a dinosaur. But it’s true. Lawyers did title searches by lifting leather-bound hand-written deed books at the courthouse.”

DANNY:

“Back in Maxwell’s day, anyone could access the courthouse by using any of six different entrances as designed by the original architect. Now there is one limited security area, and everyone is scanned for weapons.”

NORMAN:

“Something went wrong along the way. There never was a day, from the moment I entered kindergarten until the day I graduated from law school that I ever saw a police officer on patrol in one of my schools. There simply was no need. Now our educational facilities have become armed encampments, with students barricaded behind locked doors. Some teachers are debating whether they should carry guns.”

PHIL:

“We have become the architects of our own demise. If indiscriminate unending vivid acts of violence are permitted on TV, in the movies, on video games, and the Internet as an excuse for legitimate entertainment, diseased minds will succumb to the constant message that violence is justified and acceptable. We have found the enemy and it is us.”

MAXWELL OFFERS SOME COMMENTS AT HIS FUNERAL

MAXWELL:

“When I practiced law, lawyers actually filed documents at the courthouse. Now, E-filing is required. As a result, lawyers have little need to visit the courthouse. I was there just about every day.”

LORRAINE:

“When Maxwell was working, lawyers didn’t advertise.”

MAXWELL:

“Didn’t need to. Word of mouth brought the clients to your door. Seeing those ambulance chaser ads on TV makes me glad I’m dead.”

DANNY:

“When Maxwell hung out his shingle, people actually called on the phone. I can’t remember the last time somebody telephoned me rather than send an email.”

MAXWELL:

“Back when I started out, if you weren’t of Pennsylvania Dutch heritage, there was a real question whether you could become a member of the bar. Just take a look at the formal bar association portraits from about 1940 – even 1950, just a few years before I showed up. The only names you’ll find are ‘Shingeldeckers’ and ‘Fenstermachers’, with a few ‘O’Malleys’ thrown in for good measure. So there I was trying to join this closed shop. I’ll never forget that first bar meeting. They stopped playing poker and chugging beer just long enough for the few coherent members to conduct the formal business meeting.”

(Spotlight on a podium as the President of the Bar Association, Amos Bauerwexel, addresses the membership.)

MAXWELL OFFERS SOME COMMENTS AT HIS FUNERAL

BAUERWEXEL:

“The first order of business for those of you still sober enough to concentrate is approval of the treasurer’s report.”

(Off-Stage voice)

VOICE:

“Do we have any money?”

BAUERWEXEL:

“No.”

VOICE:

“I move to approve the treasurer’s report.”

BAUERWEXEL:

“So do I. There’s probably no need to take a formal vote. The next item on the agenda is the admission of a new member, Maxwell Finkel. (Bauerwexel scans the audience.) Stand up, Finkel, so we can see you. (Maxwell stands up.) Finkel ... Finkel. Is that a Pennsylvania Dutch name?”

MAXWELL:

“It is tonight.”

BAUERWEXEL:

“Good. Do I hear a motion?”

OFF-STAGE VOICE:

“I move we admit the son of a bitch, if he forks over one hundred dollars cash.”

MAXWELL OFFERS SOME COMMENTS AT HIS FUNERAL

BAUERWEXEL:

“Agreed. Give the treasurer your money, Finkel, and be prepared to buy us a round of drinks in honor of this special occasion.”

(Maxwell turns to address the four lawyers at the funeral home.)

MAXWELL:

“It was one of the proudest moments of my brief legal career. I was now an official member of the local bar association, and had simultaneously acquired a Pennsylvania Dutch heritage, all in the matter of a few seconds for the bargain price of a mere hundred bucks. However, this fleeting honor soon proved similar to taking a leak in my pants. The warm glow of this magical induction didn’t last very long as this rowdy group began to consider the next agenda item.”

BAUERWEXEL:

“I suppose it’s time to discuss former Attorney Corrigan.”

MAXWELL: (He addresses the four lawyers.)

“Who was Corrigan, I wondered to myself, and why had he become a ‘former’ counselor at law? I was about to find out.”

BAUERWEXEL:

“Now that he’s been convicted of stealing from most of his clients, the rules of this august association require that we all chip in to make a token attempt at restitution for the victims. Is there any money in the treasury?”

OFF-STAGE VOICE:

“Just a hundred bucks.”

MAXWELL OFFERS SOME COMMENTS AT HIS FUNERAL

BAUERWEXEL:

“That’s probably not enough. So each member of this bar association will be surcharged one thousand dollars to reimburse the widows and orphans who were ripped off by Corrigan.”

(Maxwell addresses the four lawyers at the funeral home.)

MAXWELL:

“Restitution! One thousand after-tax American dollars! Surcharge! Widows and orphans! Maybe I should have been warned before I was voted in as their newest member. If they gave me back my hundred bucks, I would have considered giving back my Pennsylvania Dutch lineage. But it was too late. My entrance fee had just been expended to pay for a round of drinks, and a couple of cigars for good measure.”

PHIL:

“I wonder what ever happened to Maxwell’s silver bowl?”

DANNY:

“What silver bowl?”

PHIL:

“Every lawyer who is still breathing after practicing law for fifty consecutive years receives an engraved silver bowl from the bar association. It’s tradition.”

NORMAN:

“I wonder how many lawyers actually think they’re gonna be around for five decades?”

MAXWELL OFFERS SOME COMMENTS AT HIS FUNERAL

MAXWELL:

“It was a lovely bowl with a heartfelt inscription confirming the date when I reached the half century mark as a counselor at law. I treasured that memento and rarely let it out of my sight. It sure came in handy at night when I couldn’t make it to the bathroom in time. But I’m not quite done with my story. So a year goes by, and I finally got appointed to the county public defender’s trial division. I was starting to make some real money – fifteen dollars for each guilty plea – one hundred dollars for each jury trial that I could stretch past a week. I figured another year or two and I might be able to buy a used car. So I’m walking through the prison after consulting with one of my clients. Back then there was no visitor’s room – attorneys simply proceeded into the bowels of the prison, right to the defendant’s jail cell. Then you talked face-to-face through the reinforced steel door. I guess that’s how the term ‘bar association’ came about. One thing they failed to teach us in law school was the benefit of carrying an umbrella inside the prison. It provided some protection from those dissatisfied clients residing in the upper tiers who were inclined to piss on you. After all, I only had one good suit.

