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Mother Is a Freshman

A COMEDY IN THREE ACTS

DRAMATIZED BY

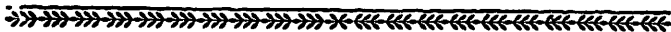
CHRISTOPHER SERGEL

FROM THE STORY BY

RAPHAEL DAVID BLAU



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Based upon the story "Mother Is a Freshman" by
RAPHAEL DAVID BLAU

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(MOTHER IS A FRESHMAN)

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Mother Is a Freshman

A Comedy in Three Acts

FOR SIX MEN AND NINE WOMEN

CHARACTERS

MRS. ABIGAIL ABBOTT.....*a widow*
SUSAN.....*her daughter*
MRS. MILLER.....*a housemother*

SYLVIA }
BUNNY }
HELEN }
CARRIE }
CLARA }*students at Pointer College*
MARGE }
BOBO }
JACK }
HOWIE }
BILL }

DEAN GILLINGHAM.....*Dean of Pointer College*
PROFESSOR MICHAELS.....*who teaches zoology*

PLACE: *A corner of the living-room in Abigail Abbott's home
and the reception hall of Green Hall Girls' Dormitory,
Pointer College, Pointer, New York.*

TIME: *The present. Early fall.*

SYNOPSIS

ACT ONE, Scene One: *A corner of the living-room in Abigail Abbott's home.*

Scene Two: *Green Hall Girls' Dormitory. The next day.*

ACT TWO: *The same. Early evening, several weeks later.*

ACT THREE: *The same. Two hours later.*

NOTES ON CHARACTERS AND COSTUMES

ABIGAIL: She is an extremely attractive woman of thirty-five, who looks even younger. Throughout the play she shows excellent taste in her selection of clothes. She may wear a hostess gown in the first scene of Act One, a tailored suit in the second scene of the act. In Act Two she first appears in a good-looking sports dress. Later she changes to a stunning evening dress. In the final act she again wears a suit.

SUSAN: Susan is a pert, winsome girl of eighteen, who is a trifle self-centered. She, too, has good taste in clothes. She wears the very latest in college sports clothes, and in the last two acts is dressed for the dance in an attractive evening gown.

MRS. MILLER: She is a quiet, pleasant woman in her fifties. She dresses conservatively throughout the play.

SYLVIA: Sylvia is a studious-looking girl who wears glasses. She seldom participates in the social activities of the school and tends to frown upon the other girls who do. She dresses plainly but neatly.

BUNNY: She is a cute, rather naïve girl. In the second scene of Act One, she wears a sweater and skirt. Later in Act Two she changes to an evening dress for the dance.

HELEN: Helen is a sophisticated girl who is far more interested in men than in her studies. She dresses smartly, and wears an evening gown with a white jacket in the last two acts.

CARRIE: Carrie is a happy-go-lucky girl. She, too, changes to an evening dress in the second act.

CLARA: She is somewhat of a scatterbrain, and tags after Susan like a faithful puppy. Throughout the play she wears sports clothes.

MARGE: Marge is a pleasing but rather heavy girl, with a fondness for sweets. She changes to an evening dress in the second act.

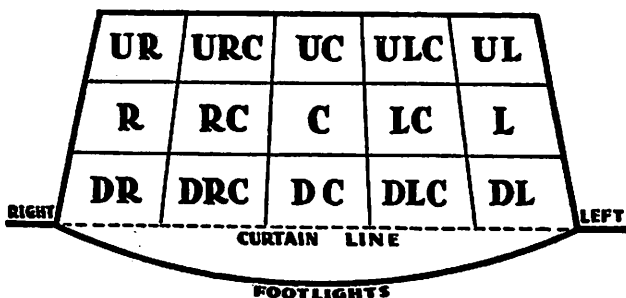
BOBO: Bobo is a pleasant-looking but somewhat conceited chap. He wears sports clothes and is dressed for the dance in the last two acts.

JACK, HOWIE, and BILL: They are likeable, good-natured college boys. They wear sports clothes, except in the last two acts, when they are dressed for the dance.

