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It's a Wonderful Life

(Full Manuscript)

Adapted for the stage by
PHILIP GRECIAN

Based on the film by
FRANK CAPRA

It's a Wonderful Life is based on the story
The Greatest Gift by
PHILIP VAN DOREN STERN

Dramatic Publishing Company
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(IT'S A WONDERFUL LIFE [FULL MANUSCRIPT])

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For Gabrielle

It's a Wonderful Life was first produced by Arts Club Theatre Company on November 29, 2007, at the Granville Island stage in Vancouver, British Columbia, with the following cast, listed alphabetically:

Reineman / Gower / Charlie / Carter	Peter Anderson
Young Mary / Jane Bailey.....	Jianna Ballard
Young Violet	Valsy Bergeron
Zuzu Bailey.....	Leigh Borque
Violet Bick / Mrs. Thompson / Potter's Secretary	Sasa Brown
Clarence Oddbody	Bernard Cuffing
Young Harry Bailey / Tommy Bailey	Domenico DeMichina
Mother Bailey	Erla Faye Forsyth
Young George Bailey / Peter Bailey II	Julien Gailipeau
Harry Bailey / Peter Bailey / Horace / Tom / Ernie	Kyle Jespersen
Bert / Ed / Joseph.....	Eric Keenleyside
Uncle Billy.....	Brian Linds
Mary Hatch-Bailey.....	Jennifer Lines
Henry Potter.....	Kevin McNulty
George Bailey	Todd Talbot
Tilly.....	Beatrice Zeilinger

Production

Director	Dean Paul Gibson
Lighting Design	Marsha Sibthorpe
Set Design	Ted Roberts
Costume Design	Rebekka Sorensen
Music and Sound Design	Neil Weisensel
Projection Design.....	Jamie Nesbitt
Dramaturg	Rachel Ditor
Stage Manager	Angela Beaulieu
Assistant Stage Manager.....	Ronaye Haynes
Apprentice Stage Manager.....	Sarah Pearson

It's a Wonderful Life

CHARACTERS

MEN:

George Bailey
Henry Potter
Clarence
Reineman / Gower / Charlie / Carter (Offstage)
Bert / Ed / Welch / Man on Porch / Joseph (V.O.)
Uncle Billy / Chairman (V.O.) / The Boss (V.O.) / Man (in WWII medal scene)
Harry / Peter Bailey / Ernie Bishop / Horace / Tom

WOMEN:

Mary Hatch-Bailey
Mother Bailey / Mrs. Davis
Violet Bick / Mrs. Thompson / Secretary (V.O.)
Tilly / Mrs. Hatch (Offstage)

CHILDREN:

Young George / Peter Bailey II
Young Harry / Tommy Bailey
Young Mary / Zuzu *
Young Violet / Janie

All characters indicated with (V.O.) are never present onstage and are heard as a voice over only.

*Note: The Young Mary/Zuzu combination has been cast successfully in the past, but it may be necessary to cast an extra child as Zuzu.

TIME: Before, during and just after World War II.

PLACE: Bedford Falls and, for a few horrible hours, Pottersville. Somewhere in New York.

A NOTE FROM THE PLAYWRIGHT

In late 2006, I received a call from Bill Millerd, artistic managing director for The Arts Club Theatre in Vancouver. They had broken house records with my adaptation of *A Christmas Story* and were looking for another Christmas play. They'd seen my *It's a Wonderful Life* radio script and wondered if I would be interested in writing a full stage version for their company.

I would.

Using my previous radio script as well as the film's screenplay, I set to work. I strengthened some ideas in the film and fixed some of the plot holes, even giving Henry Potter his comeuppance, which I later added to the radio drama script when we televised it.

In late 2007, The Arts Club flew me to Vancouver for a week while the show was in previews with full houses. I sat in the back with director Dean Paul Gibson and dramaturg Rachel Ditor. "You don't need to repeat that, the audience seems to get it." "Check." "Can you make this clearer?" "I can." "Can you move the intermission to make the first act in the past and the second act in the present?" "I should've thought of it myself." "You've been too close to it for months now. That's why we're sitting here with you." "Excellent point."

I would make changes, and the actors would rehearse them the next day for that evening's production. I'd watch again with a critical eye and make more notes and changes for the next day. We did this for a week before the show officially opened.

The premiere production featured a wonderful music score by Neil Weisensel punctuating the action.

