

ACT I

SETTING: *Various locations in the life of George Bailey including: a pond, Mr. Gower's drugstore, Bailey's Savings & Loan, the Peter Bailey home, the school gym, downtown Bedford Falls, a train station, the George Bailey home, Potter's office, and a bridge. Set should be simple, theatrical – shifts in lights and sound should accommodate change in time and place.*

AT RISE: *The stage is dark. The sound of someone's ragged breathing as a special comes up on GEORGE BAILEY standing on a bridge, gazing down at the river below. He is desperate, at the end of his rope. The sound of footsteps. JOSEPH enters at a run and stops when he sees GEORGE. GEORGE is oblivious to his presence. JOSEPH closes his eyes, absorbing a song emanating from GEORGE's soul. Slowly, softly, JOSEPH begins to sing that song, summoning his fellow ANGELS.*

JOSEPH

Buffalo gals won't you come out tonight

(Summoned by JOSEPH's voice, the ANGELS enter and join in. As they continue to sing, JOSEPH scans the crowd, looking for one particular angel...)

JOSEPH/ANGELS

*Come out tonight, come out tonight...
Buffalo gals won't you come out tonight*

JOSEPH

Clarence? Where's Clarence?!

(CLARENCE enters, late. ANGEL #3 takes hold of CLARENCE and pushes him forward.)

ANGEL #3

Here he is, Joseph.

JOSEPH

Clarence. Do you see this man on the bridge?

CLARENCE

Yes.

JOSEPH

We need you to save him. This is the moment, Clarence.

CLARENCE

You mean...

JOSEPH

The time has come for you to earn your wings.

(Murmurs of excitement from the ANGELS.)

Are you up for the task?

CLARENCE

Yes sir!

JOSEPH

(Looking around at ANGELS.)

We – all of us – are here to help.

(ANGELS murmurs agreement: Yes/Of course/Whatever you need, etc.)

Now...

(JOSEPH nods to the ANGELS. They become the citizens of Bedford Falls.)

...look around. What do you see?

CLARENCE

I see... I see the streets of a small town.

JOSEPH

Bedford Falls, New York.

CLARENCE

It's cold...

(The ANGELS start humming "O Come All Ye Faithful under.)

JOSEPH

It's Christmas Eve.

CLARENCE

Christmas...

JOSEPH

Christmas Eve, 1945.

(The ANGELS become their characters as the humming shifts to prayers muttered softly, jumbled together.)

GOWER	MARTINI	MA BAILEY	NICK	MARY	JANE	ZUZU
I owe every-	Jesus, Mary,	Help my son	He	I love	Please,	Please
thing to	and Joseph,	George	never	him,	God,	bring
George	help my friend	tonight...	thinks	dear	some-	Daddy
Bailey. Help	George Bailey...		about	Lord.	thing's	back...
him, dear			him-	Watch	the	
Father...			self,	over	matter	
			God.	him	with	
			That's	to-	Daddy...	
			why	night...		
			he's in			
			trouble...			

CLARENCE

I hear something. People. People talking...

JOSEPH

What are they saying?

CLARENCE

They're praying.

JOSEPH

Yes. Praying for someone they love very much.

(One-by-one, the ANGELS steps forward to deliver their prayer. The others continue praying under.)

GOWER

I owe everything to George Bailey. Help him dear Father...

MARY

I love him, dear Lord. Watch over him tonight...

MARTINI

Jesus, Mary, and Joseph – help my friend George Bailey...

JANE

Please God, something's the matter with Daddy...

MA BAILEY

Help my son George tonight...

ZUZU

Please bring Daddy back...

NICK

George Bailey never thinks about himself, God – that's why he's in trouble...

CLARENCE

George Bailey? Wait! Is he that man on the bridge?

JOSEPH

Yes, and at exactly 10:45 pm Earth Time, George Bailey will throw away God's greatest gift.

CLARENCE

You mean... his life.

(JOSEPH nods and crosses to GEORGE.)

How can I help him?

JOSEPH

You'll have to get to know him first. The important moments in his life. And to do that, we must all go back in time twenty-six years...

ANGELS

Twenty-six years...

JOSEPH

To a cold winter's day in 1919...

(GEORGE walks off the bridge. ANGEL # 4 removes his suit jacket. ANGEL #10 wraps a scarf around him and puts a stocking cap on his head, transforming him to a young boy.)

JOSEPH (cont.)

Winter...

(ANGEL #6 steps forward, putting on his winter hat. He becomes MARTY.)

MARTY

1919...

(ANGEL #7 puts on a winter hat, becoming HARRY. ANGEL #9 follows suit, becoming SAM.)

JOSEPH

A frozen pond on the outskirts of Bedford Falls.