DEAN GILLINGHAM: The Dean is in his sixties, dignified and austere. When, however, he "lets himself go," he is quite charming. He dresses conservatively throughout the play.

PROFESSOR MICHAELS: He is an extremely good-looking and personable man in his early thirties. He wears casual sports clothes in the first act, and a suit in the last two acts.

CHART OF STAGE POSITIONS

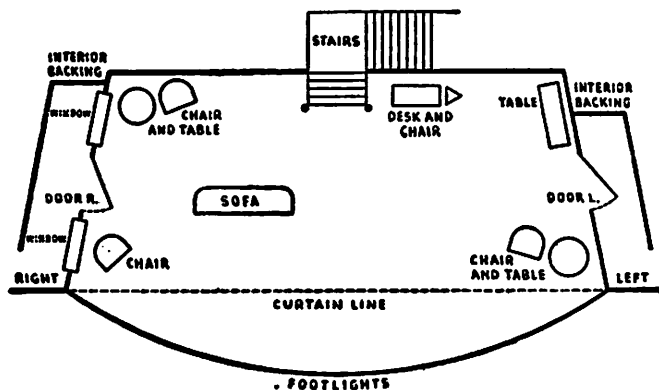


STAGE POSITIONS

Upstage means away from the footlights, *downstage* means toward the footlights, and *right* and *left* are used with reference to the actor as he faces the audience. R mean *right*, L means *left*, U means *up*, D means *down*, C means *center*, and these abbreviations are used in combination, as: U R for *up right*, R C for *right center*, D L C for *down left center*, etc. One will note that a position designated on the stage refers to a general territory, rather than to a given point.

NOTE: Before starting rehearsals, chalk off your stage or rehearsal space as indicated above in the *Chart of Stage Positions*. Then teach your actors the meanings and positions of these fundamental terms of stage movement by having them walk from one position to another until they are familiar with them. The use of these abbreviated terms in directing the play saves time, speeds up rehearsals, and reduces the amount of explanation the director has to give to his actors.

STAGE CHART



PROPERTIES

GENERAL: Two chairs, small stand, and telephone (Act One, Scene One); sofa and pillows; three easy chairs; two small study tables; lamps on study tables; desk and chair; telephone, pad, and pencil on desk; large table with magazines, mail, etc.; drapes on windows; rugs, pictures, etc.; sign-out board on desk (Act Two).

ABIGAIL: Booklet, two suitcases, purse with money in it, book.

DEAN: Booklet, slip of paper.

SYLVIA: Paper (list), book.

MICHAELS: Pack of cigarettes, small book, gardenia corsage in box.

HOWIE: Dance card, corsage box.

BILL: Dance card.

SUSAN: Abigail's purse (with I.O.U.).

ACT ONE

Scene One

AT RISE OF CURTAIN: *The curtains part just enough to show a small corner of a living-room in the Abbott home. To the right of the opening is a small stand with a telephone, with an easy chair drawn up beside it. To the left of the opening is another easy chair. SUSAN, a pert girl of eighteen, is revealed. She is standing sideways to the audience, facing L stage. Impatiently, she suddenly turns toward the audience. It is now seen that she has a telephone in her hand.]*

SUSAN [*anxiously*]. Operator! Operator! [*Listens a moment. Then exclaims in her agitation.*] Operator! This call is life or death—this is long distance—this is person to person! . . . [*Sighs with relief at getting some action at last.*] Clara Fettle—at Pointer College—Pointer, New York. She'll be at the Green Hall Girls' Dorm. And, Operator—it's urgent!

[*During this last, MRS. ABIGAIL ABBOTT, an extremely attractive woman of thirty-five, enters in front of the curtain at L, and crosses to the open space. She has a booklet, which she is studying.*]

SUSAN [*seeing her*]. Mother—I'm making a phone call.

ABIGAIL [*not looking up from booklet*]. Go ahead.

SUSAN [*impatiently*]. This is a private phone call.

ABIGAIL [*smiling up at her*]. Don't mind me. I know you go out with boys.

SUSAN [*scornfully*]. This doesn't have anything to do with boys.

ABIGAIL [*settling back in chair at L*]. Then don't worry about me.

