

OUR TOWN

-by-

Thornton Wilder

This edition adapted

2023

BarnDoor Productions

Perth, Ontario

CHARACTERS

(in the order of their appearance)

STAGE MANAGER

DR. GIBBS

GEORGE GIBBS

MR. WEBB

| WALLY WEBB

| JOE CROWELL

| SI CROWELL

| CONSTABLE WARREN

| SAM CRAIG

| HOWIE NEWSOME

| JOE STODDARD

| SIMON STIMSON

| PROFESSOR WILLARD

MRS. GIBBS

MRS. WEBB

EMILY WEBB

REBECCA GIBBS

MRS. SOAMES

| WOMAN IN THE BALCONY

AUDIENCE SHILLS | LADY IN THE BOX

| MAN IN THE AUDITORIUM

The entire play takes place in 'our town'

Act I

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 finds a place that will be his 'home', 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 originally by Mr. Thornton Wilder – we've changed it some; it is produced by David and Janice Jacklin; directed by David Jacklin. In it you will see Miss C ; Miss D ; Miss E ; and Mr. F. ... ; Mr. G ; Mr. H ; and many others. The name of the town is ... the same town you come from – in our case, here, our town is located latitude 44 degrees 54 minutes north; longitude 75 degrees 15 minutes west. The first part of this play shows a day in our town. The day is May 7, 1901. The time is just before dawn.

(A rooster crows.)

The sky is beginning to show some streaks of light over in the East there, beyond the river. 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 over there is the railway station; tracks go that way. Leslieville's across the tracks, and some Ukranian families. *(Toward the left.)* Over there is the United Church; across the street's the Presbyterian. Methodist and Anglican are over there. Baptist is down on the island by the river. Catholic Church is over beyond the tracks. Here's the Town Hall; jail's in the basement. The Post Office is across the way. John A. MacDonald once made a speech from these very steps here. Along here's a row of stores. Hitching posts and horse blocks in front of them. First automobile's going to come along – *(he pauses, takes out his watch, and looks off expectantly)* – in about five years – belonged to Mr. Matheson, our richest citizen ... lives in the big red house up on the hill. Here's the grocery store and here's Morgan's apothecary. 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 hull 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 ... holly-hocks ... heliotrope ... and a lot of burdock. (*Crosses the stage.*) In those days our newspaper come out twice a week – the *Courier* – and this is Editor Webb's house. And this is Mrs. Webb's garden. Just like Mrs. Gibbs', only it's got a lot of sunflowers, too. (*He looks upward, center stage. He returns to his place and looks at the audience for a minute.*) Nice town, y'know? Nobody very remarkable ever come out of it. The earliest tombstones in the cemetery up there on the mountain say 1816 – 1820 – they're Stewarts and McLeans and Gibbses and Herseys – same 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 Mrs. Goruslawski's come down with a case of 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, there've been lights on for some time, what with milkin' and so on. But town people sleep late. So – another day's begun.

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 downstair right. She pulls up an imaginary window shade in her kitchen and starts to make a fire in her stove.)

Doc Gibbs died in 1930. They named a hospital ward after him. Mrs. Gibbs died first – long time ago. She went down 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 Gibbses and Herseys – she was Julia Hersey 'fore she married Doc Gibbs in the United Church over there. There's Mrs. Webb, comin' downstairs to get her breakfast, too. That's Doc Gibbs. Got that call at half past one this morning; babies come when it's convenient for them. And there comes Joe Crowell, Jr., delivering Mr. Webb's *Courier*.

(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 thin 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, JR.: Morning, Doc Gibbs.

DR. GIBBS: Morning, Joe.

JOE, JR.: Somebody been sick, Doc?

DR. GIBBS: No. Just some twins born over in Leslieville.

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

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

JOE, JR.: Yes, sir. My schoolteacher Miss Foster's getting married to a fella over in the next county.

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

JOE, JR.: None of my business – but if you start out to be a teacher, you ought to stay one.

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

JOE, JR.: Fine, Doc, bu it always tells me when it's going to rain.

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

JOE, JR.: No, sir.

DR. GIBBS: Knee ever make a mistake?

JOE, JR.: No, sir.

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

STAGE MANAGER: Want to tell you something about that boy Joe there. Joe was awful

bright – graduated from high school here, head of his class, got a scholarship to university. Head of his class there, too. Goin' to be a great engineer, Joe was, but the war broke out and he died in France.

NEWSOME: *(Off left)* Giddap, Bessie! What's the matter with you today?

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

(HOWIE NEWSOME comes along Main Street from the left, walking beside an invisible horse and wagon and carrying imaginary milk bottles. The sound of clinking milk bottles is heard. He leaves some bottles at Mrs. Webb's, then, he stops center to talk to Dr. Gibbs.)

NEWSOME: Morning, Doc.

