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**Cast of Characters**

One actor, who plays Narrator and all the residents of Bedford Falls.

**Set**

Single set representing various parts of the town.

**Acknowledgments**

All production groups performing this play are required to include the following credit on the title page of every program:

*This Wonderful Life* was originally commissioned and produced by Portland Center Stage, Portland, Oregon.

# THIS WONDERFUL LIFE

## by Steve Murray

CONCEIVED BY MARK SETLOCK

ADAPTED FROM THE SCREENPLAY *IT'S A WONDERFUL LIFE*  
BY FRANCES GOODRICH, ALBERT HACKETT, FRANK CAPRA,  
AND JO SWERLING

*(Lights up on our NARRATOR, dressed in 1940s-style slacks, vest and tie.)*

**NARRATOR.** I love "It's a Wonderful Life." I love it so much, I want to do it all for you myself. Ready?

*(He launches into movie highlights, in the characters' voices, fast:)*

**JANIE.** Please, God, something's the matter with Daddy.

**FRANKLIN.** Clarence, you do a good job with George Bailey and you'll get your wings.

**YOUNG MARY.** George Bailey, I'll love you till the day I die.

**MARY.** *(Sings:)* "Buffalo gals won't you come out tonight."

**GEORGE.** You want the moon, Mary?

**NARRATOR.** *(Sings the first five notes of "The Wedding March.")*

**POTTER.** The Baileys have been a boil on my neck long enough.

**GEORGE.** I'd say you were nothing but a scurvy little spider!

**MARY.** George lassos stork!

**GEORGE.** Where's that money, you stupid, silly old fool?

**KIDS.** Hello Daddy!

**GEORGE.** Why did we have to have all these kids?

**POTTER.** You're worth more dead than alive!

**GEORGE.** Show me the way, God.

**CLARENCE.** Help!!!

**GEORGE.** I wish I'd never been born.

**CLARENCE.** You've got your wish.

**GEORGE.** *Pottersville!?!?!?*

**CLARENCE.** You really had a wonderful life.

**GEORGE.** God, let me live again. Zuzu's petals! Yay! Merry Christmas, Bedford Falls!

**NARRATOR.** *(Imitating bell:)* Ding-ding-ding!

**GEORGE.** Attaboy, Clarence!

*(NARRATOR bows then waves to us.)*

**NARRATOR.** Thank you! And good night!

*(Blackout.)*

*(After a moment, lights come back up.)*

**NARRATOR.** Sorry—was that too fast? I get a little excited.

*(We can see the set now. It's as minimal as possible, as elaborate as necessary—whatever works to keep the focus on the actor. [See note at the end of the script about the set for the original production, and notes on performance.])*

*(Three basic playing areas:)*

*(The Bailey Boarding House, front porch.)*

*(The Sycamore Stairs, George Bailey's home as an adult.)*

*(An Office Area, with a desk and an old-fashioned chair on castors. The area represents both the Bailey Building and Loan and Mr. Potter's office. [The rolling chair also doubles as Potter's wheelchair.])*

*(Everything is in shades of gray, white, black—in honor of the black-and-white original movie.)*

**NARRATOR.** Do you love this movie as much as I do? People love "It's a Wonderful Life" for different reasons. Family man George Bailey. Evil banker old man Potter. Clarence, the dotty angel. Annie the maid. Zuzu's petals!

Or...the image of a man, standing alone on a bridge on Christmas Eve. The story of how he got there. And how he found his way home again.

OK. Want me to give it another try? I'll go slower this time. Promise.

*(The lights shift. Now we begin in earnest.)*

**NARRATOR.** We're in Bedford Falls, a snowy small town in the northeast near the end of World War II. Christmas Eve.

*(We hear a Montage of Voices, pre-recorded by the actor. After the first few, the prayers begin to blend and the NARRATOR speaks over them.)*

**GOWER.** *(Recorded:)* I owe everything to George Bailey. Help him, dear Father.

**MARTINI.** *(Recorded:)* Joseph, Jesus and Mary. Help my friend Mr. Bailey.

**MRS. BAILEY.** *(Recorded:)* Help my son George tonight.

**BERT.** *(Recorded:)* He never thinks about himself, God; that's why he's in trouble.

**MARY.** *(Recorded:)* I love him, dear Lord. Watch over him tonight.

**JANIE.** *(Recorded:)* Please, God. Something's the matter with Daddy.

**ZUZU.** *(Recorded:)* Please bring Daddy back.

**NARRATOR.** The people of Bedford Falls are praying for a man named George Bailey—prayers that make their way up to the on-shift angels in heaven. Franklin and Joseph.

*(Winking stars appear in the firmament above the stage.)*

*(The angels FRANKLIN and JOSEPH are pre-recorded by the actor. So is CLARENCE – until he comes to earth. Then, the actor will play him live.)*

**FRANKLIN.** *(Recorded:)* Hello, Joseph. Trouble?

**JOSEPH.** *(Recorded:)* Looks like we'll have to send someone down.

**NARRATOR.** *(About the stars:)* These are the special effects!

**JOSEPH.** *(Recorded:)* A lot of people are asking for help for a man named George Bailey.

**FRANKLIN.** *(Recorded:)* Yes, tonight's his crucial night. We'll have to send someone down immediately.

**JOSEPH.** *(Recorded:)* That's why I came to see you sir. It's that clock-maker's turn again.

**FRANKLIN.** *(Recorded:)* Oh— Clarence. Hasn't got his wings yet, has he?

**JOSEPH.** *(Recorded:)* We've passed him right along because, you know, sir—he's got the IQ of a rabbit.

**FRANKLIN.** *(Recorded:)* But he's got the faith of a child.

*(A snatch of "Twinkle Twinkle Little Star" plays.)*

**CLARENCE.** *(Recorded:)* You sent for me, sir?

**FRANKLIN.** *(Recorded:)* Yes, Clarence. What's that book you've got there?

**CLARENCE.** (*Recorded:*) Oh, “The Adventures of Tom Sawyer.”

**FRANKLIN.** (*Recorded:*) A man down on earth needs our help.

**CLARENCE.** (*Recorded:*) Splendid! Is he sick?

**FRANKLIN.** (*Recorded:*) No, worse. He’s discouraged. At exactly 10:45 p.m. tonight, earth time, that man will be thinking seriously of throwing away God’s greatest gift. Clarence, you do a good job with George Bailey and you’ll get your wings.

**CLARENCE.** (*Recorded:*) Oh thank you, sir. Thank you.

**NARRATOR.** Then the senior angels give Clarence a little background on the life of one George Bailey. Pay attention—this is gonna go fast. It’s a snowy riverbank, many years ago, and a bunch of boys are playing on the ice.

**BOY.** Yippee!

**CLARENCE.** Hey, who’s that?

**JOSEPH.** That’s your problem—George Bailey.

**NARRATOR.** He’s only 12 here, playing with his friends—like Sam Wainwright, who always goes:

**YOUNG SAM.** Hee-Haw!

**NARRATOR.** They’re sledding down a snow bank, riding on shovel blades and zooming out across the frozen river. This one’s George:

**YOUNG GEORGE.** And here comes the scare-baby, my kid brother, Harry Bailey!

**YOUNG HARRY.** I’m not scared!

**NARRATOR.** But he should be. Little Harry goes flying out—farther across the ice than any of the bigger boys. All the way to where it’s—oh no! Cuh-RACK!

