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Samuel French Acting Edition

Our Town

by Thornton Wilder



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FOREWORD TO *OUR TOWN*

You hold in your hands the *definitive* acting edition of Thornton Wilder's American classic *Our Town*, in short, the words of the play as the author wanted them spoken on the stage.

A Brief History of *Our Town* in Print

Our Town had its world premiere on Broadway at Henry Miller's Theatre on February 4, 1938. That same year, Coward-McCann published a trade edition of the play that Wilder had submitted before rehearsals began in December of 1937. The first Samuel French acting edition, which enshrined the Broadway production stage manager's prompt copy of the play, appeared in print in 1939. But it wasn't until 1956, nearly two decades later, that Thornton Wilder, drawing on these two texts, as well as his extensive involvement with the play in a variety of ways including production, translations, adaptations – even as an actor – finally sat down to craft his definitive version of *Our Town*. The resulting text contained over 700 changes, most of which involved stage directions and punctuation. Wilder asked that this version be used in all subsequent reprints of both the reading and acting editions of the play.

The new reading edition of Wilder's *Our Town* appeared in print for the first time in October of 1957 when Harper & Bros. (now HarperCollins) published *Three Plays*, a trade publication containing the definitive editions of *Our Town*, *The Skin of Our Teeth*, and *The Matchmaker*. (This volume, still in print today, includes a preface by Wilder in which he famously describes *Our Town* as “an attempt to find a value above all price for the smallest events in our daily life.”) Three years later, in 1960, Harper & Bros also published its own single-play edition, which formally replaced the earlier 1938 trade edition. But for reasons that have never been clear, the Samuel French acting edition was never updated to reflect Wilder's 1957 definitive take on his play – until now.

So it is that Samuel French and the Wilder family find themselves in the happy position, as part of the celebration of the 75th Anniversary of the play's opening on the Great White Way, of presenting to the theatrical community the definitive acting edition of *Our Town*. For the first time in history, all existing published versions of the play share the same text.

This acting edition is still the *Our Town* that we have been familiar with for decades. It has been available in bookstores and libraries since 1957. Since then, professional theatres have been encouraged – and in recent years have been required – to use this version of the text for their productions of *Our Town*. For the most part, the differences between the two acting editions involve changes in stage directions and punctuation. While subtle, they represent an important shift in tone, making the play more understated, less sentimental, and ultimately more universal.

From Reading Edition to Acting Edition

Transforming Wilder's definitive 1957 reading edition of *Our Town* into this acting edition required a shift in format from a book designed to serve the needs of the individual reader to a manual for staging a production.

To insure that the new acting edition would reflect all of Wilder's final adjustments in dialogue and punctuation, we used Wilder's 1957 definitive edition as a basis. Once the script was formatted, we carefully reviewed the blocking and stage directions. Part of this process involved repositioning some of the directions included in the 1957 text that had been grouped to enhance a reading experience. These stage directions have not been changed; rather, their placement has been adjusted for the benefit of actors and directors so that the blocking anticipates the lines of dialogue to which it relates. We also restored some of the detailed stage directions that were not appropriate for earlier reading editions of the play. Examples of such notes include lighting and sound effect cues and the detailed pantomime performed by Mrs. Gibbs and Mrs. Webb in their kitchens. With the exception of overly precise and confusing directions ("Xing two steps L. of L.C.") or blocking that contradicts the shift in the emotional tenor that Wilder indicated in his definitive treatment, (the instructions requiring Emily to weep throughout the scene in Mr. Morgan's drugstore in Act II), all blocking from the original acting edition has been restored in the construction of this new acting edition.

Finally, we reviewed the supplementary material in the 1939 acting edition: including the costume, property, scenic design, doubling and understudy plots, and Wilder's own notes to directors. (By the 1950s, the acting edition's original unwieldy thirteen-page lighting plot had been dropped from the text.) Our goal here was self-evident: to preserve the historical record of the play. And this we have done happily, with two exceptions: we have dropped from this new edition the simplistic synopsis called the "Story of the Play" and the listing of outdated press quotes intended to help companies publicize the show. In order to assist theatres producing *Our Town*, we have also taken this opportunity to add new supplementary material: the music and lyrics for "Blest Be The Tie That Binds," "Art Thou Weary, Art Thou Languid," and "Love Divine All Loves Excelling."

In 1938, Wilder spoke of *Our Town* as "the life of a village against the life of the stars." Wherever it is performed, may this famous work continue to give much pleasure to all those who produce it, act in it, and encounter it on the other side of the non-curtain. It is indeed significant that in this new century Thornton Wilder's *Our Town* – whether it be presented in a city or a town, indoors or under the stars, will henceforth be performed as the playwright intended it to be performed.

Many hands and eyes have contributed to this project, and long hours have gone into it. It is an honor for me to conclude this note by thanking the devoted staff at Samuel French, with whom it has been a privilege to work. Rosey Strub has carried the heavy water on the Wilder side. The Wilder family thanks her and takes special pleasure in knowing that her name now has an on-going presence in this publication.

Tappan Wilder
October, 2012

SOME SUGGESTIONS FOR THE DIRECTOR

It is important to maintain a continual *dryness* of tone – the New England understatement of sentiment, of surprise, of tragedy. A shyness about emotion. These significances are conveyed by the eyes and a sharpening and distinctness of the voice. (So in the Stage Manager on the Civil War veterans: “All they knew was the name, friends – the United States of America. The United States of America.” And in all the dealings of the mothers with their children where a matter-of-factness overlays the concern.)