DR. GIBBS: Morning, Howie.

NEWSOME: Somebody sick?

DR. GIBBS: Pair of twins over to the Goruslawski's.

NEWSOME: Twins, eh? This town's gettin' bigger every year.

DR. GIBBS: Goin' to rain, Howie?

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

DR. GIBBS: Hello, Bessie. *(He strokes the horse.)* How old is she, Howie?

NEWSOME: Going on seventeen. Bessie's all mixed up about the route ever since the Lockharts stopped takin' their quart. Keeps scolding me the hull trip.

(He reaches Mrs. Gibbs' back door.)

MRS. GIBBS: Good morning, Howie.

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

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

NEWSOME: Yes. Somep'n went wrong with the separator. Don't know what 'twas. *(He passes Dr. Gibbs up center.)* Doc!

DR. GIBBS: Howie!

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

NEWSOME: Come on, Bessie! *(He goes off right.)*

MRS. GIBBS: George! Rebecca!

(DR. GIBBS passes into his house.)

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. Guess I know what it's about.

BOTH GIBBSES: Her stummick ain't what it ought to be.

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: 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 (OFF): Yes, Pal!

DR. GIBBS: *(As he goes off the stage.)* Don't you hear your mother calling you? I guess I'll go upstairs and get forty winks.

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

REBECCA (OFF): 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: Every day 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 soap 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, about sixteen, and REBECCA, eleven. Left, EMILY and WALLY, same ages. They carry strapped school-books.)

STAGE MANAGER: We've got a factory in our town, too – over by the tracks. Smell it? Makes cod-liver oil! The Wampoles own it and it brung 'em a fortune.

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 Australia.

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 phosphates, 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: *(Spoon in mouth, 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.

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

(The CHILDREN 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.)

MRS. WEBB: Wally, pull up your pants at the knee. Stand up straight, Emily.

MRS. GIBBS: Tell Miss Foster my best congratulations. Can you remember that?

REBECCA: Yes, Ma.

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

ALL: Good-by.

(MRS. GIBBS fills her apron with food for the chickens and comes down to the footlights.)

MRS. GIBBS: Here, chick, chick, chick. No, go away, you. Go away. Here, chick, chick,

chick. What's the matter with *you*? Fight, fight, fight, that's all you do. Hm ... *you* don't belong to me. Where'd you come from? *(She shakes her apron.)* Oh, don't be so scared. Nobody's going to hurt you.

(MRS. WEBB sits on the bench, stringing beans.)

Good morning, Myrtle. How's your cold?

MRS. WEBB: Well, I still get that tickling feeling. I told Charles I didn't know as I'd go to choir practice tonight. Wouldn't be any use. Somehow I can't stay on the key. While I'm resting, 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. Brief sound of chickens cackling.)

MRS. GIBBS: Now, Myrtle. I've got to tell you something because, if I 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 second-hand furniture men from Boston come to see you last Friday?

MRS. WEBB: No-o.

MRS. GIBBS: Well, he called on me. 'N he wormed his way into my parlor and, Myrtle Webb, he offered me three hundred and fifty dollars for Grandmother Wentworth's highboy, as I'm sitting here!

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 go on a real trip, I'd sell it like that. It's been the dream of my life to see Paris, France. Oh, I don't know. 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, a legacy – I'd make him take me somewhere.

MRS. WEBB: Mm-hm ... What did he say?

MRS. GIBBS: You know how he is. It might make him discontented with our town to go traipsin' about Europe, he says. Every two years he makes a trip to the battlefields of the Civil War and that's enough treat for anybody, he says.

MRS. WEBB: Well, Mr. Webb just *admires* the way Dr. Gibbs knows everything about the Civil War. Mr. Webb's a good mind to give up Napoleon and move on over, only Dr. Gibbs being one of the greatest experts in the country just makes him despair.

MRS. GIBBS: The times I've walked over those hills at Antietam or Gettysburg, Myrtle, stopping at every bush and pacing it all out, like we were going to buy it.

MRS. WEBB: Well, if that secondhand man's really serious about buyin' it, Julia, you sell it. And then just keep droppin' hints – you'll get to see Paris, all right.

MRS. GIBBS: Oh, I'm sorry I mentioned it. Only it seems to me that once in your life you ought to see a country where they don't talk English and don't 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.)

Now we're going to skip a few hours. But first, I've asked Professor Willard of the University to sketch in a few details of our past history. Is Professor Willard here?

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

May I introduce Professor Willard of the Sociology Department at the University. A few – brief – notes, thank you, Professor.

PROFESSOR WILLARD: Our town ... let me see ... our town lies on the old Pleistocene granite of the Northern Shield. I may say it's some of the oldest rock 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 fairly new: two hundred, three hundred ... million years old. Some highly interesting ... I may say, unique ... fossils have been found in Peckham's cow pasture. They can be seen at the museum downtown at any time – that is, at any reasonable time. Shall I read some of Professor Gruber's notes on mean precipitation, et cetera?

