

OUR TOWN

by
Thornton Wilder

ACT 1

SCENE 1

No curtain. No scenery. The audience arriving sees an empty stage in half-light. Presently the STAGE MANAGER, hat on and pipe in mouth enters and begins placing a table and three chairs downstage left and a table and three chairs downstage right. He also places a low bench at the corner of what will be the Webb house left. Left and right are from the point of view of the actor facing the audience. Up is toward the back wall. As the house lights go down he has finished setting the stage and leaning against the right proscenium pillar watches the late arrivals in the audience. When the auditorium is in complete darkness he speaks:

STAGE MANAGER:

This play is called "Our Town." It was written by Thornton Wilder. The name of the town is Grover's Corners, New Hampshire -- just across the Massachusetts line: latitude 42 degrees 40 minutes; longitude 70 degrees 37 minutes. The First Act shows a day in our town. The day is May 7, 1931. The time is just before dawn.

A rooster crows.

The sky is beginning to show some streaks of light over in the East there. The morning star always gets wonderful bright the minute before it has to go, doesn't it?

He stares at it for a moment then goes upstage.

Well, I'd better show you how our town lies. Up here--

That is: parallel with the back wall.

is Main Street. Way back there is the railway station; tracks go that way.

Toward the left.

Over there is the Congregational Church; across the street's the Presbyterian.

Methodist and Unitarian are over there.

Baptist is down in the holla' by the river.

Catholic Church is over beyond the tracks.

Here's the Town Hall and Post Office combined; jail's in the basement.

Along here's a row of stores. Here's the grocery store and here's Mr. Morgan's drugstore. Most everybody in town manages to look into those two stores once a day. Public School's over yonder. High School's still farther over. Quarter of nine mornings, noon times, and three o'clock afternoons, the whole town can hear the yelling and screaming from those schoolyards.

He approaches the table and chairs downstage right.

This is our doctor's house, -- Doc Gibbs'. This is the back door.

Two arched trellises covered with vines and flowers, are pushed out, one by each proscenium pillar.

There's some scenery for those who think they have to have scenery.

This is Mrs. Gibbs' garden. Corn ... peas ... beans ... hollyhocks ... heliotrope ... and a lot of burdock.

Crosses the stage.

In those days our newspaper come out twice a week, -the Grover's Corners *Sentinel* -- and this is Editor Webb's house.

This is Mrs. Webb's garden.

Just like Mrs. Gibbs', only it's got a lot of sunflowers, too.

He looks upward, center stage.

Right here ... 's a big butternut tree.

He returns to his place by the right proscenium pillar and looks at the audience for a minute.

Nice town, y'know what I mean?

Nobody very remarkable ever come out of it, s 'far as we know.

The earliest tombstones in the cemetery up there on the mountain say 1670-1680 --- they're Grovers and Cartwrights and Gibbises and Herseys -- same names as are around here now.

Well, as I said: it's about dawn.

The only lights on in town are in a cottage over by the tracks where a mother's just had twins. And in the Joe Crowell house, where Joe Junior's getting up so as to deliver the paper. And in the depot, where Shorty Hawkins is gettin' ready to flag the 5:45 for Boston.

A train whistle is heard. The STAGE MANAGER takes out his watch and nods.

Naturally, out in the country-all around-there've been lights on for some time, what with milkin's and so on. But town people sleep late.

So-another day's begun.

SCENE 2

There's Doc Gibbs comin' down Main Street now, comin' back from that baby case. And here's his wife comin' downstairs to get breakfast.

MRS. GIBBS, a pleasant woman in the middle thirties, comes "downstairs" right. She pulls up an imaginary window shade in her kitchen and starts to make a fire in her stove.

When Doc Gibbs died, they named the new hospital after him.

Mrs. Gibbs died first -- long time ago, in fact. She went out to visit her daughter, Rebecca, who married an insurance man in Canton, Ohio, and died there -- pneumonia -- but her body was brought back here. She's up in the cemetery there now -- in with a whole mess of Gibbises and Herseys -- she was Julia Hersey 'fore she married Doc Gibbs in the Congregational Church over there. In our town we like to know the facts about everybody.

There's Mrs. Webb, coming downstairs to get her breakfast, too. That's Doc Gibbs. Got that call at half past one this morning. And there comes Joe Crowell Jr., delivering Mr. Webb's Sentinel.

DR. GIBBS has been coming along Main Street from the left. At the point where he would turn to approach his house, he stops, sets down his--imaginary-black bag, takes off his hat, and rubs his face with fatigue, using an enormous handkerchief.

MRS. WEBB, a serious, crisp woman, has entered her kitchen, left, tying on an apron. She goes through the motions of putting wood into a stove, lighting it, and preparing breakfast.

Suddenly, JOE CROWELL JR., eleven, starts down Main Street from the right, hurling imaginary newspapers into doorways.

JOE CROWELL JR.: Morning, Doc Gibbs.

DR. GIBBS: Morning, Joe.

JOE CROWELL JR.: Somebody been sick, Doc?

DR. GIBBS: No. Just some twins born over on the other side of town.

JOE CROWELL JR.: Do you want your paper now?

DR. GIBBS: Yes, I'll take it. Anything serious goin' on in the world since Wednesday?

JOE CROWELL JR.:

Yessir. My schoolteacher, Miss Foster, 's getting married to a fella over in Concord.

DR. GIBBS: I declare. How do you boys feel about that?

JOE CROWELL JR.:

Well, of course, it's none of my business--but I think if a person starts out to be a teacher, she ought to stay one.

DR. GIBBS: How's your knee, Joe?

JOE CROWELL JR.:

Fine, Doc, I never think about it at all. Only like you said, it always tells me when it's going to rain.

DR. GIBBS: What's it telling you today? Goin' to rain?

JOE CROWELL JR.: No, sir.

DR. GIBBS: Sure?

JOE CROWELL JR.: Yessir.

DR. GIBBS: Knee ever make a mistake?

JOE CROWELL JR.: No, sir.

JOE goes off. DR. GIBBS stands reading his paper.

STAGE MANAGER:

Want to tell you something about that boy Joe Crowell there. Joe was awful bright-graduated from high school here, head of his class. So he got a scholarship to Massachusetts Tech. Graduated head of his class there, too. It was all wrote up in the Boston paper at the time. Goin' to be a great engineer, Joe was, But the war broke out and he got killed. All that education for nothing.

SCENE 3

STAGE MANAGER: Here comes Howie Newsome, deliverin' the milk.

HOWIE NEWSOME, about thirty, in overalls, comes along Main Street from the left, pushing a cart carrying an imaginary rack with milk bottles. The sound of clinking milk bottles is heard. He leaves some bottles at Mrs. Webb's trellis. Then crossing the stage to Mrs. Gibbs. He stops center and is greeted by Dr. Gibbs.

DR. GIBBS: Morning, Howie.

HOWIE NEWSOME: Morning, Doc.

DR. GIBBS: Goin' to rain, Howie?

HOWIE NEWSOME: No, no. Fine day--that'll burn through.

HOWIE reaches Mrs. Gibbs' back door. She is waiting for him.

MRS. GIBBS: Good morning, Howie.

HOWIE NEWSOME: Morning, Mrs. Gibbs. Doc's just comin' down the street.

MRS. GIBBS: Is he? Seems like you're late today.

HOWIE NEWSOME:

Yes. Somep'n went wrong with the separator. Don't know what 'twas.

MRS. GIBBS: (*Calling upstairs*). Children! Children! Time to get up.

HOWIE NEWSOME: Have a nice day, Mrs. Gibbs. (*He goes off right.*)

SCENE 4

MRS. GIBBS: George! Rebecca!

DR. GIBBS arrives at his back door and passes through the trellis into his house.

MRS. GIBBS: Everything all right, Frank?

DR. GIBBS: Yes. I declare--easy as kittens.

MRS. GIBBS:

Bacon'll be ready in a minute. Set down and drink your coffee. You can catch a couple hours' sleep this morning, can't you?

DR. GIBBS:

Hm! ... Mrs. Wentworth's coming at eleven. Her stomach's botherin' her again.

MRS. GIBBS:

All told, you won't get more'n three hours' sleep. Frank Gibbs, I don't know what's goin' to become of you. I do wish I could get you to go away someplace and take a rest. I think it would do you good.

MRS. WEBB:

(She calls out to Emily and Wally.) Emileeee! Time to get up! Wally! Seven o'clock!

MRS. GIBBS:

I declare, you got to speak to George. Seems like something's come over him lately. He's no help to me at all. I can't even get him to cut me some wood.

DR. GIBBS:

(Washing and drying his hands at the sink. MRS. GIBBS is busy at the stove.) Is he sassy to you?

MRS. GIBBS:

No. He just whines! All he thinks about is that baseball. George! Rebecca! You'll be late for school.

DR. GIBBS: M-m-m ...

MRS. GIBBS: George!

DR. GIBBS: George, look sharp!

GEORGE'S VOICE: Yes, Pa.

DR. GIBBS:

(He calls to George.) Don't you hear your mother calling you? I guess I'll go upstairs and get forty winks.

MRS. WEBB:

Walleee! Emileeee! You'll be late for school! Walleee! You wash yourself good or I'll come up and do it myself.

REBECCA GIBBS' VOICE: Ma! What dress shall I wear?

MRS. GIBBS:

Don't make a noise. Your father's been out all night and needs his sleep. I washed and ironed the blue gingham for you special.

REBECCA: Ma, I hate that dress.

MRS. GIBBS: Oh, hush-up-with-you.

REBECCA: Everyday I go to school dressed like a sick turkey.

MRS. GIBBS: Now, Rebecca, you always look very nice.

REBECCA: Mama, George's throwing soap at me.

MRS. GIBBS: I'll come and slap the both of you,--that's what I'll do.

A factory whistle sounds. The CHILDREN dash in and take their places at the tables. Right, GEORGE, sixteen, and REBECCA, eleven. Left, EMILY and WALLY, same ages. They carry strapped schoolbooks.

MRS. WEBB:

Children! Now I won't have it. Breakfast is just as good as any other meal and I won't have you gobbling like wolves. It'll stunt your growth,--that's a fact. Put away your book, Wally.

WALLY: Aw, Ma! By ten o'clock I got to know all about Canada.

MRS. WEBB:

You know the rule's well as I do--no books at table. As for me, I'd rather have my children healthy than bright.

EMILY:

I'm both, Mama: you know I am. I'm the brightest girl in school for my age. I have a wonderful memory.

MRS. WEBB: Eat your breakfast.

WALLY: I'm bright, too, when I'm looking at my stamp collection.

MRS. GIBBS:

I'll speak to your father about it when he's rested. Seems to me twenty-five cents a week's enough for a boy your age. I declare I don't know how you spend it all.

GEORGE: Aw, Ma,--I gotta lotta things to buy.

MRS. GIBBS: Strawberry milk shakes -- that's what you spend it on.

GEORGE:

I don't see how Rebecca comes to have so much money. She has more'n a dollar.

REBECCA: (*Dreamily.*) I've been saving it up gradual.

MRS. GIBBS: Well, dear, I think it's a good thing to spend some every now and then.

REBECCA: Mama, do you know what I love most in the world--do you?-- Money.

MRS. GIBBS: Eat your breakfast.

GEORGE, REBECCA, WALLY, and EMILY:

Mama, there's first bell-I gotta hurry.-I don't want any more.-I gotta hurry.

GEORGE, REBECCA, WALLY, and EMILY rise, seize their books and dash out through the trellises. They meet down center, and chattering, walk to Main Street, then turn left. The STAGE MANAGER goes off, unobtrusively, right.

