

husband 'n wife...enemy 'n enemy...money 'n miser...all those terribly important things kind of grow pale around here. And what's left when memory's gone, and your identity, Mrs. Smith?

(He looks at the audience a minute, then turns to the stage.)

JOE STODDARD, 60-odd, enters, crossing to glance at a grave a moment, then turns downstage a bit and stands watching for mourners off left. He carries his hat. At the same time, **SAM CRAIG**, 30, enters, wiping his forehead from the exertion. He carries an umbrella and strolls front.)

STAGE MANAGER. *(front)* Well! There are some living people. There's Joe Stoddard, our undertaker, supervising a new-made grave. And here comes a Grover's Corners boy, that left town to go out West.

SAM CRAIG. Good afternoon, Joe Stoddard.

JOE STODDARD. *(turns, surprised)* Good afternoon, good afternoon. Let me see now: do I know you?

SAM CRAIG. I'm Sam Craig.

JOE STODDARD. Gracious sakes' alive! Of all people! I should'a knowed you'd be back for the funeral. You've been away a long time, Sam.

SAM CRAIG. Yes, I've been away over twelve years. I'm in business out in Buffalo now, Joe. But I was in the East when I got news of my cousin's death, so I thought I'd combine things a little and come and see the old home. You look well.

JOE STODDARD. Yes, yes, can't complain. Very sad, our journey today, Samuel.

SAM CRAIG. Yes.

JOE STODDARD. Yes, yes. I always say I hate to supervise when a young person is taken.

(SAM turns, glancing at the gravestones, crossing to Farmer McCarty. JOE looks off left.)

They'll be here in a few minutes now. I had to come here early today – my son's supervisin' at the home.

SAM CRAIG. (*reading stones*) Old Farmer McCarty, I used to do chores for him – after school. He had the lumbago.

JOE STODDARD. Yes, we brought Farmer McCarty here a number of years ago now.

SAM CRAIG. (*staring at MRS. GIBBS' knees*) Why, this is my Aunt Julia...I'd forgotten that she'd...of course, of course.

JOE STODDARD. Yes, Doc Gibbs lost his wife two-three years ago...about this time. And today's another pretty bad blow for him, too.

MRS. GIBBS. (*to SIMON STIMSON: in an even voice*) That's my sister Carey's boy, Sam...Sam Craig.

SIMON STIMSON. I'm always uncomfortable when *they're* around.

MRS. GIBBS. Simon.

SAM CRAIG. Do they choose their own verses much, Joe?

JOE STODDARD. No...not usual. Mostly the bereaved pick a verse.

SAM CRAIG. Doesn't sound like Aunt Julia. There aren't many of those Hersey sisters left now. Let me see: where are...I wanted to look at my father's and mother's...

(*His eyes fall on Stimson's stone.*)

JOE STODDARD. Over there with the Craigs...Avenue F.

SAM CRAIG. (*reading Simon Stimson's epitaph.*) He was organist at church, wasn't he? – Hm, drank a lot, we used to say.

JOE STODDARD. Nobody was supposed to know about it. He'd seen a peck of trouble. (*behind his hand*) Took his own life, y' know?

SAM CRAIG. Oh, did he?

JOE STODDARD. Hung himself in the attic. They tried to hush it up, but of course it got around. He chose his own epy-taph. You can see it there. It ain't a verse exactly.

SAM CRAIG. Why, it's just some notes of music – what is it?

JOE STODDARD. Oh, I wouldn't know. It was wrote up in the Boston papers at the time.

SAM CRAIG. Joe, what did she die of?

JOE STODDARD. Who?

SAM CRAIG. My cousin.

JOE STODDARD. Oh, didn't you know? Had some trouble bringing a baby into the world. 'Twas her second, though. There's a little boy 'bout four years old.

SAM CRAIG. (*opening his umbrella*) The grave's going to be over there?

JOE STODDARD. Yes, there ain't much more room over here among the Gibbsses, so they're opening up a whole new Gibbs section over by Avenue B. You'll excuse me now. I see they're comin'.

(*From left to center, at the back of the stage, comes a procession. FOUR MEN carry a casket, invisible to us. All the rest are under umbrellas. One can vaguely see: DR. GIBBS, GEORGE, the WEBBS, etc. They gather about a grave in the back center of the stage, a little to the left of center. EMILY is among them, a black cloak covering her white dress.*)

MRS. SOAMES. Who is it, Julia?