STAGE MANAGER: 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 North American Indian stock. Anishanaabe tribes ... no evidence before the tenth century of this era . . . hm ... now mostly disappeared ... some living still further west. Migration toward the end of the eighteenth 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 township 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, I'm sure. *(He leads the audience in applause for the professor.)*

PROFESSOR WILLARD: Not at all, sir; not at all. *(He bows, very pleased to be applauded.)*

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

(Exit PROFESSOR WILLARD.)

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

(MRS. WEBB appears at her back door.)

MRS. WEBB: He'll be 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 *Courier*. That's our local paper, y'know. Of course you do; I've mentioned it before.

(MR. WEBB enters from his house, pulling on his coat. His finger is bound in a large bloodied rag.)

MR. WEBB: Well ... I don't have to tell you we're run here by an elected council. All males vote at twenty-one. Women vote indirect. Mostly lower middle class: some professional men ... ten per cent illiterate laborers. Politically, we're eighty-six per cent conservative; six per cent liberal; four per cent socialists; rest, indifferent. Religiously, eighty-five per cent Protestants; twelve per cent Catholics; one per cent Eastern; 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 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, they mostly come back.

STAGE MANAGER: Now, is there anyone in the audience who would like to ask Editor Webb anything about the town? Anyone? You, ma'am!

WOMAN IN THE BALCONY: Is there much drinking in your town?

MR. WEBB: Well, ma'am, I wouldn't know what you'd call *much*. Satiddy nights, the farmhands and factorymen meet down to the hotel and, sometimes, they holler some. We've got one or two town drunks, but they're always having remorse every time an evangelist comes to town. No, ma'am, I'd say likker ain't a regular thing in the home here, except in the medicine chest. Good for snake bite, y'know – always was.

STAGE MANAGER: Anyone else? You, sir!

BELLIGERENT MAN AT BACK OF AUDITORIUM: Is there no one in town aware of –

STAGE MANAGER: Stand up, will you, so we can all hear you? What were you saying?

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 sits 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? Yes, ma'am?

LADY IN A BOX: Mr. Webb, is there any culture or love of beauty in the town?

MR. WEBB: Well, no, ma'am, there ain't much – not in the sense you mean. There's some girls that play the piano at the High School Commencement ... but they ain't happy about it. Though maybe this is the place to tell you of the pleasures we do have here: we like the sun comin' up over the river in the morning, and we all notice a good deal about the birds. 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; Whistler's Mother – those are just about as far as we go.

LADY IN A BOX: So I thought. Thank you, Mr. Webb.

STAGE MANAGER: Thank you, Mr. Webb.

(MR. WEBB retires.)

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; only a few buggies on Main Street, the horses dozing at the hitching posts; you all remember what it's like. 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. EMILY comes along Main Street, carrying some books. There are some signs that she is imagining herself to be a lady of start ling 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 won't listen to you.

(She gives him an abrupt kiss.)

MR. WEBB: Golly, 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 down Main Street, throwing a ball up to dizzying heights and waiting to catch it again. This sometimes requires his taking six steps backward. He bumps into an OLD LADY invisible to us.)

GEORGE: Excuse me, Mrs. Forrest.

STAGE MANAGER: *(As Mrs. Forrest.)* Go out and play in the fields, young man. You got no business playing baseball on Main Street.

GEORGE: Awfully sorry, Mrs. Forrest. Hello, Emily.

EMILY: H'lo.

GEORGE: 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.

EMILY: Why, can you?

GEORGE: You certainly do stick to it, Emily. I don't see how you can sit still that long. I guess you like school.

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 ... just some little hint ...

EMILY: Oh I think *hints* are allowed. So, ah, 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. 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?

(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? How old would George be?

EMILY: I don't know.

- MRS. WEBB:** He must be almost sixteen.
- EMILY:** Mama. I made a speech in class today and I was very good.
- MRS. WEBB:** What was it about?
- EMILY:** The Louisiana Purchase. It was like silk off a spool. *(Pause.)* Mama, will you answer me a question, serious?
- MRS. WEBB:** Seriously, dear. Not serious.
- EMILY:** Seriously – Mama, am I good looking?
- MRS. WEBB:** 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. I never heard of such foolishness.
- EMILY:** Mama, were *you* pretty, once?
- MRS. WEBB:** *(A surprised pause.)* Yes, I was, if I do say it. Prettiest girl in town next to Mamie Cartwright.
- EMILY:** But, Mama, am I pretty enough ... to get anybody ... to get people interested in me?
- MRS. WEBB:** Emily, you make me tired. You're pretty enough for all normal purposes.
- 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.)