MRS. WEBB:

Walk fast, but you don't have to run. Wally, pull up your pants at the knee. Stand up straight, Emily.

MRS. GIBBS: Tell Miss Foster I send her my best congratulations--can you remember that?

REBECCA: Yes, Ma.

MRS. GIBBS: You look real nice, Rebecca. Pick up your feet.

SCENE 5

MRS. GIBBS:

(MRS. GIBBS spots MRS. WEBB. MRS. WEBB is sitting on the bench by her trellis, stringing beans.) Good morning, Myrtle. How's your cold?

MRS. WEBB:

Well, I still get that tickling feeling in my throat. I told Charles I didn't know as I'd go to choir practice tonight. Wouldn't be any use.

MRS. GIBBS: Have you tried singing over your voice?

MRS. WEBB:

Yes, but somehow I can't do that and stay on the key. While I'm resting myself I thought I'd string some of these beans.

MRS. GIBBS:

(Rolling up her sleeves as she crosses the stage for a chat.) Let me help you. Beans have been good this year.

MRS. WEBB:

I've decided to put up forty quarts if it kills me. The children say they hate 'em, but I notice they're able to get 'em down all winter.

Pause.

MRS. GIBBS:

Now, Myrtle. I've got to tell you something, because if don't tell somebody I'll burst.

MRS. WEBB: Why, Julia Gibbs!

MRS. GIBBS:

Here, give me some more of those beans. Myrtle, did one of those secondhand furniture men from Boston come to see you last Friday?

MRS. WEBB: No-o.

MRS. GIBBS:

Well, he called on me and he offered me three hundred and fifty dollars for Grandmother Wentworth's highboy!

MRS. WEBB: Why, Julia Gibbs!

MRS. GIBBS:

He did! That old thing!

MRS. WEBB: Well, you're going to take it, aren't you?

MRS. GIBBS: I don't know.

MRS. WEBB: You don't know? Three hundred and fifty dollars! What's come over you?

MRS. GIBBS:

Well, if I could get the Doctor to take the money and go away someplace on a real trip, I'd sell it like that.-Y'know, Myrtle, it's been the dream of my life to see Paris, France. Oh, I don't know. It sounds crazy, I suppose, but for years I've been promising myself that if we ever had the chance.

MRS. WEBB: How does the Doctor feel about it?

MRS. GIBBS:

Well, I did beat about the bush a little and said that if I got a legacy--that's the way I put it--I'd make him take me somewhere.

MRS. WEBB: What did he say?

MRS. GIBBS:

You know how he is. I haven't heard a serious word out of him since I've known him. No, he said, it might make him discontented with Grover's Corners to go traipsin' about Europe; better let well enough alone, he says.

MRS. WEBB:

Well, if that secondhand man's really serious about buyin' it, Julia, you sell it. And then you'll get to see Paris, all right. Just keep droppin' hints from time to time. That's how I got to see the Atlantic Ocean, y'know.

MRS. GIBBS:

Oh, I'm sorry I mentioned it. Only it seems to me that once in your life before you die you ought to see a country where they don't talk in English and don't even want to.

The STAGE MANAGER enters briskly from the right. He tips his hat to the ladies who nod their heads.

STAGE MANAGER:

Thank you, ladies. Thank you very much.

MRS. GIBBS and MRS. WEBB gather up their things, return into their homes, and disappear.

SCENE 6

STAGE MANAGER:

Now we're going to skip a few hours. But first we want a little more information about the town, kind of a scientific account, you might say. So I've asked Professor Willard of our State University to sketch in a few details of our past history here. Is Professor Willard here?

PROFESSOR WILLARD, a rural savant, pince-nez on a wide satin ribbon, enters from the right with some notes in his hand.

May I introduce Professor Willard of our State University. A few brief notes, thank you, Professor. Unfortunately, our time is limited.

PROFESSOR WILLARD:

Grover's Corners ... let me see ... Grover's Corners lies on the old Pleistocene granite of the Appalachian range. I may say it's some of the oldest land in the world. We're very proud of that. A shelf of Devonian basalt crosses it with vestiges of Mesozoic shale, and some sandstone outcroppings; but that's all more recent: two hundred, three hundred million years old. Some highly interesting fossils have been found ... I may say: unique fossils ... two miles out of town, in Silas Peckham's cow pasture. They can be seen at the museum in our University at any time-that is, at any reasonable time. Shall I read some of Professor Gruber's notes on the meteorological situation mean precipitation, et cetera?

STAGE MANAGER:

I'm afraid we won't have time for that, Professor. We might have a few words on the history of man here.

PROFESSOR WILLARD:

Yes ... anthropological data: Early Amerindian stock. Cotahatchee tribes ... no evidence before the tenth century of this era . . . hm ... now entirely disappeared ... possible traces in three families. Migration toward the end of the seventeenth century of English brachiocephalic blue-eyed stock ... for the most part. Since then some Slav and Mediterranean.

STAGE MANAGER:

And the population, Professor Willard?

PROFESSOR WILLARD: Within the town limits: 2,640.

STAGE MANAGER: Just a moment, Professor. *(He whispers into the professor's ear.)*

PROFESSOR WILLARD:

Oh, yes, indeed? The population, at the moment is 2,642. The Postal District brings in 507 more, making a total of 3,149. Mortality and birth rates: constant. By MacPherson's gauge: 6.032.

STAGE MANAGER:

Thank you very much, Professor. We're all very much obliged to you, I'm sure.

PROFESSOR WILLARD: Not at all, sir; not at all.

STAGE MANAGER: This way, Professor, and thank you again.

Exit PROFESSOR WILLARD.

SCENE 7

Now the political and social report: Editor Webb. Oh, Mr. Webb?

MRS. WEBB appears at her back door.

MRS. WEBB:

He'll be here in a minute He just cut his hand while he was eatin' an apple.

STAGE MANAGER: Thank you, Mrs. Webb.

MRS. WEBB: Charles! Everybody's waitin'. *Exit MRS. WEBB.*

STAGE MANAGER:

Mr. Webb is Publisher and Editor of the Grover's Corners Sentinel. That's our local paper, y'know.

MR. WEBB enters from his house, pulling on his coat. His finger is bound in a handkerchief

MR. WEBB:

Well ... We're lower middle class: sprinkling of professional men ... ten per cent illiterate laborers. Politically, we're eighty-six per cent Republicans; six per cent Democrats; four per cent Socialists; rest, indifferent. Religiously, we're eighty-five per cent Protestants; twelve per cent Catholics; rest, indifferent.

STAGE MANAGER:

Have you any comments, Mr. Webb?

MR. WEBB:

Very ordinary town, if you ask me. Little better behaved than most. Probably a lot duller. But our young people here seem to like it well enough. Ninety per cent of 'em graduating from high school settle down right here to live-even when they've been away to college.

STAGE MANAGER:

Now, is there anyone in the audience who would like to ask Editor Webb anything about the town?

WOMAN IN THE BALCONY: Is there much drinking in Grover's Corners?

MR. WEBB:

Well, ma'am, I wouldn't know what you'd call much. Saturday nights the farmhands meet down in Ellery Greenburg's stable and holler some. We've got one or two town drunks, but they're always having remorses every time an evangelist comes to town. No, ma'am, I'd say liquor ain't a regular thing in the home here, except in the medicine chest. Right good for snake bite, y'know-always was.

BELLIGERENT MAN:

Is there no one in town aware of social injustice and industrial inequality?

MR. WEBB:

Oh, yes, everybody is-somethin' terrible. Seems like they spend most of their time talking about who's rich and who's poor.

BELLIGERENT MAN:

Then why don't they do something about it? *(He withdraws without waiting for an answer.)*

MR. WEBB:

Well, I dunno I guess we're all hunting like everybody else for a way the diligent and sensible can rise to the top and the lazy and quarrelsome can sink to the bottom. But it ain't easy to find. Meanwhile, we do all we can to help those that can't help themselves and those that can we leave alone. Are there any other questions?

LADY IN A BOX:

Oh, Mr. Webb? Mr. Webb, is there any culture or love of beauty in Grover's Corners?

MR. WEBB:

Well, ma'am, there ain't much--not in the sense you mean. Come to think of it, there's some girls that play the piano at High School Commencement; but they ain't happy about it. No, ma'am, there isn't much culture; but maybe this is the place to tell you that we've got a lot of pleasures of a kind here: we like the sun comin' up over the mountain in the morning, and we all notice a good deal about the birds. We pay a lot of attention to them. And we watch the change of the seasons; yes, everybody knows about them. But those other things you're right, ma'am,--there ain't much--Robinson Crusoe and the Bible; and Handel's "Largo," we all know that; and Whistler's "Mother"--those are just about as far as we go.

STAGE MANAGER: Thank you, Mr. Webb.

MR. WEBB retires.

SCENE 8

STAGE MANAGER:

Now, we'll go back to the town. It's early afternoon. All 2,642 have had their dinners and all the dishes have been washed.

MR. WEBB, having removed his coat, returns and starts pushing a lawn mower to and fro beside his house.

There's an early-afternoon calm in our town: a buzzin' and a hummin' from the school buildings; Doc Gibbs is in his office, tapping people and making them say "ah." Mr. Webb's cuttin' his lawn over there; one man in ten thinks it's a privilege to push his own lawn mower. No, sir. It's later than I thought. There are the children coming home from school already.

Shrill girls voices are heard off left. EMILY comes along Main Street, carrying some books. There are some signs that she is imagining herself to be a lady of startling elegance.

EMILY: I can't, Lois. I've got to go home and help my mother. I promised.

MR. WEBB: Emily, walk simply. Who do you think you are today?

EMILY:

Papa, you're terrible. One minute you tell me to stand up straight and the next minute you call me names. I just don't listen to you. *She gives him an abrupt kiss.*

MR. WEBB:

(Gaily) I never got a kiss from such a great lady before. He goes out of sight. EMILY leans over and picks some flowers by the gate of her house.

GEORGE GIBBS comes careening down Main Street. He is throwing a ball up to dizzying heights) and waiting to catch it again. This sometimes requires his taking six steps backward. He bumps into EMILY.

GEORGE: Awfully sorry, Emily.

EMILY: Be careful, George.

GEORGE: (*Changing the subject*) You made a fine speech in class.

EMILY:

Well ... I was really ready to make a speech about the Monroe Doctrine, but at the last minute Miss Corcoran made me talk about the Louisiana Purchase instead. I worked an awful long time on both of them.

GEORGE:

Gee, it's funny, Emily. From my window up there I can just see your head nights when you're doing your homework over in your room. You certainly do stick to it, Emily. I don't see how you can sit still that long. I guess you like school.

EMILY: Well, I always feel it's something you have to go through.

GEORGE: Yeah.

EMILY: I don't mind it really. It passes the time.

GEORGE:

Yeah. Emily, what do you think? We might work out a kinda telegraph from your window to mine; and once in a while you could give me a kinda hint or two about one of those algebra problems. I don't mean the answers, Emily, of course not ... just some little hint.

EMILY:

Oh, I think hints are allowed. So if you get stuck, George, you whistle to me; and I'll give you some hints.

GEORGE: Emily, you're just naturally bright, I guess.

EMILY: I figure that it's just the way a person's born.

GEORGE:

Yeah. But, you see, I want to be a farmer, and my Uncle Luke says whenever I'm ready I can come over and work on his farm and if I'm any good I can just gradually have it.

EMILY: You mean the house and everything?

SCENE 9

Enter MRS. WEBB with a large bowl and sits on the bench by her trellis.

GEORGE:

Yeah. Well, thanks ... I better be getting out to the baseball field. Thanks for the talk, Emily. Good afternoon, Mrs. Webb.

