

GEORGE (*sullenly*). Violet. Two cents worth of shoelaces?

VIOLET. Please, Georgie. You're nice.

GEORGE. Aww, Violet Bick, you like every boy.

VIOLET. What's wrong with that?

GEORGE (*at arm's length*). Here you are.

VIOLET. Bye, bye, Georgie.

*She exits. GEORGE goes to the cash till whistling. GOWER staggers forward. He chews an unlit cigar. His manner is gruff and mean. It is evident he has been drinking.*

GOWER. Georgie! Georgie!

GEORGE. Yes, sir.

GOWER. You're not paid to be a canary.

GEORGE. No, sir.

*Another little girl, MARY HATCH, enters. She makes the shop-door bell ring twice.*

I see you, Mary Hatch. Quit ringing the bell!

MARY. Hello George. My mom says that every time a bell rings, an angel gets his wings.

GEORGE. So, you thought you'd hand out an extra pair, huh?

MARY. It's a nice idea.

GEORGE. What'll you have?

MARY. Pear drops as usual, I guess.

GEORGE. Pear drops! Why don't you try coconuts?

MARY. I don't like coconuts.

GEORGE. You don't like coconuts! Say, brainless, don't you know where coconuts come from? Lookit here... from Tahiti... Fiji Islands, the Coral Sea.

*Shows MARY a National Geographic magazine.*

MARY. I never saw this magazine before.

GEORGE. Of course you never. Only us explorers can get it. When I go out exploring, you watch... I'm going to have a couple of harems and maybe three or four wives. Wait and see.

GOWER. Chattering like an ape, boy. Clean up!

GEORGE. Gee, he's mean today.

MARY. He's not mean. I guess he's just sad.

GEORGE. Sad?

MARY. My mother said his son, his son at college, got sick and died of the flu. I didn't know you could die of the flu. Poor Mr Gower. He only had the one, Mother says.

GEORGE. Yeah. Thanks, Mary.

GEORGE is stunned by this news. He goes to GOWER.

MARY exits.

Mr Gower, do you want something... Anything?

GOWER. No.

GEORGE. Anything I can do?

GOWER. No.

GOWER is trying to put capsules into a box. He fumbles and drops some on the floor.

GEORGE. I'll get them, sir. (*He picks them up and offers them to GOWER.*) Here you are, sir.

GOWER. Got enough here. Empty them back into the bottle.

Got enough, see.

GEORGE goes to the big bottle and sees its POISON label.

GEORGE. Which bottle, Mr Gower?

GOWER. That big one, boy. Are you stupid?

GEORGE. No, sir, but...

GOWER. Take these. (*Thrusting the box at GEORGE.*) Take them to Mrs Blaine's. She's waiting for them.

GEORGE. They have diphtheria there, haven't they, sir?

GOWER. Umm.

GEORGE. Is it a charge, sir?

GOWER. Yes, charge.

GEORGE. Mr Gower, I think...

GOWER. Get going!

GEORGE. No, sir.

GOWER *grabs GEORGE roughly by the shirt.*

GOWER. Did you hear what I said?

GEORGE. Yes, sir, I... I can't deliver them. You...

GOWER *starts hitting GEORGE with the flat of his hand. GEORGE tries to protect himself.*

GOWER. Can't? You'll do what you're told! What kind of tricks are you playing anyway? You deliver them right away! Don't you know that boy's very sick?

GEORGE. My car... You're hurting my sore ear!

GOWER. He's a good boy but he's sick... but you... you lazy loafer! (*His him hard.*) You expect me to go... run errands... What do I pay you for? Look at me, boy. You're a lazy, stupid, disobedient...

GEORGE. Mr Gower, you don't know what you're doing. You put something wrong in those capsules. I know you're unhappy, you're upset. You put something bad in those capsules. It's not your fault, Mr Gower...

GOWER *rips the box from GEORGE's hand.*

GOWER. Why, give me those you cheeky little...

GEORGE. Just look and see what you did. Look at the bottle you took them from. It's poison, Mr Gower. I know you feel bad and...

*During this speech GOWER has broken open a capsule and tasted the contents. He throws the box to the floor and moves towards GEORGE.*

GEORGE. Don't hurt my sore ear again.

GOWER. No... no... What did I do? I could have killed that boy.

*With profound weariness he falls upon GEORGE, hugging him.*

Oh George... George... Did I hurt you? I could have killed him!

*He lets GEORGE go and stands shaking his head in confusion and relief.*

GEORGE. Mr Gower, I won't ever tell anyone. I know what you're feeling. I won't ever tell a soul. Hope to die, I won't.

GOWER. And he never did, he never told a soul. Help him tonight, Lord.

*Quietly GOWER exits. GEORGE removes his apron. During the following speech GEORGE has changed his school cap for a trilly and put on a sports jacket. He has picked up a large, new-looking suitcase.*

CLARISSA. You know, I like George Bailey. Oh, but there's so much to find out. Did he ever go exploring? Did he marry that girl? Oh my, I hope he didn't marry the wrong one! Maybe that's why... oh dear, I hope that's not it... I really couldn't sort out that kind of thing...

GEORGE (*calling towards the drug store*). Hey, Mr Gower, thanks for the bag! It's exactly what I wanted!

CLARISSA. Well, well... they grow up fast in Bedford Falls! Now, where's he going?

SAM. Hee-haw! That your overnight bag, George?

GEORGE. Sam! Isn't it great! Old Man Gower went right over to Joe's and picked it out himself.