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 some people have begun building

a new bank in our town – 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 ... some scientific fellas have found a way of painting all that reading matter with a glue – a silicate glue – that’ll make it keep a thousand – two thousand years. Of course, they’ve put in a copy of Mr. Webb’s *Courier*. We’re putting in a Bible ... and a copy of the Magna Carta – and a copy of William Shakespeare’s plays. What do you say, folks? What do you think? *(He solicits input from the audience.)* All those are good. Y’know, Babylon once had two million people in it, and all we know about ’em is the names of the kings and some copies of wheat contracts ... and contracts for the sale of slaves. Yet every night all those families sat down to supper, and the meals got cooked, and the smoke went up the chimney. So I’m going to put a copy of this play in the cornerstone and then people a thousand years from now’ll know a few simple facts about us. So! People A Thousand Years From Now! This is the way we were in one town, in one province, in one country, on one continent, at the beginning of 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 has begun singing Blessed Be the Tie That Binds. SIMON STIMSON stands directing them.)

(Two ladders have been put on stage; GEORGE and EMILY mount them and apply themselves to their schoolwork. DR. GIBBS is seated in his kitchen reading.)

Well! Good deal of time’s gone by. Choir practice is going on in the United Church. The children are at home doing their schoolwork. The day’s running down like a tired clock.

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

GEORGE: Hsst! 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: 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?*

GEORGE: M-m-m.

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

GEORGE: Good night, Emily.

EMILY: Good night, George.

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. We'll do the same music as 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.

(He descends the ladder.)

DR. GIBBS: Make yourself comfortable, George; I'll only keep you a minute. 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 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 and you leave her to chop wood – like she's some hired girl we keep around the house but 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. Hmm. Probably Rebecca'll feel she ought to have some more, too. Wonder what could have happened to your mother.

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 goes to his place on the ladder. Laughter and good nights can be heard and presently MRS. GIBBS, MRS. SOAMES and MRS. WEBB come down Main Street.)

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, wa'n'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: We all know about Mr. Stimson,, and we all know about the troubles he's been through, and Dr. Ferguson knows too and if Dr. Ferguson keeps him on ... 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. 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. 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.)

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 with a lot of hens.

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 the girls 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. How'll that end, Frank?

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 it'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. *(She starts to tidy.)* 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.)

(REBECCA climbs up the ladder beside GEORGE.)

GEORGE: 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: 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, and Canada, and half the whole world?

GEORGE: Well ... prob'ly is.

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

STAGE MANAGER: Nine thirty. Most of the lights are out. No, 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.

WARREN: Evenin', Mr. Webb.

MR. WEBB: Quite a moon!

WARREN: Yep.

MR. WEBB: All quiet tonight?

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 ...

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

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.)

Goodnight.

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?

WARREN: I don't think he smokes cigarettes, Mr. Webb. Or, not more'n two or three a year.

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

WARREN: Good night, Mr. Webb.

(Exit.)

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 just can't sleep yet, Papa. The moonlight's so *wonderful*.

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: 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 Crofut 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 Crofut; The Crofut Farm; The County Seat; Sutton County.

GEORGE: What's funny about that?

REBECCA: But listen it's not finished: the 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: What do you know!

(The tables and chairs of the-two kitchens are still on the stage. The ladders and the small-bench are gone. The STAGE MANAGER comes in.)

STAGE MANAGER: Three years have gone by. The sun's come up over a thousand times. Some babies that weren't even born before have begun talking regular sentences already; and a number of people who thought they were young and spry have noticed that they can't bound up a flight of stairs like they used to. Summers and winters have cracked the mountains a little bit more and the rains have brought down some of the dirt. Millions of gallons of water went by the mill; and here and there a new home was set up under a roof. 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.

So: It's three years later. It's 1904. 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're done with geometry and Cicero's Orations, they suddenly feel themselves fit to be married. It's early morning, again. Only this time it's been raining – pouring – and thundering.

Mrs. Gibbs' garden, and Mrs. Webb's here: drenched. All those bean poles and pea vines: drenched. All yesterday over there on Main Street, the rain looked like curtains being blown along. Hm ... it may begin again any minute. There! *(A train whistle blows.)* You can hear the 5:45 for Boston.

(MRS. GIBBS and MRS. WEBB enter their kitchen and start the day as they did before.)

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*. As the poet said: You've got to love life to have life, and you've got to have life to love life It's a vicious circle.

NEWSOME: *(Off stage left.)* Giddap, Bessie!

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

(SI CROWELL has entered hurling imaginary newspapers into doorways; HOWIE NEWSOME has come along Main Street with Bessie.)

SI CROWELL: Morning, 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 our town ever had ... George Gibbs.

NEWSOME: Yep. Mighty fine ball player. Whoa! Bessie! I guess I can stop and talk if I've a mind to!