MRS. WEBB: Good afternoon, George.

GEORGE: So long, Emily.

EMILY: So long, George.

MRS. WEBB:

Emily, come and help me string these beans for the winter. George Gibbs let himself have a real conversation, didn't he? Why, he's growing up. How old would George be?

EMILY: I don't know.

MRS. WEBB: Let's see. He must be almost sixteen.

EMILY: Mama, I made a speech in class today and I was very good.

MRS. WEBB: You must recite it to your father at supper. What was it about?

EMILY:

The Louisiana Purchase. It was like silk off a spool. I'm going to make speeches all my life. Mama, are these big enough?

MRS. WEBB: Try and get them a little bigger if you can.

EMILY: Mama, will you answer me a question, serious?

MRS. WEBB: Seriously, dear, not serious.

EMILY: Seriously, will you?

MRS. WEBB: Of course, I will.

EMILY: Mama, am I good looking?

MRS. WEBB:

Yes, of course you are. All my children have got good features; I'd be ashamed if they hadn't.

EMILY: Oh, Mama, that's not what I mean. What I mean is: am I pretty?

MRS. WEBB:

I've already told you, yes. Now that's enough of that. You have a nice young pretty face. I never heard of such foolishness.

EMILY: Oh, Mama, you never tell us the truth about anything.

MRS. WEBB: I am telling you the truth.

EMILY: Mama, were you pretty?

MRS. WEBB:

Yes, I was, if I do say it. I was the prettiest girl in town next to Mamie Cartwright.

EMILY:

But, Mama, you've got to say something about me. Am I pretty enough ... to get anybody . . . to get people interested in me?

MRS. WEBB:

Emily, you make me tired. Now stop it. You're pretty enough for all normal purposes. Come along now and bring that bowl with you.

EMILY: Oh, Mama, you're no help at all.

STAGE MANAGER:

Thank you. Thank: you! That'll do. We'll have to interrupt again here. Thank you, Mrs. Webb; thank: you, Emily.

MRS. WEBB and EMILY withdraw.

SCENE 10

STAGE MANAGER:

There are some more things we want to explore about this town. (*He comes to the center of the stage. During the following speech the lights gradually dim to darkness, leaving only a spot on him.*) I think this is a good time to tell you that the Cartwright interests have just begun building a new bank in Grover's Corners. Had to go to Vermont for the marble, sorry to say. And they've asked a friend of mine what they should put in the cornerstone for people to dig up . . . a thousand years from now. . . . Of course, they've put in a copy of the New York Times and a copy of Mr. Webb's *Sentinel* . . . We're putting in a Bible . . . and the Constitution of the United States, and a copy of William Shakespeare's plays. And I'm going to have copy of this play put in the cornerstone and the people a thousand years from now'll know a few simple facts about us. This is the way we were in the provinces north of New York in the twentieth century. This is the way we were: in our growing up and in our marrying and in our living and in our dying.

A choir partially concealed in the orchestra pit has begun singing (Blessed Be the Tie That Binds). SIMON STIMSON stands directing them. Two ladders have been pushed onto the stage; they serve as indication of the second story in the Gibbs and Webb houses. GEORGE and EMILY mount the ladders and apply themselves to their schoolwork. DR. GIBBS has entered and is seated in his kitchen reading.

Well, a good deal of time's gone by. It's evening. You can hear choir practice going on in the Congregational Church. The children are at home doing their schoolwork. The day's running down like a tired clock.

SIMON STIMSON:

Now look here, everybody. Music come into the world to give pleasure. Softer! Softer! Get it out of your heads that music's only good when it's loud. You leave loudness to the Methodists. You couldn't beat 'em, even if you wanted to. Now again. Tenors!

GEORGE: Hssst! Emily!

EMILY: Hello.

GEORGE: Hello!

EMILY: I can't work at all. The moonlight's so terrible.

GEORGE: Emily, did you get the third problem?

EMILY: Which?

GEORGE: The third?

EMILY: Why, yes, George--that's the easiest of them all.

GEORGE: I don't see it. Emily, can you give me a hint?

EMILY: I'll tell you one thing: the answer's in yards.

GEORGE: In yards? How do you mean?

EMILY: In square yards.

GEORGE: Oh ... in square yards.

EMILY: Yes, George, don't you see?

GEORGE: (*unsure*) Yeah.

EMILY: In square yards of wallpaper.

GEORGE: Wallpaper...oh, I see. Thanks a lot, Emily.

EMILY:

You're welcome. My, isn't the moonlight terrible? And choir practice going on. I think if you hold your breath you can hear the train all the way to Contoocook. Hear it?

GEORGE: M-m-m-What do you know!

EMILY: Well, I guess I better go back and try to work.

GEORGE: Good night, Emily. And thanks.

EMILY: Good night, George.

SIMON STIMSON:

Before I forget it: how many of you will be able to come in Tuesday afternoon and sing at Fred Hersey's wedding? Show your hands. That'll be fine; that'll be right nice. We'll do the same music we did for Jane Trowbridge's last month. Now we'll do: "Art Thou Weary; Art Thou Languid?" It's a question, ladies and gentlemen, make it talk. Ready.

DR. GIBBS: Oh, George, can you come down a minute.

GEORGE: Yes, Pa.

GEORGE descends the ladder.

DR. GIBBS:

Make yourself comfortable, George; I'll only keep you a minute. George, how old are you?

GEORGE: I'm sixteen, almost seventeen.

DR. GIBBS: What do you want to do after school's over?

GEORGE: Why, you know, Pa. I want to be a farmer on Uncle Luke's farm.

DR. GIBBS:

You'll be willing, will you, to get up early and milk and feed the stock ... and you'll be able to hoe and hay all day?

GEORGE: Sure, I will. What are you ... what do you mean, Pa?

DR. GIBBS:

Well, George, while I was in my office today I heard a funny sound ... and what do you think it was? It was your mother chopping wood. There you see your mother--getting up early; cooking meals all day long; washing and ironing; and still she has to go out in the back yard and chop wood. I suppose she just got tired of asking you. She just gave up and decided it was easier to do it herself. And you eat her meals, and put on the clothes she keeps nice for you, and you run off and play baseball,--like she's some hired girl we keep around the house but that we don't like very much. Well, I knew all I had to do was call your attention to it. Here's a handkerchief, son. George, I've decided to raise your spending money twenty-five cents a week. Not, of course for chopping wood for your

mother, because that's a present you give her, but because you're getting older -- and I imagine there are lots of things you must find to do with it.

GEORGE: Thanks, Pa.

DR. GIBBS:

Let's see--tomorrow's your payday. You can count on it. Probably Rebecca'll feel she ought to have some more too. Wonder what could have happened to your mother. Choir practice never was as late as this before.

GEORGE: It's only half past eight, Pa.

DR. GIBBS:

I don't know why she's in that old choir. She hasn't any more voice than an old crow. . . . Traipsin' around the streets at this hour of the night ... Just about time you retired, don't you think?

GEORGE: Yes, Pa.

GEORGE mounts to his place on the ladder. Laughter and "good nights" can be heard on stage left and presently MRS. GIBBS, MRS. SOAMES and MRS. WEBB come down Main Street. When they arrive at the corner of the stage they stop.

MRS. SOAMES: Good night, Martha. Good night, Mr. Foster.

MRS. WEBB: I'll tell Mr. Webb; I know he'll want to put it in the paper.

MRS. GIBBS: My, it's late!

MRS. SOAMES: Good night, Irma.

MRS. GIBBS:

Real nice choir practice, wasn't it? Myrtle Webb! Look at that moon, will you! Tsk-tsk-tsk. Potato weather, for sure. *(They are silent a moment, gazing up at the moon.)*

MRS. SOAMES:

Naturally I didn't want to say a word about it in front of those others, but now we're alone--really, it's the worst scandal that ever was in this town!

MRS. GIBBS: What?

MRS. SOAMES: Simon Stimson!

MRS. GIBBS: Now, Louella!

MRS. SOAMES:

But, Julia! To have the organist of a church drink and drunk year after year. You know he was drunk tonight.

MRS. GIBBS:

Now, Louella! We all know about Mr. Stimson, and we all know about the troubles he's been through, and the only thing the rest of us can do is just not to notice it.

MRS. SOAMES: Not to notice it! But it's getting worse.

MRS. WEBB:

No, it isn't, Louella. It's getting better. I've been in that choir twice as long as you have. It doesn't happen anywhere near so often.... My, I hate to go to bed on a night like this. I better hurry. Those children'll be sitting up till all hours. Good night, Louella.

(They all exchange good nights. She hurries downstage, enters her house and disappears.)

MRS. GIBBS: Can you get home safe, Louella?

MRS. SOAMES:

It's as bright as day. I can see Mr. Soames scowling at the window now. You'd think we'd been to a dance the way the menfolk carry on.

More good nights. MRS. GIBBS arrives at her home and passes through the trellis into the kitchen.

SCENE 11

MRS. GIBBS: Well, we had a real good time.

DR. GIBBS: You're late enough.

MRS. GIBBS: Why, Frank, it ain't any later 'n usual.

DR. GIBBS: And you stopping at the corner to gossip.

MRS. GIBBS:

Now, Frank, don't be grouchy. Come out and smell the heliotrope in the moonlight. (*They stroll out arm in arm along the footlights.*) Isn't that wonderful? What did you do all the time I was away?

DR. GIBBS: Oh, I read--as usual. What were you all gossiping about tonight?

MRS. GIBBS: Well, believe me, Frank--there is something to gossip about.

DR. GIBBS: Hmm! Simon Stimson far gone, was he?

MRS. GIBBS: Worst I've ever seen him.

DR. GIBBS:

I guess I know more about Simon Stimson's affairs than anybody in this town. Some people ain't made for small-town life. I don't know how that'll end; but there's nothing we can do but just leave it alone. Come, get in.

MRS. GIBBS: No, not yet ... Frank, I'm worried about you.

DR. GIBBS: What are you worried about?

MRS. GIBBS:

I think it's my duty to make plans for you to get a real rest and change. And if I get that legacy, well, I'm going to insist on it.

DR. GIBBS: Now, Julia, there's no sense in going over that again.

MRS. GIBBS: Frank, you're just unreasonable!

DR. GIBBS:

Starting into the house. Come on, Julia, it's getting late. First thing you know you'll catch cold. I gave George a piece of my mind tonight. I reckon you'll have your wood chopped for a while anyway. No, no, start getting upstairs.

MRS. GIBBS:

Oh, dear. There's always so many things to pick up, seems like. You know, Frank, Mrs. Fairchild always locks her front door every night, All those people up that part of town do.

DR. GIBBS:

(Blowing out the lamp.) They're all getting citified, that's the trouble with them. They haven't got nothing fit to burgle and everybody knows it.

They disappear.

SCENE 12

REBECCA climbs up the ladder beside GEORGE.

GEORGE:

Get out, Rebecca. There's only room for one at this window. You're always spoiling everything.

REBECCA: Well, let me look just a minute.

GEORGE: Use your own window.

REBECCA:

I did, but there's no moon there George, do you know what I think, do you? I think maybe the moon's getting nearer and nearer and there'll be a big 'slosion.

GEORGE:

Rebecca, you don't know anything. If the moon were getting nearer, the guys that sit up all night with telescopes would see it first and they'd tell about it, and it'd be in all the newspapers.

REBECCA:

George, is the moon shining on South America, Canada and half the whole world?

GEORGE: Well--prob'ly is.

SCENE 13

The STAGE MANAGER strolls on. Pause. The sound of crickets is heard.