SUSAN [*into telephone*]. Keep ringing, Operator—there's bound to be someone there.

ABIGAIL. Whom did you say you were calling, dear?

SUSAN [*bitingly*]. I said it was a private call.

ABIGAIL [*absently*]. That's right—you did.

SUSAN [*underlining*]. *Private!*

ABIGAIL [*lost in booklet, nodding*]. Mmmmmm . . .

SUSAN [*back into telephone*]. Hello? . . . What? . . . [*Then greatly disappointed.*] Oh. . . . [*Shakes head sadly.*] No, I don't want to talk to anyone except Clara Fettle. [*Unhappily.*] Cancel the call, please. [*Hangs up slowly.*] Your friends are never there when you need them. [*Sits in chair by table.*]

ABIGAIL. Why do you want to talk to her?

SUSAN. I have to talk to *somebody*.

ABIGAIL. You can talk to me.

SUSAN. You're not somebody. You're my mother.

ABIGAIL [*looking up from booklet*]. What a thing to say.

SUSAN. Oh, I know you're upset, Mother. So would I be, if my irresponsibility about money matters had ruined *my* daughter's life.

ABIGAIL [*blandly*]. I'm not upset in the least.

SUSAN [*incredulously*]. You're not upset?

ABIGAIL. If you'd listen to me—

SUSAN [*in horror*]. I can't go back to Pointer College, and you're not even upset. [*Turns away.*]

ABIGAIL [*putting down booklet*]. Susan—I've decided. [*Takes deep breath.*] I'm going to college with you. [*Waits expectantly for SUSAN to react. SUSAN lets her head sink a bit lower.*]

SUSAN [*sniffing*]. Mom—talk sense.

ABIGAIL. I said—I'm going to college with you.

SUSAN. Oh, Mom!

ABIGAIL. Susan! [*SUSAN turns around and faces her mother.*]

You don't understand. I'm going to *attend* college with you.

SUSAN [*pointing off L, to where former discussion took place*].

Half an hour ago you told me we'd used up most of the money Dad left for us—insurance and everything. You said

we're nearly broke, and I—I can't go back for my sophomore year.

ABIGAIL. I know. I've done badly with the money your father left us.

SUSAN. If I can't go back to college, how can you?

ABIGAIL. It's simple. If I go, we can afford to send you, too.

SUSAN [*bewildered*]. What?

ABIGAIL. But if I don't go—we can't.

SUSAN [*shaking head*]. Poor Mom. . . .

ABIGAIL. Don't say "Poor Mom."

SUSAN. Professor Michaels told us that mental faculties begin to decline after thirty-five.

ABIGAIL [*with touch of sharpness*]. What do you mean?

SUSAN. Last month—you were thirty-five.

ABIGAIL [*holding out booklet*]. Haven't you read the Pointer College catalog?

SUSAN. Of course.

ABIGAIL. Didn't *anything* strike you about it?

SUSAN. You mean about there being three point four boys enrolled for every girl? I don't think it's true.

ABIGAIL. I mean about the Abigail Fortitude Memorial Scholarship.

SUSAN. The one they give to any girl whose first two names are Abigail Fortitude?

ABIGAIL. Yes.

SUSAN. Clara Fettle says no one's applied for it since 1907, and there's zillions piling up.

ABIGAIL. And you never told me!

SUSAN. Of course not.

ABIGAIL. It never occurred to you that *my* first names are Abigail Fortitude—that I've had to put up with them all my life!

SUSAN. I know, Mom. It must have been awful.

ABIGAIL [*struck by thought*]. Maybe that's why my mother gave me those names. Maybe *she* knew about the scholarship.

SUSAN [*trying to bring her to her senses, rising, crossing to her*]. Mom—that scholarship's for *girls*.

ABIGAIL. What of it?

SUSAN. I mean—you're so old.

ABIGAIL [*with light asperity*]. The catalog doesn't mention any age limit. Even for someone thirty-five—whose mental faculties are beginning to decline!

SUSAN. I didn't mean it that way. But, golly, you never told me you wanted to go to college. [*Sits on right arm of ABIGAIL'S chair.*]

ABIGAIL. I don't.