As fate would have it, I was about to engage in a chance impromptu meeting with convicted felon and disbarred attorney Myron Corrigan, who was at that very moment being released after a year’s confinement. It was difficult looking him in the eye, since his face was also partially hidden by his umbrella.”

(Maxwell walks through a prison hallway as he carries an umbrella above his head.

Disbarred attorney Myron Corrigan, dressed in an ill-fitting cheap coat and tie

approaches Maxwell. Corrigan also carries an umbrella extended above his head.)

MAXWELL OFFERS SOME COMMENTS AT HIS FUNERAL

OFF STAGE VOICE:

“Good luck, Corrigan. It won’t be the same around here without your wise counsel and angelic smile.” (Some liquid rains down on Corrigan’s umbrella.)

CORRIGAN:

“Don’t forget to look me up, Bone-Cruncher, if you ever make bail.”

(Maxwell stops as he stares at Corrigan.)

MAXWELL:

“Are you Attorney Corrigan?”

CORRIGAN:

“I was ... once upon a time. Now I’m just ... ‘Corrigan’. My former professional title and place of residence changed rather dramatically after I was disbarred. (Corrigan points at Maxwell’s umbrella.) Fancy umbrella. You must be a successful lawyer.”

MAXWELL:

“Maxwell Finkel. I’m a public defender.”

CORRIGAN:

“Congratulations! Want some free but truly invaluable advice, Counselor? Don’t steal from your clients. It just doesn’t pay.”

MAXWELL:

“I know. You cost me a thousand dollars.”

CORRIGAN:

“I did? Were you one of my clients? My memory isn’t what it used to be. It’s possible I might be able to pay you back, maybe by next Tuesday.”

MAXWELL OFFERS SOME COMMENTS AT HIS FUNERAL

MAXWELL:

“I was surcharged by the bar association to help pay restitution for your crimes.”

CORRIGAN:

“That’s a shame! There oughta be a law or somethin’.”

MAXWELL:

“It’s taken me an entire year of monthly installment payments to help reimburse the widows and orphans you defrauded.”

CORRIGAN:

“I feel bad about that. I truly do. Tell you what - when I get back home, I’m gonna write you out a check for a thousand bucks. And that’s a promise.”

MAXWELL:

“Thank you, Sir. I sure could use the money.”

CORRIGAN:

“By the way, any chance I might hitch a ride with you back to town? It’s a long walk.”

(Maxwell walks across stage and re-enters the funeral home setting. He places his umbrella in an umbrella stand near the coffin. Phil notices the umbrella as he addresses the other lawyers.)

PHIL:

“Where did that umbrella come from? The forecast didn’t call for rain!”

MAXWELL OFFERS SOME COMMENTS AT HIS FUNERAL

MAXWELL:

“I was just reminiscing about the prison, and my chance meeting there with Myron Corrigan. Gave him a ride home. It’s been half a century, and I’m still waiting for his check.”

End of Scene Four.

SCENE FIVE – THE GOOD EARTH

(The state lights illuminate the four attorneys at the funeral home viewing. Maxwell is also present.)

PHIL:

“Do you think undertakers go out of their way to make their funeral homes creepy? I mean ... just look at this place. It gives me the ‘Willies’. And that soft tasteless organ music doesn’t help either.”

DANNY:

“Were you hoping there might be some dancing girls, or maybe a brass band?”

NORMAN:

“Every once in a while, something like tonight will prompt me to think about my own mortality.”

LORRAINE:

“Everybody thinks about dying.”

NORMAN:

“What I mean is that on occasion I have this recurring dream. Some might call it a nightmare.”

LORRAINE:

“A dream about death?”

NORMAN:

“Actually, about dying with my boots on while working at the law office.”

(Norman stands and walks over to a receptionist’s desk. A law office receptionist is seated behind the desk where she is concluding a telephone conversation.) **The dream**

MAXWELL OFFERS SOME COMMENTS AT HIS FUNERAL

always starts out innocently enough. I'm talking to our receptionist in the front lobby area of the law office. We're discussing the weather. And then it happens, just like clockwork."

PHIL:

"What happens?"

NORMAN:

"I suffer a massive heart attack and fall dead as a doornail even before I hit the floor."

(Norman falls to the floor, but continues to address the other attorneys from his position on the floor. The receptionist, startled, races to Norman's side and begins to pump up and down on his chest without success.)

RECEPTIONIST:

"Oh my God, Norman! Are you okay?"

NORMAN: (He addressed the receptionist)

"Not really, because as anyone can see, I'm dead. It's probably a massive heart attack. There's nothing that can be done."

DANNY:

"How terrible!"

MAXWELL:

"Not really. Look on the bright side. A quick exit! No nursing home – no bedpans."

NORMAN:

"And no more worrying about office overhead. Free. Free at last."

MAXWELL OFFERS SOME COMMENTS AT HIS FUNERAL

(A new client, Elmer Strudel, enters the reception area and addresses the distraught receptionist who is still kneeling at Norman's side.)

STRUDEL:

"Elmer Strudel, here for my two – thirty appointment with Attorney Norman Burke. Hey! Isn't that him on the floor?"

RECEPTIONIST (Distraught, she points at Norman):

"He's not feeling very well. He may have just dropped dead!"

STRUDEL:

"Are you quite sure? Just my luck. All I have is a quick question. It won't take that long. Can he give me five minutes?"

NORMAN:

"Believe me – I'm dead."

STRUDEL:

"By the way, he wasn't planning to charge me, was he? After all, it's just a quick question."

RECEPTIONIST:

"Can't you see he's unavailable!"

STRUDEL:

"I suppose you have a point. Listen, is there some other lawyer who can talk to me? It's just a quick question, so I don't expect to be billed."

(The receptionist and Strudel exit the stage as Norman stands up and returns to his fellow attorneys at the funeral viewing area.)