STAGE MANAGER:

Nine-thirty. Most of the lights are out. There's Constable Warren trying a few doors on Main Street. And here comes Editor Webb, after putting his newspaper to bed.

MR. WARREN, an elderly policeman, comes along Main Street from the right, MR. WEBB from the left.

MR. WEBB: Good evening, Bill.

CONSTABLE WARREN: Evenin', Mr. Webb.

MR. WEBB: Quite a moon!

CONSTABLE WARREN: Yepp.

MR. WEBB: All quiet tonight?

CONSTABLE WARREN:

Simon Stimson is rollin' around a little. Just saw his wife movin' out to hunt for him so I looked the other way--there he is now.

SIMON STIMSON comes down Main Street from the left, only a trace of unsteadiness in his walk.

MR. WEBB: Good evening, Simon ... Town seems to have settled down for the night pretty well

SIMON STIMSON comes up to him and pauses a moment and stares at him, swaying slightly.

MR. WEBB: Good evening ... Yes, most of the town's settled down for the night, Simon ... I guess we better do the same. Can I walk along a ways with you?

SIMON STIMSON continues on his way without a word and disappears at the right.

MR. WEBB: Goodnight.

CONSTABLE WARREN: I don't know how that's goin' to end, Mr. Webb.

MR. WEBB:

Well, he's seen a peck of trouble, one thing after another Oh, Bill ... if you see my boy smoking cigarettes, just give him a word, will you? He thinks a lot of you, Bill.

CONSTABLE WARREN: I don't think he smokes no cigarettes, Mr. Webb. Leastways, not more'n two or three a year.

MR. WEBB: Hm ... I hope not. Well, good night, Bill.

CONSTABLE WARREN: Good night, Mr. Webb. *(He exits.)*

MR. WEBB: Who's that up there? Is that you, Myrtle?

EMILY: No, it's me, Papa.

MR. WEBB: Why aren't you in bed?

EMILY: I don't know. I just can't sleep yet, Papa. The moonlight's so wonderful. And the smell of Mrs. Gibbs' heliotrope. Can you smell it?

MR. WEBB: Hm ... Yes. Haven't any troubles on your mind, have you, Emily?

EMILY: Troubles, Papa? No.

MR. WEBB: Well, enjoy yourself, but don't let your mother catch you. Good night, Emily.

EMILY: Good night, Papa.

MR. WEBB crosses into the house, whistling "Blessed Be the Tie That Binds" and disappears.

REBECCA:

I never told you about that letter Jane Crowley got from her minister when she was sick. He wrote Jane a letter and on the envelope the address was like this: It said: Jane Crowley; The Crowley Farm; Grover's Corners; Sutton County; New Hampshire; United States of America.

GEORGE: What's funny about that?

REBECCA:

But listen it's not finished: the United States of America; Continent of North America; Western Hemisphere; the Earth; the Solar System; the Universe; the Mind of God-that's what it said on the envelope.

GEORGE: What do you know!

REBECCA: And the postman brought it just the same.

GEORGE: You don't say!

REBECCA:

Well, I guess it's time for bed. Good-night, George. *(She descends the ladder and exits.)*

GEORGE: Good night, Rebecca.

GEORGE and EMILY descend from their ladders and exit.

End of Act 1

ACT 2
SCENE 14

The tables and chairs of the-two kitchens are still on the stage. The ladders and the small- bench have been withdrawn. The STAGE MANAGER has been at his accustomed place watching the scene change.

STAGE MANAGER:

Three years have gone by. Yes, the sun's come up over a thousand times. Summers and winters have cracked the mountains a little bit more and the rains have brought down some of the dirt. Some babies that weren't even born before have begun talking regular sentences already; and a number of people who thought, they were right young and spry have noticed that they can't bound up a flight of stairs like they used to, without their heart fluttering a little. All that can happen in a thousand days. Nature's been pushing and contriving in other ways, too: a number of young people fell in love and got married.

Almost everybody in the world gets married,-you know what I mean? In our town there aren't hardly any exceptions. Most everybody in the world climbs into their graves married. The first part of the play was called *Daily Life*. This part is called *Love and Marriage*. There's another act coming after this: I reckon you can guess what that's about.

So it's three years later. It's 1934. It's July 7th, just after High School Commencement. That's the time most of our young people jump up and get married. Soon as they've passed their last examinations, looks like they suddenly feel themselves fit to be married. It's early morning. Only this time it's been raining. It's been pouring and thundering. Mrs. Gibbs' garden, and Mrs. Webb's here--drenched. All yesterday over there on Main Street, the rain looked like curtains being blown along. Hm ... it may begin again any minute.

MRS. GIBBS and MRS. WEBB enter their kitchen and start the day as in the First Act.

And there's Mrs. Gibbs and Mrs. Webb come down to make breakfast, just as though it were an ordinary day. I don't have to point out to the women in my audience that those ladies they see before them, both of those ladies cooked three meals a day-one of 'em

for twenty years, the other for forty--and no summer vacation. They brought up two children apiece, washed, cleaned the house--and never a nervous breakdown. It's like what one of those Middle West poets said: You've got to love life to have life, and you've got to have life to love life It's what they call a vicious circle.

HOWIE NEWSOME enters with his milk delivery cart from stage left.

STAGE MANAGER:

Here comes Howie Newsome delivering the milk. And there's Si Crowell delivering the papers like his brother before him.

Si CROWELL has entered hurling imaginary newspapers into doorways; HOWIE NEWSOME has come along Main Street.

SI CROWELL: Morning, Howie.

HOWIE NEWSOME: Morning, Si. Anything in the papers I ought to know?

SI CROWELL:

Nothing much, except we're losing about the best baseball pitcher Grover's Corners ever had--George Gibbs.

HOWIE NEWSOME: Reckon he is.

SI CROWELL: He could hit and run bases, too.

HOWIE NEWSOME:

Yep. Mighty fine ball player.

SI CROWELL:

I don't see how he could give up a thing like that just to get married. Would you, Howie?

HOWIE NEWSOME: Can't tell, Si. Never had no talent that way.

CONSTABLE WARREN enters. They exchange good mornings.

HOWIE NEWSOME: You're up early, Bill.

CONSTABLE WARREN:

Seein' if there's anything I can do to prevent a flood. River's been risin' all night.

HOWIE NEWSOME:

Si Crowell's all worked up here about George Gibbs' retiring from baseball.

CONSTABLE WARREN:

Yes, sir; that's the way it goes. Back in the day we had a player, even George Gibbs couldn't touch him. Name of Hank Todd. Went down to Maine and become a parson. Wonderful ball player. Howie, how does the weather look to you?

HOWIE NEWSOME: Oh, 'tain't bad. Think maybe it'll clear up for good.

CONSTABLE WARREN and SI CROWELL continue on their way. HOWIE NEWSOME brings the milk first to Mrs. Gibbs' house. She meets him by the trellis.

MRS. GIBBS: Good morning, Howie. Do you think it's going to rain again?

HOWIE NEWSOME: Morning, Mrs. Gibbs. It rained so heavy, I think maybe it'll dear up.

MRS. GIBBS: Certainly hope it will.

HOWIE NEWSOME: How much did you want today?

MRS. GIBBS:

I'm going to have a houseful of relations, Howie. Looks to me like I'll need three-a-milk and two-a-cream.

HOWIE NEWSOME:

My wife says to tell you we both hope they'll be very happy, Mrs. Gibbs. Know they will.

MRS. GIBBS: Thank you, Howie. Tell your wife I hope she gets there to the wedding.

HOWIE NEWSOME: Yes, she'll be there; she'll be there if she can.

HOWIE NEWSOME crosses to Mrs. Webb's house.

HOWIE NEWSOME: Morning, Mrs. Webb.

MRS. WEBB:

Oh, good morning, Mr. Newsome. I told you four quarts of milk, but I hope you can spare me another.

HOWIE NEWSOME: Yes'm ... and the two of cream.

MRS. WEBB: Will it start raining again, Mr. Newsome?

HOWIE NEWSOME:

Well. Just sayin' to Mrs. Gibbs as how it may lighten up. Mrs. Newsome told me to tell you as how we hope they'll both be very happy, Mrs. Webb. Know they will.

MRS. WEBB:

Thank you, and thank Mrs. Newsome and we're counting on seeing you at the wedding.

HOWIE NEWSOME:

Yes, Mrs. Webb. We hope to get there. Couldn't miss that.

Exit HOWIE NEWSOME.

SCENE 15

DR. GIBBS descends in shirt sleeves and sits down at his breakfast table.

DR. GIBBS: Well, Ma, the day has come. You're losin' one of your chicks.

MRS. GIBBS:

Frank Gibbs, don't you say another word. I feel like crying every minute. Sit down and drink your coffee.

DR. GIBBS:

The groom's up shaving himself-only there ain't an awful lot to shave. Whistling and singing, like he's glad to leave us. Every now and then he says "I do" to the mirror, but it don't sound convincing to me.

MRS. GIBBS:

I declare, Frank, I don't know how he'll get along. I've arranged his dothes and seen to it he's put warm things on -- Frank! they're too young. Emily won't think of such things. He'll catch his death of cold within a week.

DR. GIBBS: I was remembering my wedding morning, Julia.

MRS. GIBBS: Now don't start that, Frank Gibbs.

DR. GIBBS:

I was the scarest young fella in the State of New Hampshire. I thought I'd made a mistake for sure. And when I saw you comin' down that aisle I thought you were the prettiest girl I'd ever seen, but the only trouble was that I'd never seen you before. There I was in the Congregational Church marryin' a total stranger.

MRS. GIBBS:

And how do you think I felt! Frank, weddings are perfectly awful things. Farces, that's what they are!

She puts a plate before him.

MRS. GIBBS: Here, I've made something for you.

DR. GIBBS: Why, Julia Hersey -- French toast!

MRS. GIBBS: 'Tain't hard to make and I had to do something.

Pause. DR. GIBBS pours on the syrup.

DR. GIBBS: How'd you sleep last night, Julia?

MRS. GIBBS: Well, I heard a lot of the hours struck off.

DR. GIBBS:

Ye-e-s! I get a shock every time I think of George setting out to be a family man-that great gangling thing! I tell you Julia, there's nothing so terrifying in the world as a son. The relation of father and son is the darndest, awkwardest.

MRS. GIBBS: Well, mother and daughter's no picnic, let me tell you.

DR. GIBBS:

They'll have a lot of troubles, I suppose, but that's none of our business. Everybody has a right to their own troubles.

MRS. GIBBS:

(At the table, drinking her coffee, meditatively.) Yes ... people are meant to go through life two by two. 'Tain't natural to be lonesome.

Pause. DR. GIBBS starts laughing.

DR. GIBBS: Julia, do you know one of the things I was scared of when I married you?

MRS. GIBBS: Oh, go along with you!

DR. GIBBS:

I was afraid we wouldn't have material for conversation more'n'd last us a few weeks.

They both laugh.

DR. GIBBS:

I was afraid we'd run out and eat our meals in silence, that's a fact. Well, you and I been conversing for twenty years now without any noticeable barren spells.

MRS. GIBBS:

Well, good weather, bad weather-'tain't very choice, but I always find something to say. *(She goes to the foot of the stairs.)* Did you hear Rebecca stirring around upstairs?

DR. GIBBS:

No. Only day of the year Rebecca hasn't been managing everybody's business up there. She's hiding in her room. I got the impression she's crying.

MRS. GIBBS:

Lord's sakes! This has got to stop. Rebecca! Rebecca! Corne and get your breakfast.

SCENE 16

GEORGE comes rattling down the stairs, very brisk.

