

# OUR TOWN

By Thornton Wilder

## **CHARACTERS (in the order of their appearance)**

Stage Manager

Dr. Frank Gibbs

Joe & Si Crowell (& Cemetery)

Howie Newsome

Mrs. Julia Gibbs

Mrs. Myrtle Webb

George Gibbs

Rebecca Gibbs

Wally Webb

Emily Webb

Mr. Charles Webb

Professor Willard (& Choir & Cemetery)

Woman in the audience (& Choir & Cemetery)

Belligerent man in the audience (& Choir & Cemetery)

Flirtatious woman in the audience (& Choir & Cemetery)

Simon Stimson

Mrs. Louella Soames

Constable Bill Warren

Sam Craig (& Choir)

Joe Stoddard (& Choir)

## OUR TOWN

*The audience, arriving, sees an empty stage. A small Ragtime orchestra is playing Scott Joplin's "The Paragon Rag". Presently the STAGE MANAGER enters and places the script on a table. Two ACTORS appear to help place two simple square tables onstage. They then place three chairs at each table. The STAGE MANAGER places a low bench at the corner of what will be the Webb house. He walks over to the piano, places his script on it and studies it while the audience continues to be seated.*

*Once the stage is set, the music segues from Scott Joplin to a quiet Beethoven sonata. The lights change and the following characters enter and study the set: EMILY WEBB, MRS. GIBBS, MRS. SOAMES, SIMON STIMSON, WALLY WEBB AND REBECCA GIBBS. Satisfied, they exit.*

*At the 'curtain hour' the STAGE MANAGER looks over the audience, checks his phone, puts it on silent, then pointedly holds it up to the audience as a cue for them to do likewise. He signals the Lights and the Pianist to conclude. The house and stage lights come up to full.*

STAGE MANAGER: This play is called "Our Town." It was written by Thornton Wilder and is being produced here by Amerrycan Theatre. The name of our town is Grover's Corners, New Hampshire, just over the line from Massachusetts; latitude 42 degrees, 40 minutes, longitude 70 degrees, 37 minutes. First Act shows a day in our town. The day is May 7, 1901, just about dawn.

*A rooster crows.*

Yep, just about. The sky is beginning to show some streaks of light over in the east there, behind our mountain. The morning star always gets wonderful bright just the minute before it has to go... (*He stares at it for a moment.*) doesn't it? Well, I'd better show you how our town lies. Out there –

*That is: behind the center audience.*

– is Main Street. Way back there is the railway station; tracks go that way. Polish Town's across the tracks. Foreign families mostly, come to work in the mill, and some Canadian families and the Catholic Church.

*Toward the left.*

Over there is the Congregational Church; across the street's the Presbyterian. Methodist and Unitarian are over there. Baptist is down in the valley – (*Smiling.*) ...by the river.

Here's the Town Hall and Post Office combined; jail's in the basement. President Lincoln once made a speech from these very steps here.

Along Main Street here's a row of stores. Hitching posts and horse blocks in front of them. First automobile's gonna come along in about five years – belonged to Banker Cartwright, our richest citizen... lives in the big white house up on the hill.

There's the grocery store and there's Mr. Morgan's drugstore. Most everybody in town manages to look into one those stores at least once a day.

*He approaches the table and chairs downstage right.*

## OUR TOWN

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 side of the 'houses'.*

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

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

*Crosses the stage.*

In those days our newspaper came 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'. Except it's got some sunflowers.

*He looks upward, center stage.*

And right here – is a big butternut tree.

*He returns to his station and looks at the audience for a moment.*

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 ready to deliver the paper. And in the depot, where Shorty Hawkins is getting ready to flag the 5.45 for Boston.

*A train whistle is heard. The Stage Manager takes out his phone and nods.*

There it is. 'Course out in the country – all around – they've had lights on for some time, what with milkin's and so on. But town people sleep late.

So – another day's begun.

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

*Mrs. Gibbs comes "downstairs" from Right. She pulls up an imaginary window shade in her kitchen and starts to make a fire in her stove.*

Doc Gibbs died in 1930. 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 she died there – pneumonia – but her body was brought back here. She's up there in the cemetery – in with a whole mess of Gibbses and Herseys – she was Julia Hersey before she married Doc Gibbs in the Congregational Church over there.

In our town we like to know the facts about everybody.

There's Mrs. Webb coming downstairs to get her breakfast too. – That's Doc Gibbs. Got the call to go to Polish Town at 1:30 this morning.

## OUR TOWN

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

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

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

STAGE MANAGER: And here comes Joe Crowell delivering Mr. Webb's *Sentinel*.

JOE CROWELL: Morning, Doc Gibbs.

DR. GIBBS: Morning, Joe.

JOE CROWELL: Somebody been sick, Doc?

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

JOE CROWELL: Do you want your paper now?

DR. GIBBS: (*Setting bag on chair.*) Yes, I'll take it. – Anything serious goin' on in the world since Wednesday?

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

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

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

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

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

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

JOE CROWELL: No sir.

DR. GIBBS: Sure?

JOE CROWELL: Yes sir.

DR. GIBBS: Knee ever make a mistake?

JOE CROWELL: No sir.

*JOE goes off. DR. GIBBS stands reading his newspaper, yawns.*

*MRS. GIBBS crosses to cupboard, cuts several slices of bread, then cuts a pie.*

## OUR TOWN

STAGE MANAGER: Joe was awful bright – graduated from the high school here, head of his class. So he got a scholarship to M.I.T. Graduated head of his class from there, too. It was all wrote up in the Boston paper at the time. Goin' to be a great engineer, Joe was. But the war broke out and he died in France. – All that that education for nothing.

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

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

*HOWIE NEWSOME, in overalls, comes along Main Street from the Left, walking beside an invisible horse and wagon and carrying an imaginary rack with milk bottles. He leaves some bottles at MRS. WEBB'S trellis, then, crossing the stage to MRS. GIBBS, 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: Twins, eh? This town's getting' bigger every year.