SUSAN. Then why do you even suggest such a thing?

ABIGAIL. It's one way to earn a living—for a while, anyway, till I can find something else. [*Seriously.*] There aren't a lot of opportunities for an unskilled widow.

SUSAN. Couldn't you get a job in a dress shop—or something?

ABIGAIL. I couldn't earn enough to keep you in college. But this scholarship—it's so very generous—

SUSAN [*rising*]. Mom—think of something *practical*.

ABIGAIL. Such as?

SUSAN [*gesturing*]. Such as—as . . . [*But she drops her hand as she can't think of anything.*]

ABIGAIL. You see?

SUSAN. But this is a *crazy* idea! It's insane!

ABIGAIL. It might even be fun.

SUSAN. For one thing, I don't think you could even keep up with the courses. Some of them are really stiff.

ABIGAIL. I'll study very hard.

SUSAN. Then take physical education. It'd be too strenuous for a woman your age.

ABIGAIL [*rising*]. I might mention a few tennis scores.

SUSAN. I was off my game yesterday.

ABIGAIL. And the hike we took last Sunday—who *insisted* on taking the bus home? [*ABIGAIL and SUSAN step downstage. The curtains close behind them. NOTE: The small set is removed, so that the main set may be seen when the curtains are again parted.*]

SUSAN. I just can't reason with you.

ABIGAIL. It's the only solution, Susan—till I can work out something else.

SUSAN. Mom, you just can't do this. There's another reason, too. It'd be too cruel.

ABIGAIL [*smiling*]. What would be so cruel?

SUSAN. The social life—you'd see people rushing about—having fun—going on dates. And there you'd sit—alone—no friends—out of everything.

ABIGAIL. What about the stiff courses? Don't they all study?

SUSAN. Yes and no. Mom, you'd be so lonely—you'd die.

ABIGAIL. You'd be there.

SUSAN [*moving toward R stage*]. I wouldn't have much free time. There's all my work with Professor Michaels. [*Turns.*]

ABIGAIL. I'll bear up.

SUSAN. If you'd only understand.

ABIGAIL [*settling the matter, crossing toward her*]. We'll have to get our things packed and catch the early train tomorrow.

SUSAN [*remonstrating*]. Mom——

ABIGAIL [*paying no attention to her*]. We'll be on the train for Pointer. I don't want to hear any more about it.

SUSAN. But it's for *your* sake!

ABIGAIL. I don't see any other way. I don't know what other job I could get, or what else we can do. We've practically no money left. Maybe this scholarship can tide us over. [*Decisively.*] And I don't care two hoots whether I have any social life or not.

SUSAN. You won't feel that way later—when you're sitting around the dorm like—like a left-over chaperon.

ABIGAIL. Left-over chaperon.

SUSAN. Or an extra housemother.

ABIGAIL [*shortly*]. At least we'll be fed, and have a roof over us—and you'll be getting your education. I don't see any other way.

SUSAN. If you won't think about yourself—think about *me*.

ABIGAIL. I *am* thinking about you.

SUSAN. Think how it will look—think what everyone will say.

ABIGAIL. What will they say?

SUSAN. I mean, you'll make me feel like a perfect baby. People think I'm too young as it is.

ABIGAIL [*moving past her, toward R*]. That's nonsense!

SUSAN. You'll make me ridiculous. I'll be a joke.

ABIGAIL. Why?

SUSAN. Can't you visualize my position?

ABIGAIL. You're being very silly.

SUSAN. You've got to understand.

