screaming from those schoolyards. (He approaches the table and chairs downstage right.) This is our doctor's house, - Doc Gibbs'. This is the back door. (Two arched trellises, covered with vines and flowers, are pushed out, one by each proscenium pillar.) There's some scenery for those who think they have to have scenery. This is Mrs. Gibbs' garden. Corn...peas...beans...hollyhocks...heliotrope... and a lot of burdock. (crosses the stage) In those days our newspaper come out twice a week - the Grover's Corners Sentinel - and this is Editor Webb's house. And this is Mrs. Webb's garden. Just like Mrs. Gibbs', only it's got a lot of sunflowers, too. (He looks upward, center stage.) Right here's... a big butternut tree. (He returns to his place by the right prescenium pillar and looks at the audience for a minute. Nice town, y'know what I mean? Nobody very remarkable ever come out of it, s'far as we know. The earliest tombstones in the cemetery up there on the mountain say 1670-1680 - they're Grovers and Cartwrights and Gibbses and Herseys - same names as are around here now. Well, as I said: it's about dawn. The only lights on in town are in a cottage over by the tracks where a Polish mother's just had twins. And in the Joe Crowell house, where Joe Junior's getting up so as to deliver the paper. And in the depot, where Shorty Hawkins is gettin' ready to flag the 5:45 for Boston.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

STAGE MANAGER. And the population, Professor Willard?

PROFESSOR WILLARD. Within the town limits: 2,640. **STAGE MANAGER.** Just a moment, Professor.

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

(GEORGE snivels.)

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

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

George, I've decided to raise your spending money twenty-five cents a week. Not, of course, for chopping wood for your mother, because that's a present you give her, but because you're getting older – and I imagine there are lots of things you must find to do with it.

GEORGE. Thanks, Pa.

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

GEORGE. (still broken up) It's only half past eight, Pa.

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

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

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

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

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

(Women's voices respond.)

MRS. WEBB. (calling off left) I'll tell Mr. Webb; I know he'll want to put it in the paper.

MRS. GIBBS. My, it's late!

MRS. SOAMES. Good night, Irma.

(They stroll silently.)

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

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

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

MRS. GIBBS. What?

MRS. SOAMES. Simon Stimson!

(MRS. WEBB turns, annoyed.)

MRS. GIBBS. Now, Louella!

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

MRS. GIBBS. Now, Louella! We all know about Mr. Stimson, and we all know about the troubles he's been through, and Dr. Ferguson knows too, and if Dr. Ferguson keeps him on there in his job the only thing the rest of us can do is just not to notice it.

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

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

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

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

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

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

(Both laugh and start on their ways.)

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

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

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

DR. GIBBS. (looks at pocketwatch) You're late enough.

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

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

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

(He puts book reluctantly on the table and rises. They stroll out arm in arm along the footlights.)
(A bobwhite calls three times. They speak quietly.)

Isn't that wonderful?

(They stop to survey the moonlit scene out front.) What did you do all the time I was away?

DR. GIBBS. (interested, though he tries to disapprove) Oh, I read – as usual. What were the girls gossiping about tonight?

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

(exits, trying doors)

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

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

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

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

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

EMILY. Troubles, Papa? No.

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

EMILY. Good night, Papa.

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

REBECCA. (when he is off, looking at the moon throughout) I never told you about that letter Jane Crofut got from her minister when she was sick. He wrote Jane a letter and on the envelope the address was like this: It said: Jane Crofut; The Crofut Farm; Grover's Corners; Sutton County; New Hampshire; United States of America.

GEORGE. What's funny about that?

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

GEORGE. What do you know!

REBECCA. And the postman brought it just the same.

GEORGE. What do you know!

(Pause. Crickets.)

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

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

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

HOWIE NEWSOME. (offstage left) Giddap, Bessie!

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

STAGE MANAGER. Here comes Howie Newsome delivering the milk.

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

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

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

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

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

SI CROWELL. Morning, Howie.

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

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

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

HOWIE NEWSOME. Reckon he is. SI CROWELL. He could hit and run bases, too. HOWIE NEWSOME. Yep. Mighty fine ball player.

(Horse whinny off left.)

(looking off left) – Whoa! Bessie! I guess I can stop and talk if I've a mind to!

