

POTTER. Look at you. You used to be so cocky! You were going to go out and conquer the world! But what are you now? A miserable little clerk crawling in here on your hands and knees and begging for help. No securities – no stocks – no bonds – nothing but a miserable little five-hundred-dollar equity in a life insurance policy. You're worth more dead than alive. I'll tell you what I'm going to do for you, George. Since the state bank examiner is here, as a stockholder of the Building and Loan, I'm going to swear out a warrant for your arrest. Misappropriation of funds, manipulation, malfeasance...

GEORGE is no longer listening. He leaves the office.

Go ahead, George. You can't hide in a town like this.

CLARISSA. I see... I see... money... it's just money. Well, that's a relief. At least it's nothing serious. Oh, but I suppose it is serious for George. Going to prison. Yes, that would be serious. But they wouldn't... a man like George... I mean, just for money. Oh dear, I guess they would. I'd forgotten what it's like down here... The time's getting close.

During this speech GEORGE has gone to Martini's bar and is now being helped out by MARTINI.

MARTINI. Why you drink so much, my friend? Please go home, Mr Bailey. This is Christmas Eve.

A man just about to enter the bar hears this.

WELCH. Bailey? Which Bailey?

MARTINI. This is Mr George Bailey, my good friend but he...

WELCH punches GEORGE on the jaw and sends him sprawling.

WELCH. Next time you talk to my wife like that you'll get worse. She cried for an hour. It isn't enough she slaves away teaching your stupid kids how to read and write you have to bawl her out!

MARTINI. You get out of here, Mr Welch.

WELCH. I want a drink.

MARTINI. Not in my bar! You hit my best friend! Go away!

WELCH leaves.

You all right?

GEORGE. Who was that?

MARTINI. Don't worry. His name is Welch. He don't come into my place no more. Teppista!

GEORGE. Welch, huh? Figures. Where's my insurance policy? (Finds it in his pocket.) Oh, here...

MARTINI. Don't go now. Come back and sit down a little. You don't feel so good.

GEORGE. I'm all right.

MARTINI. Please don't go... please...

GEORGE stumbles off. CLARISSA makes for the bridge. We hear again the Christmas carol from the beginning of the play and then GEORGE enters as he did at the beginning and goes onto the bridge. He stares down into the waters below for a while. He repeats exactly what he did in Act One.

CLARISSA. I wouldn't do that if I were you.

GEORGE (startled). What?

CLARISSA. I said I wouldn't do that if I were you.

GEORGE (angrily). Wouldn't do what?

CLARISSA. What you were thinking of doing.

GEORGE. How do you know what I was thinking?

CLARISSA. Oh, we make it our business to know a lot of things. Your lip's bleeding, George.

GEORGE. Yeah, I got a bust in the jaw a little bit ago... hey, how do you know my name?

CLARISSA. Oh, I know all about you. I've watched you grow up from a little boy.

GEORGE. What are you, a mind reader or something?

CLARISSA. Oh no.

GEORGE. Well, who are you then?

CLARISSA. Clarissa Odbody, A-S-2.

GEORGE. Odbody... A-S-2. What's that?

CLARISSA. Angel Second Class

GEORGE. Oh brother. What did Martini put in those drinks? Why don't you go back through the Pearly Gates and just leave me in peace?

CLARISSA. Oh no, I can't do that. I'm your guardian angel, George.

GEORGE. I wouldn't be a bit surprised.

CLARISSA. Ridiculous of you to think of killing yourself for money. Eight thousand dollars!

GEORGE (*bewildered*). Now... that's the sort of thing... how do you know that?

CLARISSA. I told you, I'm your guardian angel. I know everything about you.

GEORGE. You look about like the kind of angel I'd get. Sort of a fallen angel, aren't you? What happened to your wings?

CLARISSA. I haven't won my wings yet.

GEORGE. So, go ring a bell.

CLARISSA. What?

GEORGE. It's a stupid kids' thing. Every time a bell rings...

CLARISSA. An angel gets his wings. Quite so. But you can't just go ringing it yourself. Oh, dear me no. You have to earn them and then...

GEORGE. Okay, okay. You're the expert. Gimme a break.

CLARISSA. You'll help me earn them, won't you?

GEORGE (*humouring her*). Sure. How do I do that?

CLARISSA. By letting me help you.

GEORGE. Only one way you can help me. You don't have eight thousand bucks on you?

CLARISSA. Oh no, no, no... We don't use money in heaven.

GEORGE. Silly me. I keep forgetting. Comes in pretty handy down here, lady.

CLARISSA (*tutting*). Oh dear, oh dear.

GEORGE. I found it out a little late. I'm worth more dead than alive.

CLARISSA. You mustn't talk like that. I won't get my wings with that attitude. You just don't know all that you've done. If it hadn't been for you...

GEORGE. Yeah, if it hadn't been for me, everybody'd be a lot better off. My wife, my kids, my friends. Go off and haunt somebody else, will you?

CLARISSA. No, you don't understand. I've got my job...

GEORGE. Shut up, will you?

CLARISSA. Hmm, this isn't going to be so easy. So, you still think that killing yourself would make everyone feel happier, do you?

GEORGE. Oh, I don't know. I guess you're right. I suppose it would have been better if I'd never been born at all.

CLARISSA. What did you say?

GEORGE. I said I wish I'd never been born.

CLARISSA. Well, that's an idea. That's a very good idea! I could do that, couldn't I?

GLORIA (*or voice*). Go ahead, Clarissa, go ahead!

CLARISSA. All right... You've got your wish. You've never been born.