ABIGAIL. I have to start packing. We're taking the train tomorrow. [*Goes out R.*]

SUSAN [*moving after her*]. Mom—[*Greatly agitated.*—don't you see? It's so impossible. I'm a sophomore! [*Wails.*] How can I have a mother who's a *freshman*? [*Hurries on out R, after ABIGAIL. Lights dim out.*]

ACT ONE

Scene Two

SCENE: *The sound of a train gradually fades in, rises for a moment, and then gradually dies out once more. The curtain rises on the reception hall of Green Hall Girls' Dormitory at Pointer College. There is a stairway U C. The front door is R, while another door, L, leads to the other rooms downstairs. On either side of the door R are attractively-draped windows. There is a roomy sofa with pillows at R C. At D R stage is an easy chair. In the D L and U R corners of the room are easy chairs drawn up beside small study tables. On these tables are lamps. Above the door L is a larger table for magazines, the girls' mail, etc. At the foot of the stairs, to the left, are a small desk and chair. On the desk is a telephone. Rugs, pictures, and other furnishings give the room a homey, comfortable appearance.]*

AT RISE OF CURTAIN: *MRS. MILLER, a pleasant house-mother, is seated by the telephone, the receiver to her ear.]*

MRS. MILLER [*after a pause, into telephone*]. Yes, Dean Gillingham. Mrs. Abigail Fortitude Abbott—[*Starts suddenly.*] Did you say "Mrs."? . . . But what does she want here? . . . You think it may be a publicity stunt. Oh, dear! . . . Yes, Dean—I'll be on the lookout for her, and if there's any way we can settle her hash—Yes, Dean. [*Hangs up.*]

[**SYLVIA**, a studious-looking girl who wears glasses, enters R. She has a paper in her hand.]

SYLVIA [*crossing to desk*]. The Bursar's Office told me to bring the list of new students for this dorm, Mrs. Miller.

MRS. MILLER [*taking it*]. Let me see it.

SYLVIA [*as MRS. MILLER runs her finger down it*]. Looking for someone?

MRS. MILLER [*finding name*]. Oh, dear!

SYLVIA. Who is it?

MRS. MILLER. You haven't noticed any particular new students?

SYLVIA. Innumerable.

MRS. MILLER. I mean—an older woman.

SYLVIA [*shaking head*]. Just the usual bunch of bird-brains.

MRS. MILLER. This person is named Abigail Fortitude Abbott.

SYLVIA [*drily*]. Anyone named Abigail Fortitude isn't likely to admit it to a stranger.

MRS. MILLER [*rising*]. If you should see her, she's to wait here for the Dean.

SYLVIA. What's up?

MRS. MILLER. I don't know, exactly. [*Shakes head as she goes out L.*] I didn't expect trouble *this* early. [*Completes her exit L.*]

SYLVIA [*picking up list from desk*]. Trouble? [*Scans list. Stops at name.*] "Abigail Fortitude Abbott—Mrs." [*Sets list down again with a "Hmrrrrrr."*]

[BUNNY comes down the stairs.]

BUNNY. Oh, no!

SYLVIA. What's the matter?

BUNNY. I've got Marge for a roommate again. I'll gain twenty pounds. [*Slumps on sofa in disgust.*]

SYLVIA [*coming downstage*]. Control your appetite. All it takes is will power.

BUNNY. It'll be nine months of listening to Tschai-kowsky on the radio, and peanut butter and jelly sandwiches.

[HELEN enters R.]

SYLVIA. You're out all the time. What do you care?

HELEN [*to BUNNY*]. You took my sweater. [*Pauses right of sofa.*]

BUNNY. I only borrowed it.

HELEN. I laid out all my things on the lower bed so the new girl would understand she's to sleep—[*Points up.*]*—*topside.

BUNNY [*rising*]. It was a lovely display. I think this sweater does something for me. [*Poses in it.*]

HELEN. Today's the first day—and it's got to do something for me.

SYLVIA. Have you seen your new roommate? [*Sits on left arm of sofa.*]

HELEN. I hope I never do. [*With distaste.*] Her name is Abigail! [*Sits D R.*]

BUNNY. *Abigail!*

SYLVIA. *Mrs. Abigail Fortitude Abbott.*

HELEN. Do you think she's a sweet old lady?

SYLVIA. Could be.

BUNNY. Just what you need. [*Sits on sofa again.*]

HELEN. I won't have it.

SYLVIA. Room assignments are by chance—Pointer College rule.

BUNNY. I got Marge again.

HELEN. I'd trade with you. At least she isn't a wet blanket.

SYLVIA. How do you know yours is a wet blanket?

HELEN. An elderly character named Abigail Fortitude?