MAXWELL OFFERS SOME COMMENTS AT HIS FUNERAL

PHIL:

“Now that Maxwell is gone, I suppose we ought to clean out his office and make room for someone else – perhaps a young associate.”

NORMAN:

“There’s a lot of stuff in there. His diplomas, a couple of paintings, and some family photos. I suppose his widow will want all that memorabilia.”

MAXWELL:

“Don’t forget my deed hanging on the wall. That deed meant a great deal to me. That’s why I put it on display.”

DANNY:

“Isn’t there some old deed titled in Maxwell’s name?”

NORMAN:

“Not just ‘some old deed’, my friend – THE DEED.”

DANNY:

“I don’t understand. What’s so special about it?”

NORMAN:

“Inch for inch it’s the most expensive real estate ever acquired during all of recorded civilization, and Maxwell was the undisputed owner of record. Dirt that the astronauts brought back from the moon cost less to acquire. Maxwell always planned to bequeath that special parcel of land to future generations of his family, to be held in trust in perpetuity.”

MAXWELL OFFERS SOME COMMENTS AT HIS FUNERAL

DANNY:

“I had no idea that deed had such significance. I just assumed it was some old forgotten document decorating Maxwell’s office.”

MAXWELL:

“That deed instilled in me a life-long interest in and respect for real estate law. It was the reason I decided to attend law school. It was the reason I chose to represent so many farmers in our locale as they purchased, transferred and devised their land. That deed on my wall constituted my first acquisition of real estate, title to which I have continued to retain.”

NORMAN:

“I think that deed may have been Maxwell’s prized possession.”

MAXWELL:

“Quite possibly. The year was 1955 and televisions were just beginning to make an appearance in American homes. I was a third grader living with my parents. One day after elementary school I was watching my favorite TV show, *Sergeant Preston of the Yukon*. The Sergeant was a Canadian mounted policeman who wore a red uniform, carried a large gun, and engaged in weekly exploits of bravery and daring. He always got his man. I hoped to someday follow in his footsteps and become a Canadian mounted policeman just like him. However, those plans didn’t work out, and ultimately I ended up attending law school instead.”

(Maxwell walks over to a TV set and sits on the floor cross-legged like a child. An off-stage voice is projected from the television.)

MAXWELL OFFERS SOME COMMENTS AT HIS FUNERAL

OFF-STAGE VOICE:

“Kids! Know what cereal Sergeant Preston eats every morning before he sets out to maintain law and order?”

MAXWELL:

(Points at the television.) **“Quaker Puffed Rice!”**

OFF-STAGE VOICE:

“That’s right! And guess what?”

MAXWELL:

“What?”

OFF-STAGE VOICE:

“Now you too can own a piece of the Yukon Territory here in Canada – the very same territory patrolled by Sergeant Preston and the other Mounties! Land where felonies occur on a regular basis.”

MAXWELL:

“I can?”

OFF-STAGE VOICE:

“Yes, ‘cause starting this week and as long as limited supplies last, whenever you buy a box of Quaker Puffed Rice, you’ll find a deed inside transferring title to one square inch of the Yukon Territory. You’ll own a part of Canada where gold can be found glistening right on top of the ground!”

MAXWELL: (In disbelief.)

“No!”

MAXWELL OFFERS SOME COMMENTS AT HIS FUNERAL

OFF-STAGE VOICE:

“Yes! So tell Mom and Dad you want Quaker Puffed Rice today, and hurry!”

MAXWELL:

(Returns to the funeral home and the four lawyers.) **“That cereal tasted like wallpaper paste. Still does. On the other hand, I figured purchasing a box or two might help foster my burgeoning career as an international land baron. Twenty-four hours later a box of Quaker Puffed Rice reposed on our kitchen counter. Thankfully, Mom had gotten to the grocery store before supplies ran out. I nervously searched inside the box for my deed.”**

(Maxwell pulls the deed out of the cereal box and begins to study the document. An off-stage echo voice reads aloud some of the wording printed on the deed.)

OFF-STAGE VOICE:

“This indenture made this 4th day of January, in the year of Our Lord One Thousand Nine Hundred and Fifty-Five, between Klondike Big Inch Land Company, Inc., a body corporate duly registered for the purposes of carrying on business in the Yukon Territory, having its head office for said Territory in the City of Whitehorse, hereinafter called the ‘Grantor’ of the first part, and ‘fill in your name’ hereinafter called the ‘Grantee’ of the second part witnesseth that the Grantor for good and valuable consideration now paid by the Grantee to the Grantor, the receipt whereof is hereby acknowledged, doth grant, bargain, sell, and convey unto the Grantee, his heirs and assigns forever an estate in fee simple to all that certain parcel or tract of land lying and being in the Yukon Territory more particularly known and described as tract number L 425916.”

MAXWELL OFFERS SOME COMMENTS AT HIS FUNERAL

MAXWELL:

“I owned part of the Yukon. If I purchased enough cereal, I might be able to consolidate my holdings and build a condo or even a cape cod with a view of some roaming moose. Sergeant Preston might be one of my neighbors. I began to dream of dual citizenship, but first I would have to investigate whether Canada had a mandatory draft.”

DANNY:

“That deed displayed on Maxwell’s wall gave him title to one square inch of Yukon Territory?”

NORMAN:

“It wasn’t quite that simple.”

PHIL:

“Nothing ever is. Ask any lawyer.”

NORMAN:

“Maxwell did his homework. He learned that some advertising genius had purchased nineteen acres of wilderness in the Yukon Territory for five thousand bucks. Then this purveyor of cereal divided the tract into one-inch square lots. Apparently zoning in the Yukon back then didn’t require adherence to a minimum lot area.”

MAXWELL:

“One acre of land possesses forty-three thousand five hundred sixty square feet or six million two hundred seventy-two thousand six hundred forty square inches. Nineteen acres possess one hundred nineteen million eight hundred seventy

MAXWELL OFFERS SOME COMMENTS AT HIS FUNERAL

thousand one hundred fifty square inches, give or take an inch or two. The supply of deeds probably wouldn't have run out until after the first astronauts had walked on the moon and had brought back some rocks."