DR. GIBBS: Goin' to rain, Howie?

HOWIE NEWSOME: No, no. Fine day – that'll burn through. Come on, Bessie.

DR. GIBBS: Hello, Bessie.

*He strokes the horse, which has remained up center.*

How old is she, Howie?

HOWIE NEWSOME: Going on seventeen. Bessie is all mixed up about the route ever since the Lockharts stopped taking their quart of milk every day. She wants to leave 'em a quart just the same – keeps scolding me the whole trip.

*HOWIE reaches MRS. GIBBS' back door. She is waiting for him.*

MRS: GIBBS: Good morning, Howie.

HOWIE NEWSOME: Morning, Mrs. Gibbs. Doc's just coming' 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.*

Doc!

DR. GIBBS: Howie!

MRS. GIBBS: Children! Children! Time to get up.

## OUR TOWN

HOWIE NEWSOME: Come on, Bessie!

*He goes off Right.*

MRS. GIBBS: George! Rebecca!

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

Everything all right, Frank?

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

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

DR. GIBBS: Hm!... Mrs. Wentworth's coming at eleven. Guess I know what it's about, too. Her stomach ain't what it ought to be.

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

MRS. WEBB: Emileeee! Time to get up! Wally! Seven o'clock!

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

DR. GIBBS:

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

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

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

MRS. GIBBS: George!

DR. GIBBS: George, look sharp!

GEORGE'S VOICE: Yes, Pa!

DR. GIBBS: Don't you hear your mother calling you?

MRS. WEBB: Wally, you'll be late for school!

DR. GIBBS: *(As he goes off the stage.)* I guess I'll go upstairs and get forty winks.

MRS. WEBB: Wally, you wash yourself good now or else I'll come up and do it myself.

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

MRS. GIBBS: Hush now, 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.

## OUR TOWN

REBECCA: Ma, I hate that dress.

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

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

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

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

MRS. GIBBS: George, I'll come up there and knock a fart out of you!

*A factory whistle sounds.*

STAGE MANAGER: We've got a mill 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 and REBECCA, eleven. Left, EMILY and WALLY, same ages. They carry strapped schoolbooks.*

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

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

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

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

MRS. WEBB: Eat your breakfast.

WALLY: I'm bright, too, when I'm carving with my whittling knife. (*Flashing his imaginary knife.*)

MRS. WEBB: You are not taking that into school.

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

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

MRS. GIBBS: Strawberry phosphates – that's what you spend it on.

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

REBECCA: (*Spoon in mouth, dreamily.*) I've been saving it up gradual.

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

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

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MRS. GIBBS: Eat your breakfast.

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

*The CHILDREN rise, seize their books and dash out through the trellises. They meet, down center, and chattering, walk to Main Street, then turn left.*

*The STAGE MANAGER goes off, unobtrusively.*

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

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

REBECCA: Yes, Ma.

MRS. GIBBS: And you look very nice, Rebecca. Pick up your feet.

*Rebecca walks offstage comically.*

ALL: Goodbye.

*MRS. GIBBS fills her apron with food for the chickens and comes downstage.*

MRS. GIBBS: Here, chick, chick, chick. No, go away, you. Go away. Here, chick, chick, chick. What's the matter with you? Fight, fight, fight, – that's all you do. Hm...you don't belong to me. Where'd you come from? (She shakes her apron.) Oh, don't be so scared. Nobody's going to hurt you.

*MRS. WEBB is sitting on the bench by her trellis, stringing beans.*

Good morning, Myrtle. How's your cold?

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

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.

*Beat. 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!

## OUR TOWN

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, he offered me three hundred and fifty dollars for Grandmother Wentworth's highboy, as I'm sitting here!

MRS. WEBB: My lands!

MRS. GIBBS: He did! That old thing! 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 – Julia, 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. (*Pause.*) Y'know, Myrtle, it's been the dream of my life to see Paris, France. – Oh, I know, I know, it sounds crazy, I suppose, but for years I've been promising myself that if we ever had the chance –

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

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

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 said. 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.

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 was 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 – you 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 English and don't even want to.

*The STAGE MANAGER enters briskly.*

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

## OUR TOWN

*MRS. GIBBS and MRS. WEBB gather up their things, return into the 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 enters with some notes in his hand.*

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 – unique fossils – two miles out of town, in Silas Peckham's cow pasture. They can be seen at the museum in our university at anytime – that is, at any reasonable time. Shall I read some of Professor Gruber's notes on the meteorological situation – mean precipitation, etc?

STAGE MANAGER: Afraid we won't have time for that, professor, but you might say a few brief words on the history of humanity here.

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

STAGE MANAGER: Yes, well... and the population, Professor Willard?

PROFESSOR WILLARD: Within the town limits: 2,642. Mortality and birth rates constant – by McPherson'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, not at all, thank you.

*Professor Willard exits.*

STAGE MANAGER: And now, a social report from Mr. Webb – Mr. Webb!

*MRS. WEBB appears at her back door.*

MRS. WEBB: He'll be out in a minute...He just cut his hand while he was eating an apple. (Pause.) Charles! Everybody's waitin'!

*Exit MRS. WEBB.*

## OUR TOWN

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

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

STAGE MANAGER: Any comments about the society of Grover's Corners, Mr. Webb?

MR. WEBB: Well, very ordinary town, if you ask me. A 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 AUDIENCE: Is there much drinking in Grover's Corners?

MR. WEBB: Well, ma'am, I wouldn't know what you'd call *much*. Saturday nights the farmhands meet down in Ellery 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 liquor ain't a regular thing in the home here, except in the medicine chest. Right good for snake bites, y'know – always was.

BELLIGERANT MAN: Is there no one in town aware of –

STAGE MANAGER: Come forward, will you, where we can all hear you – what were you saying?

