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## Finding the Man, Husband, Physician & Father: Creating the Role of Doc Gibbs in Thornton Wilder's Our Town

Patrick Payne  
*University of New Orleans*

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Finding the Man, Husband, Physician & Father:  
Creating the Role of Doc Gibbs in  
Thornton Wilder's *Our Town*

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the  
University of New Orleans  
in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of

Master of Fine Arts  
in  
Film, Theatre and Communication Arts  
Performance

by

Patrick L. Payne

B.A. New Mexico State University, 2003

December 2010

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**“Life is what happens to you... while you are busy making other plans.”**

**- John Lennon**

(from the song *Beautiful Boy [Darling Boy]* from his last album *Double Fantasy* 1980)



## Acknowledgements

In order to do this correctly, I must go all the way back to 1997, when my close friend Brian Culberson goaded me into auditioning for *The Gift of the Magi*. I did not know that this play was a musical, nor did I know that I would have to sing for my audition. I do not sing. Needless to say, I did not get cast. However, this led directly to my meeting my other good friend, Dale Pawley. Dale cast me in David Ives' one act play, *The Philadelphia*. That was it. I caught the theater bug. Over the next four years I did just about every play the community theater put on, whether it be a small speaking role or a non-speaking background character. I took everything.

During the Spring of 2001 I was cast as Hamlet in the production of *Rosencrantz & Guildenstern are Dead*. Working on the production would change my life.

I met the two people whom I credit as my original mentors in theater, even if it was in an unofficial capacity. Mike Wise, a theater professor from New Mexico State University, was the director. Susan Smith, a local English and theater high school teacher, was cast as Gertrude.

These two individuals took me in and began to teach me about process and craft. They gave me a wealth of knowledge and experience. Together the three of us collaborated on two other projects: *The Beauty Queen of Leanne* and *Uncle Vanya*. I consider these two productions as two of my best performances to date.

It was because of these two people and two productions that I quit my day job as a title researcher and went back to school to seek a M.A. in Theater Arts from the University of Texas at El Paso. My emphasis was Playwriting. It was there that I met and worked with Professors Joel Murray and Chuck Gorden. While I was there, Joel directed me in *The Diary of Anne Frank*, and Chuck directed me in *Macbeth*. It was my association with these two gentleman, which led

me to New Orleans. Not satisfied with just an M.A. I sought out a terminal degree. Joel introduced me to David Hoover, my current professor and mentor at The University of New Orleans.

Over the past two and half years in New Orleans, I befriended Marshall Carby, Christopher Hornung, Jennie Freeman and Beau Bratcher.

To all of the aforementioned individuals, each one of you have taken me a step further toward my goal of becoming a theater professor. I am grateful to you all. Thank you so much and God bless.

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## **Abstract**

This thesis serves as documentation of my efforts to define accurately my creative process as an actor in creating the role of Doc Gibbs in *Our Town* by Thornton Wilder. This includes research, rehearsal journal, character analysis and evaluation of my performance. *Our Town* was produced by the University of New Orleans Department of Film, Theatre and Communication Arts in New Orleans, Louisiana. The play was performed in the Robert E. Nims Theatre of the Performing Arts Center at 7:30 pm on the evenings of April 22 through April 24, 2010 and April 29 through May 1, 2010 as well as one matinee at 2:30 pm on Sunday, May 2, 2010.

**Keywords:** Patrick L. Payne, University of New Orleans, UNO, Doc Gibbs, *Our Town*, Thornton Wilder.

## Introduction

I arrived at the University of New Orleans during August of 2008. I began my MFA studies that fall. The program that I enrolled in was traditionally a three-year program. However, I was an exception, because I had previously taken four semesters of graduate classes in theater arts from the University of Texas at El Paso. Twelve hours of this credit would be able to be transferred to UNO. This would leave me with only having to take five semesters of classes, allowing me to graduate in two and a half years instead of three. This would also enable me to teach beginning my second semester at UNO.

My first semester at UNO, I was cast as the Old Man in Eugene Ionesco's *The Chairs*. During the spring of 2008 I was cast as the lead in *Macbeth*. This was the most challenging role that I had undertaken up until that point. Upon its completion, I wondered what could possibly be more challenging. The Absurdist play by Ionesco would prove to be just that.

The following semester, the spring of 2009, I was cast as Don Pedro in William Shakespeare's *Much Ado About Nothing*. Initially, I thought I wanted the role of Benedick, but it was not to be; however, the Prince was a light-hearted role, and I had a lot of fun creating him. I enjoyed watching the other actors grow as well, and *Much Ado About Nothing* was and is my favorite of all of Shakespeare's plays.

During the fall of 2009, I undertook the most difficult process of my life. I was cast as four separate characters in the original script *Verses from Jordan* by UNO playwright Bradley Troll. I was cast as the Man, the Father, Gift Giver and Walt Whitman. It was a tremendous task trying to develop four separate and distinctive characters. The content of the play was also challenging, as it concerned the taboo subject of bug chasing, a current counter-culture

movement amongst the gay community, where gay men actively pursue acquiring the AIDS virus.

It was also decided during the fall of 2009 that my thesis role would be the Reverend Shannon in Tennessee Williams' *The Night of the Iguana*. However, this was not to be. Due to unfortunate circumstances beyond my control, my health prevented me from participating in the production. As a result, it was decided that my thesis role would be Doc Gibbs in UNO's spring 2010 production of *Our Town*. This particular role would be considerably more difficult than any other role that I had had during the previous five years. Doc Gibbs was concise. The challenge before me was being able to establish a memorable and truthful character in the short amount of time the Doc was on stage, and challenging it was indeed.

UNO and the city of New Orleans, during my two and a half years there, pushed me in directions I never would have chosen for myself.

## **Biographical Information**

Thornton Niven Wilder was born on April 17, 1897 in the capital city of Madison, Wisconsin. Although he was born in what is considered Midwestern America, his family roots were deeply seeded in New England, specifically Maine. This would become more and more evident later in his life. His parents were Amos Parker Wilder and Isabella Niven Wilder. Unfortunately, not that he was aware of it at the time, Thornton's life was marked from the moment he entered this world by tragedy, as his twin brother died during their birth. However, eventually, Thornton would become the second oldest of five siblings. He had one older brother named after their father, Amos. He also had three younger sisters: Isabel, Charlotte, and the youngest member of the family, Janet. (Konkle)

From an early age, Thornton was a world traveler. His father, who was a prominent newspaper owner and editor, was also the United States Consul General to Hong Kong and Shanghai, China. At the age of eight years old in the year of 1906, the Wilder family crossed the Pacific Ocean to reside in Hong Kong. This was a short-lived visit to China, as they returned to the United States during the month of October of that same year. They would move to Berkeley, California. During the fall of 1906, Thornton would begin his tenure at the Emerson Public School located in Berkeley. He would continue schooling there until 1910. During the summer of 1910, the Wilder family would return across the Pacific Ocean to China where he would attend the China Inland Mission School located at Chefoo for the following two years. He and his family would return to the United States once again in 1912. This time they would move to Ojai, California, where he would begin studies at the Thatcher School. From the Thatcher School, Thornton would return to Berkeley, where he would attend and graduate from Berkeley High School in 1915. It was during these years that Thornton would develop his interest in the theater

world. It was here that he performed in his first play, *The Russian Princess*. After his graduation from high school, Thornton would leave the sunny west coast of California for Oberlin College, located in Ohio. He would spend two years there, but would eventually return to his New England roots and enroll at Yale University, where he would graduate with his B. A. in the 1920's. (Konkle)

After this accomplishment, Thornton would leave the United States once again. This time, however, he would travel in the other direction, crossing the Atlantic Ocean, this time traveling to Rome, where he would attend the esteemed American Academy. This particular school is the oldest American school located in Europe for independent study of the arts and humanities. He attended the Academy during the years 1920 through 1921. It was during this time that Thornton began to develop and cement his skill and love of writing, his formative years. After these few influential years in Italy, Thornton returned to the United States once again. This time he would find himself in Lawrenceville, New Jersey at the Lawrenceville School, where he would first teach classes in the French language. Because of its proximity, Thornton would next enroll at Princeton University where he would eventually receive a Masters of Art in French during the year 1926. (Konkle)

However, it was during these early years of the 1920's that Thornton would begin his visits to the MacDowell Colony, located in Peterborough, New Hampshire. The MacDowell Colony was founded in 1907 by Edward and Marian MacDowell with strictly donated funds. The Colony was specifically designed to give poets, artists, writers, playwrights and composers a sanctuary in which to work and create without distraction. Visits were limited to no more than two months at a time. Room and board were provided. An environment was created which left



the visitor with nothing to worry about other than their craft. Over the years an estimated sixty Pulitzer Prizes were awarded to alumni of the Colony, three of which belong to Thornton Wilder.

Although one might assume Thornton to be the genius of the Wilder family, it must be noted that he was brought up and nurtured in a very talented and intelligent environment.

Thornton's father, Amos Parker Wilder was born and raised in the New England state of Maine. Preceding his middle son's attendance, Father Wilder also attended Yale University, where he received his B. A. in 1884, as well as his P.H.D. in 1892, on the reformation of municipality systems. After leaving Yale, he would pursue work as a journalist all over the upper northeast, including New York City. During 1894, the same years as his marriage to Isabella, Thornton's mother, Amos would purchase a considerable interest in the Wisconsin State Journal. He would sit as editor of the paper until 1906. Because of relationships with William Howard Taft and President Theodore Roosevelt, Father Wilder would receive an appointment, as previously stated, as United States Consul General to China. He would remain in his country's service until 1914. After his retirement he would return to Yale as an instructor. (Konkle)

Isabella Niven Wilder, Thornton's mother, was the daughter of a New York clergyman. Mother Wilder always took it upon herself to be well read. She kept up with all of the modern writers and dramatists. She also had a passionate love of poetry and often wrote her own poems. She enjoyed translating European works into English. Wherever the Wilder family lived, Isabella always took it upon herself to be a cultural force within her family as well as within their community. During the year 1920, she broke barriers by becoming the first female elected official in the city of Hamden, Connecticut. Thornton held his mother in very high regard. He called her "... one of Shakespeare's girls – a star danced and under it I was born."

Amos Niven Wilder, Thornton's older brother, also attended Yale University where he received a B.A. as well as a P.H.D. A consummate academic, Brother Wilder also studied at Oxford University and at the University of Brussels. He served in the American Field Service during the First World War as well as in the artillery forces as a corporal. In 1926, Amos became an ordained minister for the community of North Conway, New Hampshire. After several years of being a pastor, Brother Wilder began following a prolific career as a teacher all over the country, including such schools as the University of Chicago, Andover and the Harvard Divinity School. On top of all his academic successes, Amos was also an award-winning poet and literary critic. (Konkle)

Charlotte Wilder was Thornton's oldest sister. She too attended Berkeley High School and upon her graduation she moved on to Mount Holyoke College where she graduated magna cum laude with a B. A. in English in 1919. She went on to receive an advanced degree from Radcliffe University. The high point of her intellectual career was when she received the Shelley Memorial Award for poetry in 1937. Unfortunately in 1941, Charlotte suffered from a severe nervous breakdown, a tragedy from which she would never recover. She lived in institutions for the rest of her life. She died in 1980. (Konkle)

Isabel Wilder was somewhat less prolific than her older siblings. She attended an estimated thirteen different schools before she was the age of twenty. She never did attend a college or university formally. However, Isabel was one of the first students the Yale School of Drama graduated in 1928. Despite her aloofness with her schooling she did pen three novels during the Great Depression. Her most important role, though, was her relationship with her brother, Thornton. They were extremely close. Isabel never wed. As a result she devoted her life to her brother's career, serving as his agent, spokeswoman and representative to society. After

their parents passed away, Isabel moved in with Thornton in their family home. She was by his side at his deathbed. She passed away in 1995. (Konkle)

Janet was the youngest of the Wilder children, but by no means lesser than any of the others. She graduated from New Haven High School in Connecticut and went on to attend Mount Holyoke College as her sister Isabel did. She too graduated magna cum laude in 1933. She continued on and received a P.H.D. from the University of Chicago in zoology. Janet married a young attorney during the year 1941 and moved to Amherst, Massachusetts, where she and her husband dedicated their lives to conservation efforts and animal rights. Upon her death in 1994, Amherst University honored her passing by giving her the title “The First Lady of Amherst.”(Konkle)

After I read about the aforementioned accolades of the entire Wilder family, the amount of success that Thornton Wilder received over his long and adventurous life does not seem so surprising. However, this is not to say, by any means, that his achievements should be trivialized or seen as something that was expected or typical of a man with his academic and intellectual heritage. It is not. Thornton Wilder was an exceptional American writer and creator.

From the time he attended the American Academy in Rome during the early 1920's, to the period which sparked his interest in writing, until the year before his death in 1975, a nearly fifty-year span, Wilder achieved more success and accolades than any one writer/ playwright could possibly dream of. Over this fifty-year period, Wilder penned seven novels, the second of which, *The Bridge of San Luis Rey*, won him his first Pulitzer Prize in the year 1927 at the young age of thirty. In 1963, Thornton, was awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom, the highest award that can be given to a civilian in the United States, by President John F. Kennedy. Recipients of the award include Cesar Chavez, John F. Kennedy (himself/ posthumously),

Roberto Clemente, Harvey Milk and a plethora of other notable Americans. In 1965 The National Book Committee awarded him the Medal for Literature. With the publication of *The Eighth Day* in 1967, he received the National Book Award. (Konkle)

However, despite his tremendous success amongst the realm of fictional literature, the world will remember Thornton Wilder, in my opinion, most notably for his theatrical endeavors. In 1938, his now long enduring epic about a small New Hampshire town named Grover's Corners entitled *Our Town* was introduced to America. One could say that the early success and recognition of this legendary play can now be seen as a foreshadowing of what was to come for the play. Even today *Our Town* is one of the most produced plays in the United States. Thornton received his second Pulitzer Prize for this endeavor.

Only four years later, Thornton would follow up the success of *Our Town* with a play entitled *The Skin of our Teeth*. Once again, he received the Pulitzer Prize for his efforts.

As we move further into the 21<sup>st</sup> century, we move further and further away from the life of a man that began in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and yet his work continues to endure as does his legacy. Thornton Wilder will persevere.

## Wilder's World

David H. Watters, the Director of the Center of New England Culture located at the University of New Hampshire, states within the introduction of his study guide to *Our Town*, “Wilder, however, avoided an aesthetic or political agenda, drawing instead on the rich repository of associations and memories that could draw audiences to consider the essential value of daily life in America.”

Wilder crafted a play which would come to embody the essence of what it was like and what it meant to be a part of a small New England community. He was meticulous in his vision. He was specific in his description. He created a community that anyone of us might have been a part of during the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. He showed us the Gibbs and Webb families engaging in daily activities that most would lose in the monotony and shuffle of any daily life. Why would Wilder do this?

In 1929, the New York Stock Market crashed, thus marking the beginning of what history now labels The Great Depression. It was the beginning of nearly a decade of economic, agricultural and environmental strife that would be felt around the world. Almost eleven thousand of the United States' twenty-five thousand financial institutions folded. Because of a myriad of mistakes concerning monetary policy and the gold standard compliance, production and demand were dramatically diminished, resulting in the highest unemployment rate in the United States ever. By 1932 nearly thirty percent of the United States' work force was unemployed. It was these staggering numbers that led the then newly elected President Franklin D. Roosevelt to create The New Deal. (Great Depression)

Grover's Corners is the antithesis of America in the 1930's. From the opening sequence we see the residents of the small New Hampshire town bustling about with their own morning

business. The Doc is returning from a house call. Joe is delivering his newspapers. Howie is making sure every household has its milk. Mrs. Gibbs and Mrs. Webb are hustling about, getting their children ready for school. Everything is as it should be. With the exception of George's allowance, there is nary a mention of commerce or money in the play. It is almost a utopian society when juxtaposed to the real world of Wilder. It is a society where a "crash" would not occur.

The phrase "New Deal" was taken from Roosevelt's acceptance speech for the Democratic nomination in 1932. It was a reactionary phrase given in response to the inability of the previous Herbert Hoover administration to offer any viable solutions to the nation's current plight. The New Deal strived to curb the national unemployment numbers by providing immediate economic supplement. The Works Progress Administration (WPA) was created under this program. It was designed to create jobs for those millions of victims of The Great Depression. The plan idealized the notion of saving an individual's skills as well as their self-esteem and self-respect. Their employment, ideally, would increase purchasing power thus stimulating the poor economic conditions. (New Deal)

The citizens of Grover's Corners seem to support one another. It is not written anywhere specifically in the play; however, one does get the sense of a symbiotic nature amongst the people in the town. They help one another out when it is necessary. In this sense they are their own WPA.

One of the most powerful images from The Great Depression is that of the Dust Bowl. Prior to the First World War the central part of the country was largely grasslands used for raising livestock. After the First World War ended these regions were stripped and plowed under in order to grow wheat. Unfortunately, after years of poor maintenance and over cultivation,

these lands became barren. Typically, these areas of the country would receive less than twenty inches of rain per year. The grass, now gone, was essential in keeping the water in the ground as well as keeping the topsoil from eroding away. A drought seized the central United States during the 1930's coinciding with the great economic strife. Winds ensued and the region became a barren wasteland. Families were forced to flee their homes and farms that were now incapable of sustaining crops. (Dust Bowl)

My Grandmother Evans, my mother's mom, and my grandpa moved from Kansas during the 1930's to Arizona. Their farm became unfertile and was being blown away before their very eyes. My mother wasn't born yet, but Grandma and Grandpa packed their things and their oldest daughter, my aunt – my Mother's big sister, and fled Kansas. Grandma used to tell me how the dust was so thick that one could breath it in and that it blacked out the sun.

Now contrast the aforementioned image with Grover's Corners, New Hampshire. I've been to New England during what they call a dry season. It is still very green. The juxtaposition of these two images is that of life and death.

As if all of the aforementioned weren't enough, the United States after the First World War was the bank for post-war Europe, supplying credit for the rebuilding countries. With the collapse of the United States' financial stability, Europe was also thrust into economic upheaval. Germany was struck particularly hard, as the country was already financially strapped with the burden of paying for their aggressiveness and destruction during the First World War. This plight gave rise to Adolf Hitler. In 1933 he took power in Germany and began building a war machine the likes of which the world will never forget. The Nazi Party was created and Fascism was their politics. Under this political system, individualism is discouraged. All loyalties are owed to the state and its sole leader. Any dissent whatsoever is dealt with harshly.

The German people were desperate and in a state of depression. The bravado-filled and enigmatic speaking voice of Adolf Hitler lured them away from their senses. Whereas President Roosevelt attempted to raise his people through the policies of his New Deal, Adolf Hitler promised prosperity through force and hatred. Italy would soon follow Germany's example and rally a Fascist government behind the dictator Benito Mussolini. And far to the east, Emperor Hirohito embraced the ideals of Fascism as well. The seeds of the Second World War were being planted. (Fascism)

Individualism is what makes Grover's Corners alive. Each character, big or small, has a life of their own. There is loyalty to the community, but one could hardly imagine a hard line attitude being embraced with this ordinary little town.

This was the world Thornton Wilder wrote *Our Town* during. As the world's countries scrambled to hang on to their national identities, words such as "isolationist" became popular with governments. This was a particular political policy initiated in order to preserve national production by placing taxes and international tariffs. Ultimately, it did more harm than good. By the end of the year 1932 international trading was half of what it once had been. (Isolationist)

Perhaps, it was such terms as "isolationist", or the naked aggression of Fascism, or the desperation of a nation crippled by unemployment, or visually, the stimulation of a dark, black, vastly expansive cloud of dust engulfing the heart of the United States that provoked Thornton Wilder's penning of *Our Town*. He created an idyllic little town living simple but satisfying lives of family, friends and community, all of which are set in the New England of old and prior to the jarring impact of the First World War. The innocence of George and Emily during the first two acts of the play reveals in their naivety when contrasted with the vast world that surrounds them. Wilder celebrates this simplicity.



However, because of this very approach, *Our Town* was not without its critics. Once again within his study guide to *Our Town*, David Watters quoted a noted communist writer, contemporary with Wilder, named Michael Gold. Gold states concerning Wilder's work, "'It is a museum, it is not a world,' because it avoids the 'blood, horror, and hope of the world's new empire.'"

*Our Town* is just as Michael Gold described it. It is a museum, but rather than spinning a negative connotation on the term "museum," why not use his own terminology as argument against his opinion? *Our Town* is a museum. Wilder's play takes the audience out of the harsh realities of current society. *Our Town* is an homage to a time when the world was a little less complicated and a little more innocent, just like George and Emily at the beginning of the play. Granted, by the play's end they both become abruptly aware of life and its arbitrary selection of suffering. So in this sense, Wilder does not "avoid" life by any means, but illustrates it. Gold is incorrect when he states, "... it is not a world." It is a world full of life, real people, real occupations, and a true sense of community. One could say that Gold is correct when he claimed Wilder "avoids" all of the "blood" and "horror." My question to this position is "Why wouldn't he?" The world was still recovering from the atrocities of the First World War. The United States as well as the rest of the world was suffering from an unrivalled economic depression historically speaking. Why wouldn't Wilder want to revisit a place where beauty is found in the smallest tasks of a day or where a world of family and community exists in earnest? Why wouldn't he write about a place of comfort and home, when the world he was living in at the time was full of images of aloofness and disorder: shanty towns in New York City's Central Park, the heartland of America eroding into a barren wasteland or families gathering everything they own and traveling west to find work that does not exist? Why wouldn't Wilder want to provide a glimpse

of the past and of better times when the world around him was consumed by economic and social strife, or when Europe was on the verge of being overrun by the aggressiveness of Fascism's military might?

With *Our Town*, Thornton Wilder did give us a glimpse backward, and in doing so created an institution which would be reproduced over and over again, surviving each new decade, as new generations discover the simple world of Grover's Corners and the endearing characters that reside there. *Our Town* is a "museum", but it is not stagnant. George and Emily grow up before our eyes, and in the end Wilder, through the voice of Emily, illustrates the universality of the play. Emily asks the questions that we all ask. George and Doc suffer losses, which all of us will face eventually in our lives. Despite the specificity of *Our Town's* time and place, it has endured for over seventy years and will continue to persevere because of this common ground.

## ***Our Town* Production History**

It has been approximately seventy-two years since *Our Town*'s opening and literally thousands of curtains have risen and fallen over the town of Grover's Corners, but the very first time was on the evening of February 4, 1938 at the Henry Miller Theater in New York City. This original production was presented and directed by Mr. Jed Harris. The role of the Stage Manager was performed by Frank Craven, who also assisted Wilder with the adaptation of the script. Dr. Gibbs was played by Jay Fassett and Mrs. Gibbs was portrayed by Evelyn Varden. Thomas W. Ross played Mr. Webb and Helen Carew played his wife, Mrs. Webb. George was played by John Craven and Martha Scott played Emily. (Wilder viii)

The following day a review of the opening night performance was found in the Theater section of the New York Times written by Brooks Atkinson.

“Although Thornton Wilder is celebrated chiefly for his fiction, it will be necessary now to reckon with him as a dramatist. His *Our Town*, which opened at Henry Miller's last evening, is a beautifully evocative play. Taking as his material three periods in the history of a placid New Hampshire town, Mr. Wilder has transmuted the simple events of human life into universal reverie. He has given familiar facts a deeply moving, philosophical perspective. Staged without scenery and with the curtain always up, *Our Town* has escaped from the formal barrier of the modern theatre into the quintessence of acting, thought and speculation. In the staging, Jed Harris has appreciated the rare quality of Mr. Wilder's handiwork and illuminated it with a shining performance. *Our Town* is, in this column's opinion, one of the finest achievements of the current stage.”  
(New York Times)

As one can see, from the very first evening the world received a glimpse of Wilder's homage to the life of a small New Hampshire town, the play was conceived and accepted for its basic simplicity. In a world that was seemingly spiraling out of control, his *Our Town* offered comfort from the storm of the Great Depression.

“Under his benign guidance we see three periods in career of one generation of Grover Corners folks-‘Life,’ ‘Love’ and ‘Death.’ Literally, they are not important. On one side of an imaginary street Dr. Gibbs and his family are attending to their humdrum affairs with relish and probity. On the opposite side Mr. Webb, the local editor, and his family are fulfilling their quiet destiny.” (New York Times)

Here Mr. Atkinson touches on a trinity of human life. His use of the phrase “quiet destiny” touches on the one truth that awaits for us all. Although, “life” and “love” might be sought after by all, they are not necessarily obtained. It would be nice to believe that every individual achieves these two base desires, but, unfortunately, it is not a reality. Every human has “life”, but that is not say that every life has “love.” Death is the universal truth that we all have in common. It is our shared “quiet destiny.”

“Nothing happens in the play that is not normal and natural and ordinary. But by stripping the play of everything that is not essential, Mr. Wilder has given it a profound, strange, unworldly significance. This is less the portrait of a town than the sublimation of the commonplace; and in contrast with the universe that silently swims around it, it is brimming over with compassion. ...some of it is heartbreaking in the mute simplicity of human tragedy.” (New York Times)

Mr. Atkinson, after the very first viewing of *Our Town* touches the characteristics that will come to weave all future productions back to this original. He removes any connotation that specifically refers back to Grover’s Corners and its citizens. He takes a blanket from the New Hampshire town and places it over any town with his phrasing “... the sublimation of the commonplace.”

“So Mr. Wilder's pathetically humble evidence of human living passes into the wise beyond. Grover Corners is a green corner of the universe.” (New York Times)

Mr. Atkinson could not have been aware of the enduring legacy that *Our Town* would have, but he certainly foreshadows it with “... passes into the wise beyond.” He continues this imagery simply with his use of the word “green” when describing Grover’s Corners. Green is the color of things living, things that grow and die continually over the course of time.

“But under the leisurely monotone of the production there is a fragment of the immortal truth. *Our Town* is a microcosm. It is also a hauntingly beautiful play.”  
(New York Times)

Merriam-Webster dictionary defines *microcosm* as, “A community or other unity that is an epitome of a larger unity.” How could Atkinson have known the future of this new play? He certainly seemed to have an insight.

As testimony to its success, approximately a year-and-a-half later, a twenty-three year old Orson Welles along with his partner John Houseman chose to include *Our Town* within *The Mercury Theater On Air* 1939 season. A live radio broadcast of Wilder’s Broadway hit was aired on May 12, 1939 with Welles as the Stage Manager. (Scarborough)

During the early 1930’s Welles and Houseman founded *The Mercury Theater On Air*. It was tremendously successful largely due to the company of players, which, over the few years that the company existed, included Agnes Moorehead, Vincent Price, Ray Collins, Anne Baxter, Norman Lloyd and many others who would strive on to have flourishing theatrical careers. The company managed to produce seventeen productions their first year in existence, without sponsorship. However, in December of 1938, Campbell Soup began sponsoring the group and they were renamed The Campbell Playhouse. This name would be the umbrella under which *Our Town* would be produced. (Scarborough)

It must be noted that the group’s success and notoriety came largely due to an unorthodox and frightening broadcast of H.G. Wells’ *The War of the Worlds* on October 30, 1938. The night before Halloween, New York City was shocked to hear what seemed like an actual alien invasion of the earth being broadcast over the radio. The listeners failed to recognize that it was a story being played, convincingly, live on the air by the Mercury Players. A brief panic ensued, but it

was shortly resolved. For *Our Town*, a brand new play at the time, to be included on such a popular medium at the time only compounded its success. (Scarborough)

In the earliest part of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, America was once again stricken with sorrow. However, this time it was not a great economic depression or an erosion of the land before our very eyes, but the aftershock of the events of September 11, 2001. The country was scared, grief stricken and paranoid that we were not safe. Just as Thornton Wilder penned a play about small town life amid a world absorbed in chaos, veteran actor Paul Newman along with the Public Broadcasting Service (PBS) picked up Wilder's homage to simplicity and brought it back to life on the big stage with Newman as the wise Stage Manager. The production was staged at the legendary Westport Country Playhouse. On June 13, 2002 Bruce Weber reviewed the production for the New York Times.

“‘You know how it is,’ the actor was saying from the stage. ‘You’re 21 or 22, and you make some decisions. Then, boom!’ -- and he clapped his hands with a sudden and surprising liveliness – ‘you’re 70.’” (New York Times)

From a man who arguably lived a charmed life and lived and worked on the stage and screen for more than fifty years to describe life in such an abrupt and succinct manner is indicative of Wilder's theme in *Our Town*. Despite everything we might do in our lives, we are all heading in the same direction, and it happens quickly.

“The play is ‘Our Town,’ Thornton Wilder's quintessentially American meditation on mortality from 1938. And in the Westport Country Playhouse's rickety production, this is the galvanizing moment for the audience. For the actor who delivers the speech as Wilder's narrator, the avuncular character known as the Stage Manager, is Paul Newman. And it is lost on no one that this American film icon and emblem of virility is a silver-haired grandfather. He may still possess the good looks that have inspired generations to awe and envy, but Paul Newman is 77. You can't help but feel a pinch of historicity.” (New York Times)

Mr. Weber, utilizing the phrase “meditation of mortality,” affirms that the theme and message of *Our Town* has certainly endured into the 21<sup>st</sup> century. He also uses the term “historicity”, which is defined by Merriam-Webster’s dictionary as being “historical actuality.” “Actuality” is defined as being a “reality or fact.” Paul Newman’s career is a fact, just as his journey toward death is. We all share the same destination.