The ice breaks! Harry falls through. He’s only 9—he can’t swim! Big brother George jumps in, grabs Harry and gets him back out on the ice. But the water, it’s so freezing cold—it ruins George’s hearing in one ear. (*Points to his left ear.*)

Then the angels hit fast-forward. It’s springtime. George arrives at his after-school job at the pharmacy, where he scoop up ice cream and delivers prescriptions for the owner, Mr. Gower. Who’s drunk and in a rotten mood.

**GOWER.** You’re late!

**NARRATOR.** George's little classmates Mary and Violet are there at the drugstore, and they're not there for the drugs. Here's little blond Violet Bick, studying Vamp 101.

**VIOLET.** Hello, George. (*Reluctantly:*) 'Lo, Mary.

**NARRATOR.** And brown-haired Mary Hatch, Girl-Next-Door.

**MARY.** Hello, Violet.

**NARRATOR.** Violet has a thing for George.

**VIOLET.** I like him.

**MARY.** You like every boy.

**VIOLET.** What's wrong with that?

**NARRATOR.** Mary asks George to make her an ice cream sundae, but she can't decide what kind of topping she wants.

**MARY.** I don't like coconuts.

**YOUNG GEORGE.** Say, brainless—don't you know where coconuts come from? From Tahiti, Fiji Islands, the Coral Sea! I've been nominated for membership on the National Geographic Society!

**NARRATOR.** While he's scooping Mary's ice cream, she leans over the counter.

**MARY.** Is this the ear you can't hear on? George Bailey, I'll love you till the day I die.

**YOUNG GEORGE.** I'm going out exploring some day, you watch. And I'm going to have a couple of harems, and maybe three or four wives. Wait and see. (*He starts to whistle.*)

**GOWER.** George! George! You're not paid to be a canary.

**NARRATOR.** He's having a horrible day, Mr. Gower. George finds an open telegram by the register: Gower's son Robert. He's died of the flu. That explains why Gower's drunk—and why George sees him mistakenly fill Mrs. Blaine's prescription for *her* sick son out of a big bottle marked POISON. You know—like you always see in drugstores.

**GOWER.** Take these capsules over to Mrs. Blaine's.

**YOUNG GEORGE.** Mr. Gower, I think—

**GOWER.** Aw, get going!

**NARRATOR.** George goes to see his dad instead, to get advice on this whole poison-an-innocent-kid thing. It's the family business, Bailey Building & Loan. But when he gets there, his Uncle Billy stops him outside his dad's office. Now Uncle Billy, he's so absent-minded

he's always got strings around his fingers to remind him of things he's never gonna remember. He's like Aunt Clara. You know, from "Bewitched?" If she drank a lot.

**UNCLE BILLY.** Avast there, Captain Cook! Where ya headed? There's a squall in there that's shapin' up into a storm.

**NARRATOR.** But George sneaks in anyway. George's dad is trying to get a loan from Mr. Potter.

**POTTER.** Have you put any real pressure on these people of yours to pay these mortgages?

**NARRATOR.** That's Potter, this evil old craphead-in-a-wheelchair—owns most of the town and wants the Bailey business too—because the Building & Loan helps people buy their *own* houses, and not pay crazy rent to *him*.

**POTTER.** Are you running a business or a charity ward? Not with my money!

**BAILEY.** Mr. Potter, what makes you such a hard-skulled character? You have no family—no children. You can't begin to spend all the money you've got.

**POTTER.** So I suppose I should give it to miserable failures like you and that idiot brother of yours to spend it for me.

**NARRATOR.** Not something somebody's kid ought to hear.

**YOUNG GEORGE.** He's not a failure! You can't say that about my father! Don't let him say that about you, Pop! You're not! You're the biggest man in town!

**NARRATOR.** But Mr. Bailey scoots George out of the office. So the poor kid can't get his dad's advice and has to go back to the pharmacy with the poison still in hand.

**GOWER.** Where's Mrs. Blaine's box of capsules? Why didn't you deliver them right away? What kind of tricks are you playing, anyway?

*(GOWER grabs GEORGE by the collar and Slaps! Slaps! Slaps! his ear.)*

**YOUNG GEORGE.** You're hurting my sore ear! Mr. Gower, you put something wrong in those capsules. It's poison, I tell ya—poison! I know you're unhappy. You got that telegram, and you're upset. Don't hurt my sore ear again.

**NARRATOR.** Mr. Gower opens a capsule and tastes the powder inside.

*(GOWER reacts to the taste, realizes his mistake and hugs the boy, sobbing.)*

**GOWER.** Oh George, George...

**NARRATOR.** Gower sees how he almost poisoned Mrs. Blaine's boy. And how, by stopping him, George saved his life, too.

The next time we see George, he's all grown up now, a high school grad. Been working at the building and loan a few years. He's shopping for a big suitcase so he can finally follow his National Geographic dreams, see the world, come back and go to college.

**GEORGE.** Nope, nope, nope. Now, look, Joe—

**NARRATOR.** Oh yeah—he bears a striking resemblance to Jimmy Stewart.

**GEORGE.** (*Stretching his arms out level to his shoulders:*) Now, look, I...I want a *big* one.

(*GEORGE freezes.*)

**JOSEPH.** (*Recorded:*) I want you to take a good look at that face.

**CLARENCE.** (*Recorded:*) Who is it?

**JOSEPH.** (*Recorded:*) George Bailey.

**CLARENCE.** (*Recorded:*) Oh, you mean the kid that had his ears slapped back by the druggist?

**GEORGE.** (*Unfreezing:*) Big—see! I don't want one for one night. I want something for a thousand and one nights, with plenty of room for labels from Italy and Baghdad, Samarkand...a great big one. (*Sees a big 'un.*) Now you're talkin'! How much does this cost?

**NARRATOR.** Not a thing. Because Mr. Gower the pharmacist, who's cleaned up his act, thanks to George—he's bought the giant suitcase for him. The night before his big expedition, George has a man-to-man with his dad.

(*Bailey Boarding House.*)

**GEORGE.** Boy oh boy! My last night in the ol' Bailey Boarding House!

**BAILEY.** You know, George, wish we could send Harry to college with you.

**GEORGE.** We have that all figured out. Harry'll take my job at the Building and Loan, work there four years, then *he'll* go.

**BAILEY.** You wouldn't consider coming back to the Building and Loan, would you?

**GEORGE.** No, no, Pop, I...I...couldn't. I couldn't face being cooped up for the rest of my life in a shabby little office. Oh, I'm sorry, Pop, I

didn't mean that. But this business of nickels and dimes...I just feel like if I don't get away, I'd bust.

**BAILEY.** You're right, son. This town is no place for any man unless he's willing to crawl to Potter. You get yourself an education. Then get out of here.

**GEORGE.** Pop, you want a shock? I think you're a great guy.

**NARRATOR.** That night, George goes back to his old high school. There's a big dance in the gymnasium. Sam Wainwright's there—

**SAM.** Hee-haw!

**NARRATOR.** Here comes Violet in a knockout dress.

**VIOLET.** Oh, this old thing? Why, I only wear it when I don't care how I look.

**NARRATOR.** And over there: Mary Hatch, all grown up from girl-next-door into who-is-*that*? She's getting her ear talked off by this teenage know-it-all, Freddie—who looks a lot like the kid who played Alfalfa in “The Little Rascals.”