MAN IN AUDIENCE: Is there no one in town aware of social injustice and 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.

BELLIGERANT MAN: Then why don't they do something about it?

*He withdraws without waiting for an answer.*

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

WOMAN IN AUDIENCE: Oh, Mr. Webb? (*Fancying him.*) Mr. Webb, is there any culture or love of beauty in Grover's Corners?

MR. WEBB: Well, ma'am, there ain't much – not in the sense you mean. Come to think of it, there's some girls that play the piano at High School Commencement; but they ain't happy about it, unless they're playing that new Ragtime music. 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 a bit of Beethoven, we all like that; and Whistler's "Mother" – those are just about as far as we go.

## OUR TOWN

STAGE MANAGER: Well, thank you, Mr. Webb.

*MR. WEBB retires.*

Now, we'll get back to our town. It is two o'clock. All 2,642 had their lunches, dishes have been washed, children are back in school. There's kind of a buzzin' and a hummin' from the school buildings; only a few buggies on Main Street – the horses dozing at the hitching posts. Kind of an early afternoon calm has come over the town. Do you remember what that's like?

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

Doc Gibbs is in his office, tapping people on the chest and making them say, "ah." Mr. Webb's cuttin' his lawn over there.

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

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

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

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

*She gives him an abrupt kiss.*

MR. WEBB: Golly, I never got a kiss from such a great lady before.

*He mows out of sight. EMILY leans over and picks some flowers by the gate of her house.*

*GEORGE GIBBS comes careening down Main Street. He is throwing a ball up to dizzying heights and waiting to catch it again. This sometimes requires his taking six steps backward. He bumps into 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: I'm awfully sorry, Mrs. Forrest.

*The Stage Manager leaves muttering under his breath.*

Hello, Emily.

EMILY: H'lo.

GEORGE: You made a fine speech in class.

## OUR TOWN

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

GEORGE: Gee, it's funny, Emily. From my window up there I can just see your head at nights when you're doing your homework over in your room.

EMILY: Why, can you?

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

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

GEORGE: Yeah.

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

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

EMILY: Oh, I think *hints* are allowed. – So – 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. She sits on the bench by her trellis.*

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

MRS. WEBB: Good afternoon, George.

GEORGE: So long, Emily.

EMILY: So long, George.

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

EMILY: I don't know.

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

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

## OUR TOWN

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

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

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

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

MRS. WEBB: Seriously, dear – not serious.

EMILY: Seriously, – will you?

MRS. WEBB: Of course, I will.

EMILY: Mama, am I good looking?

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

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

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

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

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

EMILY: Mama, were *you* pretty?

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

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

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

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

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

*MRS. WEBB & EMILY withdraw.*

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

*He comes to the center of the stage.*

I think this is a good time to tell you that the Cartwright family 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 put in a copy of the New York Times and a copy

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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... 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 invention of the internet and Brexit. See what I mean?

So – people a thousand years from now – this is the way we were in the provinces in the northern U.S. at the beginning of the twentieth century. – This is the way we were: in our growing up and in our marrying in our living and in our dying.

*A choir has begun singing “Blessed Be the Tie That Binds.” SIMON STIMSON stands directing them.*

*Two ladders have been 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: 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.

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

GEORGE: Hsst! Emily!

EMILY: Hello?

GEORGE: Hello!

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

GEORGE: Emily, did you get the third problem?

EMILY: Which?

GEORGE: The *third*?

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

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

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

GEORGE: !!! In yards? How do you mean?

EMILY: In *square* yards.

GEORGE: Oh... in square yards.

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

GEORGE: Yeah.

EMILY: In square yards of *wallpaper*.

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

EMILY: You're welcome. My, isn't the moonlight *terrible*? And choir practice going on. I think if you hold your breath you can hear the train all the way to Contoocook ('*Con-TUK-uk*'). Hear it?

GEORGE: M-m-m – What do you know!

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

GEORGE: Good night, Emily. And thanks.

EMILY: Good night, George.

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

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

GEORGE: Yes, Pa.  
*He descends the ladder.*

DR. GIBBS: Make yourself comfortable, George; I'll only keep you a minute. 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: Well, George, I was in my office today and I heard a funny sound... and what do you think it was? It was your mother chopping wood. There you see your mother – getting up

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early, cooking meals all day long; washing and ironing; – and still she has to go out in the back yard and chop wood. I suppose she just got tired of asking you. She just gave up and decided it was easier to do it herself. And you eat her meals, and put on the clothes she keeps nice for you, and you run off and play baseball, – like she's some hired girl we keep around the house but that we don't like very much. Well, I knew all I had to do was call your attention to it. (*Beat.*) Here's a handkerchief, son. George, I've decided to raise your spending money twenty-five cents a week. Not, of course, for chopping wood for your mother, because that's a present you give to her, but because you're getting older – and I imagine there are lots of things you must find to do with it.

GEORGE: Thanks, Pa.

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

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

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

GEORGE: Yes, Pa.

*GEORGE mounts to his place on the ladder.*

*Laughter and good nights can be heard 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: Goodnight Martha. Good night, Mr. Foster.

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

MRS. GIBBS: My, it's late!

MRS. SOAMES: Goodnight, Irma.

MRS. GIBBS: Real nice choir practice, wa'n't it? Myrtle Webb! Look at that moon, will you! Tsk-tsk-tsk. Potato weather, for sure.

*They are silent a moment, gazing up at the moon.*

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

MRS. GIBBS: What?

MRS. SOAMES: Simon Stimson!

MRS. GIBBS: Now, Louella!

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

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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: 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 all hours. Good night, Louella.

*They all exchange good nights. MRS. WEBB hurries downstage, enters her house and disappears.*

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

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

*Many good nights. MRS. GIBBS arrives at her house and passes through the trellis into the kitchen.*

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

DR. GIBBS: You're late enough.

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

DR. GIBBS: And you stopping at the corner to gossip with a lot of hens.

