

# Great Scene: "It's A Wonderful Life"

[Scott Myers](#)

George Bailey and Mary Hatch have an intense telephone conversation.

Movie: *It's a Wonderful Life* (1946), screenplay by Frances Goodrich & Albert Hackett and Frank Capra, story by Philip Van Doren Stern

IMDb plot summary: An angel is sent from Heaven to help a desperately frustrated businessman by showing him what life would have been like if he had never existed.



It's a Wonderful Life

Scene Setup: Frustrated that it looks like he'll continue to be stuck in Bedford Falls now that his brother has secretly gotten married, George goes out for a walk and ends up visiting Mary. They get into a heated argument, then fate

intervenes: A phone call from their old friend Sam Wainwright.

MRS. HATCH'S VOICE

Mary! Mary! The telephone! It's Sam!

INT. HALL — NIGHT

MEDIUM CLOSE SHOT

Mary comes into the hall.

MARY

(almost weeping)

I'll get it.

As Mary comes into the hall, she stops by the phonograph, which is still playing "Buffalo Gals," takes off the record with a jerk, and smashes it against the machine. The phone is still ringing.

MRS. HATCH

Mary, he's waiting!

MARY

Hello.

As Mary picks up the phone, George comes in from the front porch.

GEORGE

I forgot my hat.

MARY

(overly enthusiastic)

Hee-haw! Hello, Sam, how are you?

SAM'S VOICE

Aw, great. Gee, it's good to hear your voice again.

George has stopped, hat in hand, to hear the first greetings.

MARY

Oh, well, that's awfully sweet of you, Sam.

(glances toward door,  
sees George still  
there)

There's an old friend of yours here.  
George Bailey.

SAM

You mean old moss-back George?

MARY

Yes, old moss-back George.

SAM'S VOICE

Hee-haw! Put him on.

MARY

Wait a minute. I'll call him.

(calling)

George!

MRS. HATCH

He doesn't want to speak to George, you idiot!

MARY

He does so. He asked for him.

(calling)

Geo... George, Sam wants to speak to you.

She hands the instrument to George.

GEORGE

Hello, Sam.

INT. SAM'S NEW YORK OFFICE — NIGHT

MEDIUM CLOSE SHOT

Sam is seated at his desk, while a couple of his friends are nearby, with highballs in their hands.

SAM

(into phone)

Well, George Baileyoffski! Hey, a fine pal you are. What're you trying to do? Steal my girl?

INT. HATCH HALL — NIGHT

MEDIUM CLOSE SHOT — GEORGE AND MARY

GEORGE

(into phone)

What do you mean? Nobody's trying to steal your girl. Here... here's Mary.

SAM'S VOICE

No, wait a minute. Wait a minute. I want to talk to both of you. Tell Mary to get on the extension.

GEORGE

(to Mary)

Here. You take it. You tell him.

MARY

Mother's on the extension.

INT. UPPER HALLWAY — NIGHT

CLOSE SHOT — MRS. HATCH

As she hears this, she hastily hangs up the extension phone on which she has been listening.

BACK TO SHOT — GEORGE AND MARY

MARY

We can both hear. Come here.

Mary takes the telephone from George and holds it so that of necessity George's cheek is almost against hers. He is very conscious of her proximity.

MARY

(on phone)

We're listening, Sam.

SAM'S VOICE

I have a big deal coming up that's going to make us all rich. George, you remember that night in Martini's bar when you told me you read someplace about making plastics out of soybeans?

GEORGE

Huh? Yeah-yeah-yeah... soybeans. Yeah.

SAM'S VOICE

Well, Dad's snapped up the idea. He's going to build a factory outside of Rochester. How do you like that?

Mary is watching George interestedly. George is very conscious of her, close to him.

GEORGE

Rochester? Well, why Rochester?

SAM'S VOICE

Well, why not? Can you think of anything better?

GEORGE

Oh, I don't know... why not right here? You remember that old tool and machinery works? You tell your father he can get that for a song. And all the labor he wants, too. Half the town was thrown out of work when they closed down.

SAM'S VOICE

That so? Well, I'll tell him. Hey, that sounds great! Oh, baby, I knew you'd come through. Now, here's the point. Mary, Mary, you're in on this too. Now listen. Have you got any money?

GEORGE

Money? Yeah... well, a little.

SAM'S VOICE

Well, now listen. I want you to put every cent you've got into our stock, you hear? And George, I may have a job for you; that is, unless you're still married to that broken-down Building and Loan. This is the biggest thing since radio, and I'm letting you in on the ground floor. Oh, Mary... Mary...

MARY

(nervously)

I'm here.

SAM'S VOICE

Would you tell that guy I'm giving him the chance of a lifetime, you hear? The chance of a lifetime.

As Mary listens, she turns to look at George, her lips almost on his lips.

MARY

(whispering)

He says it's the chance of a lifetime.

George can stand it no longer. He drops the phone with a crash, grabs Mary by the shoulders and shakes her. Mary begins to cry.

GEORGE

(fiercely)

Now you listen to me! I don't want any plastics! I don't want any ground floors, and I don't want to get married — ever — to anyone! You understand that? I want to do what I want to do. And you're... and you're...

He pulls her to him in a fierce embrace. Two meant for each other find themselves in tearful ecstasy.

GEORGE (CONT'D)

Oh, Mary... Mary...

MARY

George... George... George...

GEORGE

Mary...

CLOSE SHOT

Mrs. Hatch is at the top of the stairs. She practically faints at what she sees.

WIPE TO:

INT. FRONT HALL BAILEY HOME — DAY — SEVERAL MONTHS LATER

CLOSEUP

Cousin Tilly's face fills the screen as she cries:

COUSIN TILLY

Here they come!

CAMERA PULLS BACK, and we hear the SOUND of the Wedding March. People are crowded into the rooms: family, friends, neighbors. There is a din of conversation. Mary and George appear at the top of the stairs in traveling clothes, with Mrs. Hatch, red-eyed, behind them. Mary throws her bouquet, which is caught by Violet Bick. As they come out onto the porch, we see that it is raining. Nevertheless, Cousin Eustace has his camera equipment set up and is taking pictures of the group. George and Mary dodge through the rain and a shower of rice and get into Ernie's taxicab, which pulls away from the curb.

Here is the movie version of the scene:

"He says it's the chance of a lifetime." One of the most important lines in the movie. Here the text is about Sam Wainwright offering George and Mary a business investment opportunity. The subtext: George has an opportunity to be with Mary.

But there is a callback later when Clarence says this to George: "You've been given a great gift, George: A chance to see what the world would be like without you."

There's that word again: Chance. George opted to take the chance to be with Mary. Then he's given a chance to look

back on the ramifications of that choice. So in effect, there is not only subtext in this scene, but also a setup to a later payoff.

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