But the most unusual aspect of the staging was something they felt a need to prepare me for: "We ... added film clips on the upstage cyclorama." "Huh?" It was true, and it was perfect. Jamie Nesbitt's moving video of *It's a Wonderful Life* film clips, accompanied by Weisensel's music, introduced scenes while sets shifted in, then stayed on the screen upstage as stills (The Old Granville House, for instance, or the main street in the town). In the scene where the Bailey Building and Loan is being mobbed by townspeople, the still on the cyclorama came up to reveal a crowd with umbrellas facing upstage toward the building front. Once the scene began, the closest umbrellas to us began to move as the actors broke away from the original picture to startling effect.

Ted Roberts' clever set elements slid in and out to Weisensel's music and Nesbitt's video work, bringing Bedford Falls fully alive.

Since that first year, the Arts Club has brought the show back many times, and I have flown into Vancouver nearly every time to see it. It still works magic on me.

If you're interested in making the video (which can even be customized for your production) and musical score a part of your own production—and I highly recommend both—you can reach Jamie and Neil at their websites: www.neilmusic.com and www.jamienesbitt.com.

It's a Wonderful Life

ACT I

SETTING: *The stage is dark. Once the lights have come up, we will see that a bridge with steel cross bracing runs from SL to SR, high in the air above the stage floor.*

AT RISE: *Lights come up on the bridge to reveal GEORGE BAILEY, a man in his late 30s, wearing a rumpled business suit and scarf, standing center on the bridge, his arms braced against the railing, looking downward. The sky is dark and cloudy behind him, black below. A gentle snow is falling.*

(A train whistle in the distance, as THE PEOPLE OF BEDFORD FALLS enter from L and R and move downstage where they gather, looking out over the house. GEORGE's light fades slowly as a dim light illuminates the group.)

GOWER. I owe everything to George Bailey, help him Lord.

MOTHER BAILEY. Dear God, please help my son, George.

BERT. He never thinks about himself, Lord, that's why he's in trouble now.

UNCLE BILLY. Please, your honor, he's protecting me. It's all my fault. Don't let him get hurt.

HARRY. He's given so much. That should count for something, shouldn't it?

VIOLET. I hate to think what our lives would have been like without him, God. Oh, you've just got to help him!

TILLY. He's just the best, Lord. Give 'im a hand here, wouldja?

MARY. I love him, Lord. Watch over him for me.

ZUZU. Please, God, something's the matter with Daddy! Please bring him back home. Thank you. Your friend, Zuzu.

(Music effects under as THE PEOPLE turn and move offstage in several directions. The bridge moves upward and out of sight, and the sky is replaced with a star field. Wind chimes tinkle to punctuate the dialogue between THE BOSS and JOSEPH, disembodied, echoing voices.)

THE BOSS. You wanted to speak with me, Joseph?

JOSEPH. Sorry to bother you, Boss, but the name "George Bailey" keeps turning up.

THE BOSS. Yes. I know.

JOSEPH. We should probably send someone down.

THE BOSS. Whose turn is it?

JOSEPH. Clarence ... the clockmaker.

THE BOSS. Ah. Clarence. He still doesn't have his wings, does he?

JOSEPH. No sir, he doesn't have his wings, he doesn't have ... well, he doesn't have much going for him at all, Boss.

THE BOSS. He has faith, Joseph ... a strong and simple faith. Seems to me that's exactly what George Bailey needs right now. Send for Clarence.

(Through this last bit of dialogue, CLARENCE has entered far upstage to stand C in the darkness. Now a spot fades up downstage, and he strolls down into it. He is dressed in 18th century shirt, trousers and shoes.)

CLARENCE. You wanted to see me, sir?

THE BOSS. Yes, Clarence. Someone needs our help. His name is George Bailey, and he's about to throw away God's greatest gift.

CLARENCE. His life?

THE BOSS. His life.

CLARENCE. Oh dear!

THE BOSS. It will be your mission, Clarence, to change his mind.

CLARENCE (*in rapture*). I have a mission! Um ... sir ... if I should accomplish my mission ... might I perhaps have my wings? It's been nearly two hundred years now ... and ... well ... people are beginning to talk.

THE BOSS. Clarence, you do a good job and you'll get your wings.

CLARENCE. Oh, thank you, sir!

THE BOSS. Joseph?

JOSEPH. Sir?

THE BOSS. I'm turning this over to you. Brief Clarence on his mission.

JOSEPH. Yes sir.

THE BOSS. I have my eye on a sparrow I must attend to. (*Fading.*) Good luck, Clarence!

