

CHARLOTTE. No, I don't think *you* understand. We're very busy now, so good-bye! (*And she pushes HOWARD out the door and slams it.*) These people! They walk right in as if they own the place.

ETHEL. You didn't have to be rude to him.

CHARLOTTE. Mother, stay out of this.

(**CHARLOTTE** is heading off.)

ETHEL. I used to know a man named Capra. I wonder if he's related...?

(**CHARLOTTE** stops cold.)

CHARLOTTE. ...Capra?

ETHEL. What?

CHARLOTTE. CAPRA?!

ETHEL. What about him?

CHARLOTTE. WHY DID YOU SAY CAPRA?!

ETHEL. I didn't say it. He said it. He introduced himself. Frank Capra. It sounds extremely familiar...

CHARLOTTE. (*It sinks in and she clutches her breast.*) ...Oh my God! (*Shaking* **ETHEL.**) **MOTHER, WHY DIDN'T YOU TELL ME?!!** (*She rushes out the street door.*) Wait a second! Please! Wait!

ETHEL. (*As she heads backstage:*) It's like living in an asylum on the guard's day off.

(**ETHEL** exits; then **CHARLOTTE** reappears, leading a bewildered, reluctant **HOWARD** into the room.)

CHARLOTTE. I am so sorry. I could just beat myself with a stick! Please, come in.

HOWARD. ...You're sure? I could wait outside. It's a nice day, which is pretty much what I predicted.

CHARLOTTE. Oh no no no no! Oh, God. You must think I'm completely mad.

HOWARD. Mmmno.

CHARLOTTE. My mother should have said something. The older lady who was standing here. I'm afraid she's just a teensy bit hard of hearing.

HOWARD. "Grandma."

CHARLOTTE. Hm?

HOWARD. Maybe I should call her "Grandma." Heh heh. Or "Granny."

(HOWARD chuckles about this.)

CHARLOTTE. ...Why not?! Granny it is! So. Perhaps we should start over. (*Extending her hand, with enormous charm.*) I'm Charlotte Hay.

HOWARD. Hi—

CHARLOTTE. Now before you say another word, I just want to tell you what a *huge fan* I am of your work.

HOWARD. ...Gee, thanks.

CHARLOTTE. "It Happened One Night!"

HOWARD. ...Well, actually it happens every night at six and eleven.

CHARLOTTE. "It's A Wonderful Life." Wow.

HOWARD. Gee, you have such a good attitude.

(*Absentmindedly, HOWARD picks up a paperweight from the table and plays with it.*)

CHARLOTTE. "You Can't Take It With You."

(HOWARD quickly puts it down.)

HOWARD. I'm not! I-I-I-

CHARLOTTE. And you're such a young man to have accomplished so much. I had no idea.

HOWARD. Thanks. A lot of people think it's easy. Like there's nothing to it.

CHARLOTTE. Oh, come now...

HOWARD. They do! They think it's all just a matter of barometric pressure.

(HOWARD laughs at this; CHARLOTTE joins in—
trying to figure it out.)

CHARLOTTE. I'm sure the pressure must be intense these days.

HOWARD. It's pretty bad. But there's a cold front moving up from Atlanta, so that should give us some relief.

CHARLOTTE. ...Really? Well. Can I get you some coffee?

HOWARD. Mmmmmno. No thanks.

CHARLOTTE. A drink drink?

HOWARD. I never drink.

CHARLOTTE. Nor do I. Nor does George, my husband. The minute we start to work, there is no such thing in the world as liquor.

(At which point, GEORGE bursts in through the backstage door with a new bottle of whiskey in his hand, reeling with drunkenness. He wears an undershirt and trousers.)

GEORGE. "Once more unto the breach, dear friends, once more! Or close the wall up with our English dead!"

(He collapses in a heap on the floor. Silence.

CHARLOTTE just looks at him, horrified, at a complete loss. Then she starts clapping furiously.)

CHARLOTTE. Bravo! Brav-o!!

HOWARD. *(Starts clapping too, trying to be a good sport.)* Bravo!

CHARLOTTE. *(Confidentially.)* He's been working on this concept for months. Henry the Fifth, the-the-the... Pickled Prince.

HOWARD. He's very convincing. *(Calling to GEORGE, who is still out cold on the floor.)* That's very good!

CHARLOTTE. Shhh! Please. He's concentrating.

HOWARD. Sorry.

CHARLOTTE. Oh my God, just look at the time. We really must get you to your seat. But we will see you after the performance. Do you promise?

HOWARD. Sure.