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

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

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

You're up early, Bill.

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

- **CONSTABLE WARREN.** 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 become a parson. Wonderful ball player. Howie, how does the weather look to you?
- HOWIE NEWSOME. Oh, 'tain't bad. Think maybe it'll clear up for good.

(CONSTABLE WARREN continues on his way.) (SI starts off, throwing newspapers, exits.)

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

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

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

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

(HOWIE NEWSOME exits.)

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

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

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

MRS. GIBBS. Frank Gibbs, don't you say another word. I feel like crying every minute. (crosses to pour coffee at the table for him) Sit down and drink your coffee.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

MRS. GIBBS. (crossing to table with milk for Rebecca) And how do you think I felt! (serves his toast) - Frank, weddings are perfectly awful things. Farces, - that's what they are!

(She puts a plate before him.)

Here, I've made something for you.

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

MRS. GIBBS. (pleased) 'Tain't hard to make and I had to do something. (turns, suddenly serious, crosses to stove and serves self)

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

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

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

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

MRS. GIBBS. (stirs coffee) Well, mother and daughter's no picnic, let me tell you. (drinks)

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. WEBB washes dishes.)

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. (cuts toast)

(Pause. DR. GIBBS starts laughing.)

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

MRS. GIBBS. Oh, go along with you! (eats)

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

(Both laugh.)

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

(MRS. WEBB dries hands on towel.)

MRS. GIBBS. Well, – good weather, bad weather – 'tain't very choice, but I always find something to say. Did you hear Rebecca stirring around upstairs? (Rises, taking both plates. Crosses to sink to scrape plates.)

(MRS. WEBB crosses to sit at table, covers apron.)

DR. GIBBS. No. Only day of the year Rebecca hasn't been managing every-body's business up there.

with Mr. Webb and drink this cup of coffee; (crossing to stairs) 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. GEORGE sits at table, uses sugar, stirs, steals look at 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. (Pause. Earnestly.) Mr. Webb, what sense could there be in a superstition like that?

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

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

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

GEORGE. (stirring coffee) 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. (cuts food and eats)

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

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

GEORGE. No, sir. (pause) 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. (stirring coffee) Oh, age hasn't much to do with it, George – not compared with...uh...other things. (drinks)

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

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

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

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

GEORGE. What?

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

GEORGE. (hitches chair nearer, enthusiastic) 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 –

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. (Young voices are heard off left.)

I don't have to tell you how important that is.

(Voices mount gaily as he places a board across the backs of two chairs, which he takes from those at the Gibbs family's table. He brings two high stools from the wings and places them behind the board. Persons sitting on the stools will be facing the audience. This is the counter of Mr. Morgan's drugstore. STAGE MANAGER exits.)

Yep - there they are coming down Main Street now.

(EMILY, carrying an armful of – imaginary – schoolbooks, comes along Main Street from the left, speaking off left as voices die out.)

Ch, Ernestine! Ernestine! Can you come over tonight and do Latin? Isn't that Cicero the worst thing –! Tell your mother you have to. G'by, G'by, Helen. G'by, Fred.

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

GEORGE. Can I carry your books home for you, Emily? **EMILY.** (coolly) Why...uh...Thank you. It isn't far.

(She gives them to him. **GEORGE** takes her books under his arm, turns to speak offstage. **EMILY** is shy and embarrassed.)

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

EMILY. (suddenly alert) Good-by, Lizzy.

GEORGE. (also to "Lizzy", not enthusiastic) Good-by, Lizzy.

I'm awfully glad you were elected, too, Emily.
 EMILY. (coolly) 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. (*hurt*) Emily, why are you mad at me? **EMILY.** (*defensive*) I'm not mad at you.

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

EMILY. (dreading to face the issue) Well, since you ask me, I might as well say it right out, George, –

(She catches sight of a teacher passing.)

Good-by, Miss Corcoran.

GEORGE. Good-by, Miss Corcoran. - 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.

(GEORGE turns away, a bit hurt. She glances at him.)

I'm sorry if that hurts your feelings, but I've got to – tell the truth and shame the devil.

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

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

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

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

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

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

EMILY. (all innocence, yet firm) 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. (cries)

GEORGE. (choked voice) 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. (controlling herself) Well, thank you...I would.