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

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

(CONSTABLE WARREN enters. They exchange good mornings.)

You're up early, Bill.

WARREN: Tryin' to prevent a flood. River's been risin' all night.

NEWSOME: Si Crowell here says George Gibbs' is retiring from baseball.

CONSTABLE WARREN: Yes, sir; that's the way it goes. Back in '84 we had a player, Si, name of Hank Todd. even George Gibbs couldn't touch him. Went down to Maine and become a parson. Howie, how does the weather look to you?

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?

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

MRS. GIBBS: Certainly hope it will.

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.

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

MRS. GIBBS: Thanks a lot, Howie. Tell your wife I hope she gets there to the wedding.

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

(HOWIE NEWSOME crosses to Mrs. Webb's house.)

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 ... and two of cream.

NEWSOME: That's what I thought, ma'am, so I brought extra.

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

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, both. We're counting on you at the wedding.

NEWSOME: We hope to git there. Couldn't miss that. Come on, Bessie.

(Exit HOWIE NEWSOME. 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.

MRS. GIBBS: Frank, I don't know how he'll get along. I've arranged his clothes 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 within a week.

DR. GIBBS: *(He pulls her down onto his lap.)* 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 county. I thought I'd make 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 it was like I'd never seen you before! There I was in the United Church marryin' a total stranger.

MRS. GIBBS: *(She gets up.)* 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.)

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: I get a shock every time I think of George setting out to be a family man – that great gangling thing! 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'd run out of conversation after a few weeks and eat our meals in silence. That's a fact. *(Both laugh.)* Well, you and I been conversing for twenty years now without any noticeable barren spells.

MRS. GIBBS: Good weather, bad weather – 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, crying.

MRS. GIBBS: Lord's sakes! This has got to stop. Rebecca! Come and get your breakfast.

(GEORGE comes rattling down the stairs, very brisk.)

GEORGE: Good morning, everybody. Only five more hours to live.

(Makes the gesture of cutting his throat and a loud 'k-k-k' 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! It's raining torrents. Put on your overshoes.

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. 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. Good morning, Mr. Webb.

(Enter MR. WEBB.)

MR. WEBB: Good morning, George.

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

MR. WEBB: Millions have followed it, George. Don't be the first to fly in the face of custom.

(He sits at the table, facing right.)

GEORGE: How is Emily?

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

GEORGE: She's *asleep!!!*

MRS. WEBB: No wonder! We were up 'til all hours. Now, you set down here with Mr. Webb a minute; and I'll see she doesn't come down and surprise you.

(Exit MRS. WEBB. Embarrassed 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 things. A girl's apt to be a mite nervous on her wedding day.

(Pause.)

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

MR. WEBB: Every man that's ever married has felt that way about it, George; but it hasn't been any use. For a while now, the women have it all their own. All those good women standing shoulder to shoulder making sure that the knot's tied in a mighty public way. A man looks pretty small at a wedding.

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 wonderful, a wonderful thing. And don't you forget that.

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

MR. WEBB: Well, 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. George, I was thinking the other night of some advice my father gave me. Charles, he said, start out early showing who's boss. Give an order, even if it don't make sense; just so she'll learn to obey. And he said: if 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: I didn't say it was good advice. I just said it was advice. 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? Oh, well, 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 coming downstairs for breakfast. She sends you her love but she doesn't want to lay eyes on you. Good-by.

GEORGE: Good-by.

(GEORGE crosses to his own home, bewildered and crestfallen. He dodges puddles and goes 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 anytime near it. Now, remember that.

STAGE MANAGER: Thank you very much, Mr. and Mrs. Webb.

(Both leave the stage. The STAGE MANAGER stares after them for a moment or so, then looks with surprise at the audience.)

Oh! That's the intermission, friends. You can stretch your legs. The washrooms are 'way over there, for those who need 'em. You might want to start right away. The ladies'll be putting out some refreshments here, so you can come on up and get some. We'll start again in fifteen minutes or so.

END OF ACT ONE

STAGE MANAGER: Are you all back? That's fine. We can get on, again.

Now, the First Part was called The Daily Life. This part is called Love and Marriage. There's another part coming after this: I reckon you can guess what that's about.

But, first! – you see, we want to know how all this began – this wedding, this spending a lifetime together. I'm awfully interested in how big things like that begin. You know how it is: you're twenty-one and you make some decisions; then *whisssh!* you're seventy: you've been a lawyer for fifty years, and that white-haired person at your side has eaten over *fifty thousand* meals with you.

How do such things begin? George and Emily are going to show you a conversation they had when they first knew that ... as the saying goes ... they were meant for each other. But before they do, I want you to remember what it was like to have been young – particularly the days when you were first in love. When you didn't quite see the street you were in and didn't quite hear what was said to you. You're just a little bit crazy.