Mary sees George. George sees Mary. And he steals her away to dance. Poor Freddie.

*(GEORGE and MARY start dancing.)*

**GEORGE.** Well hello.

**MARY.** Hello. You look at me as if you didn't know me.

**GEORGE.** Well, I don't.

**MARY.** You've passed me on the street almost every day.

**GEORGE.** Uh-uh. That was a little girl named Mary Hatch. That wasn't you.

**NARRATOR.** George's kid brother Harry—the one George saved from drowning? He grabs the microphone:

**HARRY.** Oyez oyez oyez! The big Charleston contest.

*(Charleston Music plays.)*

**GEORGE.** I'm not very good at this.

**MARY.** Neither am I!

**NARRATOR.** And that's just bull. They're good. They know it.

*(Starts dancing the Charleston.)*

While they're dancing up a storm, poor Freddie finds a cool way to get revenge on George for stealing Mary away.

See, Bedford Falls has maybe a population one thousand. Four churches, two restaurants and one black housekeeper—but they've got an Olympic-size swimming pool under the gym floor. How 'bout that? You hit a button, the floor splits open down the middle. And guess which button Freddie hits?

*(A blue strip of light appears on the floor behind NARRATOR, slowly widening as "they" dance.)*

George and Mary—they don't even notice the pool opening up behind them! They keep dancing closer and closer to the edge and the crowd's going crazy!

*(The crowd roars with excitement!)*

**GEORGE.** They're cheering us—we must be good!

**NARRATOR.** The pool keeps opening up, until—

*(The pool of blue light reaches his feet—and he tumbles backward on the floor. A big Splash!)*

**NARRATOR.** Then they all jump in. Everybody! All the kids in their tuxes and prom gowns—even the principal! It's like the swimming pool scene in "Rocky Horror," only...not.

George and Mary leave their wet clothes back at the gym and walk home in dry things they borrowed from the locker rooms. They're singing—so the punch must've been good.

**GEORGE.** *(Sings:)* "Buffalo gals, won't you come out tonight, won't you come out tonight, won't you come out tonight."

**NARRATOR.** George is wearing this too-tight jersey and too-big football pants.

**MARY.** *(Sings:)* "Buffalo gals, won't you come out tonight."

**NARRATOR.** Mary's only got a bathrobe on.

**GEORGE.** *(Sings:)* "And dance by the light of the moon."

**NARRATOR.** They find themselves in front of the empty old Granville house at 320 Sycamore, windows shining in the moonlight.

*(GEORGE picks up [an invisible] rock.)*

**GEORGE.** You see, you make a wish and then try and break some glass.

**NARRATOR.** No wonder nobody lives there anymore.

*(GEORGE starts to throw with one hand, stops himself with the other.)*

**MARY.** Oh, no, George, don't. It's full of romance, that old place. I'd like to live in it.

**GEORGE.** In that place? I wouldn't live in it as a ghost.

*(He throws. Sound of glass breaking.)*

**MARY.** What'd you wish, George?

**GEORGE.** Well, not just one wish. A whole hatful, Mary. I know what I'm going to do tomorrow and the next day and the next year and the year after that. I'm shaking the dust of this crummy little town off my feet and I'm going to see the world. Italy, Greece, the Parthenon, the Coliseum. Then I'm coming back here and go to college and see what they know...and then I'm going to build things. I'm gonna build air fields. I'm gonna build skyscrapers a hundred stories high. I'm gonna build bridges a mile long...

**NARRATOR.** Now it's Mary's turn:

*(MARY throws. Glass breaks.)*

**GEORGE.** Hey, that's pretty good. What'd you wish, Mary?

**MARY.** *(She slinks away, singing:)* "Buffalo Gals, won't you come out tonight..."

**GEORGE.** What is it you want, Mary? You want the moon? Just say the word and I'll throw a lasso around it and pull it down. Then you could swallow it and it'd all dissolve, see? And the moonbeams'd shoot out of your fingers and your toes, and the ends of your hair... Am I talking too much?

**MAN ON PORCH.** Yes!! Why don't you kiss her instead of talking her to death?

**NARRATOR.** That's the old guy sitting on his porch across the street. Mary's so embarrassed, she tries to run away—but George is standing on her bathrobe belt and—*whoops!* Robe's on the sidewalk, Mary's hiding naked in the bushes.

**GEORGE.** This is a very interesting situation... A man doesn't get in a situation like this every day.

**MARY.** *(Crouched behind the stool "bush.")* I'd like to have my robe.

**GEORGE.** Maybe I could sell tickets. Let's see. No, the point is, in order to get this robe... I've got it! I'll make a deal with you, Mary.

**NARRATOR.** Now, just when it's about to get interesting—or really weird—a car pulls up with Harry and Uncle Billy.

**UNCLE BILLY.** George! George! Come on home, quick! Your father's had a stroke!

**NARRATOR.** A fatal one. Mr. Bailey doesn't last the night.

George cancels his travel-the-world vacation to take care of his father's business for a few months. The day he's supposed to leave for college, the Building and Loan board of directors meet. Including evil, money-grubbing wheelchair spider Mr. Potter.

**POTTER.** I make a motion to dissolve this institution. Peter Bailey was not a business man. That's what killed him.

**GEORGE.** Now hold on, Mr. Potter. You're right when you say my father was no business man. Why he even started this cheap, penny-ante Building and Loan, I'll never know. Why, in the 25 years since he and Uncle Billy started this thing, he never once thought of himself. But he did help a few people get out of your slums, Mr. Potter. People were human beings to him, but to you—a warped, frustrated old man—they're cattle. Well, in my book he died a much richer man than you'll ever be!

**NARRATOR.** Well, that speech gets George exactly what he *doesn't* want: a vote-of-confidence from the other board members to take his father's job, running the business.

**GEORGE.** Now let's get this thing straight. I'm leaving. I'm leaving right now. I'm going to school. This is my last chance.

**NARRATOR.** Back up in heaven, old Clarence is getting the hang of things:

**CLARENCE.** (*Recorded:*) I know. I know. He didn't go.

**NARRATOR.** Instead, George gives his college fund to kid brother Harry. Figures when Harry's outta school *he'll* take over the business. But when he graduates, Harry surprises everybody by marrying this girl Ruth and taking a job working for *her* dad. And George is all, "Fu—" (*Pause.*) Um, "Fudge this stinkin' stuff." But in typical George Bailey fashion, he throws a big party for the newlyweds. Uncle Billy, for one, has an *excellent* time.

(*Bailey Boarding House.*)

**UNCLE BILLY.** (*Very drunk:*) Oh, boy, oh boy, oh boy. I feel so good I could spit in Potter's eye. I think I will. What did you say, huh? Oh, maybe I'd better go home.

(*He exits singing "My Wild Irish Rose." Sound of a Crash after he goes.*)

I'm all right! I'm all right!

**NARRATOR.** Ma Bailey finds George outside, facing the fact that he's still stuck in Bedford Falls.

**MRS. BAILEY.** Did you know that Mary Hatch is back from school? Nice girl, Mary. Kind that will help you find the answers, George. Can you give me one good reason why you shouldn't call on Mary?