It has already been proven that absence of scenery does not constitute a difficulty and that the cooperative imagination of the audience is stimulated by that absence. There remain, however, two ways of producing the play. One, with a constant subtle adjustment of lights and sound effects; and one through a still bolder acknowledgment of artifice and make-believe: the rooster’s crow, the train and factory whistles, and school bells frankly, man-made and in the spirit of “play”. I am inclined to think that this latter approach, though apparently “amateurish” and rough at first, will prove the more stimulating in the end and will prepare for the large claim on attention and imagination in the last act. The scorn of verisimilitude throws all the greater emphasis on the ideas which the play hopes to offer.

It seems advisable that at the opening of the play where the audience is first introduced to pantomime and imaginary props, that Mrs. Gibbs and Mrs. Webb in the preparation of breakfast perform much of their business with their backs to the audience, and do not distract and provoke its attention with too distinct and perhaps puzzling a picture of the many operations of coffee-grinding, porridge-stirring, etc.

At the beginning of the wedding scene there is an abrupt change of approach. The audience is hearing the thoughts of the characters and is seeing a symbolical statement of attitudes that never were consciously expressed by the characters in their daily life. This change is greatly aided by the entrance of the bride and groom through the aisles of the auditorium; and by the fact that it is accompanied by the very soft singing of the hymns by the congregation. It would be well that George on arriving on the stage draws back well toward the proscenium, indicating that this scene does not literally take place in the church or before the church. After Mrs. Gibbs’s line: “George! If anyone should hear you! Now stop. Why, I’m ashamed of you!” George passes his hand over his forehead, as though emerging from a dream, and with a complete change of matter, returning to realism, explains: “What? Where’s Emily?” Mrs. Gibbs and George do not touch each other during the scene until she straightens his tie, and the strong emotion is indicated by tension,

not by weeping. In the following scene between Emily and her father, however, Emily is in tears and flings herself into her father's arms.

The Stage Manager/Clergyman's speech: "I've married over two hundred couples in my day," etc., is not delivered to the village congregation before him, but across their heads, an almost dreamy meditation, during which the tableau on the stage "freezes".

In the last act it is important to remove from the picture of the seated dead any suggestion of the morbid or lugubrious. They sit easily; there is nothing of the fixed and unwinking about their eyes. The impression is of patient composed waiting.

Emily's revisiting her home and her farewell to the world is under strong emotion, but the emotion is that of wonder rather than of sadness. Even the "I love you all, everything!" is realization and discovery as much as it is poignancy.

Thornton Wilder
April, 1939

OUR TOWN was first performed at the McCarter Theatre, Princeton, New Jersey, on January 22, 1938.

The first New York performance of *OUR TOWN* was at Henry Miller's Theatre, February 4, 1938. It was produced and directed by Jed Harris. The technical director was Raymond Sovey; the costumes were designed by Madame Hélène Pons. The cast was as follows:

STAGE MANAGER	Frank Craven
DR. GIBBS	Jay Fassett
JOE CROWELL	Raymond Roe
HOWIE NEWSOME	Tom Fadden
MRS. GIBBS	Evelyn Varden
MRS. WEBB	Helen Carew
GEORGE GIBBS	John Craven
REBECCA GIBBS	Marilyn Erskine
WALLY WEBB	Charles Wiley, Jr.
EMILY WEBB	Martha Scott
PROFESSOR WILLARD	Arthur Allen
MR. WEBB	Thomas W. Ross
WOMAN IN THE BALCONY	Carrie Weller
MAN IN THE AUDITORIUM	Walter O. Hill
LADY IN THE BOX	Aline McDermott
SIMON STIMSON	Philip Coolidge
MRS. SOAMES	Doro Merande
CONSTABLE WARREN	E. Irving Locke
SI CROWELL	Billy Redfield
BASEBALL PLAYERS	Alfred Ryder, William Roehrick, Thomas Coley
SAM CRAIG	Francis G. Cleveland
JOE STODDARD	William Wadsworth
ASSISTANT STAGE MANAGERS	Thomas Morgan, Alfred Ryder
PEOPLE OF THE TOWN	Carrie Weller, Alice Donaldson, Walter O. Hill, Arthur Allen, Charles Melody, Katharine Raht, Mary Elizabeth Forbes, Dorothy Nolan, Jean Platt, Barbara Brown, Alida Stanley, Barbara Burton, Lyn Swann, Dorothy Ryan, Shirley Osborn, Emily Boileau, Ann Weston, Leon Rose, John Irving Finn, Van Shem, Charles Walters, William Short, Frank Howell, Max Beck, James Malaidy, Charles Wiley, Sr.

CHARACTERS

(in the order of their appearance)

STAGE MANAGER

DR. GIBBS

JOE CROWELL

HOWIE NEWSOME

MRS. GIBBS

MRS. WEBB

GEORGE GIBBS

REBECCA GIBBS

WALLY WEBB

EMILY WEBB

PROFESSOR WILLARD

MR. WEBB

WOMAN IN THE BALCONY

MAN IN THE AUDITORIUM

LADY IN THE BOX

SIMON STIMSON

MRS. SOAMES

CONSTABLE WARREN

SI CROWELL

THREE BASEBALL PLAYERS

SAM CRAIG

JOE STODDARD

FARMER MCCARTY

MAN AMONG THE DEAD

WOMAN AMONG THE DEAD

SETTING

The entire play takes place in Grover's Corners, New Hampshire.