MRS. GIBBS: Now, Frank, don't be grouchy. Come out and smell the heliotrope in the moonlight.

*They stroll out arm in arm along the footlights.*

Isn't that wonderful? What did you do all the time I was away?

DR. GIBBS: Oh, I read – as usual. What were the girls gossiping about tonight?

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

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

MRS. GIBBS: Worst I've ever seen him. How'll that end, Frank? Dr. 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. Come, get in.

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

DR. GIBBS: What are you worried about?

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

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

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

DR. GIBBS: (*Starting into the house.*) Come on, Julia, it's getting late. First thing you know you'll catch cold. I gave George a piece of my mind tonight. I reckon you'll have your wood chopped for a while anyway.

*MRS. GIBBS begins to tidy up in the room.*

No, no, start getting upstairs.

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

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

*They disappear.*

*REBECCA climbs up the ladder beside GEORGE.*

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

REBECCA: Well, let me look just a minute.

GEORGE: Use your own window.

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

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

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

GEORGE: Well – prob'ly is.

*The STAGE MANAGER strolls on.*

*Beat. The sound of SIMON STIMSON singing in the distance can be heard.*

STAGE MANAGER: Nine thirty. Most of the lights are out. No, there's Constable Warren trying a few doors on Main Street. And here comes Editor Webb, after putting his newspaper to bed.

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

MR. WEBB: Good evening, Bill.

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CONSTABLE WARREN: Evenin', Mr. Webb.

MR. WEBB: Quite a moon!

CONSTABLE WARREN: Yepp.

MR. WEBB: All quiet tonight.

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

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

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

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

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 into the night.*

MR. WEBB: 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.

*Exit.*

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

EMILY: No, it's me, Papa.

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

EMILY: I 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: Hm... Yes. Haven't any trouble on your mind, have you, Emily?

EMILY: *Troubles, Papa? No.*

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

EMILY: Good night, Papa.

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

REBECCA: I never told you about that letter Jane 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: But listen, it's not finished: the United States of America; Continent of North America; Western Hemisphere; the Earth; the Solar System; the Milky Way Galaxy; 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.

STAGE MANAGER: That's the end of the First Act, friends. You can go and smoke now, those that smoke.

## CURTAIN

## OUR TOWN

### ACT II

*The tables and chairs of the two kitchens are still on the stage. The ladders and the small bench have been withdrawn. The STAGE MANAGER has been at his accustomed place watching the audience return to its seats.*

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.

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 7<sup>th</sup>, 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 trigonometry and Beowulf, looks like they suddenly feel themselves fit to be married.

It's early morning. Only this time it's been raining. It's been pouring and thundering. Mrs. Gibbs' garden, and Mrs. Webb's here: drenched. All those bean poles and pea vines: drenched. There! You can hear the 5:45 for Boston.

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

And there's Mrs. Gibbs and Mrs. Webb come down to make breakfast, just as though it were an ordinary day.

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

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

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

SI CROWELL: Morning, Howie.

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

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

HOWIE NEWSOME: Reckon he is.

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

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

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

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

*CONSTABLE WARREN enters. They exchange good mornings.*

HOWIE NEWSOME: You're up early, Bill.

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

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

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

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

*CONSTABLE WARREN and SI CROWELL continue on their way.*

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

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

HOWIE NEWSOME: Morning, Mrs. Gibbs. It rained so heavy, I think maybe it'll 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: My wife says to tell you we both hope they'll be very happy, Mrs. Gibbs. Know they *will*.

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

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

*HOWIE NEWSOME crosses to MRS. WEBB'S house.*

Morning, Mrs. Webb.

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

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

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

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

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

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

*Exit HOWIE NEWSOME.*

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

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

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

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

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

DR. GIBBS: I was remembering my wedding morning.

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

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

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

*She puts a plate before him.*

Here, I've made something for you.

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

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

*Beat. DR. GIBBS pours on the syrup.*

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

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

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

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

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

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

*Beat. DR. GIBBS starts laughing.*

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

MRS. GIBBS: Go on, then.

DR. GIBBS: I was afraid we wouldn't have material for conversation more'n'd last us a few weeks. (*They both laugh.*) I was afraid we'd run out and eat our meals in silence, that's a fact. – Well, you and I have been conversing for twenty years now without any noticeable barren spells.

MRS. GIBBS: Well, – good weather, bad weather – 'tain't very choice, but I always find something to say.

*She goes to the foot of the stairs.*

Did you hear Rebecca stirring around upstairs?

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

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

*GEORGE comes rattling down the stairs, very briskly.*

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

*GEORGE Makes the gesture of cutting his throat, and a loud "k-k-k," and starts through the trellis.*

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

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

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

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

MRS. GIBBS: Young man: you'll catch your death of cold and cough all through the service.

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

*DR. GIBBS goes upstairs.*

*GEORGE returns reluctantly to the kitchen and pantomimes putting on overshoes.*

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

GEORGE: Be back in a minute.

*He crosses the stage, leaping over the puddles.*

Good morning, Mother Webb.

MRS. WEBB: Goodness! You frightened me! – Now, George, you can come in for a minute out of the wet, but you know you can't come in!

GEORGE: Wha...? Why not –?

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

GEORGE: Aw! – that's just a superstition.

*Enter MR. WEBB.*

Good morning, Mr. Webb.

MR. WEBB: Good morning, George.

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

MR. WEBB: There's a lot of common sense in some superstitions, George.

*MR. WEBB sits at the table.*

MRS. WEBB: Millions have folla'd it, George, and you don't want to be the first to fly in the face of custom.

GEORGE: How's Emily?

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

GEORGE: Emily *asleep!*

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

*Exit MRS. WEBB. Embarrassed silence between GEORGE & MR. WEBB.  
MR. WEBB dunks doughnuts in his coffee.*

*More silence.*

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

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

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MR. WEBB: Well, you see, – on her wedding morning a girl's head's apt to be full of... clothes and one thing and another.