GEORGE: Good morning, everybody. Only five more hours to live. (He makes the gesture of cutting his throat and starts through the trellis.)

MRS. GIBBS: George Gibbs, where are you going?

GEORGE: Just stepping across the grass to see my girl.

MRS. GIBBS:

Now, George! You put on your overshoes. It's raining torrents. You don't go out of this house without you're prepared for it.

GEORGE: Aw, Ma. It's just a step!

MRS. GIBBS: George! You'll catch your death of cold and cough all through the service.

DR. GIBBS: George, do as your mother tells you!

DR. GIBBS goes upstairs. GEORGE returns reluctantly to the kitchen and pantomimes putting on overshoes.

MRS. GIBBS:

From tomorrow on you can kill yourself in all weathers, but while you're in my house you'll live wisely, thank you. Maybe Mrs. Webb isn't used to callers at seven in the morning. Here, take a cup of coffee first.

GEORGE:

Be back in a minute. *(He crosses the stage, leaping over the puddles.)* Good morning, Mother Webb.

MRS. WEBB:

Goodness! You frightened me! Now, George, you can come in a minute out of the wet, but you know I can't ask you in.

GEORGE: Why not?

MRS. WEBB:

George, you know's well as I do: the groom can't see his bride on his wedding day, not until he sees her in church.

GEORGE; Aw! That's just a superstition. (*MR. WEBB enters*) Good morning, Mr. Webb.

MR. WEBB: Good morning, George.

GEORGE: Mr. Webb, you don't believe in that superstition, do you?

MR. WEBB: There's a lot of common sense in some superstitions, George. (*He sits at the table, facing right.*)

MRS. WEBB:

Millions have followed it, George, and you don't want to be the first to fly in the face of custom.

GEORGE: How is Emily?

MRS. WEBB: She hasn't waked up yet. I haven't heard a sound out of her.

GEORGE: Emily's asleep!!!

MRS. WEBB:

No wonder! We were up 'til all hours, sewing and packing. Now I'll tell you what I'll do; you set down here a minute with Mr. Webb and drink this cup of coffee; and I'll go upstairs and see she doesn't come down and surprise you. There's some bacon, too; but don't be long about it. *Exit MRS. WEBB.*

Awkward silence. MR. WEBB dunks doughnuts in his coffee. More silence.

MR. WEBB: (*Suddenly and loudly.*) Well, George, how are you?

GEORGE:

(*Startled; choking over his coffee.*) Oh, fine, I'm fine. (*Pause.*) Mr. Webb, what sense could there be in a superstition like that?

MR. WEBB:

Well, you see, on her wedding morning a girl's head's apt to be full of ... clothes and one thing and another. Don't you think that's probably it?

GEORGE: Ye-e-s. I never thought of that.

MR. WEBB: A girl's apt to be a mite nervous on her wedding day.

Pause.

GEORGE: I wish a fellow could get married without all that marching up and down.

MR. WEBB:

Every man that's ever lived has felt that way about it, George; but it hasn't been any use. It's the womenfolk who've built up weddings, my boy. For a while now the women have it all their own. A man looks pretty small at a wedding, George. All those good women standing shoulder to shoulder making sure that the knot's tied in a mighty public way.

GEORGE: But ... you believe in it, don't you, Mr. Webb?

MR. WEBB: (With alacrity.) Oh, yes; oh, yes. Don't you misunderstand me, my boy. Marriage is a wonderful thing, wonderful thing. And don't you forget that, George.

GEORGE:

No, sir. Mr. Webb, how old were you when you got married?

MR. WEBB:

Well, you see: I'd been to college and I'd taken a little time to get settled. But Mrs. Webb--she wasn't much older than what Emily is. Oh, age hasn't much to do with it, George, not compared with ... uh ... other things.

GEORGE: What were you going to say, Mr. Webb?

MR. WEBB:

Oh, I don't know. Was I going to say something? (*Pause.*) George, I was thinking the other night of some advice my father gave me when I got married. Charles, he said, Charles, start out early showing who's boss, he said. Best thing to do is to give an order, even if it don't make sense; just so she'll learn to obey. And he said: if anything about your wife irritates you -- her conversation, or anything -- just get up and leave the house. That'll make it clear to her, he said. And, oh, yes! he said never, never let your wife know how much money you have, never.

GEORGE: Well, Mr. Webb ... I don't think I could ...

MR. WEBB:

So I took the opposite of my father's advice and I've been happy ever since. And let that be a lesson to you, George, never to ask advice on personal matters. George, are you going to raise chickens on your farm?

GEORGE: What?

MR. WEBB: Are you going to raise chickens on your farm?

GEORGE: Uncle Luke's never been much interested, but I thought...

MR. WEBB:

A book came into my office the other day, George, on the Philo System of raising chickens. I want you to read it. I'm thinking of beginning in a small way in the back yard, and I'm going to put an incubator in the cellar.

Enter MRS. WEBB.

MRS. WEBB:

Charles, are you talking about that old incubator again? I thought you two'd be talking about things worth while.

MR. WEBB: *(Bitingly.)* Well, Myrtle, if you want to give the boy some good advice, I'll go upstairs and leave you alone with him.

MRS. WEBB: *(Pulling GEORGE up.)* George, Emily's got to come downstairs and eat her breakfast. She sends you her love but she doesn't want to lay eyes on you. Good-bye, George.

GEORGE: Good-bye.

GEORGE crosses the stage to his own home, bewildered and crestfallen. He slowly dodges a puddle and disappears into his house.

MR. WEBB: Myrtle, I guess you don't know about that older superstition.

MRS. WEBB: What do you mean, Charles?

MR. WEBB: Since the cave men: no bridegroom should see his father-in-law on the day of the wedding, or near it. Now remember that.

They both leave the stage.

SCENE 17

STAGE MANAGER:

Thank you very much, Mr. and Mrs. Webb. Now I have to interrupt again here. You see, we want to know how all this began--this wedding, this plan to spend a lifetime together. I'm awfully interested in how big things like that begin. You know how it is: you're twenty-one or twenty-two and you make some decisions; then whisssh! you're seventy: you've been a lawyer for fifty years, and that white-haired lady at your side has eaten over fifty thousand meals with you. How do such things begin?

George and Emily are going to show you now the conversation they had when they first knew that . . . that . . . as the saying goes ... they were meant for one another. But before they do it I want you to try and remember what it was like to have been very young. And particularly the days when you were first in love; when you were like a person sleepwalking, and you didn't quite see the street you were on and didn't quite hear everything that was said to you. You were just a little bit crazy. Will you remember that, please?

Now they'll be coming out of high school at three o'clock. George has just been elected President of the Junior Class, and as it's June, that means he'll be President of the Senior Class all next year. And Emily's just been elected Secretary and Treasurer. I don't have to tell you how important that is.

He places a board across the backs of two chairs which he takes from those at the Gibbs family's table. He brings two high stools from the wings and places them behind the board. Persons sitting on the stools will be facing the audience. This is the counter of Mr. Morgan's drugstore. The sounds of young people's voices are heard off left.

Yepp, there they are coming down Main Street now:

EMILY, carrying an armful of imaginary-schoolbooks, comes along Main Street from the left.

EMILY:

I can't, Louise. I've got to go home. Good-bye. Oh, Ernestine! Ernestine! Can you come over tonight and do Latin? Isn't that Cicero the worst thing! Tell your mother you have to. G'by. G'by, Helen. G'by, Fred.

GEORGE, also carrying books, catches up with her.

GEORGE: Can I carry your books home for you, Emily?

EMILY: *(Coolly.)* Why ... uh ... Thank you. It isn't far. *She gives them to him.*

GEORGE: Excuse me a minute, Emily. Say, Bob, if I'm a little late, start practice anyway. And give Herb some long high ones.

EMILY: Good-bye, Lizzy.

GEORGE: Good-bye, Lizzy. I'm awfully glad you were elected, too, Emily.

EMILY: Thank you.

They have been standing on Main Street, almost against the back wall. They take the first steps toward the audience when GEORGE stops and says:

GEORGE: Emily, why are you mad at me?

EMILY: I'm not mad at you.

GEORGE: You've been treating me so funny lately.

EMILY: Well, since you ask me, I might as well say it right out, George. *(She catches sight of a teacher passing.)* Good-bye, Miss Corcoran.

GEORGE: Good-bye, Miss Corcoran. Wha-what is it?

EMILY:

(Not scoldingly; finding it difficult to say.) I don't like the whole change that's come over you in the last year. I'm sorry if that hurts your feelings, but I've got to tell the truth and shame the devil.

GEORGE: A change?-Wha-what do you mean?

EMILY:

Well, up to a year ago I used to like you a lot. And I used to watch you as you did everything ... because we'd been friends so long ... and then you began spending all your time at baseball . . . and you never stopped to speak to anybody any more. Not even to your own family you didn't ... and, George, it's a fact, you've got awful conceited and stuck-up, and all the girls say so. They may not say so to your face, but that's what they say about you behind your back, and it hurts me to hear them say it, but I've got to agree with them a little. I'm sorry if it hurts your feelings ... but I can't be sorry I said it.

GEORGE:

I ... I'm glad you said it, Emily. I never thought that such a thing was happening to me. I guess it's hard for a fella not to have faults creep into his character.

They take a step or two in silence, then stand still in misery.

EMILY:

I always expect a man to be perfect and I think he should be.

GEORGE: Oh ... I don't think it's possible to be perfect, Emily.

EMILY:

Well, my father is, and as far as I can see your father is. There's no reason on earth why you shouldn't be, too.

GEORGE:

Well, I feel it's the other way round. That men aren't naturally good; but girls are.

EMILY:

Well, you might as well know right now that I'm not perfect. It's not as easy for a girl to be perfect as a man, because we girls are more-more-nervous. Now I'm sorry I said all that about you. I don't know what made me say it.

GEORGE: Emily,--

EMILY:

Now I can see it's not the truth at all. And I suddenly feel that it isn't important, anyway.

GEORGE:

Emily ... would you like an ice-cream soda, or something, before you go home?

EMILY: Well, thank you ... I would.

SCENE 18

They advance toward the audience and make an abrupt right turn, opening the door of Morgan's drugstore: Under strong emotion, EMILY keeps her face down. GEORGE speaks to some passers-by.

GEORGE: Hello, Stew, how are you? Good afternoon, Mrs. Slocum.

MR. MORGAN, owner of the town drugstore, enters abruptly from the right and stands between the audience and the counter of his soda fountain.

MORGAN:

Hello, George. Hello, Emily. What'll you have? Why, Emily Webb, what you been crying about?

GEORGE:

(He gropes for an explanation.) She ... she just got an awful scare, Mr. Morgan. She almost got run over by that hardware-store delivery truck. Everybody says that Tom Huckins drives like a crazy man.

MR. MORGAN:

(Drawing a drink of water.) Well, now! You take a drink of water, Emily. You look all shook up. I tell you, you've got to look both ways before you cross Main Street these days. Gets worse every year. What'll you have?

EMILY: I'll have a strawberry soda, please, Mr. Morgan.

GEORGE:

No, no, Emily. Have a milk shake with me. Two strawberry milk shakes, Mr. Morgan.

MR. MORGAN: (*Working the faucets.*) Two strawberry milk shakes, yes sir. Yes, sir. With all these automobiles they're bringing in, the best thing to do is to just stay home. Why, I can remember when a dog could go to sleep all day in the middle of Main Street and nothing come along to disturb him. He sets the imaginary glasses before them. There they are. Enjoy 'em. He sees a customer, right. Yes, Mrs. Ellis. What can I do for you? *He goes out right.*

EMILY: They're so expensive.