THE DOUBLING AND UNDERSTUDY PLOT

- 1) **PROFESSOR WILLARD:** sings in choir, plays **A MAN AMONG THE DEAD**, understudies **STAGE MANAGER** and **MR. WEBB**.
- 2) **WOMAN IN BALCONY:** sings in choir, plays **A WOMAN AMONG THE DEAD**, understudies **MRS. WEBB**, **MRS. SOAMES**.
- 3) **MAN IN AUDITORIUM:** plays **BASEBALL PLAYER**, is **ASSISTANT STAGE MANAGER**, understudies **GEORGE**.
- 4) **LADY IN THE BOX:** sings in choir, understudies **MRS. GIBBS**.
- 5) **BASEBALL PLAYER:** is **ASSISTANT STAGE MANAGER**, understudies **SIMON STIMSON** and **SAM CRAIG**.
- 6) **FARMER MCCARTY:** understudies **CONSTABLE WARREN**, **JOE STODDARD**, and **A MAN AMONG THE DEAD**.
- 7) **STAGE MANAGER:** plays **SAM CRAIG**, understudies **HOWIE NEWSOME** and **PROFESSOR WILLARD**.
- 8) **CHOIR SINGER:** understudies **DOC GIBBS**, and **MAN IN AUDITORIUM**.
- 9) **CHOIR SINGER:** understudies **EMILY** and **REBECCA**, and **LADY IN BOX**, and **WOMAN IN BALCONY**.

If no understudy is engaged for the **THREE BOYS**:

In case of illness of **JOE CROWELL**, scene must be cut and **STAGE MANAGER**'s succeeding speech also cut.

WALLY understudies **SI CROWELL** (**STAGE MANAGER**'s introductory line being changed accordingly to cover **WALLY**).

SI. CROWELL understudies **WALLY** (with same change in Act II)

BASEBALL PLAYERS can be reduced from three to two without changes in lines.

Lines of **A WOMAN FROM AMONG THE DEAD** can be spoken by **MRS. SOAMES**.

Lines of **A MAN FROM AMONG THE DEAD** can be spoken by **FARMER MCCARTY**.

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, leaning against the right proscenium pillar, watches the late arrivals in the audience.)

(When the auditorium is in complete darkness he speaks:)

STAGE MANAGER. This play is called “Our Town”.

It was written by Thornton Wilder; produced and directed by A... (*or: produced by A...; directed by B...*). 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 Grover’s Corners, New Hampshire – just across the Massachusetts line: latitude 42 degrees 40 minutes; longitude 70 degrees 37 minutes.

(The lights start to glow into a dawn effect, which is followed by a gradual morning light, which increases to noon through the action of the act.)

STAGE MANAGER. *(cont.)* The First Act shows a day in our town. The day is May 7, 1901. The time is just before dawn.

(Cock crows offstage.)

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

(He stares at it for a moment, then goes upstage.)

Well, I'd better show you how our town lies. Up here – *(that is: parallel with the back wall)* – is Main Street. Way back there is the railway station; tracks go that way. Polish Town's across the tracks, and some Canuck families. *(toward the left)* Over there is the Congregational Church; across the street's the Presbyterian. Methodist and Unitarian are over there. *(off down right)* Baptist is down in the holla' by the river. Catholic Church is over beyond the tracks. Here's the Town Hall and Post Office combined; jail's in the basement. Bryan once made a speech from these very steps here. Along here's *(Main Street, parallel with the back wall)* a row of stores. Hitching posts and horse blocks in front of them. First automobile's going to come along in about five years – belonged to Banker Cartwright, our richest citizen...lives in the big white house up on the hill. Here's the grocery store and here's Mr. Morgan's drugstore. *(pointing right and left behind him)* 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, noontimes, 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...hollyhocks...heliotrope... and a lot of burdock. (*crosses the stage*) In those days our newspaper come out twice a week – the *Grover's Corners Sentinel* – and this is Editor Webb's house. 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.*) Right here's... a big butternut tree. (*He returns to his place by the right proscenium pillar and looks at the audience for a minute.*) Nice town, y'know what I mean? Nobody very remarkable ever come out of it, s'far as we know. The earliest tombstones in the cemetery up there on the mountain say 1670-1680 – they're Grovers and Cartwrights and Gibbsses and Herseys – same names as are around here now. Well, as I said: it's about dawn. The only lights on in town are in a cottage over by the tracks where a Polish mother's just had twins. And in the Joe Crowell house, where Joe Junior's getting up so as to deliver the paper. And in the depot, where Shorty Hawkins is gettin' ready to flag the 5:45 for Boston. (*A train whistle is heard. The STAGE MANAGER takes out his watch and nods.*)

Naturally, out in the country – all around – there've been lights on for some time, what with milkin's and so on. But town people sleep late. So – another day's begun. There's Doc Gibbs comin' down Main Street now, comin' back from that baby case.

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

STAGE MANAGER. (*cont.*) And here’s his wife comin’ downstairs to get breakfast. Doc Gibbs died in 1930. The new hospital’s named after him. Mrs. Gibbs died first – long time ago, in fact. She went out to visit her daughter, Rebecca, who married an insurance man in Canton, Ohio, and died there – pneumonia – but her body was brought back here. She’s up in the cemetery there now – in with a whole mess of Gibbises and Herseys – she was Julia Hersey ’fore she married Doc Gibbs in the Congregational Church over there. In our town we like to know the facts about everybody.