**GEORGE.** Sure—Sam Wainwright. Sam's crazy about Mary.

**MRS. BAILEY.** Well, she's not crazy about him. And besides, Sam Wainwright's away in New York, and you're here in Bedford Falls.

**GEORGE.** And all's fair in love and war?

**MRS. BAILEY.** I don't know about war.

**NARRATOR.** George leaves, wandering around town, then drags his feet over to Mary's and paces up and down on the sidewalk till she leans out an upstairs window.

**MARY.** What are you doing, picketing?

**GEORGE.** Hello Mary. I just happened to be passing by.

**MARY.** Have you made up your mind? Your mother just phoned and said you were on your way over to pay me a visit.

**GEORGE.** I didn't tell anybody. I just went for a walk and happened to be passing by... I'll come in for a minute, but I didn't tell anybody I was coming over here...

**NARRATOR.** Mary runs downstairs and lets George in.

*(MARY smiles as GEORGE enters, but the smile fades due to his surliness.)*

**MARY.** Would you rather leave?

**GEORGE.** No, I don't want to be rude.

**MARY.** Well, then, sit down. *(Awkward pause.)* It was nice about your brother Harry and Ruth, wasn't it?... Don't you like her?

**GEORGE.** Well of course I like her. She's a peach.

**MARY.** Oh, it's just marriage in general you're not enthusiastic about, huh?

**NARRATOR.** Mary's mom is at the top of the stairs, snooping.

**MRS. HATCH.** Mary? Who's down there with you?

**MARY.** It's George Bailey, Mother.

**MRS. HATCH.** George Bailey? What's he want?

**MARY.** He's making violent love to me, mother.

**MRS. HATCH.** You tell him to go right back home. Sam Wainwright promised to call you from New York tonight.

(GEORGE *stands, insulted.*)

**GEORGE.** What's your mother mean? You know I didn't come here to, to, to...

**MARY.** What *did* you come here for? Oh, why *don't* you go home?

**GEORGE.** That's where I'm going. I don't know why I came here in the first place! Good night!

**NARRATOR.** But before he can leave—

(*The phone rings.*)

And Mary is all, "I'll show him." Typical.

**MARY.** (*Overdoing it:*) Hee-haw! Hello, Sam, how are you?

**SAM.** (*Recorded:*) Aw, great. Gee, it's good to hear your voice again.

**MARY.** Oh well, that's awfully sweet of you, Sam. An old friend of yours is here. George Bailey.

**SAM.** (*Recorded:*) You mean old moss-back George?

**MARY.** Yes, old "moss-back George."

**SAM.** (*Recorded:*) Hee-haw! Put him on!

**NARRATOR.** Sam wants to talk to both of them at the same time, so George and Mary have to share the receiver. For a Christmas story, this is pretty sexy.

**SAM.** (*Recorded:*) I have a big deal coming up that's going to make us all rich. George, you remember that night in Martini's bar when you told me you read someplace about making plastics out of soybeans?

**NARRATOR.** Sam yammers on. He can't see Mary and George, leaning closer and closer, cheek-to-cheek.

**SAM.** (*Recorded:*) Now listen, have you got any money?

**GEORGE.** Yeah, well...a little...

**NARRATOR.** They're breathing in unison now, their lips almost touching.

**SAM.** (*Recorded:*) Oh Mary... Mary?

**MARY.** I'm here...

**SAM.** Mary, would you tell that guy I'm giving him the chance of a lifetime?

**MARY.** (*Whispers:*) He says it's the chance of a lifetime.

**NARRATOR.** Then, George shows her how a tender marriage proposal is made in Bedford Falls:

**GEORGE.** (*Shaking her violently:*) Now you listen to me! I don't want any plastics! I don't want any ground floors, and I don't want to get married—ever—to anyone! You understand that? I want to do what I want to do. And you're...and you're...

(*Makes a big kissy-mouth face.*)

Oh Mary, Mary.

**NARRATOR.** Then they kiss.

**MARY.** George, George, George!

**NARRATOR.** One of those old-style Hollywood kisses. Where they mush their cheeks together but can't ever find each other's lips.

**GEORGE.** Mary...

(*"The Wedding March" plays. NARRATOR throws confetti from his pocket.*)

**NARRATOR.** The wedding day, there's a downpour—par for the course, right? Family and friends wave them off to their honeymoon, including Annie the Maid and Mother Bailey.

**MRS. BAILEY.** First Harry, now George. Annie, we're just two old maids now.

**ANNIE.** You speak for yourself, Mrs. B.

**NARRATOR.** Oh, that Annie! Like there are any *black* men in Bedford Falls!

(*He pulls a lever and a medallion for Ernie's Taxi Service pops out of the floor. He kneels behind it.*)

Ernie the cabbie drives the newlyweds toward the train station.

**ERNIE.** Where are you two going on this here now honeymoon?

(*GEORGE pulls out a thick wad of cash from an inner jacket pocket.*)

**GEORGE.** We're going to shoot the works. A whole week in New York. A whole week in Bermuda. The highest hotels, the oldest champagne, the richest caviar, the hottest music, and the prettiest wife!

**ERNIE.** *Rrrrrrow!* That does it!

**NARRATOR.** But when they look out the taxi window, the street is full of people. There's a run on the bank!

For you kids, a run on the bank has something to do with the Great Depression. Your parents will explain it later. Bottom line is, people want to get their money out *now*.

George rushes to the Building and Loan. Dozens of people are locked out on the sidewalk. George goes inside and finds Uncle Billy, hiding.

**UNCLE BILLY.** All I know is the bank called our loan. I had to hand over all our cash. Every cent of it.

**GEORGE.** Holy mackerel!

**NARRATOR.** And, like always, that evil, candy-from-a-baby-stealing Old Man Potter, tries to get rich off other people's bad luck.

*(POTTER in his chair, on the phone.)*

**POTTER.** George, there is a rumor around town that you've closed your doors. Do you need any police?

**GEORGE.** Police? What for?

**POTTER.** Mobs get pretty ugly sometimes, you know. George, I'm going all out to help in this crisis. I've just guaranteed the bank sufficient funds. I'm willing to guarantee your people, too. Just tell them to bring their shares over here and I will pay them 50 cents on the dollar.

**GEORGE.** Aw, you never miss a trick, do you, Potter? Well, you're going to miss this one.

**NARRATOR.** Potter was right about the mob, though. Everybody comes in wanting their money yesterday.

*(Sound of an Anxious Crowd.)*

**GEORGE.** No, but you...you're thinking of this all wrong. The money's not here. Your money's in Joe's house—right next to yours. And in the Kennedy house and Mrs. Macklin's house, and a hundred others.

**RANDALL.** Old man Potter'll pay fifty cents on the dollar for every share you got.

**NARRATOR.** And the crowd goes:

**CROWD.** Fifty cents on the dollar!/ Fifty cents on the dollar!/ Fifty cents on the dollar!

**GEORGE.** Now listen to me. If Potter gets hold of this building and loan there'll never be another decent house built in this town. He wants to keep you living in his slums and paying the kind of rent he decides. Potter isn't selling. Potter's buying! Now, we can get through this thing all right. We've got to stick together, though. We have to have faith in each other.