(GEORGE starts to take her arm, but is too shy. 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.

(GEORGE starts into store, then steps back to let EMILY go first. They cross to stools and GEORGE puts books down on board.)

(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. (He gropes 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.

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.)

JOE STODDARD, 60-odd, enters, crossing to glance at a grave a moment, then turns downstage a bit and stands watching for mourners off left. He carries his hat. At the same time, SAM CRAIG, 30, enters, wiping his forehead from the exertion. He carries an umbrella and strolls front.)

stage Manager. (front) 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.

SAM CRAIG. Good afternoon, Joe Stoddard.

JOE STODDARD. (turns, surprised) 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 Buffalo now, Joe. But I was in the East when I got news of my cousin's death, so I thought I'd combine things a little and come and see the old home. You look well.

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

SAM CRAIG. Yes.

JOE STODDARD. Yes, yes. I always say I hate to supervise when a young person is taken.

(SAM turns, glancing at the gravestones, crossing to Farmer McCarty. JOE looks off left.)

They'll be here in a few minutes now. I had to come here early today – my son's supervisin' at the home.

- 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 my Aunt Julia...I'd forgotten that she'd...of course, of course.
 - JOE STODDARD. Yes, Doc Gibbs lost his wife two-three 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. Doesn't sound like Aunt Julia. There aren't many of those Hersey sisters left now. Let me see: where are...I wanted to look at my father's and mother's...

(His eyes fall on Stimson's stone.)

JOE STODDARD. Over there with the Craigs...Avenue F.

SAM CRAIG. (reading Simon Stimson's epitaph.) He was organist at church, wasn't he? – Hm, drank a lot, we used to say.

JOE STODDARD. Nobody was supposed to know about it. He'd seen a peck of trouble. (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. It was wrote up in the Boston papers at the time.

SAM CRAIG. Joe, what did she die of?

JOE STODDARD. Who?

SAM CRAIG. My cousin.

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

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

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

(From left to center, at the back of the stage, comes a procession. 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. EMILY is among them, a black cloak covering her white dress.)

MRS. SOAMES. Who is it, Julia?

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

MR. WEBB. Good morning, Mother. (removes his hat and coat)

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. (*He starts upstairs*.) Charles! Don't forget, it's Emily's birthday. Did you remember to get her something?

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

(He goes off left.)

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

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

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

EMILY. Good morning, Mama.

MRS. WEBB. (crossing to embrace and kiss her; in her characteristic matter-of-fact manner) Well, now, dear, a very happy birthday to my girl and many happy returns. (She returns to the stove, slipping out of EMILY's arms which were about to embrace her.) There are some surprises waiting for you on the kitchen table.

EMILY. Oh, Mama, you shouldn't have. (She throws an anguished glance at the STAGE MANAGER.) I can't – I can't.

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

(EMILY steps to table and looks over gifts.)

That in the blue paper is from your Aunt Carrie; and I reckon you can guess who brought 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. (putters at stove again)

EMILY. (To herself. Very gently picking up album.) Oh, George! I'd forgotten that....

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

EMILY. (with mounting urgency) Oh, Mama, just look at me one minute as though you really saw me.

(MRS. WEBB turns to stir oatmeal at stove, placid and smiling, not hearing.)

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

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

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

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

MR. WEBB. (offstage) Where's my girl? Where's my birthday girl?

EMILY. (in a loud voice to the STAGE MANAGER) I can't. I can't go on. It goes so fast. We don't have time to look at one another. (She breaks down sobbing.)

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

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

STAGE MANAGER. No. (pause) The saints and poets, maybe – they do some.

EMILY. (calmly, as she absorbs the thought) I'm ready to go back.

(She returns to her chair beside MRS. GIBBS. As she does so the lights dim, leaving only a deep blue except for amber on the Dead.)

(pause)

MRS. GIBBS. Were you happy?

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

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

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

simon stimson. (with mounting violence; bitingly) Yes, now you know. Now you know! That's what it was to be alive. To move about in a cloud of ignorance; to go up and down trampling on the feelings of those...of those about you. To spend and waste time as though you had a million years. To be always at the mercy of one self-centered passion, or another. Now you know – that's the happy existence you wanted to go back to. Ignorance and blindness.

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

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

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

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