NORMAN:

"Maxwell was no fool. He knew that annual provincial taxes had to be paid to the Canadian government, or his land holdings could be sold at sheriff's sale. So he made a long distance phone call to the tax assessment office in the Yukon Territory. He spoke with a Mr. Gildersleeve."

MAXWELL:

"I explained that I owned a square inch of Yukon Territory, and that I might be acquiring more, depending on how much cereal I could digest, and that I wished to receive a bill so that I might stay current with the payment of my taxes. It took some doing, but we finally came to an agreement, and I sent in my first installment of three cents subject to the standard international rate of exchange. Ultimately, I drafted by-laws for a foundation that included a Board of Directors to be named at a later date to monitor a trust with sufficient monies in escrow to assure timely annual payments in perpetuity. My last will and testament makes reference to my land holdings in the Yukon and the trust that will retain title on behalf of my future descendants. Each year I continued to eat a bowl of Quaker Puffed Rice in honor of Sergeant Preston. After all, if it weren't for him, my land holdings in the Yukon would probably be significantly smaller."

(The four lawyers sit silently for a moment.)

MAXWELL OFFERS SOME COMMENTS AT HIS FUNERAL

PHIL:

“Real estate was a significant factor in Maxwell’s practice.”

MAXWELL:

“Whenever one of my clients bought or sold land, I was called upon to attend the real estate closing. Sometimes a surprise or two arose during the formal settlement. I remember one such encounter when Farmer Jones and his wife, Matilda showed up at the office. (Maxwell walks over to his office where he meets Farmer Jones and his wife, Matilda, both of whom are seated at a small conference table. These clients, devoid of a sense of humor, speak with a Pennsylvania Dutch accent.) So today’s the big day, folks. You ready to purchase the lower tract along the creek?”

FARMER JONES:

(Farmer Jones and his wife, Matilda, speak with a thick Pennsylvania Dutch accent. They both possess emotionless expressionless faces.) **“Yup. We plan to grow potatoes derr. Maybe some veet, too.”**

MAXWELL:

“Meat? Meat and potatoes. That’s a good combination.”

FARMER JONES:

“Veet – not meat.”

MAXWELL:

“Beet? Beets are tasty.”

MATILDA: (Speaks louder)

“VEET! Not beet.”

MAXWELL OFFERS SOME COMMENTS AT HIS FUNERAL

MAXWELL:

“Weed? It’s becoming legal under certain conditions.”

FARMER JONES:

“Veet!”

MAXWELL:

“Wheat? Nothin’ like a fresh loaf of bread.”

MATILDA:

“Veet!”

MAXWELL:

“Veet. That’s nice. I hope you sell a lot of it. (He shuffles some papers.) This shouldn’t take very long.”

FARMER JONES:

(Jones looks around the room.) **“Vhere is da seller? Ain’t he coming?”**

MAXWELL:

“Not necessary. The executor of the estate already signed the deed and dropped it off yesterday. I’ll just send him a check when we’re done.”

FARMER JONES: (Unconvinced)

“If you say so.”

MAXWELL:

“As I recall, the purchase price is Forty Thousand Dollars. Is that right?”

FARMER JONES:

“And not a penny more. (The Farmer turns to his silent wife.) Matilda, get de sock. It’s time to give dis here lawyer da money. (Matilda obediently reaches into her bra,

MAXWELL OFFERS SOME COMMENTS AT HIS FUNERAL

and produces a large argyle knitted sock that sags from the weight of money reposing inside. She hands the sock to Farmer Jones, who hands it to Maxwell.) **Should be for-dy tow-zan der. Count it already once-t.**

MAXWELL:

“As you wish. (Maxwell opens the sock and dumps wrapped wads of currency on the table. He studies each wad.) **Are these all hundred dollar bills?”**

MATILDA:

“Each vad contains five tow-zan dollars. Count it, vhy don’t chu now.”

(Maxwell counts ten wads. He looks up in surprise.)

MAXWELL:

“There’s fifty thousand here. You only need forty.”

FARMER JONES: (Surprised.)

“FIV-TY? (Jones turns to his wife.) Matilda, you brought de wrong sock!”

MATILDA:

(Shrugs her shoulders as Mr. and Mrs. Jones exit the stage. Maxwell leaves his office and returns to the funeral viewing to address his fellow lawyers.)

MAXWELL:

“Not everyone who I represented wanted to stay on the farm. I’ll never forget my very first domestic relations support conference. I represented Ms. Lucy Klodstopper, who had finally decided to leave her husband. She had worked on their dairy farm during the last thirty years of marital bliss, and she recently had come to the conclusion that there wasn’t much of a future milking cows unless she were to receive adequate compensation. Actually, her cheap husband had never

MAXWELL OFFERS SOME COMMENTS AT HIS FUNERAL

paid her so much as a dime, and so she sought to investigate her other options outside the bonds of matrimony. I was a young lawyer fresh out of law school.”

(Maxwell dons a wig of full dark hair to depict that he has transformed into a young lawyer. He approaches Judge Potter who sits at the elevated courtroom bench. Also standing before Judge Potter are Henry Klodstopper and Lucy Klodstopper, husband and wife. Henry is dressed in boots and farmer’s overalls supported by suspenders. Lucy is dressed in a simple but presentable homemaker’s dress. They are both about 50 years old. It appears that their best years are behind them. They have no sense of humor. Judge Potter carefully studies their file before addressing Lucy.)

JUDGE POTTER:

“You are Mrs. Klodstopper?”

LUCY:

“Lucy Klodstopper. That’s right, your Judgeship.”

JUDGE POTTER

“And you, Sir, are Mr. Klodstopper?”

HENRY:

“Henry Klodstopper. We’re married to each other. That’s why we both have the last same name.”

JUDGE POTTER:

“I see. Now in your petition, Mrs. Klodstopper, you seek spousal support. Is that correct?”

MAXWELL OFFERS SOME COMMENTS AT HIS FUNERAL

LUCY:

“Money. I need money so I can finally leave this here husband and all them smelly cows, too.”

HENRY:

“She’s planning on leaving me high and dry for no particular reason, Your Honor.”