(**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.)

There’s Mrs. Webb, coming downstairs to get her breakfast, too.

(**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.)

– That’s Doc Gibbs. Got that call at half past one this morning.

(*sound of newspapers sliding along the verandah*)

And there comes Joe Crowell, Jr., delivering Mr. Webb’s *Sentinel*.

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

JOE CROWELL, JR. Morning, Doc Gibbs.

DR. GIBBS. Morning, Joe.

JOE CROWELL, JR. Somebody been sick, Doc?

DR. GIBBS. No. Just some twins born over in Polish Town.

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

DR. GIBBS. Yes, I'll take it.

(JOE hands paper to DR. GIBBS.)

– Anything serious goin' on in the world since Wednesday?

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

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

JOE CROWELL, JR. Well, of course, it's none of my business – but I think if a person starts out to be a teacher, she ought to stay one. *(starts off, throwing papers)*

(MRS. GIBBS crosses to stove to put bacon in skillet.)

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

JOE CROWELL, JR. *(stops)* Fine, Doc, I never think about it at all. Only like you said, it always tells me when it's going to rain. *(starts off again, throwing papers)*

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

JOE CROWELL, JR. No, sir.

DR. GIBBS. Sure?

(MRS. WEBB puts coffee on stove.)

JOE CROWELL, JR. Yessir.

DR. GIBBS. Knee ever make a mistake?

JOE CROWELL, JR. No, sir.

(JOE goes off. DR. GIBBS stands reading his paper. MRS. GIBBS crosses to cupboard, cuts several slices of bread, then cuts a pie.)

(MRS. WEBB mixes, rolls, and cuts biscuits at table by stove.)

STAGE MANAGER. Want to tell you something about that boy Joe Crowell there. Joe was awful bright – graduated from high school here, head of his class. So he got a scholarship to Massachusetts Tech. Graduated head of his class there, too. It was all wrote up in the Boston paper at the time.

(DR. GIBBS turns paper inside out, yawns. MRS. GIBBS opens cupboard for tablecloth, crosses to spread it on table, crosses to cupboard for cup and spoon, crosses to set them on table for DR. GIBBS.)

Goin' to be a great engineer, Joe was. But the war broke out and he died in France. – All that education for nothing.

(The sound of milkbottles is heard offstage.)

HOWIE NEWSOME. *(off left)* Giddap, Bessie! What's the matter with you today?

(MRS. GIBBS crosses to stove, turns bacon, breaks four eggs into skillet.)

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

(HOWIE NEWSOME, about thirty, in overalls, comes along Main Street from the left, walking beside an invisible horse and wagon and carrying an imaginary rack with milk bottles. The sound of clinking milk bottles. The sound of clinking milk bottles continues through HOWIE's scene except when he sets down the rack. He stops center to talk to DR. GIBBS.)

HOWIE NEWSOME. Morning, Doc.

DR. GIBBS. Morning, Howie.

HOWIE NEWSOME. Somebody sick?

DR. GIBBS. Pair of twins over to Mrs. Goruslawski's.

HOWIE NEWSOME. *(starting towards Mrs. Webb's trellis)*

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

DR. GIBBS. Goin' to rain, Howie?

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

(horse whinny off left)

Come on, Bessie. *(sets rack down, sets out two bottles in trellis)*

DR. GIBBS. Hello Bessie.

(He strokes the horse, which has remained center.)

How old is she, Howie?

HOWIE NEWSOME. *(takes rack, crosses towards MRS. GIBBS)*

Going on seventeen. Bessie's all mixed up about the route ever since the Lockharts stopped takin' their quart of milk every day.

(MRS. GIBBS, after glancing at HOWIE through window, crosses to trellis.)

HOWIE NEWSOME. She wants to leave 'em a quart just the same – keeps scolding me the hull trip.

(He reaches MRS. GIBBS' back door. She is waiting for him.)

MRS. GIBBS. *(opening the door, which she leaves open)* Good morning, Howie.

HOWIE NEWSOME. *(sets rack down and hands her two bottles)* Morning, Mrs. Gibbs. Doc's just comin' down the street.

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

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

(He passes DR. GIBBS up center on his way offstage.)

Doc!

DR. GIBBS. Howie!

MRS. GIBBS. *(taking milk to cupboard and calling upstairs)*

Children! Children! Time to get up.

HOWIE NEWSOME. Come on, Bessie!

(He goes off right.)

MRS. GIBBS. George! Rebecca!

(MRS. WEBB puts biscuits in oven, gets tablecloth, dishes, etc., from cupboard and lays table, making several trips.)

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

MRS. GIBBS. *(taking bread from the cupboard to the table)*

Everything all right, Frank?

DR. GIBBS. Yes. I declare – easy as kittens.

MRS. GIBBS. *(crossing to stove for coffee pot)* Bacon'll be ready in a minute. Set down and drink your coffee. *(crossing to pour coffee in his cup, then sets pot back on stove)* You can catch a couple hours' sleep this morning, can't you?

DR. GIBBS. *(crossing to the sink and washing his hands)* Hm!...Mrs. Wentworth's coming at eleven. Guess I know what it's about, too. Her stummick ain't what it ought to be.