CLARENCE. Thank you, sir!

(The sound of mark tree bar chimes.)

JOSEPH. All right, Clarence, let's go.

CLARENCE. Go? Where?

JOSEPH. Into the past.

CLARENCE. The past?

JOSEPH. George Bailey's past.

(Lights come up onstage as YOUNG GEORGE enters, carrying a snow shovel over his shoulder. Sky cyclorama lit for cold winter weather. CLARENCE watches, delighted. YOUNG GEORGE is just past CLARENCE when YOUNG HARRY runs in, losing his scarf as he runs after his brother. CLARENCE notices and crosses to the scarf.)

YOUNG HARRY. George! George! Wait for me! George!

(YOUNG GEORGE stops, turns.)

YOUNG GEORGE. Go home, Harry!

YOUNG HARRY. No, I wanna play with you guys!

YOUNG GEORGE. It's too dangerous.

YOUNG HARRY. Why? Whatcha gonna do?

YOUNG GEORGE. Gonna slide down the hill and across Potter's Pond on these snow shovels. You're too little.

YOUNG HARRY. Am not!

YOUNG GEORGE. Are, too! Now scram!

YOUNG HARRY (*crossing away, picking up the scarf. CLARENCE is pleased*). I'm tellin' Mom. Mom!

YOUNG GEORGE (*drops the shovel and pursues YOUNG HARRY*). OK, OK, OK!

YOUNG HARRY (*stops and turns*). I can come?

YOUNG GEORGE. Yeah ... you can come.

YOUNG HARRY. Hooray! (*He crosses past YOUNG GEORGE, dropping the scarf again, and grabs the*

shovel. CLARENCE crosses to the scarf.) Me first! I'll go farther'n anybody!

(He exits offstage. YOUNG GEORGE turns and starts to move after YOUNG HARRY. He cups his hands and shouts.)

YOUNG GEORGE. Don't go too far! The ice is thin out in the middle! Hey, fellas! Here comes the scare-baby, my kid brother, Haaaarrrry Bailey!

YOUNG HARRY *(from offstage, shouting)*. I'm not scared, George!

(YOUNG GEORGE notices the scarf, turns and crosses to pick it up. CLARENCE beams.)

CHILDREN'S VOICES *(offstage ad-lib)*. Go Harry! Attaboy, Harry! (etc)

HARRY *(offstage)*. Here I gooooooooooooo!

(The sound of the shovel across the ice. The ice breaks. A splash.)

CLARENCE. Oh no! The ice broke! He's fallen through the ice!

CHILDREN'S VOICES *(offstage ad-lib)*. Harry! Somebody save him! He fell in! He's going to drown!
(Etc.)

YOUNG HARRY. George!

(YOUNG GEORGE, scarf in hand, turns and runs offstage. CLARENCE follows him across the stage.)

YOUNG GEORGE. I'm comin', Harry! Everybody, make a chain! Make a chain!

(The lights fade, save for CLARENCE's.)

CLARENCE. What happened? Did George jump in and save Harry?

JOSEPH.. Yes. But, he caught a bad cold.

CLARENCE. Oh!

JOSEPH. That led to an infection in his left ear.

CLARENCE. Oh!

JOSEPH. And he lost the hearing in that ear.

CLARENCE. Permanently?

JOSEPH. Permanently. It was weeks before he could return to his after-school job at Gower Drug.

(Lights come up RC, Gower Drug. A counter and soda fountain, with 3 stools R. A high back bar with an opening through which prescriptions may be dispensed from the back. YOUNG MARY sits on a stool at the soda fountain. A door opens offstage, a bell tinkles and the door closes. YOUNG GEORGE enters; he doesn't see YOUNG MARY.)

YOUNG GEORGE. It's me, Mr. Gower ... George Bailey!

(He crosses to the big cigar lighter bolted to the L end of the counter, puts his hand on the trigger mechanism, closes his eyes and raises the other hand in the air.)

CLARENCE. What's he doing?

JOSEPH. Cigar lighter ... a complementary light for customers.

CLARENCE. He doesn't smoke at his age!

JOSEPH *(with a chuckle)*. No ... he dreams dreams and makes wishes ...

CLARENCE. On a falling star?

JOSEPH. No ... on that old cigar lighter. It's a tradition among the boys in Bedford Falls.

YOUNG GEORGE. Wish I had a million dollars. *(He triggers the lighter, igniting a flame.)* Hot dog!