*(Crowd Members:)*

**MAN.** Can't feed my kids on faith.

**WOMAN.** But my husband hasn't worked in over a year.

**ANOTHER MAN.** I got doctor bills to pay.

**NARRATOR.** Then Mary, like Lady Liberty, holds up the 2000 dollars for their honeymoon.

**MARY.** How much do you need?

**NARRATOR.** The customers all line up. Two-hundred forty here, 80 dollars there. The less the better. Then up comes little Grandma Walton herself.

**MRS. DAVIS.** Could I have seventeen-fifty?

**NARRATOR.** George gives her a big ol' kiss. She turns the tide! If this little old lady can get by on 17.50, everybody else figures they can manage, too. They make it to six o'clock; they're still in business! So, after an exhausting day of fending off financial ruin, missing the train *and* his honeymoon, George gets a call from Mary to come home.

**GEORGE.** What home? Three-twenty Sycamore? Whose home is that?... The Waldorf Hotel, huh?

*(Sound of rain falling. NARRATOR moves to the Sycamore Stairs.)*

**NARRATOR.** Only, it's that old empty house. Bert the Cop and Ernie the cabbie are taping travel posters over the windows George and Mary helped break. There's a sign on the front door: "Bridal Suite." Ernie pretends to be a bellhop.

**ERNIE.** Hiya, George—uh... Entray, monsoor, entray.

*("Song of the Islands" plays.)*

**NARRATOR.** Inside, Mary's waiting.

**MARY.** Welcome home, Mr. Bailey. Remember the night we broke windows in this old house? This is what I wished for.

**NARRATOR.** The house, it's still a wreck. Rain through the ceiling. But Mary's been busy. Over here she's pushed packing boxes together to make a dinner table. There's a cord attached to the record player spindle, so every time the record spins, two chickens turn on a rotisserie in the fireplace. She's hung up a picture of George lassoing the moon. Oh, and there's a Jacuzzi in the back yard, the granite-topped kitchen island is almost finished, and there's a plasma TV just waiting to be hung in the den... OK, maybe not. But she's been busy. You gotta admit, it's kind of romantic. And over there through *that* door: *(In a semi-GEORGE voice here:)* there's a, there's a, there's a *bed*.

*(He gawks/double takes.)*

It's better than any honeymoon in Paris. Outside in the rain, Bert and Ernie sing:

**BERT / ERNIE.** *(Sings:)* "I love you truly," etc.

**NARRATOR.** Inside, George and Mary—cover your eyes, little children—they kiss. A real kiss! Lips and everything! And out in the rain Ernie gives Bert a smack.

*(A kiss.)*

And Bert gives him one back.

*(A smack of the hand.)*

Because Bedford Falls doesn't cotton to that kind of behavior.

A couple of years pass, and George gets a visit from an old friend.

**SAM.** Hee-haw!

**NARRATOR.** Yeah, him again. Sam Wainwright. Driving this giant car and married to a trophy wife caked in jewels.

**SAM.** We just stopped in town to take a look at the new factory, and then we're going to drive on down to Florida. Jane, I offered to let George in on the ground floor in plastics, and he turned me down cold.

**GEORGE.** Oh, now, don't rub it in.

**NARRATOR.** It's not just the money George missed out on. He still hasn't made it to Tahiti or Paris. Florida's a foreign country, too. That big old suitcase Mr. Gower bought him? It's never left Bedford Falls.

Even though George never wanted to run the Building and Loan, he helps a lot of people out. He opens Bailey Park, where folks can ditch Potter as a landlord and buy their *own* homes. Folks like Mr. Martini, the nice immigrant fellow who owns the bar called, uh, Martini's.

**MARTINI.** No more we live like pigs in this a Potter's Field!... Oh thank you, Mr. Bailey.

**NARRATOR.** Mr. Martini is like Annie the maid: One of the cherished Amusing Ethnic Stereotypes allowed to live in Bedford Falls...

Now, evil, toad-face-toilet-breath Mr. Potter doesn't much care for George's work.

**POTTER.** The Bailey family has been a boil on my neck long enough...

**NARRATOR.** *Eeeeeew!* The old booger-eating bastard comes up with a strategy to lure George to the selfish side of the street. Invites him to his office, and tries to hook him on devil tobacco—even lights the cigar himself.

*(Potter's Office.)*

**POTTER.** You like it? I'll send you a box.

**NARRATOR.** Think of this scene as "The Last Temptation of George." No, wait. Next-to-last.

**POTTER.** George, I'm an old man and most people hate me. But I don't like them either, so that makes it all even. You know just as well as I do that I run practically everything in this town but the Bailey Building and Loan. You know also that for a number of years I've been trying to get control of it...or kill it. You have beaten me, George. You saved the Building and Loan, and I saved all the rest.

**GEORGE.** Yes. Well, most people say you stole all the rest.

**POTTER.** The envious ones say that, George, the suckers. Now, let's look at your side. Young man, 27, 28, married, making, say, 40 a week.

**GEORGE.** Forty-five!

**POTTER.** Out of which, after supporting your mother and paying your bills, you're able to keep, say, 10 if you skimp. A child or two comes along and you won't even be able to save the 10. Now, if this young man was a common, ordinary yokel, I'd say he was doing fine. But George Bailey is an intelligent, smart, ambitious young man who hates the Building and Loan almost as much as I do. A young man who's been dying to get out on his own ever since he was born.

**GEORGE.** Now what's your point, Mr. Potter?

**POTTER.** My point? My point is, I want to hire you.

**GEORGE.** Hire me?

**POTTER.** You wouldn't mind living in the nicest house in town, buying your wife a lot of fine clothes, a couple of business trips to New York a year, maybe once in a while Europe. You wouldn't mind that, would you, George?

**GEORGE.** Would I! You know, this is me, you remember me? George Bailey...

**POTTER.** Oh, confound it, man, are you afraid of success?

**GEORGE.** Well, Mr. Potter, I...I...I wonder if it would be possible for you to give me 24 hours to think it over?

**POTTER.** Sure, sure, sure. You go on home and talk about it to your wife. OK, George?

**GEORGE.** OK, Mr. Potter...

*(He stands up, reaches out and shakes POTTER's hand—only to look down at their clasped hand as if they were vipers.)*

No...no...no...no, now wait a minute here! I know right now and the answer is no! NO! Doggone it! You sit around here and you spin your little webs and you think the whole world revolves around you and your money. Well, it doesn't, Mr. Potter! In the whole vast configuration of things, I'd say you were nothing but a scurvy little spider.

*(Dejected, GEORGE heads home and climbs the Sycamore Stairs.)*

**GEORGE.** Mary Hatch, why in the world would you ever marry a guy like me? You could have married Sam Wainwright or anybody else in town.

**MARY.** I didn't want to marry anybody else in town. I want my baby to look like you.

**GEORGE.** You didn't even have a honeymoon... Your what? You mean... Mary, you on the nest?

**MARY.** George Bailey lassoes stork.

**GEORGE.** Lassoes the stork! You mean you... What is it, a boy or a girl?

**MARY.** Mmm-hmmm!

**JOSEPH.** *(Recorded:)* Now, you've probably already guessed that George never leaves Bedford Falls.

**CLARENCE.** *(Recorded:)* No!

**NARRATOR.** You forgot about those angels, too, huh? But it's true. George is stuck there. First comes a baby boy—*waaaah*—, then a baby girl—*waaaaah*—then another one of each—*waaaah, waah!*

*(Walks down the Sycamore Stairs.)*

Mary turns the old Granville house into a home, but—

*(The knob comes off in his hand.)*

It's a big project. And, yeah, expensive. Plus, there's four new mouths to feed... George works harder than ever.