GEORGE: (*A slightly dirty snicker.*) Yeah! I never thought of that.

*Beat.* MR. WEBB eyes George. GEORGE is oblivious.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

GEORGE: What?

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

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

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

*Enter MRS. WEBB.*

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MRS. WEBB: Charles, are you talking about that old incubator again? I thought you two'd be talking about things worthwhile.

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

MRS. WEBB: George, Emily's got to come downstairs and eat her breakfast. She sends you her love but she doesn't want to lay eyes on you. Goodbye.

GEORGE: Goodbye.

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

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

MRS. WEBB: What do you mean, Charles?

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

*Both leave the stage.*

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

George and Emily are going to show you now the conversation they had when they first knew that... that... as the saying goes... they were meant for each other.

But before they do it I want you to try and remember what it was like to have been very young. And particularly the days when you were first in love; when you were like a person sleepwalking, and you didn't quite see the street you were in, and didn't quite hear everything that was said to you. You're just a little bit crazy. Will you remember that, please?

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

*Two ACTORS move two chairs from the kitchen tables, and the STAGE MANAGER places a board across the backs of the two chairs. The ACTORS bring two high stools from the wings and place them behind the board. Persons sitting on the stools will be facing the audience. This is the counter of Mr. Morgan's drugstore. The sounds of young people's voices are heard off left.*

Yep, – there they are coming down Main Street now.

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

## OUR TOWN

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

*GEORGE, also carrying books, has caught up with her.*

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

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

*She gives them to him.*

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

EMILY: Goodbye Lizzy.

GEORGE: Goodbye, Lizzy. – I'm awfully glad you were elected, too, Emily.

EMILY: Thank you.

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

GEORGE: Emily, why are you mad at me?

EMILY: I'm not mad at you.

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

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

GEORGE: Goodbye, Miss Corcoran. – Wha – what is it?

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

GEORGE: A *change*? – Wha – what do you mean?

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

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

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

## OUR TOWN

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

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

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

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

EMILY: Well, you might as well know right now that I'm not perfect. It's not as easy for a girl to be perfect as a man, because we girls are more – more – nervous. – Now I'm sorry I said all that about you. I don't know what made me say it. (*Returning his handkerchief.*) Thank you.

GEORGE: Emily, –

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

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

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

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

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

*The STAGE MANAGER, wearing spectacles and assuming the role of MR. MORGAN, enters abruptly from the right and stands between the audience and the counter of his soda fountain.*

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

GEORGE: (*Groping for an explanation.*) She... she just got an awful scare, Mr. Morgan. She almost got run over by that hardware-store wagon. Everybody says that Tom Huckins drives like a crazy man.

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

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

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

STAGE MANAGER: (*Working the faucets.*) Two strawberry ice-cream sodas, yes sir. 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.

## OUR TOWN

*He sets the imaginary glasses before them.*

There they are, Enjoy 'em.

*He sees a customer, right.*

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

*He goes out right.*

EMILY: They're so expensive.

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

EMILY: N-no.

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

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

GEORGE: No, Emily, 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.

*Beat. 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.

*Beat.*

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

EMILY: Why, George –

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

## OUR TOWN

EMILY: My!

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

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

*Beat.*

GEORGE: (*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: I don't see why you have to decide right now. It's a whole year away.

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

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

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

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

GEORGE: Emily.

EMILY: 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.

*Beat, as they allow themselves to stare into each other's eyes for the first time.*

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

*EMILY smiles and nods in agreement.*

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

*With mounting alarm GEORGE digs into his pockets for the money. The STAGE MANAGER enters, right. GEORGE, deeply embarrassed, decides to be direct.*

## OUR TOWN

GEORGE: Mr. Morgan, I'll have to go home and get the money to pay you for this. It'll only take 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. – 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 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.*

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

*The STAGE MANAGER strolls to the center of the stage, down front, and musingly, addresses the audience, beginning his sermon, while...*

*STAGEHANDS remove the chairs, tables and trellises from the Gibbs and Webb houses.*

*They arrange the pews for the church in the center of the stage. The congregation will sit facing the back wall. The aisle of the church starts at the center of the back wall and comes toward the audience.*

*A small platform is placed against the back wall on which the STAGE MANAGER will stand later, playing the minister. The two ladders are placed either side of the platform to form the church.*

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

For a while now, the play gets pretty serious.

Y'see, some churches say that marriage is a sacrament. I don't quite know what that means, but I can guess. Like Mrs. Gibbs said a few minutes ago: People were made to live two-by-two. This is a good wedding, but people are so put together that even at a good wedding

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there's a lot of confusion way down deep in people's minds and we thought that that ought to be in our play, too.

The real hero of this scene isn't on the stage at all, and you know who that is. It's like what one of those European fellas said: every child born into the world is nature's attempt to make a perfect human being. Well, we've seen nature pushing and contriving for some time now. We all know that nature's interested in quantity; but I think she's interested in quality, too, – that's why I'm in the ministry.

And don't forget all the other witnesses at this wedding, – the ancestors. Millions of them. Most of them set out to live two-by-two, also. Millions of them.

Well, that's all my sermon. 'Twan't very long, anyway.

*The piano starts playing Beethoven's Sonata 32, and the congregation streams into the church.*

*MRS. GIBBS sits in the front row, the first seat on the aisle, the right section; next to her are REBECCA and DR. GIBBS. Across the aisle MRS. WEBB, WALLY and MR. WEBB. A small choir, led by SIMON STIMSON, takes its place, facing the audience.*

*MRS. WEBB, holding a basket with small bags of rice, weaves through the audience, and gives them to audience members in the front row.*

MRS. WEBB: I don't know why on earth I should be crying. I suppose there's nothing to cry about. It came over me breakfast this morning; there was Emily eating her breakfast as she's done for seventeen years and now she's going off to eat it in someone else's house. I suppose that's it.