CLARENCE. He'll get his wish!

JOSEPH. Hmmm. Now listen ... and watch.

(CLARENCE looks upward and nods as his light dims to black.)

YOUNG GEORGE. Mr. Gower ... ? You back there?

GOWER *(offstage)*. You're late!

YOUNG GEORGE. Yes, sir. Sorry.

(YOUNG GEORGE crosses around behind the soda fountain.)

YOUNG MARY. Hello, George.

YOUNG GEORGE. Oh ... hi, Mary.

YOUNG MARY. I have a whole dime. I'm trying to decide between a soda and chocolate ice cream.

(The door opens offstage, the bell tinkles and the door closes. YOUNG VIOLET enters, crossing to the soda fountain.)

YOUNG VIOLET. Hello, Georgie!

YOUNG GEORGE. Hi, Violet.

YOUNG VIOLET *(sizing up a rival)*. 'Lo, Mary

YOUNG MARY *(primly)*. Hello, Violet.

YOUNG GEORGE. The usual?

YOUNG VIOLET *(sits on a stool)*. Mary was here first.

YOUNG MARY. I'm still deciding.

YOUNG VIOLET. All right, then, two cents worth of licorice shoelaces.

YOUNG GEORGE *(confirmed)*. The usual. I'll get 'em. Be right back. *(He starts a move, accidentally kicking something behind the bar. Reaches down, brings up an empty whiskey bottle and sits it on the bar.)*
Hnh! Wonder where that came from? *(Exits.)*

YOUNG VIOLET. I like him!

YOUNG MARY. You like every boy you see!

YOUNG VIOLET. What's wrong with that? *(Pause.)* Sammy Wainwright likes you.

(YOUNG GEORGE re-enters with a package of licorice.)

YOUNG MARY. I know.

YOUNG VIOLET. Sammy Wainwright says ... Oh! Here comes George!

YOUNG GEORGE. There you go, Violet.

YOUNG VIOLET *(honey dripping)*. Thank you, George. Help me down off the stool? It's awfully high.

YOUNG GEORGE *(not buying it)*. Uh huh.

YOUNG VIOLET *(hops down)*. There! Did it myself! Goodbye, Georgie! *(Flatly.)* Goodbye, Mary.

YOUNG MARY. Goodbye, Violet.

(YOUNG VIOLET exits. The door opens offstage. The bell tinkles. The door closes.)

YOUNG GEORGE. Made up your mind yet?

YOUNG MARY. Chocolate ice cream.

YOUNG GEORGE. What? Sorry ... talk into my good ear here.

YOUNG MARY. Chocolate ice cream.

YOUNG GEORGE. With coconut?

YOUNG MARY. I don't like coconut.

YOUNG GEORGE. You don't like coconut! Say, don't you know where coconuts come from?

YOUNG MARY. A coconut tree?

YOUNG GEORGE. No! *(He realizes she's right, though it's not the answer he wanted.)* Well yeah! But where is that tree?

YOUNG MARY. I don't know.

YOUNG GEORGE. Tahiti! Or the Fiji Islands ... the Coral Sea! Look here! *(He pulls a magazine from behind the soda fountain and hands it across the counter.)*

YOUNG MARY. A magazine! Ooo! All these faraway places!

YOUNG GEORGE. That's *National Geographic Magazine*! Only us explorers can get it! I been nominated for membership!

YOUNG MARY. Ooo.

YOUNG GEORGE *(takes the magazine back)*. You just watch ... I'm goin' out exploring some day.

YOUNG MARY *(all the faith in the world)*. I know you will.

YOUNG GEORGE. Darn right. I got a bank account ... savin' my money. Gonna go around the world, gonna go to college, gonna ... hey, what's this on the floor? You drop this?

YOUNG MARY. No, George, I ...

YOUNG GEORGE *(bending down out of sight)*. Hold on, I'll get it.

YOUNG MARY. George? *(Softly)*. Oh ... your ear. You can't hear me. *(A pause. Soft.)* Well, then ... I love you, George Bailey ... I'll love you till the day I die. *(She realizes what she has said.)* Oh!

YOUNG GEORGE *(straightening up)*. Here it is. Looks like some kinda ... telegram or somethin'. *(MARY hops down from the stool.)* You drop this? Hey, what's the matter with you?

YOUNG MARY. Nothing.

YOUNG GEORGE. I'll get you that ice cream.

YOUNG MARY. No ... no. I changed my mind. I ... I have to go. Goodbye, George!