*(Montage of War Sounds.)*

**NARRATOR.** World War II begins. George can't even leave Bedford Falls for *that*. His bad ear. He's stuck at home while Bert the cop earns a Silver Star, fighting in Africa. Ernie the cabbie parachutes into France. Sam Wainwright piles up another fortune manufacturing war supplies. *Potter* heads up the draft board. And George's kid brother Harry shoots down 15 enemy planes, keeps them from sinking a transport full of soldiers and earns the Congressional Medal of Honor and is flown to Washington, D.C. for the ceremony.

It's a busy, very happy Christmas Eve for the Baileys. At first.

*(A phone rings.)*

Long-distance from Washington!

**GEORGE.** *(Answering phone:)* Harry! Oh, you old seven kinds of a son of a gun. Congratulations! How's mother standing it? She did?... Mother had lunch with the president's wife... What? Uncle Billy? ... Has Uncle Billy come in yet?

**NARRATOR.** No, Uncle Billy's at the bank to deposit eight thousand, cash, into the Bailey account.

*(Holds up an envelope of cash.)*

Right on time, too, 'cause the bank examiner's coming to the Building and Loan to check the books. Yeah, Christmas Eve, go figure!

When *Potter* comes wheeling into the bank reading the newspaper. And of course Billy's gotta gloat. Grabs that paper out of *Potter*'s hand and shakes open the headlines.

*(Takes the newspaper out of Potter's chair, opens it and reads.)*

**UNCLE BILLY.** Well well well, Harry Bailey wins Congressional Medal. That couldn't be one of the Bailey boys? You can't keep those Baileys down, now can you, Mr. *Potter*?

*(For emphasis, he swats his other hand in the middle of the paper—the hand holding the cash envelope. He folds it inside the paper and drops it back in the chair. Then walks to the teller window.)*

**NARRATOR.** Wow, what a great moment for Uncle Billy. He's still smiling when he goes to the teller window.

**UNCLE BILLY.** *(Searching pockets:)* I know I had...

**NARRATOR.** Yeah, a great moment... Except for the part where he absent-mindedly folded that \$8000 into *Potter*'s newspaper.

*(Returns to the chair, sits and becomes POTTER.)*

**POTTER.** *(Fuming:)* Bailey... *(Then he unfolds the paper...)*

**NARRATOR.** And wouldn't you know it. Potter *finds* the money. And immediately calls the Bailey residence to let George know. The end.

*(Pause.)*

You didn't fall for that, right? No, he *keeps* it. Yes, kids: those bullies who shake you down for your lunch money, they're gonna be CEO's someday.

Back at the Building and Loan, Violet shows up.

*(Building & Loan.)*

**VIOLET.** George, can I see you for a second?

**NARRATOR.** She's moving to New York. Well, bad girl, small town—not the best combo. But George writes her a character reference.

**VIOLET.** Character? If I had any character, I'd...

**GEORGE.** It takes a lot of character to leave your hometown and start all over again...

**NARRATOR.** He starts to give her some money—and man, did you notice how much this story's about money? ...Discuss.

**VIOLET.** No, George, don't.

**GEORGE.** Here, now, you're broke, aren't you? What do you want to do, hock your furs, and that hat? They charge for meals and rent up there just the same as they do in Bedford Falls.

**VIOLET.** I'm glad I know you, George Bailey.

**NARRATOR.** Yeah, well, who wouldn't, Violet? Always handing out money he doesn't have to whoever—I mean, come on, he's a nice guy, but sometimes don't you want to just shake him? But finally, something *does*. Uncle Billy tells him he lost the \$8000.

**GEORGE.** Now look, did you buy anything?

**UNCLE BILLY.** Nothing. Not even a stick of gum.

**NARRATOR.** They look everywhere. Turn everything upside-down. The office. Uncle Billy's house. Nothing. But hey, it's Christmas Eve and Uncle Billy's family. George cuts him some slack.

**GEORGE.** *(Shaking BILLY:)* Where's that money, you stupid, silly old fool? Where's the money? Do you realize what this means? It means bankruptcy and scandal, and prison. That's what it means! One of us is going to jail! Well, it's not going to be me!

**NARRATOR.** It's Christmas Eve. It's the worst day of George Bailey's life. But at least he's home now.

*(A shaky piano rendition of "Hark the Herald Angels Sing" starts and stops, over and over, and GEORGE enters his house immediately besieged by the kids, JANIE, PETE, and little TOMMY.)*

**CHILDREN.** Hello daddy hello daddy!!!

**PETE.** Daddy, did you bring the Christmas wreath?

**GEORGE.** What? What wreath?... Must she keep playing that?

**JANIE.** I have to practice for the party tonight, Daddy.

**PETE.** Mommy says we can stay up till midnight and sing Christmas carols.

**TOMMY.** *(Tugging the air above him: His dad's pants leg:)* Excuse me... excuse me.

**GEORGE.** Excuse you for what?!

**TOMMY.** I burped!

**NARRATOR.** Mary tells George that little Zuzu is upstairs with a cold.

**MARY.** Caught it coming home from school. They gave her a flower for a prize and she didn't want to crush it so she didn't button her coat.

**GEORGE.** Gosh, I don't know why we don't all have pneumonia. This drafty old barn! Why did we have to live here in the first place and stay around this measly, crummy old town?

**MARY.** George, what's wrong?

**GEORGE.** Wrong? Everything's wrong! You call this a happy family? Why did we have to have all these kids?

*(Piano music stops. GEORGE climbs the stairs. The knob comes off in his hand. He almost throws it. The Zuzu scene is played at top of stairs.)*

**NARRATOR.** Zuzu's upstairs in bed.

**GEORGE.** Well, what happened to you?

**ZUZU.** I won a flower.

**GEORGE.** All right, all right. Here, give daddy the flower. I'll give it a drink.

**NARRATOR.** Some petals fall off.

**ZUZU.** Look, daddy...paste it.

**GEORGE.** Yeah, all right. Now I'll paste this together.

**NARRATOR.** He sneaks the loose petals into his pocket.

**GEORGE.** There it is, good as new. Now will you try to get some sleep? Then you can dream about it, and it'll be a whole garden.

**ZUZU.** It *will*?

*(GEORGE goes downstairs. The piano starts again. Telephone rings. And it's perfectly all right if the phone has been left behind in Potter's office, because the NARRATOR can go fetch it, return it to the Bailey home, then "discover" it and pick it up as MARY.)*

**MARY.** Hello. Oh, thank you, Mrs. Welch. I'm sure she'll be all right.

**GEORGE.** Is that Zuzu's teacher? *(Grabs the phone from her.)* Hello, Mrs. Welch? Say, what kind of a teacher are you, anyway? What do you mean sending her home like that, half naked? Is that the sort of thing we pay taxes for—to have teachers like you? Silly, stupid, careless people who send our kids home without any clothes on?...

