

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!

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*(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.

HARRY. This'll be the last chance we get.

MOTHER BAILEY. Oh ... all right.

HARRY. Yahoo! Mother ... (*He kisses her.*) you're a peach! George ... (*He moves toward GEORGE, who backs off, with his hands up for protection against a possible kiss.*) Right. Sorry.

*(He leaves quickly with the box of dishes.)*

MOTHER BAILEY. He's going to miss you.

GEORGE. I'm going to miss him.

MOTHER BAILEY. Your father will miss you at the Building and Loan.

GEORGE. Yeeeah. Pop was awful tired tonight.

MOTHER BAILEY. Oh ... another tussle with Mr. Potter. Biggest one yet, I think.

GEORGE. I worry about Pop.

MOTHER BAILEY *(with a sigh)*. Your father thought that putting Mr. Potter on the board of directors would get him on our side a little bit.

GEORGE. Didn't happen that way.

MOTHER BAILEY. No. No, it didn't.

GEORGE. Potter! What do you suppose is eating that old buzzard, anyway?

MOTHER BAILEY. Oh, he's sick, George ... sick in his mind, sick in his soul.

GEORGE. If he has one.

MOTHER BAILEY. He hates everybody and anything he can't have.

GEORGE. Hates Pop mostly.

MOTHER BAILEY. Have you thought about coming back after graduation?

*(HARRY enters quickly. Stops to listen.)*

GEORGE. I couldn't, Mother. I'd ... I'd go crazy cooped up for the rest of my life in some shabby little office! I want to do something big ... something important.

MOTHER BAILEY *(quietly)*. You know, George, in his own small way your father's doing something important, too. People want a place to call their own ... and he helps them get that in his "shabby little office."

GEORGE. Aw ... I didn't mean it that way. I just ... I've always dreamed about ...

MOTHER BAILEY. Designing buildings.

GEORGE. Yeah ... designing buildings ... big, beautiful buildings ... and ... and planning modern cities ... and figuring out new ways to build things ...

HARRY. Like that floor you designed over at the school!

GEORGE. Yeah, like that. That's what I mean, Mother!

HARRY. Oh, it's a doozy! Gymnasium floor opens right up the middle. Have you seen it, Mother?

MOTHER BAILEY. I went to the ribbon cutting.

HARRY. Opens right up ... slick as a whistle ... *(He demonstrates, moving his hands apart, making heavy machinery sounds.)* moves over ... swimming pool underneath.

MOTHER BAILEY. Saved the school board a lot of money we might have spent on another building.

GEORGE. Y'see, Mother? That's what I can do! I know how! I've read every book the library's got on engineering and architecture!

HARRY. You've got the talent, George!

GEORGE. But I need the training ... and I need the diploma ... so people will listen to me! Mother, I got so many ideas I wanna try! So many things I wanna do! I just gotta get out in the world!

MOTHER BAILEY. I understand, George. I do. Harry, you go get your tie and coat—

GEORGE. *My* tie and coat.

MOTHER BAILEY. George's tie and coat, and I'll get you those car keys.

HARRY *(runs to exit into the house. Turns at the porch)*. You comin' to the dance, George?

GEORGE. What? And be bored to death?

HARRY. Great way to die! Lots of pretty girls! Violet Bick said she'd be there!

GEORGE. Hm. Yeah.

MOTHER BAILEY. No gin tonight, son.

HARRY. Aw, Mother! Just a little!

MOTHER BAILEY. No, not one drop.

HARRY. Aaaaaw!

*(He exits into house.)*

GEORGE. Did I act like that when I graduated from high school?

MOTHER BAILEY. Almost exactly. George, I'd appreciate it if you didn't let your father know we had this conversation.

GEORGE. I won't.

MOTHER BAILEY. He wants you to get that education and follow those dreams of yours.

GEORGE. Pop's a great guy.

MOTHER BAILEY. Yes he is.

GEORGE *(hugs her)*. You're a great gal.

MOTHER BAILEY. Well, you're pretty great yourself ... now go on, get dressed. Go to Harry's party.

GEORGE. Think I will. *(HARRY enters with a tie hanging loose around his neck.)* Can't wear my tuxedo, though. It has a previous engagement. *(He kisses her on the cheek and exits into the house.)*

HARRY. Mother, can you help me with this tie?

MOTHER BAILEY. Certainly. Come here. *(She ties HARRY's tie as thy talk, and he dances in place, full of life.)* You should learn how to do this.

HARRY. Why should I, if I can get you to do it for me?

MOTHER BAILEY. I won't be able to tie your ties forever, you know.

HARRY. Well, sure, but ... Say, are you crying?

MOTHER BAILEY. What would I be crying about?

HARRY. I dunno ... I just thought ...

MOTHER BAILEY. Don't be silly. Chin up. *(She pushes his chin up, tightens his tie and smoothes his collar.)* Now, go get your coat. I'll find those car keys.

HARRY. Right!

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*(HARRY hurries into the house. MOTHER BAILEY turns away, takes out her handkerchief and wipes her eyes. She straightens her shoulders and exits into the house. CLARENCE steps into the light on the porch.)*

CLARENCE. I thought you said George Bailey needs my help.

JOSEPH. He does.

CLARENCE. You said he was going to throw away God's greatest gift.

JOSEPH. He will. Unless you stop him.

CLARENCE. But why? He has everything to live for!

JOSEPH. You're too impatient, Clarence.

CLARENCE *(coming downstage, his light goes with him. The rest of the stage is dark)*. I really want my wings, Joseph.

JOSEPH. I know.

CLARENCE. Are you sure we have the right George Bailey?

JOSEPH. I'm sure.

CLARENCE. Maybe the boss made a mistake.