JUDGE POTTER:

“Apparently so. Why are you thinking of leaving, Mrs. Klodstopper?”

LUCY:

“Cause for thirty years he’s promised me the moon and the stars, but all I’ve gotten was a bucket of manure and unending housework from dawn to dusk. Them cows produce more than just milk, if you know what I mean.”

HENRY:

“You’ve got a roof over your head.”

LUCY:

“But he won’t give me no money. I shovel the manure and milk the cows, but I ain’t never seen a dime.”

JUDGE POTTER:

“Is that true?”

HENRY:

“She’d spend it on stuff she probably don’t need.”

LUCY:

“A girl needs to splurge once in a while. Maybe walk into town, buy a Pepsi, and get some lipstick, too.”

MAXWELL OFFERS SOME COMMENTS AT HIS FUNERAL

HENRY:

“See what I mean? She’s always talkin’ crazy. She’s got everything she needs right there on the farm.”

JUDGE POTTER: (Addresses Henry)

“You’ve never given her any money?”

LUCY:

“Not a dime. So I’ve decided to leave and see the world before it’s too late. But I need some of the milk money to do that.”

JUDGE POTTER:

“Where do you plan to go?”

HENRY:

“Hollywood. She wants to meet some of them fancy movie stars she’s been readin’ ‘bout in them magazines at the free li-berry.”

JUDGE POTTER:

“You don’t say!”

LUCY:

“It’s my only vice. I admit it. But I’m goin’ before it’s too late. Ain’t gettin’ any younger.”

JUDGE POTTER:

“When do you plan to leave?”

LUCY:

“Next Sunday. Right after church. I’ll start walking west.”

MAXWELL OFFERS SOME COMMENTS AT HIS FUNERAL

HENRY:

“But Judge, she don’t understand. There is no money. The farm just ‘bout breaks even.”

LUCY:

“Ah, he’s been sayin’ that for thirty years.”

JUDGE POTTER:

“What if it’s true? What if there is no money?”

LUCY:

“The Lord will provide. I still plan on leavin’, right after Sunday’s church service.”

JUDGE POTTER:

“It costs quite a bit of money to travel. If you have no cash, how will you get to the west coast?”

LUCY:

“I’ve given that a lot of thought, Your Honor, and prayed some in church, too. And then the idea come to me like one of them epiphanies the pastor is always talkin’ ‘bout. If necessary, I’ll screw my way there.”

MAXWELL: (addresses the four lawyers)

“And that’s when Judge Potter made one of his succinct observations.”

JUDGE POTTER:

“Madame, do you have any idea exactly how far it is to California?”

HENRY:

“Your Honor, I can tell you from personal experience, she’s gonna have trouble gettin’ past Pittsburgh.”

MAXWELL OFFERS SOME COMMENTS AT HIS FUNERAL

MAXWELL: (Returns to the funeral viewing.)

“Not all domestic relations confrontations ended in acrimony. On rare occasions, an unexpected peaceful end result might be achieved. The Protzki divorce stands out as a primary example of equitable dispute resolution.

What started out as your usual run of the mill marital break-up had its share of twists and turns. See, generally any reasonable couple will agree to split things down the middle, fair and square, fifty-fifty. The husband gets the mortgage – the wife gets the house. He gets the child support payments – she gets the kids. He gets to work an additional ten years. She gets a significant portion of his pension. But Mr. Protzki refused to listen to reason.” (Maxwell walks over to his office and greets Mr. Protzki who appears tired, distraught, and hopeless.)

PROTZKI:

“It’s getting worse each week. Know what she did now?”

MAXWELL: (Sympathetic.)

“I can’t imagine.”

PROTZKI:

“She moved the mother-in-law from Hell into my house. My house! They changed the locks and now that witch has a key to my front door. I never liked her very much. Meanwhile, I’m living on the third floor of the YMCA, and the air conditioning stopped working.”

MAXWELL:

“The house has only been on the market for six months. As soon as it sells, you’ll receive half the proceeds. You’ve just got to be patient.”

MAXWELL OFFERS SOME COMMENTS AT HIS FUNERAL

PROTZKI: (Doesn't appear to be listening.)

"And she's turned the dog against me. I don't know how she did it, but now that mutt ignores me, too, just like my kids. Doesn't even wag his tail when I stop by. Total change in personality. Is she allowed to do that?"

MAXWELL:

"Mr. Protzki, there's a simple solution. We've discussed this for several months."

PROTZKI:

"Sure, sure. Split everything fifty-fifty. But why should I? She sat home eating bonbons while I slaved for years. The thought that her new boyfriend might benefit from a dime of my money makes me crazy. Did I mention that he's never held a job more than two weeks?"

(Maxwell leaves his office and returns to the funeral home to address the four lawyers.)

MAXWELL:

"What was I to do? There was no magic elixir, no simple solution with a snap of the fingers to resolve Protzki's obvious pain. Every time this forty-year-old man came to my office, his physical appearance continued to dramatically decline. He was losing weight, he seemed to have aged twenty years, and he now shuffled about similar to an old man. He was dying before my very eyes. I tried to reason with his wife's legal counsel, the self-righteous and all-knowing Philamona Snodscrew, but to no avail. The only difference between a female domestic relations attorney and a rabid pit-bull is that sooner or later the pit-bull will come up for air and let go of your ankle. The situation was becoming hopeless. I feared for what little was left of Protzki's mental health. And then one lovely autumn day, the vision of a miracle

MAXWELL OFFERS SOME COMMENTS AT HIS FUNERAL

appeared at my office door. It was Protzki, although at first I did not recognize him. There was a spring in his energetic step, a wide smile upon his rejuvenated face, and it was obvious that if called upon he could have run a mile in less than four minutes flat. He was a man reborn who had obviously partaken of a magic potion derived from none other than the fountain of youth.”

(Maxwell returns to his office as Protzki addresses him.)

PROTZKI: (Content and at peace.)

