

ACT THREE

One minute after the end of Act II, two ASSISTANT STAGE MANAGERS clear the chairs and pulpit box and set chairs for Act III.

At end of intermission, the following enter single file, row by row, and sit (see ground plan for seating order), entering in sequence as follows: WALLY, FARMER MCCARTHY, MRS. SOAMES, 2ND DEAD MAN, 1ST DEAD MAN, 1ST DEAD WOMAN, 2ND DEAD WOMAN, MRS. GIBBS, and SIMON STIMSON. They remain placid throughout the act, facing out mostly, only half-turning their heads to each other as they speak.

As they are mostly seated the house slowly dims and the stage lights are slowly established.

STAGE MANAGER appears down R., lighted by his pinspots. He no longer lounges, but stands near the proscenium, hands behind him.

STAGE MANAGER. This time nine years have gone by, friends—summer, 1913. Gradual changes in Grover's Corners. Horses are gettin' rarer. Farmers coming into town now in Fords. Everybody locks their house doors now at night. Ain't been any burglars in town yet, but everybody's heard about 'em. You'd be surprised though—on the whole, things don't change much around here— This is certainly an important part of Grover's Corners. It's on a hilltop—a windy hilltop—lots of sky, lots of clouds,—often lots of sun and moon and stars. You come up here on a fine afternoon and you can see range on range of hills—awful blue they are—up there by Lake Sunapee and Lake Winnepesaukee—

and if you go way up, you can see the White Mountains and Mount Washington—where North Conway and Conway is. And, of course, our favorite mountain, Mount Monadnock's right here—and all around it lie these towns—Jaffrey 'n North Jaffrey, 'n Peterborough, 'n Dublin and (*Then pointing down in the audience*) there, quite a way's down, is Grover's Corners. Yes, beautiful spot up here. Mountain laurel and li-lacks. I often wonder why people like to be buried in Woodlawn and Brooklyn when they might pass the same time up here in New Hampshire. (*Xing to L. C., pointing down L.*) Over here are the old stones—1660—1670. Strong-minded people that come a long ways to be independent. Summer people walk around there laughing at the funny words on the tombstones—it don't do any harm. And genealogists come up from Boston—get paid by city people for looking up their ancestors. They want to make sure they're Daughters of the American Revolution and of the Mayflower— Well, I guess that don't do any harm, either. Over there— (*down L. C.*) are some Civil War veterans. Iron flags on their graves— New Hampshire boys—had a notion that the Union ought to be kept together, though they'd never seen more than fifty miles of it themselves. All they knew was the name, friends—the United States of America. The United States of America. And they went and died about it. (*Xing three steps R.*) This here is the new part of the cemetery. There's your friend, Mrs. Gibbs, and Mr. Stimson, organist at the Congregational Church. And Mrs. Soames who enjoyed the weddin' so much, remember? Oh, and a lot of others. And Editor Webb's boy, Wallace, whose appendix burst while he was on a Boy Scout trip to Crawford Notch. (*Xing slowly down R.*) Yes, an awful lot of sorrow has sort of quieted down up here. People just wild with grief have brought their relatives up to this

hill—and then times—sunny days—rainy days—snow— We all know how it is. A lot of thoughts come up here, night and day, but there's no post office— Now there are some things we all know but we don't take 'em out and look at 'em very often. We all know that *something* is eternal. And it ain't houses and it ain't names, and it ain't earth, and it ain't even the stars—everybody knows in their bones that *something* is eternal, and that something has to do with human beings. All the greatest people ever lived have been telling us that for five thousand years and yet you'd be surprised how people are always letting go of that fact. There's something way down deep that's eternal about every human being. (Pause) Y'know, the dead don't stay interested in us living people for very long. Gradually, gradually, they let go hold of the earth—and the ambitions they had—and the pleasures they had—and the things they suffered—and the people they loved. They get weaned away from earth—that's the way I put it, weaned away. Yes, they stay here while the earth-part of 'em burns away, burns out, and all that time they slowly get indifferent to what's goin' on in Grover's Corners. They're waitin'. They're waitin' for something they feel is comin'. Something important and great. Aren't they waitin' for the eternal part in them to come out—clear? Some of the things they're going to say maybe'll hurt your feelings—but that's the way it is: mother 'n daughter—husband 'n wife—enemy 'n enemy—money 'n miser—all those terribly important things kinda grow pale around here. And what's left? What's left when memory's gone, and your identity, Mrs. Smith?

(Pause. Then JOE STODDARD, 60-odd, enters from down L. Xing to glance at grave a moment, then turns L. downstage a bit and stands watching for mourners off L. He carries his hat. At the same time

~~enter up R. SAM CRAIG, 30, somewhat more stified than others in the play, carrying a rolled umbrella (real). He Xes rear of DEAD and down to R. of JOE. Well, here are some living people. There's Joe Stoddard, our undertaker, supervising a new-made grave. And here comes Sam Craig, a Grover's Corners boy that left town to go out West. (Watches them a moment, then strolls off down R.)~~

~~SAM. (Pleasantly) Good afternoon, Joe Stoddard.~~

~~JOE. (Turns surprised) Good afternoon, good afternoon. Let me see now: do I know you?~~

~~SAM. I'm Sam Craig.~~

~~JOE. Gracious sakes' alive! Of all people! I shoulda knowed you'd be back for the funeral. You've been away a long time, Sam.~~

~~SAM. Yes, I've been away over twelve years. I'm in business out in Buffalo now, Joe— But I was in the East when I got news of my cousin's death, so I thought I'd combine things a little and come back and see the old home— You look well.~~

~~JOE. Yes, yes, can't complain— Very sad, our journey today, Samuel.~~

~~SAM. Yes. (Xing up a bit to glance at grave)~~

~~JOE. Yes, yes. I always say, I hate to supervise when a young person is taken. (SAM turns R. glancing at gravestones. Xing to McCARTHY. JOE looks off L.) They'll be here in a few minutes now. I had to come here early today— (Turns R.) my son's supervisin' at the home.~~

~~SAM. (As if reading stone. Reminiscing) Old Farmer McCarthy! I used to do chores for him after school. He had lumbago. (Xing slowing to L. of MRS. GIBBS, above her)~~

~~JOE. Yes, we brought Farmer McCarthy here a number of years ago now.~~

~~SAM. Why, this is my Aunt Julia—I'd forgotten that she'd—of course, of course!~~

~~JOE. (Xing R. a bit) Yes, Doc Gibbs lost his wife~~