

~~have happened to your mother. Choir practice never was as late as this before.~~

~~(GEORGE. (Still broken up) It's only half-past eight, Pa.~~

~~DR. GIBBS. I don't know why she's in that old choir anyway. She hasn't got any more voice than an old crow! And traipsin' around the streets at this hour of the night! (Finally, gently) Just about time you retired, don't you think?~~

~~GEORGE. Yes, Pa. (Lays handkerchief by father, who pockets it. GEORGE rises and mounts ladder, gazes at moon. DR. GIBBS soon resumes reading)~~

MRS. SOAMES. (Off L., linking arms with MRS. WEBB on her R., MRS. GIBBS on her L. She is in her thirties, the town gossip.) Goodnight, Martha. Goodnight, Mr. Foster. (WOMEN'S voices respond. The trio strolls up L. and stops to look back down L.)

MRS. WEBB (Calling off L.) I'll tell Mr. Webb; I know he'll want to put it in the paper.

MRS. GIBBS. My, it's late!

MRS. SOAMES. Goodnight, Irma. (They stroll silently to up C.)

MRS. GIBBS. Real nice choir practice, wa'n't it?

MRS. WEBB. Um-m! (They turn facing down up C.)

MRS. GIBBS. Myrtle Webb! Look at that moon will you! Tsk—tsk—tsk! Potato weather, for sure. (Pause)

MRS. SOAMES (Scandalized) Well, naturally I didn't want to say a word about it in front of those others (looks off rear L.), but now we're alone—really, it's the worst scandal that ever was in this town!

MRS. GIBBS. What?

MRS. SOAMES. Simon Stimson!

(MRS. WEBB turns half R., annoyed)

MRS. GIBBS. Now, Louella!

MRS. SOAMES. But, Julia! To have the organist of a church, drink, and drunk year after year.

MRS. GIBBS. Louella!

MRS. SOAMES. Julia, you know he was drunk to-night.

MRS. GIBBS. (Looking at moon) Now Louella! We all know about Mr. Stimson, and we all know about the troubles he's been through, and Doctor Ferguson knows too, and if Doctor Ferguson keeps him on there in his job the only thing the rest of us can do is just not to notice it.

MRS. SOAMES. Not to notice it! But it's getting worse.

MRS. WEBB (Acidly) No, it isn't, Louella. It's getting better. I've been in that choir twice as long as you have. It doesn't happen anywhere near so often. My, I hate to go to bed on a night like this. Gracious, I'd better hurry. (Gathers skirts at sides in both hands and rushes down through trellis and off L.) Those children'll be sittin' up till all hours. Goodnight, Louella—Julia—(EMILY, as MRS. WEBB passes her, excitedly blows out—i.e., switches off—the light that shines on her face from the ladder-shelf, and again gazes at the moon)

MRS. GIBBS (Xing down a few steps, turns to face LOUELLA) Goodnight, Myrtle. Can you get home safe, Louella?

MRS. SOAMES. (Xing L. a step) Oh, it's as bright as day. I can see Mr. Soames scowling at the windows now. (Laughs at the thoughts) You'd think we'd been to a dance the way the men folk carry on! (BOTH laugh and start on their ways) Goodnight, Julia.

MRS. GIBBS. Goodnight, Louella.

MRS. SOAMES. See you on Sunday.

MRS. GIBBS. See you then. (MRS. SOAMES exits slowly off R. MRS. GIBBS sweeps through trellis to