“Last week was the final straw. She gave my slippers, the comfortable ones that took years to break in, to the dog and that beast ate them. I realized something had to be done. And then your words of wisdom came to mind. I decided to settle things as you have been suggesting for over a year. Fifty – fifty, split down the middle. While she and her useless mother were out spending my after tax dollars on their usual afternoon lunch, I went over to my house with my trusty two-horsepower tree saw and my arc welder. I split everything down the middle just like you said, including the house. Let’s just say the piano is no longer an upright and the combination refrigerator - freezer is no longer combined.”

(Maxwell turns to address the four lawyers.)

MAXWELL:

“Protzki had accurately described the situation. My secretary popped in to advise that both Attorney Snodscrew and the police were simultaneously calling at that very moment. I asked my secretary to tell them I was in conference. Then I turned to Protzki and told him that I did not approve of what he had done. He didn’t seem to care.”

MAXWELL OFFERS SOME COMMENTS AT HIS FUNERAL

PROTZKI:

“You don’t get it, do you counselor?”

MAXWELL:

“Get what?”

PROTZKI:

“I can’t remember the last time I felt this relaxed. After work tonight, I just might go out dancing for the first time in years. You can’t put a price on good health and contentment.”

(Maxwell walks over to the funeral reception and addresses the four lawyers.)

MAXWELL:

“He had a point. Just ask Attorney Snodscrew. I returned her call. She was highly agitated as was her displaced client, but it didn’t really matter. There wasn’t that much left to fight about. In due course, Snodscrew let go of my client’s ankle, the parties went their separate ways, and Mr. Protzki continued to be the picture of health. Unfortunately, the same could not be said about his former wife.

She tried to sue Protzki for all of the damage he had caused, but that proved to be a useless exercise. He no longer owned anything which arguably had been his former wife’s goal from the outset. There was nothing left for her to grab. Last I heard, Protzki had made several new friends at the YMCA, which had repaired its air conditioning system, and he had won several prizes at various Arthur Murray dance contests.”

End of Scene Five.

MAXWELL OFFERS SOME COMMENTS AT HIS FUNERAL

SCENE SIX – THE GOLD BARS

(Maxwell returns to the four attorneys at the funeral home viewing. He approaches his coffin, and stops to straighten one of the satin sheets. He notices a smudge on the outside of his coffin, and so he removes an exposed folded handkerchief from the breast pocket of his dress coat, bends down, breathes heavily on the smudge, and then wipes the area clean with his handkerchief which he finally returns to his coat pocket. He addresses the four lawyers.)

MAXWELL: \

“It never hurts to tidy up a bit and look your best. (Maxwell thinks quietly for a moment.) That wasn’t the last time I would come in contact with Farmer Jones. He was a long-time client. As you might agree, farmers are a unique breed, possessed with a special love for the land – the land they and often their prior generations have tilled by the sweat of their brow. It’s the sacred land they have lived on and hope to die upon. Farmer Jones was no exception. His farm was the only thing of importance in his life. Similar to being a lawyer, his chosen profession had given his simple existence its meaning and identity. His farm was a part of him, and he was a part of his farm. They were inseparable, and that’s why he was known as ‘Farmer Jones’ rather than simply ‘Mr. Jones’. I remember when he decided to consult with me regarding the inevitable passing of ownership at his death of the acreage he so dearly cherished.”

(Maxwell walks over to his office and greets Farmer Jones, who is dressed in a ‘shoulder to toe’ one piece overall supported by suspenders. They shake hands and sit at a simple conference table.)

MAXWELL OFFERS SOME COMMENTS AT HIS FUNERAL

MAXWELL:

“It’s good to see you, Farmer Jones.”

JONES:

“Yup. Now here’s da ‘ting’ already once – I need a wheel.”

MAXWELL:

“For one of your tractors?”

JONES:

“A last wheel ... and a test-termint, too.”

MAXWELL:

“A wheel! A last wheel and test-termint.”

JONES:

“Dat’s vhat I said, didn’t I? Do you have any of dem?”

MAXWELL:

“Yes, I write both wheels and test-termints, as well.”

JONES:

“How much vill dey cost already?”

MAXWELL:

“They come as a package deal. One price for both.”

JONES:

“Oh! Like an assault and a battery.”

MAXWELL:

“Yes, I suppose so.”

MAXWELL OFFERS SOME COMMENTS AT HIS FUNERAL

JONES:

“Do you charge by de verd or by de minutes dat ve jabber together?”

MAXWELL:

“Your choice.”

JONES:

“OK. Vy don’t I pay den by each verd that shows up on de paper. I need just a simple wheel. It shouldn’t run more den two pages tops, if you leave out all the unnecessary verds. Don’t put in any of dem introductory ‘wherefores’ or useless clauses like ‘nothing above to the contrary vithstanding’. If it’s contrary, I don’t vant to vithstand it. Agreed?”

MAXWELL:

“Fair enough. Suppose we limit your wheel to no more than three hundred words at five cents a word. If it runs over, I won’t charge extra.”

JONES: (Jones begins to count on his fingers.)

“Fifteen dollars maximum?”

MAXWELL: (Maxwell also counts on his fingers.)

“Yup, fifteen bucks.”

JONES:

“Good. Vill you need a retainer?”

MAXWELL:

“That won’t be necessary.”

MAXWELL OFFERS SOME COMMENTS AT HIS FUNERAL

JONES:

“Deal. (He points at Maxwell’s pad of paper.) So start takin’ notes. Der’s no time to delay. As you may recall, I live alone in de house I built vit my own two hands. No one helped me, udder den de vife, Matilda, but she’s been dead now goin’ on three years. I got de two grown kids, Zeek and Zelda, so vhen I die, dey get de farm and de house, fifty-fifty.”

MAXWELL: (He looks up from his note taking.)

“Fifty-fifty.”

JONES

“And den I vant you should add one more clause about my gold.”

MAXWELL:

“Gold? What gold?”

JONES:

“Vhen I die, de two kids get to divide up de gold bars and coins I’ve got hid in de farmhouse basement.”

MAXWELL:

“Shouldn’t you put your gold in a safer place, like a bank vault?”

JONES:

“Never trusted no bank. Every so often one of dem goes ‘belly-up’. Anyways, my stockpile of gold is hidden pretty good. It’ll take a vhile for my kids to dig it up.”

MAXWELL:

“Whatever you say.”

