

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 ear... You're hurting my sore ear!

GOWER. He's a good boy but he's sick... but you... you lazy loafer! (*Hits 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 trilby 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.