“The residents -- who grow up, work, marry, beget the next generation and die -- are sweet-natured, unambitious and ordinary. And such is Wilder's point, to strip American life to its mundane fundamentals and illustrate, with a folksiness that belies the play's rather brutally unsentimental evocation of death, that our mortality is what we share and that, realize it or not, it is what makes our most ordinary moments precious. It's a blunt, realistic message, gently and supernaturally delivered. Being the play's chief messenger allows Mr. Newman to marshal the cool assuredness and gravitas-with-a-wink that are his natural gifts, and to pontificate with the comic, philosophical rue of seniority.” (New York Times)

Forty-four years after its opening, *Our Town* still resonated its significance. What are we all taking for granted in our lives as we look beyond today? What’s here now, right in front of us?

“For the long speech he delivers near the end --'Everybody knows in their bones that something is eternal, and that something has to do with human beings' -- he turns directly to the audience, stabs the air with a forefinger and fixes his famous blue eyes on us, and it feels revelatory. It's not quite the climactic moment of the play as envisioned by Wilder, but in this production, with Mr. Newman willingly, graciously and resonantly proving that the stage reduces even stars to human scale, it is.” (New York Times)

Paul Newman passed away on September 26, 2008. Even giants die.

In 2002 two English teachers from Dominguez High School, located in Compton, California, endeavored to prove the universality of *Our Town* by undertaking to produce the play with an all African-American cast. Documentarian/ Director Scott Hamilton Kennedy went to the urban-impoverished, Californian neighborhood to capture the adventure. After the process had finished Kennedy stated, “Compton and Grover’s Corners seem a world apart – separated by

race, language and lifestyle, but the themes in the play and the movie are universal. This is a credit to the original play as well as to the students and teachers in *OT: Our Town*. The students say it best: ‘*Our Town* is Compton, our town is every town.’ (OT: Our Town)

On August 15, 2003 A.O. Scott wrote a review of *OT: Our Town* for the New York Times.

“Anyone who has attended high school has no doubt heard well-intentioned bromides about the universality of great literature, something most teachers are content to assert without bothering to prove. But the value of art can be realized only by being tested. A few years ago Catherine Borek and Karen Greene, two English teachers at Dominguez High School in the tough Southern California city of Compton, decided to test themselves, their students and Thornton Wilder's ‘Our Town,’ reputedly the most frequently staged play in the American repertory and a staple of the secondary school curriculum. The results of their experiment are on display in ‘OT: Our Town,’ Scott Hamilton Kennedy's modest, moving documentary.” (New York Times)

In my opinion, this experiment was the bravest and most valid attempt to prove *Our Town's* universal appeal. There were more obstacles here than any Broadway production.

“...but the members of the ‘Our Town’ cast are neither outlaws nor athletes. Their ambitions, anxieties and dreams are those of high school students anywhere, and they are seriously concerned with the world's perceptions of them. Their natural pride is edged with defensiveness about being young Mexican- and African-Americans from a place associated, if it is thought of at all, with Crips, Bloods and gangster rap.” (New York Times)

It's long been a Caucasian-dominated literary canon in the academic world. Each decade that moves us further and further away from Wilder's original production in 1938 takes us one step further away from Wilder's America during the 1930's. America is now a melting pot of ethnicities, nationalities and languages, yet Wilder's play still remains relevant.

“At first ‘Our Town,’ with its nostalgia for the simple verities of a long-vanished (if not always imaginary) New England, seems completely alien to them. Clips from a 1977 televised version with Hal Holbrook as the avuncular Yankee Stage Manager, only emphasize the distance between Compton and Grover's Corners. The students, however, resist Ms. Borek's efforts to



bring the play closer to the realities of their own lives, worrying that they will end up presenting stereotypes of themselves. In the end, though, they bring a lot of themselves to Wilder's text, which in turn reveals itself to them. Mr. Kennedy's discreet inquiry into their offstage lives and into the ethos of their town follows the structure of the play, in which the three acts are devoted to daily life, love and marriage, and death. Mr. Kennedy observes his subjects with sympathy and tact, and he does the students the courtesy of allowing them to explain themselves, which they do with candor, heart and humor. At the end, when they have created a vibrant new theater program for their school, their sense of triumph is infectious. 'Our Town Is Ghetto!' one of them exults. Thornton Wilder, wherever he is, would understand and take it as a compliment." (New York Times)

*OT: Our Town* went on to be nominated for Best Documentary by both the Independent Spirit Awards and the Los Angeles Film Festival. The film won Best Documentary at the New York International Latino Film Festival and also the Audience Award at the New Haven and Aspen film festivals. (OT: Our Town)

During the mid-summer of 2010, after a seventeen month Off-Broadway run at the Barrow Street Theater, Helen Hunt, the Academy Winning Best Actress (*As Good As it Gets*/1997) joined the cast of *Our Town*.

Chester Higgins Jr. wrote the following for the New York Times.

".... She is also the first female Stage Manager there, and a rare high-profile entry for her sex in the 72-year history of the role, which has included performances by Frank Craven (in the Broadway premiere), Hal Holbrook, Henry Fonda and Paul Newman. Geraldine Fitzgerald is believed to have been the first female Stage Manager, in a production at the Williamstown Theater Festival in 1971. While the current production was planning to accommodate its new Stage Manager either by rendering that 'sir' as an inaudible mutter or dropping it altogether, Ms. Hunt was more preoccupied during rehearsals with the notion of authority the 'sir' reflected — specifically, as she put it during a recent interview, 'What authority do I have, or does any female actor or male actor have, to say what it means to be human?' I've answered the question for myself in moments in the play,' Ms. Hunt said over breakfast near her apartment on the Upper West Side. (She lives mostly in Los Angeles.) 'Especially the moments when I interact with the two wife-mothers, Mrs. Webb and Mrs. Gibbs, and with Emily,' the doomed young bride who comes to grips with the frailties of life and relationships in the play. 'A lot of the second act, when Emily gets

married, allows me to draw on my particular, strong feelings about love and marriage and children, and I'm throwing all those feelings into the lines in a very non-objective, non-voice-of-God way,'" (New York Times)

Ms. Hunt's ambiguous, blanketed use of the word "human" embodies the spirit of Wilder's play and illustrates its themes. It denotes a certain sense of humility, recognition and respect for the journey we all share.

"And also because I'm an actor with a longstanding date with this play.' Put another way, Ms. Hunt is perhaps the only Stage Manager who has ever also been Emily. At the age of 25 she replaced Penelope Ann Miller in the role for the Lincoln Center Theater production on Broadway during the 1988-89 season, which starred Spalding Gray as the Stage Manager. She recalled the experience fondly, though her voice halted with emotion when she described her experience during her Act III conversations with Gray, who died by suicide in 2004.'" (New York Times)

Ms. Hunt's long history with *Our Town* brings life's realities home to her. It does not matter how high some of us might climb, even giants die.

"Ms. Hunt's career has quieted over the last decade after a burst of films, like 'What Women Want,' 'Cast Away,' and 'Pay It Forward.' Motherhood has dominated..." (New York Times)

Life imitates art. Home and family life trump the business of the outside world.

"I knew she had this role in her bones.' Ms. Hunt, who is scheduled to appear in 'Our Town' through Aug. 1, said she felt the time was especially right for her to do the play because she was starting to notice the way that life's distractions were beginning to creep into her daughter's world. 'We don't let her watch TV, and she's in a school that's all about crayons and imagination, but I can feel that life is beginning to land on her, beginning to intrude, and I'll have less and less control over what she experiences,' Ms. Hunt said. 'A lot of this reminds me of 'Our Town.' There's heartbreak, fear, relationships that are unsatisfying, and people will let you down. And you wake up and make coffee and iron clothes and get through the day. And then, if all goes well, you grow old and, by the way, you die. I played Emily as a young woman, and now I'm playing the Stage Manager in my 40s, when the play has resonance with my relationship with my daughter,' she added. 'In 20 years I'll probably be playing the undertaker.'" (New York Times)

It would be an almost impossible undertaking to chronicle the entire journey *Our Town* has taken since 1938, as it is still one of the most widely produced plays in the United States. With this brief production history, I tried to highlight vital productions produced over the seventy-two year history of the play. I tried to select productions that illustrated the universal appeal of the play to the public as well as to the actors who have embraced it. I tried to select productions that embraced the universality of the text and did not allow stereotypical trends or previous productions to prevent them from staging *Our Town*.

## Rehearsal Journal

It's funny how things work and change. Whereas "the Reverend Shannon" from Tennessee Williams' *The Night of the Iguana*, a leading role, was to be my thesis; now my thesis is the significantly smaller role of "Dr. Gibbs" from Thornton Wilder's *Our Town*. I won't delve into the circumstances under which this transition occurred, but it is now a reality. For the last five or six years I've always had leading roles, and this statement is not me being arrogant. I paid my dues for almost five years before I had my first leading part. I earned the parts I received. After portraying the Scottish King in *Macbeth*, the "Old Man" in Eugene Ionesco's *The Chairs*, and the three separate character roles from *Verses from Jordan*, each one step more challenging than the former, it occurred to me that the smaller character part of Dr. Gibbs just might be the next challenge I have been seeking. Wherein the challenge lies in the part's minimal time on stage, thus restricting the opportunities and time in which I have to establish my character and leave a lasting impression upon the audience. Dr. Gibbs is a central and moral figure in *Our Town* and his presence must linger and be felt throughout the play.

Another hurdle, which could be seen as an opportunity or a hindrance depending upon which way one chooses to view it, is that I have never seen a live production of *Our Town* before. Astounding! I know, but it is the truth. Many years ago I saw the BBC's production made for PBS starring Paul Newman as "The Stage Manager." This is an opportunity, as I will be a blank slate, uninhibited by previous performances that I might have seen. Alternately, I've got a lot more work to do to in order to discover the world of *Our Town* and Dr. Gibbs' place in it.

Lastly, due to the scheduling of various University events, including KC/ACTF rehearsals for *The Night of the Iguana*, and Spring Break, the rehearsal process for *Our Town*

was shorter than what is typical at UNO. Because of these aforementioned inconveniences, the rehearsal process was fragmented and separate. The cast in its entirety, up until tech week of the show before opening, had not met together since the first read-through. This left a concern lingering in the back of my mind on whether or not a “unification” of the cast could be achieved. All questions would soon be answered in kind.

### ***Rehearsal One: First read- through***

I understand the necessity of the first read-through. I do. It allows the cast to hear one another and possibly catch an early glimpse of what lies ahead as far as character voices and choices are concerned. It allows the director to hear the play based upon his casting choices. He or she at that point may express joy or possibly fear and regret stemming from their casting. Either way, it is the beginning of the journey. Despite the utility of the read-through, it has always been my least favorite part of the process, and it does not matter whether one has a small role or a large role, read-throughs bore me. As I stated, I understand their necessity, but necessity does not always preface fun and excitement. I know. However, my sentiments do go out to those individuals whom are cast in “non-speaking” roles, basically crowd fillers, or those whom might have one line or maybe two. These poor individuals seem to suffer more than most through a three act read-through. I can only see this as youthful ignorance, i.e. them not understanding the importance of knowing one’s environment and place within it. An older teacher/coach of mine always told me there was more opportunity for acting when one is not speaking. Listening.

With the read-through completed in just under two-and-a-half hours, a length of time not completely unbearable considering *Our Town* is three acts, a few things revealed themselves. Mr. Mckinnie, the Stage Manger, a young man grounded in musical theater, will bring a nice

“everyman” quality to the role despite his own personal reservations. I feel the audience will embrace his breathy, Jimmy Stewartesque approach to the show. He makes one feel at home. However, after the reading, it has become abundantly evident that the required northern New England dialect is going to be an issue in the long run, as far as consistency and continuity within the cast.

With the read-through done, now comes a sizeable break. My next rehearsal will not be for another two weeks. The principal characters will be meeting intermittently in between my visits to the theater. This could be a good thing for the cast, or it might be a bad thing. Hopefully, the rest of the cast will use this time to do their “homework,” and return to the stage prepared and ready to work rather than the alternative.

### ***Rehearsal Two: Initial blocking for Doc and family***

Today was an awkward day for several reasons. Firstly, as I previously stated, I have not physically been at a rehearsal in almost two weeks. It’s been me and my script since our read-through. The principal actors, the Stage Manager, George and Emily, have been rehearsing for days now. Coming in occasionally, as I have been up to this point, always seems to leave me feeling like an outsider. Typically a rehearsal process lasts anywhere from four to six weeks depending upon the play and the venue. During that time, the cast members bond for many reasons: the interaction of their characters, the process of developing their relationships, conflicts and environment the characters find themselves living, and merely the simple fact that the actors spend many compressed periods of time together. Casts laugh, cry, struggle and grow together like a family. A brief little family, if one will. So, if one is not present during this process frequently enough, the cohesiveness which bonds these “families” together, is simply not there for me. I felt this way coming into my second rehearsal of *Our Town* - disconnected.

Secondly, it was an awkward day as we began blocking Dr. and Mrs. Gibbs scenes from Act I. It became apparent that things would be difficult even before I arrived at rehearsal, as I knew that we were rehearsing in the “dance studio.” *Our Town* was forced to rehearse in this significantly smaller space as *The Night of the Iguana*, was still occupying the main theater. We would not be able to use the main theater until the *Iguana* set was transferred downtown for the Williams’ Festival. So, suffice it to say, the basic plotting of the blocking would remain the same; however, the room to maneuver and the scale of our actual space would have to be modified for the entire show, once our rehearsals moved into the main theater. The two spaces were significantly disproportionate. Often, these types of transplants transition smoothly, but there are those rare occasions where having less space than readily available presents blocking issues. Largely, what are typically underestimated are literally the distances for entrances and exits of the actors. Timing is essential for the fluidity of the play when performance is concerned. Re-blocking, under these circumstances, nearly always seems necessary. It is not necessarily difficult, but it is important. Re-blocking is not always difficult, but it is tedious and redundant from an actor’s perspective. By the end of my time at rehearsal, we had blocked my two scenes from Act I and then ran the act to cement the movement in our heads. I was at rehearsal just over an hour.

### ***Rehearsal Three: Blocking continued***

Once again we are in the cramped studio. Today we are blocking portions of Act I and Act II which culminates with the wedding of George and Emily; however, we cannot block the wedding itself, it literally is too massive in its scope. Every single member of the cast is literally on stage as either an attendee of the wedding, member of the wedding party or part of the church choir. This part of the act will have to wait to be blocked and plugged into the show once we are

allowed to rehearse in the main theater. As for myself, my entrance late in the first act is extremely specific, despite the sparseness of the staging. One must maintain the same patterns of movement to establish the Gibbs' kitchen. The use of props is not permitted in *Our Town* with few exceptions. The majority of the items utilized in the play must be mimicked. In the first part of my late scene in Act I, I carry on a book, which I read far down-stage in my kitchen while George and Emily stand on ladders, implying that they are in their own bedrooms and chatting from their windows. This activity spans approximately three to four minutes. I tried to mimic holding the book, scanning the lines of the page as I normally would when reading, take the appropriate amount of time to read the page, and then lick my finger, grasp the corner of the page and turn it. I would then crease the page on the left to hold it in place. I would continue this activity right up until my cue where I call George down to visit with him. I literally visualized an old book in my hand, which I believe reads well to the audience. If I believe I have a book, so will the audience.

The same entrance specificity on my part was required for my entrance in Act II, the morning before George and Emily's wedding. In the scene I am chatting with Mrs. Gibbs about her anxiousness concerning her son's impending nuptials. The activity I am performing while attempting to ease her apprehensiveness is merely drinking coffee. This required me to mimic all of the appropriate gestures and behaviors of actually drinking a cup of coffee. Blowing on it before taking a sip. Holding it gingerly as the cup is warm from its contents. I palmed it from the bottom while placing two fingers through the handle to the side, all the while being as specific as possible attempting never to deviate from my initial posturing, if one will. In the same scene, before George makes his entrance on the morning of this wedding, Mrs. Gibbs cooks me a breakfast of French toast. Once she places the plate of food in front of me, I lean forward, turn



the plate and inhale the wonderful aroma of my special breakfast. I then remove a napkin from the table, flip it open with a snap, and then lay it across my lap. I then cut small pieces for myself and placed them in my mouth, enjoying each bite while George rattles on in excitement wiping my mouth after each morsel. All of which are mimed. However, I smelled and enjoyed a lovely hot breakfast every night – out of nothing. If I believe it and can see it, so will the audience. This was an interesting new and challenging task for me – miming activities.

Rehearsals from this point on will be once again sparse. A large majority of *Our Town*'s cast is also in the cast of *The Night of the Iguana*, which opens next week and runs through the end of the month. Also, I will be leaving to travel home for Spring Break. I will be off of rehearsal for almost two weeks time, an eternity in rehearsal time.

#### ***Rehearsal Four: Plug ins***

Yet again I am returning back to rehearsals after a long absence. It's funny, but it's even stranger now than it was during the gap between the first read-through and my first blocking rehearsal. When working on a production, one becomes immersed in the world of the play, at least I do. However, when the continuity and repetition of daily rehearsals is broken up by large gaps of time, it leaves one feeling disjointed and frustrated; it being that much more difficult to lose oneself in one's character despite looking at the script every day. The theater is the environment, the world of the play, which grows each day. Each actor grows increasingly more confident as opening night approaches day by day. I did not have this. I shouldn't have left for the break.

Tonight is basically a "plug in" night. Now that the play is blocked, it is time to go back and plug in those scenes, the Church Chorus singing/entrance and Emily's funeral scene at the

end of Act III. Now that we are rehearsing on the main stage, blocking on a large scale is now possible. These particular types of scenes always take the most time to block. This is simply because of the number of actors on the stage simultaneously. It's much like directing traffic. One must make sure all of the entrances and exits do not criss cross, thus causing pile ups. Each actor has a specific route and destination. It is specifically choreographed, mapped out and rehearsed incessantly. This must be achieved or the audience will lose that sense of truth and reality on stage, thus taking them out of moment. Fluidity of movement must be achieved and in a timely manner to ensure the play keeps moving. This is especially important in a three-act play.

Once the "plug ins" were completed, we began working on the actual Choir songs which were sung during the wedding and funeral scenes. To my dismay, I was being required to sing. Everybody knows how much I love to sing (irony). Fortunately, amongst a choir/chorus, I am able to stay on key and blend in as long as I do not have to project, as in a solo. I am not a good singer by any means, but as I learned tonight, I am not the worst singer either. Our "George," was singing just to my right. He was so flat and so loud, it threw the group dynamic/ harmony off completely. Our director figured out that it was George and asked him to hum the hymn from that point. I believe George was a little bit hurt.

After I left the stage for my final exit during Act III, I walked out into the auditorium and took a seat. I began to watch the final sequence of the play, involving mainly George, Emily and Simon Stimson. Listening to Emily upon her ghostly return, I found myself leaning forward, captivated. I had heard these words many times before this evening, but they had never affected me before as they did tonight. I caught a shiver. I finally understood the universal appeal of *Our Town*. As Emily and Simon spoke, I became personally attached to this play. I was remembering my own dealings and sufferings with death, having lost my mother and my young wife as well.

The value and acuteness of life is fragile and brief. Are we aware of each day's value? Wow. How do young kids always do this show? Are they capable of understanding the levity of it? Do we realize that we are alive today? Our Emily certainly seems to know.

***Rehearsal five: blocking the wedding scene***

Tonight we blocked the wedding scene from the end of Act II and plugged it into the production. This particular scene would be the most taxing and require the most "traffic direction" of all of the "plug in" scenes. Every member of the cast would eventually be on stage and need to get there with expediency and grace, if one will. Again, fluidity of movement is essential, as every member of the cast, who was a guest at the wedding, is required to bring on their own chair in which they seat themselves. So, as one may see, the potential for disaster and a long evening of avoiding potential collisions was imminent. However, after a few botched attempts, the cast came together, knowing exactly when and where they needed to go and be. Our director was prepared.

Coming into this evening's rehearsal, I was not excited about the possibility of being herded all over the stage like cattle all evening, which has little to do with acting, but is necessary, I know. Despite these anxieties, another moment came upon me, letting me in on another secret. It should have been obvious to me. Within this evening's activities, I began to see the absolute necessity of "filler" in these large productions. Without all of the characters that have only a line or two, without all of the characters which do not have lines *Our Town* would be full of holes, gaps. These characters, who seemingly do not advance the plot of the story, serve a vital purpose. We search for truth on stage. Every single one of the smaller parts, the actors that sit tirelessly in the theater waiting patiently for their moment on stage, create and paint the world the principal actors exist and play in. It is a symbiotic relationship that I have taken for granted,

previously. I now understand the meticulousness of small parts and small rehearsals more fully now.

***Rehearsal Six: Act one off book***

There was a time when learning lines came easily to me. I'm not sure at what point things changed for me, but learning lines has become the most difficult task of the process. It is a chore that I dread and loathe, which in turn created this procrastination syndrome from which I now suffer. The process now has literally become a pounding into the skull exercise, i.e. walking in circles and repeating a line a minimum of seven times, until it is cemented in my head. Well, tonight will be the first evening I attempt being off book for Act I. It's always a strange and difficult transition for me, as I previously stated one spends so much time, so many hours and days learning lines. Then one walks on stage. Attempting to vocalize what I had previously learned, for the most part in my head, I inevitably hit a wall. Combining one's own work, actualizing it and then joining one's fellow cast members on stage in your playing environment, more often than not, is awkward the first night. It is almost as if one is learning the part all over again. This evening was no different. It is humbling. One minute the words are there and then they are not. A few hours later the words were perfectly flowing from my breath like a cool serene stream. Then I get to rehearsal and I find myself in the great dust bowl during the Great Depression choking on my own saliva. Terrible.

However tonight, despite it being "off book" disaster night, we caught a breath of fresh air. Tonight, nine-year old Madison joined our cast as my vivacious daughter, Rebecca Gibbs. Her light coming into the process does not by any means imply that rehearsal was getting stale. Far from it, but once Madison was in the house I began seeing how huge and exciting things must be through her eyes. I remember when I was that young, every once in a while my father's

friend's son, who was twenty years old and a quarterback for Western State College, would include me in his Sunday afternoon touch football game. I felt so proud, so grown up. It is a fond memory of mine. I imagine this *Our Town* experience might be the same for Madison a few years down the road. This young lady's enthusiasm is contagious, and that's a great thing.

### ***Rehearsal Seven: full run-through off book***

Today is the first full run-through off book. The potential for disaster is high. These days are usually pretty rough and very long. Start. Stop. Start. Line. Stop. Line.

We'll see soon enough. (LATER) Well... Nobody died! At this point in the process, this type of run-through, typically, is meant to keep the actors honest by ensuring that everyone is on the same page – small or large part. And believe me, it is painfully obvious concerning who is prepared and who is not. Fortunately, everybody seemed to be up to par. In many cases, metaphorically speaking, rehearsals such as this one are like eating sandpaper, i.e. the actors choking on their own words; however, this evening's portion was a fine-grained sheet and not a coarse one. Whew.

### ***Rehearsal Eight: run through***

This evening was another run-through. Progressively, just as every night, my lines are cementing themselves in my head. Repetition combined with blocking movement is the best memorization tool. As my lines become more and more confident my choices and intentions come more and more naturally. Instinct takes over when the burden of line learning is over. This is when play-time begins. This is what we work so hard for... The fun.

We ran the show this evening, but we started and stopped many times, working the scenes thoroughly. This is the first evening I felt we worked my scenes. My director, David, and I discussed the persona of Dr. Gibbs for the first time. After a moment of banter, the both of us

came to the conclusion that despite the fact that the Doc is genuinely an amiable man with a jesting nature, he is still a very turn-of-the-century, conservative New Hampshire man with regards to romance and affection. Dr. Gibbs loves his wife, but there is a reluctance within him; however, this could be said to be true of the majority of Grover's Corners' Christian men. One can only think that men of this era, early twentieth century, view affection and romance as taboo or a weakness. However, fortunately, these sort of quirks within his personality, given the aforementioned, gives the Doc layers, thus enabling myself to bring him to life.

### ***Rehearsal Nine: run through #3***

Although from the outside, night after night of run-throughs might seem tedious or monotonous; however, as I stated previously, repetition is the best tool that allows a character to grow evening after evening. Although, within the repetition, there is always some little thing that presents itself, which encourages one further along night after night. Tonight... it was the Doc's shoes. Yes. Shoes. Tonight I put on Dr. Gibbs' actual shoes. It might sound like an unimportant, miniscule detail amongst larger character components, but it is a vital one. This has never been more true than with building a character for the stage. A character's shoes balance an actor. One walks differently in one's own shoes. One stands differently. Honestly, it affects one's whole disposition. Typically, the character's shoes are the first piece of an actor's costume given to them; therefore, they are the cornerstone of the character; the first building block many. So, suffice it to say, Dr. Gibbs, the previous evening was wearing Vans and had poor posture, which is not the Doc at all, but myself. Tonight... the Doc wore his own loafers and seemed to be a foot taller, as my posture straightened and I stood more erect.

#### ***Rehearsal Ten: run-through #4***

We had another run-through this evening; however, as I previously stated last evening, every night will inevitably present something new within one's character. Our production of *Our Town*, as are most it seems, is sparsely staged with a minimal amount of props to be utilized. The majority of the objects the actors work with are pantomimed. For myself, I read a newspaper, drink coffee, eat French toast, open doors and carry a bouquet of flowers. These are my responsibilities. I received a note this evening from my director that my pantomimes were far too general and needed to be much more specific. As we learned in Anne Reyerson's workshop this past Saturday, if the actor can actually visualize what he or she is doing or handling, the audience will see as well, i.e. actually palming the saucer under one's coffee cup, blowing on the coffee, sipping the coffee gingerly and then lastly swallowing the coffee. Smelling my French toast. Unfolding my napkin and placing it in my lap. Opening and holding the door open and closing the door. Unfolding a newspaper, reading the paper, turning then pages and the re-folding it.

#### ***Rehearsal Eleven: run-through #5 – sound effects***

As we progress each evening, getting closer and closer to opening night, each rehearsal adds something new, which brings the world of *Our Town* one step closer to its reality. This evening the sound effects were tested and added into the run. These unique little sound bites give our sparsely decorated set a little flavor and a suggestion of life. Train whistles, cricket chirps, slurping straw noises from the malt shop and many others all add environmental qualities to the production allowing the audience member's imagination to let go and see the play as it should be seen. Each little thing grants our minimally dressed set to be that much more believable. Willing suspension of disbelief takes over.

Unfortunately, this past evening also brought some frustration to a few of the actors as well. As in many cases, when dealing with plays which require a dialect, (New England/ New Hampshire for *Our Town*), younger actors will become overly focused on how they sound, rather than what they are doing. In essence, scenes often become more about the dialect being attempted than the action of the scene. George was confronted with this issue this evening during notes by our director. George was asked to not use his attempt at an accent. One could see the disappointment and frustration on this George's face after weeks of hard work, but the simple fact was that it was interfering with his performance. It should be noted that it was not due to lack of effort on this young actor's part, but more a strained and consuming over-focus on his part. He'll find that picking out specific words to emphasize and flavor will give his speech a suggestion of dialect.

Another frustrating part of this past evening involved the scene between George and Dr. Gibbs. Dr. Gibbs is confronting his son about his irresponsibility toward his mother and his neglect of his household chores. Despite the discussions my director and I have had concerning this scene, it has not clicked between George and me yet. My director and I concluded that the Doc could be stern without ever pushing the issue in a harsh manner, i.e. the Doc never had to raise his voice nor threaten punishment to his son in order to get out of him what he wanted. The Doc merely needed to state calmly and not un-sympathetically the facts of his son's neglect, and that would be enough. Unfortunately, I have never felt, as I stated previously, that George and I were on the same page. This, in turn, pushed me to try different tactics to get out of George what I needed. Up until this point, I have not been happy with the scene nor has our director. I've got to work harder.



### ***Rehearsal Twelve: run-through – no line calling night***

Tonight the cast of *Our Town* is going to the circus, metaphorically speaking, of course. Tonight we are not allowed to call for lines anymore. It's the night the trapeze high wire performers go up with out a net. We'll see how we do. (LATER) Despite a few burps, tonight went as smoothly as can be expected. Surprisingly, this run came in under two hours and fifteen minutes, even with the few hiccups. In my mind a three-act play nearly always comes in around fifteen minutes of hitting three hours long. This is a great thing. Run-throughs from this point on will only get tighter and more efficient as we approach opening night, and opening night adrenaline will push things along even faster. It is asking a lot of an audience to sit through a nearly three-hour performance, even with two intermissions.

Well, from this point forward, the creative part of the acting process finds itself on hold, as the production lends itself to the technical portion and staging of the play. Tomorrow begins the "tech weekend" of the rehearsal process. The addition of lighting will be completed over the next two rehearsal days. Actors during this portion of the process cease to be the emphasis. "Cue to cues" become the central importance now. This entails merely moving the actors from scene to scene depending upon which cue, whether it be sound or lightning, in order for he or she to know and find their "light."