GEORGE:

No, no; don't you think of that. We're celebrating our election. And then do you know what else I'm celebrating?

EMILY: N-no.

GEORGE:

I'm celebrating because I've got a friend who tells me all the things that ought to be told me.

EMILY:

George, please don't think of that. I don't know why I said it. It's not true. You're...

GEORGE:

No, Emily. I'm glad you spoke to me like you did. But you'll see: I'm going to change so quick--you bet I'm going to change. And, Emily, I want to ask you a favor.

EMILY: What?

GEORGE:

Emily, if I go away to State Agriculture College next year, will you write me a letter once in a while?

EMILY: I certainly will. I certainly will, George ...

Pause. They start sipping the milk shakes through the straws.

EMILY:

It certainly seems like being away three years you'd get out of touch with things. Maybe letters from Grover's Corners wouldn't be so interesting after a while. Grover's Corners,

isn't a very important place when you think of all New Hampshire; but I think it's a very nice town.

GEORGE: The day wouldn't come when I wouldn't want to know everything that's happening here. I know that's true, Emily.

EMILY: Well, I'll try to make my letters interesting.

Pause.

GEORGE:

Y'know. Emily, whenever I meet a farmer I ask him if he thinks it's important to go to Agriculture School to be a good farmer.

EMILY: Really?

GEORGE:

Yeah, and some of them say that it's even a waste of time. You can get all those things, anyway, out of the pamphlets the government sends out. And Uncle Luke's getting old--he's about ready for me to start in taking over his farm tomorrow, if I could.

EMILY: My!

GEORGE:

And, like you say, being gone all that time ... in other places and meeting other people.. Gosh, if anything like that can happen I don't want to go away. I guess new people aren't any better than old ones. I'll bet they almost never are. Emily ... I feel that you're as good a friend as I've got. I don't need to go and meet the people in other towns.

EMILY: But, George, maybe it's very important for you to go and learn all that about-cattle judging and soils and those things Of course, I don't know.

GEORGE:

(After a pause, very seriously). Emily, I'm going to make up my mind right now. I won't go. I'll tell Pa about it tonight.

EMILY:

Why, George, I don't see why you have to decide right now. It's a whole year away.

GEORGE:

Emily, I'm glad you spoke to me about that ... that fault in my character. What you said was right; but there was one thing wrong in it, and that was when you said that for a year I wasn't noticing people, and ... you, for instance. Why, you say you were watching me when I did everything ... I was doing the same about you all the time. Why, sure, I always thought about you as one of the chief people I thought about. I always made sure where you were sitting on the bleachers, and who you were with, and for three days now I've been trying to walk home with you; but something's always got in the way. Yesterday I was standing over against the wall waiting for you, and you walked home with Miss Corcoran.

EMILY: George! ... Life's awful funny! How could I have known that? Why, I thought...

GEORGE:

Listen, Emily, I'm going to tell you why I'm not going to Agriculture School. I think that once you've found a person that you're very fond of ... I mean a person who's fond of you, too, and likes you enough to be interested in your character ... Well, I think: that's just as important as college is, and even more so. That's what I think.

EMILY: I think it's awfully important, too.

GEORGE: Emily?

EMILY: Yes, George?

GEORGE:

Emily, if I do improve and make a big change...would you be ... I mean: could you be...

EMILY: I ... I am now; I always have been.

GEORGE: *(Pause.)* So I guess this is an important talk we've been having.

EMILY: Yes ... yes.

GEORGE:

(Takes a deep breath and straightens his back.) Wait just a minute and I'll walk you home. *(With mounting alarm he digs into his pockets for the money. MR. MORGAN enters, right. GEORGE, deeply embarrassed, but directly says to him:)* Mr. Morgan, I'll have to go home and get the money to pay you for this. It'll only take me a minute.

MR. MORGAN:

(Pretending to be affronted.) What's that? George Gibbs, do you mean to tell me...

GEORGE:

Yes, but I had reasons, Mr. Morgan. Look, here's my gold watch to keep until I come back with the money.

MR. MORGAN: That's all right. Keep your watch. I'll trust you.

GEORGE: I'll be back in five minutes.

MR. MORGAN:

I'll trust you ten years, George--not a day over. Got all over your shock, Emily?

EMILY: Yes, thank you, Mr. Morgan.

GEORGE:

(Taking up the books from the counter.) I'm ready. *They walk in grave silence across the stage and pass through the trellis at the Webbs' back door and disappear. MR. MORGAN watches them go out and then exits.*

STAGE MANAGER:

Well, *(He claps his hands as a signal.)* Now we're ready to get on with the wedding.

SCENE 19

He stands waiting while the set is prepared for the next scene. STAGEHANDS remove the chairs, tables, and trellises from the Gibbs and Webb houses. They arrange the pews for the church in the center of the stage. The congregation will sit facing the back wall. The aisle of the church starts at the center of the back wall and comes toward the audience.) A small platform is placed against the back wall in which the STAGE MANAGER will stand later, playing the minister. The image of a stained-glass window is cast from a lantern slide upon the back wall. When all is ready the STAGE MANAGER strolls to the center of the stage, down front, and musingly addresses the audience.

STAGE MANAGER:

There are a lot of things to be said about a wedding; there are a lot of thoughts that go on during a wedding. We can't get them all into one wedding, naturally, and especially not into a wedding at Grover's Corners, where they're awfully plain and short. In this wedding, I play the minister. That gives me the right to say a few more things about it. For a while now, the play gets pretty serious.

Y'see, some churches say that marriage is a sacrament. I don't quite know what that means, but I can guess. Like Mrs. Gibbs said a few minutes ago: People were made to live two-by-two. This is a good wedding, but people are so put together that even at a good wedding there's a lot of confusion way down deep in people's minds and we thought that that ought to be in our play, too. The real hero of this scene isn't on the stage at all, and you know who that is. It's like what one of those European fellas said: every child born into the world is nature's attempt to make a perfect human being. Well, we've seen nature pushing and contriving for some time now. We all know that nature's interested in quantity; but I think she's interested in quality, too--that's why I'm in the ministry. And don't forget all the other witnesses at this wedding--the ancestors. Millions of them. Most of them set out to live two-by-two, also. Millions of them. Well, that's my sermon.

The organ starts playing Handel's "Largo." The congregation streams into the church and sits in silence. Church bells are heard. MRS. GIBBS sits in the front row, the first seat on the aisle, the right section; next to her are REBECCA and DR. GIBBS. Across the aisle MRS. WEBB, WALLY and MR. WEBB. A small choir takes its place, facing the audience under the stained glass window.

MRS. WEBB, on the way to her place, turns back and speaks to the audience.

MRS. WEBB:

I don't know why on earth I should be crying. I suppose there's nothing to cry about. It came over me at breakfast this morning; there was Emily eating her breakfast as she's done for seventeen years and now she's going off to eat it in someone else's house. I suppose that's it. And Emily! She suddenly said: I can't eat another mouthful, and she put her head down on the table and she cried. (*She starts toward her seat in the church, but turns back and adds:*) Oh, I've got to say it: you know, there's something downright cruel about sending our girls out into marriage this way. I hope some of her girl friends have told her a thing or two. It's cruel, I know, but I couldn't bring myself to say anything. I went into it blind as a bat myself In half-amused exasperation. The whole world's wrong, that's what's the matter. There they come. (*She hurries to her place in the pew.*)

GEORGE starts to come down the right aisle of the theatre, through the audience. The choir starts singing ("Love Divine, All Love Excelling".) GEORGE has reached the stage. He stares at the congregation a moment, then takes a few steps of withdrawal, toward the right proscenium pillar. His mother, from the front row, seems to have felt his confusion. She leaves her seat and comes down the aisle quickly to him.

MRS. GIBBS: George! George! What's the matter?

GEORGE: Ma, I don't want to grow old. Why's everybody pushing me so?

MRS. GIBBS: Why, George ... you wanted it.

GEORGE: No, Ma, listen to me.

MRS. GIBBS: No, no, George, you're a man now.

GEORGE: Listen, Ma, for the last time I ask you ... All I want to do is to be a fella.

MRS. GIBBS: George! If anyone should hear you! Now stop. Why, I'm ashamed of you!

GEORGE: *He comes to himself and looks over the scene.* What? Where's Emily?

MRS. GIBBS: Relieved. George! You gave me such a turn.

GEORGE: Cheer up, Ma. I'm getting married.

MRS. GIBBS: Let me catch my breath a minute.

GEORGE:

Comforting her. Now, Ma, you save Thursday nights. Emily and I are coming over to dinner every Thursday night ... you'll see. Ma, what are you crying for? Come on; we've got to get ready for this.

MRS. GIBBS, mastering her emotion, fixes his tie and whispers to him. In the meantime, EMILY, in white and wearing her wedding veil, has come through the audience and onto the stage. She too draws back, frightened, when she sees the congregation in the church. The choir begins: "Blessed Be the Tie That Binds."

EMILY:

I never felt so alone in my whole life. And George over there, looking so ... ! I hate him. I wish I were dead. Papa! Papa!

MR. WEBB:

(Leaves his seat in the pews and comes toward her anxiously.) Emily! Emily! Now don't get upset. ...

EMILY: But, Papa,-I don't want to get married

MR. WEBB: Sh-sh-Emily. Everything's all right.

EMILY: Why can't I stay for a while just as I am? Let's go away.

MR. WEBB: No, no, Emily. Now stop and think a minute.

EMILY:

Don't you remember that you used to say, all the time you used to say, all the time: that I was your girl! There must be lots of places we can go to. I'll work for you. I could keep house.

MR. WEBB:

Sh ... You mustn't think of such things. You're just nervous, Emily. *(He turns and calls:)* George! George! Will you come here a minute?

(He leads her toward George.) Why you're marrying the best young fellow in the world. George is a fine fellow.

EMILY: But Papa...

MRS. GIBBS returns unobtrusively to her seat. MR. WEBB has one arm around his daughter. He places his hand on GEORGE'S shoulder.

MR. WEBB:

I'm giving away my daughter, George. Do you think you can take care of her?

GEORGE:

Mr. Webb, I want to ... I want to try. Emily, I'm going to do my best. I love you, Emily. I need you.

EMILY: Well, if you love me, help me. All I want is someone to love me.

GEORGE: I will, Emily. Emily, I'll try.

EMILY: And I mean for ever. Do you hear? For ever and ever.

They fall into each other's arms. The March from Lohengrin is heard. The STAGE MANAGER, as the MINISTER, stands on the box, up center.

MR. WEBB:

Come, they're waiting for us. Now you know it'll be all right. Come, quick.

GEORGE slips away and takes his place beside the STAGE MANAGER-MINISTER . EMILY proceeds up the aisle on her father's arm.

STAGE MANAGER as the MINISTER: Do you, George, take this woman, Emily, to be your wedded wife, to have . . .

MRS. SOAMES has been sitting in the last row of the congregation. She now turns to her neighbors and speaks in a shrill voice. Her chatter drowns out the rest of the minister's words.

MRS. SOAMES: Perfectly lovely wedding! Loveliest wedding I ever saw. Oh, I do love a good wedding, don't you? Doesn't she make a lovely bride?

GEORGE: I do.

STAGE MANAGER as the MINISTER:

Do you, Emily, take this man, George, to be your wedded husband...

Again his further words are covered by those of MRS. SOAMES.

MRS. SOAMES:

Don't know when I've seen such a lovely wedding. But I always cry. Don't know why it is, but I always cry. I just like to see young people happy, don't you? Oh, I think it's lovely.