(She runs offstage. The door opens offstage and the bell tinkles.)

YOUNG GEORGE *(crossing from behind the counter with the telegram)*. Oh, hey, you forgot your telegr ... *(The door slams.)* Well, don't that beat all. *(He crosses back to sit on a stool at the soda fountain.)* Maybe it isn't hers. *(Reading softly.)* "Dear Mr. Gower ... " Oh! "We regret to inform you that your son, Robert, died ... " *(He turns to look in GOWER's direction, then back to the telegram.)* "Died this morning of influenza ... Everything possible was done for his comfort ... " Oh. Gee.

GOWER *(offstage)*. George! Come back here!

(YOUNG GEORGE sits, numbly, reading and rereading the telegram.)

GOWER *(cont'd, offstage)*. George! Where are you! George Bailey!

(GOWER enters, disheveled, the stump of a cigar in the corner of his mouth. He is drunk. He carries a large jar of white powder and a small box of pills.)

GOWER *(cont'd)*. Oh. Here y'are.

(He crosses to the end of the soda fountain and puts the large jar on the counter. YOUNG GEORGE watches him for a moment, then picks up the empty whiskey bottle. Makes the connection.)

YOUNG GEORGE. Mr. Gower, have you been dr ...

GOWER (*picking up a pad of billing forms from the counter*). I'm just ... I'm just ... making ... this order for Mrs. Blaine. Pills ... doctor prescribed.

YOUNG GEORGE. Yes sir. But ...

GOWER (*writes on the billing form as he crosses DR.*) Order for Mrs. ... Blaine ... pills ...

YOUNG GEORGE. They got the diphtheria over there, don't they?

(He gets down off the stool, countering, moves to the end of the soda fountain and turns the jar around to read the label.)

YOUNG GEORGE (*cont'd, to himself*). Say ... this is ... poison! (*He crosses down toward GOWER.*) You get the stuff for these capsules out of that jar, Mr. Gower?

GOWER. Mmmmm. (*He tears the bill from the pad, wraps the bill around the box and thrusts it at YOUNG GEORGE.*) Take these capsules over to the Blaine ... the Blaine house. Mrs. Blaine. She ... she ...

YOUNG GEORGE. Mr. Gower ... I ... I think maybe you better ...

GOWER (*shouts in a sudden rage*). Get going! Get out! Now!

YOUNG GEORGE. Yes sir! (*Exits quickly.*)

(The lights cross fade from Gower Drug, R, to the Bailey Building and Loan, L. TILLY sits at her desk and switchboard. A counter behind her with a grill on the upstage edge and an opening for customer business. UNCLE BILLY stands L, trying to listen to a conversation in an office off L. The phone line buzzes and TILLY, wearing a headset with attached microphone yoke, answers.)

TILLY (*affected phone voice*). Bailey Building and Loan. (*Drops phone voice.*) Oh hi, Maude. No, he's in a meeting! (*Lowering voice ... heavy with foreboding.*) With Potter. I got a bad feeling about it. "Tilly," I sez to myself, "That Potter's up to no good." Well, no, Maude, every time he comes here, I start looking through the want ads for another job. Hey, I got skills, and I'm still young. Mostly. (*Another buzz.*) There's the other line. Gotta go, Maude.

(YOUNG GEORGE enters quickly from R, headin for his father's office door, off L. UNCLE BILLY grabs his arm.)

UNCLE BILLY. Avast there, Captain Cook! Where you headin'?

YOUNG GEORGE. Gotta see Pop, Uncle Billy.

UNCLE BILLY. No no, there's a squall goin' on in there shapin up into a storm.

YOUNG GEORGE. But ...

TILLY. Billy, telephone.

BILLY. Who is it?

TILLY. Bank examiner. Says you were supposed to call him yesterday.

BILLY (*looks at a string around his finger*). That's what this string was supposed to remind me about!

TILLY. Look how well it worked.

BILLY. Yes, but what're these other strings for? (*He opens his hand to show a string on each finger.*) I'll take it in my office. Find that file for me, will you?

(He exits. TILLY turns to paw through files. HENRY POTTER, an older man in a wheelchair, comes rolling in from L. YOUNG GEORGE retreats upstage. PETER BAILEY enters from L, just in.)

POTTER. Bailey, you're hopeless! Don't come crying to me when these people can't pay their debts!

PETER BAILEY. I'm not crying, Mr. Potter, but times are hard, and a lot of these people are out of work. It's ...