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 from 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 MORGAN's drugstore.)

Yep, there they are coming from school down Main Street now.

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

EMILY: Good-bye, Louise. Oh, Ernestine! Can you come over tonight and do Latin? Isn't that Cicero the worst! Tell your mother you *have* to. G'bye.

(GEORGE, also carrying books, catches up with her.)

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

EMILY: *(Coolly.)* Why ... uh ... it isn't far. Thank you.

(She gives them to him.)

Good -by, Lizzy.

GEORGE: Good-by, 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. *(Pause.)* Well, since you ask me, I might as well say it right out, George –

(She catches sight of a teacher passing.)

Good-by, Miss Corcoran.

GEORGE: Good-by, Miss Corcoran. 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, we've been friends so long and, up to a year ago I used to like you a lot. And I used to watch you as you did everything ... because ... 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.

(They stand still in misery.)

GEORGE: I guess it's hard for a fella not to have faults creep into his character.

EMILY: I always expect a man to be perfect.

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

EMILY: Well, my father is, and your father is. I don't see why you shouldn't be.

GEORGE: But, it's the other way round: men aren't naturally good; but girls are.

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

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

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

(They advance toward the audience and make an abrupt right turn, opening the door of Morgan's drugstore. EMILY keeps her face down, ashamed of her frankness. The STAGE MANAGER, assuming the role of Mr. MORGAN, enters and stands between the audience and the counter of his soda fountain.)

STAGE MANAGER: 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 wagon.

STAGE MANAGER: *(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. What'll you have?

EMILY: I'll have a strawberry phosphate, thank you, Mr. Morgan.

GEORGE: No, no, Emily. Have an ice-cream soda with me. Two strawberry ice-cream sodas, Mr. Morgan.

STAGE MANAGER: *(Working the faucets.)* Two strawberry ice-cream sodas, yes sir. There are a hundred and twenty-five horses in our town this very minute. And now they're bringing in these auto-mobiles 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. (*He sees a customer, right.*) Yes, Mrs. Ellis. What can I do for you? (*He goes out.*)

EMILY: They're so expensive.

GEORGE: 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 I ought to be told.

EMILY: George, *please* don't think of that. I don't know why I said it. 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 ... 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: Maybe being away three years ... Maybe letters from here wouldn't be so interesting after a while. Our town isn't a very important place when you think of all the towns in the world ...

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. They start sipping the sodas through the straws.)

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: Why, George –

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 ... 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 about cattle judging and ... soil and ... things ...

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 tonight.

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

GEORGE: Emily, 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 say you were watching me when I ... well, I was doing the same about you. I always thought about you as one of the chief people I ... thought about. For three days now I've been trying to walk home with you; but something always got in the way. Yesterday, I was standing, waiting for you, and you walked home with *Miss Corcoran*.

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

GEORGE: Listen, Emily, 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, and even more so. That's what I think.

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

GEORGE: Emily.

EMILY: Y-yes, George?

GEORGE: Emily, if I *do* improve ... make a big change ... would you ... 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. The STAGE MANAGER enters, right.)

(Deeply embarrassed, but direct, 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. Look, here's my gold watch to keep until I come back with the money.

STAGE MANAGER: That's all right. Keep your watch. I'll trust you.

GEORGE: I'll be back in five minutes.

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

EMILY: Yes, thank you, Mr. Morgan. All over it.

GEORGE: *(Taking up the books from the counter.)* I'm ready.

(They walk in grave silence across the stage and pass through the Webbs' back door and disappear. The STAGE MANAGER watches them go out, then turns to the audience.)

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

(He stands waiting while STAGEHANDS arrange the chairs 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.)

(When all is ready the STAGE MANAGER strolls to the center of the stage, down front, and, musingly, addresses the audience.)

There are a lot of thoughts that go on during a wedding. We can't get them all in, naturally, and especially not into a wedding in our town, where they're awfully plain and short.

In this wedding I play the minister. That gives me the right to say a few things. 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 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 all my sermon. 'Twan't very long, anyway.

(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.)

(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 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. GEORGE starts to come down the right aisle of the theatre, through the audience. MEMBERS of his baseball team appear by the right proscenium pillar and start whistling and catcalling to him.)

THE BALL PLAYERS: Eh, George, George! Look at him – he looks scared to death. Yaow! George, you old geezer. We know what you're thinking! Don't disgrace the team! Whoo-oo-oo!

STAGE MANAGER: All right! All right! That'll do. That's enough of that. (*Smiling, he pushes them off the stage.*) There used to be an awful lot of that kind of thing at weddings in the old days, Rome – and later. We're more civilized now, so they say.

(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. His mother, from the front row, 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 mounted onto the stage. She too draws back, frightened, when she sees the congregation. 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: '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 CLERGYMAN, stands on the box, up center.)