MAXWELL OFFERS SOME COMMENTS AT HIS FUNERAL

JONES:

“And one last ‘ting’. I’ll be givin’ you a letter for safe keepin’. When I die, vait six months, den open de letter and give it to my kids. ”

MAXWELL:

“I’m not quite sure I understand.”

JONES:

“It’s simple. Dat letter vill answer any questions dat might come up later.”

MAXWELL: (He turns to the four attorneys at the viewing.)

“I wrote Farmer Jones’ last will as requested. It was composed of two hundred and seventy succinct words. I was able to draft an expedited version with no fanfare added. Farmer Jones stopped by the office, counted each word twice to confirm billing accuracy, signed the document, and paid me the discounted sum of thirteen dollars and fifty cents. ‘Good verk’ he confirmed, as he also handed me an envelope that noted on its cover ‘Open six months after my death.’

He left my office clutching the original will in his hand. He died two months later. Not surprisingly, within twenty-four hours after the funeral, his two grieving children stopped by my office to make a few loving inquiries.

(Maxwell returns to his Spartan law office where Zeek and Zelda are seated at his conference table. Both children are dressed in ripped work clothes that are soiled by dirt and mud. Each child carries a shovel. They are agitated and impatient.) **Nice to make your acquaintance.”**

MAXWELL OFFERS SOME COMMENTS AT HIS FUNERAL

ZEEK:

“Let’s get to the point. Dad died. You’re not gonna charge us for a few simple questions, are you?”

MAXWELL:

“I am so sorry for your loss.”

ZELDA:

“Whatever. Did you write his Last Will?”

MAXWELL:

“And his test-termint...testament, too.”

ZEEK:

“He gave us the house and the gold he had been collecting all them years.”

MAXWELL:

“I recall. Those were his wishes.”

ZELDA:

“Did he tell you anything in particular about the gold?”

MAXWELL: (He thinks out loud.)

“I suppose since you two are the estate representatives and the only beneficiaries, I won’t breach any client privacy issues by discussing what was said.”

ZEEK:

“Well, get to the point! Did he?”

MAXWELL OFFERS SOME COMMENTS AT HIS FUNERAL

MAXWELL:

“Your father said that the gold bars and coins were hidden in the basement. I suggested that these valuables be transferred to a safer environment, such as a bank vault, but your father disagreed.”

ZELDA:

“Where, exactly in the basement?”

MAXWELL:

“He wasn’t specific. Only that some effort would be required to dig up his gold.”

ZEEK:

“That’s for sure!”

(Zeek and Zelda abruptly stand up and leave Maxwell’s office without another word.

Maxwell walks back to the funeral viewing to address the four lawyers as he leans against his coffin.)

MAXWELL:

“During the next six months, Zeek and Zelda continued their quest to locate the elusive buried gold. They also decided to sell their father’s precious farm, since they had no desire to be farmers and did not share his love of the land. The realtor with whom they listed the property advised me that during one visit to the farm to erect a ‘For Sale’ sign, he noticed that the two children had removed the farmhouse one brick at a time, and were engaged in the digging of an ever expanding twenty foot deep hole, one shovel load at a time, that encompassed the entire basement area. They never left each other’s side, since they didn’t trust each other to be alone with

MAXWELL OFFERS SOME COMMENTS AT HIS FUNERAL

all that gold, which they needed to find before the farm was sold. They dug non-stop night and day.

Six months passed, and so I opened the letter as directed by the late Farmer Jones.”

(Farmer Jones appears on stage as a single spotlight illuminates his ghostly presence. He reads from a letter he holds in his hand.)

JONES:

“To Zeek and Zelda: You never verked da soil, so I decided to give you vun last chance to do so by viewing the good earth up close and personal. Der is no gold and never vas. You two greedy fools deserve each other. You can stop digging now.”

(Farmer Jones exits from the stage.)

End of Scene Six.

SCENE SEVEN – THE MEANING OF LIFE

(Maxwell addresses his wife, Mabel, and the four attorneys at the funeral viewing.)

MAXWELL:

“It’s time for me to take my leave of you. I sure have enjoyed spending the evening reminiscing with such good friends and with Mabel, my life partner. Looking back, I can say that I have very few regrets.”

MABEL: (She addresses the four attorneys)

“Thank you, counselors, for being here tonight. If Maxwell had been able to join us, he would have expressed his sincere appreciation.”

MAXWELL:

“How very true. Your kind expressions of sympathy have meant a great deal to me.”

NORMAN:

“Maxwell made his living giving good counsel to countless clients. I wonder what final words he might have shared with us if he had had the opportunity.”

MAXWELL:

“That’s simple. After all these years on the face of the earth, the meaning of life has become clear to me, and I’m prepared to share my findings with you. Simply stated, nothing is more important than the love of a good woman. It makes all the other bumps in life’s road tolerable.”

MABEL:

“I will miss my beloved Maxwell. We were happy together.”

MAXWELL OFFERS SOME COMMENTS AT HIS FUNERAL

DANNY:

“Tell me, Mrs. Finkel, is there some special secret that guarantees a long and loving relationship?”

MAXWELL:

“I can answer that, Honey. Let me tell them. You see, when we became engaged, I imposed one minor, but necessary condition regarding the conduct of our marriage. Since I was the man of the house, I alone would make all of the important decisions. Mabel, being the woman, was relegated to only making the minor decisions. There can only be one captain of the ship. And as you can see, this understanding has worked flawlessly for over fifty years. What’s interesting, however, is the fact that during the last half century, there never was a time when I needed to make a single important decision. If you like, I can give you an example of Mabel’s decision making ability.”

MABEL:

“My answer, Danny, would be ‘Loyalty’. Once you become engaged, and dedicate your lives to one another, a bond is created that must not be broken.”

MAXWELL:

“Actually, that was the very first minor decision that Mabel was called upon to make. When we got engaged, she had to pick out an engagement ring. So we went to the jewelry store on Main Street to look at the selection of diamonds.”

(Maxwell and Mabel don wigs to reflect that they have transformed into a young couple.

Maxwell and Mabel join hands as they walk into a jewelry shop to select a diamond ring.