POTTER (*stops, turns chair to face PETER BAILEY*). Then foreclose! If they don't want to work, they have

no right to own a house.

PETER BAILEY. They *want* to work, Mr. Potter, they ...

POTTER. If they wanted to work they'd have jobs!

PETER BAILEY. These people have children. I can't...

POTTER. They're not *my* children! Is this a business or a charity ward?

YOUNG GEORGE. Pop! I need some advice! See, these pills are ...

TILLY. Not now, George. Your father's in a meeting.

(YOUNG GEORGE gives her a look. She shrugs and exits toward UNCLE BILLY's office.)

PETER BAILEY. Mr. Potter, have you no pity? You have more money than you could ever spend ...

POTTER. So I should give it all to miserable failures who can't pay their mortgages? *(He moves back toward PETER BAILEY.)* Or failures like you and that idiot brother of yours with your shoestring Building and Loan!

YOUNG GEORGE *(jumps in POTTER's path)*. He's not a failure! You can't say that about my father!

PETER BAILEY *(overlapping)*. George, George ...

YOUNG GEORGE. You're not a failure, Pop, you're the biggest man in town!

PETER BAILEY. George ...

YOUNG GEORGE. Don't let him say that about you, Pop.

PETER BAILEY. George, we'll discuss this at dinner.

YOUNG GEORGE. Yes sir.

POTTER *(mumbling, with some amusement)*. Biggest man in town! *(Scoffs.)*

YOUNG GEORGE. Bigger'n you!

PETER BAILEY. George, I'll talk to you tonight. Come back in, Mr. Potter. *(POTTER moves back toward the office, PETER BAILEY guiding the wheelchair.)* All I'm asking is thirty days more.

POTTER. Thirty days!

MR. BAILEY. Just thirty short days.

POTTER. May as well be thirty years! Have you put any real pressure on these people of yours to pay those mortgages?

YOUNG GEORGE. Pop, I need ...

BAILEY. Not now, George. Times are bad, Mr. Potter. I'll dig up that five thousand somehow.

(MR. BAILEY and POTTER exit L. YOUNG GEORGE stands for a moment, contemplating the box of capsules, makes up his mind and leaves.)

The lights crossfade from the Bailey Building and Loan back to Gower Drug just as GOWER's phone, on the L end of the back bar, rings.)

GOWER *(answers the phone)*. Gower Drug. Whuzzat? Wull ... those ... those pills shoulda been there 'n hour ago! Yes'm ... 'msorry ... thank you f ... fur callin'. *(He hangs up the phone just as YOUNG GEORGE enters.)* George Bailey!

YOUNG GEORGE *(crosses to GOWER)*. Mr. Gower, I been pacin' up and down out front here, and I guess I'd better tell you ...

GOWER *(grabs YOUNG GEORGE)*. Where's Mrs. Blaine's pills?! Where!

YOUNG GEORGE. Ooow! Let go! You'll rip my shirt! Ouch! Let go! You don't ...

(GOWER cuffs and slaps YOUNG GEORGE.)

GOWER (*in a rage*). Where are they? What kind of tricks are you playing? Answer me! I'll beat it out of you! So help me I will! Don't you know that boy's sick? Don't you know he could die?

GOWER. Poison? What ...

YOUNG GEORGE. I couldn't deliver 'em! Look at 'em! Look at 'em!

(GOWER takes the box from YOUNG GEORGE, opens it, takes out a capsule, breaks it open and puts a small bit of the contents on the tip of his tongue. Quickly, he crosses to the jar on the soda fountain counter and turns it so he can see the label.)

GOWER. Oh my God ... oh my dear God. George!

(He runs to YOUNG GEORGE, who cringes and pulls back.)

YOUNG GEORGE. No, please ... please don't hurt my sore ear again.

GOWER (*he embraces YOUNG GEORGE*). Oh, George, I am so sorry

YOUNG GEORGE. I won't tell anyone, Mr. Gower, not ever.

(GOWER breaks the embrace and moves back to the soda fountain, leaning on the far end of the counter, facing upstage.)

YOUNG GEORGE (*cont'd*). You don't need to worry. I won't tell a soul.

(YOUNG GEORGE moves toward him, crossing behind the counter.)

YOUNG GEORGE (*cont'd*). I know how sad you are ... you don't need to worry ... you don't need to ... you don't need to ...

