

(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 Gibbses 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.

(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 STAGE MANAGER mutters, "The Ring." GEORGE takes it from his pocket, slips it on EMILY's finger, then steps to embrace and kiss her.)

(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 go-cart, the Sunday-afternoon drives in the Ford, the first rheumatism, the grandchildren, the second rheumatism, the deathbed, the reading of the will, —

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

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

(The organ picks up the March. Church bells sound.)

(The BRIDE and GROOM come down the aisle, radiant, but trying to be very dignified.)

(The TOWNSPEOPLE have gradually risen and turned to watch as they pass by, chattering.)

MRS. SOAMES. *(as "Wedding March" starts)* Aren't they a lovely couple? Oh, I've never been to such a nice wedding. I'm sure they'll be happy. I always say:

happiness, that's the great thing! The important thing is to be happy.

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

STAGE MANAGER. That's all the Second Act, folks. Ten minutes' intermission.

(Lights fade. STAGE MANAGER in momentary darkness walks off. The crowd exits.)

Mrs. Newsome told me to tell you as how we hope they'll both be very happy, Mrs. Webb. Know they will.

MRS. WEBB. (calling after him) Thank you, and thank Mrs. Newsome and we're counting on seeing you at the wedding.

HOWIE NEWSOME. Yes, Mrs. Webb. We hope to git there. Couldn't miss that. Come on, Bessie.

(HOWIE NEWSOME exits.)

(MRS. WEBB takes two bottles to table above stove; returns for four more. MRS. GIBBS near stove stops to blow nose, on verge of tears.)

(DR. GIBBS descends in shirt sleeves, trying to be cheerful.)

SECTION 8

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. (crosses to pour coffee at the table for him) Sit down and drink your coffee.

(MRS. WEBB peels and slices potatoes at table above stove.)

DR. GIBBS. (sits down at his breakfast table, tucks napkin into neck, puts sugar in coffee) The groom's up shaving himself - only there ain't an awful lot to shave.

(MRS. GIBBS sets pot on stove and crosses to cupboard for silver.)

Whistling and singing, like he's glad to leave us. - Every now and then he says, "I do" to the mirror, but it don't sound convincing to me. (blows coffee and drinks)

MRS. GIBBS. (crossing to table to set places for herself and Rebecca) I declare, Frank, I don't know how he'll get along. I've arranged his clothes and seen to

SM Mrs G Dr G webbs E

it he's put warm things on - Frank! They're too young. Emily won't think of such things. He'll catch his death of cold within a week.

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

MRS. GIBBS. (crossing to stove to turn French toast) Now don't start that, Frank Gibbs.

DR. GIBBS. (smiling) I was the scarest young fella in the State of New Hampshire. I thought I'd make a mistake for sure.

(MRS. GIBBS crosses to the cupboard to pour milk.)

And when I saw you comin' down that aisle I thought you were the prettiest girl I'd ever seen, but the only trouble was that I'd never seen you before. There I was in the Congregational Church marryin' a total stranger.

(MRS. WEBB sets table from cupboard in three trips.)

MRS. GIBBS. (crossing to table with milk for Rebecca) And how do you think I felt! (serves his toast) - 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. (pleased) 'Tain't hard to make and I had to do something. (turns, suddenly serious, crosses to stove and serves self)

(Pause. DR. GIBBS pours on the syrup, round and round four times, then:)

DR. GIBBS. How'd you sleep last night, Julia? (eats)

MRS. GIBBS. (crossing to sit at table with own plate and coffee) Well, I heard a lot of the hours struck off. (takes sugar and cream)

(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 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. 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

Rebecca
George
Warren
SM
MW
Simon
E

44
SECTION 6

(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 'slosion.

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

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 1901. 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.)

They brought up two children apiece, washed, cleaned the house – and *never a nervous breakdown.*

(MRS. GIBBS grinds coffee into pot above stove. MRS. WEBB puts pot on stove and starts to make corn bread.)

It's like what one of those Middle West poets said: You've got to love life to have life, and you've got to have life to love life...It's what they call a vicious circle.

HOWIE NEWSOME. *(offstage left)* Giddap, Bessie!

(Sound of milk bottles in a rack starts off left and continues through scene as in Act I. MRS. GIBBS crosses to sink to pump water into a pot.)

STAGE MANAGER. Here comes Howie Newsome delivering the milk.

(Sound of newspapers slapping on verandahs off right. HOWIE starts down left, rack in hand.)

And there's Si Crowell delivering the papers like his brother before him.

(STAGE MANAGER watches a moment, then drifts off downstage.)

(MRS. GIBBS crosses to pump water into coffee pot.)

(SI CROWELL has entered hurling imaginary newspapers into doorways per Joe Crowell's routine in Act I; HOWIE NEWSOME has come along Main Street with Bessie.)

SI CROWELL. Morning, Howie.

HOWIE NEWSOME. Morning, Si. – Anything in the papers I ought to know? *(Stops. Sets rack down.)*

(MRS. GIBBS puts coffee on stove, crosses to cupboard and prepares two pieces of French toast. She holds back tears for a moment. MRS. WEBB crosses to cupboard to slice bacon and rearrange the shelves.)

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

5

HOWIE NEWSOME. Reckon he is.

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

HOWIE NEWSOME. Yep. Mighty fine ball player.

(Horse whinny off left.)

(looking off left) – 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?

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

(CONSTABLE WARREN enters. He walks with a cane, a little older than before. They exchange good mornings.)

You're up early, Bill.

