

ACT TWO

We hear, quietly, some WW2 music – The Andrews Sisters' 'Boogie Woogie Bugle Boy' maybe. The three angels enter.

GLORIA. War.

CLARISSA. I don't like it.

GLORIA. No, Clarissa, it's an awful sign of failure. Do we know how Bedford Falls got through it?

JOSEPH. Well now, let me see. Everyone plays their part. Mary joins the Red Cross, she's got three little ones by then, but she does her bit. Her brother, Marty, helped capture Remagen Bridge and Ernie, left his cab and parachuted into France. Sam Wainwright made a fortune in plastic hoods for planes and Potter became Head of the Draft Board

CLARISSA. That figures.

JOSEPH. Bert the cop was wounded in North Africa, got the Silver Star. But Harry, Harry Bailey topped them all. George's kid brother became a Navy flier. He shot down fifteen planes, two of them as they were about to crash into a transport full of soldiers.

GLORIA. But George, where's George?... Ah yes... poor old George.

GEORGE *walks slowly and thoughtfully back to the bridge.*

GLORIA. On account of his ear, he was refused the draft. George fought the battle of Bedford Falls... air-raid warden, paper drives, scrap drives... and like everyone else on VE Day he wept and prayed... and on VJ Day he wept and prayed again.

CLARISSA. So here we are... back to today... Christmas Eve, nineteen hundred and forty-five. Oh my, I still don't know why he's here and there's so little time left to find out.

GLORIA. Down you go, Clarissa. And don't let him out of your sight.

As they exit, JOSEPH starts the speech then GEORGE takes it up.

JOSEPH and GEORGE. The water sure looks cold. Wonder how long a man could stay alive in it.

CLARISSA *(not standing on the bridge, slightly panicky tone)*. I wouldn't do that if I were you.

GEORGE *looks round, puzzled. No one is there.*

I need to go back to the start of the day... the start of the day, George.

GEORGE *starts to move off the bridge, heading back the way he came.*

There must be an easier way than this to earn my wings.

As GEORGE and CLARISSA exit, ACTORS 3 and 4 sing a carol, a jolly one to contrast with GEORGE's mood. I suggest 'Deck the Halls'. UNCLE BILLY enters with a newspaper with which he conducts the singing, MARY enters carrying Christmas parcels.

BILLY. They're gonna deck the town with a great big banner, Mary, and it's gonna have Harry Bailey's name on it! Hope they spell the name right!

MARY. See you at the party, Billy.

BERT *enters as MARY leaves.*

BILLY. Hi, Bert, look at that!

BILLY holds up the front page of the Bedford Falls Sentinel with the headline, 'PRESIDENT DECORATES HARRY BAILEY – LOCAL BOY WINS CONGRESSIONAL MEDAL OF HONOR.'

BERT. Gonna snow again.

BILLY. What do you mean... it's gonna snow again? Look at that – *(He reads.)* 'President decorates Harry Bailey'.

BERT. I know, it's great.

BILLY. Great? Everything's great this morning!

BERT exits. UNCLE BILLY counts the takings in a tatty envelope as she walks along.

(To people in the audience.) Merry Christmas, Tom... Seen the papers? Merry Christmas, Mr Gower... you coming to the party? See you later, Charlie. Just got to pay in the takings at the bank.

POTTER appears carrying a newspaper and heading for the bank.

Why, good morning, Mr Potter. What's the news?

Grabs POTTER's paper and flourishes it.

Well, well, well, Harry Bailey wins Congressional Medal. That couldn't be one of the Bailey boys? You just can't keep those Baileys down, now can you, Mr Potter?

POTTER. Good day, Mr Bailey. How does slacker George feel about that?

BILLY. Slacker George would have gotten two of those medals if he had gone.

POTTER. But his bad ear came in handy, eh?

In a fit of triumphalism UNCLE BILLY hands POTTER back the wrong newspaper, his own newspaper with the day's takings folded inside it.

BILLY. We needed heroes here too.

POTTER. Pah!

He turns away, feels the lump in the paper and looks as BILLY carries on.

BILLY. Someone had to protect us from the profiteers!

POTTER. Profiteers, eh?

POTTER considers the situation. He looks at the money and then at UNCLE BILLY, grinning smugly before him.

BILLY. Oh yes... there's some folk who try to make a profit out of anything. Shocking, isn't it?

POTTER. Mr William Bailey...

BILLY. Yes, Mr Potter?

POTTER. Enjoy your celebrations.

He folds up the newspaper and heads for his office or, anyway, away from UNCLE BILLY.

BILLY. And Merry Christmas to you too!

GEORGE now enters and goes to the Building and Loan. Perhaps he comes on singing. VIOLET enters and stands hesitantly at the door.

GEORGE. Oh, hello Vi. Have you seen this? (Shows her the newspaper.)

VIOLET. I've seen it. You must be proud, George. You got a lot to be proud of.

GEORGE. He's quite a kid, eh?

VIOLET. Can I see you for a second?

We see GEORGE and VIOLET talking but the sound transfers to the bank where UNCLE BILLY is frantically searching for the money. BERT joins him. The sound will transfer between two scenes throughout this section.

BILLY. Oh shucks... I know I had it...

BERT. Retrace your steps.

BILLY. And the Bank Examiner's due today. He'll want the accounts payable...

BERT. Now look, did you buy anything?

BILLY. Nothing. Not even a stick of gum.

BERT. We'll go over every step since you left the house.

BILLY. George is gonna be so mad at me...