(JOSEPH points to ANGEL #4 and ANGEL #10, assigning them to the frozen pond. As one, the BOYS drop to the ground to put on their skates. GEORGE finishes first, stands up and starts "skating" across the stage.)

GEORGE

Yippee!!

CLARENCE

Why, George is just a boy.

JOSEPH

Twelve years old. Something happens here you'll have to remember later on.

GEORGE

Hurry, Marty!

(MARTY stands and starts to "skate.")

MARTY

Coming, George!

GEORGE

Come on, Sam!

(SAM stands and starts to “skate.” He waggles his fingers against his ears, imitating donkey ears.)

SAM

Hee-haw! Right behind you, George!

GEORGE

C’mon, Harry. Or is my kid-brother a scaredy cat?

SAM/MARTY

Scaredy cat! Scaredy cat!

HARRY

I’m not scared.

(Cautiously, awkwardly, HARRY starts to “skate.”)

BOYS

Let’s go, Harry!/Attaboy, Harry!/You can do it!

(HARRY skates to another part of the stage.)

GEORGE

Harry, watch out – that’s thin ice...

(ANGEL #4/ANGEL #10 grab HARRY.)

ANGEL #4/ANGEL #10

Crack!

HARRY

George...?

ANGEL #4/ANGEL #10/ANGEL #3/ANGEL #5

CRACK!

HARRY

George! The ice!

(ANGEL #4 and ANGEL #10 pull HARRY to the ground. He is under the water.)

GEORGE

Harry!

He fell thru the ice.

MARTY

So cold...

ANGEL #3

He'll freeze to death.

ANGEL #5

I'm coming, Harry!

GEORGE

(GEORGE skates towards him.)

George! No!

SAM

(ANGEL # 10/ANGEL #4 reach up and pull GEORGE under.)

CRACK!

ANGEL #10/ANGEL #4/ANGEL #5/ANGEL #3

Now George is in the water too!

ANGEL #5

They'll both drown!

ANGEL #3

(GEORGE is in the water with HARRY. He grabs him under the arms.)

I've got you, Harry.

GEORGE

George!

SAM

Sam! Marty! Hurry! Grab hold. That's it. That's it. You got him?

GEORGE

(SAM and MARTY help rescue HARRY. JOSEPH crosses to them. During the following, the ANGELS shifts the scene to Gower's drugstore.)

JOSEPH

George saved his brother's life that day.

ANGEL #4

But George caught a bad cold...

ANGEL #10

Made him go deaf in his right ear...

ANGEL #4

He was in bed for two months

ANGEL #5

Finally he was able to return to his after-school job at old man Gower's drugstore...

(The Drugstore. Stage left, the soda shop, is represented by a counter. Stage right, GOWER's pharmacy, is represented by a stool. GOWER enters, drinking from a flask, telegram in hand. He crosses to the stool.)

CLARENCE

Who's that?

ANGEL #7

Mr. Gower, the druggist.

(Young MARY HATCH enters and stands in front of the counter.)

CLARENCE

And who's that little girl?

ANGEL #6

Her name is Mary Hatch.

JOSEPH

You'll see a lot more of her as time goes on...

(CLARENCE and JOSEPH melt into the shadows. GEORGE enters the soda shop. An Angel hands him an apron, which he dons.)

GEORGE

It's me, Mr. Gower. George Bailey.

GOWER
You're late.

GEORGE
Yes, sir.

(GOWER exits. Young VIOLET BICK enters the soda shop.)

VIOLET
(Flirty)
Hello, Georgie-Porgie.

(Unenthusiastically)
Hello, Mary.

MARY
Hello, Violet.

GEORGE
What do you want, Violet?

VIOLET
She was here first.

MARY
I'm still thinking.

GEORGE
(To VIOLET)
Well?

VIOLET
I just came in to say hello. Hello.

(GEORGE just stares at her. VIOLET turns to MARY.)

I like him.

MARY
You like every boy.

VIOLET
What's wrong with that? Bye, Georgie-Porgie.

(VIOLET exits.)

GEORGE
Made up your mind yet?

MARY
I'll take chocolate.

GEORGE
With coconuts?

MARY
I don't like coconuts.

GEORGE
What?! Don't you know where coconuts come from? Tahiti, the Fiji Islands, the Coral Sea! Sheesh. Girls. Let me get your ice cream.

*(He leans down to scoop the ice cream, his deaf ear toward her.
She leans over, speaking softly.)*

MARY
Is this the ear you can't hear in? George Bailey, I'll love you till the day I die.

(She draws back as he stands up.)

GEORGE
I'm going out exploring someday, you watch. I'm going to see everything there is to see. Paris, China, the jungles of Africa...

(GOWER enters, quite drunk. He holds the opened telegram.)

GOWER
George!

GEORGE
Yes, sir.

GOWER
I don't pay you to talk. Get back to work.

GEORGE
Yes, sir.