(He ducks below the counter for a moment and is quickly replaced by GEORGE, grown up, who comes out from behind the soda fountain carrying a suitcase. GOWER whirls around and moves to the center of the room. His hair is combed, tie straightened. Light change.)

GEORGE. You don't need to ... you don't need to go and do a thing like this ...

GOWER. I wanted to, George. Least I could do. It's not so much ...

GEORGE. Not so m ... !

GOWER. Been hiding it back there for a week, waiting for you to come by. Just an old second hand suitcase.

GEORGE. Say, listen, this is better than any of the new ones I've seen ... this ... this is quality. They don't build 'em like this anymore. I been lookin' for a nice, strong big one like this. Why, I ... I could use it for a raft in case the boat sinks!

GOWER. Picked it out myself. I'm glad you like it.

GEORGE. Like it! It's even got my name on it ... engraved right there. "George Bailey."

GOWER. I thought that'd tickle ya.

GEORGE. Tickle me! Say, I'm walkin' on air here! (*He looks straight out into the house.*) Wait a minute, wait a minute, is that a new jukebox?

GOWER. Yeah, it is. I got so many of the kids coming here after school these days, I just thought ... well, you know. I love kids.

GEORGE. Look at the colored lights on that, will ya?

GOWER. And bubbles! See the bubbles!

GEORGE. That's a humdinger! Say, I haven't been in here for a couple o' months! You're really changin' the

old place! Wouldja look at that! *(He crosses to the tobacco counter.)* The old cigar lighter!
GOWER. I'll never get rid of that, George! It's a tradition! Go ahead! Make a wish on it ... for old time's sake.

(GEORGE puts his hand on the trigger mechanism, closes his eyes and holds the other hand in the air.)

GEORGE. Wish I had a million dollars. *(He triggers the lighter, igniting a flame.)* Hot dog!

(They laugh. A mark tree bar chime run, and GEORGE and GOWER freeze in place. CLARENCE enters from an unlikely direction.)

CLARENCE. Why did you stop it?

JOSEPH. Take a good look at that face.

(CLARENCE moves to GEORGE, gets close. Looks into his eyes.)

CLARENCE. It's a good face. I like George Bailey. Did he ever tell anyone about the pills?

JOSEPH. Not a soul.

CLARENCE. How about that girl? The one who loves him? Did he ever ...

JOSEPH. Clarence.

CLARENCE. Yes?

JOSEPH. Wait and see.

CLARENCE *(stepping away from GEORGE. With a sigh)*. While it's true I died over 200 years ago, Joseph, my habits didn't. Old habits die hard.

JOSEPH. Clarence ...

CLARENCE. Joseph, I was a clockmaker. I have always been very good at measuring time, but I have never been very good at putting up with it. For two hundred years I have waited in the wings ... for my wings.

JOSEPH. You know what the boss says.

CLARENCE. Yes. "A thousand years are as a day." And, I guess they are to the boss. But, I'm not the boss, Joseph; to me two hundred years are as *two hundred years*. Sometimes even more. And I still don't have my wings.

(A bar chimes run and GEORGE and GOWER come back to life. GEORGE moves away. CLARENCE moves out of the way just in time, throwing a dirty look heavenward.)

GEORGE. Oh! Say, look at the time. I've gotta go.

GOWER. Packing for your big adventure, eh?

GEORGE. Yessir, and now I got a good suitcase! This ... this is my flying carpet ... for a thousand and one nights, with plenty of room to stick on labels from Italy and Baghdad and Samarkand ... My life's about to begin! Thanks again, Mr. Gower! *(Moves to exit.)*

GOWER. You're more than welcome, George! Oh, hey, what boat you sailing on?

GEORGE. I'm working my way across on a cattle boat.

GOWER. A cattle boat?

GEORGE. OK, I like cows. *(As they both laugh.)* Thanks, Mr. Gower!

(GEORGE moves downstage, arcing DL as the Gower Drug set moves off UR. A bench rolls in DL. An attached sign reads, "Taxi Stand." ERNIE the cab driver sits reading a newspaper. BERT the cop is standing with one foot on the bench, writing in a small notebook.)

GEORGE. Hey, Ernie!

ERNIE. Hiya, George!

GEORGE. Hi, Bert!

BERT. How's it goin', George?

GEORGE. Hey, you boys aren't busy or anything, are ya? I mean ... you're not givin' Ernie a ticket, are ya, Bert ... 'cause I could come back later.

BERT. Naw. Just makin' up the grocery list.

ERNIE. Just passin' the time, George.