And Emily! She suddenly said: "I can't eat another mouthful," and she put her head down on the table and *she* cried.

*She starts toward her seat in the church, but turns back and adds:*

Oh, I've got to say it: you know, there's something downright cruel about sending our girls out into marriage this way.

I hope some of her girlfriends have told her a thing or two. It's cruel, I know, but I couldn't bring myself to say anything. I went into it blind as a bat myself. (*In half-amused exasperation.*) The whole world's wrong, that's what's the matter.

There they come.

*MRS. WEBB hurries to her place in the pew.*

*GEORGE starts to come down the right aisle of the theatre, through the audience.*

*The choir starts singing 'Love Divine, All Loves Excelling'. GEORGE has reached the stage. He stares at the congregation a moment, then takes a few steps of withdrawal. MRS. GIBBS, from the front row, seems to have felt his confusion. She leaves her seat and comes down the aisle quickly to him.*

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

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

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

## OUR TOWN

GEORGE: No, Ma, listen to me –

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

*MRS. GIBBS, mastering her emotion, fixes his tie and whispers to him.*

*In the meantime, EMILY, in white and wearing her wedding veil, has come through the audience and onto the stage. She too draws back, frightened, when she sees the congregation in the church. The choir begins another hymn. Emily chooses a member of the audience for support.*

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

MR. WEBB: (*Leaves his seat and comes to Emily anxiously.*) Emily! Emily! now just relax...

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

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

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

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

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

MR. WEBB: Sh... You mustn't think of such things. You're just nervous, Emily. (*He turns and calls:*) George! George! Will you come here a minute? (*He leads her toward George.*) Why, you're marrying the best young fellow in the world. George is a fine fellow.

EMILY: But Papa, –

*MRS. GIBBS returns unobtrusively to her seat.*

*MR. WEBB has one arm around his daughter. He places his hand on GEORGE'S shoulder.*

## OUR TOWN

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

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

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

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

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

*They fall into each other's arms.*

*The March from Lohengrin is heard.*

*The STAGE MANAGER, as CLERGYMAN, stands on the box, up center.*

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

*GEORGE slips away and takes his place beside the STAGE MANAGER-CLERGYMAN.*

*EMILY proceeds up the aisle on her father's arm.*

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

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

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

GEORGE: I do.

STAGE MANAGER: Do you, Emily, take this man, George, to be your wedded husband, –

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

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

*The ring.*

*The kiss. Then the couple gaze at each other.*

*All ACTORS suddenly freeze in a silent tableau.*

STAGE MANAGER: (*His eyes are on the distance, as though to himself.*) 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 lawn mower, the Sunday afternoon drives in the Ford, the first arthritis, the grandchildren, the second arthritis, 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.*

## OUR TOWN

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

*The piano picks up the March.*

STAGE MANAGER: Dearly Beloved, I present to you: Mr. and Mrs. George Gibbs!

*Applause.*

*EMILY and GEORGE come down the aisle, radiant.*

MRS. SOAMES: The bouquet! Throw the bouquet!

*EMILY turns her back to the left audience and throws the bouquet. Huge cheers and laughter.*

*GEORGE kneels. EMILY coyly raises her dress, exposing a garter above her knee.*

MRS. WEBB: (*Mortified.*) Ohhhhh! (*She buries her head in shame and sees the basket of rice bags. She turns to the audience.*) Oh, the rice! Throw the rice!

*GEORGE turns to the audience, gives them a cheeky smile and a cool 'Give it to me' gesture. He returns to removing EMILY'S garter, turns his back to the right audience and throws it out to them.*

*The STAGE MANAGER takes out his mobile phone; GEORGE and EMILY turn their back to the center audience and pose for a photo with the audience.*

*GEORGE and EMILY lock arms and run up the aisle joyously.*

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

## CURTAIN

## OUR TOWN

### ACT III

*During the intermission the audience has seen the STAGEHANDS arranging the stage. Ten or twelve ordinary chairs have been placed in openly spaced rows facing the audience. These are graves in the cemetery.*

*Toward the end of the intermission, we hear the sound of Beethoven's Sonata 32 again and the following characters enter and take their seats: MRS. GIBBS, SIMON STIMSON, MRS. SOAMES, JOE CROWELL, WALLY WEBB and others.*

*The dead do not turn their heads or their eyes to right or left, but they sit in relaxed quiet with a sense of hopeful expectation, save for Simon Stimson. When they speak their tone is matter-of-fact, without sentimentality and, above all, without sadness or seriousness.*

*The STAGE MANAGER takes his accustomed place and waits for the house lights to go down.*

STAGE MANAGER: This time nine years have gone by, friends – Summer, 1913. Gradual changes in Grover's Corners... Horses are getting rarer; farmers coming into town in Fords... Everybody locks their house doors now at night. Ain't been any burglars in town yet, but everybody's heard about 'em. You'd be surprised though – on the whole, things don't change much around here.

This is certainly an important part of Grover's Corners. It's on a hilltop – a windy hilltop – lots of sky, lots of clouds, – often lots of sun and moon and stars. You come up here, on a fine afternoon and you can see range on range of hills – awful blue they are – and, of course, our favorite mountain, Mt Monadnock, 's right here – and all these towns that lie around it: Jaffrey, 'n Peterborough, 'n Dublin and (*Pointing down in the audience.*) there, quite a ways down, is Grover's Corners.

Yes, beautiful spot up here. Mountain laurel and lilacs. I often wonder why people like to be buried in Woodlawn and Brooklyn when they might pass the same time up here in New Hampshire.

Over there – (*Pointing to stage left.*) are the old stones, –1670, 1680. Strong-minded people that come a long way to be independent.

This here is the new part of the cemetery. Here's your friend Mrs. Gibbs. 'N let me see – Here's Mr. Stimson, music director at the Congregational Church. And Mrs. Soames who enjoyed the wedding so – you remember? Oh, and a lot of others. And Editor Webb's boy, Wallace, whose appendix burst while he was on a Boy Scout trip to Crawford Notch.