MRS. GIBBS. *(picks silverware out of a drawer)* 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. *(crossing to set three places at the table)* 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. (*Drying his hands at the sink. MRS. GIBBS is busy at the stove.*) Is he sassy to you?

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

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

MRS. GIBBS. George!

DR. GIBBS. George, look sharp!

GEORGE'S VOICE. Yes, Pa!

(**MRS. GIBBS** turns eggs.)

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.

(*He exits upstairs.*)

MRS. WEBB. Walleee! Emileee! You'll be late for school! Walleee! You wash yourself good or I'll come up and do it myself. (*serves two dishes of oatmeal, which she places on the table*)

REBECCA. (*offstage*) Ma! What dress shall I wear?

MRS. GIBBS. (*crosses to cupboard for two plates and crosses to stove*) 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. (*serves one plate and sets it on the table for GEORGE*)

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. (*serves second plate*) Now, Rebecca, you always look *very* nice.

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

MRS. GIBBS. (*crossing to set plate for REBECCA*) I'll come and slap the both of you, – that's what I'll do.

(*A factory whistle sounds.*)

STAGE MANAGER. We've got a factory in our town, too – hear it? Makes blankets. Cartwrights own it and it brung 'em a fortune.

(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.)

(MRS. GIBBS crosses to stove for coffee pot, pours coffee for GEORGE, replaces pot on stove, crosses to cupboard to pour glass of milk, places it on the table for REBECCA, goes to cupboard for butter.)

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

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

MRS. WEBB. *(She sits and eats.)* You know the rules well as I do – no books at table. As for me, I'd rather have my children healthy than bright.

(WALLY puts book into bag, annoyed, then eats.)

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. *(rises and crosses for milk; returns to pour for both, replaces milk and sits)*

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

MRS. GIBBS. *(crosses to table and sets down butter)* 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. *(crosses to stove to pour her own coffee)* 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. (*crosses between children with cup, sips*)

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. (*crosses to set cup above the stove*)

(*An old-fashioned schoolbell is heard in the distance.*)

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 and exit.*)

(*The STAGE MANAGER goes off, unobtrusively, right.*)

MRS. WEBB. Walk fast, but you don’t have to run. Wally, pull up your pants at the knee. Stand up straight, Emily. (*clears the table in two quick trips, putting dishes in the sink, then gets two bowls from under the sink*)

MRS. GIBBS. (*as the children start, following them a few steps out of the trellis*) Tell Miss Foster I send her my best congratulations – can you remember that?

REBECCA. Yes, Ma.

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

ALL. Good-by.

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

(sounds of excited chickens)

MRS. GIBBS. *(feeding chickens)* 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? *(flinging last of her feed, which causes loud clucks)*

(She shakes her apron.)

(MRS. WEBB, laden with two large bowls, crosses through trellis, sits on bench and begins stringing beans.)

MRS. GIBBS. Oh, don't be so scared. Nobody's going to hurt you. *(MRS. GIBBS turning to catch sight of MRS. WEBB)* Good morning, Myrtle. How's your cold?

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

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

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

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

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

(Pause. 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. First I thought he was a patient wantin' to see Dr. Gibbs. 'N he wormed his way into my parlor, and, Myrtle Webb, (*both stop work*) 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! (*continues work*) Why, it was so big I didn't know where to put it and I almost give it to Cousin Hester Wilcox.

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

MRS. GIBBS. I don't know.

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

MRS. GIBBS. Well, if I could get the Doctor to take the money and go away someplace on a real trip, I'd sell it like that. (*stops work*) – Y'know, Myrtle, it's been the dream of my life to see Paris, France.

(*glances shyly at MRS. WEBB, who is shocked, then laughs, hand to face*)

– Oh, I don't know. It sounds crazy, I suppose, but for years I've been promising myself that if we ever had the chance –

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

MRS. GIBBS. (*continues to work through scene*) Well, I did beat about the bush a little and said that if I got a legacy – that's the way I put it – I'd make him take me somewhere.

MRS. WEBB. M-m-m...What did he say?

MRS. GIBBS. You know how he is. I haven't heard a serious word out of him since I've known him. No, he said, it might make him discontented with Grover's Corners to go traipsin' about Europe; better let well enough alone, he says. 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 over to the Civil War, only Dr. Gibbs being one of the greatest experts in the country just makes him despair.

MRS. GIBBS. It's a fact! Dr. Gibbs is never so happy as when he's at Antietam or Gettysburg. The times I've walked over those hills, Myrtle, stopping at every bush and pacing it all out, like we were going to buy it.

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

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

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

STAGE MANAGER. Thank you, ladies. Thank you very much.

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

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

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

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

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

STAGE MANAGER. Afraid we won't have time for that, Professor. We might have a few words on the history of man here.

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

STAGE MANAGER. And the population, Professor Willard?

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

STAGE MANAGER. Just a moment, Professor.

(He whispers into the PROFESSOR's ear.)

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

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

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

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

(Exit PROFESSOR WILLARD.)

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

(MRS. WEBB appears at her back door.)

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

STAGE MANAGER. Thank you, Mrs. Webb.

MRS. WEBB. Charles! Everybody's waitin'.

(Exit MRS. WEBB.)