BUNNY [*laughing*]. It'll be good for you.

[*CARRIE enters L.*]

CARRIE. Hi, kids! [*Comes to C Stage.*]

BUNNY. We have a crisis.

CARRIE. Already?

HELEN. It isn't funny.

BUNNY. Helen's drawn an old lady named Abigail Fortitude.

CARRIE. You're kidding!

HELEN. I wish I were. That's her name.

CARRIE [*smiling*]. Maybe she'll teach you how to knit. [*Moves behind sofa and lolls over back of it.*]

HELEN. Why does a character like that come to Pointer?

BUNNY. Maybe she heard something about a home economics course.

SYLVIA. Maybe she wants more education.

BUNNY [*in disgust*]. You're always bringing up things like that.

HELEN [*to SYLVIA*]. Incidentally, this term, I'll thank you to stop making me feel guilty every time I cut a class.

SYLVIA. I don't care if you get straight "D"s.

HELEN. They're still passing. My spine feels like a wet noodle.
[*Wiggles in chair.*]

CARRIE. You should have seen the mob at Professor Michaels' zoology class. He affects them worse than——[*Name current leading male singer.*]

BUNNY. He affects me the same way. [*Sighs.*]

SYLVIA. Did he teach you any zoology?

BUNNY. Scads!

HELEN. Me, too. He's my type exactly.

CARRIE. Don't let Susan Abbott hear you. She thinks the Professor is her personal property.

BUNNY. I haven't seen Sue yet. Did she get here?

CARRIE [*nodding*]. I saw her down at the Palais de Coke talking with Clara Fettle. They were really going at it.

HELEN [*sighing*]. Do you suppose this Abigail Fortitude is off a farm?

BUNNY. Positively!

HELEN. She'll probably want lights out at nine-thirty, and windows wide open all winter.

CARRIE. And she'll have a clock that ticks like the Anvil Chorus, with an alarm like a fire engine.

HELEN. What have I done to deserve it?

SYLVIA. Shall I start the list?

HELEN. It was a rhetorical question. That's what I like about Pointer—they taught me to use words like "rhetorical."

SYLVIA. Let's hear you spell it.

HELEN. I'm only a junior.

CARRIE [*laughing*]. Bill's coming later. I'm going to change.
[*Starts up stairs.*]

HELEN [*rising, to BUNNY*]. And you can change out of that sweater.

BUNNY [*starting up stairs*]. You wouldn't want to wear a smart sweater like this around a farm lady like Abigail. You'll make the old girl mm-m-mighty uncomfortable.

[*At this point, ABIGAIL, a suitcase in each hand, enters R. She sets her suitcases down.*]

HELEN [*who has followed others up stairs*]. Thing of what must go with a name like that. [*In horror.*] *Abigail Fortitude!*

ABIGAIL [*looking up at mention of her name*]. Yes? [*But the three girls have completed their exit up stairs. Only SYLVIA remains, and she regards the smartly-dressed and attractive ABIGAIL for a moment.*]

SYLVIA [*rising*]. You are Abigail Fortitude Abbott?

ABIGAIL [*apprehensively*]. Yes. [*Comes in front of sofa.*]

SYLVIA [*starting to walk around her in an inspection tour*]. Mrs?

ABIGAIL. My husband died some years ago.

SYLVIA. Some years ago . . . [*ABIGAIL nods.*] You're going to be a big disappointment. [*Shakes her head.*]

ABIGAIL [*worried*]. I will?

SYLVIA. To the girls. [*Stands left of ABIGAIL.*]

ABIGAIL. They were expecting someone—different?

SYLVIA. Entirely.

ABIGAIL [*still worried*]. I'll certainly try my best not to be in the way or cause any trouble.

SYLVIA. You're just as entitled to be in the way or cause trouble as anyone else. [*Holds out her hand.*] My name is Sylvia.

ABIGAIL [*relaxing, taking her hand*]. Glad to know you, Sylvia. That's the first friendly gesture I've met since I got off the train.

SYLVIA. The Dean wants you to wait here for him.

ABIGAIL. He wants to see me again?

SYLVIA. That was the message.