

Start

*(He crosses the stage, leaping over the puddles.)*

*(MRS. GIBBS shakes her head in annoyance, takes cup, pours coffee back in pot on stove, exits upstairs.)*

*(crossing to her, cheerily)* Good morning, Mother Webb.

MRS. WEBB. Goodness! You frightened me! *(rises, turns to him)* – Now, George, you can come in a minute out of the wet, but you know I can't ask you in.

GEORGE. Why not – ?

MRS. WEBB. George, you know 's well as I do: the groom can't see his bride on his wedding day, not until he sees her in church.

*(enter MR. WEBB)*

GEORGE. Aw! – That's just a superstition. – Good morning, Mr. Webb.

MR. WEBB. Good morning, George. *(crosses to stove for coffee pot, takes it to table)*

GEORGE. *(laughing)* Mr. Webb, you don't believe in that superstition, do you?

MR. WEBB. There's a lot of common sense in some superstitions, George.

*(He sits at the table.)*

MRS. WEBB. *(pouring coffee for him)* Millions have folla'd it, George, and you don't want to be the first to fly in the face of custom. *(crosses to replace pot on stove)*

*(MR. WEBB takes four spoonfuls of sugar.)*

GEORGE. How is Emily?

MRS. WEBB. She hasn't waked up yet. I haven't heard a sound out of her. *(pouring coffee at stove)*

GEORGE. Emily's asleep!!!

MRS. WEBB. No wonder! We were up 'til all hours, sewing and packing. *(sets cup for GEORGE)* Now I'll tell you what I'll do; you set down here a minute

with Mr. Webb and drink this cup of coffee; (*crossing to stairs*) and I'll go upstairs and see she doesn't come down and surprise you. There's some bacon, too; but don't be long about it.

(*Exit MRS. WEBB.*)

(*Embarrassed silence. GEORGE sits at table, uses sugar, stirs, steals look at MR. WEBB.*)

(*MR. WEBB dunks doughnuts in his coffee.*)

(*more silence*)

MR. WEBB. (*suddenly and loudly*) Well, George, how are you?

GEORGE. (*startled, choking over his coffee*) Oh, fine, I'm fine. (*Pause. Earnestly.*) Mr. Webb, what sense could there be in a superstition like that?

MR. WEBB. Well, you see – on her wedding morning a girl's head's apt to be full of...clothes and one thing and another. Don't you think that's probably it? (*dunks and eats*)

GEORGE. Ye-e-s. I never thought of that.

MR. WEBB. A girl's apt to be a mite nervous on her wedding day. (*pause*)

GEORGE. (*stirring coffee*) I wish a fellow could get married without all that marching up and down.

MR. WEBB. Every man that's ever lived has felt that way about it, George; but it hasn't been any use. It's the womenfolk who've built up weddings, my boy. For a while now the women have it all their own. A man looks pretty small at a wedding, George. All those good women standing shoulder to shoulder making sure that the knot's tied in a mighty public way. (*cuts food and eats*)

GEORGE. But...you *believe* in it, don't you, Mr. Webb?

MR. WEBB. (*With alacrity. Suddenly looking at GEORGE.*)

Oh, yes; *oh, yes*. Don't you misunderstand me, my boy. Marriage is a wonderful thing, – wonderful thing. And don't you forget that, George.

GEORGE. No, sir. *(pause)* Mr. Webb, how old were you when you got married?

MR. WEBB. Well, you see: I'd been to college and I'd taken a little time to get settled. But Mrs. Webb – she wasn't much older than what Emily is. *(stirring coffee)* Oh, age hasn't much to do with it, George – not compared with...uh...other things. *(drinks)*

GEORGE. What were you going to say, Mr. Webb?

MR. WEBB. Oh, I don't know. – Was I going to say something? *(pause)* George, I was thinking the other night of some advice my father gave me when I got married. Charles, he said, Charles, start out early showing who's boss, he said. Best thing to do is to give an order, even if it don't make sense; just so she'll learn to obey. And he said: if anything about your wife irritates you – her conversation, or anything – just get up and leave the house. That'll make it clear to her, he said. And, oh, yes! he said never, *never* let your wife know how much money you have, never.

GEORGE. Well, Mr. Webb...I don't think I could...

MR. WEBB. So I took the opposite of my father's advice and I've been happy ever since. And let that be a lesson to you, George, never to ask advice on personal matters. – George, are you going to raise chickens on your farm?

GEORGE. What?

MR. WEBB. Are you going to raise chickens on your farm?

GEORGE. *(hitches chair nearer, enthusiastic)* Uncle Luke's never been much interested, but I thought –

MR. WEBB. A book came into my office the other day, George, on the Philo System of raising chickens. I want you to read it. I'm thinking of beginning in a small way in the back yard, and I'm going to put an incubator in the cellar –

(MRS. WEBB enters and crosses to MR. WEBB.)

MRS. WEBB. Charles, are you talking about that old incubator again? I thought you two'd be talking about things worth while.

MR. WEBB. (*bitingly*) Well, Myrtle, if you want to give the boy some good advice, I'll go upstairs and leave you alone with him.

MRS. WEBB. (*pulling GEORGE up and forcing him through the trellis*) George, Emily's got to come downstairs and eat her breakfast. She sends you her love but she doesn't want to lay eyes on you. Good-by.

GEORGE. Good-by.

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(GEORGE crosses the stage to his own home, bewildered and crestfallen. He slowly dodges a puddle and disappears into his house. MRS. WEBB stands above the trellis, watching.)

MR. WEBB. Myrtle, I guess you don't know about that older superstition.

MRS. WEBB. What do you mean, Charles?

MR. WEBB. (*wagging his finger*) Since the cave men: no bridegroom should see his father-in-law on the day of the wedding, or near it.

(*exiting upstairs*)

Now remember that.

(MRS. WEBB, eyes following him in surprise, exits.)

STAGE MANAGER. (*entering*) Thank you very much, Mr. and Mrs. Webb. — Now I have to interrupt again here. You see, we want to know how all this began — this wedding, this plan to spend a lifetime together. I'm awfully interested in how big things like that begin. You know how it is: you're twenty-one or twenty-two and you make some decisions; then whisssh! you're seventy: you've been a lawyer for fifty years, and that white-haired lady at your

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