(MRS. GIBBS puts French toast into skillet on stove, then gets cloth from cupboard, lays table, sets cup and plate for dog.)

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

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

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

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

(CONSTABLE WARREN continues on his way.)

(SI starts off, throwing newspapers, exits.)

(MRS. WEBB puts bacon on stove, then washes and dries her hands at sink.)

(HOWIE NEWSOME brings the milk first to MRS. GIBBS' house. She meets him by the trellis.)

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

HOWIE NEWSOME. *(sets down rack)* Morning, Mrs. Gibbs. It rained so heavy, I think maybe it'll clear up.

MRS. GIBBS. Certainly hope it will.

HOWIE NEWSOME. How much did you want today?

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

HOWIE NEWSOME. *(handing her two bottles, putting three on the doorstep)* My wife says to tell you we both hope they'll be very happy, Mrs. Gibbs. Know they will. *(picks up rack, starts toward MRS. WEBB's house.)*

MRS. GIBBS. *(calling after him)* Thanks a lot, Howie. Tell your wife I hope she gets there to the wedding.

(MRS. WEBB crosses down to trellis. MRS. GIBBS takes two bottles to cupboard, returns for other three, then crosses to burn French toast, winking back tears.)

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

(HOWIE NEWSOME crosses to MRS. WEBB's house.)

Morning, Mrs. Webb. *(sets rack down)*

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

HOWIE NEWSOME. *(kneeling, hands her two bottles, sets four on doorstep)* Yes'm...and the two of cream.

MRS. WEBB. *(looking up)* Will it start raining again, Mr. Newsome?

HOWIE NEWSOME. Well. Just sayin' to Mrs. Gibbs as how it may lighten up. *(rises, takes rack, starts up center)*

6

SECTION 2

MRS. WEBB. MRS. GIBBS

MSW
MSG
SM
Man
Woman
Lady

(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. *(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

REBECCA

(exits, trying doors)

MR. WEBB. *(stops right of ladder, sensing someone in window)*
Who's that up there? Is that you, Myrtle?

EMILY. *(poo-h-pooing 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

EMILY - GEORGE

8

STAGE MANAGER. *(working the faucets)* Two strawberry ice-cream sodas, yes sir. Yes, sir. There are a hundred and twenty-five horses in Grover's Corners this minute I'm talking to you.

State Inspector was in here yesterday. And now they're bringing in these auto-mo-biles, the best thing to do is to just stay home. Why, I can remember when a dog could go to sleep all day in the middle of Main Street and nothing come along to disturb him.

(He sets the imaginary glasses before them.)

There they are. Enjoy 'em.

(He sees a customer, right.)

Yes, Mrs. Ellis. What can I do for you?

(He goes out right.)

EMILY. They're so expensive. *(sips through straw)*

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

EMILY. N-no.

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

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

GEORGE. *(with a brief look at her)* No, Emily, you stick to it. I'm glad you spoke to me like you did. But you'll see: I'm going to change so quick - you bet I'm going to change. And, Emily, I want to ask you a favor.

EMILY. What?

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

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

(Pause. They start sipping the sodas through the straws.)

It certainly seems like being away three years you'd get out of touch with things. Maybe letters from Grover's Corners wouldn't be so interesting after a while. Grover's Corners isn't a very important place when you think of all - New Hampshire; but I think it's a very nice town.

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

EMILY. Well, I'll try to make my letters interesting. *(pause)*

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

EMILY. *(looks at him, happy that he might not leave town)* Why, George -

GEORGE. *(eagerly)* 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. *(glowing)* My!

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

EMILY. *(to him, arguing nobly against her inclinations)* But, George, maybe it's very important for you to go and learn all that about - cattle judging and soils and those things...Of course, I don't know.

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

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

GEORGE. Emily, I'm glad you spoke to me about that... that fault in my character. What you said was right; but there was *one* thing wrong in it, and that was when you said that for a year I wasn't noticing people, and...you, for instance. Why, you say you were watching me when I did everything...I was doing the same about you all the time.

(She looks at him wide-eyed, he at her.)

Why, sure, - I always thought about you as one of the chief people I thought about. I always made sure where you were sitting on the bleachers, and who you were with, and for three days now I've been trying to walk home with you; but something's always got in the way. Yesterday I was standing over against the wall waiting for you, and you walked home with *Miss Corcoran*.

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

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

EMILY. *(quietly)* I think it's awfully important, too.
(pause)

GEORGE. Emily.

EMILY. Y-yes, George.

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

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

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

EMILY. Yes...yes.

GEORGE. *(takes a deep breath and straightens his back)* Wait just a minute and I'll walk you home.

(Both rise.)

(With mounting alarm, he digs into his pockets for the money.)

(The STAGE MANAGER enters, right.)

(GEORGE, 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.

STAGE MANAGER. *(pretending to be affronted)* What's that? George Gibbs, do you mean to tell me - !

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

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.

(GEORGE slowly gets the point, laughs, returns watch.)

- Got all over your shock, Emily!

EMILY. Yes, thank you, Mr. Morgan. It was nothing.

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

(They walk in grave silence across the stage and pass through the trellis at the Webbs' back door and disappear.)

(The STAGE MANAGER watches them go out, then turns to the audience, removing his spectacles.)

(5)

9

JOE - DR. GIBBS

(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.

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.

WALLY-REBECCA

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.)

END

SIMON - GEORGE - EMILY

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 debating 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.

vs 2

step

vs 2

Softer than hum

hum

vs 1

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. v51
hum

(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.

END
4

SOAMES
MS W
MS G
Dr G

(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.