*(MR. WELCH comes on the line. We hear his angry, buzzing words: pre-recorded.)*

Hello? Oh, Mr. Welch! Gives me a chance to tell you what I really think of your wife. Oh, you will, huh? OK, Mr. Welch, any time you think you're man enough. Hello?...

**PETE.** Daddy, how do you spell hallelujah?

**GEORGE.** How should I know? What do you think I am, a dictionary? Janie, haven't you learned that silly tune yet? Now stop it! Stop it!

*(Piano music stops. JANIE sobs.)*

**JANIE.** Oh, daddy...

**MARY.** George, why must you torture the children? Why don't you...

**NARRATOR.** Mary doesn't finish her sentence. And George can't begin to tell her what's wrong.

**GEORGE.** Mary...

**NARRATOR.** George staggers out into the night...

**PETE.** Is daddy in trouble?

**MARY.** Yes Pete.

**JANIE.** Shall I pray for him?

**MARY.** Yes, Janie, pray very hard... You too, Tommy.

**NARRATOR.** It's cold outside and snowing hard. Not a night to be out in. Especially when George has to do what he's spent his whole life avoiding. He crawls to Potter.

*(Potter's office.)*

**GEORGE.** I'm in trouble, Mr. Potter. I need help. I've got to raise eight thousand dollars immediately. Please help me, Mr. Potter. Help me, won't you please? Can't you see what it means to my family?

**POTTER.** George, could it possibly be there's a slight discrepancy in the books? What've you been doing, George? Playing the market with the company's money? It's all over town that you've been giving money to Violet Bick.

**GEORGE.** What!?

**POTTER.** Why don't you go to Sam Wainwright and ask him for the money.

**GEORGE.** I can't get hold of him. He's in Europe.

**POTTER.** I see. I've suddenly become quite important. What kind of security would I have George?

**GEORGE.** I have some life insurance, a fifteen thousand dollar policy.

**POTTER.** Look at you. You used to be so cocky! You once called me a warped, frustrated old man. What are you but a warped, frustrated young man, crawling in here on your hands and knees and begging for help. You're worth more dead than alive. But I'll tell you what I'm going to do for you, George. As a stockholder of the Building and Loan, I'm going to swear out a warrant for your arrest. Misappropriation of funds, manipulation, malfeasance— You can't hide in a little town like this.

**NARRATOR.** George leaves before Potter can pick up the phone.

*(Martini's bar. The Martini's neon sign flashes on.)*

**MARTINI.** Merry Christmas! Glad you come. We got everything.

**NARRATOR.** Yeah, everything—but nothing that can help George tonight.

**GEORGE.** God... God... Dear Father in Heaven, I'm not a praying man, but if you're up there and you can hear me, show me the way. I'm at the end of my rope. Show me the way, God.

**NARRATOR.** Nick the bartender? He's never seen George like this. And, and...*none* of us have.

**NICK.** Are you all right, George? Want someone to take you home?

**MARTINI.** Why you drink so much, my friend? Please go home, Mr. Bailey.

**NARRATOR.** The guy on the barstool beside him hears that.

**MR. WELCH.** Bailey? Which Bailey?

**NARRATOR.** Mr. Welch, the schoolteacher's husband.

*(MR. WELCH jumps up and throws a punch, then stands over GEORGE, whom he's knocked on the floor.)*

**MR. WELCH.** And the next time you talk to my wife like that you'll get worse. She cried for an hour. It isn't enough she slaves teaching your stupid kids how to read and write, and you have to bawl her out—

**MARTINI.** You get out of here, Mr. Welch! You hit my best friend. Get out!

**NARRATOR.** George is way past caring, except for--

**GEORGE.** *(On the floor, checking his inner jacket pocket:)* Where's my insurance policy? Oh, here.

**NARRATOR.** George stumbles out of Martini's and heads to the river.

*(Snow falls and the bridge flies in. NARRATOR takes his place on it, hands on the railing.)*

**NARRATOR.** No traffic on the bridge. Christmas Eve. Everybody's at home with their families. *Not* worrying about money. *Not* worrying about their lives being wasted. George is more alone than he's ever been. Life insurance in his pocket, for the ones he loves. He looks down at the black water rushing toward the rocky falls that give the town its name.

This isn't about Christmas. It's about all the *other* days of the year, even the bad ones, and all the rough things we go through, trying to get to the next good day.

But George... Here's the gift he's ready to throw away—life. His knuckles, white on the railing. Filling his lungs with one last breath. He's just about to—wait!

*(He looks up.)*

This guy out of thin air, literally!

*(He watches the trajectory of the man falling into the river. Sound of a Splash!)*

**CLARENCE.** *(Recorded:)* Help! Help!

**NARRATOR.** *(Pulling off his jacket:)* George forgets his own troubles—

**CLARENCE.** *(Recorded:)* Help! Help!

**NARRATOR.** Jumps in the river to save this stranger--

*(The bridge flies out above him as he “jumps” in. Another Splash!*  
 NARRATOR “swims” with one arm, the other around CLARENCE.)

**NARRATOR.** Like he did with his kid brother Harry, George swims the stranger safely to shore. He takes him inside the bridge toll house so they can dry out by the stove.

The stranger’s name is—you know this, right? Clarence. This pudgy, baby-faced, white-haired fellow. Wearing this ridiculous nightshirt with a frilly lace collar.

**CLARENCE.** My wife gave me this on my last birthday. I passed away in it. Oh, “Tom Sawyer”’s drying out, too. You should read the new book Mark Twain’s writing now.

**NARRATOR.** He chatters on, all casual—not like a guy who just fell in a river.

**CLARENCE.** I didn’t fall in. I jumped in... I knew if I were drowning you’d try to save me. And you see, you did. Your lip’s bleeding, George.

**GEORGE.** Yeah, I got a bust in the jaw in answer to a prayer a little bit ago.

**CLARENCE.** No, George—I’m the answer to your prayer. That’s why I was sent down here. Clarence Oddbody, A-S-2. Angel Second Class. I’m your guardian angel.

**GEORGE.** Well, you look about like the kind of an angel I’d get. Sort of a fallen angel, aren’t you? What happened to your wings?

**CLARENCE.** I haven’t won my wings yet. That’s why I’m an Angel Second Class. I’ve got to earn them, and you’ll help me, won’t you?

**GEORGE.** You don’t happen to have eight thousand bucks on you?

**CLARENCE.** Oh, no no. We don’t use money in Heaven.

**GEORGE.** Comes in pretty handy down here, bub.

**CLARENCE.** Oh, *tut tut tut.*

**GEORGE.** I’m worth more dead than alive. Look, little fellow, go off and haunt somebody else, will you? I wish I’d never been born at all.

**CLARENCE.** *(Looking up:)* Wait a minute. That’s an idea. What do you think? Yeah, that’ll do it...

You’ve got your wish. You’ve never been born.

*(The wind rises. The snow stops falling.)*

You've never been born. You don't exist. You haven't a care in the world.

**GEORGE.** (*Reacts, surprised.*) Say something else in that ear.

**CLARENCE.** Sure, you can hear out of it. Your lip's stopped bleeding, too, George.

**GEORGE.** What do you know about that. What's happening here? What I need is a couple of good stiff drinks. Now come on, Gabriel, we'll stroll up to— Oh, I'm sorry. I'll stroll, you fly.