These rehearsals are typically long and arduous, and more often than not last four or five hours at a time.

### ***Rehearsal Thirteen & Fourteen: Tech rehearsals***

Well... things were as I said they would be... "long and arduous." Actors simply said their lines, moving tediously through their blocking, always/inevitably with a resounding "Hold Please!" continually interrupting any kind of continuity that might have been useful to us. This is

always perpetually followed by “Let’s go back again.” Often this sequence was repeated time after time for one reason or another, but as I said before, these days are not for the actors.

Typically, “timing” was the problem, whether it being an actor not hitting his or her light quickly enough, or the tech crew not cueing up the sound or lighting cue quick enough to cue the actor.

However, it should be noted that running crews aren’t added to rehearsals until the week before the show opens. They have not had the time to watch the show endlessly at all, rather and more than likely have only seen one run-through by the time they join the process. Regardless to say, it does strain the patience of the actor but it is a necessary evil, and the end product of this tenuous few days is more than worth it, as the addition of lighting and sound completes the world of the play. The lighting designer did a wonderful job of taking a large, open, thrust stage and isolating specific areas to create smaller environments, thus making them more intimate for the audience i.e. Dr. and Mrs. Gibbs kitchen and porch and Mr. and Mrs. Webb’s kitchen and garden. But more notable was the projection of a beautiful stained glass window on the upstage wall for the church sequences. This, as well as the outside evening scenes, which were marked by a beautiful full moon projection made the overall spectacle of our production intimate.

### ***Dress rehearsal week: following final dress***

The final week of rehearsal was a whirlwind of run-throughs with full costumes, makeup, lights, sound, set changes, intermissions and notes at the end. Everything is pulled together for three nights of “wrenching,” i.e. tightening up of any kind of gaps which might still exist. The final dress rehearsal was “preview” night. That evening we actually had an audience, which was sparse, but still an audience. These rehearsals create adrenaline, which in turn, puts the actors in the “performance” frame of mind before the real thing, and this particular week went fairly smoothly. I don’t know recall any major “f.u.b.a.r.” moments. Tomorrow evening is what Mr.

Jack Lemmon would call “magic time.” Weeks of hard work by everyone will bring *Our Town* to life in New Orleans.

## Building the Character

“The actor should realize that all he can do is bring himself to the theater in optimum condition to participate in the play at hand. Identifying what things he can do to put himself in optimum condition and then doing them consistently so that they become habitual to him will give the actor satisfaction of always knowing what to do, what his job truly is.” (Bruder 3)

Coming in to the role of Dr. Gibbs, it seemed to me that a man of his accomplishments and family status would be much older than Wilder made him. He is the town physician, an occupation that required many years of schooling, self-discipline and a strong sense of responsibility. Dr. Gibbs is also a family man, home owner, and father of two children, all of which also require self-discipline, a strong sense of responsibility, as well as a nurturing quality within him that enables him to create a safe, loving and prosperous household.

Wilder, within the text of the play, describes Doc Gibbs as, “...a pleasantly portly man in his thirties...” (Wilder 4)

Although I was married for four-and-a-half years during my early thirties, this is the only common trait that I share with Dr. Gibbs. I’m not exactly sure what Wilder meant when he described the Dr. as being “pleasantly portly,” but I do not believe that I have ever been described as such. I have never been in the position of having to provide for a household, nor have I had the responsibility of watching over and caring for a community. These are the obstacles I must overcome to find a truthful Dr. Gibbs within myself.

*The Practical Handbook for the Actor* defines the term “as if” as,

“A simple fantasy that makes specific for you the action you have chosen in the analysis; it is a mnemonic device serving to bring the action to life in you.” (Bruder 87)

In order to find my doorway into Dr. Gibbs, I am going to modify this definition. My only experience with a man of Doc’s stature and moral responsibility is the relationship I have

had with my stepfather over the past twenty-six years. This man married my mother when I was twelve years old. My older brother was sixteen years old. His children were grown and had moved on many years prior to the marriage. He was fifty years old at the time and my mother had just turned forty years old. At a time when he was very close to his retirement, having worked for the State of Arizona for twenty-three years at that point, he took it upon himself to be the provider for two adolescent boys just beginning their formative years. He openly embraced the responsibility and became the male role model in my life.

I will be playing Dr. Gibbs “as if” my stepfather were him.

Dr. Gibbs enters the play during the early morning hours, carrying his coat with his tie loosened around his collar, walking slowly. As he approaches his home, he comes across Joe Crowell, the paper boy. We then discover that the Doc has been out all night delivering twins in Polish Town. It must be noted that the play begins in the year 1901. One-hundred-and-nine years later, it is difficult to comprehend the notion of a doctor coming to one’s house for medical care, much less staying all through the night tendering that care. So, the first impression we receive of Dr. Gibbs is that he is a dedicated man with a strong work ethic.

The Doc’s interaction with Joe reveals yet another quality. Yes, he is the town physician, a man of stature. However, this stature does not prevent him from interacting with the young man with a smile on his face, even after his arduous evening and morning. This interaction paints the Doc to be a humble man, not above his fellow Grover’s Corner residents. He lives with them. He cares for them. He is one of them.

When the Doc enters the stage he wants to go home. He wants to go to sleep. Despite this want, Wilder has the Doc interact with not one but two individuals, the second being Howie Newsome, the milkman. Then, after the interactions, he sits quietly and reads his newspaper.

Why would Wilder do this? Dr. Gibbs has two hats. One is his doctor hat, and one is his home hat. It seems Wilder put this moment in the play as a transition for the Doc. Dr. Gibbs is a practical man. He is a sensible man. This moment in the play is the Doc decompressing from the night's activities. He needs to bring himself back down from the complications of being a doctor. The townspeople naturally gravitate toward questions concerning the Doc's duties. The Doc, wanting to metaphorically throw off his doctor's hat and be a regular guy, merely changes the subject toward more nominal topics like the weather. This is his action.

“Joe. Anybody been sick?

Dr. Gibbs. No. Some twins over Polish Town—Joe, I see your teacher Miss Foster is goin' to get married.”

Joe. Yes, sir, to a feller over in Concord.

Dr. Gibbs. I declare. Well, how do you boys feel about that?”  
(Wilder 5-6)

Having grown up in New Hampshire himself, Doc Gibbs, even with his education and elevated social status, was Joe Crowell also at one point, when he was younger. Vicariously through Joe, Doc sheds his doctor's hat. For a brief moment, he is one of the boys again. However, being the consummate doctor that he is, Doc can never quite rid himself of his work ethic.

“Dr. Gibbs. How's you knee, Joe?

Joe. Fine, Doc, I never think about it at all. Only like you said it always tell me when it's going to rain.

Dr. Gibbs. What's it telling you today? Goin' to rain?

Joe. No sir.

Dr. Gibbs. Sure?

Joe. Yes sir.

Dr. Gibbs. Knee ever make a mistake?”  
(Wilder 6)

Despite this little inquiry, Doc immediately returns to small talk about the weather and then proceeds to playfully tease Joe.

This initial introduction of Doc Gibbs leaves us with the impression that he is a gracious, thoughtful, caring and dedicated man. I believe Wilder embodied all of these qualities of Doc Gibbs within his use of the word “pleasant.” The further I delve into the Doc’s character, I begin to realize that Wilder’s use of the adjective “portly” does not necessarily pertain to the man’s physique so much as it describes an aura about the man. Stereotypically, portly men are assumed to be jolly, festive or typically happy the majority of the time. In my opinion it is from this stereotype that Wilder draws the characteristic of the term and not the physical implications.

After Doc Gibbs’ decompression, he is ready to put on his home hat. He folds up his newspaper and heads for his house.

Doc still wants to rest, but before he is able to do that, he is aware that once he puts his home hat on it splits into two sub-hats. While at home he has his husband hat and his father hat, both of which potentially present obstacles to his want of sleep. Upon entering his home he is immediately greeted by his wife, who, as the play progresses we discover, is constantly worrying about her husband overworking himself. The first exchange we see between the couple is one of gentle spousal concern.

“Mrs. Gibbs. Everything all right, Frank?”

“Yes, I declare. Easy as kittens.”  
(Wilder 9)

Doc enters his home after working all night and his first instinct is to put on good face for his concerned wife. His first action is to appease his wife, assuring her that he is well despite his

long evening. It is significant testimony as to the Doc's character, one we also see within his work as well. His first instinct is toward others and not himself. Both sides of the Doc present themselves during this first exchange. Despite his lack of sleep, he still will not allow his commitment to his work to falter.

“Mrs. Gibbs. You can catch a couple hours this morning, can't you?”

Dr. Gibbs. Mrs. Wentworth's coming at eleven. Guess I know what it's about too. Her Stomach ain't what it ought to be.”  
(Wilder 9)

Although this particular statement could be interpreted many different ways, I feel the Doc is being a tad bit sarcastic concerning Mrs. Wentworth implying that she might be a hypochondriac. It makes sense to me that at some point the Doc must drop his professionalism to vent about his patients. Who else could be his release other than his wife? However, this does not prevent him from attending to the lady anyway. Doc Gibbs is committed to all aspects of his life. He is an unwavering professional as well as a devoted husband and father.

Mrs. Gibbs then presents another obstacle for her husband before his want of sleep will be satisfied.

“Mrs. Gibbs. I declare you've got to speak to George. Seems like somethin'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. Is he sassy to you?

Mrs. Gibbs. No. He just whines! All he thinks about is that Baseball...”  
(Wilder 9)

Now the Doc puts on his father cap. As the children are heading out for school, Doc knows this situation will have to be resolved later in the day when George is home from school. However, this does not dissuade him from taking action.



“Dr. Gibbs. George, Look Sharp!

George. Yes, Pa!

Dr. Gibbs. Don’t you hear your mother calling you?”  
(Wilder 10)

Doc’s action here is to warn his son. Although, “warn” might be a harsh word to use for the Doc, these actions are filtered through his character. As we will discover as the play progresses, Doc’s gentle demeanor in his work and with his wife carries over into his fatherly tactics as well. The Doc with these two abrupt addresses to his son, lets George know that his father has spoken to his mother and that there will be a conversation to come.

Having worn both of his home hats and successfully established himself “at home”, the Doc, once again, comforts his wife and achieves his goal of rest. She is appeased that her husband will finally get some rest, if only briefly.

“Dr. Gibbs. Guess I’ll go upstairs and take forty winks.”  
(Wilder 10)

The next time we encounter the Doc, we find him ready to have the conversation with his son about George’s recent poor behavior. The Doc calls his son downstairs. His action is to guilt his son. He merely wants his son to recognize his responsibilities and realize that he is not a boy anymore. He is able to do without raising his voice in my opinion. He does not need to. He is able to chastise his son without being overtly threatening. Doc’s fatherly gift comes through his practicality and calm demeanor. He merely brings things to George’s attention, allowing his son to judge himself.

“Dr. Gibbs. Make yourself comfortable, George; I’ll only keep you a minute. George, how old are you?”

George. Me? 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?"  
(Wilder 28-29)

Notice that Doc does not literally say, "George. You're almost a man now!" He does not say, "It's back breaking labor, George. You're too lazy to be a farmer." He sets George up. He merely asks the right questions. He is a good father. He knows it is important for his son to discover his own faults and bad habits. The Doc does not ask George why he wasn't chopping the wood. He merely points out that his Mother was chopping her own wood. To compound this imagine, Doc proceeds to layout his wife's daily schedule, which includes so many things that Mrs. Gibbs does for her son's benefit. I feel there should be no judgment in his voice. He is merely stating facts calmly, allowing his son's mind to weave its own conclusions, or rather guilt. The Doc's cap to this lecture is George's sniffing. He has achieved what he wants. The Doc then gives away his tactic.

"Dr. Gibbs. .... Well, I knew all I had to do was call your attention to it. Here's a handkerchief, son."  
(Wilder 29)

Doc Gibbs, having been a boy in Grover's Corners, like his son, recognizes George's shortcomings as simply characteristics of being a boy. He loves his son and knows he will grow up fine. However, everybody needs a little direction every now and then. Doc's fatherly tactics give George perspective. At the same time, recognizing the fact that his son is growing up, Doc gives George a raise in allowance.

“Dr. Gibbs. ....George, I’ve decided to raise your spending money twenty-five cents a weeks. ...because you’re getting older—and I imagine there are lots of things you must find to do with it.”  
(Wilder 29)

Here the Doc acknowledges his son’s responsibility, but positively. He understands the necessity of building George into a man. It is his responsibility and duty, which he accomplishes.

Doc Gibbs is a good father.

After dismissing his son off to bed, the Doc continues to read in the kitchen while waiting for his wife to return home from choir practice.

Doc, being the amiable man that he is, chooses to tease his wife upon her late return home.

“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. What did you do all of the time I was away?

Dr. Gibbs. Oh, I read—as usual—What were the girls gossiping about tonight?”  
(Wilder 32)

Here we discover another side of the Doc. He plays the role of the saintly martyr, in accord with my choices, and playfully guilts his spouse. He implies that while he was home reading and disciplining their son, she was out being less than honorable by discussing other folks’ business. He labels his wife and her cohorts “girls” and not women or ladies. The Doc is choosing to mock this girlish behavior by merely bringing it up, much like his discussion concerning George’s poor habits. This exposes the Doc as having a sense of humor as well as all

of the qualities that make him a good doctor, husband and father. It gives him another depth to create that is fun, which adheres to the second rule of technique from *A Practical Handbook for the Actor*, “be fun to do.”

From this point, the conversation shifts to Mr. Simon Stimson, the choir director, which is the subject matter of the girls’ gossip, as Mr. Stimson has a less than reputable character.

“Mrs. Gibbs. Well, believe me, Frank—there’s 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? Doctor 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 how that’ll end; but there’s Nothing we can do but just leave it alone.”  
(Wilder 32)

This is an interesting exchange. Here, Wilder presents an evocative character with Simon Stimson, who is less than perfect. Once again we find the Doc choosing to comfort his wife, but Wilder does it in an alternate manner. Simon Stimson is the antithesis of Doc Gibbs. We again see the moral fortitude and dedication of the Doc. It seems to me Mr. Stimson’s imperfections reflect the Doc’s decency. Mr. Stimson’s indiscretions make the Doc’s work and family ethic shine, and Mrs. Gibbs recognizes this and in turn embraces her husband’s Jimmy Stewart charm.

It is from this recognition that Mrs. Gibbs again returns to her concern for her husband’s rest.

“Mrs. Gibbs. ... Frank, I’m worried about you.

Dr. Gibbs. What are you worried about?

Mr. Gibbs. I think its my duty to make plans for you to Get a real rest and change. And if I get that legacy, I’m

going to insist on it.

Dr. Gibbs. Now, Julia, there's no sense in going over that again."  
(Wilder 33)

Once again the Doc puts on his husband hat and wants to comfort his wife. As I hinted at earlier, I see the Grover's Corners' boy woven into the man. I think his humor is a cornerstone of his personality. So, once again he teases his wife playfully.

"Dr. Gibbs. Come on, Julia. It's getting late. First thing you thing you know you'll catch cold."  
(Wilder 33)

This playful side of the Doc serves a greater purpose. It is an intermediary transition tactic to take his wife's attention away from his issue of rest. The Doc would never falter in his duties. Whether they be for the town and its population or for his family, he is a staunch, dedicated man. Once again he chooses to distract his wife by changing the subject. This always assists him in controlling the focus of what is being discussed.

"Dr. Gibbs. ...I gave George a piece of my mind tonight. I reckon you'll have your wood chopped, --for a while anyway."  
(Wilder 33)

Once the couple returns to the kitchen, Mrs. Gibbs begins to clean up. The Doc, understanding the busy days his wife goes through all day every day, insists that she wait till the morning to straighten up.

"Dr. Gibbs. ...No, no. Start getting up stairs."  
(Wilder 33)

Although these six words could be seen in many different ways, I feel this simple gesture testifies to the Doc's awareness of his wife's daily trials. It's simple. It's sweet. It's the little things. He is an attentive man. In my opinion, this particular moment and line embodies what Wilder was attempting to achieve when he wrote *Our Town*. Community. Home. Family. Love.

Simplicity. The Doc is a complex man, but at heart he is simply a good-mannered boy from Grover's Corners.

The next time we see the Doc, he is coming downstairs on the morning of George and Emily's wedding. Doc, being the attentive husband that he is, knows that his wife will be overly pensive this particular day. He knows that it is his job to keep his wife from losing it. When he enters the kitchen he chooses to tease Mrs. Gibbs as his first tactic, thinking this might distract her into a humorous mood.

“Dr. Gibbs. Well, Ma, the day has come. You're losing 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.”  
(Wilder 42)

Obviously, the Doc's first choice did not result as he would have wished. So, he switches his tactic. Using his son George, the Doc begins to paint a picture of himself metaphorically. He describes George as he was going through his morning activities emphasizing his son's naivety and youthfulness. He does not do this to provoke his wife, but to remind her of himself on their similar morning years ago.

“Dr. Gibbs. The groom's up there shaving himself, only their 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” into the mirror, but it don't sound convincing to me.”  
(Wilder 42)

Although the Doc is in a playful mood and has a light tone, his intention is to soothe his wife's anxiety about their son leaving the nest, then he jumps straight to the chase.

“Dr. Gibbs. I remember my wedding morning, Julia.

Mrs. Gibbs. Now don't start that Frank Gibbs.

Dr. Gibbs. I was the scarest young man in the state of New

Hampshire. I thought I'd made a mistake for sure..."  
(Wilder 42)

Here, again, the Doc uses his sense of humor to try and ease his wife; however, this time he makes a direct parallel to himself and how unsure he was on his big day. Unfortunately, this tactic does not work either. He switches to a more nurturing tactic.

"Dr. Gibbs. How'd you sleep last night, Julia?

Mrs. Gibbs. Well, I heard a lot of the hours struck off."  
(Wilder 42)

What the Doc does next is sentimental and brave. He allows himself to express his own concerns and doubts. Being the consummate husband and provider for his family, it is a tremendous thing for him to show a softer side, a less confident side of his character. This reveals yet another side of the Doc we have not seen. He is a strong man, but he is a tender man also.

"Dr. Gibbs. Aya, 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 damndest, awkwardest--"  
(Wilder 44)

Next the Doc becomes blunt. With this tactic he abandons his humor, attempting to stir his wife into being practical and realize it's time to let go. Their son is on his way to becoming a man. He will trip, but that's how he will grow up.

"Dr. Gibbs. They'll have a lot of troubles, I suppose, but that's none of our business. Everybody's got a right to their own troubles."  
(Wilder 44)

However, having possibly jarred his wife, he returns to comforting Mrs. Gibbs. He does this by taking her back to when they were young. He basically hugs her with nostalgia. He assures his wife that their son will be fine, just as they were and are fine.

“Dr. Gibbs. Julia, do you know one of the things I was scared of when I married you?

Mrs. Gibbs. Oh, go along with you!

Dr. Gibbs. I was afraid we didn't have material for conversation more'n'd last us a few weeks. 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.”  
(Wilder 44)

The next and last time we see Doc Gibbs is at his daughter-in-law's funeral. He comforts his son for his loss and then places flowers on his own wife's grave. Walking away from the cemetery is the last we see of Doc Gibbs. He is walking away from death. Doc Gibbs endures life. He endeavors to persevere. What else can he do?



## Directorial Exit Interview

**Did you feel our production was successful, this being in terms of your vision and casting, and not considering the student (twenty something's) opinion of the play?**

“I’ve long since forgot about trying to connect to the twenty something generation, because nothing seems to connect with them.... yeah, I think, generally, I think the play was very successful. There were spots throughout that needed work, but that’s with anything, but like I said I thought the play was very successful, and I was really happy with where Caroline (Emily) and James (George) arrived. I think James could’ve, well both of them, could’ve gotten more if we’d had more time, but I was happy with where they end up.”

**Initially, you cast Chris Klocke as Doc Gibbs and myself as the professor. What was your thinking at the time... then how did you ultimately decide that you would offer myself the role... despite the given circumstances (Chris leaving and myself being ill and unable to perform in Iguana.)**

“Well, originally, part of it was just creating the look of the family. Once I knew I wanted to go with James (George), his stockier build made the decision (Chris being stocky himself and older). It was a visual thing. Also at the time we were still a little unsure about your health. I thought, well, Professor Willard comes in and then goes out. He’s got his one scene, and it was about me being able to rehearse you. Then we knew more once the show was cast, so that was part of it. Later I saw you would be okay, so I was not as worried about you taking on more lines and a larger part.”

**What were my weaknesses, as far as my choices for Doc? What were my strengths? Overall, did you feel that I was successful as Doc, when you consider your original vision for the play and the overall, eventual outcome? What would you have had me do differently?**

“Okay, here we go. Here is the juice. Here is my answer to this. This is basically going to be, I think, my general comments about you as an actor. I was dumbfounded that you weren’t completely, solidly off book after spring break. I thought, surely Patrick knows that the work

doesn't begin until you're cold on the lines. Then we can actually do something. I felt that you were struggling with lines much longer than you should have been. Especially when you had spring break off. I thought you'd just blow in and be cold on everything with two weeks left to opening. I was a little taken aback by that. I think that is a weakness. Now, I don't know. That was our first show together. I don't know if this has been a problem anywhere else, but I was kind of surprised. These lines are not Stoppard."

At this point in the response I offered a few words of explanation.

"In the last year, year and a half, since I've been here, learning lines for me has become more of a chore, and I'm not sure what has changed, but things have changed. The only thing that I think I can equate it to is that I have had distractions, obviously. I've allowed these things going on in my life to affect my work, which is not acceptable, and I understand that. But it has affected me. I used to not fret over learning lines. I was always off book the days I needed to be, but now it seems that I am off book, but not cold. It is a struggle for me. So, I know, that I need to figure out a new method for myself, because the old one just isn't working anymore."

David responded, "I would really suggest that, because everybody wonders how do we learn lines, and I never saw it as a big deal. It's just "donkey work." You just do it and then it's fine. What's interesting though is that there are still a lot of people out there that are so many weeks into rehearsal and still haven't learned their lines. I think it is age. I also think... for you, you have been kind of far between projects. There might be a little muscle work that has atrophied, a little bit. That might be part of it. I don't know. Yes, so, if you want to call that a weakness... it surprised me. Knowing how short we were on rehearsals, you said that we had only eleven rehearsals, I knew we were pressed, and I was really relying on the MFAs to just arrive at the table. Even though I was giving Crissy (Mrs. Webb) grief, she had a truckload of

lines, including Iguana, but when I see Crissy struggling, the difference is I see what she is playing, I see what her intention is, and sometimes when I see you struggling for a line I don't know what's behind what you're trying to do. Your energy always seems to be about finding the line rather than me seeing what you're doing, what you're trying to get, seeing what you want or seeing what your action is. Paraphrase, if you have to, for the sake of the action. I think that is a difference and that is something you can work on too. Whether I've got the line perfectly or not, I know exactly what I want and that has energy and weight on stage. Because of this, there always seems to be a vacancy in you when you do not have your lines.

Moving on, I'm going to say that one of your strengths is one of your weaknesses. I agree with Rodney (Hudson). You rely on your voice. It's deep. It's big. It's booming. It's your default. It's a great thing, but I do think you do rely on it too much, because it is something I think has worked for you."

During this response, I inquired to David, "Can you, within the frame of Doc, give me a specific instance or remember an example, because I hear that constantly from everybody. Honestly, I have a hard time distinguishing exactly when or where it happens. Because when I played Macbeth it was that voice. I did it for four months because Chuck (Gorden) pushed me in that direction. Within Doc, I don't know, but I felt I was subtler, but I do have a big voice."

David responded, "Well I think that in some of your public scenes, I think it is totally fine and I think it's a great default when talking to Joe Crowell or the Constable or whatever, but I felt like there needed to be a new tone once you were inside the house – more a discovered softness with George. I always felt like the scene with George... I think you got there to a certain point, but I think you could've gone a lot further in the sense of knowing exactly how you're going to manipulate George, had only to do with that line you left out that one day 'I knew all I

had to do was bring it to your attention.’ To me, remember Rodney (Hudson) always used to say, there is a line that tells you what it is in a monologue. To me that was it. That one line. It’s like, you had the security of knowing that the moment these words come out of my mouth he’s going to feel bad. I feel like that would have allowed you a different vocal quality. But you still had a little bit of this stern father figure thing. I think out on the porch with Mrs. Gibbs too was a place where you were still using that theater voice. You could have found more range in that scene as well. Those are two specific examples for you.

I think you needed a rehearsal coat and hard sole shoes earlier. You wear a lot of flip flops and you drag your feet a lot, and I don’t know if that conditions how you walk. You scuffed your feet a lot and you weren’t aware of it, but I think getting those hard sole shoes early for you would have helped.

Generally, I think it was one of the stronger performances that you’ve given here. I do think that. Specifically, I thought there was a good connection with Jennie (Mrs. Gibbs). I thought you were able to find more with her. I thought those scenes were pretty successful. In fact I even remember giving you a note saying to back off on some of the touching, because I thought the comfort level got to be almost too much, we needed to keep that New England stoicism. But I liked the fact that you all connected. I thought that was good.”

**Often times, because of obvious time constraints the director is maneuvered into working largely with the primary roles, and in this case, which were cast with young actors. Do you feel you had enough time to work me... What would you have focused on more after having seen my performances?**

“Oh, (laughing) there is never enough time, but the thing is, it surprised me that I had to spend so much time on minute details. I anticipated those things, but at some point you’ve got to cut your losses, accept that, what it is... is as good as it’s going to be, and say a little prayer.

There is never enough time. James and Caroline could have used more. There is so much to play

with going into the soda fountain. There are some moments there where we could've found more stuff for. The one thing I really regret in rehearsal time is the scene with you and George, because I had to spend so much time to shape the choir and getting them in and out so that it wasn't eating up your scene. I needed to spend more time on just your scene. We never had enough time to break that down moment by moment. That's a scene I would have wanted more time with, specifically."

I added to David's comments, "In relation to that, I never felt like I connected with James. He was always a little absent just sitting there. It made it difficult for me to know what would work and what wouldn't work. Not disregarding your direction, but trying to get something from James by doing it this way or doing it that way, attempting to make it seem more natural wasn't working. I never felt like I got there."

**May we talk about dialect, specifically for a moment, since it was such a big part of the show? What would you have done differently, since everybody was responsible for their own learning through the tapes?**

"I thought Dan (Schubert-Skelly) had one of the better dialects, which was more than appropriate for the Constable. I think that there are imbedded dialects. Howie is one of them. Which is an example of the people which are really imbedded in the town who never get out i.e. Mr. Webb and Dr. Gibbs. I thought Cameron's (Howie) dialect was very good too. Differently, I'd hire a dialect coach. That would be the first thing that I'd do. Because dialect needs a full time person; it needs somebody's full attention. Someone who could pull people aside while other rehearsal is going on and work with them on certain sounds and this and that. I thought Zach's (Mr. Webb) was very good. I thought his was consistent and good. I thought generally there was a fairly decent wash/ coloration of the dialect. Individually, some were thicker than others, and I don't have a problem with that. Naturally, some people will have thicker dialects

than others. So, I wasn't looking for that kind of layer. I just wanted to make sure nobody stuck out with bad sounds. And actually, the one comment I made to you about sounding 'Boston', you fixed it. Once I brought that to your attention that one time you fixed it and I never heard it again. But, generally, I think the general wash of the dialects was pretty good. I look at P.J. (Stage Manager) and wonder if I should have had him in dialect or not, but I think I like the choice of not having him in dialect, except when playing a character. He has an everyman quality to him. His voice is sort of soothing anyway and not overly theatrical. He has a breathy voice and I like the difference between that and the actors. It was a good contrast. But for you, I thought your dialect was consistent once we got in and you got into a rhythm. I could have used a little bit more of it, maybe. I think it could have been thicker."

I replied, "I didn't want to over do it. I started to hear, for some reason... I found this really old movie. Remember Fred Gwyn, the actor? He was in a really bad Stephen King movie call Pet Semetary set in Maine. He had that voice. I started to hear that in my head, and it was really overwhelming, so I was really trying not to mimic him, because I had inadvertently watched that film while we were rehearsing. I said to myself that's it right there, but that's Fred Gwyn."

David continued, "It can become a little sing-songy rhythmically speaking. Those rhythms of the town folk's speech needed to be preserved.

Let's talk progression of age now. That was something that surprised me too. In your prospectus you labeled Doc as 'middle aged'. I'm like, 'Patrick read the script.' You're one of the few characters which has a specific age listed, but that's handed down from bad productions. If you look at the Paul Newman production, they cast all of these old people playing Doc Gibbs and Mr. Webb and everybody. They are not that old."

I replied, “I think what a lot of that was... there it was right on the page and then I felt like an idiot. I believe it said thirty-five. Myself, I’m thirty-eight. To me the character just seemed older. I don’t have children and I don’t own a home. I’m not a professional. I feel a lot younger than I am, and it just seemed to me that he would be a forty-five year old man as opposed to a thirty-five year old.”