MR. WEBB: 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-CLERGYMAN. EMILY proceeds up the aisle on her fathers arm.)

STAGE MANAGER: 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 clergyman'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: 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, 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. M ... marries N ... millions of them. The cottage, the honeymoon, the Sunday-afternoon drives in the Ford, the first rheumatism, the grandchildren, the second rheumatism, the deathbed, the reading of the will.

(He looks at the audience 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 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. They descend into the auditorium and run up the aisle joyously.)

(The STAGEHANDS arrange 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. The ACTORS 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. The third row has WALLY WEBB. The dead do not turn their heads or their eyes to right or left, but they sit in a

quiet way without stiffness. When they speak their tone is matter-of-fact, without sentimentality and, above all, without lugubriousness. The STAGE MANAGER takes his usual place.)

STAGE MANAGER: This time nine years have gone by, friends – summer, 1913.

Gradual changes in our town. Horses are getting rarer. Farmers are 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 our town. 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 – awful blue they are, up here – and all the towns that lie around it; and (*Then pointing down in the audience.*) there, quite a ways down, is our town. Yes, beautiful spot up here. Laurel and li-lacks. I often wonder why people like to be buried in a city cemetery when they might pass the same time up here. Over there (*Pointing to stage left.*) are the old stones – 1816, 1820. Strong-minded people that come a long way to be independent. Summer people walk around there laughing at the funny words on the tombstones ... it don't do any harm. And genealogists come up from the city – get paid by city people for looking up their ancestors. They want to make sure they're the right stock – original stock, you know. Well, I guess that don't do any harm, either. Wherever you come near the human race, there's layers and layers of nonsense ... Over there are some veterans of the wars. Iron flags on their graves ... boys who had a notion that some things are worth fighting for, home and country, though they'd never seen more than fifty miles of it themselves. All they knew was the idea, friends, just the idea that it was worth it. And they went and died about it. This here is the new part of the cemetery. Here's your friend Mrs. Gibbs, 'n, let me see – here's Mr. Stimson, organist at the United Church. And Mrs. Soames who enjoyed the wedding so – you remember? Oh, and a lot of others. And Editor Webb's boy, Wallace, whose appendix burst while he was on a Boy Scout trip up north.

Yes, an awful lot of sorrow has sort of quieted down up here. We all know how it is ... and then time ... and sunny days ... and rainy days ... and snow ... We're all glad they're in a beautiful place and we're coming up here ourselves when our fit's over.

Now there are some things we all know, but don't take out and look at very often. We all know that *something* is eternal. And it ain't names and it ain't houses, and it ain't earth, and it ain't even the stars – yep, even the stars disappear – still, everybody knows in their bones that *something* is eternal,

and that something has to do with human beings. The great people have been telling us that for five thousand 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.)

The dead ... don't stay interested in the living for very long. Gradually, gradually, they lose hold of the earth ... and ambitions ... and pleasures ... and suffering ... and love. They just 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; and all that time they're waitin'. Waitin' for ... something ... something important and great. Waitin' for the eternal part in them to burn its way clear. Some of the things they're going to say maybe'll hurt your feelings but mother'n daughter ... husband'n wife ... enemy'n enemy ... money'n miser ... all those important things grow pale around here. And what's left when memory's gone, and your identity, Mrs. Smith? Mr. Jones? What's left when that's all that's left?

(He looks at the audience a minute then turns to the stage.)

Well! There are some *living* people. Joe Stoddard, our undertaker, has just finished supervising a new-made grave. He'll go down and meet the bereaved, now.

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

MRS. GIBBS: Simon.

STAGE MANAGER: The grave's going to be over there. There ain't much more room over here among the Gibbises, so they're opening up a whole new Gibbs section over by Avenue B. You'll excuse me now. I see they're comin'.

(From left to center, at the back of the stage, comes a procession. All are under umbrellas. One can vaguely see: DR. GIBBS, GEORGE, the WEBBS, etc. They gather about a grave in the back center, 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. It was her second. There's a boy about four.

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

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.

A WOMAN FROM AMONG THE DEAD: It's on the same road we lived on.

A MAN AMONG THE DEAD: Yep, right smart farm.

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

A WOMAN AMONG THE DEAD: 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, 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.

A MAN AMONG THE DEAD: 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 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?

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, and it never sinks below a certain mark. It's fine.

(Her voice trails off; 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 Mrs. Carter's.

(She sees MR. CARTER among the dead.)

Oh, Mr. Carter, my little boy is spending the day at your house.

MR. CARTER: Is he?

EMILY: Yes, he loves it there. Mother Gibbs, we have a Ford, too. 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: Sh –

(The mourners 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.)

THE DEAD: Little cooler than it was. – Yes, that rain's cooled it off a little. – Those northeast winds always do the same thing, don't they? – 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 spot. 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. She 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 – 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, 1899. A Tuesday. – Do you want any special time of day?

