

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.