David continued, “Well, I think also, when we first see him he has been out all night. So there is that kind of odd lethargy to him. But I think it’s an interesting given circumstance that here he is coming down the street and doesn’t go into the house. He sits out and reads the paper. And I don’t care how large the theater is, he’s got to kill time out there somehow. Why? There are public moments and private moments, this is private. It’s the burden of the mantle of fatherhood and husband. Public moments/ private moments. The moment he steps in the house, he’s got to engage on those levels. Sitting on the stoop just reading the newspaper he is just Citizen Joe. I think there are qualities about that, and I remember thinking ‘why in the world is he having this moment?’ I don’t think Thornton Wilder was sitting there going ‘you know I’m going to put him out there just a little bit longer just to give him this private moment or to have this moment with Joe (Shane Doty). I don’t think it was conscious on the playwright’s part. I think he knew when he wanted Doc to enter the house and when he was going to create these different things. I think it’s an interesting quality. But, yeah, he’s not that old. He can be mature in a certain way because of his life situation, yeah. I agree with that. But he’s not old. Physicality. Mannerisms. I think this is why you needed a rehearsal coat and shoes. I think there were other physical aspects you might have discovered with a coat. How to use the coat. Getting Jennie (Mrs. Webb) to help you with the coat. When you loosen a tie and when you don’t. I think

all of these are small details that you ended up finding, but I think you could have found them earlier which might have led to other possibilities.”

I responded, “I did three or four pages in my journal on the day I put the shoes on and what the differences were. I was like ‘wow’. I should have done this ten days ago. And I understand why David is yelling at me right now (Laughing), because I’m an idiot. But it did change things.”

David continued, “Footwear is unbelievably important, I think, to an actor in terms of what it makes you feel like. Then you would have a chance to FIX that scuffing thing earlier, Patrick.

Okay. Did that help? Give you some stuff? Good.”

“Thank you.” I finished.



## Self Assessment

Everything about my *Our Town* experience must begin with my failure before *The Night of the Iguana*. Initially I was to play the Reverend Shannon in Tennessee Williams' play for the Tennessee Williams' festival in the French Quarter. It was a dream, but it was not to be. The older that I become, the more I realize how things never turn out how one would have them. Without getting into the gory details, medically speaking, I had to drop my lead role in *Iguana*, much to my dismay. *Our Town* was the next show of the UNO Spring 2010 season. Initially, when I was still officially part of the *Iguana* cast, Mr. Hoover cast me as Professor Willard, which only had the one scene in the play. Fortunately, or rather unfortunately, my health took me out of *The Night of the Iguana*, and simultaneously Chris Klocke, who was primarily cast as Doc Gibbs, gave up the part for personal reasons. Mr. Hoover then offered the part to me. It was a nice gesture and surprise in the middle of a semester that seemed doomed to me.

I find it interesting, here at the end of it all, that I have written so many pages concerning a part in a play that merely constitutes only seventeen pages of an eighty-six page script. However, the process was a discovery. Doc Gibbs is the moral center of this play. I found him to be the glue amongst the myriad of characters in the play.

It is a difficult thing to look oneself in the mirror and pass judgment. I've always adhered to my Father's discipline. My Father was a career Marine. He always told me, "Shut up and listen! You'll learn more." The further that I delved into the theater world, the more I took his words with me. Years later, when I was instructed by my former professor, Chuck Gorden, I heard him reiterate, "There are more acting opportunities when you're not speaking than when you have lines." His words reflected my Father's words. Long story short, I find more

knowledge and learning from the advice and criticism from my mentors and peers rather than getting lost in my own thoughts. However, the powers that be state I must evaluate myself.

I'll begin basically. I had a few successes for my efforts, but for the most part I have to be honest with myself. I do not feel that I succeeded with the part of Doc Gibbs overall. When the Doc enters the stage for the first time he encounters the young men, Joe and Howie. My interactions outside of the Gibbs' home I believe were truthful. As Mr. Hoover puts it, one of my strengths is one of my weaknesses. I have a big "theater" voice and have no problems whatsoever projecting. Outside the Doc's home this voice worked, as I do feel the Doc is a little larger than life when out in the community of Grover's Corners. However, it is when he is in his home interacting with his family that I fell short. I was unable to find that softness within the Doc. My "theater" voice then became a liability. Its boldness lacked the sincerity that would create the intimacy between he and Mrs. Gibbs. Although, despite this liability, I do feel that Mrs. Gibbs (Jennie Freeman) and I did have a natural chemistry between the two of us. We were quite comfortable embracing one another, as I feel our body language conveyed. However, as I stated previously, my vocal choices did not match our physical interactions.

Next, came the scene between the Doc and his son George (James Vitale). I never felt this scene succeeded once, despite the different choices I made tactically and vocally. I never found that gentle authority figure that embodied Doc Gibbs. I take most of the responsibility for this scene's failure. I always came across much too harshly, as Mr. Hoover pointed out during my exit interview, and I agreed with him. However, I never felt I got much out of James to play on with this scene. He always seemed to play it down, i.e. negatively, in my opinion. Mr. Hoover admitted that he felt that the scene was not rehearsed enough, but I cannot blame him at all for this, as the production was huge and filled with younger actors, thus his attention and focus had

to be on the larger picture. It was my responsibility, as Mr. Vitale, (George), was a young actor himself, having only two shows under his belt prior to *Our Town*. I was the veteran actor. I was the MFA.

I do feel that I found the humor within Doc Gibbs during the wedding morning scene with Mrs. Gibbs. She is hysterical, and the Doc teasingly reminds his wife of their own experience when they were young trying ease her anxiety. This I felt worked well. However in this scene, as well as the previous scene with Mrs. Gibbs, Mr. Hoover felt that my affection toward Jennie was too much. We had discussed previously, during rehearsal, about the stoicism, indicative of the time period, the Doc should have concerning public intimacy toward his wife. I never really found the balance for this either.

Doc Gibbs' final appearance in the play is during the funeral scene during the third act. I feel that this was my most successful part of the play, as it was my most truthful moment on stage. The Doc walks all the way downstage and places flowers on his wife's grave. I knew this moment. During April of 2008 I buried my young wife, Rachel. Ironically, during April of 2010, just two years later, I found myself placing flowers on my stage wife's grave. Life truly does imitate art.

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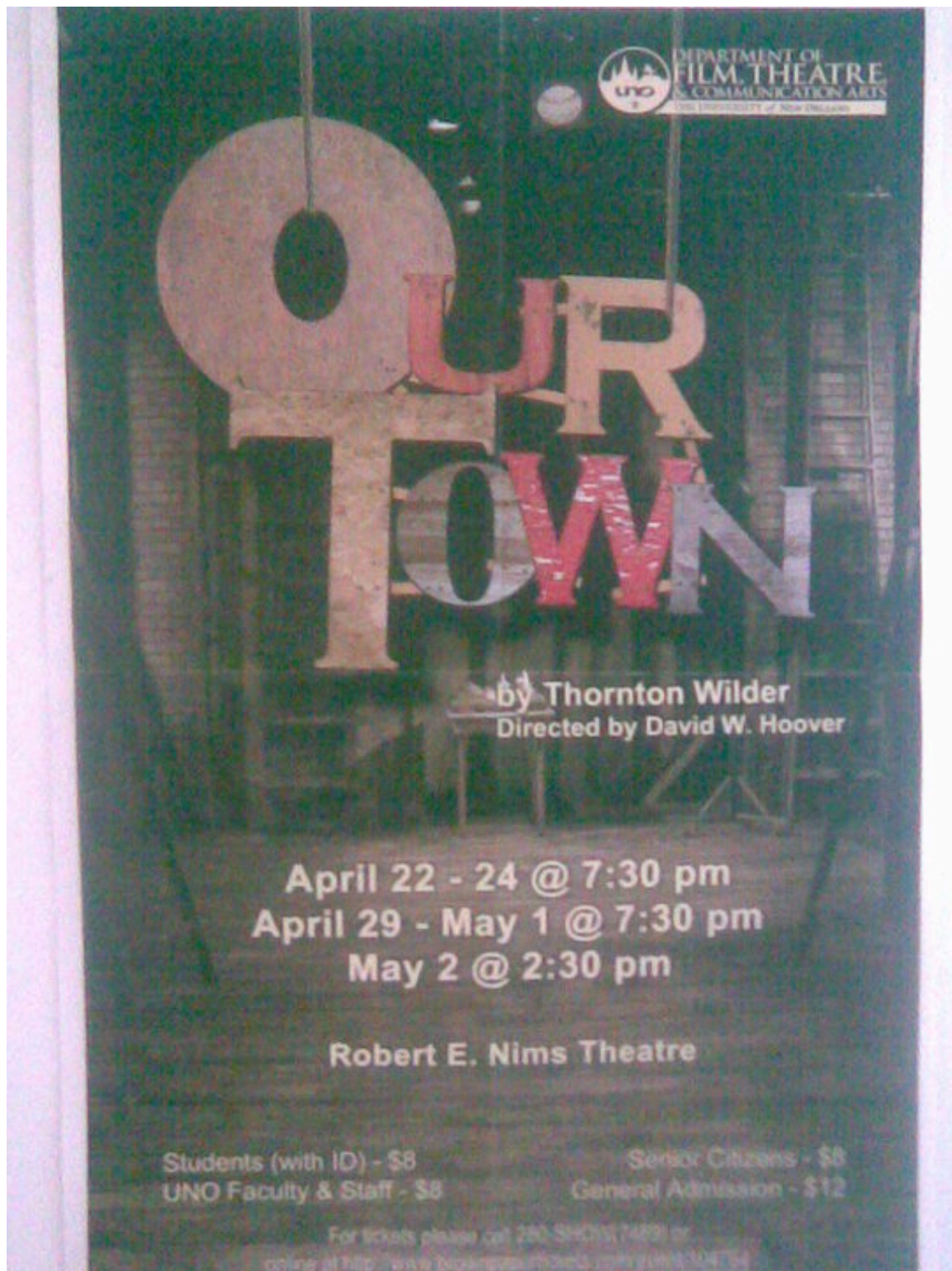
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## Appendix – A



## **Appendix – B**

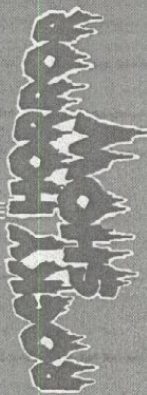


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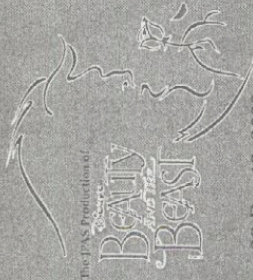


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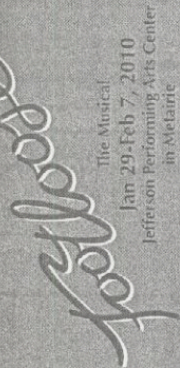
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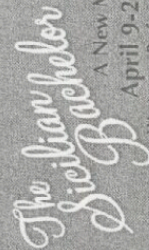
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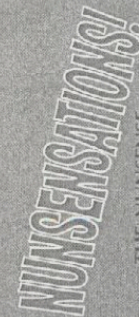
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THE NUNSENSE  
VEGAS REVUE  
Feb 19-March 7, 2010  
Teatro Wego Theatre in Westwego

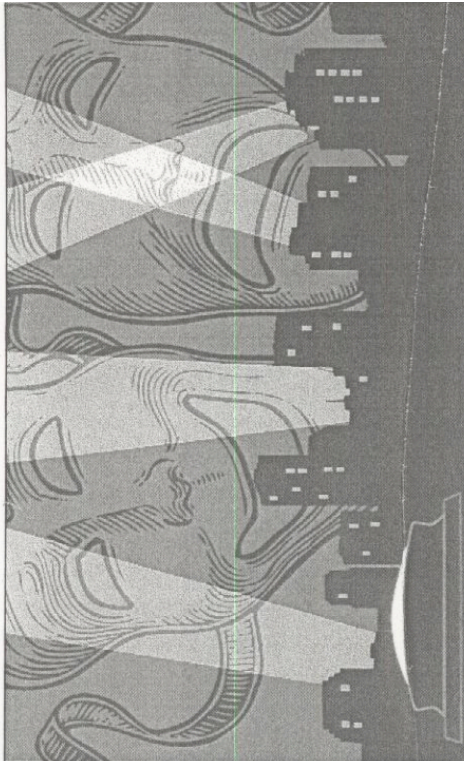
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# Our Town

by Thornton Wilder

Directed by David W. Hoover

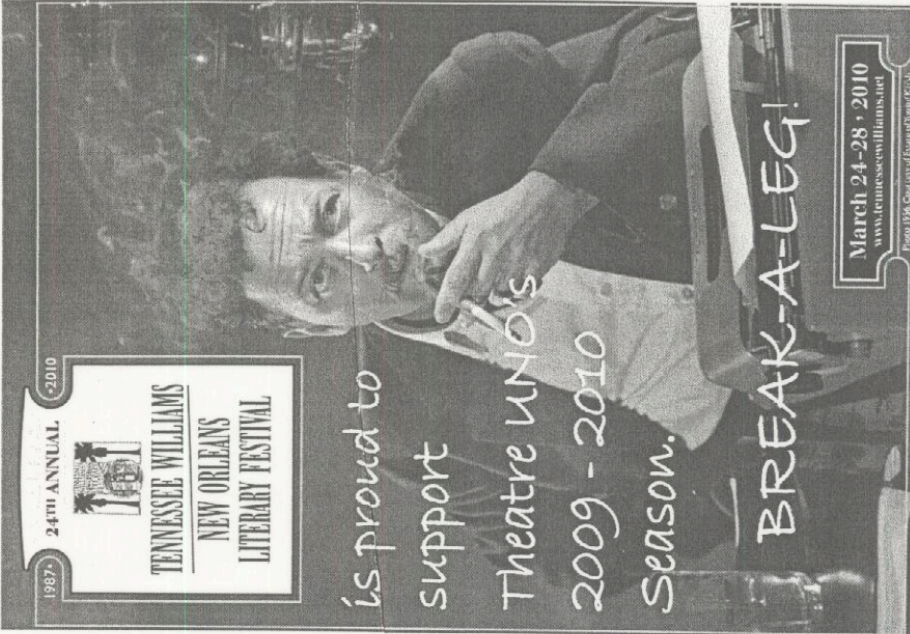
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## Letter from our Chair

This has been an amazing year for Theatre UNO! From our record breaking *The Last Days of Judas Iscariot* in conjunction with InSideOut productions, hosting the 2009 Kennedy Center American College Theatre Festival in the fall, and sharing our students talents with the critically acclaimed production of *The Night of the Iguana* with the patrons of the Tennessee Williams New Orleans Literary Festival we have been a very active group this year. In addition, we've continued our commitment to original work with *Verses from Jordan* and *Tio's Blues*; two challenging commentaries on being human. Now we close with a perennial classic of the American Theatre, *Our Town*. We hope you've enjoyed this journey as much as we've enjoyed bringing it to you. If you haven't joined our e-mail list it is not too late to join and be the first to know what we have planned for 2010-2011. You can add your name to our list by picking up an information card at the concession stand. As always we appreciate your patronage and look forward to another year of engaging theatre.

David W. Hoover, Chair

## Our Town

Act I: The Daily Life  
Dawn, Grover's Corners, New Hampshire. May 7, 1901

Act II: Love and Marriage  
Morning, Grover's Corners, New Hampshire. July 7, 1904

Act III: Death and The Grave  
Dawn, Grover's Corners, New Hampshire. Summer, 1913

## Thornton Wilder on *Our Town*

"(*Our Town*) is an attempt at complete immersion into everything about a New Hampshire village which, I hope, is gradually felt by the audience to be an allegorical representation of all life."

"At first glance, (*Our Town*) appears to be practically a genre study of a village in New Hampshire. On second glance, it appears to be a meditation about the difficulty of, as the play says, 'realizing life while you live it.' But buried back in the text, from the very commencement of the play, is a constant repetition of the words 'hundreds,' 'thousands,' 'millions.' It's as though the audience is looking at that town at ever greater distances through a telescope. Some examples include: Soon after the play begins, the Stage Manager calls upon the professor from the geology department of the state university, who says how many million years old the ground is they're on. And the Stage Manager talks about putting some objects and reading matter into the cornerstone of a new bank and covering it with a preservative so that it can be read a thousand years from now. Or as a minister presiding at the wedding, the Stage Manager muses to himself about all the marriages that have ever taken place - 'millions of 'em, millions of 'em... who set out to live two by two...' Finally, among the seated dead, one of the dead says, 'My son was a sailor and used to sit on the porch. And he says the light from that star took millions of years to arrive.' There is still more of this."

## Our Town Cast

Stage Manager .....	P.J. McKinnie
Dr. Frank Gibbs .....	Patrick Payne*
Joe Crowell .....	Shane Doty
Howie Newsome .....	Cameron Bradford
Mrs. Julia Gibbs .....	Jennie Freeman
Mrs. Myrtle Webb .....	Chrissy Garrett
George Gibbs .....	James Vitale
Rebecca Gibbs .....	Madison Underwood
Wally Webb .....	Paxton Anderson
Emily Webb .....	Caroline Langlois
Professor Willard .....	Dr. Edward Johnson
Mr. Charles Webb .....	Zach Rogers
Woman in Balcony .....	Katelin Nicholson
Man in Auditorium .....	Matthew Rigdon
Lady in the Box .....	Shelby L. Butera
Simon Stimson .....	Matthew Martinez
Mrs. Louella Soames .....	Leianna Seals
Constable Warren .....	Daniel Schubert-Skelly
Si Crowell .....	Louis Saubat III
Baseball Players .....	Eric Long, Louis Saubat, III
Sam Craig .....	Robert Facio
Joe Stoddard .....	Elliott Bonnet
Farmer McCarthy .....	Matthew Rigdon
Choir & Dead People ..	Rebecca Laborde, Becca Posterino, Daniel Schubert-Skelly, Danielle Pointer

## Production Team

Director .....	David W. Hoover
Stage Manager .....	Alicia Plaisance
Assistant Stage Manager ..	Sarah Chatelain
Technical Director .....	Shannon R. Miller
Scenic Design .....	Gordon Smith
Lighting & Sound Design ..	Shannon R. Miller
Costume Design .....	Tony French
Publicity .....	Beau Bratcher
Box Office .....	Adam Falik
Poster Design .....	Mike Harkins

\* This production serves as partial fulfillment of a Masters of Fine Arts Degree



## Our Town Cast Bios

**Paxton Anderson (Wally Webb)** has previously been seen in *Some of Summer, Best Christmas Pageant Ever*, *Peter Pan*, *Kid Summer Nights Dream*, and *Wizard of Oz*. He is very excited to be back on stage at UNO. Paxton can be seen again this summer in UNO LYTE's production of *Alice in Wonderland*.

**Elliot Bonnet (Joe Stoddard)** is a Junior at UNO working on his degree in Philosophy. He is incredibly grateful for this wonderful opportunity, the illuminating cast, crew, and director, and all of his theatre teachers. He also wants to thank his family and friends for their unwavering support.

**Cameron Bradford (Howie Newsome)** is an undergraduate FTCA major with a focus on theatre. He transferred from Centenary College. Some of his stage credits include, Technical Director for UNO's recent production of *The Night of the Iguana*, Mercutio in *Romeo & Juliet*, and Haemon in *Antigone*. He would like to thank the faculty of UNO's theatre department for this wonderful experience and learning environment.

**Shelby Lynn Marie Butera (Lady in the Box)** is ecstatic to be working on *Our Town*! Shelby is currently a sophomore at UNO where she is working diligently towards a degree in Film, Theatre and Communication Arts. She would love to thank Robert Facio for his support.

**Shane Doty (Joe Crowell)** is a sophomore FTCA major. His previous credits at UNO include acting in *Much Ado About Nothing* and stage managing *Tio's Blues*. He would like to thank his friends and family for their love and support. "Be who you are and say what you feel, for those who mind don't matter and those who matter don't mind." - Dr. Seuss

**Robert Facio (Sam Craig)** is in his final semester as an FTCA undergraduate at UNO and is working towards getting his Doctorate. Some previous credits include Guy in *Some Girl(s)*, Mac Sam in *The Miss Firecracker Contest*, and most recently Matt in *Tio's Blues*. He would like to thank his family, friends, and Shelby for their support.

**Jennie Freeman (Mrs. Gibbs)** is a second year MFA Performance student at UNO, where she was last in *Tio's Blues* as Maeve. New Orleans credits include *The Last Days of Judas Iscariot*, *Much Ado About Nothing*, *The Music Man*, and *The Chairs*. She received her BA in Theatre from Texas A&M- Corpus Christi.

**Chrissy Garrett (Mrs. Webb)** was last seen as "Hannah Jelkes" in Theatre UNO's production of *THE NIGHT OF THE IGUANA* at Le Petit. This will be her last performance at UNO before she receives her MFA in acting in May. Chrissy would like to thank her parents. This is one of mom's favorites! And thank you to all the people I've worked with, studied with, and performed alongside for the past six years. Thank you, David Hoover. You're the best!

**Dr. Edward Johnson (Professor Willard)** majored in Philosophy at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. He appeared most recently in the title role in the Wilson College Theater production of Goethe's *Faust*, at Princeton University, in 1975. Since then, he has been between gigs.

## Our Town Cast Bios

**Rebecca Laborde (Choir/Dead person)**, a senior FTCA major, is thrilled to be in *Our Town*. She was last seen as Hilda in *The Night of the Iguana*, and before that as Kerk in *Tio's Blues*. Rebecca would like to thank her family as well as everyone involved in this production.

**Caroline Alyssa Langlois (Emily Webb)** is jubilant to be a part of the UNO's production of *Our Town*. Caroline is currently a Senior FTCA Major at UNO. Past credits include: *All Shook Up*, *Beauty and the Beast*, *Much Ado About Nothing*, *Aida*, *Damn Yankees*, *Footloose*, and *The Night of the Iguana*, for which she received an Irene Ryan Acting Nomination. Caroline dedicates this performance to Anna Bella Langlois!

**Eric Long (Baseball Player)** is a sophomore Film Arts major at UNO. He wants to thank the cast and crew for being so welcoming to the "new-comer". He also wants to thank his Acting I teacher, Marshall Carby, for forcing him to try out for *Our Town*, because it has been such a great experience.

**Matthew Martinez (Simon Stimson)** is in his junior year at UNO. His most recent credit is UNO's production of *The Night of the Iguana* at Le Petit. Other credits were in last year's *Indifferent Blue* and Shakespeare's *Much Ado About Nothing*. Matthew would like to thank his parents, as always, for their support.

**P.J. McKinnie (Stage Manager)** is in his first year as an MFA in acting student at UNO. Recent credits: *Altar Boys* (Luke) at Harrahs Casino, Southern Rep, and Le Petit; *Footloose* (Ren) at JPAS; *The 25th Annual Putnam County Spelling Bee* (Leaf Coneysbear) at Le Petit; *The Last Days of Judas Iscariot* (St. Matthew) at UNO. Big thanks to David, Shannon, Tony, and the entire cast and crew. Love to CEB and BUM!

**Katelin Nicholson (Woman in Balcony)** is a sophomore FTCA major with a minor in Psychology at UNO. This is her second theatrical performance at UNO, her first was in last season's *Indifferent Blue*, and she also enjoys working on films.

**Patrick Payne (Dr. Gibbs)** is an MFA in acting candidate at the University of New Orleans. He will graduate in December 2010. Patrick was last seen earlier this season playing multiple roles in the UNO production of *Verses from Jordan*.

**Danielle Pointer (Choir/Dead person)** is a Freshman in UNO's FTCA program, and is excited to be making her first appearance on the UNO stage. She extends her love and gratitude to everyone in the cast and crew for the honor of working with them, and her thanks twice over for making *Our Town* a fun and enjoyable learning experience.

**Becca Posterino (Choir/Dead person)** is an exchange student from Southern Cross University in NSW, Australia. Previous credits include; Julia in *George Orwell's 1984*; Frauline Schneider in *Cabaret*; Jenny in *Lipstick Dreams*; and Peggy in *The Front Page*. Becca would like to thank David, Alicia and the amazing cast and crew of *Our Town* for a smashing finale at UNO.



## Our Town Cast Bios

**Matthew Rigdon (Farmer McCarthy)** is a sophomore at UNO. He has been part of two productions with Theatre UNO. He was St. Peter in *Indifferent Blue* and helped backstage with *The Night of the Iguana*. He would like to thank his friends and family for all of their support.

**Zach Rogers (Mr. Webb)** is very excited about performing in his first Theatre UNO production. He recently transferred to UNO from Bossier Parish Community College. He performed on the UNO stage for the first time last fall, at KCACTF, in *The Woman in Black*. He is a junior FTCA major, with a focus on theatre.

**Louis Saubatz, III (Si Crowell/Baseball Player)** is happy to be a part of the *Our Town* cast. Louis graduated from UNO in May '09 and is currently pursuing his MBA. Recent credits include: *The Night of the Iguana* (Pancho); *The Last Days of Judas Iscariot* (Jesus of Nazareth); *Much Ado About Nothing* (Claudio). Louis would like to thank his family, friends and Caroline for all their love, support, and inspiration!

**Daniel Schubert-Skelly (Constable Warren)** is a Senior FTCA major focusing on Film at UNO. He was last seen in Theatre UNO's production of *The Night of the Iguana* at Le Petit Theatre.

**Leianna Seals (Mrs. Soames)** is ecstatic to be performing in her first UNO production! A junior FTCA major, Leianna thanks God, her family and her friends for their everlasting support. She also wishes to thank the cast, crew and director for their hard work into making this production a successful one.

**Madison Underwood (Rebecca Gibbs)** is a Third grade student at Bissonet Plaza Elementary in Metairie. She participates in the Gifted and Talented Program and is active in the Jefferson Parish Drama Program. She has appeared in four productions over the last two years. She is honored and grateful for the opportunity to be a part of Theatre UNO's production of *Our Town*.

**James Vitale (George Gibbs)** is a junior FTCA major, with a focus on Theater. He was last seen as Wolfgang in *The Night of the Iguana*. James would just like to simply say, "Never stop dreaming the unimaginable because accomplishing the impossible is nothing when you believe!"

"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 cycle."

- *Stage Manager*

SPECIAL THANKS:

Tulane Summer Lyric, David Cuthbert, Sara Fanelli,  
Dr. Susan Krantz

## Our Town Production Bios

**David Hoover (Director)** is the chair of the department of Film, Theatre, and Communication Arts at the University of New Orleans. For the Tennessee Williams Literary Festival he has directed Alec Baldwin, Elizabeth Ashley, John Goodman, Stephanie Zimbalist, Eli Wallach, and Anne Jackson. In New Orleans his acting/directing work has been seen at Le Petit Theatre du Vieux Carre, Tulane Summer Shakespeare Festival, Rivertown Rep, Le Chat Noir, Southern Rep, and Tulane Summer Lyric. He has worked at several other prestigious theatres that include The Guthrie, the Dallas Theatre Center, Shakespeare Festival of Dallas, and The Lyceum. David is the recipient of the Big Easy, Marquee, and Storer Boone Awards. Internationally he has lectured at the Universite de Sorbonne in Paris, been an adjudicator in London and has taught extensively in Italy and Mexico. David received an Artist Fellowship award from the Louisiana Division of the Arts; the first award of its kind made to a director. In 2007 David received UNO's coveted Career Achievement Award for Excellence in Research presented by the Alumni Association. Recently, David received the 2009 Big Easy Award for "Best Director of a Musical" for his production of *The 25th Annual Putnam County Spelling Bee*.

**Alicia Plaisance (Stage Manager)** is a sophomore theatre major at UNO. Before *Our Town*, she stage managed *Jewtopia* and *Spooky Dog and the Teenage Gang Mysteries*, both at Le Chat Noir. She is grateful for all the opportunities that have come her way since entering the theatre scene, and sends love to her bubbala, Joe.

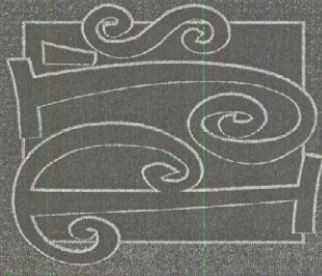
**Tony French (Costume Designer)** joined UNO faculty in 1992. Some of the many productions he has designed for the UNO stage include *Kiss of the Spider Woman* - the Musical, *Ghosts*, *Miss Julie*, *Blood Brothers*, *Measure for Measure* and *Lot's Daughters*. He has also designed for Southern Rep, the Shakespeare Festival at Tulane and Hope Summer Repertory Theatre. He has an MFA in Costume Design from Carnegie-Mellon University.

**Shannon R. Miller (Light Designer)** is in his second year with UNO's FTCA department. Shannon received his BFA in Theatre and Design Technology from Marshall University. He completed his MFA at the University of Southern Mississippi. As a designer and technologist his work has been featured throughout the nation including Utah Shakespeare Festival, Southern Arena Theatre, Theatre West Virginia, Alabama Shakespeare Festival, Southern Rep, Kentucky Repertory Theatre, and Jefferson Performing Arts Society.