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

Now there are some things we all know, but we don't take 'm out and look at 'm very often. We all know that *something* is eternal. And it ain't houses and it ain't names, and it ain't earth, and it ain't even the stars... everybody knows in their bones that *something* is eternal, and that something has to do with human beings. All the greatest people ever lived have been telling us that for five thousand years and yet you'd be surprised how people are always losing hold of it. There's something way down deep that's eternal about every human being.

*Beat.*

## OUR TOWN

You know as well as I do that the dead don't stay interested in us living people for very long. Gradually, gradually, they lose hold of the earth... and the ambitions they had... and the pleasures they had... and the things they suffered... and the people they loved. They get weaned away from earth – that's the way I put it, – weaned away. And they stay here while the earth part of 'em burns away, burns out; and all that time they slowly get indifferent to what's goin' on in Grover's Corners.

They're waitin'. They're waitin' for something that they feel is comin'. Something important, and great. Aren't they waitin' for the eternal part in them to come out clear?

Some of the things they're going to say maybe'll hurt your feelings – but that's the way it is: mother 'n daughter... husband 'n wife... enemy 'n enemy... money 'n miser... all those terribly important things kind of grow pale around here. And what's left when memory's gone, and your identity, Mrs. Smith?

*He looks at the audience a minute, then turns to the stage.*

Well! There are some *living* people. There's Joe Stoddard, our undertaker, supervising a new-made grave. And here comes a Grover's Corners boy, that left town to go out West.

*JOE STODDARD has hovered about in the background.*

*SAM CRAIG enters, wiping his forehead from the exertion. He carries an umbrella and strolls front.*

SAM CRAIG: Good afternoon, Joe Stoddard.

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

SAM CRAIG: I'm Sam Craig.

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

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

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

SAM CRAIG: Yes.

JOE STODDARD: Yes, yes. I always say I hate to supervise when a young person is taken. They'll be here in a few minutes now. I had to come here early today – my son's supervisin' at the home.

SAM CRAIG: (*Reading stones.*) Old Farmer McCarty, I used to do chores for him – after school. He had the lumbago.

JOE STODDARD: Yes, we brought Farmer McCarty here a number of years ago now.

SAM CRAIG: (*Staring at Mrs. Gibbs' knees.*) Why, this is Aunt Julia...I'd forgotten that she'd... of course, of course.

## OUR TOWN

JOE STODDARD: Yes, Doc Gibbs lost his wife six-seven years ago... about this time. And today's another pretty bad blow for him, too.

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

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

MRS. GIBBS: Simon.

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

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

SAM CRAIG: (*Reading Simon Stimson's epitaph.*) He was music director at the church, wasn't he? – Hm, drank a lot, we used to say.

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

SAM CRAIG: Oh, did he?

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

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

JOE STODDARD: Oh, I wouldn't know. He was wrote up in the New York papers at the time.

SAM CRAIG: Joe, what did she die of?

JOE STODDARD: Who?

SAM CRAIG: My cousin.

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

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

JOE STODDARD: Yes, there ain't much more room over here among the Gibbises, so they're opening up a whole new Gibbs section over by Avenue B. You'll excuse me now. I see they're comin'.

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

MRS. SOAMES: Who is it, Julia?

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

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

## OUR TOWN

MRS. GIBBS: In childbirth.

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

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

MRS. GIBBS: Simon! Now, remember!

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

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

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

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

A WOMAN AMONG THE DEAD. I always liked that hymn. I was hopin' they'd sing a hymn.

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

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

MRS. SOAMES: Hello, Emily.

A MAN AMONG THE DEAD: Hello, Mrs. Gibbs.

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

MRS. GIBBS: Emily.

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

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

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

SIMON STIMSON: How do you do, Emily.

*EMILY continues to look about her with a wondering smile. As though to shut out from her mind the thought of the funeral company she starts speaking to MRS. GIBBS with a touch of nervousness.*

## OUR TOWN

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

MRS. GIBBS: I did?

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

MRS. GIBBS: Yes, yes, Emily.

EMILY: Well, there's a device on the drinking fountain so that it never overflows, Mother Gibbs, and it never sinks below a certain mark they have there. It's fine.

*Her voice trails off and her eyes return to the funeral group.*

It won't be the same to George without me, but it's a lovely farm.

*Suddenly she looks directly at MRS. GIBBS.*

Live people don't understand, do they?

MRS. GIBBS: No, dear – not very much.

EMILY: They're sort of shut up in little boxes, aren't they? I feel as though I knew them a thousand years ago... My boy is spending the day at Mrs. Carter's.

*She sees MR. CARTER among the dead.*

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

MR. CARTER: Is he?

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

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

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

MRS. GIBBS: Sh – .

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

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

*DR. GIBBS goes off.*

## OUR TOWN

THE DEAD: Little cooler than it was. – Yes, that rain's cooled it off a little. – Those northeast winds always do the same thing, don't they? If it isn't rain, it's a three-day blow. –

*A patient calm falls on the stage. The STAGE MANAGER appears. EMILY sits up abruptly with an idea.*

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

MRS. GIBBS: Yes, of course you can.

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

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

EMILY: (*Appealing urgently to the Stage Manager.*) But it's true, isn't it? I can go and live... back there... again.

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

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

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

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

*THEY are silent.*

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

EMILY: Yes?

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

EMILY: But is that – painful? Why?

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

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

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

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

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

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

## OUR TOWN

STAGE MANAGER: All right. February 11<sup>th</sup>, 1899. A Tuesday. – Do you want any special time of day?

EMILY: Oh, I want the whole day.

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

*One side of the stage gradually becomes very bright – the brightness of a crisp winter morning.*

EMILY: (*With a cry; rising.*) There's our house!

STAGE MANAGER: Yes, it's 1899. This is fourteen years ago.