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

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

MR. WEBB. Well...I don't have to tell you that we're run here by a Board of Selectmen. – All males vote at the age of twenty-one. Women vote indirect. We're lower middle class: sprinkling of professional men...ten per cent illiterate laborers. Politically, we're eighty-six per cent Republicans; six per cent Democrats; four per cent Socialists; rest, indifferent. Religiously, we're eighty-five per cent Protestants; twelve per cent Catholics; rest, indifferent.

STAGE MANAGER. Have you any comments, Mr. Webb?

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

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

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

MR. WEBB. (*amused*) Well, ma'am, I wouldn't know what you'd call *much*. Satiddy nights the farmhands meet down in Ellery Greenough's stable and holler some. We've got one or two town drunks, but they're always having remorsees 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. Right good for snake bite, y'know – always was.

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

STAGE MANAGER. Come forward, will you, where 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 withdraws without waiting for an answer.*)

MR. WEBB. (*tolerantly*) Well, I dunno...I guess we're all hunting like everybody else for a way the diligent

and sensible can rise to the top and the lazy and quarrelsome can sink to the bottom. But it ain't easy to find. Meanwhile, we do all we can to help those that can't help themselves and those that can we leave alone. – Are there any other questions?

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

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

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.

(Lights are now at high noon. Chicken sounds are again heard for a moment. Shrill girls' voices are heard, off left. MR. WEBB kneels to pick grass from edge of walk.)

No, sir. It's later than I thought. There are the children coming home from school already.

(EMILY comes along Main Street, carrying some books. There are some signs that she is imagining herself to be a lady of startling elegance.)

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

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

EMILY. Papa, you're terrible. One minute you tell me to stand up straight and the next minute you call me names. I just don't listen to you.

(She gives him an abrupt kiss then strolls to the trellis.)

MR. WEBB. *(rising)* Golly, I never got a kiss from such a great lady before.

(He goes off pushing the lawn-mower. EMILY leans over and picks some flowers by the gate of her house.)

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

(STAGE MANAGER smiles at audience and drifts off downstage. GEORGE turns shyly, peering around the Webb house to see if EMILY is there.)

– Hello, Emily.

EMILY. *(shyly turning from trellis)* H'lo.

GEORGE. *(edging down, socking mitt with baseball)* 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. *(puts ball back in pocket, looks at own house)* 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.

(BOTH face mostly front, shy throughout.)

EMILY. *(pleased at his admission)* 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. Well, I always feel it's something you have to go through.

GEORGE. Yeah.

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

GEORGE. Yeah. – Emily, what do you think? We might work out a kinda telegraph from your window to mine; and once in a while you could give me a kinda hint or two about one of those algebra problems.

(EMILY looks at him, shocked.)

I don't mean the answers, Emily, of course not... 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.

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

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

EMILY. You mean the house and everything?

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

GEORGE. Yeah. *(Pause. Gets ball out; edges away.)* Well, thanks...I better be getting out to the baseball field. Thanks for the talk, Emily. – Good afternoon, Mrs. Webb.

(EMILY, wrapt in thoughts of GEORGE, looks after him.)

MRS. WEBB. Good afternoon, George.

GEORGE. So long, Emily.

(crosses off, socking ball into mitt)

EMILY. So long, George.

MRS. WEBB. Emily, come and help me string these beans for the winter.

(EMILY sits and helps.)

George Gibbs let himself have a real conversation, didn't he? Why, he's growing up. How old would George be?

EMILY. *(coming out of trance, protesting too much)* I don't know.

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

EMILY. *(changing the subject)* Mama, I made a speech in class today and I was very good.

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

EMILY. The Louisiana Purchase. It was like silk off a spool. I'm going to make speeches all my life. (*holding up a bean in both hands*) – Mama, are these big enough?

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

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

MRS. WEBB. Seriously, dear – not serious.

EMILY. Seriously, – will you?

MRS. WEBB. Of course, I will.

EMILY. (*after a brief pause, expectantly*) Mama, am I good looking?

MRS. WEBB. (*steals a quick look at her*) Yes, of course you are. All my children have got good features; I'd be ashamed if they hadn't.

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

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

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

MRS. WEBB. I *am* telling you the truth.

EMILY. (*whedding a bit*) Mama, were *you* pretty?

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

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

MRS. WEBB. (*turning on her, firmly*) Emily, you make me tired. Now stop it. You're pretty enough for all normal purposes. (*rises, taking bowl with her*) – Come along now and bring that bowl with you. (*She exits through trellis.*)

EMILY. (*picking up bowl from floor and following*) Oh, Mama, you're no help at all.

(During preceding scene, the lights have gradually dimmed to late afternoon. Now they slowly change to night.)

STAGE MANAGER. *(appears with manuscript under his arm)*

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

There are some more things we want to explore about this town.

(He comes to the center of the stage. During the following speech the lights gradually dim to darkness, leaving only a spot on him.)

I think this is a good time to tell you that the Cartwright interests have just begun building a new bank in Grover's Corners – had to go to Vermont for the marble, sorry to say. And they've asked a friend of mine what they should put in the cornerstone for people to dig up...a thousand years from now...Of course, they've put in a copy of *The New York Times* and a copy of Mr. Webb's *Sentinel*....We're kind of interested in this because 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. We're putting in a Bible...and the Constitution of the United States – and a copy of William Shakespeare's plays. What do you say, folks? What do you think? 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 father came home from his work, and the smoke went up the chimney, – same as here. And even in Greece and Rome, all we know about the *real* life of the people is what we can piece together out of the

joking poems and the comedies they wrote for the theatre back then. So I'm going to have a copy of this play put in the cornerstone and the people a thousand years from now'll know a few simple facts about us – more than the Treaty of Versailles and the Lindbergh flight. See what I mean? So – people a thousand years from now – this is the way we were in the provinces north of New York 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 partially concealed in the orchestra pit has begun singing "Blessed Be the Tie That Binds".)*

(SIMON STIMSON stands directing them.)