**Gordon Smith (Scenic Designer)** is a non-traditional candidate for his MFA. He is a grad of Georgia College and State University of 2009. He has extensive experience in community, regional, and professional theatre. He has worked at Le Petit, UCON Nutmeg summer stock, Loeb Drama Center at Harvard, TD at Portsmouth NH Theatre-By-The-Sea, and master carpenter, assistant TD at the Alley Theatre in Houston.

**Sarah Chatelain (ASM)** is a first year Theatre Arts student in UNO's FTCA program. She recently helped out with UNO LYTE's *Twice The Night Before Christmas*. This is Sarah's first time working as an ASM, and is enjoying the learning experience. She would like to thank her friends, family, cast, and crew.





DEPARTMENT OF  
FILM, THEATRE  
& COMMUNICATION ARTS  
THE UNIVERSITY OF NEW ORLEANS

# Theatre UNO

## 2009 - 2010 SEASON

**The Last Days of Judas Iscariot**  
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By Evan Guilford-Blake  
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**The Night of the Iguana**  
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Directed by Beau Bratcher  
Le Petit Theatre du Vieux Carre  
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Directed by David W. Hoover  
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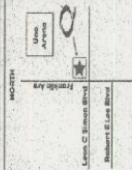
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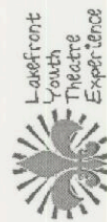


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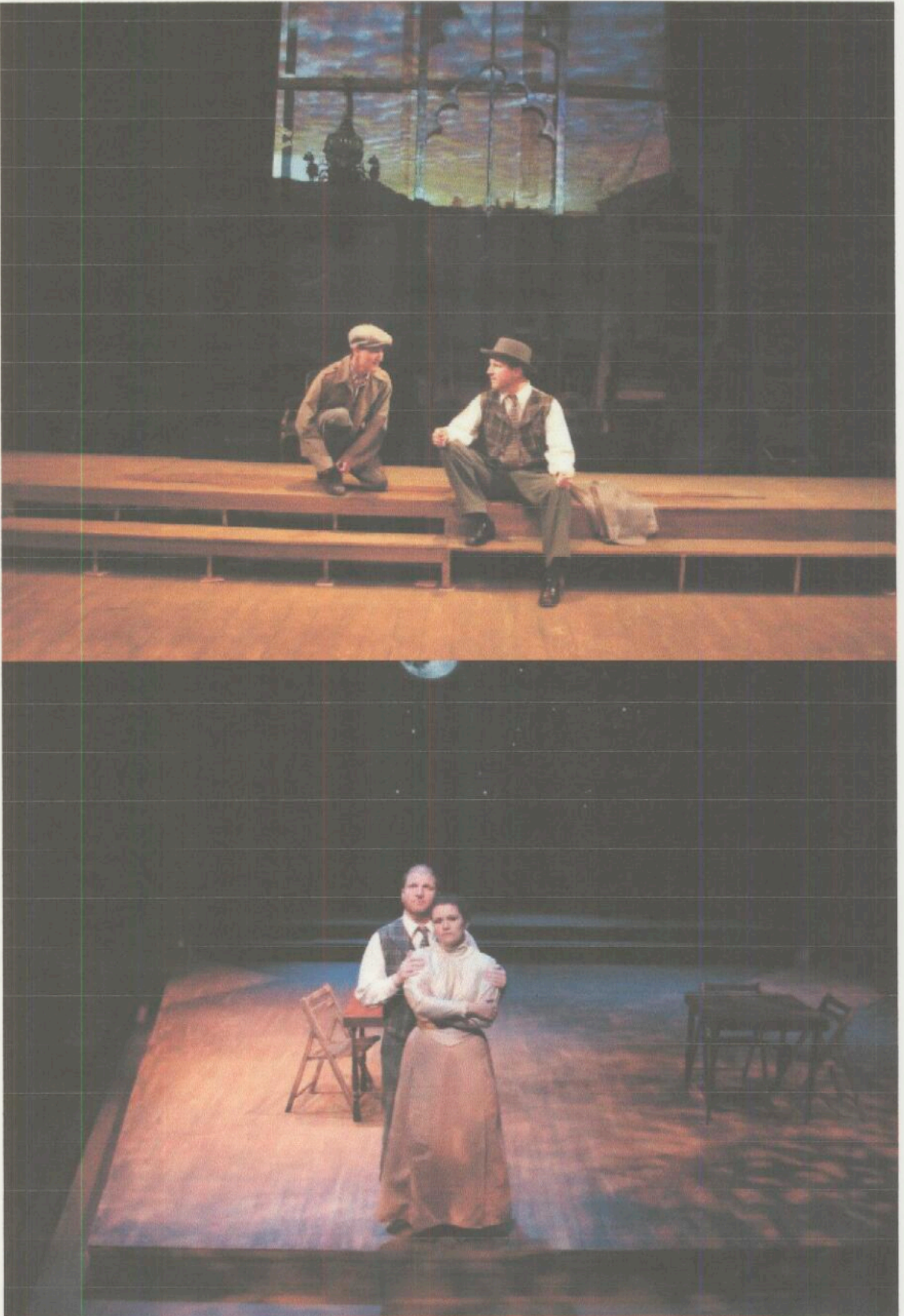
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## Appendix – C











## Appendix -D

### OUR TOWN

#### ACT ONE

*As the audience assembles the curtain is up and the stage is completely bare. A pilot light on a short stand is lighted, down left near the proscenium. At the appointed "curtain hour", the STAGE MANAGER saunters from Right, a script in his hand, a pipe in his mouth, hat on head. Crossing off Left, he reappears with a table which he places L. C. leaving the script on it. He then sets chairs per the set diagram (see appendix). He does the same for table and chairs Right, then crosses for the prompt script, which he takes down Right and passes it offstage to an unseen assistant, then lounges against the proscenium. During the setting of the stage a blue early-morning light has been established, and a pinspot has picked up the STAGE MANAGER as he reaches the proscenium. STAGE MANAGER now looks over the audience, puffs his pipe, consults watch, deprecates late-comers, etc., while the house lights gradually dim. When the house is quiet, he speaks.*

STAGE MANAGER. This play is called "Our Town." It was written by Thornton Wilder and produced by ..... In it you will see Mr. ...., Mr. ...., Mr. ...., Miss ...., Miss ...., Miss ...., and many others too numerous to mention. The name of our town is Grover's Corners, N. H., just over the line from Massachusetts; latitude 42 degrees, 40 minutes, longitude 70 degrees, 37 minutes.

*(A light strip on the floor up L. starts glowing into a dawn effect, which is followed by gradual morning light, which increases to noon through the action of the act.)*

The first act shows a day in our town. The date is May 7, 1901, just before dawn. (*COCK CROW off-stage.*) Aya, just about. Sky is beginnin' to show some streaks of light over in the East there, back of our mountain. (*Xing half up C.*) The mornin' star always gets wonderful bright the minute before it has to go. (*Stares up off L. at star a moment.*) Well, now I'll show you how our town lies. (*Xing up C. into Main Street*) Up here is Main Street. Cuttin' across it over there on the left is the railroad tracks. Across the tracks is—Polish Town. You know, foreign people that come here to work in the mill, couple of Canuck families, and the Catholic Church. (*Xing few steps down, pointing off L. with pipe.*) The Congregational Church is over there; the Presbyterian's across the street. Methodist and Unitarian are over there. (*Off down R.*) Baptist is down in the holla (*out front*)—by the river. (*Xing up C. again*) Next to the Post Office there (*Off L.*) is the Town Hall; jail is in the basement. Bryan once made a speech from those steps there. (*Swinging arms along street*) Along Main Street there's a row of stores. Hitchin' posts and horse-blocks in front of 'em. (*Xing down a few steps*) First automobile's goin' to come along in about five years—belonged to Banker Cartwright, our town's richest citizen. Lives up in the big white house up there on the hill. (*Pointing with pipe off R.*) Here's the grocery store and Mr. Morgan's drug store. (*Pointing with pipe R. and L. behind him*) Most everybody in town manages to look into these stores once a day. (*Xing down C., pointing to furniture R. C.*) This is our doctor's house—Doc Gibbs'.

(Two ASSISTANT STAGE MANAGERS bring trellises, with roses climbing over them, definitely worn and theatrical, from behind the tormentors, and set them at angles just below and center of the tormentors; then they withdraw behind tormentors.)

This is the back door— (*Glances at both trellises*) Here's a couple of trellises for those that feel they have to have scenery— This is Mrs. Gibbs' garden—(*down of furniture*) corn—peas—beans—hollyhocks—heliotrope, and a lot of burdock. In those days our newspapers came out twice a week—the *Grover's Corners Sentinel*—and this (*indicating furniture L. C., Xing L. of C.*) is Editor Webb's house. And this is Mrs. Webb's garden. (*Down of furniture L. C.*) Just like Mrs. Gibbs's, only it's got a lot of sunflowers too— Right here— (*Xing to run hands up and down an imaginary tree where the chair just L. of C. stands*) is a big butternut tree. (*He looks up at it, then faces out and Xes down C. onto apron.*) Nice town, y' know what I mean? Nobody very remarkable ever come out of it, s'far as we know. The earliest dates on the tombstones up there in the cemetery (*Off L.*) say 1670. They're Grovers and Cartwrights and Gibbises and Herseys—same names as around here now. Well, as I said, it's early morning. 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 gettin' ready to deliver the mornin' paper. And in the depot, where Shorty Hawkins is gettin' ready to flag the 5:45 for Boston. (*TRAIN WHISTLE offstage. STAGE MANAGER takes watch from vest pocket and consults it.*) Aya—there she is. Naturally out in the country, all around, they've been lights on for some time, what with milkin' and so on. But town folks sleep late.

So—another day's begun. (*Looks off L.*) There's Doc Gibbs comin' down Main Street now, comin' back from that baby case.

(*MRS. GIBBS, a plump, pleasant woman in the thirties, comes downstairs R. She bustles to put up shade, open window a bit, then to make a wood fire in the stove.*)

And here's his wife comin' downstairs to get breakfast. (*STAGE MANAGER Xing down R.*) Doc Gibbs died in 1930. New hospital's named after him. Mrs. Gibbs died first—long time ago, in fact. She went out to visit her daughter Rebecca, who married an insurance man in Canton, Ohio, and died there—pneumonia—but her body was brought back here.

(*MRS. GIBBS grinds coffee into a pot above the stove.*)

She's up in the cemetery there now—in with a whole mess of Gibbises and Herseys—she was Julia Hersey before she married Dr. Gibbs in the Congregational Church over there. In our town we like to know the facts about everybody.

(*MRS. WEBB, a thin, serious, crisp little woman in the thirties, hurries downstairs L., tying on an apron (real), Xes to stove, shakes the grate, adds coal from a hod with a shovel, turns damper, etc.*)

There's Mrs. Webb comin' downstairs to get her breakfast too.

(*DOC GIBBS, a pleasant portly man in the thirties having started down L. on cue "facts about*

ACT I

OUR TOWN

5

*everybody," now appears up L. on Main Street, yawning, carrying a bag in L. hand.)*

(MRS. GIBBS Xes to sink to pump water into coffee pot.)

Super OBJECTIVE:  
TO NURTURE HIS  
FAMILY.

That's Doc Gibbs. Got the call to go to Polish Town at half past one this morning. (Sound off R. of newspaper sliding along verandah.)

ENTERS  
FROM  
UP STAGE  
LEFT.

(JOE CROWELL, a boy of eleven, starts down R., Xing up onto Main St. and to C. Every few feet he takes a newspaper from under his L. arm and throws it upstage, whereat the sliding sound is again heard.)

BEAT 1

OBJECTIVES:

TO DECOMPRESS

ACTIONS:

1. TO ACKNOWLEDGE

And here comes Joe Crowell deliverin' Mr. Webb's Sentinel.

JOE. (Turning into Main St.) Mornin', Doc!

DR. GIBBS. Mornin', Joe! ①

JOE. Want your paper now?

DR. GIBBS. (Setting bag on chair R. of up C.) Yes, I'll take it. ② JOE hands paper to DR. GIBBS, who unfolds it and stands by chair reading front page.)

SITS &  
READS.

2. TO RELAX

(MRS. GIBBS Xes to put coffee pot on stove, then to cupboard to slice bacon.)

JOE. (Xing rear to L. C.) Anybody been sick, Doc? (Continues throwing papers.)

(MRS. WEBB Xes to cupboard to grind coffee into pot.)

3. To comply

4. TO CHANGE  
SUBJECT

DR. GIBBS. No. Some twins over in Polish Town ③  
—Joe, I see your teacher Miss Foster is goin' to get ④ married.

JOE (*Xing back to chair L. of up C.*) Yes, sir, to a feller over in Concord.

DR. GIBBS. I declare. Well, how do you boys <sup>(5)</sup> feel about that?

JOE. (*Seriously*) Well, of course it ain't none of my business—but I think if a person starts out to be a teacher she ought to stay one. (*Starts L. throwing papers.*)

(MRS. GIBBS *Xes to stove to put bacon in skillet.*)

DR. GIBBS. (*Smiling*) How's you knee, Joe? <sup>(6)</sup>

JOE (*Stops up L.*) Fine, Doc, I never think about it at all. Only like you said, it always tell me when it's going to rain. (*Starts off to down L., throwing papers.*)

DR. GIBBS. What's it telling you today? Goin' — STANDS to rain? <sup>(7)</sup>

JOE. No sir.

DR. GIBBS. Sure? <sup>(8)</sup>

(MRS. WEBB *puts coffee on stove.*)

JOE. Yes sir.

DR. GIBBS. Knee ever make a mistake? <sup>(9)</sup>

JOE. No sir. (*Exits down L.*)

(DR. GIBBS *stands looking the newspaper over, — READS PAPER* yawns.)

(MRS. GIBBS *Xes to cupboard, cuts several slices of bread, then cuts a pie.*)

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

STAGE MANAGER. I want to tell you something about that boy Joe Crowell there. Joe was awful bright—graduated from the High School here head of his class. So he got a scholarship to Boston

5. TO TEASE

6. TO COMFORT

7. TO RIB

8. TO INQUIRE

9. TO KID

ACT I

OUR TOWN

7

Techn—M.I.T., that is. Graduated head of his class from there too. It was all written up in the Boston papers at the time.

(DR. GIBBS turns paper inside out, yawns.)

(MRS. GIBBS opens cupboard for tablecloth, Xes to spread it on table, Xes to cupboard for cup and spoon, Xes to set them for Doc at R. side of table.)

Goin' to be a great engineer, Joe was, but the war broke out and he died in France. Yes sir, all that education for nothing. What business he had picking a quarrel with the Germans we can't make out to this day, but it all seemed perfectly clear to us at the time.

HOWIE NEWSOME. (Off down L.) Gid-ap, Bessie. What's the matter with you?

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

(The sound of MILK BOTTLES in a hand-rack is heard off L., and it continues through HOWIE's scene except when he sets down the rack.)

STAGE MANAGER. Here comes Howie Newsome delivering the milk.

(HOWIE starts from down L., an overalled country "character" of about thirty, carrying milkrack in L. hand; Xes up C., then down C. to trellis down L. He walks with a hitch.)

HOWIE. Mornin', Doc! (10)

DR. GIBBS. Mornin', Howie!

HOWIE. Somebody sick?

FOLDS PAPER

10. TO GREET

11. To DISMISS

12. TO CHANGE  
SUBJECT

13. To RELAX

14. TO DEPART

8

OUR TOWN

ACT I

DR. GIBBS. Pair of twins over to Mrs. Goruslaw- (11)  
ski's.

HOWIE. (*Starting down C. to trellis down L.*)  
Twins, eh? This town's gettin' bigger every year.

DR. GIBBS. (*Smiling*) Going to rain, Howie? (12)

HOWIE. No, no. Fine day—it'll burn through.  
(HORSE WHINNY effect off L.) Come on,  
Bessie. (*Sets rack down, sets out two bottles in  
trellis.*) (13)

DR. GIBBS. Hello, Bessie! (*Folding paper, putting  
it under L. arm, Xes to pat horse by chair L. of C.*)  
How old is she, Howie? (14)

HOWIE. (*Takes rack, Xes down R.*) Going on  
seventeen. Bessie's all mixed up about the route  
ever since the Lockharts stopped takin' their quart  
of milk every day. (*Mrs. Gibbs, after glancing at  
HOWIE through window Xes into trellis.*) She  
wants to leave 'em a quart just the same—keeps  
scolding me the hull trip.

MRS. GIBBS. (*Opening door, which she leaves  
open.*) Good morning, Howie!

HOWIE. (*Sets rack down, hands her two bottles.*)  
Mornin', Mis' Gibbs. Doc's just comin' down the  
street.

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

(*DR. GIBBS takes bag, starts down C. to down L.*)

HOWIE. (*Taking rack, starts up C. and off R.  
without stopping*) Aya. Somep'n went wrong with  
the separator. Don't know what 'twas. (*Passing DR.  
GIBBS.*) Doc!

DR. GIBBS. Howie! (14)

MRS. GIBBS. (*Taking milk to cupboard—calling  
upstairs*) Children! Children, time to get up!

HOWIE. Come on, Bessie!

MRS. GIBBS. George! Rebecca!

PETS HORSE

HEADS DOWN STAGE



BEAT 2  
OBJECTIVE:  
TO REST  
ACTIONS:

1. TO ASSURE

2. TO EXASPERATE

3. TO MOCK

4. TO PROBE

ACT I OUR TOWN 9

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

(DR. GIBBS enters house through trellis, sets bag down on steps.)

MRS. GIBBS. (Taking bread from cupboard to table.) Everything all right, Frank?

DR. GIBBS. (Laying newspaper on table) Yes, I declare. Easy as kittens. (1)

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

DR. GIBBS. (Xing to sink, tosses hat off R., pumps water into basin, washes hands) Mrs. Wentworth's comin' at eleven. (2) Guess I know what it's about too. Her stomach ain't what it ought to be. (3)

MRS. GIBBS. (Xing to cupboard, picks out silver from drawer.) All told, you won't get more'n three hours sleep. Frank Gibbs, I don't know what's goin' to become of you. I do wish you could go away some place and take a rest. I think it would do you good.

MRS. WEBB. (Calling off L.) Emily! Time to get up! Wally! Seven o'clock!

MRS. GIBBS. (Xing to set three places at table, R. to L.) I declare, you got to speak to George. Seems like somethin's come over him lately. He's no help to me at all. I can't even get him to cut me some wood. (4)

DR. GIBBS. Is he sassy to you? (Pulls down roller towel below sink, dries hands.)

MRS. GIBBS. (Xing to stove, picks up spatula) No. He just whines! All he thinks about is that baseball— (Xing R. a bit to call) George! Rebecca! You'll be late for school.

PUTS  
COAT ON  
CHAIR

SITS

5. TO DR. GIBBS. *M-m-m.* (5)  
 CONTEMPLATE MRS. GIBBS. George!  
 DR. GIBBS. *George, look sharp!* (6)

6. TO GEORGE. Yes, Pa! (*Off R.*)

BERATE (Mrs. Gibbs turns eggs.)

7. TO DR. GIBBS. *Don't you hear your mother calling* (7)  
 REMIND you? (*Xes to stairs.*)

MRS. WEBB. Walleee! You'll be late for school!

8. TO DR. GIBBS. *Guess I'll go upstairs and take forty* (8)  
 BREATH winks. (*Exit upstairs.*)

EASY MRS. WEBB. Walleee! You wash yourself good  
 or I'll come up and do it myself. (*Xes to table up R.  
 to serve two dishes of oatmeal, which she places on  
 table.*)

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

MRS. GIBBS. (*Xes to cupboard for two plates, Xes  
 to stove.*) Don't make a noise. Your father's been  
 out all night and needs his sleep. I washed and ironed  
 the blue gingham for you special. (*Serves one plate  
 and sets it on table for George.*)

REBECCA. Oh, Ma, I hate that dress.

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

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

MRS. GIBBS. (*Serves second plate*) Now, Re-  
 becca, you always look very nice.

REBECCA. (*Shrilly*) Mama, George's throwin'  
 soap at me!

MRS. GIBBS. (*Xing to set plate for REBECCA*)  
 I'll come up an' slap the both of you, that's what  
 I'll do! (*Xes to cupboard for plate.*)

(A FACTORY WHISTLE blows)

STAGE MANAGER. (*Still by R. proscenium*) We  
 got a mill in our town, too—hear it? (*Another*

STANDS

EXITS STAGE  
 RIGHT

*WHISTLE.*) Makes blankets. Cartwrights own it, and it's brung 'em a fortune.

*(Two beats after first whistle the CHILDREN have rushed downstairs, GIRLS leading. Entering R., REBECCA, 11, and GEORGE, about 16, drop their strapped books on the steps and sit at table, he above, she L. of it. At once he starts eating sleepily, she to eat languidly, staring vaguely out. EMILY and WALLY, same ages, sit respectively above and R. of their table. WALLY hangs book bag on his chair back. EMILY puts her books carefully at her L., WALLY opens a book and at once starts to read while both eat ravenously.)*

*(MRS. GIBBS sets plate on table. Xes to stove for coffee pot, Xes to pour it for GEORGE, replaces pot on stove, Xes to cupboard to pour glass of milk, Xes to place it for REBECCA, Xes to cupboard for butter.)*

MRS. WEBB. *(Xes to set down oatmeal for both children)* Children! Now I won't have it. Breakfast is just as good as any other meal and I won't have you gobblin' like wolves. It'll stunt your growth, that's a fact. Wally, put away your book!

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

MRS. WEBB. *(Sits L. of table, eats)* You know the rule's well as I do—no books at table. As for me, I'd rather have my children healthy than bright.

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

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

MRS. WEBB. Eat your breakfast. *(Rises, Xes up*

*R. for milk, returns to pour for both, replaces milk, returns to sit.)*

MRS. GIBBS. (*Xing to R. of GEORGE to set down butter.*) I'll speak to your father about it when he's rested. Seems to me twenty-five cents a week's enough for a boy of your age. (*Xing to stove to pour own coffee*) I declare I don't know how you spend it all.

GEORGE. Aw, Ma,—I gotta lotta things to buy.

MRS. GIBBS. Strawberry phosphates—that's what you spend it on. (*Xes to between CHILDREN with cup, sips.*)

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

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

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

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

MRS. GIBBS. Eat your breakfast. (*Xes to set cup above stove.*)

(*An old-fashioned SCHOOLBELL is heard in the distance, off L.*)

REBECCA. (*Rising, running front of table to pick up her books*) There's the first bell. I gotta go.

(*All CHILDREN rise and rush for their books, then out to meet down C. REBECCA and WALLY lead out, followed by GEORGE and EMILY. On meeting, they ad lib greetings and, as they hurry up C. and off L. the GIRLS pair together, as do GEORGE and WALLY, chatting gaily.*)

(*STAGE MANAGER drifts off down R. as they pass up Main Street.*)

MRS. WEBB. (*As they start, following them into trellis*) Now walk fast, but you don't have to run. Wally pull up your pants at the knee. (*Clears table in two quick trips, putting dishes in sink, then gets two bowls from under sink.*)

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

REBECCA. Yes, Ma.

MRS. GIBBS. You look real nice, Rebecca. Pick up your feet! (*Goes in to cupboard, gets some cracked corn in her apron, and Xes through trellis to down R. C.*) (*Sounds of excited CHICKENS from off R.*)

MRS. GIBBS. (*Feeding chickens*) Here, chick-chick-chick— No, you go away, you— Here, chick-chick— What's the matter with you? Fight, fight, fight—that's all you do— You don't belong to me. Where'd you come from? (*Flings last of her feed, which causes loud clucks.*) (MRS. WEBB, *laden with two large bowls, Xes through trellis to sit L. end of bench, puts one bowl on floor, other on lap.*) Oh, don't be scared. Nobody's goin' to hurt you. (MRS. WEBB *strings beans into bowl on lap.*) (MRS. GIBBS *turning to catch sight of MRS. WEBB, hands on hip.*) Good morning, Myrtle. How's your cold?

MRS. WEBB. Well, I still get that tickling feeling in my throat. Told Charles I didn't know as I'd go to choir rehearsal 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. (MRS. GIBBS *Xes to sit R. of MRS. WEBB.*) While I am restin' myself I thought I'd string some of these beans.

MRS. GIBBS. Let me help you. Beans have been

good this year. (*Reaches for beans in bowl on ground.*)

MRS. WEBB. Aya, I decided to put up forty quarts if it kills me. Children say they hate 'em but I notice they're able to get 'em down all winter. (*Pause. CHICKEN NOISES.*)

MRS. GIBBS. (*After glance at chickens*) Now, Myrtle, I've got to tell you something, because if I don't tell somebody I'll burst.

MRS. WEBB. Why Julia Gibbs!

MRS. GIBBS. Myrtle, did one of those second-hand furniture men from Boston come to see you last Friday?

MRS. WEBB. (*Reaches for more beans*) No-o.

MRS. GIBBS. (*Reaches for more beans*) Well, he called on me. First I thought he was a patient wantin' to see Doctor Gibbs. (*BOTH stop work.*) 'N he wormed his way into my parlor, and, Myrtle Webb, he offered me three hundred and fifty dollars for Grandmother Wentworth's highboy, as I'm sitting here!

MRS. WEBB. Why, Julia Gibbs! (*Continues work.*)

MRS. GIBBS. (*Continues work*) 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!—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 some place on a trip I'd sell it like that. (*Stops work.*) Y'know, Myrtle, it's been the dream of my life to see Paris, France. (*Glances slyly at Mrs. Webb, who is shocked, then laughs, hand to face.*) Oh, I don't know. It sounds

crazy, I suppose, but for years I been promising myself that if we ever had the chance—

MRS. WEBB. How's Doctor feel about it?

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

MRS. WEBB. M-m-m— What did he say? (*Reaches for beans.*)

MRS. GIBBS. You know how he is. I haven't heard a serious word out of him, since I've known him. No, he said, it might make him discontented with Grover's Corners to go traipsin' about Europe; better let well enough alone, he says. Every two years he makes a trip to the battlefields of the Civil War and that's enough treat for anybody, he says.

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

MRS. GIBBS. It's a fact, Doctor 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, all right. Just keep droppin' hints from time to time—that's how I got to see the Atlantic Ocean, y'know.

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

STAGE MANAGER. (*Entering briskly down R. Xes*

to R. C.) Thank you very much, ladies. (*To audience*) Now we'll skip a few hours.

(*BOTH women look up at him a moment in surprise, then MRS. GIBBS rises, brushing apron, and Xes through trellis R. and upstairs, nodding pleasantly at STAGE MANAGER as she passes him. MRS. WEBB picks up bowls and, after nod, rises to exit through trellis L. and behind tormentor, managing the bowls with difficulty.*)

But first we want a little more information about our 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. Professor Willard? (*The STAGE MANAGER peers off R.*)

(*WILLARD, a little dried-up man, flutters in nervously from down R., Xes to R. C. on apron.*)  
(*STAGE MANAGER takes hat off.*)

May I introduce Professor Willard of our State University. Just a few brief notes, thank you, Professor—unfortunately our time is limited. (*Xes to lean against proscenium, puts hat on.*)

PROFESSOR WILLARD. Grover's Corners—mmm—let me see—Grover's Corners lies on the old pleiocene granite of the Appalachian range. I may say it's some of the oldest land in the world—we're very proud of that here. Of course there are some more recent outcroppings,—sandstone showing through a shelf of Devonian basalt, and some vestiges of Mezozoic shale, but these are comparatively new—perhaps two or three hundred million years. Some highly interesting fossils have been found—I may say, unique fossils—two miles north of the Peckham Farm—in Silas Peckham's cow-pasture. These



may be seen in the museum at the University at any time—that is, at any reasonable time. (*Reaches for notes in inside pocket—to STAGE MANAGER*) Shall I read some of Professor Gruber's notes on the meteorological situation—mean precipitation, et cetera?

STAGE MANAGER. (*Xes R. C.*) Afraid we won't have time for that, Professor. We might have a few words on the history of man here—you know—

PROFESSOR WILLARD. Oh, anthropological data—

STAGE MANAGER. (*Smiling at him*) Er—yes.

PROFESSOR WILLARD. —Early Amerindian stock, Cotahatchee tribes—no evidence before the 10th Century of this era—now entirely disappeared—Oh, possible traces in three families—migration in early part of the 17th Century of English brachiocephalic blue-eyed stock— Since then, some Slav and Mediterranean—

STAGE MANAGER. And the population, Professor Willard?

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

STAGE MANAGER. Just a moment Professor. (*He whispers into PROFESSOR's ear*)

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

STAGE MANAGER. (*Urging him off down R.*) Thank you *very* much, Professor Willard. I know we're all very much obliged to you.

PROFESSOR WILLARD. Not at all, sir, not at all. (*Exits down R.*)

STAGE MANAGER. (*Xing R. C.*) Now the political and social report: Editor Webb— Oh, Mr. Webb?

MRS. WEBB. (*Appearing in trellis*) He'll be here in a minute— He just cut his hand whilst eatin' an apple. (*Exits*)

STAGE MANAGER. Thank you, Mrs. Webb.  
(*Turns R.*)

MRS. WEBB. (*Off R.*) Charles! Everybody's waitin'.

STAGE MANAGER. (*Xing R. to proscenium*) Mr. Webb is Publisher and Editor of *The Grover's Corners Sentinel*. That's our local paper, y'know.