The ring. The kiss. The stage is suddenly arrested into silent tableau. The STAGE MANAGER as MINISTER, his eyes on the distance) as though to himself:

STAGE MANAGER:

I've married over two hundred couples in my day. Do I believe in it? I don't know. The cottage, the go-cart, the Sunday-afternoon drives in the Ford, the first rheumatism, the grandchildren, the second rheumatism, the deathbed, the reading of the will...

He now looks at the audience for the first time with a warm smile that removes any sense of cynicism from the next line.

Once in a thousand times it's interesting. Well, let's have Mendelssohn's "Wedding March"!

The organ picks up the March. The BRIDE and GROOM come down the aisle radiant, but trying to be very dignified.

MRS. SOAMES:

Aren't they a lovely couple? Oh, I've never been to such a nice wedding. I'm sure they'll be happy. I always say: happiness--that's the great thing! The important thing is to be happy.

The BRIDE and GROOM reach the steps leading into the audience. A bright light is thrown upon them. They descend into the auditorium and run up the aisle joyously.

STAGE MANAGER:

Well, now is a good time for a break. So you all take a moment to stretch your legs and maybe think about what's comin' next. We'll see you in a few minutes.

END of ACT 1

ACT 3**SCENE 20**

During the intermission the audience has seen the stagehands arranging the stage. On the right-hand side, a little right of the center, ten or twelve ordinary chairs have been placed in three openly spaced rows facing the audience. These are graves in the cemetery. Toward the end of the intermission the ACTORS enter and take their places. The front row contains: toward the center of the stage, an empty chair; then MRS. GIBBS; SIMON STIMSON. The second row contains, among others, MRS. SOAMES and MRS. CARTER. The dead do not turn their heads or their eyes to right or left, but they sit in quiet without stiffness. When they speak their tone is matter-of-fact, without sentimentality and, above all, without lugubriousness. The STAGE MANAGER takes his accustomed place and waits for the house lights to go down.

STAGE MANAGER: Hello friends. This time nine years have gone by--summer of 1943.

The world's at war but changes have been gradual in Grover's Corners. Farmers coming into town in Fords. Everybody locks their house doors now at night. Ain't been any burglars in town yet, but everybody's heard about 'em. You'd be surprised, though--on the whole, things don't change much around here. This is certainly an important part of Grover's Corners. It's on a hilltop--a windy hilltop-lots of sky, lots of clouds--often lots of sun and moon and stars. You come up here, on a fine afternoon and you can see range on range of hills.

Yes, beautiful spot up here. Mountain laurel and lilacs. Over there (*Pointing to stage left*) are the old stones, 1670, 1680. Strong-minded people that come a long way to be independent. This here is the new part of the cemetery. Here's your friend Mrs. Gibbs. --Here's Mr. Stimson, organist at the Congregational Church. And Mrs. Soames who enjoyed the wedding so-you remember? Oh, and a lot of others.

Yes, an awful lot of sorrow has sort of quieted down up here. People just wild with grief have brought their relatives up to this hill. We all know how it is ... and then time ... and sunny days ... and rainy days. ... 'n snow ... We're all glad they're in a beautiful place and

we're coming up here ourselves when our fit's over. We all know that something is eternal. And it ain't houses and it ain't names, and it ain't earth, and it ain't even the stars ... everybody knows in their bones that something is eternal, and that something has to do with human beings. All the greatest people ever lived have been telling us that for thousands of years and yet you'd be surprised how people are always losing hold of it. There's something way down deep that's eternal about every human being.

(Pause.)

You know as well as I do that the dead don't stay interested in us living people for very long. Gradually, gradually, they lose hold of the earth ... and the ambitions they had ... and the pleasures they had ... and the things they suffered ... and the people they loved. They get weaned away from earth--that's the way I put it--weaned away. And they stay here while the earth part of 'em burns away, burns out; and all that time they slowly get indifferent to what's goin' on in Grover's Corners. They're waitin'. They're waitin' for something that they feel is comin'. Something important, and great. Aren't they waitin' , for the eternal part in them to come out clear? Some of the things they're going to say maybe'll hurt your feelings--but that's the way it is: mother'n daughter ... husband 'n wife ... enemy 'n enemy ... money 'n miser ... all those terribly important things kind of grow pale around here. *(He looks at the audience a minute, then turns to the stage.)*

SCENE 21

Well! There are some living people. There's Joe Stoddard, our undertaker, supervising a new-made grave. And here comes a Grover's Corners boy, that left town to seek his fortune, as they say.

JOE STODDARD has hovered about in the background. SAM CRAIG enters left, wiping his forehead from the exertion. He carries an umbrella and strolls front.

SAM CRAIG: Good afternoon, Joe Stoddard.

JOE STODDARD: Good afternoon, good afternoon. Let me see now: do I know you?

SAM CRAIG: I'm Sam Craig.

JOE STODDARD:

Gracious sakes' alive! Of all people! I should'a known you'd be back for the funeral. You've been away a long time, Sam.

SAM CRAIG:

Yes, I've been away over twelve years. I'm in business out in Buffalo now, Joe. But I was in the East when I got news of my cousin's death, so I thought I'd combine things a little and come and see the old home. You look well.

JOE STODDARD: Yes, yes, can't complain. Very sad, our journey today, Samuel.

SAM CRAIG: Yes.

JOE STODDARD:

Yes, yes. I always say I hate to supervise when a young person is taken. They'll be here in a few minutes now.

SAM CRAIG:

(Reading stones and staring at Mrs. Gibbs' knees.) Why, this is my Aunt Julia ... I'd forgotten that she'd

JOE STODDARD:

Yes, Doc Gibbs lost his wife two or three years ago. And today's another pretty bad blow for him, too.

MRS. GIBBS: *(To Simon Stimson: in an even voice.)* That's my sister Carey's boy, Sam ... Sam Craig.

SIMON STIMSON: I'm always uncomfortable when they're around.

MRS. GIBBS: Simon.

SAM CRAIG: Do they choose their own verses much, Joe?

JOE STODDARD: No ... not usual. Mostly the bereaved pick a verse.

SAM CRAIG:

Doesn't sound like Aunt Julia. There aren't many of those Hersey sisters left now. *(He spots Simon Stimson's grave and reads Simon Stimson's epitaph).* Simon Stimson -- He was organist at church, wasn't he? Hm, drank a lot, we used to say.

JOE STODDARD: Nobody was supposed to know about it. He'd seen a peck of trouble. Took his own life, y' know.

SAM CRAIG: Oh, did he? .

JOE STODDARD: Hung himself in the attic. They tried to hush it up, but of course it got around. He chose his own epitaph. You can see it there. It ain't a verse exactly.

SAM CRAIG: Why, it's just some notes of music--what is it?

JOE STODDARD: Oh, I wouldn't know. It was wrote up in the Boston papers at the time.

SAM CRAIG: Joe, what did she die of?

JOE STODDARD: Who?

SAM CRAIG: My cousin.

JOE STODDARD:

Oh, didn't you know? Had some trouble bringing a baby into the world. 'Twas her second, though. There's a little boy 'bout four years old.

SAM CRAIG: (*Opening his umbrella.*) The grave's going to be over there?

JOE STODDARD:

Yes, there ain't much more room over here among the Gibbsses, so they're opening up a whole new Gibbs section over there (*points*). You'll excuse me now. I see they're comin'.

SCENE 22

From left to center, at the back of the stage comes a procession. FOUR MEN carry a casket, invisible to us. All the rest are under umbrellas. One can vaguely see: DR. GIBBS, GEORGE, the WEBBS, etc. They gather about a grave in the back center of the stage) a little to the left of center.

MRS. SOAMES: Who is it, Julia?

MRS. GIBBS: (*Without raising her eyes.*) My daughter-in-law, Emily Webb.

MRS. SOAMES:

(A little surprised but no emotion.) Well, I declare! The road up here must have been awful muddy. What did she die of, Julia?

MRS. GIBBS: In childbirth.

MRS. SOAMES:

Childbirth. (*Almost with a laugh.*) I'd forgotten all about that. My, wasn't life awful? (*With a sigh.*) ...And wonderful.

SIMON STIMSON: (*With a sideways glance.*) Wonderful, was it?

MRS. GIBBS: Simon! Now, remember!

MRS. SOAMES:

I remember Emily's wedding. Wasn't it a lovely wedding! And I remember her reading the class poem at Graduation Exercises. Emily was one of the brightest girls ever graduated from High School. I've heard Principal Wilkins say so time after time. I called on them at their new farm, just before I died. Perfectly beautiful farm.

MRS. CARTER (FROM AMONG THE DEAD):

It's on the same road we lived on. Yepp, right smart farm.

They subside. The group by the grave starts singing "Blessed Be the Tie That Binds."

MRS. CARTER:

I always liked that hymn. I was hopin' they'd sing a hymn.

Pause.

Suddenly, Emily appears from among the umbrellas. She is wearing a white dress. Her hair is down her back and tied by a white ribbon like a little girl. She comes slowly, gazing wonderingly at the dead, a little dazed. She stops halfway and smiles faintly. After looking at the mourners for a moment, she walks slowly to the vacant chair beside Mrs. Gibbs and sits down.

EMILY: *(To them all, quietly, smiling.)* Hello.

MRS. SOAMES: Hello, Emily.

MRS. CARTER: Hello, M's Gibbs.

EMILY: *(Warmly)* Hello, Mother Gibbs.

MRS. GIBBS: Emily.

EMILY: Hello. *(With surprise.)* It's raining. *(Her eyes drift back to the funeral company.)*

MRS. GIBBS: Yes ... They'll be gone soon, dear. Just rest yourself.

EMILY:

It seems thousands and thousands of years since I ... Papa remembered that that was my favorite hymn. Oh, I wish I'd been here a long time. I don't like being new here. How do you do, Mr. Stimson?

SIMON STIMSON: How do you do, Emily.

EMILY continues to look about her with a wondering smile as though to shut out from her mind the thought of the funeral company. She starts speaking to Mrs. Gibbs with a touch of nervousness.

EMILY:

Mother Gibbs, George and I have made that farm into just the best place you ever saw. We thought of you all the time. We wanted to show you the new barn and a great long cement drinking fountain for the stock. We bought that out of the money you left us.

MRS. GIBBS: I did?

EMILY:

Don't you remember, Mother Gibbs--the legacy you left us? Why, it was over three hundred and fifty dollars.

MRS. GIBBS: Yes, yes, Emily.

EMILY:

Well, there's a patent device on the drinking fountain so that it never overflows, Mother Gibbs, and it never sinks below a certain mark they have there. It's fine. *(Her voice trails off and her eyes return to the funeral group.)* It won't be the same to George without me, but it's a lovely farm. *(Suddenly she looks directly at Mrs. Gibbs.)* Live people don't understand, do they?

MRS. GIBBS: No, dear, not very much.

EMILY:

They're sort of shut up in little boxes, aren't they? I feel as though I knew them last a thousand years ago ... My boy is spending the day at the Carter's. *(She sees MRS. CARTER among the dead.)* Oh, Mrs. Carter, my little boy is spending the day at your house.

MRS. CARTER: Is he?

EMILY:

Yes, he loves it there. Mother Gibbs, we have a Ford, too. Never gives any trouble. I don't drive, though. Mother Gibbs, when does this feeling go away? Of being ... one of them? How long does it ... ?

MRS. GIBBS: Sh! dear. Just wait and be patient.

EMILY: *(With a sigh.)* I know. Look, they're finished. They're going.

MRS. GIBBS: Shhhh--.

The umbrellas leave the stage. DR. GIBBS has come over to his wife's grave and stands before it a moment. EMILY looks up at his face. MRS. GIBBS does not raise her eyes.