(Two ladders have been pushed onto the stage; they serve as indication of the second story in the Gibbs and Webb houses. GEORGE and EMILY mount them, and apply themselves to their schoolwork.)

(DR. GIBBS has entered and is seated in his kitchen reading.)

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

(He listens a minute, then withdraws downstage.)

(At the end of the first line of the hymn, lights in the pit have come up showing the heads of the choir silhouetted as they face the stage, while SIMON STIMSON conducts them, facing the audience, – now slightly drunk.)

SIMON STIMSON. *(as verse ends)* Now look here, everybody. Music come into the world to give pleasure.

*This music appears on page 101 in the back of this Acting Edition.

(**EMILY** leans out the window and peers at **GEORGE** a moment, then works again.)

(Choir starts again, "Blessed Be the Tie That Binds" with increasing volume. At the end of the second phrase:)

(gently) Softer!

(They still increase in volume, and he suddenly becomes furious.)

Softer!

(Choir stops.)

Get it out of your heads that music's only good when it's loud. You leave loudness to the Methodists. You couldn't beat 'em, even if you wanted to. Now again. Tenors!

(Choir sings three verses of "Blessed Be the Tie That Binds".)

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?

(**DR. GIBBS** comes downstairs and sits at the table, takes a book from it, reads.)

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.

(First verse of hymn ends.)

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. (*He does not see.*)

EMILY. In square yards of wallpaper. (*giving him more than a hint*)

GEORGE. Wallpaper (*a great light breaking*) – oh, I see.

(*EMILY looks at him beaming agreement. He erases and rewrites.*)

Thanks a lot, Emily.

EMILY. You're welcome. (*looks out*) My, isn't the moonlight *terrible*? And choir practice going on. (*listens hard a moment, awed*) – I think if you hold your breath you can hear the train all the way to Contoocook.

(*GEORGE holds his breath, leaning out of the window.*)

Hear it?

GEORGE. M-m-m – What do you know!

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

GEORGE. Good night, Emily. And thanks.

EMILY. Good night, George.

(*BOTH return unwillingly to work, but almost immediately give up and gaze at the moon, chins on hands.*)

SIMON STIMSON. (*as the third verse ends*) 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.

(*Choir raises hands. DR. GIBBS puts down book, ponders.*)

That'll be fine; that'll be right nice. We'll do the same music we did for Jane Trowbridge's last month. – Now we'll do: "Art Thou Weary; Art Thou

Languid?" It's a question, ladies and gentlemen, make it talk. Ready.

(Choir sings two verses of "Art Thou Weary, Art Thou Languid?", the lights fading on them as they start. SIMON STIMSON disappears.)*

DR. GIBBS. *(calling offstage to upstairs)* 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 sits.)

George, how old are you?

GEORGE. I? I'm sixteen, almost seventeen.

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

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

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

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

DR. GIBBS. *(never harshly)* Well, George, while I was in my office today I heard a funny sound...and what do you think it was? It was your mother chopping wood.

(GEORGE turns slowly, ashamed.)

DR. GIBBS. There you see your mother – getting up early; cooking meals all day long; washing and ironing; – and still she has to go out in the back yard and chop wood. I suppose she just got tired of asking you. She just gave up and decided it was

*This music appears on page 102 in the back of this Acting Edition.

easier to do it herself. And you eat her meals, and put on the clothes she keeps nice for you, and you run off and play baseball – like she's some hired girl we keep around the house but that we don't like very much.

(**GEORGE** *snivels.*)

Well, I knew all I had to do was call your attention to it. Here's a handkerchief, son.

(*Lays it on the table. GEORGE takes it, blows nose.*)

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. Choir practice never was as late as this before.

GEORGE. (*still broken up*) 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. (*finally, gently*) ...Just about time you retired, don't you think?

GEORGE. Yes, Pa. (*lays handkerchief by his father who pockets it*)

(**GEORGE** *mounts to his place on the ladder, gazes at the moon. DR. GIBBS soon resumes reading.*)

(*Laughter and good nights can be heard off stage left and presently MRS. GIBBS, MRS. SOAMES and MRS. WEBB come down Main Street. When they arrive at the corner of the stage they stop.*)

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

(Women's voices respond.)

MRS. WEBB. *(calling off left)* 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.

(They stroll silently.)

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. *(scandalized)* Naturally I didn't want to say a word about it in front of those others, *(looks offstage)* 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. WEBB turns, annoyed.)

MRS. GIBBS. Now, Louella!

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

MRS. GIBBS. Now, Louella! We all know about Mr. Stimson, and we all know about the troubles he's been through, and Dr. Ferguson knows too, and if Dr. Ferguson keeps him on there in his job 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. *(acidly)* No, it isn't, Louella. It's getting better. I've been in that choir twice as long as you have. It doesn't happen anywhere near so often...My, I hate to go to bed on a night like this. – I better hurry. Those children'll be sitting up till all hours. Good night, Louella.