A jeweler, Mr. Twaddle, positioned on the other side of a showcase, faces them as he

MAXWELL OFFERS SOME COMMENTS AT HIS FUNERAL

assists with this purchase. Maxwell addresses Mr. Twaddle, a nervous sales clerk, who wears a ridiculous bow tie.)

TWADDLE:

“May I help you?”

MAXWELL:

“We’re here to buy a diamond ring. We plan on getting married.”

TWADDLE:

“You’ve come to the right place. We have the finest selection in the entire valley.”

MAXWELL:

“We want a diamond that sparkles, similar to our love.”

MABEL:

“Oh Maxwell, you make me so happy!”

TWADDLE:

“What price range might you be considering?”

MAXWELL:

“Range? The one that proves how we feel about each other.”

TWADDLE:

“We have several very special diamonds in that particular bracket. I’m sure we can find something that meets with your approval.”

(Maxwell turns to the four attorneys and describes the selection process.)

MAXWELL:

“We spent over two hours looking at diamond rings. After all, even though this was a minor decision, it was an important decision. It wasn’t as if I was looking over some used L.L. Bean shoes destined for recycling.”

(Maxwell returns to Mabel who is still standing across from Twaddle as she holds up a ring.)

MABEL:

“Maxwell, are you sure we can afford this one? It’ll take months for us to earn that much money!”

MAXWELL:

“If that’s the ring you want, then that’s the ring you’ll wear. After all, it has to last a lifetime.”

TWADDLE:

“If I may say so, you have made a remarkable selection. The clarity, cut, and brilliance of this stone are unparalleled. I commend you on your outstanding choice.”

MABEL:

“Oh, Maxwell, I’m the luckiest girl in the world!”

TWADDLE:

“It will take a week to properly ‘size’ the ring. Would you kindly return next Saturday for a final fitting?”

MAXWELL OFFERS SOME COMMENTS AT HIS FUNERAL

MABEL:

“I don’t know how I’ll be able to wait seven whole days to wear my incredible engagement ring, but I suppose all good things take time!”

MAXWELL: (Addresses Twaddle)

“We’ll be back in exactly one week. (Maxwell addresses the four lawyers.) And that’s what we did. My loving Mabel endured the excruciating period of seven consecutive days without the benefit of that sparkling engagement ring on her finger. But finally the happy hour arrived as we returned to the jewelry store.”

(Maxwell again joins Mabel who stands at the jewelry store counter, waiting for Mr. Twaddle, who finally appears from behind a curtain. He attempts to conceal an expression of significant concern. Maxwell and Mabel are too excited to note that there may be a problem.)

MABEL:

“I’ve never been so excited! Where’s my ring? It’s time for Maxwell to put it on my finger.”

TWADDLE: (Clears his throat as he tries nervously to adjust his bow tie.)

“Good afternoon. What I’m about to say ... you see ... this has never quite happened before ... at least I don’t think it has ... as far as I know ...”

MAXWELL:

“Is there a problem?”

TWADDLE:

“You see ... it’s like this ... we sized the ring ... and it certainly was beautiful ...”

MAXWELL OFFERS SOME COMMENTS AT HIS FUNERAL

MABEL:

“Was! Is there something wrong? Did the diamond crack?”

TWADDLE:

“Not quite. You see ... what I mean to say is ... the ring was inadvertently placed back in the display rack ... which should never have happened ...”

MABEL:

“Oh dear!”

TWADDLE:

“And my associate sold it to another couple, who took it with them. They eloped to Hawaii last Tuesday.”

MABEL:

“My special ring, the only one on the face of the earth that adequately signifies my love for my fiancé, is gone?”

TWADDLE: (His voice begins to crack.)

“It left for Hawaii.”

(Mabel begins to realize the significance of the problem, and starts to breathe with difficulty. Then she begins to whimper, shake, and display a spectrum of emotions without control as she periodically cries out.)

MABEL:

“My unique ring (heaving and sighing) is gone?”

TWADDLE: (Unable to lend any comfort)

“Best I can tell ... as of last Tuesday. (Mabel cries inconsolably, uncontrollably.

Twaddle is unsure what to do, so he again attempts to adjust his bow tie. Suddenly he is

MAXWELL OFFERS SOME COMMENTS AT HIS FUNERAL

overtaken by an epiphany.) **Of course, because of this unfortunate oversight, I would be pleased to have you select another diamond ...**

MABEL:

“How could some other inferior diamond replace my perfect diamond?”

TWADDLE:

“Because the cost of the new diamond you select may exceed the cost of the old one by an additional one thousand dollars ... at no extra charge.”

(Mabel immediately stops crying.)

MABEL:

“Say that again ... what you just said.”

TWADDLE:

“You may select a new diamond worth a thousand dollars more than the old one. My treat.”

MABEL: (Puts her handkerchief back in her purse.)

“Why didn’t you say so before? Bring out the more expensive diamonds. We don’t have all day.”

(Maxwell leaves Mabel at the jewelry store as he returns to the funeral viewing where he removes his wig and transitions back to an old man. He addresses the four attorneys.)

MAXWELL:

“She found a nice diamond. Similar to when she first spotted me, it was love at first sight and she never again let either of us slip out of her grip.

Well, it’s probably time for me to get back in that coffin. (Maxwell points.)
It’s nine o’clock and way past my bedtime. I got used to the nursing home schedule.

MAXWELL OFFERS SOME COMMENTS AT HIS FUNERAL

You know - dinner at four-thirty – bedpans at five – lights out at eight. (Maxwell stretches and yawns.) I certainly have enjoyed our little get together, and truly look forward to seeing everyone again. It's probably only a matter of time. Remember to do the right thing with your clients. They deserve honest representation. And if you're real lucky, fall in love with that special person. Make a commitment. Buy her a nice ring, or perhaps an even nicer ring. It gives a special meaning to life, and a reason to be here. (Maxwell climbs back into his coffin and pulls the rope ladder in behind him.) I'll see you guys in the Big Courtroom up above. As for me, a further continuance appears to have been denied."

(Maxwell closes the lid. The stage lights dim, signifying the end of the play.)