

GEORGE. Wreath, what wreath?

MARY. The Merry Christmas wreath for the window.

GEORGE. No, I left it at the office.

MARY. Is it snowing?

GEORGE. Yeah, just started.

MARY. What's the matter?

GEORGE (*bitterly*). Nothing's the matter. Everything's all right.

*The piano practice begins again.*

MARY. Have a hectic day?

GEORGE. Oh, yeah, another big red-letter day for the Baileys.

MARY. Better hurry and clean up. The families will be here soon.

GEORGE. Families! I don't want the families over here! Does she have to keep playing that?

MARY. She's practising for the party tonight.

GEORGE. Some party!

MARY. George, what's wrong?

GEORGE. Wrong? Everything's wrong! You call this a happy family? Why did we have to have kids at all? And where's Pete? He's eleven years old, he should be helping. Why isn't he helping you? Why, when I was his age I...

MARY. He's upstairs sitting with Zuzu.

GEORGE. Zuzu! What's the matter with Zuzu?

MARY. Oh, she's got a cold. She's in bed. Caught it coming home from school. They gave her a flower for a prize. She didn't want to crush it so she didn't button up her coat.

GEORGE. What is it, a sore throat or what?

MARY. Just a cold. The doctor says it's nothing serious.

GEORGE. The doctor? Was the doctor here?

MARY. Yes, I called him right away. He says it's nothing to worry about.

GEORGE. Is she running a temperature? What is it?

MARY. Just a teensie one... ninety-nine, six. She'll be all right.

*The phone rings. MARY waits for GEORGE to answer it but he doesn't, so she goes. He talks to himself as she answers the call.*

GEORGE. It's this old house. I don't know why we don't all have pneumonia. Why did we have to live here in the first place and stay around this measly, crummy old town?

*The above speech and the following one may overlap a little.*

MARY. Hello. Yes, this is Mrs. Bailey... Thank you, Mrs.

Welch. I'm sure she'll be all right. The doctor says that she ought to be out of bed in time to have her Christmas dinner.

GEORGE. Is that Zuzu's teacher?

MARY. Yes.

GEORGE. Let me speak to her.

*He snatches the phone.*

Hello, hello! Mrs. Welch? This is George Bailey. I'm Zuzu's father. Say, what kind of a teacher are you anyway? What do you mean sending her home like that, half-naked? Do you realise she'll probably end up with pneumonia on account of you?

MARY. George!

GEORGE. Is this the sort of thing we pay taxes for? To have teachers like you? Silly, stupid, careless people who send our kids home without any clothes on! You know, maybe my kids aren't the best dressed kids, maybe they don't have any decent clothes...

MARY wrestles the phone from him.

That stupid...