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

(EMILY, as MRS. WEBB passes her, excitedly blows out – i.e., switches off – the light that shines on her face from the ladder-shelf, and again gazes at the moon.)

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. *(laughs at the thought)* You'd think we'd been to a dance the way the menfolk carry on.

(Both laugh and start on their ways.)

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

(GEORGE snaps off the light on his ladder-shelf as his mother goes by.)

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

DR. GIBBS. *(looks at pocketwatch)* 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.

(He puts book reluctantly on the table and rises. They stroll out arm in arm along the footlights.)

(A bobwhite calls three times. They speak quietly.)

Isn't that wonderful?

(They stop to survey the moonlit scene out front.)

What did you do all the time I was away?

DR. GIBBS. *(interested, though he tries to disapprove)* 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. Ferguson can't forgive him forever.

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

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

DR. GIBBS. *(smiling)* 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. *(pats her back, pushes her, pouting, 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.

(Turns inside trelis to close door. MRS. GIBBS picks up string from floor and, winding it up, goes to cupboard to leave it.)

I reckon you'll have your wood chopped for a while anyway. No, no, start getting upstairs.

MRS. GIBBS. Oh, dear. There's always so many things to pick up, seems like. You know, Frank, Mrs. Fairchild always locks her front door every night.

(MRS. GIBBS starts upstairs and off.)

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.)

(The sound of crickets. REBECCA tiptoes to George's ladder and climbs up beside him.)

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

REBECCA. *(at the moon)* 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 'splosion.

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

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

GEORGE. Well – prob'ly is.

(The STAGE MANAGER strolls on.)

(MR. WARREN, an elderly policeman, comes along Main Street from the right, trying a door knob every few feet. MR. WEBB enters from the left.)

(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.
(Exits.)

MR. WEBB. Good evening, Bill.

CONSTABLE WARREN. Evenin', Mr. Webb.

MR. WEBB. Quite a moon!

CONSTABLE WARREN. *(looks at it, unmoved)* Yep.

(They stop to chat.)

MR. WEBB. All quiet tonight?

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

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

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

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

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

(SIMON STIMSON continues on his way without a word and disappears at the right. Men turn to watch as he starts off.)

Good night.

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

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

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

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

CONSTABLE WARREN. Good night, Mr. Webb.

(exits, trying doors)

MR. WEBB. *(stops right of ladder, sensing someone in window)*

Who's that up there? Is that you, Myrtle?

EMILY. *(pooh-poohing him)* No, it's me, Papa.

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

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

MR. WEBB. *(turns to smell, turns back)* Hm...Yes. Haven't any troubles on your mind, have you, Emily?

EMILY. *Troubles, Papa?* No.

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

EMILY. Good night, Papa.

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

REBECCA. *(when he is off, looking at the moon throughout)*

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; Grover's Corners; Sutton County; New Hampshire; United States of America.

GEORGE. What's funny about that?

REBECCA. *(with increasing awe)* But listen, it's not finished: the United States of America; Continent of North America; Western Hemisphere; the Earth; the Solar System; the Universe; the Mind of God – that's what it said on the envelope.

GEORGE. What do you know!

REBECCA. And the postman brought it just the same.

GEORGE. What do you know!

(Pause. Crickets.)

STAGE MANAGER. (*appearing down right*) That's the end of the First Act, friends. You can go and smoke now, those that smoke.

(*The stage lights dim and THE ACTORS walk off during the dim.*)

END OF ACT I

ACT II

(The tables and chairs of the two kitchens are still on the stage.)

(During intermission, the ladders and the small bench are withdrawn.)

(A minute before 'curtain time,' the stage lights fade gradually into an early morning blue.)

*(The **STAGE MANAGER** has been at his accustomed place watching the audience return to its seats.)*

(During the opening scene, morning light is gradually established.)

STAGE MANAGER. Three years have gone by. Yes, the sun's come up over a thousand times. Summers and winters have cracked the mountains a little bit more and the rains have brought down some of the dirt. Some babies that weren't even born before have begun talking regular sentences already; and a number of people who thought they were right young and spry have noticed that they can't bound up a flight of stairs like they used to, without their heart fluttering a little. All that can happen in a thousand days. Nature's been pushing and contriving in other ways, too: a number of young people fell in love and got married. Yes, the mountain got bit away a few fractions of an inch; millions of gallons of water went by the mill; and here and there a new home was set up under a roof. Almost everybody in the world gets married – you know what I mean? In our town there aren't hardly any exceptions. Most everybody in

the world climbs into their graves married. The First Act was called the Daily Life. This act is called Love and Marriage. There's another act coming after this: I reckon you can guess what that's about. So: It's three years later. It's 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've passed their last examinations in solid geometry and Cicero's Orations, looks like they suddenly feel themselves fit to be married. It's early morning.

(The sound of distant thunder.)

STAGE MANAGER. *(cont.)* Only this time it's been raining. It's been 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.

(More thunder. He looks up and out.)

Hm...it may begin again any minute.

(Distant train whistle. He looks at pocket watch.)

There! You can hear the 5:45 for Boston.

(MRS. GIBBS and MRS. WEBB enter their kitchens and start the day as in the First Act.)

(MRS. GIBBS again raises the shade and window and makes her wood fire. MRS. WEBB shakes the grate, adds coal to her stove, turns damper, fills coffee pot at sink.)

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.

(MRS. WEBB crosses with pot to cupboard and grinds coffee.)

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