

GEORGE. What's this? Looks like dinner for two. Fireplace. Music. Champagne. Well, well, Ernie, you've really ... *(Turns.)* Ernie? Where'd you go? Ernie?

MARY *(entering from L and stepping into the light, just R of the table)*. I just gave the servants the night off.

GEORGE *(turns. Reverently)*. Mary. *(Moving to her.)* Mary ... where did you ...

(He puts his hands gently on her waist. She puts her arms around his neck, and they embrace and kiss. All lights, save for a special on GEORGE and MARY and a dim special UL on BERT and ERNIE, as they begin to sing in harmony. After the first line, the singing fades in volume but remains under GEORGE and MARY's dialogue.)

BERT & ERNIE. I love you truly, truly dear,
Life with its sorrow, life with its tear
Fades into dreams when I feel you are near
For I love you truly, truly dear.

GEORGE. Oh, Mary ...

MARY. George, do you remember the night we broke the windows in this old house?

GEORGE. Yes I do ... and you made a wish.

MARY. This is what I wished for, George ... you and me ... here ... in our house.

GEORGE. Our house? Our ... Oh, Mary ...

MARY. Welcome home, Mr. Bailey.

(BERT and ERNIE finish singing. Their light fades quickly to black, leaving GEORGE and MARY in a single, tight pool of light. Set pieces move off. An instrumental of "I Love You Truly" swells up and fades as they kiss. Their light dims to black, and they exit.)

(Lights come up on POTTER, sitting behind a desk just in, RC. A guest chair faces the desk. REINEMAN, his rent collector, stands near the desk. A buzzer sounds, prompting POTTER to punch a button on the intercom.)

POTTER. Yes, what is it?

SECRETARY. Congressman Blatz is still waiting to see you, Mr. Potter.

POTTER. Tell him to continue waiting.

SECRETARY. Yes, sir.

POTTER. Now, go on, Reineman. What were you saying?

REINEMAN *(moving downstage, peering out through a downstage "window")*. Say, nice window on Main Street you've got here. *(Turning in profile, straining to see far R.)* Can you see Bailey Building and Loan from here? Hmmm. No. Almost, though. Maybe if you had a bay window ...

POTTER. Get to the point, Reineman!

REINEMAN *(moving back upstage)*. No skin off my nose, Mr. Potter. I'm just your lowly rent collector. Give the word and I'll butt out, keep my mouth shut, just do my job.

POTTER. Say what's on your mind, show me what you've got and be done with it.

REINEMAN. Like I said, you can't laugh off Bailey Park any more. *(He unrolls a map on the desk.)* Look at this old map. Fifteen years ago, Peter Bailey starts up Bailey Park. You've got a half-dozen houses stuck here and there. Squirrels, buttercups, daisies, the old cemetery. Each year, another house or two. But now look at *this* map! *(He unrolls a second map over the first one.)* Bailey Park the way it is *today*. George Bailey's been busy the last two years. Dozens of the prettiest little homes you ever saw. Ninety percent owned by suckers who used to pay rent to you. Your "Potter's Field" is becoming just that.

POTTER. The Baileys haven't made a dime from any of that.

REINEMAN *(rolling up the maps)*. No. Not yet, anyway. Too busy helping people out. But, if I were you, Mr. Potter ...

POTTER. Well, you are *not* me!

REINEMAN. OK. All right, no skin off my nose. But one of these days, I've got a feeling I'll be asking George Bailey for a job.

POTTER. "No skin off my nose." Why, I oughta ...

(The intercom buzzes.)

SECRETARY. George Bailey is here, sir.

POTTER. Send him in.

SECRETARY. What about the congressman?

POTTER. Oh, hang the congressman!

SECRETARY. He's waited an hour.

POTTER. And he can wait another hour.

SECRETARY. But sir ...

POTTER. Tell him if he leaves I won't buy him any more elections. Send in George Bailey.

SECRETARY. Yes sir.

REINEMAN. Well, I'd better go, but ...

POTTER. No, no ... stick around. Watch how I handle George Bailey.

(With a shrug, REINEMAN moves upstage as GEORGE enters from L, looking uneasily over his shoulder into the outer office.)

POTTER. George! George, come in!

GEORGE. Well, you know, Congressman Blatz is ... is ...

POTTER. I don't care about Congressman Blatz; right now I care about you. Sit down, sit down!

GEORGE. How do you do?

(REINEMAN nods.)

POTTER *(offers the open cigar humidor)*. Have a cigar.

GEORGE *(takes a cigar)*. Oh. Well, thanks, I ...

POTTER *(closes the humidor, picks up a cigar lighter)*. Let me light it for you. *(Clicks the lighter on.)*

GEORGE. Make a wish.

POTTER. What?

GEORGE *(leans forward, the cigar in his mouth muffling the words as he puffs)*. Nothing. Nothing. Mmmm. This is quite a cigar, Mr. Potter.

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

GEORGE *(sitting)*. So, just ... just what did you want to see me about?

POTTER *(a forced laugh)*. You know, George, that's what I like about you! Right to the point! *(False sincerity.)*

George, I'm an old man, and most people hate me, but I don't like them either, so we're even. Now, you know that I run practically everything in this town ...

GEORGE. Except Bailey Building and Loan.

POTTER. Except Bailey Building and Loan. You know, too, that for a number of years I've been trying to get control of it—or kill it—but I haven't been able to do that. *You* have been stopping me, George.

GEORGE. What's your point, Mr. Potter?

POTTER. I want to hire you.

GEORGE *(chokes on the smoke. Stands. Barely gets out)*. Hire me!

POTTER. To manage my businesses, run my properties. I'll start you out at twenty thousand a year.