MR. WEBB. (*Enters through trellis, Xing to L. C., real handkerchief about R. middle finger, finishing putting on his coat. A smiling, quizzical man in the late forties.*) Well,—I don't have to tell you that we're run here by a Board of Selectmen. All males vote at the age of 21. Women vote indirect. We're lower middle-class: sprinklin' of professional men—10% illiterate laborers. Politically, we're 86% Republicans; 6% Democrats; 4% Socialists; Rest, indifferent. Religiously, we're 85% Protestants; 12% Catholics; Rest, indifferent.

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

MR. WEBB. Very ordinary town, if you ask me. Little better behaved than most. Porbably a lot duller. But our young people here seem to like it well enough: 90% 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 any questions about our town?

WOMAN IN THE BALCONY. (*In high-pitched voice, in Balcony, L.*) Is there much drinking in Grover's Corners?

MR. WEBB. (*Amused, Xing few steps toward C.*) Well, ma'am, I wouldn't know what you'd call *much*. Sattidy 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 havin' remorse every time an evangelist comes to

town. No, ma'am, I'd say likker ain't a regular thing in the home here, except in the medicine chest. Right good for snake-bite, y'know—always was.

MAN AT BACK OF AUDITORIUM. (*At rear, L., in muffled tone*) Is there no one in town aware of—

STAGE MANAGER. Come forward, will you, where we can all hear you— What was it you wanted to ask?

MAN. (*Coming to under balcony front*) Is there no one in town aware of social injustice and industrial inequality?

MR. WEBB. Oh yes, everybody is,—somethin' terrible. Seems like they spend most of their time talking about who's rich and who's poor.

MAN. (*Forcefully*) Then why don't they do something about it?

MR. WEBB. (*Tolerantly*) Well, I dunno. I guess we're all huntin' like everybody else for a way the diligent and sensible can rise to the top and the lazy and quarrelsome sink to the bottom. But it ain't easy to find. Meantime, we do all we can to take care of those who can't help themselves and those that can we leave alone. Are there any other questions?

(MAN retires up aisle.)

ARTISTIC LADY IN A BOX. (*In Right Box—a Club Woman type*) Mr. Webb!

MR. WEBB. (*Xing L. of L. C.*) Yes, ma'am?

ARTISTIC LADY. Mr. Webb, is there any culture or love of beauty in—Grover's Corners?

MR. WEBB. (*Smiling*) Well, ma'am, there ain't much—not in the sense you mean. Come to think of it, there's some girls that play the piano over at High School Commencement; but they ain't happy about it. No, ma'am, there isn't much culture; but maybe this is the place to tell you that we've got a

lot of pleasures of a kind here: we like the sun comin' up over the mountain in the morning, and we all notice a good deal about the *birds*. We pay a lot of attention to them. And we watch the change of the seasons: yes, everybody knows about them. But those other things—you're right, ma'am,—there ain't much—Robinson Crusoe and the Bible; and Handel's Largo, we all know that; and Whistler's Mother—those are just about as far as we go.

STAGE MANAGER. (*Xing C.*) Thank you, Mr. Webb.

(MR. WEBB *nods and exits through trellis L.*)

Now we'll go back to the town. It's two o'clock. All two thousand six hundred and forty-two have had their lunches, and all the dishes have been washed.

(MR. WEBB, *having removed his coat, starts pushing a lawn-mower, to appropriate sounds, from down L. above his house to L. of C. Turning, he retraces and makes another trip to L. of C.*)

The children have gone back to school—there's a buzzin' and a hummin' from the school buildings. Only a few buggies on Main Street, horses dozin' at the hitchin' posts. There's an early afternoon calm about the town. You all remember what it's like. (*Xing down R.*) Doc Gibbs is in his office, tappin' people and makin' 'em say "Ah". Mr. Webb's cuttin' his lawn over there,—one man in ten thinks it's a privilege to push his own lawn-mower.

(*Lights are now at high noon.*)

(CHICKEN SOUNDS are again heard for a moment, then from off down L. a gay babble of young voices.)

(MR. WEBB kneels L. of C. to pick grass from edge of walk.)

EMILY. (*Starts up from down L., walking sedately along Main Street. As she reaches the corner, she speaks off to her R.*) I can't, Lois. I've got to go home and help my mother. I promised. (*Starts to C.*)

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

EMILY. (*Xing slowly up C. then to him*) Oh, 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. (*Gives him an abrupt kiss on the back of the neck, then strolls to trellis down L., where she plays with roses.*)

MR. WEBB. (*Rising*) Golly, I never got a kiss from such a great lady before. (*Pushes lawn-mower off L.*)

GEORGE. (*Starting down L. on "You're terrible", has been throwing a ball high in the air and running forward to catch it—once up L., and now he rushes directly up C. and catches an unusually high one, bumping into someone. Facing up*) Excuse me, Mrs. Forrest.

STAGE MANAGER. (*Down R., imitating MRS. FORREST*) You go out and play in the fields, young man. You got no business playing baseball on Main Street.

GEORGE. (*Still facing up*) Awfully sorry, Mrs. Forrest. (*STAGE MANAGER smiles at audience and drifts off down R.*) (*GEORGE turns shyly down to chair R. of up C., peering around the WEBB house to see if EMILY is there*) Hello, Emily!

EMILY. (*Shyly, turning from trellis*) H'lo!

GEORGE. (*Edging to down C., socking L. mitt with baseball*) You made a fine speech in class.

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

GEORGE. (*Puts ball in back pocket, looks at own house, edges to R. of bench*) Gee, it's funny, Emily. From my window up there I can just see your head nights when you're doing your home-work over in your room. (*BOTH face mostly front, shy throughout*)

EMILY. (*Pleased at his admission*) Why, can you?

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

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

GEORGE. Yeah.

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

GEORGE. Yeah.—Emily, what do you think? We might work out a kinda telegraph from your window to mine; and once in a while you could give me a kinda hint or two about one of those Algebra problems. (*EMILY looks at him, shocked*) I don't mean the answers, Emily, of course not—just some little hint—

EMILY. Oh I think *hints* are allowed.—So-ah—If you get stuck, George, you whistle to me; and I'll give you some hints.

GEORGE. Emily, you're just naturally bright, I guess.

EMILY. (*Front*) I figure 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. (*To him*) You mean the house and everything?

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

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

MRS. WEBB. (*Enter behind tormentor with bowls, Xes to sit on R. end of bench*) Good-afternoon, George!

GEORGE. So-long, Emily! (*Xing up R. then off down R., socking ball into L. hand.*)

EMILY. (*Casual, still in a dream*) So long, George!

MRS. WEBB. Emily, come and help me string these beans for the winter. (*EMILY sits L. of her and helps*) Well, George Gibbs let himself have a real conversation, didn't he? Why, he's growing up. How old would George be?

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

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

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

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

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

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

EMILY. (*Thoughts on GEORGE, facing out*) Mama, will you answer me a question, serious?

MRS. WEBB. Seriously, dear—not serious.

EMILY. (*Annoyed*) Seriously,—will you?

MRS. WEBB. Of course, I will.

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

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

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

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

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

MRS. WEBB. (*Turning on her, firmly*) Emily, you make me tired! Now stop it! You're pretty enough for all *normal* purposes. (*Rises, taking bowl from bench*) Come along now and bring that bowl with you. (*Exits L. through trellis.*)

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

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

STAGE MANAGER. (*Appears at proscenium R. with manuscript under arm. Xes C.*) Now, I think this is a good time to tell you that the Cartwright



interests have just begun building a new bank in Grover's Corners—had to go to Vermont for the marble, sorry to say. And they've asked a friend of mine what they should put in the cornerstone for people to dig up a thousand years from now. 'Course, they've put in a copy of the *New York Times* and a copy of Mr. Webb's *Sentinel*. We're kind of interested in this because some scientific fellas have found a way of painting all that reading matter with a kind of glue—sillicate glue—that'll make it keep a thousand—two thousand years— We're puttin' in a Bible—'n a copy of the Constitution of the United States 'n a copy of William Shakespeare's *plays*. What do you say, folks? What you you think? Y' know, Babylon once had two million people in it, and all we know about 'm is the names of the kings and some copies of wheat contracts and—the sales of slaves. Yes, 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 (*Tapping the manuscript!*) put in the cornerstone so the people a thousand years from now'll know a few simple facts about us—more than the Treaty of Versailles and the Lindbergh flight. See what I mean? So,—people a thousand years from now,—this is the way we were in the provinces North of New York at the beginning of the Twentieth Century,—this is the way we were—in our growing up and in our marrying, and in our living, and in our dying.

(Choir, in orchestra pit, start "Blessed Be The Tie That Binds". Rising on second phrase)

Now we'll get back to Grover's Corners. It's evening.

*(Stepladders are moved on from R. and L. to R. C. and L. C. by ASSISTANT STAGE MANAGERS. GEORGE and EMILY enter R. and L. and mount ladders, where they do their arithmetic as if on windowsills)*

*(STAGE MANAGER Xes slowly down R.)*

You can hear the choir practice goin' on in the Congregational Church. The children are at home doin' their school work. The day is runnin' down like a tired clock. *(He listens a moment, then withdraws off down R.)*

*(At the end of the first line of the hymn, lights in the pit have come up showing the heads of the choir silhouetted as they face the stage, while SIMON STIMSON C. conducts them, facing the audience,—a long-faced "character" in his early thirties, now slightly drunk.)*

STIMSON. *(As verse ends)* All right, now do it again. And remember, ladies, music came into the world to give pleasure. Now try it again.

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

*(CHOIR starts again "Blessed Be The Tie That Binds" with increasing volume. At the end of 2nd phrase:)*

*(STIMSON gently)*

Softer—

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

Softer!

*(CHOIR stops)*

ENTERS DOWN  
STAGE RIGHT  
SITS AT KITCHEN  
TABLE & READS

Now look here, everybody, get it out of your head that music's only good when it's loud. You leave loudness to the Methodists. You couldn't beat 'em, even if you wanted to. Now again, tenors!

(CHOIR sings three verses of "Blessed Be The Tie That Binds".)

GEORGE. Hsst, Emily!

EMILY. Hello!

GEORGE. Hello!

(Pause)

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

GEORGE. (Pause) Emily, did you get the third problem?

(DR. GIBBS comes down stairs R. and sits R. of table, takes a book from it, reads)

EMILY. Which?

GEORGE. The *third*.

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

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

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

(First verse of hymn ends)

GEORGE. !!! in yards? How do you mean?

EMILY. In *square* yards.

GEORGE. Oh—in square yards.

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

GEORGE. Yeah.

(He does not see)

EMILY. In square yards of *wall-paper*.

(Faces out, having given more than a hint)

GEORGE. (A great light breaking) Oh, I see. Square yards of wall-paper! (EMILY looks at him,

*beaming agreement. He erases and rewrites*) Thanks a lot, Emily.

EMILY. You're welcome. (*Looks out*) My, isn't the moonlight terrible? (*Second verse of hymn ends*) And choir practice going on. (*Listens hard a moment, awed*) I think, if you hold your breath, you can hear the train all the way to Contookuck! (*GEORGE holds his breath, leaning out of window*) Hear it?

GEORGE. M-m-m— What do you know!

EMILY. (*Reluctant*) Well, I guess I better go back and try to work.

GEORGE. Goodnight, Emily.

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

STIMSON. (*As third verse ends*) That's better; but it ain't no miracle. (*CHOIR sits, at signal from him*) 'Fore I forget it: How many of you'll be able to come in Tuesday afternoon and sing at Fred Hersey's wedding?—Show your hands. (*CHOIR raises hands above orchestra rail. DR. GIBBS puts down book, ponders*) That'll be fine. That'll be right nice. Once again now: "Art thou weary, art thou languid?" It's a question, ladies and gentlemen. — Make it talk.

DR. GIBBS. (*Calling off R. upstairs*) Oh, George, can you come down a minute? ①

GEORGE. (*Listening upstage, as if stairs were behind him*) Yes, Pa. (*Descends ladder, stands above table*)

STIMSON. And remember Sunday to take the second verse real soft and sort of die out at the end. Ready? (*The CHOIR sings two verses of "Art thou weary, art thou languid?", the lights fading on them as they start. STIMSON disappears*)

DR. GIBBS. (*Facing out throughout, gently throughout*) Make yourself comfortable, George;

BEAT 3  
OBJECTIVE:  
TO DISCIPLINE  
GEORGE

1. TO ROUSE

2. TO EASE

Puts Book Down  
AND STANDS

3. To INFORM

4. To INQUIRE

5. To TEST

6. To AUDIT

7. To INTERROGATE

8. To GUILT

9. To CONDEMN

10. To ACCUSE

11. To DESIST

12. To COMPENSATE

13. To EMPHASIZE

14. To BOOST

15. To ASSURE

16. To CONSIDER

17. To JOKE

ACT I

OUR TOWN

29

I'll only keep you a minute. (GEORGE sits above table) George, how old are you? (4)

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

DR. GIBBS. What do you want to do after school's over? (5)

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? (6)

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

DR. GIBBS. (Never harshly) Well, George, while I was in my office today I heard a funny sound—and what do you think it was? It was your mother chopping wood. (7) GEORGE turns slowly L., ashamed) There you see your mother—getting up early; cooking meals all day long; washing and ironing;—and still she has to go out in the backyard and chop wood. (8) suppose she just got tired of asking you. She just gave up and decided it was easier to do it herself. (9) 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. (10) (GEORGE snivels) Well, I knew all I had to do was call your attention to it. Here's a handkerchief, son. (11) (Lays it on table, GEORGE takes it, blows nose) George, I've decided to raise your spending money twenty-five cents a week. (12) Not, of course, for chopping wood for your mother, because that's a sort of present you give her. (13) but because you're getting older—and I imagine there are lots of things you must find to do with it. (14)

GEORGE. Thanks, Pa.

DR. GIBBS. Let's see—tomorrow's pay day. You can count on it. (15) Hmm. (16) (Annoyed) Probably Rebecca'll feel she ought to have some more too. (17) (Un-easy, to make conversation) Wonder what could

WALKS  
BACK &  
FORTH  
BEHIND  
GEORGE

HANDS GEORGE  
HANDKERCHIEF

DOC GIBBS DOES ALL OF THIS IN  
AN EVEN TONE WITHOUT JUDGEMENT  
IN HIS VOICE

18. TO CHANGE  
SUBJECT

19. TO DOUBT

20. TO JEST

21. TO ACCUSE

22. TO DISMISS

30

OUR TOWN

ACT I

have happened to your mother. <sup>(18)</sup> Choir practice never was as late as this before. <sup>(19)</sup>

WALKS TO DOOR

GEORGE. *(Still broken up)* It's only half-past eight, Pa.

DR. GIBBS. I don't know why she's in that old choir anyway. She hasn't got any more voice than an old crow. <sup>(20)</sup> And traipsin' around the streets at this hour of the night. <sup>(21)</sup> Finally, gently Just about time you retired, don't you think? <sup>(22)</sup>

GEORGE. Yes, Pa. *(Lays handkerchief by father, who pockets it. GEORGE rises and mounts ladder, gazes at moon. DR. GIBBS soon resumes reading)*

MRS. SOAMES. *(Off L., linking arms with Mrs. WEBB on her R., Mrs. GIBBS on her L. She is in her thirties, the town gossip.)* Goodnight, Martha. Goodnight, Mr. Foster. *(WOMEN'S voices respond. The trio strolls up L. and stops to look back down L.)*

MRS. WEBB. *(Calling off L.)* 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. *(They stroll silently to up C.)*

MRS. GIBBS. Real nice choir practice, wa'n't it?

MRS. WEBB. Um-m! *(They turn facing down up C.)*

MRS. GIBBS. Myrtle Webb! Look at that moon will you! Tsk—tsk—tsk! Potato weather, for sure. *(Pause)*

MRS. SOAMES. *(Scandalized)* Well, naturally I didn't want to say a word about it in front of those others *(looks off rear L.)*, 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 half R., annoyed)*

SITS BACK  
DOWN & CONTINUE  
to READ

MRS. GIBBS. Now, Louella!

MRS. SOAMES. But, Julia! To have the organist of a church, drink, and drunk year after year.

MRS. GIBBS. Louella!

MRS. SOAMES. Julia, you know he was drunk to-night.

MRS. GIBBS. (*Looking at moon*) Now Louella! We all know about Mr. Stimson, and we all know about the troubles he's been through, and Doctor Ferguson knows too, and if Doctor 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. Gracious, I'd better hurry. (*Gathers skirts at sides in both hands and rushes down through trellis and off L.*) Those children'll be sittin' up till all hours. Goodnight, Louella—Julia—(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 (*Xing down a few steps, turns to face LOUELLA*) Goodnight, Myrtle. Can you get home safe, Louella?

MRS. SOAMES. (*Xing L. a step*) Oh, it's as bright as day. I can see Mr. Soames scowling at the windows now. (*Laughs at the thoughts*) You'd think we'd been to a dance the way the men folk carry on! (*BOTH laugh and start on their ways*) Goodnight, Julia.

MRS. GIBBS. Goodnight, Louella.

MRS. SOAMES. See you on Sunday.

MRS. GIBBS. See you then. (MRS. SOAMES exits slowly off R. MRS. GIBBS sweeps through trellis to

BEAT 4  
OBJECTIVE:  
TO GO TO  
BED.  
ACTIONS:

1. TO ALLEGE

2. TO DIG

3. TO GUILT

4. TO INSINUATE

5. TO CONSIDER

6. TO JUDGE

7. TO REGRET

8. TO EXPOUND

9. TO ADVISE

10. TO REQUEST

DOC IS ALWAYS  
EVENTUALLY

32

OUR TOWN

ACT I

above L. end of table, takes her hat off, jabs it with hatpin, lays it on table) (GEORGE snaps off the light on his ladder-shelf as his mother goes by) Well, we had a real good time.

DR. GIBBS. (Looks at pocket watch) You're late enough. (1)

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. (2)

MRS. GIBBS. Now, Frank, don't be grouchy. (Xing to take his R. arm) Come out and smell my heliotrope in the moonlight. Come on! Uh! (He puts book reluctantly on table, rises, and they stroll, her arm in his, out trellis to C. A BOBWHITE calls three times. They speak quietly)

MRS. GIBBS. (Sighing) Isn't that wonderful? (They stop C. surveying the moonlit scene out front) What did you do all the time I was away?

DR. GIBBS. (Interested, though he tries to disprove) Oh, I read—as usual. (3) What were the girls gossiping about tonight? (4)

MRS. GIBBS. Well, believe me, Frank—there's something to gossip about.

DR. GIBBS. Hmm! Simon Stimson far gone, was he? (5)

MRS. GIBBS. Worst I've ever seen him. How'll that end, Frank? Doctor 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. (6) She takes arm from his, turns to gaze half R.) I don't know how that'll end; but there's nothing we can do but just leave it alone. (Pause) Get in. (7)

MRS. GIBBS. (Taking his arm again) No, not yet. —Frank, I'm worried about you.

GETS UP  
& THEY GO  
OUTSIDE

PUTS ARM  
AROUND HER



11. TO SOOTHE

DR. GIBBS. (*Smiling*) What are you worried about? <sup>(1)</sup>

MRS. GIBBS. I think it's my duty to make plans for you to get a real rest and change. (DR. GIBBS laughs, breaks, crosses to her R.) And if I get that legacy, I'm going to insist on it.

12. TO ASSURE

DR. GIBBS. Now, Julia, there's no sense in going over that again. <sup>(2)</sup>

MRS. GIBBS. Frank, you're just unreasonable!

13. TO APPEAL

DR. GIBBS. (*Pats her back, pushes her ahead pouting, into house*) Come on, Julia, it's gettin' late. <sup>(3)</sup>

First thing you know you'll catch cold! <sup>(4)</sup> I gave George a piece of my mind tonight. (*Turns inside*

14. TO TEASE

*trellis to close door*) (MRS. GIBBS picks up string from floor and, winding it up, goes to cupboard to leave it) I reckon you'll have your wood chopped, <sup>(5)</sup>

15. TO CHANGE SUBJECT

for awhile anyway. No, no. Start gettin' upstairs. <sup>(6)</sup> (*Goes to table, holds hand out as if to blow out lamp, stops to listen*)

16. TO RELIEVE

MRS. GIBBS. Oh dear, there's always so many things to pick up, seems like. (*Xing to table for hat*) You know, Frank, Mrs. Fairchild always locks her front door every night. (DR. GIBBS blows out lamp) (MRS. GIBBS starts upstairs and off R.) All those people up that part of town do.

17. TO JUDGE

DR. GIBBS. (*Following her*) They're all gettin' citified, that's the trouble with them. They haven't got anythin' fit to burgle and everybody knows it. <sup>(7)</sup>

18. TO JOKE

(*There is the sound of CRICKETS as REBECCA, starting down R. as MRS. GIBBS starts up steps, tiptoes to GEORGE's ladder and climbs up beside him, to his L.*)

GEORGE. (*As she is half-way up*) Get out, Rebecca. There's only room for one at this window.

REBECCA. (*At the moon*) Well, let me look just a minute.

THEY GO BACK  
INSIDE

GEORGE. Use you own window.

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

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

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

GEORGE. Well—prob'ly is.

(CONSTABLE WARREN, an old man, starting off R. on "Telescopes," Xes up Main Street to C., trying a doorknob every few feet)

(MR. WEBB starts from down L., hands in hip pockets, Xes to up C.)

STAGE MANAGER. (Appears at proscenium down R.) Nine-thirty. Most of the lights in town are out. There's Constable Warren trying a few doors on Main Street. And here comes Editor Webb, after putting his newspaper to bed. (Exits down R.)

MR. WEBB. (As he turns corner) Good evening, Bill.

CONSTABLE WARREN. (Up C.) Evenin', Mr. Webb.

MR. WEBB. Quite a moon!

CONSTABLE WARREN. (Looks at it, unmoved) Yeh! (They stop up C. to chat)

MR. WEBB. All quiet tonight?

(STIMSON starts down L., trying hard to walk soberly, head held high)

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

MR. WEBB. (*As STIMSON turns corner*) Good evening, Simon. Town seems to have settled down for the night pretty well. (*Pause, while STIMSON comes up to him quite close and stops*) 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? (*STIMSON stares a moment, then staggers above them, stops R. of CONSTABLE a moment, lifts his head in pleading agony, and exits R. slowly and unsteadily. MEN turn to watch as he starts off*) (*As he nears R. corner*) 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. (*Starts down C.*) Good night, Bill.

CONSTABLE WARREN. Good night, Mr. Webb. (*Exits L. trying doors*)

MR. WEBB. (*Stops R. 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. (*Xing down two steps*) 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's heliotropes. 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, don't let your mother catch you. *(Starts to down L.)* Good night, Emily.

EMILY. Good night, Papa. *(MR. WEBB exits through trellis, whistling "Blessed Be The Tie That Binds")*

REBECCA. *(When he is off, looking at 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. *(Momentarily at him, 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. Yep, and the postman brought it just the same.

GEORGE. What do you know! *(Pause. CRICKETS)*

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

*(The stage lights dim and the pilot light fades in. The ACTORS walk off during the dim)*

END OF ACT ONE

## ACT TWO

*In the intermission, five minutes after the close of Act I, the STAGE MANAGER, hat on and pipe in mouth, strolls on and pushes both ladders off; also sets chair L. of table L. C. half toward audience, for Mr. Webb's later use, and pushes chair L. of table R. C. close under table, then strolls off.*

*A minute before "curtain time" the stage lights fade gradually into an early-morning blue. The pin-spot on the R. proscenium then fades in and the STAGE MANAGER enters to lean against proscenium, watching late smokers. As he waits the house and pilot light fades out. When fade is complete, he crosses to C., where another pin-spot picks him up as the R. one fades. During the opening speech morning light is gradually established.*

STAGE MANAGER. Three years have gone by. 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 talkin' 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 use-ta, without their hearts flutterin' a little. All that can happen in a thousand days. Nature's been pushin' and contrivin' in other ways, too—a number of young people fell in love and got married. Yes, the mountain got bit away a few frac-

tions of an inch; millions of gallons of water have passed by the mill; and here and there a new home was set up under a roof. Almost everybody in the world gets married,—you know what I mean? In our town there aren't hardly any exceptions. Most everybody climbs into their grave married. The First Act was called *The Daily Life*; this Act is called *Love and Marriage*. So: It's three years later. It's 1904. It's July 7th, just after High School Commencement. That's the time most of our young people jump up and get married. Soon as they've passed their last examinations in Solid Geometry and Cicero's Orations, looks like they suddenly feel themselves fit to get married— It's early morning again. (*Distant THUNDER effect*) Only this time it's been raining. It's been pouring and thundering. Mrs. Gibbs's garden—and Mrs. Webb's here—drenched. All those bean-poles and pea-vines,—drenched. All yesterday, over there on Main Street the rain looked like curtains being blown along. (*More THUNDER. He looks up and out*) Hm—don't know now—may begin again any minute. (*DISTANT TRAIN WHISTLE. He looks at pocket watch*) There's the 5:10 train for Boston.

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

And there's Mrs. Gibbs and Mrs. Webb come down to make breakfast, just as if this were an ordinary day. (*Turning a few steps up*) I don't have to point out to the women in the audience that both these ladies they see before them, both these ladies cooked three meals a day, one of 'em for twenty years and the other for forty—and no summer vacation.

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

They raised two children apiece, washed, cleaned the house, and never had a nervous breakdown.

(MRS. GIBBS. *grinds coffee into pot above stove.*  
MRS. WEBB *Xes to put pot on stove, starts to make corn bread*)

Never thought themselves hard-used, either —It's like what one of those Middle West poets said: You got to love life to have life, and you got to have life to love life— It's what they call a vicious circle.

HOWIE. (*Off down L.*) Gid-ap, Bessie! (*Sound of MILK BOTTLES in rack starts off L. and continues through scene as in Act I. MRS. GIBBS Xes to sink to pump water into pot*)

STAGE MANAGER. (*Xing down R.*) And there comes Howie Newsome and Bessie, deliverin' the milk.

(*Sound of newspapers slapping on verandahs off R. HOWIE starts down L., Xes to up C., rack in L. hand*)

And there's Si Crowell deliverin' the papers like his brother before him. (*Watches a moment from proscenium, then drifts off down R.*)

(MRS. GIBBS *Xes to pump water into coffee into coffee pot.*)

(SI CROWELL, 11, *enters-down R. following route up C. throwing newspapers, per Joe Crowell's routine in Act I.*)

SI. Mornin', Howie.

HOWIE. Mornin', Si. Anythin' in the papers I ought to know. (*Stops up C. by chair L. of C., sits on its back, sets rack down*)

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

SI. (*Stops by chair R. of C.*) Nothin' much, except we're losin' about the best baseball pitcher Grover's Corners ever had.

HOWIE. Aya, reckon he is.

SI. And now all he'll be doin' is pitchin' hay.

(HORSE WHINNY off L.)

HOWIE. (*Looking off L.*) Whoa, Bessie! Guess I can stop and talk if I've a-mind to!

SI. He could hit, too. And run bases.

HOWIE. Aya. Mighty fine ballplayer.

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

HOWIE. Can't tell, Si. Never had no talent that way. (CONSTABLE WARREN starts down L., Xes up L. to up C. He walks with a cane. A little older than before)

CONSTABLE WARREN. Mornin', Howie.

HOWIE. Hello, Bill. You're up early. (MRS. GIBBS puts French toast into skillet on stove, then gets cloth from cupboard, lays table, sets cup and spoon for dog)

SI. Mornin', Mr. Warren.

CONSTABLE WARREN. Seein' if there's anything I can do to prevent a flood. River's been risin' all night. (*He stops between the two*)

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

CONSTABLE WARREN. Yes, sir, that's the way it goes. In '84 we had a player, Si, even George Gibbs couldn't a touched him. Name a Hank Todd. Went



down to Maine and become a parson. Wonderful ballplayer. (*Xes rear Si and off R., looking up C. at sky*) Howie, how's the weather seem to you?

(*Si starts off L., throwing newspapers, exits*)

HOWIE. (*Picking up rack, Xing down R.*) Oh, 'tain't bad. Think mebbe it'll clear up for good. (*Mrs. Webb puts bacon on stove, then washes and dries hand at sink*) (*Mrs. Gibbs Xes down to open door and meet Howie*)

HOWIE. Bill!

CONSTABLE WARREN. Howie!

HOWIE. Morning, Mrs. Gibbs. (*Sets rack down*)

MRS. GIBBS. Good morning, Howie.

HOWIE. Too bad about the weather. It's been raining so heavy that maybe it'll clear up.

MRS. GIBBS. Certainly hope it will.

HOWIE. 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. (*Handing her two bottles, setting three on doorstep*) Three a milk and two a cream. My wife says to tell you we hope they'll be happy,—know they will. (*Picks up rack, starts to down L.*)

MRS. GIBBS. (*Calling after him*) Thanks a lot, Howie. Tell your wife I hope she gets to the wedding. (*Mrs. Webb Xes down to trellis*) (*Mrs. Gibbs takes two bottles to cupboard, returns for other three, then Xes to turn french toast, winking back tears*)

HOWIE. Maybe she kin. She'll get there if she kin. Good morning, M's Webb. (*Sets rack down.*)

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

HOWIE. (*Kneeling, hands her two bottles, sets four on doorstep*) Yes'm—and two-a-cream.