GEORGE. Ernie, I'm a rich tourist today. Figure to ride in style.

BERT. Gonna ride home in that?

GEORGE. No, that's my new suitcase.

BERT. Big enough to ride home in.

GEORGE. I figured to ride home in Ernie's cab instead. How about it, Ernie?

ERNIE. Sure, I'm just parked right over there.

BERT. Illegally parked right over there.

ERNIE. It's OK. I got connections in the police department.

BERT. Tonight's your brother's graduation dance over at the high school, isn't it?

GEORGE. Yeah. Harry's chairman of the eats committee.

ERNIE. You goin'?

GEORGE. To a high-school dance? Me?

ERNIE. I just thought ...

VIOLET (*all grown up and grown up well, entering from L and crossing*). Good afternoon, Mr. Bailey. Are you going to the graduation dance?

GEORGE. No, I ... Oh. Hello, Violet. Hey, you look good. (*VIOLET stops and turns.*) That's some dress you got on there.

VIOLET. What? This old thing? I only wear it when I don't care how I look. Well, goodbye, George. See you at the dance.

(She crosses and exits R. The men stand dumbfounded.)

GEORGE. Only wears it when she ...

BERT. Yeah.

ERNIE. Ready, George?

GEORGE. Yeeeah. Let's ... let's go, Ernie, before I forget where it is I'm goin'.

ERNIE. Yeah.

(GEORGE and ERNIE exit L. BERT stays onstage, watching after VIOLET, taking a step or two in her direction. ERNIE re-enters and calls to him.)

ERNIE (*cont'd*). Bert!

(BERT comes to himself, turns and exits quickly off L. The lights come down on the park bench area. The bench scoots offstage.)

Lights up C on the front porch of the BAILEY home. GEORGE is leaning on the porch railing, looking out. From inside, thuds and crashes are heard.)

MOTHER BAILEY (*offstage*). Harry! You're shaking the house down!

HARRY (*offstage*). Mother!

MOTHER BAILEY (*offstage*). What?

HARRY (*offstage*). Where are my good shoes?

MOTHER BAILEY (*offstage*). They're in the closet!

HARRY (*offstage*). No they're not, I'm looking in the closet! Oh! Never mind!

(More crashing.)

MOTHER BAILEY (*offstage*). Are you crawling around in the closet in your good suit?

HARRY (*offstage*). I'm not that stupid.

MOTHER BAILEY (*offstage*). Good.

HARRY (*offstage*). I'm wearing George's tuxedo!

MOTHER BAILEY (*offstage*). You're wearing George's ... Oh, never mind!

(GEORGE crosses down off the porch as MOTHER BAILEY comes through the door and crosses down to him.)

MOTHER BAILEY (*cont'd*). He's crawling around the closet floor in your tuxedo.

GEORGE. Let him go. Not every day you graduate from high school.

MOTHER BAILEY. What are you doing out here?

GEORGE. Thinking. Day after tomorrow I'm off to start my life. That dinner I just had was the second to last one.

MOTHER BAILEY. There'll be others.

GEORGE. Not very soon.

MOTHER BAILEY. You know, George, we wish we could send Harry to college with you. Your father and I talked it over half the night.

GEORGE. Harry and I have that all figured out. See, while I'm gone, he'll do the job I've been doing at the Building and Loan ... then, in four years, he'll go. And by then I'll be out ... and I'll have a good job ... and I can help put Harry through school.

MOTHER BAILEY. He's pretty young for that job.

GEORGE. Which job?

MOTHER BAILEY. Your job ... at Bailey Building and Loan.

GEORGE. No younger than I was.

MOTHER BAILEY. Maybe you were born older.

GEORGE (*cupping his hand over his good ear*). How's that?

MOTHER BAILEY. I said, maybe you were born older.

(HARRY comes bursting through the door wearing tuxedo slacks and shirt and an unbuttoned vest. He is carrying a heavy box.)

HARRY. Mother ...

GEORGE. Nice tux.

HARRY. Thanks. Mother, can I have the car? I'm going to take over a lot of plates and things.

MOTHER BAILEY (*looking into the box*). What plates?

HARRY (*nervous*). Well, see, I'm chairman of the eats committee and we only need a couple dozen because ...

MOTHER BAILEY. Oh no you don't! Not my best Haviland!

GEORGE. Oh, let him have the plates.

HARRY. And the car.

GEORGE. And the car.

MOTHER BAILEY. Ganging up on me?

GEORGE. Probably.