

EMILY. Good morning, Mama.

MRS. WEBB. (*crossing to embrace and kiss her; in her characteristic matter-of-fact manner*) Well, now, dear, a very happy birthday to my girl and many happy returns. (*She returns to the stove, slipping out of EMILY's arms which were about to embrace her.*) There are some surprises waiting for you on the kitchen table.

EMILY. Oh, Mama, you *shouldn't* have. (*She throws an anguished glance at the STAGE MANAGER.*) I can't – I can't.

MRS. WEBB. (*facing the audience, over her stove*) But birthday or no birthday, I want you to eat your breakfast good and slow. I want you to grow up and be a good strong girl.

(*EMILY steps to table and looks over gifts.*)

That in the blue paper is from your Aunt Carrie; and I reckon you can guess who brought the post-card album. I found it on the doorstep when I brought in the milk – George Gibbs...must have come over in the cold pretty early...right nice of him. (*putters at stove again*)

EMILY. (*To herself. Very gently picking up album.*) Oh, George! I'd forgotten that....

MRS. WEBB. Chew that bacon good and slow. It'll help keep you warm on a cold day.

EMILY. (*with mounting urgency*) Oh, Mama, just look at me one minute as though you really saw me.

(*MRS. WEBB turns to stir oatmeal at stove, placid and smiling, not hearing.*)

Mama, fourteen years have gone by. I'm dead. You're a grandmother, Mama. I married George Gibbs, Mama. Wally's dead, too. Mama, his appendix burst on a camping trip to North Conway. We felt just terrible about it – don't you remember? But, just for a moment now we're all

together. Mama, just for a moment we're happy.
Let's look at one another.

MRS. WEBB. (*puts dish on table*) That in the yellow paper is something I found in the attic among your grandmother's things. You're old enough to wear it now, and I thought you'd like it.

EMILY. And this is from you. Why, Mama, it's just lovely and it's just what I wanted. It's beautiful!

(She flings her arms around her mother's neck. Her MOTHER goes on with her cooking, but is pleased.)

MRS. WEBB. Well, I hoped you'd like it. Hunted all over. Your Aunt Norah couldn't find one in Concord, so I had to send all the way to Boston. (*laughing*) Wally has something for you, too. He made it at manual-training class and he's very proud of it. Be sure you make a big fuss about it. – Your father has a surprise for you, too; don't know what it is myself. Sh – here he comes.

MR. WEBB. (*offstage*) Where's my girl? Where's my birthday girl?

EMILY. (*in a loud voice to the STAGE MANAGER*) I can't. I can't go on. It goes so fast. We don't have time to look at one another. (*She breaks down sobbing.*)

(The lights dim on the left half of the stage. MRS. WEBB disappears.)

I didn't realize. So all that was going on and we never noticed. Take me back – up the hill – to my grave. But first: Wait! One more look. Good-by, Good-by, world. Good-by, Grover's Corners... Mama and Papa. Good-by to clocks ticking...and Mama's sunflowers. And food and coffee. And new-ironed dresses and hot baths...and sleeping and waking up. Oh, earth, you're too wonderful for anybody to realize you. (*She looks toward the STAGE MANAGER and asks abruptly, through her tears:*) Do any human beings ever realize life while they live it? – every, every minute?