EMILY:

Look! Father Gibbs is bringing some of my flowers to you. He looks just like George, doesn't he? Oh, Mother Gibbs, I never realized before how troubled and how ... how in the dark; live persons are. Look at him. I loved him so. From morning till night, that's all they are-troubled.

DR. GIBBS goes off.

MRS. CARTER:

Little cooler than it was.

MRS. GIBBS:

Yes, that rain's cooled it off a little.

MRS. SOAMES:

Those northeast winds always do the same thing, don't they?

MR. STIMSON:

If it isn't a rain, it's a three-day blow.

A patient calm falls on the stage. The STAGE MANAGER appears at his proscenium pillar.. EMILY sits up abruptly with an idea.

EMILY:

But, Mother Gibbs, one can go back; one can go back there again ... into living. I feel it. I know it. Why just then for a moment I was thinking about ... about the farm ... and for a minute I was there, and my baby was on my lap as plain as day.

MRS. GIBBS: Yes, of course you can.

EMILY: I can go back there and live all those days over again ... why not?

MRS. GIBBS: All I can say is, Emily, don't.

EMILY:

(She appeals urgently to the stage manager.) But it's true, isn't it? I can go and live ... back there ... again.

STAGE MANAGER: Yes, some have tried--but they soon come back here.

MRS. GIBBS: Don't do it, Emily.

MRS. SOAMES: Emily, don't. It's not what you think it'd be.

EMILY:

But I won't live over a sad day. I'll choose a happy one. I'll choose the day I first knew that I loved George. Why should that be painful?

THEY are silent. Her question turns to the stage manager.

STAGE MANAGER: You not only live it; but you watch yourself living it.

EMILY: Yes?

STAGE MANAGER:

And as you watch it, you see the thing that they down there will never know. You see the future. You know what's going to happen afterwards.

EMILY: But is that--painful? Why?

MRS. GIBBS:

That's not the only reason why you shouldn't do it, Emily. When you've been here longer you'll see that our life here is to forget all that, and think only of what's ahead, and be ready for what's ahead. When you've been here longer you'll understand.

EMILY:

(Softly.) But, Mother Gibbs, how can I ever forget that life? It's all I know. It's all I had.

MRS. SOAMES: Oh, Emily. It isn't wise. Really, it isn't.

EMILY: But it's a thing I must know for myself. I'll choose a happy day, anyway.

MRS. GIBBS: No. At least, choose an unimportant day. Choose the least important day in your life. It will be important enough.

EMILY:

(To herself) Then it can't be since I was married; or since the baby was born. *(To the stage manager, eagerly.)* I can choose a birthday at least, can't I? I choose my twelfth birthday.

STAGE MANAGER: All right. February 11th, 1929. A Tuesday. Do you want any special time of day?

EMILY: Oh, I want the whole day.

STAGE MANAGER:
We'll begin at dawn.

SCENE 23

STAGE MANAGER:
You remember it had been snowing for several days; but it had stopped the night before, and they had begun clearing the roads. The sun's coming up.

EMILY: *(With a cry; rising.)* There's Main Street ... why, that's Mr. Morgan's drugstore before he changed it!

The stage at no time in this act has been very dark; but now the left half of the stage gradually becomes very bright--the brightness of a crisp winter morning. EMILY walks toward Main Street.

STAGE MANAGER: Yes, it's 1929. This is fourteen years ago.

EMILY:
Oh, that's the town I knew as a little girl. And, look, there's the old white fence that used to be around our house. Oh, I'd forgotten that! Oh, I love it so! Are they inside?

STAGE MANAGER: Yes, your mother'll be coming downstairs in a minute to make breakfast.

EMILY: *(Softly.)* Will she?

STAGE MANAGER:
And you remember: your father had been away for several days; he came back on the early-morning train.

EMILY: No ... ?

STAGE MANAGER: He'd been back to his college to make a speech in western New York, at Clinton.

MRS. WEBB has appeared in her kitchen but EMILY does not see her until she calls.

MRS. WEBB: Chil-dren! Wally! Emily! ... Time to get up.

EMILY:

Mama, I'm here! Oh! how young Mama looks! I didn't know Mama was ever that young.

MRS. WEBB: You can come and dress by the kitchen fire, if you like; but hurry.

EMILY: *(With an effort.)* Mama, I can't find my blue hair ribbon anywhere.

MRS. WEBB:

Just open your eyes, dear, that's all. I laid it out for you special--on the dresser, there. If it were a snake it would bite you.

EMILY: Yes, yes ... *(She puts her hand on her heart.)*

MR. WEBB comes along Main Street. He shakes the snow off his feet and enters his house.

EMILY: *(Whispers.)* Papa.

MR. WEBB: Good morning, Mother.

MRS. WEBB: How did it go, Charles?

MR. WEBB: Oh, fine, I guess. I told'm a few things. Everything all right here?

MRS. WEBB:

Yes--can't think of anything that's happened, special. Been right cold.

MR. WEBB:

Yes, well, it's colder than that at Hamilton College. Students' ears are falling off. Paper have any mistakes in it?

MRS. WEBB:

None that I noticed. Coffee's ready when you want it. *(He starts upstairs.)* Charles! Don't forget, it's Emily's birthday. Did you remember to get her something?

MR. WEBB:

(Patting his pocket.) Yes, I've got something here. *(Calling up the stairs.)* Where's my girl? Where's my birthday girl? *(He goes off left.)*

MRS. WEBB:

Don't interrupt her now, Charles. You can see her at breakfast. She's slow enough as it is. Hurry up, children! It's seven o'clock. Now, I don't want to call you again.

EMILY:

(Softly, more in wonder than in grief.) I can't bear it. They're so young and beautiful. Why did they ever have to get old? Mama, I'm here. I'm grown up. I love you all, everything. I can't look at everything hard enough.

She looks questioningly at the Stage Manager, saying or suggesting, "Can I go in?" He nods briefly. She crosses to the inner door to the kitchen, left of her mother, and as though entering the room, says, suggesting the voice of a girl of twelve:

EMILY: Good morning, Mama.

MRS. WEBB:

(Crossing to embrace and kiss her; in her characteristic matter-of-fact manner.) Well, now, dear, a very happy birthday to my girl and many happy returns. There are some surprises waiting for you on the kitchen table.

EMILY:

Oh, Mama, you shouldn't have. *(She throws an anguished glance at the stage manager.)* I can't, I can't.

MRS. WEBB:

(Facing the audience, over her stove.) But birthday or no birthday, I want you to eat your breakfast good and slow. I want you to grow up and be a good strong girl.

That in the blue paper is from your Aunt Carrie; and I reckon you can guess who brought the postcard album. I found it on the doorstep when I brought in the milk--George Gibbs must have come over in the cold pretty early ... right nice of him.

EMILY: (*To herself.*) . Oh, George! I'd forgotten that

MRS. WEBB: Chew that bacon good and slow. It'll help keep you warm on a cold day.

EMILY:

(*With mounting urgency.*) Oh, Mama, just look at me one minute as though you really saw me. Mama, fourteen years have gone by. I'm dead. You're a grandmother, Mama. I married George Gibbs, Mama. Wally's dead, too. Mama, his appendix burst on a camping trip to North Conway. We felt just terrible about it--don't you remember? But, just for a moment now we're all together. Mama, just for a moment we're happy. Let's look at one another.

MRS. WEBB:

That in the yellow paper is something I found in the attic among your grandmother's things. You're old enough to wear it now, and I thought you'd like it.

EMILY:

And this is from you. Why, Mama, it's just lovely and it's just what I wanted. It's beautiful!

She flings her arms around her mother's neck. Her MOTHER goes on with her cooking, but is pleased.

MRS. WEBB:

Well, I hoped you'd like it. Hunted all over. Your Aunt Norah couldn't find one in Concord, so I had to send all the way to Boston. (*Laughing.*) Wally has something for you, too. He made it in manual-training class and he's very proud of it. Be sure you make a big fuss about it. Your father has a surprise for you, too; don't know what it is myself. Shhh--here he comes.

MR. WEBB:

(*Offstage.*) Where's my girl? Where's my birthday girl?

EMILY:

(In a loud voice to the stage manager.) I can't. I can't go on. It goes so fast. We don't have time to look at one another. *(She breaks down sobbing.)*

The lights dim on the left half of the stage. MRS. WEBB disappears.

SCENE 24

EMILY:

I didn't realize. So all that was going on and we never noticed. Take me back -- up the hill -- to my grave. But first: Wait! One more look. Good-bye, Good-bye, world. Good-bye, Grover's Corners ... Mama and Papa. Good-bye to clocks ticking ... and Mama's sunflowers. And food and coffee. And new-ironed dresses and hot baths... and sleeping and waking up. Oh, Earth, you're too wonderful for anybody to realize you. *(She looks toward the stage manager and asks abruptly, through her tears:)* Do any human beings ever realize life while they live it? -- every, every minute?

STAGE MANAGER: No. *(Pause.)* The saints and poets, maybe -- they do some.

EMILY: I'm ready to go back. *She returns to her chair beside Mrs. Gibbs.*

Pause.

MRS. GIBBS: Were you happy?

EMILY:

No ... I should have listened to you. That's all human beings are! Just blind people.

MRS. GIBBS: Look, it's clearing up. The stars are coming out.

EMILY: Oh, Mr. Stimson, I should have listened to them.

SIMON STIMSON:

(With mounting violence; biting.) Yes, now you know. Now you know! That's what it was to be alive. To move about in a cloud of ignorance; to go up and down trampling

on the feelings of those ... of those about you. To spend and waste time as though you had a million years. To be always at the mercy of one self-centered passion, or another. Now you know -- that's the happy existence you wanted to go back to. Ignorance and blindness.

MRS. GIBBS:

(Spiritedly.) Simon Stimson that ain't the whole truth and you know it. Emily, look at that star. I forget its name.

MRS. CARTER:

My boy Joel was a sailor; knew 'em all. He'd set on the porch evenings and tell 'em all by name. Yes, sir, wonderful!

MRS. SOAMES: A star's mighty good company.

MRS. GIBBS: Yes. Yes, 'tis.

SIMON STIMSON: Here's one of them coming.

MRS. CARTER:

That's funny. 'Tain't no time for one of them to be here.- Goodness sakes.

EMILY: Mother Gibbs, it's George.

MRS. GIBBS: Shhh, dear. Just rest yourself.

EMILY: It's George.

GEORGE enters from the left, and slowly comes toward them. GEORGE sinks to his knees then falls full length at Emily's feet.

MRS. CARTER: Goodness! That ain't no way to behave!

MRS. SOAMES: He ought to be home.

EMILY: Mother Gibbs?

MRS. GIBBS: Yes, Emily?

EMILY: They don't understand, do they?

MRS. GIBBS: No, dear. They don't understand.

The STAGE MANAGER appears at the right, one hand on a dark curtain which he slowly draws across the scene. In the distance a clock is heard striking the hour very faintly.

STAGE MANAGER:

Most everybody's asleep in Grover's Corners. There are a few lights on: Shorty Hawkins, down at the depot, has just watched the Albany train go by. And at the livery stable somebody's setting up late and talking. Yes, it's clearing up. There are the stars -- doing their old, old crisscross journeys in the sky. Scholars haven't settled the matter yet, but they seem to think there are no living beings up there. Just chalk ... or fire. Only this one is straining away, straining away all the time to make something of itself. The strain's so bad that every sixteen hours everybody lies down and gets a rest.

(He winds his watch.) Hm Eleven o'clock in Grover's Corners. You get a good rest, too. Good night.

THE END