

easier to do it herself. And you eat her meals, and put on the clothes she keeps nice for you, and you run off and play baseball – like she’s some hired girl we keep around the house but that we don’t like very much.

(GEORGE snivels.)

Well, I knew all I had to do was call your attention to it. Here’s a handkerchief, son.

(Lays it on the table. GEORGE takes it, blows nose.)

George, I’ve decided to raise your spending money twenty-five cents a week. Not, of course, for chopping wood for your mother, because that’s a present you give her, but because you’re getting older – and I imagine there are lots of things you must find to do with it.

GEORGE. Thanks, Pa.

DR. GIBBS. Let’s see – tomorrow’s your payday. You can count on it – Hmm. Probably Rebecca’ll feel she ought to have some more too. Wonder what could 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. She hasn’t any more voice than an old crow... 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 his father who pockets it)*

(GEORGE mounts to his place on the ladder, gazes at the moon. DR. GIBBS soon resumes reading.)

(Laughter and good nights can be heard off stage left and presently MRS. GIBBS, MRS. SOAMES and MRS. WEBB come down Main Street. When they arrive at the corner of the stage they stop.)

MRS. SOAMES. Good night, Martha. Good night, Mr. Foster.

(Women's voices respond.)

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

MRS. GIBBS. My, it's late!

MRS. SOAMES. Good night, Irma.

(They stroll silently.)

MRS. GIBBS. Real nice choir practice, wa'n't it? Myrtle Webb! Look at that moon, will you! Tsk-tsk-tsk. Potato weather, for sure.

(They are silent a moment, gazing up at the moon.)

MRS. SOAMES. *(scandalized)* Naturally I didn't want to say a word about it in front of those others, *(looks offstage)* 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, annoyed.)

MRS. GIBBS. Now, Louella!

MRS. SOAMES. But, Julia! To have the organist of a church *drink* and *drunk* year after year. You know he was drunk tonight.

MRS. GIBBS. Now, Louella! We all know about Mr. Stimson, and we all know about the troubles he's been through, and Dr. Ferguson knows too, and if Dr. 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. – I better hurry. Those children'll be sitting up till all hours. Good night, Louella.

(They all exchange good nights. She hurries downstage, enters her house and disappears.)

(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. Can you get home safe, Louella?

MRS. SOAMES. It's as bright as day. I can see Mr. Soames scowling at the window now. *(laughs at the thought)* You'd think we'd been to a dance the way the menfolk carry on.

(Both laugh and start on their ways.)

(More good nights. MRS. GIBBS arrives at her home and passes through the trellis into the kitchen.)

(GEORGE snaps off the light on his ladder-shelf as his mother goes by.)

MRS. GIBBS. Well, we had a real good time.

DR. GIBBS. *(looks at pocketwatch)* You're late enough.

MRS. GIBBS. Why, Frank, it ain't any later 'n usual.

DR. GIBBS. And you stopping at the corner to gossip with a lot of hens.

MRS. GIBBS. Now, Frank, don't be grouchy. Come out and smell the heliotrope in the moonlight.

(He puts book reluctantly on the table and rises. They stroll out arm in arm along the footlights.)

(A bobwhite calls three times. They speak quietly.)

Isn't that wonderful?

(They stop to survey the moonlit scene out front.)

What did you do all the time I was away?

DR. GIBBS. *(interested, though he tries to disapprove)* Oh, I read – as usual. What were the girls gossiping about tonight?

MRS. GIBBS. Well, believe me, Frank – there is something to gossip about.