EMILY: Oh, I want the whole day.

STAGE MANAGER: We'll begin at dawn. 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! ... And there's the livery stable.

(EMILY walks toward Main Street looking around.)

STAGE MANAGER: Yes, it's 1899. 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 – out west, at Clinton.

EMILY: Look! There's Howie Newsome. There's our policeman. But he's *dead*; he *died*.

(The voices of HOWIE NEWSOME, CONSTABLE WARREN and JOE, JR. are heard at the left of the stage. EMILY listens in delight.)

NEWSOME: Whoa, Bessie! – Bessie! 'Morning, Bill.

CONSTABLE WARREN: Morning, Howie.

NEWSOME: You're up early.

CONSTABLE WARREN: Been rescuin' a party; darn near froze to death, down by Leslieville there. Got drunk and laid out in the snowdrifts. Thought he was in bed when I shook 'im.

EMILY: Why, there's Joe ...

JOE: Good morning, Mr. Warren. 'Morning, Howie.

(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.

(HOWIE NEWSOME has entered along Main Street and brings the milk to MRS. WEBB's door.)

Good morning, Mr. Newsome. Whhhh – it's cold.

NEWSOME: Ten below by my barn, Mrs, Webb.

MRS. WEBB: Think of it! Keep yourself wrapped up.

(She takes her bottles in, shuddering.)

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 where he meets CONSTABLE WARREN. Their movements and voices are increasingly lively in the sharp air.)

MR. WEBB: Good morning, Bill.

CONSTABLE WARREN: Good morning, Mr. Webb. You're up early.

MR. WEBB: Been back to my old college back west. Been any trouble here?

CONSTABLE WARREN: Well, I was called up this mornin' to rescue a fella – darn near froze to death he was.

MR. WEBB: We must get it in the paper.

CONSTABLE WARREN: 'Twan't much.

EMILY: *(Whispers.)* Papa.

(MR. WEBB shakes the snow off his feet and enters his house. CONSTABLE WARREN goes off, right.)

MR. WEBB: Good morning, Mother.

MRS. WEBB: How did it go, Charles?

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

MRS. WEBB: Yes – can't think of anything that's happened, special. Been right cold. Howie Newsome says it's ten below over to his barn.

MR. WEBB: Yes, well, it's colder than that at Hamilton College. Students' ears are falling off. It ain't Christian. Paper have any mistakes in it?

MRS. WEBB: None that I noticed. Coffee's ready when you want it.

(He starts upstairs.)

Charles! 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. 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 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: "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:)

Good morning, Mama.

MRS. WEBB: *(Crossing to embrace and kiss her in her characteristic matter-of-fact manner)* Well, 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 found the post-card album on the doorstep when I brought in the milk– George Gibbs must have come over in the cold pretty early ...

EMILY: *(To herself.)* Oh, George! I'd forgotten that *(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. I married George Gibbs, Mama. You're a grandmother. Wally's dead, too, Mama. His appendix burst on a camping trip up north. 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 the city, so I had to send all the way to the capitol. *(Laughing.)* Wally has something for you, too. He made it at 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. Sh – here he comes.

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

EMILY: *(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.)

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-by. Good-by, world. Good-by, my beautiful town ... Mama and Papa. Good-by to ... clocks ticking and ... Mama's sunflowers. And ... food and ... coffee. And ... new-ironed dresses and ... hot baths ... and sleeping and waking. 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? I mean 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.

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 ... 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 .

A MAN AMONG THE DEAD: My boy Joel was a sailor – he knew 'em all. He'd set on the porch evenings and tell 'em all by name. Yes, sir, wonderful!

ANOTHER MAN AMONG THE DEAD: A star's mighty good company.

A WOMAN AMONG THE DEAD: Yes. Yes, 'tis.

STIMSON: Here's one of *them* coming.

THE DEAD: That's funny. – 'Tain't no time for one of them to be here. – Goodness sakes.

EMILY: Mother Gibbs, it's George.

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

EMILY: It's George.

(GEORGE enters from left and slowly comes toward them. GEORGE sinks to his knees at EMILY's grave, then drops his head into her lap..)

A MAN FROM AMONG THE DEAD: And my boy, Joel, who knew the stars, he used to say It took millions of years for that speck o' light to get to the earth. Don't seem like a body could believe it, but that's what he used to say – millions of years.

A WOMAN AMONG THE DEAD: 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. In the distance a clock is heard striking the hour very faintly. GEORGE rises and moves to his chair followed by all the others who are not yet seated.)

STAGE MANAGER: Most everybody's asleep in our town. There are a few lights on: Shorty Hawkins, down at the depot, has just watched the east-bound 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 our town. You get a good rest, too. Good night.

THE END