MRS. WEBB. (*Looking up.*) Will it start raining again, Howie?

HOWIE. (*Looking up*) Well— I was just sayin' to M's Gibbs as how it may clear off. (*Rises, takes rack, starts up C. and off R.*) Mrs. Newsome told me special to tell you as how we hope they'll be happy, M's Webb,—know they will.

MRS. WEBB. (*Calling after him*) Thank you, and thank Mrs. Newsome; and we're counting on seeing you at the church.

HOWIE. Yes, M's Webb. We hope to git there all right. Couldn't miss that. Come on, Bessie! (*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. (*Enters downstairs R. to R. of table. Trying to be cheerful*) Well, Ma, the day has come. You're losing one of your chicks. ①

MRS. GIBBS. (*Covering up tears*) Frank Gibbs, don't you say another word. I feel like cryin' every minute. (*Xes to pour coffee at table for him*) Sit down and drink your coffee. (*MRS. WEBB peels and slices potatoes at table above stove.*)

DR. GIBBS. (*Sits R. of 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 Xes 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. ② (*Blows coffee and drinks*)

MRS. GIBBS. (*Xing to table to set places for self and REBECCA*) I declare, Frank, I don't know how he'll get along. I've arranged his clothes, and seen to it his feet are dry and he's got warm things on—/

BEAT 5  
OBJECTIVE:  
TO CALM  
HIS WIFE.  
ACTION:

1. To BERT

2. To Goad

ENTER KITCHEN  
FROM DOWN STAGE  
RIGHT.  
HUGS HER.

SITS

they're too young, Frank. Emily won't think of such things. He'll catch his death-a-cold within a week.

DR. GIBBS. I remember my wedding morning, Julia. ③

MRS. GIBBS. (*Xing to stove to turn french toast*) Now don't start that, Frank Gibbs.

DR. GIBBS. (*Smiling*) I was the scarest young fella in the state of New Hampshire. I thought I'd made a mistake for sure. (MRS. GIBBS *Xes to cupboard to pour milk*) When I saw you coming 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 *puts potatoes on stage to German-fry. Then sets table from cupboard in three trips.*)

MRS. GIBBS. (*Xing to table with milk for REBECCA*) And how do you think I felt? (*Xing to above to serve his toast*) Frank, weddings are perfectly awful things. Farces,—that's what they are! (*Xing to table to set plate before him*) Here, I've made something for you.

DR. GIBBS. Why, Julia Hersey! French toast! ⑦

MRS. GIBBS. (*Pleased*) 'Tain't hard to make and I had to do something. (*Turns suddenly serious and Xes to stove, serves self.*)

DR. GIBBS. (*Pause. DR. GIBBS pours syrup round and round four times, then:*) How'd you sleep last night, Julia? ⑧ (*Eats*)

MRS. GIBBS. (*Xing to sit above table with own plate and coffee*) Well, I heard a lot of the hours struck off. (*Takes sugar and cream*)

DR. GIBBS. (*Thoughtfully, facing half out*) Aya, 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 damndest, awkwardest— ⑩

BEGIN'S  
TO EAT

3. To PROVOKE

4. TO RECOLLECT

5. TO FLATTER

6. TO JOSH

7. TO APPRECIATE

8. TO EMPATHIZE

9. TO REVEAL

10. TO JOKE

11. TO CONFESS

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 faces up, washes dishes*) (12)

MRS. GIBBS. (*Drinking coffee, reminiscent*) Aya—people are meant to live two-by-two in this world. 'Tain't natural to be lonesome. (*Cuts toast*)

DR. GIBBS. (*After a slight pause; laughing*) Julia, do you know one of the things I was scared of when I married you? (13)

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

DR. GIBBS. I was afraid we didn't have material for conversation more'n'd last us a few weeks. (*BOTH laugh heartily*) 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 spell. (14) (*Eats*) (*MRS. WEBB dries hands on towel, starts to weep.*)

MRS. GIBBS. Well, good weather, bad weather, 'tain't very choice, but I always find something to say. Did you hear Rebecca stirrin' around upstairs? (*Rises, taking both plates. Xes to sink to scrape plates*) (*MRS. WEBB Xes to sit above table, facing L., covers apron*)

DR. GIBBS. No. Only day of the year Rebecca hasn't been managing everybody's business up there. (15) She's hiding in her room. I got the idea she's crying. (16)

MRS. GIBBS. (*Xing two steps R.*) Lord's sakes—this has got to stop. Rebecca! Rebecca! Come and get your breakfast.

(*DR. GIBBS wipes mouth with napkin*)

GEORGE. (*Runs down stairs R. Cheerily, Xing to slap Father's back*) Good morning, everybody.

12. To DECLARE

13. To CHANGE  
SUBJECT

14. To KID

15. To Comfort

16. To TEASE

17. To  
SYMPATHIZE

Only four more hours to live! (*Gestures cutting throat with "K-k-k-z-z" sound. Xes into trellis down R. GIBBS looks annoyed at sound.*)

MRS. GIBBS. (*Xing to half to table*) George Gibbs, where are you going?

GEORGE. (*Stepping back into room*) Just stepping across the grass to see my girl. (*DR. GIBBS folds napkin*)

MRS. GIBBS. Now, George, you put on your rubbers. It's raining torrents. You don't go out of this house without you're prepared for it. (*DR. GIBBS rises, Xes to stairs, stops*)

GEORGE. Aw, Ma—it's just a step.

MRS. GIBBS. George. (*Takes dog's plate and cup to sink, scrapes plate*) You'll catch your death-a-cold and cough all through the service. (*GEORGE starts doggedly out trellis*)

DR. GIBBS. George, do as your mother tells you! (*Exits upstairs*) (*GEORGE droops, Xes to sit on steps, puts on rubbers*) (8)

MRS. GIBBS. (*To cupboard for cup, sets it on table*) From tomorrow on you can kill yourself in all weathers, but while you're in my house you'll live wisely, thank you. (*Xing to stove for pot, starts to table with it*) Perhaps Mrs. Webb isn't used to callers at seven in the morning. (*GEORGE rises, Xes into trellis*) Here, take a cup of coffee first!

GEORGE. (*Gaily*) 'Be back in a minute. (*Runs, jumping puddles to down L. and through trellis*)

(*MRS. GIBBS shakes head in annoyance, takes cup, pours coffee back in pot on stove, exits upstairs.*)

GEORGE. (*Xing in above to R. of her, cheerily*) Good morning, Mother Webb.

MRS. WEBB. Good morning, George. Goodness!

STANES  
PUTSON  
JACKET

18. TO COMMAND

You frightened me! (*Rises, turns to him*) Now, George—I hate to say it—you can stand here a minute out of the rain—but really—you understand, George, I can't ask you in.

GEORGE. Why not—?

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

(*MR. WEBB starts downstairs*)

GEORGE. Aw,—that's just a superstition. Good morning, Mr. Webb.

MRS. WEBB. Good morning, George. (*Xes to stove for coffee pot, takes it to up L. of table*)

GEORGE. (*Laughing*) Mr. Webb, you don't believe in that superstition, do you?

MR. WEBB. There's a lot of common-sense in superstitions, George. (*Sits L. of table*)

MRS. WEBB. (*Pouring coffee for him*) Millions have folla'd it, George, and don't you be the first to fly in the face of custom. (*Xes to replace pot on stove*)

(*MR. WEBB takes four spoons of sugar*)

GEORGE. How is Emily?

MRS. WEBB. She hasn't waked up yet. I haven't heard a sound out of her. (*Pouring coffee at stove*)

GEORGE. Emily's asleep!!

MRS. WEBB. No wonder! We were up til' all hours sewing and packing. (*Sets cup for GEORGE*) Now, I'll tell you what I'll do, George; you set down here a minute with Mr. Webb and drink this cup of coffee; (*Xing to stairs*) and I'll run upstairs and see she don't come down and surprise you. There's some bacon, too. (*Going upstairs*) But don't be long about it.

(*Long pause. GEORGE sits above table, uses sugar, stirs, steals look at Mr. WEBB. WEBB, facing half out, embarrassed, dunks doughnut and eats ravenously*)

MR. WEBB. Well, George, how are you?

GEORGE. (*About to drink, sets cup down*) I'm fine. (*Pause. Earnestly*) Mr. Webb, what common-sense *could* there be in a superstition like that?

MR. WEBB. (*Still half out*) Well, George—on the wedding morning a girl's head's full of—oh, you know—clothes and—one thing and another. Don't you think that's probably it? (*Dunks and eats*)

GEORGE. I—uh—yes. I never thought of that.

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

GEORGE. (*Stirring coffee*) Gee, I wish a person could get married without all that marching up and down.

MR. WEBB. Every man that's ever lived has felt that way, George, but it hasn't been any use. It's the women-folk who've built up weddings, my boy. For a while now the women have it all their own. (*Drinks from saucer*) 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. (*Earnestly*) Well, you believe in it, don't you, Mr. Webb?

MR. WEBB. (*Quietly*) Yes. (*With alacrity, suddenly looking at GEORGE*) Oh, yes! Now, don't misunderstand me, George. Marriage is a wonderful thing. A wonderful thing. 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 got much to do with it, George, compared with—other things. (*Drinks*)

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

MR. WEBB. I don't know. Was I going to say something? (*GEORGE is confused*) (*Pause*) (*MR. WEBB sits back, crosses knees, folds arms—*) George, I was remembering the other night the advice my father gave me when I got married. Yes, he said: "Charles," he said: "start right off showin' who's boss. Best thing to do is to give an order about something, even if it don't make sense, just so she'll learn to obey," he said. (*GEORGE is more perplexed, looks out throughout*) Then he said: "If anything about her irritates you, her conversation or anything, get right up and leave the house; that'll make it clear to her." And, oh, yes, he said: "Never let your wife know about how much money you have, never."

GEORGE. (*Frightened and flabbergasted*) Well, I couldn't exactly—

MR. WEBB. So I took the opposite of his advice and I've been happy ever since. (*GEORGE rests chin on L. hand, completely puzzled. MR. WEBB smiles at his confusion. He has obviously invented the story*) So let that be a lesson to you never to ask advice of anybody on personal matters (*Faces him*) George, are you going to raise chickens on your farm?

GEORGE. What?

MR. WEBB. Are you raising chickens on your farm?

GEORGE. (*Hitches chair a bit nearer, enthusiastic*) Yes, Uncle Luke has never gone in for chickens much—but I been figuring on readin' up—

MR. WEBB. George, a book came into my office on the Philo System of raising chickens. I wish



you'd read it, I'm thinking of beginning in a small way myself, in the back yard! I'm going to put an incubator in the cellar—

MRS. WEBB. (*Enters downstairs. Xes to above MR. WEBB*) Charles Webb, are you talking about that incubator again? I thought you two'd be talking about things worth while!

MR. WEBB. (*Firm and sarcastic*) Well, Myrtle, if you want to give the boy some good advice, I'll go upstairs.

MRS. WEBB. (*Pulls GEORGE up and forces him out through trellis*) George, Emily's got to come down and eat her breakfast! She sends you her love, but she doesn't want to lay her eyes on you. Good-bye.

GEORGE. (*More perplexed than ever*) Goodbye. (*GEORGE Xes slowly home, avoiding a puddle C., and upstairs, MRS. WEBB stands above trellis watching*)

MR. WEBB. (*Rise*) Myrtle, guess you didn't know about that older superstition.

MRS. WEBB. What do you mean, Charles?

MR. WEBB. (*Wagging his finger*) Since the cave-man. No bridegroom should see his father-in-law on the day of the wedding, or near it. (*Exit upstairs*) Now remember that. (*MRS. WEBB, eyes following him in surprise, exits behind tormentor*)

STAGE MANAGER. (*Entering down R., Xing to C.*) 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 life-time together. I'm awfully interested in how big things like that begin. You know how it is: you're twenty-one or twenty-two any you make some decisions; then whisssh! you're seventy; you've been a lawyer for fifty years, and that white-haired lady by 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—as the saying goes—they were meant for one another. But before they do that I want you to try and remember what it was like when you were very young, and particularly the days when you were first in love; when you were like a person sleep-walking, and you didn't quite see the street you were walking in, and you 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 Senior Class and as this is 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 L. He starts R.*) Aya, there they are coming down Main Street now. (*Voices mount gaily, as STAGE MANAGER picks up board behind R. tormentor, Xes rear of table to place it across chair-backs left of table R. C., to serve as a soda-fountain, then brings on two stools to place behind board. Exits down R.*)

EMILY. (*Xing from down L. to up L., speaking off L., as voices die out. She carries books under L. arm*) I can't, Louise, I gotta go home. Goodbye. (*Turns, facing down L.*) Oh, Ernestine! Ernestine! Can you come over tonight and do Latin?— Isn't that Cicero the worst thing?— Well, tell your mother you have to. Goodbye. Goodbye, Helen, goodbye, Fred. (*Turns few steps to up L. C.*)

GEORGE. (*Xing up to her, books under R. arm*) Emily, can I carry your books home for you?

EMILY. (*Cooly*) Why—uh—thank you. It isn't far. (*GEORGE takes her books under his left arm, turns to speak off down L. EMILY is shy and embarrassed*)

GEORGE. 'Scuse me one minute, Emily, will

you?— (*Hurriedly*) Say, Bob, if I'm a little late, start practice, and give Herb some long high ones.

EMILY. (*Suddenly alert*) Goodbye, Lizzie.

GEORGE. (*Also to "LIZZIE", not enthusiastic*) Oh, goodbye. (*BOTH turn and stroll to up C., GEORGE above, BOTH shy*) I'm awful glad you were elected too, Emily.

EMILY. (*Coldly*) Thank you. (*Stops up C. facing down. He stops R. of her*)

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— (*Turns to him, catches sight of TEACHER, who has passed above to their R.*) Oh, goodbye, Miss Corcoran. (*Faces down again*)

GEORGE. (*Turning, then back*) Goodbye, Miss Corcoran.—Wha-what is it?

EMILY. (*Finding it very hard to say*) I don't like the whole change that's come over you in the last year. (*GEORGE turns R. a bit, hurt. She glances at him*) I'm sorry if that hurts your feelings; but I've just got to—tell the truth and shame the devil.

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

EMILY. (*Facing mostly out, on verge of tears*) Well, up to a year ago, I used to like you a lot. And I used to watch you while you did everything—because we'd been friends so long. And then you began spending all your time at baseball. (*She bites the word*) And you never stopped to speak to anybody any more—not to really speak—not even to your own family, you didn't. And George, it's a fact—ever since you've been elected Captain, you've got awful stuck up and conceited, and all the girls say so. And it hurts me to hear 'em say it; but I got to agree with 'em a little, because it's true.

GEORGE. (*Helpless and hurt*) Gosh, Emily—I

never thought that such a thing was happening to me—I guess it's hard for a fella not to have *some* faults creep into his character.

EMILY. (*The complete prig*) I always expect a man to be perfect and I think he should be.

GEORGE. Oh, I—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, well, we girls are more—nervous— (*Her face controls and she turns L.*) 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's not important, anyway. (*Cries harder, hands to eyes*)

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

EMILY. (*Controlling self*) Well, thank you—I—I would. (*GEORGE starts to take her arm, but is too shy. They start slowly down and turn into the drug-store R. C.*)

GEORGE. (*Over his emotions, as they walk, first gruffly, then courteously*) Hello, Stew, how are you?— Good afternoon, Mrs. Slocum. (*He starts R. into store, then steps back to let her go first*) (*EMILY Xes him to R. stool. GEORGE Xes to left end of board, puts books on it.*)

STAGE MANAGER. (*Enters down R., wearing glasses as MR. MORGAN, Xes to R. end of board*) Hello, George. Hello Emily. What'll you have?— Why, Emily Webb, what you been cryin' about?

GEORGE. (*Quickly Xing to her side as she looks to him for help*) She got an awful scare, Mr. Morgan. That—that hardware-store wagon almost ran over her. Everybody says Tom Huckins drives like a crazy man. (*EMILY nods agreement*)

STAGE MANAGER. (*Xing down R. to draw water*) Here, take a good drink-a-water, Emily. (*EMILY and GEORGE sit on stools, respectively R. and L. embarrassed. BOTH looking front*) You look all shook up. I tell you, you got to look both ways before you cross Main Street these days. (*Sets glass before her, She sips*) Gets worse every year—What'll you have?

EMILY. (*Hardly able to speak*) I'll have a strawberry phosphate, Mr. Morgan.

GEORGE. No, no, Emily—have a soda with me.

EMILY. Well,—

GEORGE. Two strawberry ice-cream sodas, Mr. Morgan.

STAGE MANAGER. (*Xing down R., facing out, as he mixes two sodas*) Two strawberry ice-cream sodas, yes sir. Yes, sir,—I want to tell you,—there are two hundred and twenty-five horses in Grover's Corners this minute I'm talking to you. (*GEORGE and EMILY face front through all this, she with tears in eyes, he very upset*) State Inspector was in here yestiddy. And now they're bringing in these auto-mo-biles, best thing to do is just stay home. Why I can remember when dogs used to sleep in the middle of the street all day, and nothing ever come to disturb'm. (*Sets sodas before them*) There you are! (*Sees someone off down R.*) Yes, Mrs. Ellis, be with you in a minute. What can I do for you? (*Exits down R.*)

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

GEORGE. No, no—don't you think of that, Emily.

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. (*Tearfully*) George, please don't think of that. I don't know why I said it. It's not true. You're—

GEORGE. (*With brief look at her*) No, Emily, you *stick* to it. I'm *glad* you spoke to me like you did. But you'll *see*. I'm going to change so quick—you bet I'm going to change. (*She sips, winking back tears*) And Emily, I want to ask you a favor.

EMILY. W-wh-a-t?

GEORGE. Emily, if I go away to State Agriculture College next year, (*The thought hurts EMILY and she turns down R. biting lip*) will you write me a letter once in a while?

EMILY. (*Winks back tears*) I certainly will. I certainly will, George— (*Sips*) 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. (*Sips*)

GEORGE. The day wouldn't come when I wouldn't want to know everything about our town. I know *that's* true. Emily—

EMILY. Well, I'll try to make the letters interesting. (*Pause*)

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

EMILY. (*Looks at him, Happy that he may not leave town*) Why, George—

GEORGE. (*Eagerly*) Yeh, and some of them say

it's even a waste of time. (*She looks out down R., happy*) You can get all that stuff, anyway, in the pamphlets the Government sends out— And Uncle Luke's gettin' old,—he's about ready for me to start in taking over his farm tomorrow, if I could.

EMILY. (*Glowing*) My!

GEORGE. (*Front*) 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 probably aren't any better than old ones. I'll bet they almost never are. Emily—I feel that you're as good a friend as I've got. I don't need to go and meet the people in other towns.

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

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

EMILY. Why George. I don't see why you have to decide right now— It's a whole year away. (*Turns away, biting lip*)

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. That's where you said that I wasn't noticing—people—and you, for instance—why, you say you were watchin' me when I did everything— Why, I was doing the same about you all the time. (*She looks at him wide-eyed, he at her*) Why sure—I always thought about you as one of the chief people I thought about. (*She turns away, joyously tearful*) I always made sure where you were sitting on the bleachers, and who you were with, and for three days not I've tried to walk home with you; but something's always got

in the way. Yesterday, I was standing over by the wall waiting for you, (*Almost weeping*) and you walked home with Miss Corcoran.

EMILY. (*Breaking down a moment*) Oh, George!—Life's awful funny! (*Almost pleading*) How could I have known that? I thought—

GEORGE. Listen, Emily, I'm going to tell you why I'm not going to Agricultural School. I think once you've found a person you're very fond of—I mean a person who's fond of you, too, and who likes you well enough to be interested in your character—(*EMILY turns down R., terribly embarrassed*) Well, I think that's just as important as college is, and even more so. That's what I think.

EMILY. (*Quietly*) I think that's awfully important, too. (*Pause*)

GEORGE. Emily—

EMILY. Y—yes, George.

GEORGE. (*His head down. Squirming*) Emily, if I do improve, and make a big change,—would you be—I mean: could you be—

EMILY. (*Bursting into tears*) I—I am now; and I always have been.

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

EMILY. Yes—yes. (*Pause. He suddenly dives into his soda, she into hers*)

GEORGE. (*Deep breath; straightens*) Wait just a minute and I'll walk you home. (*BOTH rise, EMILY Xes to wait by chair, R. of up C. facing up. STAGE MANAGER enters down R., Xes to table. GEORGE Xes to front of EMILY's stool*) Mr. Morgan, I'll—I'll have to go home and get the money to pay you for this.

STAGE MANAGER. (*Pretending annoyance*) What's that? George Gibbs, do you mean to tell me—!

GEORGE. Yes. But I had reasons, Mr. Morgan.



Look— (*Takes watch from trouser watch-pocket, holds it out to STAGE MANAGER*) here's my gold watch to keep until I come back with the money.

STAGE MANAGER. That's all right, George. Keep you watch. I'll trust you.

GEORGE. I'll be back in five minutes.

STAGE MANAGER. I'll trust you ten years, George—not a day over.— (*GEORGE slowly gets the point—laughs, returns watch, gets book under R. arm, starts up to EMILY*) Got all over your shock, Emily?

EMILY. (*Turns, step a bit L.*) Yes, thank you, Mr. Morgan—it was nothing.

GEORGE. (*Turning by her side*) I'm ready. (*BOTH walk down C. and off through trellis down L., very straight and radiant, but not looking at each other*)

STAGE MANAGER. (*Watches them off, then removes glasses and puts them in pocket, Xes C.*) Well, (*Claps hands*) now we'll get on to the wedding.

(*Immediately the lights except a pinspot which covers him fade out. Two ASSISTANT STAGE MANAGERS during the following speech remove the trellises, tables and the bench, and set thirty-two chairs facing up, sixteen on either side of an aisle, in close formation to suggest the pews of a church, four chairs to a row. They also set up C. a box for a pulpit and an extra chair R. of the first row for SIMON STIMSON*)

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,—especially not into a wedding at Grover's Corners, where weddings are mighty short and plain. In this play I take the part of the minister. That gives me the right to say a few things more. Yes, 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 are supposed to live two-by-two. This is a good wedding. The people are pretty young, but they come from a good State, and they chose right. The real hero of this scene isn't on the stage at all. And you all know who that is. Like one of those European fellas said: Every time a child is born into the world it's Nature's attempt to make a perfect human being. Well, we've seen Nature pushing and contriving for some time now. We all know she's interested in quantity; but I think she's interested in quality, too. Maybe she's tryin' to make another good Governor for New Hampshire. That's what Emily hopes. And don't forget the other witnesses at this wedding: the ancestors. Millions of them. Most of them set out to live two-by-two. Millions of them. Well, that's all my sermon. 'Twan't very long anyway. *(Turning upstage, he walks up the church aisle, then R. to stand R. of choir placed for SIMON STIMSON)*

*(On cue "sermon" the pinspot has started to fade out)*

*(On same cue CHURCH BELLS sound,—ding-dong, ding-dong.)*

*(On sixth beat of bells enter from downstage sides of stage a CROWD of townspeople, who surge into the church, gradually lighted by dim lights crossing the stage from opposite rear corners. As townspeople crowd into the pews they are illumined from above. Then the CHOIR of ten stream in from R. and, facing down, take positions behind the pulpit. As they do so, strong lights flood the pulpit, the crosslights fade out, and the reflection of a slightly distorted church*

window, "American Gothic" in style, is thrown on the wall above the pulpit.)

(*Entering with the crowd, MRS. GIBBS sits in the first row, and seat on R.; MRS. WEBB in first row, end seat on L. Next to them sit their husbands, and next Doc Gibbs, Rebecca; next Mr. Webb, Wally. As the CHOIR gets into place, the CHURCH BELLS stop and an unseen ORGAN begins Handel's "Largo."*)

MRS. WEBB. (*At first note of music MRS. WEBB rises. Xes down L. C., speaks*) I don't know why on earth I should be crying. I suppose there's nothing to cry about. This morning at breakfast it came over me. There was Emily eating her breakfast as she's done for seventeen years—and she's going out of my house. I suppose that's it— And Emily! She suddenly said: I can't eat another mouthful. And she put her head on the table and *she* cried. Oh, I've got to say it— You know, there's something downright cruel about sending girls out into marriages like that. It's—it's cruel, I know; but I just couldn't get myself to say anything—I went into it as blind as a bat myself. The whole world's wrong, that's what's the matter. (*Sees GEORGE coming down stage-right aisle through audience*) There they come. (*Xes up to sit*)

(*Three young BALLPLAYERS enter from R. tormentor on cue "wrong" and, just inside it, call out to GEORGE as he comes slowly down aisle*)

BASEBALL PLAYER ONE. Eh, George! George! Hsst-yaow!

BASEBALL PLAYER TWO. Yao-o-o!

BASEBALL PLAYER ONE. Look at him, fellas. He's scared to death!

BASEBALL PLAYER TWO. Oh, George!

BASEBALL PLAYER THREE. George!

BASEBALL PLAYER TWO. You don't have to look so innocent, you old geezer. We know what you're thinking.

BASEBALL PLAYER ONE. Go to it, big boy, y' old geezer you.

STAGE MANAGER. (*Xes down L. of them, pushes them off R.*) All right! All right! That'll do. That's enough of that.

BASEBALL PLAYERS. (*Tutti. Off.*) Yaou! Kee-ee. Whoo-oo-oo!

STAGE MANAGER. (*Steps to footlights, addresses audience*) There used to be an awful lot of that kind of thing in weddings in the old days,—Rome, and later— We're more civilized now,—so they say. (*Xes up R., across in front of choir to up R. and off down R.*)

(*As he starts up, MRS. SOAMES hurries in from behind tormentor to centre aisle of church, flutters a moment, sits in aisle on R. side of downstage row*)

(*GEORGE, having come down stage-right aisle through audience, has mounted steps over footlights and now stands R. of them surveying the scene, frightened*)

(*As GEORGE steps onto stage, the ORGAN and choir start "Love Divine, All Love Excelling", of which they do one verse, holding hymnals*)

MRS. GIBBS. (*Turning, sees him, hurries down to L. of him*) George! George! George! What's the matter?

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

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

GEORGE. No, Ma, listen to me—

MRS. GIBBS. No, no, George—you're a man now!

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

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

GEORGE. (*Calms down. Pause. He raises his head 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. (*Following, takes her arms, comforts her*) Now, Ma, you save Thursday nights. Emily and I are coming over to dinner every Thursday night—you'll see. Why, Ma, you look all funny. What are you crying for? Come on. We got to get ready for this. (*MRS. GIBBS controls herself and, as he continues to comfort her, fixes his tie, smooths his hair, and kisses him*)

(*EMILY, having come down the stage-left aisle through the audience, has stepped over the footlights, during GEORGE's speech. She too looks over the scene, frightened, and turns half-front*)  
(*As EMILY appears the ORGAN and choir, finishing the first hymn, start two verses of "Blessed Be The Tie That Binds."*)

EMILY. I never felt so alone in my whole life.  
(*MR. WEBB, hearing her, rises and hurries to R. of her*) And George, over there—I hate him—I wish I were dead. Papa! Papa! (*Flings herself in his arms*)

MR. WEBB. Emily! Emily! Now don't get upset—

EMILY. But, Papa darling,—I don't want to get married—

MR. WEBB. Sh-h—Emily—Everything's all right.

EMILY. (*Pleading*) 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 what you used to say—all the time, that I was *your* girl. There must be lots of places we can go to. I'd work for you. I could keep house.

MR. WEBB. Sh! You musn't think of such things. You're just nervous. Now, now,— (*Turns R.*) George! George! Will you come here a minute! (*Takes her C. arms about her*) Why, you're marrying the best young fellow in the world. George is a fine fellow.

EMILY. But, Papa— (*GEORGE, on being called, gives a final pat to MRS. GIBBS and Xes to meet them C. MRS. GIBBS Xes up slowly to sit, now in control of herself. MR. WEBB, arms about EMILY, put his hand on GEORGE's shoulder*)

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

GEORGE. (*Trembling*) Mr. Webb, I want to—I want to try— (*MR. WEBB turns to face up, blows his nose. EMILY and GEORGE face each other, helpless, breathless.*) 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. (*She flings her arms about his neck; his go about her waist in a long embrace*)

(*Hymn finishes and the ORGAN starts the "Wedding March from Lohengrin".*)

MR. WEBB. (*Turns and takes EMILY's R. arm*) Come, they're waiting for us. Now, you know it'll be all right. Come quick.

(EMILY and MR. WEBB slowly X up the church aisle. STAGE MANAGER has started from down L., at first note of the March. Xes up to mount box up C. GEORGE, as MR. WEBB takes EMILY, Xes front of them past L. of church to stand by STAGE MANAGER, just L. of him. Just after he reaches there, MR. WEBB arrives with EMILY, leaves her facing GEORGE, R. of pulpit, and goes to his seat)

(The CROWD has bustled with interest during the March, and is now all attention.)

STAGE MANAGER. (Hands holding lapels) Do you, George, take this woman, Emily, to be your wedded wife, to have and to hold from this day forward, in sickness and in health, for richer for poorer, to love and to cherish till death do us part?