**CLARENCE.** I can't fly. I haven't got my wings.

**NARRATOR.** They go back to Martini's...but everything's...different. Starting with:

*(The sign "NICK'S" lights up where "MARTINI'S" previously was. Ambient Bar Sounds and lewd, jazzy music.)*

There's ol' Nick the bartender.

**GEORGE.** Hey Nick, where's Martini. Your boss. Where is he?

**NICK.** Look, I'm the boss. You want a drink or don't you?

**GEORGE.** OK—double bourbon, quick, huh? What about you, little fella?

**CLARENCE.** I was just thinking of a flaming rum punch. No, it's not cold enough for that, not nearly cold enough. Wait a minute, I got it. Mulled wine, heavy on the cinnamon and light on the cloves. Off with you, me lad, and be lively.

**NICK.** Look mister. We serve hard drinks in here for men who want to get drunk fast. And we don't need any characters around to give the joint atmosphere. Is that clear? Or do I have to slip you my left for a convincer?

**GEORGE.** What's the matter with him? I never saw Nick act like that before.

**CLARENCE.** You'll see a lot of strange things from now on.

**NARRATOR.** Just then, Nick rings up a shot of rotgut at the register.

*(Cash register bell rings.)*

**CLARENCE.** Oh, oh! Somebody's just made it. Every time you hear a bell ring, it means that some angel's just got his wings.

**NICK.** That does it! Out you two pixies go, through the door or out the window!

**GEORGE.** Look, Nick, what's wrong?

**NICK.** And that's another thing. Where do you come off calling me Nick? I don't know you from Adam's off ox.

**NARRATOR.** I don't know what that means, either. The door opens and a bum wanders in.

**NICK.** Hey you! Rummy! Come here! Didn't I tell you never to come panhandling around here?

**NARRATOR.** It's old Mr. Gower, the pharmacist. Looks like a patch of bad road. Nick grabs a bottle of seltzer and—

*(NICK sprays the mimed seltzer bottle across the stage—and NARRATOR follows its trajectory to become the target, GOWER, soaked and sputtering.)*

*(The Bar Patrons laugh.)*

**NARRATOR.** Totally soaks the old guy.

**GEORGE.** Mr. Gower, Mr. Gower, it's me, George Bailey. Don't you know me?

**GOWER.** No...no...

**GEORGE.** Hey Nick, Nick. Isn't that Mr. Gower, the druggist?

**NICK.** You know, that's another reason for me not to like you. That rumhead spent 20 years in jail for poisoning a kid. If you know him, you must be a jailbird yourself. Would you show these two gentlemen to the door?

**NARRATOR.** And out they go, George and Clarence, tossed face-down in the snow.

*(He hits the floor as if booted out.)*

**CLARENCE.** You see, George, you were not there to stop Gower from putting that poison into the--

**GEORGE.** What the—hey, what's going on around here.

**CLARENCE.** Don't you understand, George. It's because you were not born. There is no George Bailey. You have no papers, no cards, no driver's license—

*(GEORGE searches his pockets.)*

They're not there, either: Zuzu's petals. You've been given a great gift, George. A chance to see what the world would be like without you.

**GEORGE.** Now shut up! Cut it out. You're, you're, you're crazy! You're screwy and you're driving me crazy, too! I'm going home and see my wife and family. And I'm going home alone!

**NARRATOR.** And off he goes, on foot. But the Bedford Falls he knows is gone.

*(A garish Pottersville sign lights up where the modest one for Bedford Falls once was. Neon lights. Rowdy sounds of crowds, cars, music.)*

**GEORGE.** "Pottersville!?"

**NARRATOR.** Neon signs, gin joints, gambling dens—there's even jazz. Where the Building and Loan used to be it's a jitterbug club. On the curb outside, police are shoving Violet Bick into a paddy wagon.

**VIOLET.** *(Drunk and spitting:)* That sailor's a liar! I know every big shot in this town! I know Potter, and I'll have you kicked off the beat!

*(GEORGE, startled and disoriented, flags down—and pulls up—the cab sign.)*

**GEORGE.** Ernie, take me home. I'm off my nut.

**ERNIE.** Where do you live?

**GEORGE.** 320 Sycamore.

**ERNIE.** *(Skeptical:)* 320 Sycamore?

**GEORGE.** Doggone it, Ernie, don't *you* start pulling that stuff. Look here, Ernie, straighten me out here. I've got some bad liquor or something. Now, you are Ernie Bishop and you live in Bailey Park with your wife and kid?

**ERNIE.** Look, bud... I live in a shack in Potter's Field and my wife ran away three years ago and took the kid. And I ain't never seen you before in my life... Is this the place? This house ain't been lived in for 20 years.

*(The Sycamore Staircase, dark, ghostly.)*

**NARRATOR.** He's right. It sure looks that way.

**GEORGE.** *(Running up the stairs:)* Mary! Mary! Tommy! Pete! Janie! Zuzu!

**CLARENCE.** *(Reappearing at the top of the stairs:)* They're not here, George. You have no children.

**NARRATOR.** George runs back to his childhood home, where a sign on the door reads Ma Bailey's Boarding House. A bitter old hag opens the door.

*(Bailey Boarding House.)*

**GEORGE.** Mother...

**MA BAILEY.** “Mother?” What do you want? If you’re looking for a room there’s no vacancy.

I don’t take in strangers unless they’re sent here by somebody I know.

**GEORGE.** Well, I know everybody you know. Your brother-in-law, Uncle Billy.

**MA BAILEY.** That’s a lie! He’s been in the insane asylum ever since he lost his business. And if you ask me, that’s where you belong.

*(The door slams. GEORGE staggers back. CLARENCE is there again.)*

**CLARENCE.** Strange, isn’t it? Each man’s life touches so many other lives, and when he isn’t around he leaves an awful hole, doesn’t he?

**GEORGE.** You’ve got me in some kind of a spell, or something. Well, I’m going to get out of it. I know how, too. The last man I talked to before all this stuff started happening to me was Martini. He lives in Bailey Park.

*(GEORGE runs briefly through the garishness of Pottersville until he reaches a cold, dark space in which a tombstone has risen. He stops, startled.)*

**GEORGE.** Where are the houses?

**CLARENCE.** You weren’t here to build them.

**NARRATOR.** It’s true. Instead of a place where people live their lives, now it’s where they end them.

*(GEORGE approaches the tombstone...)*

**GEORGE.** Harry. Harry.

**CLARENCE.** Your brother, Harry Bailey, broke through the ice and was drowned at the age of nine.

**GEORGE.** That’s a lie! Harry Bailey went to war! He got the Congressional Medal of Honor! He saved the lives of every man on that transport.

**CLARENCE.** Every man on that transport died. Harry wasn’t there to save them because you weren’t there to save Harry. You see, George, you really had a wonderful life.

**GEORGE.** Clarence... Where’s Mary? I don’t know how you know these things, but tell me—where is she?

**CLARENCE.** You’re not going to like it, George. She’s an old maid.

**GEORGE.** Where’s my wife?

**CLARENCE.** She’s just about to close up—the library!

**THIS PLAY IS  
NOT OVER!**

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