EMILY: Oh, I love it so! Are they inside?

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

EMILY: (*Softly.*) Will she?

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

EMILY: No... ?

STAGE MANAGER: He'd been back to his university to make a speech in western New York.

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

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

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

CONSTABLE WARREN: Morning, Howie.

HOWIE NEWSOME: You're up early.

CONSTABLE WARREN: Been rescuin' a fella, darn near froze to death, down by Polish Town there. Got drunk and lay out in the snowdrifts. Thought he was in bed when I shook 'm.

*MRS. WEBB has appeared in her kitchen, but is not yet able to see EMILY.*

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

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

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

*HOWIE NEWSOME has entered along Main Street and brings the milk to Mrs. Webb's door.*

## OUR TOWN

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

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

MRS. WEBB: Think of it! Keep yourself wrapped up. (*She takes her bottles in, shuddering.*)

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

MRS. WEBB: Just open your eyes, dear, that's all. I laid it out for you special – on the dresser, there. If it were a snake it would have bit you.

EMILY: Yes, yes...

*She puts her hand on her heart. MR. WEBB comes along Main Street, where he meets CONSTABLE WARREN. Their movements and voices are increasingly lively in the sharp air.*

MR. WEBB: Good morning, Bill.

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

MR. WEBB: Yes, just been back to my old university in New York State. Been any trouble here?

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

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

EMILY: (*Whispering.*) Papa.

*MR. WEBB shakes the snow off his feet and enter his house. CONSTABLE WARREN goes off, right.*

MR. WEBB: Good morning, Mother.

MRS. WEBB: How did it go, Charles?

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

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

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

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

*MR. WEBB starts upstairs.*

Charles! Don't forget; it's Emily's birthday. Did you remember to get her something?

MR. WEBB: (*Patting his pocket.*) Yes, I've got something here. (*Calling up the stairs.*) Where's my girl? Where's my birthday girl?

## OUR TOWN

*He goes off. MRS. WEBB begins frying real bacon on the hob, so that the scent wafts into the audience.*

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

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

*EMILY looks questioningly at the STAGE MANAGER, saying or suggesting: "Can I go in?" He nods briefly. She goes into the kitchen and says, suggesting the voice of a girl of twelve:*

Good morning, Mama.

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

EMILY: Oh, Mama, you *shouldn't* have.

*EMILY throws an anguished glance at the STAGE MANAGER.*

I can't – I can't.

MRS. WEBB: (*Facing the audience over her stove.*) But birthday or no birthday, I want you to eat your breakfast good and slow. I want you to grow up and be a good strong girl. (*Motioning to the presents.*) That in the blue paper is from your Aunt Carrie; and I reckon you can guess who bought the post-card album. I found it on the doorstep when I brought in the milk – George Gibbs... must have come over in the cold pretty early... right nice of him.

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

MRS. WEBB: When I give you this bacon, I want you to chew it good and slow. It'll help keep you warm on a cold day.

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

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

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

*EMILY flings her arms around her mother's neck. MRS. WEBB goes on with her cooking, but is pleased.*

## OUR TOWN

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

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

EMILY: (*To the Stage Manager.*) I can't. I can't go on. (*She breaks down sobbing and steps out of the kitchen.*) Oh, God, it goes so fast! We don't even have time to look at one another!

(*Composing herself.*) I didn't realize. So all that was going on and we never noticed. Take me back – up the hill – to my grave. But first: Wait! One more look.

Goodbye... Goodbye, world... Goodbye, Grover's Corners... Mama and Papa. Goodbye to clocks ticking... and Mama's sunflowers. And food and coffee. And new-ironed dresses and hot baths... and sleeping and waking up. Oh, earth, you're too wonderful for anybody to realize you.

*EMILY looks toward the STAGE MANAGER and asks abruptly, through her tears:*

Do any human beings ever realize life while they live it? – every, every minute?

STAGE MANAGER: (*Simply.*) No. Saints and poets maybe... They do some.

EMILY: I'm ready to go back.

*EMILY returns to her chair beside MRS. GIBBS.*

*Beat.*

MRS. GIBBS: Were you happy?

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

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

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

SIMON STIMSON: That's what it was to be alive. To move about in a cloud of ignorance; to go up and down trampling on the feelings of... of those about you. To spend and waste time as though you had a million years. To be always at the mercy of one self-centered passion, or another. – That's the happy existence you wanted to go back to. Ignorance and blindness.

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

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

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

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

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

## OUR TOWN

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

EMILY: Mother Gibbs, it's George.

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

EMILY: It's George.

*GEORGE enters, and slowly comes toward them.*

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

*GEORGE sinks to his knees then falls full length with his face at Emily's feet.*

A WOMAN AMONG THE DEAD: Goodness! That ain't no way to behave!

MRS. SOAMES: He ought to be home.

EMILY: Mother Gibbs?

MRS. GIBBS: Yes, Emily.

EMILY: They don't understand, do they.

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

*The STAGE MANAGER appears. In the distance a clock is heard striking the hour very faintly.*

STAGE MANAGER: Most everybody's asleep in Grover's Corners. There are a few lights on: Shorty Hawkins, down at the depot, has just watched the Albany train go by. And at the general store somebody's sitting up late and talking.

*The coda from Beethoven's Sonata 32 begins.*

Yes, it's clearing up. There are the stars – doing their old, old crisscross journeys in the sky.

Scholars haven't settled the matter yet, but they seem to think there are no living beings up there. Just rocks... or fire. Only this one is straining away, straining away all the time to make something of itself. The strain's so bad that every sixteen hours everybody lies down and gets a rest. (*He checks his watch.*) Hm... Eleven o'clock in Grover's Corners. – You get a good rest, too. Good night.

*The STAGE MANAGER walks off. We hear the finale of Beethoven's sonata, as the lights rise to a brilliant bath of illumination on the Dead. Blackout.*

THE END