(His voice sinks to an unintelligible mumble, over which rises the gabbling voice of MRS. SOAMES)

MRS. SOAMES. (On cue "EMILY", playing over STAGE MANAGER, to her neighbor) 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, to have and to hold—etc.

MRS. SOAMES. (On cue "GEORGE") Don't know when I've seen such a lovely wedding. But I always cry; (Wiping tears) 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!

EMILY. (On cue "happy") I do.

(STAGE MANAGER mutters "The ring." GEORGE takes it from pocket, slips it on EMILY's finger, then steps to embrace and kiss her. Kiss is held throughout following speech, EMILY's ecstatic face uplifted against GEORGE's L. shoulder)

STAGE MANAGER. (To audience) I've married two hundred couples in my day. Do I believe in it? I don't know. I suppose I do. M marries N. Millions of them. The cottage, the go-cart, the Sunday afternoon drives in the Ford—the first rheumatism—the grandchildren—the second rheumatism—the death-bed—the reading of the will—Once in a thousand times it's interesting.

(The ORGAN starts "Mendelssohn's Wedding March". CHURCH BELLS sound)

(GEORGE and EMILY break, turn slowly down, smiling happily, and go slowly down aisle as lights flood on them. They cross to R. steps, increasing speed, descend steps into theatre aisle and run off in an increasing blaze of light. The TOWNSPEOPLE have gradually risen and turned to watch as they passed by, chattering.)

MRS. SOAMES. (As "Wedding March" starts) Aren't they a lovely couple? Oh, I've never been to such a nice wedding, I'm sure they'll be happy. I always say: Happiness—that's the great thing. The important thing is to be happy.

(STAGE MANAGER, as couple cross to steps, Xes down C. All stage lights except window have dimmed out as the couple crossed the footlights, so that he now stands alone in a pinspot.)

STAGE MANAGER. That's all the second act, folks. Ten minutes intermission.



ACT II

OUR TOWN

65

*(Pinspot and window go out. STAGE MANAGER in  
momentary darkness walks off R. The CROWD  
exists R. and L.)*  
*(Pilot light fades in, followed by the house lights)*

END OF ACT TWO

### ACT THREE

*One minute after the end of Act II, two ASSISTANT STAGE MANAGERS clear the chairs and pulpit box and set chairs for Act III.*

*At end of intermission, the following enter single file, row by row, and sit (see ground plan for seating order), entering in sequence as follows: WALLY, FARMER MCCARTHY, MRS. SOAMES, 2ND DEAD MAN, 1ST DEAD MAN, 1ST DEAD WOMAN, 2ND DEAD WOMAN, MRS. GIBBS, and SIMON STIMSON. They remain placid throughout the act, facing out mostly, only half-turning their heads to each other as they speak.*

*As they are mostly seated the house slowly dims and the stage lights are slowly established.*

*STAGE MANAGER appears down R., lighted by his pinspots. He no longer lounges, but stands near the proscenium, hands behind him.*

STAGE MANAGER. This time nine years have gone by, friends—summer, 1913. Gradual changes in Grover's Corners. Horses are gettin' rarer. Farmers coming into town now 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—up there by Lake Sunapee and Lake Winnepesaukee—

and if you go way up, you can see the White Mountains and Mount Washington—where North Conway and Conway is. And, of course, our favorite mountain, Mount Monadnock's right here—and all around it lie these towns—Jaffrey 'n North Jaffrey, 'n Peterborough, 'n Dublin and (*Then pointing down in the audience*) there, quite a way's down, is Grover's Corners. Yes, beautiful spot up here. Mountain laurel and li-lacks. 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. (*Xing to L. C., pointing down L.*) Over here are the old stones—1660-1670. Strong-minded people that come a long ways to be independent. Summer people walk around there laughing at the funny words on the tombstones—it don't do any harm. And genealogists come up from Boston—get paid by city people for looking up their ancestors. They want to make sure they're Daughters of the American Revolution and of the Mayflower— Well, I guess that don't do any harm, either. Over there— (*down L. C.*) are some Civil War veterans. Iron flags on their graves— New Hampshire boys—had a notion that the Union ought to be kept together, though they'd never seen more than fifty miles of it themselves. All they knew was the name, friends—the United States of America. The United States of America. And they went and died about it. (*Xing three steps R.*) This here is the new part of the cemetery. There's your friend, Mrs. Gibbs, and Mr. Stimson, organist at the Congregational Church. And Mrs. Soames who enjoyed the weddin' so much, 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. (*Xing slowly down R.*) 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—and then times—sunny days—rainy days—snow— We all know how it is. A lot of thoughts come up here, night and day, but there's no post office— Now there are some things we all know but we don't take 'em out and look at 'em 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 letting go of that fact. There's something way down deep that's eternal about every human being. (Pause) Y'know, the dead don't stay interested in us living people for very long. Gradually, gradually, they let go 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. Yes, 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 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 kinda grow pale around here. And what's left? What's left when memory's gone, and your identity, Mrs. Smith?

(Pause. Then JOE STODDARD, 60-odd, enters from down L. Xing to glance at grave a moment, then turns L. downstage a bit and stands watching for mourners off L. He carries his hat. At the same time

*enter up R. SAM CRAIG, 30, somewhat more citified than others in the play, carrying a rolled umbrella (real). He Xes rear of DEAD and down to R. of JOE.)* Well, here are some living people. There's Joe Stoddard, our undertaker, supervising a new-made grave. And here comes Sam Craig, a Grover's Corners boy that left town to go out West. *(Watches them a moment, then strolls off down R.)*

SAM. *(Pleasantly)* Good afternoon, Joe Stoddard.

JOE. *(Turns surprised)* Good afternoon, good afternoon. Let me see now: do I know you?

SAM. I'm Sam Craig.

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

SAM. 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 back and see the old home— You look well.

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

SAM. Yes. *(Xing up a bit to glance at grave)*

JOE. Yes, yes. I always say, I hate to supervise when a young person is taken. *(SAM turns R. glancing at gravestones, Xing to McCARTHY. JOE looks off L.)* They'll be here in a few minutes now. I had to come here early today— *(Turns R.)* my son's supervisin' at the home.

SAM. *(As if reading stone. Reminiscing)* Old Farmer McCarthy! I used to do chores for him after school. He had lumbago. *(Xing slowing to L. of MRS. GIBBS, above her)*

JOE. Yes, we brought Farmer McCarthy here a number of years ago now.

SAM. Why, this is my Aunt Julia—I'd forgotten that she'd—of course, of course!

JOE. *(Xing R. a bit)* Yes, Doc Gibbs lost his wife

two-three years ago—about this time. And today's another bad blow for him, too.

MRS. GIBBS. (*To STIMSON: in a pleasant tone*) That's my sister Carrie's boy Sam—Sam Craig.

STIMSON (*Resentful*) I'm always uncomfortable when *they're* around.

MRS. GIBBS. (*Gently*) Simon!

SAM. Do they choose their own verses much, Joe?

JOE. No—not usual. Mostly the bereaved pick a verse.

SAM. (*Xing beyond STIMSON*) Doesn't sound like Aunt Julia. Well, there aren't many of those Hersey sisters left now, I suppose. (*Turns L.*) Let me see: I wanted to look at my father's and mother's— (*His eye falls on STIMSON's stone*)

JOE. (*Points off R.*) Over there with the Craigs—Avenue F.

SAM. (*After glance at JOE, focuses on STIMSON*) He was organist at church, wasn't he? Drank a lot, we used to say.

JOE. (*Xing to L. of STIMSON, above him*) Nobody was supposed to know about it. He'd seen a peck of trouble. (*Glances L., confidentially*) Took his own life, y'know?

SAM. Oh, did he?

JOE. Hung himself in the attic. They tried to hush it up, but of course it got around. Chose his own epitaph. You can see it there. It ain't a verse exactly. (*Turns L.*)

SAM. Why, it's just some notes of music—what is it?

JOE. (*Xing slowly C., turning up coat collar*) Oh, I wouldn't know. It was wrote up in the Boston papers at the time.

SAM. (*Follows*) Joe, what did she die of?

JOE. Who? (*Stops L. C. still looking off L.*)

SAM. My cousin. (*Stops C., opens umbrella*)

JOE. Oh, didn't you know? Had some trouble

bringing a baby into the world. 'Was her second, though. There's a little boy 'bout four years old.

SAM. And the grave's going to be over here—  
(*Xes to above grave*)

JOE. 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'. (*Xes off L., turns up and leads on the funeral procession, which is led by four bare-headed MEN carrying a coffin on their shoulders. Some twenty-five people follow after in groups and singly, ALL under umbrellas (real). JOE joins SAM, under his umbrella. The PALLBEARERS stop below the grave and set the coffin over it. The OTHERS all group in front of and L. of the grave, close-packed, their umbrellas hiding their heads. MEN remove hats as they near the grave. EMILY is in the crowd, a black cloak covering her white dress.*)

MRS. SOAMES. (*As procession moves on*) Who is it, Julia?

MRS. GIBBS. (*Without looking, pleasantly*) My daughter-in-law, Emily Webb.

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

MRS. GIBBS. (*Calmly*) In childbirth.

MRS. SOAMES. Childbrith! I'd forgotten all about that! My, wasn't life awful—(*With a sigh*) and wonderful.

STIMSON. (*Bitter*) Wonderful, was it?

MRS. GIBBS. Simon! Now, remember!

MRS. SOAMES. (*A bit surprised*) 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.

(FUNERAL GROUP is now in place)

1ST DEAD WOMAN. It's on the same road we lived on, hm-hm.

1ST DEAD MAN. Aya, right smart farm.

(The GROUP by the grave sings softly and slowly one verse of "Blessed Be The Tie That Binds.")

2ND DEAD WOMAN. I always liked that hymn. I was hopin' they'd sing a hymn. (Two beats after the first line of the hymn, EMILY, in her wedding dress without the veil, emerges swiftly up C. from behind the group; stops after a few steps to look at the DEAD, first with surprise then with understanding; turns to survey the funeral group lovingly, stretches arms toward them, then slowly walks to the chair left vacant for her, and sits facing out. Then she turns to the dead)

EMILY. (To all DEAD, quietly) Hello!

MRS. SOAMES. (Looking straight out) Hello, Emily!

1ST DEAD MAN. (Out) H'lo, M's Gibbs!

EMILY. (Warmly) Hello, Mother Gibbs!

MRS. GIBBS. Emily!

(A VOICE in the FUNERAL GROUP mumbles a portion of the funeral service, but the words are inaudible.)

EMILY. Hello! (Faces front. Pause, she looks out and up,—surprised) It's raining! (She looks at funeral)

MRS. GIBBS. (Facing front throughout) Yes—They'll be gone soon, dear. Just rest yourself.



EMILY. It seems thousands and thousands of years since I— (*The prayer over, the FUNERAL GROUP sings Second verse of "Blessed Be The Tie That Binds."*) (*Pleased*) Papa remembered that that was my favorite hymn. (*Pause—turns slowly R.*) Oh, I wish I'd been here a long time! I don't like being new here. (*Leans forward*) Oh, how do you do, Mr. Stimson?

SIMON STIMSON. (*Firmly*) How do you do, Emily?

EMILY. (*His tone confuses her a moment*) (*Settling back for the first time, more at ease. Enthusiastic*) 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.

(*Starting with those at L. the FUNERAL GROUP breaks up and exits slowly L. A SMALL GROUP only remains at grave,—Mr. and Mrs. Webb, GEORGE, and DR. GIBBS, who has no umbrella*)

MRS. GIBBS. Yes, yes, Emily.

EMILY. Well, there's a patent device on this 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. Sadly.*) It won't be the same to George without me, but it's a lovely farm. (*Looks front again, sits forward, struck by a new realization*) Live people don't understand, do they?

MRS. GIBBS. No, dear—not very much.

BEAT 6

OBJECTIVE:

TO COMFORT

GEORGE

ACTIONS:

ENTER  
WITH  
PROCESSION  
FROM  
STAGE  
LEFT

SING  
HYMN  
WITH  
GROUP

EMILY. They're sort of shut up in little boxes, aren't they? I feel as tho I knew 'em last a thousand years ago— (*Sits back, again at ease, easily*) My boy is spending the day at Mrs. Carter's. (*Turns to 1ST DEAD MAN*) (*The Crowd is now off*) Oh, Mr. Carter, my little boy is spending the day at your house.

1ST DEAD MAN. Is he?

EMILY. Yes, he loves it there. Mother Gibbs, we have a Ford, too. (*MR. and MRS. WEBB and GEORGE slowly exeunt L.*) Never gives any trouble. I don't drive, though. (*Pause*) (*Pained,—sitting forward*) Mother Gibbs, when does this feeling go away?—Of being one of them? How long does it—

MRS. GIBBS. Sh! dear. Just wait and be patient.

(*DR. GIBBS kneels to take flowers from grave, slowly rises and crosses to face MRS. GIBBS*) ①

EMILY. (*Looking off L., calmly*) I know— Look, they're finished. They're going.

MRS. GIBBS. Sh-h-h!

EMILY. (*Lovingly*) Look! Father Gibbs is bringing some of my flowers to you. (*As he passes, surprised*) He looks just like George, doesn't he? (*DR. GIBBS lays flowers at wife's feet and stands, head bowed and sighs*) (*All sympathy:*) 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. (*Long pause. DR. GIBBS exits slowly L., gradually raising head. When he is two-thirds off, and putting on his hat*) From morning till night, that's all they are—troubled.

1ST DEAD MAN. (*Colloquially*) Little cooler than it was.

1ST DEAD WOMAN. Aya, that rain's cooled it off a little.

1ST DEAD MAN. Those northeast winds always

L. TO GRIEVE

BEGIN TO  
WALK DOWN  
STAGE WITH  
FLOWERS

KNEELS AND  
PUTS FLOWERS  
ON GRAVE

RISES AND EXITS  
UPSTAGE

do the same thing, don't they? If 'tain't a rain, it's a three-day blow.

EMILY. (*Sitting up abruptly, her L. hand hugging her waist, both fists clenched*) 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* (*Looking at her lap a moment*) and my baby was on my lap as plain as day!

MRS. GIBBS. Yes, of course you can.

EMILY. (*Excited*) I can go back there and live all those days over again—why not?

MRS. GIBBS. All I can say is, Emily, don't. (*STAGE MANAGER enters down R. and stands hands behind him, looking out.*)

EMILY. (*To STAGE MANAGER, but only half facing him*) But it's true, isn't it? I can go and live—back there—again.

STAGE MANAGER. (*Quietly*) Yes, some have tried, but they soon come back here.

MRS. GIBBS. (*Gently*) Don't do it, Emily.

MRS. SOAMES. (*Pleading*) Emily, don't. It's not what you think it'd be.

EMILY. (*Eagerly*) 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! (*Leans forward as in pain, pressing L. arm to side*) Oh no, no! Why should that be painful?

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

EMILY. (*Head up, still leaning forward*) 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. (*Sitting up*) 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— (EMILY *shakes her head*) and think only of what is ahead—and be ready for what is ahead. When you've been here longer you'll understand.

EMILY. But, Mother Gibbs, how can I *ever* forget that life? It's all I know! It's all I had!

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

EMILY. (*Insistent*) But it's a thing I must know for myself! I'll choose a happy day, anyway.

MRS. GIBBS. (*Sharply*) No! (*Calmly*) 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 STAGE MANAGER, eagerly*) I can choose a birthday at least, can't I?—I choose my twelfth birthday.

STAGE MANAGER. All right. It's February 11th, 1899. A Tuesday. Do you want any special time of day?

EMILY. Oh, I want the whole day!

STAGE MANAGER. We'll begin at dawn. You remember it had been snowing for several days; but it stopped the night before, and they had begun clearing the roads. (EMILY *rises, turns up L.*) The sun's coming up. (*The wall area up L., followed by the area of the Webb kitchen, glows with light*)

EMILY. (*With a cry of amazement, Xing a bit C.*) There's Main Street—why, that's Mr. Morgan's drugstore before he changed it! . . . (*Xing up L. C., with brief—surprised look back at STAGE MANAGER*) And there's the livery stable!

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

EMILY. (*Amazed*) Oh, that's the town I knew as a little girl! (*Faces—turns down—warmly*) And, look, there's the old white fence that used to be around our house. Oh, I'd forgotten that! I love it

so! (*She almost embraces it, then turns eagerly to*  
STAGE MANAGER) 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 a couple of days; he came back  
on the early morning train.

EMILY. No?

STAGE MANAGER. He'd been back to his college to  
make a speech—in Western New York, at Clinton.

EMILY. (*Trying to remember, turns thoughtfully*  
*L.*) Look! There's Howie Newsome! (*Xing a bit*  
*L.*) There's our policeman! (*Looks at* STAGE MAN-  
AGER, *confused*) But he's dead; he died!

HOWIE. (*Off L.*) Whoa, Bessie!—Morning, Bill.

BILL. (*Off L.*) Morning, Howie.

HOWIE. You're up early.

(EMILY, *listening in delight, turns slowly towards*  
*them*)

BILL. Been rescuin' a party; darn near froze to  
death, down by Polish Town thar. Got drunk and  
lay out in the snowdrifts. (*They laugh*) Thought he  
was in bed when I shook'm.

EMILY. (*Delighted*) There's Joe Crowell!

(*Enter* MRS. WEBB *from L., unnoticed by* EMILY,  
*Xing briskly front of her to shake grate of*  
*stove*)

JOE CROWELL. (*Off down L.*) Good mornin', Mr.  
Warren. 'Mornin', Howie.

CONSTABLE WARREN AND HOWIE. Mornin', Joe.

MRS. WEBB. (*Turning L. at stove*) Children!  
Wally! Emily! Time to get up! (*Turns to stove and*  
*quickly adds coal to fire*)

EMILY. (*Has turned excitedly on hearing her mother's voice, and now hurries behind her to up R. of her*) (*In ecstasy*) Mama, I'm here! (*Gently*) Oh, how young Mama looks! I didn't know Mama was ever that young—

(*HOWIE, starting down L. on "time to get up" to usual sound of MILK BOTTLES, has crossed up C. and is now coming down to where trellis stood down L.*)

MRS. WEBB. (*Xing to where stairs previously were—calling upstairs*) You can come and dress by the kitchen fire, if you like, but hurry. (*Hurries to meet HOWIE down L.*) Good mornin', Mr. Newsome.

HOWIE NEWSOME. Mornin', Mis' Webb. (*Handing her two bottles of milk*)

MRS. WEBB. (*Clutching sweater at neck*) Whhh—it's cold.

HOWIE. (*Starting up C. and then off R.*) Yep. Ten below by my barn, Mis' Webb.

(*As HOWIE passes by her to up C., EMILY turns and reaches out her arms to him, craving to embrace him*)

MRS. WEBB. (*Calling after him*) Think of it! Keep yourself wrapped up. (*Picks up album, drops it on table and takes bottles to table above stove. From this point on she moves no more than two short steps from stove, suggesting movements about kitchen rather than pacing them*)

HOWIE. (*As he exits*) Come on, Bessie, gid-ap!

EMILY. (*Turns to her mother, makes up her mind half-fearfully to speak*) Mama, I can't find my blue hair-ribbon anywhere.

MRS. WEBB. (*Turning at stove to call upstairs*) 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'd bite you. (*Turns to start breakfast at stove, her moves more confined and less realistic than in previous acts*)

EMILY. (*Smiling agreement as mother reacts as she hoped*) Yes—yes—

(MRS. WEBB *Xes to cupboard for dishes and silver, then to set table where it used to stand, making two quick trips*)

(CONSTABLE WARREN, *having started down L. on "blue hair ribbon", walking as though against a cold wind, has reached up C. MR. WEBB, starting down L. on "bite you", Xes up C. and then down as if through trellis, speaking as he starts and never stopping*)

MR. WEBB. Good mornin', Bill.

CONSTABLE WARREN. (*Stops up C. to look back*) Good mornin', Mr. Webb. You're up early.

(EMILY, *ecstatic at seeing her father, watches him from the moment he turns the corner up L., never taking her eyes from him. As he crosses down C. she follows him, reaching arms as if to grasp him and whispering "Papa!" but he keeps hurrying away from her to the trellis. She draws quickly up to above R. of her mother and watches the scene between mother and father eagerly*)

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

CONSTABLE WARREN. (*Louder as MR. WEBB moves away*) I was called up this mornin' to rescue a Polish fella—darn near froze to death he was. (*Starts off R.*)

MR. WEBB. (*Calling back loudly*) We must get it in the paper.

(MRS. WEBB *Xes to putter at stove*)

CONSTABLE WARREN. Twan't much. (*Exits R.*)

MR. WEBB. (*Stamping snow from feet as he enters house*) Good mornin', Mother. (*Xes off L. to remove hat and coat*)

MRS. WEBB. (*At stove*) How did it go, Charles?

(EMILY *Xes slowly up L. of MRS. WEBB, watching in agonized delight*)

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

MRS. WEBB. Yes—can't think of anything that's happened, special. (MR. WEBB *returns, rubbing cold hands, stays L. of EMILY*) Been right cold. Howie Newsome says its 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— (EMILY *smiles through tears at remembering the joke*) Paper have any mistakes in it?

MRS. WEBB. None that I noticed. (MR. WEBB *starts off L., then stops*) Coffee's ready when you want it. Charles! Don't forget; it's Emily's birthday. Did you remember to get her anything?

MR. WEBB. (*Hand on pocket*) Yes, I've got something here. (*Xing off L., calling gaily*) Where's my girl? Where's my birthday girl?

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

EMILY. (*Softly, rueful*) I can't bear it. They're so young and beautiful. Why did they ever have to



get old? (*Xing to near mother, who turns down to putter at stove*) Mama, I'm here! I'm grown up! I love you all, everything! (*Leans over table as if wanting to embrace it*) (MRS. WEBB *faces up, pares potatoes*) I can't look at everything hard enough. (*With a new eager thought, she looks at STAGE MANAGER and whispers lightly, "Can I go in?" He nods soberly. Smiling in anticipation, she turns a few steps up L., then down and R., as if entering kitchen, then beams at mother*) (*Gently, as a girl of 12*) Good morning, Mama.

MRS. WEBB (*Xing to embrace and kiss her—without showing her true affection*) Well, now, dear, a very happy birthday to my girl and many happy returns. (*Returns to stove, slipping out of EMILY's arms, which were about to embrace her*) There are surprises waiting for you on the kitchen table.

EMILY. (*Terribly hurt at her mother's lack of emotion, looks down at her wedding-dress between her empty arms, then at her mother who is calmly puttering at the stove. Finally she forces herself to speak a banality:*) Oh, Mama, you shouldn't have. (*Looking for help from the unmoved STAGE MANAGER, she clasps her hands in agonized appeal toward him and, as she speaks, moves a couple of steps C.*) I can't! I can't!

MRS. WEBB. (*Over her shoulder, dryly as usual*) 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", 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 door-set when I brought in the milk—George Gibbs—must come over in the cold pretty early—right nice of him. (*Putters at stove again*)

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

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

EMILY. (*Unable to stand longer her mother's aloofness, slowly drops album on table, and moves quickly to L. of Mother*) (*Passionately*) On, Mama, just look at me one minute as though you really saw me. (MRS. WEBB turns front to stir oatmeal at stove, placid and smiling, not hearing. EMILY turns down close behind her) Mama! Fourteen years have gone by!— I'm dead!— You're a grandmother, Mama— (*More and more desperate*) I married George Gibbs, Mama!— Wally's dead, too.— Mama! His appendix burst on a camping trip to Crawford Notch. We felt just terrible about it, don't you remember?— (*More gently and appealing*) But, just for a moment now we're all together— Mama, just for a moment let's be happy— (*In greatest desperation*) Let's look at one another!

MRS. WEBB. (*One step L., to put 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. (*Turns to table, forcing her child's tone*) 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 shoulders. Mrs. Webb pats her hand, then turns away to stove*)

MRS. WEBB. (*Pleased*) Well, I hoped you'd like it. (*As she turns away, EMILY is again agonized*) 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. (*EMILY turns L., stretching arms toward upstairs to WALLY*) 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. (*Off L.*) Where's my girl? Where's

my birthday girl? (*Swaying, EMILY turns up and to C., weeping, rushes rear of mother. As she does so, lights dim on house area, whereat MRS. WEBB exits sedately and slowly L.*)

EMILY. (*As she crosses to up C.*) I can't! I can't go on! (*Sobs a moment*) It goes so fast. We don't have time to look at one another. (*She breaks down sobbing again, controls herself and looks off down L.*) I didn't realize. So all that was going on and we never noticed! (*Half to STAGE MANAGER, Xing slowly down C.*) Take me back—up the hill—to my grave. But first: Wait! (*Turns L.*) One more look! (*Xing up L. C.*) (*Gently*) Goodbye! (*Then passionately, her arms outflung*) Goodbye, world! (*Then lovingly, glancing at the town up L.*) Goodbye, Grover's Corners— (*Turns to look off down L., softly*) Mama and Papa— (*Turns a step C., eyes uplifted*) Goodbye to clocks ticking—and my butternut tree! (*Her eyes follow its trunk down and she moves lovingly toward it a step or two, then gestures toward the garden*) and Mama's sunflowers— (*Her head gradually raised as the thrill grows*) and food and coffee—and new-ironed dresses and hot baths— (*With increasing fervor*) and sleeping and waking up!— (*She flings her arms wide in an ecstasy of realization*) Oh, earth, you're too wonderful for anyone to realize you! (*Thinking a moment, she half-turns to the STAGE MANAGER, questioning more gently:*) Do any human beings ever realize life while they live it—every, every minute?

STAGE MANAGER. (*Quietly*) No— Saints and poets maybe—they do some. (*Pause*)

EMILY. (*Calmly, after absorbing the thought*) I'm ready to go back. (*Yes slowly to sit. As she does so, the lights dim up L., leaving only a deep blue except for amber on the dead*)

MRS. GIBBS. (*After a long pause, quietly*) Were you happy?

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

MRS. GIBBS. (*Gently and cheerfully, looking up and out*) Look, it's clearing up. The stars are coming out.

EMILY. (*After a glance up, turning slowly R.*) Oh, Mr. Stimson, I should have listened to them. (*She sits back at ease, nodding agreement as he speaks*)

STIMSON. (*With mounting violence*) 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*) That ain't the whole truth and you know it, Simon Stimson. (*Resuming her tranquility*) Emily, look at that star. I forget its name.

1ST DEAD MAN. (*Quietly, proud of his son*) My boy Joel was a sailor—knew 'em all. He'd set on the porch evenin's 'n tell 'em all by name. Yes, sir, wonderful.

2ND DEAD MAN. A star's mighty good company.

1ST DEAD WOMAN. Yes. Yes 'tis.

STIMSON. (*Resentfully, with a glance half L.*) There's one of *them* comin'.

2ND DEAD WOMAN. That's funny! 'Tain't no time for 'em to be here.

1ST DEAD WOMAN. Goodness sakes!

EMILY. (*Watching off down L.*) Mother Gibbs! It's George! (*GEORGE appears down L., hat in L. hand, crossing slowly front to face EMILY.*)

MRS. GIBBS. Sh-h, dear. Just rest yourself.

EMILY. (*Tenderly*) It's George!

1ST DEAD MAN. (*As before*) And my Joel, who knew the stars—he used to say it took millions of years for that little speck o' light to git down to earth. Don't seem like a body could believe it, but that's what he used to say—millions of years.

(GEORGE *slowly kneels before EMILY, drops hat, and slowly falls forward face on ground*)

1ST DEAD WOMAN. Goodness! That ain't no way to behave.

MRS. SOAMES. He ought to be home.

(GEORGE *gives a convulsive sob*)

EMILY. (*Softly, looking down at GEORGE, all pity*) Mother Gibbs?

MRS. GIBBS. Yes, Emily?

EMILY. They don't—understand—do they?

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

(TRAIN WHISTLES off R.)

STAGE MANAGER. (*Draws a blue traveller curtain from R. to L. speaking as he starts*) 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 livery stable somebody's setting up late and talking. —Yes, it's clearing up. (*Stops a moment, looking out and up*) There are the stars—doing their old, old criss-cross in the skies. (*Continues*) Scholars haven't settled the matter yet, but they seem to think there are no living beings up there. Just chalk—or fire. Only this one is straining away, straining away all the time to make something of itself. The strain's so great that every sixteen hours everybody lies down and gets a rest. (CLOCK strikes. He reaches

*L.)* Hm— Eleven o'clock in Grover's Corners. (*He winds his watch*) Everybody's resting in Grover's Corners. Tomorrow's going to be another day. You get a good rest too. Good night. (*Exits down L.*)

*(The traveller curtain opens slowly disclosing a completely empty and unlighted stage.)*

END OF THE PLAY

## **Vita**

Patrick Lee Payne received his B.A. in English from New Mexico State University in December of 2003. He continued his education as a Master's student at the University of Texas at El Paso in Theater Arts. Patrick was accepted into the University of New Orleans Fine Arts program as an actor in 2008. Upon his graduation from UNO in 2010, Patrick hopes to return to the desert southwest of New Mexico where he will continue his study of acting as well as becoming a theater professor.