# The SKIN of OUR TEETH

Thornton Wilder

# Thornton Wilder



PLAY IN THREE ACTS



Harper & Brothers Publishers

NEW YORK and LONDON

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## MICHAEL MYERBERG

presents

Tallulah Bankhead Frederic March Florence Eldridge

in

# THE SKIN OF OUR TEETH

A New Comedy by Thornton Wilder
with a company of forty and
Florence Reed
Directed by Elia Kazan

Settings by Albert Johnson
Costumes by Mary Percy Schenck

CAST (in the order of their appearance)

ANNOUNCER SABINA Mr. FITZPATRICK Mrs. Antrobus DINOSAUR Маммотн TELEGRAPH BOY GLADYS HENRY Mr. Antrorus DOCTOR PROFESSOR TUDGE HOMER MISS E. MUSE MISS T. MUSE

Morton DaCosta Tallulah Bankhead E. G. Marshall Florence Eldridge Remo Buffano Andrew Ratousheff Dickie Van Patten Frances Heflin Montgomery Clift Frederic March Arthur Griffin Ralph Kellard Joseph Smiley Ralph Cullinan Edith Faversham **Emily Lorraine** 

# CAST-(continued)

Miss M. Muse USHER USHER GIRL ) DRUM MAJORETTES FORTUNE TELLER CHAIR PUSHER CHAIR PUSHER Conveener Conveener Conveener CONVEENER Conveener Conveener Broadcast Official DEFEATED CANDIDATE Mr. Tremayne HESTER Ĩνγ

FRED BAILEY

Eva Mudge Nelson Stanley Prager Harry Clark Elizabeth Scott Patricia Riordan Florence Reed Earl Sydnor Carroll Clark Stanley Weede Seumas Flynn Aubrey Fassett Stanley Prager Harry Clark Stephan Cole Morton DaCosta Joseph Smiley Ralph Kellard Eulabelle Moore Viola Dean Stanley Prager

Act I. Home, Excelsior, New Jersey.

Act II. Atlantic City Boardwalk.

Act III. Home, Excelsior, New Jersey.

Costumes from Brooks Costume Co. Dinosaur and Mammoth costumes and special properties designed and executed by Remo Buffano. Scenery built and painted by Studio Alliance, Inc. Electrical equipment from Duwico.

First performance at the Shubert Theatre, New Haven, Connecticut, October 15, 1942. First New York performance at the Plymouth Theatre, November 18, 1942.

# Acr I

A projection screen in the middle of the curtain. The first lantern slide: the name of the theatre, and the words: NEWS EVENTS OF THE WORLD. An ANNOUNCER'S voice is heard.

#### ANNOUNCER:

The management takes pleasure in bringing to you—The News Events of the World:

Slide of the sun appearing above the horizon.

Freeport, Long Island.

The sun rose this morning at 6:32 a.m. This gratifying event was first reported by Mrs. Dorothy Stetson of Freeport, Long Island, who promptly telephoned the Mayor.

The Society for Affirming the End of the World at once went into a special session and postponed the arrival of that event for TWENTY-FOUR HOURS.

All honor to Mrs. Stetson for her public spirit.

# New York City:

Slide of the front doors of the theatre in which this play is playing; three cleaning WOMEN with mops and pails.

The X Theatre. During the daily cleaning of this theatre a number of lost objects were collected as usual by Mesdames Simpson, Pateslewski, and Moriarty.

Among these objects found today was a wedding ring, inscribed: To Eva from Adam. Genesis II: 18.

The ring will be restored to the owner or owners, if their credentials are satisfactory.

# Tippehatchee, Vermont:

Slide representing a glacier.

The unprecedented cold weather of this summer has produced a condition that has not yet been satisfactorily explained. There is a report that a wall of ice is moving southward across these counties. The disruption of communications by the cold wave now crossing the country has rendered exact information difficult, but little credence is given to the rumor that the ice had pushed the Cathedral of Montreal as far as St. Albans, Vermont.

For further information see your daily papers.

# Excelsior, New Jersey:

Slide of a modest suburban home.

The home of Mr, George Antrobus, the inventor of the wheel. The discovery of the wheel, following so closely on the discovery of the lever, has centered the attention of the country on Mr. Antrobus of this attractive suburban residence district. This is his home, a commodious seven-room house, con-

veniently situated near a public school, a Methodist church, and a firehouse; it is right handy to an A. and P.

Slide of MR. ANTROBUS on his front steps, smiling and lifting his straw hat. He holds a wheel.

Mr. Antrobus, himself. He comes of very old stock and has made his way up from next to nothing.

It is reported that he was once a gardener, but left that situation under circumstances that have been variously reported.

Mr. Antrobus is a veteran of foreign wars, and bears a number of scars, front and back.

Slide of MRS. ANTROBUS, holding some roses.

This is Mrs. Antrobus, the charming and gracious president of the Excelsior Mothers' Club.

Mrs. Antrobus is an excellent needlewoman; it is she who invented the apron on which so many interesting changes have been rung since.

Slide of the FAMILY and SABINA.

Here we see the Antrobuses with their two children, Henry and Gladys, and friend. The friend in the rear, is Lily Sabina, the maid.

I know we all want to congratulate this typical American family on its enterprise. We all wish Mr. Antrobus a successful future. Now the management takes you to the interior of this home for a brief visit.

Curtain rises. Living room of a commuter's home. SABINA—straw-blonde, over-rouged—is standing by the window back center, a feather duster under her elbow.

#### SABINA:

Oh, oh, oh! Six o'clock and the master not home yet.

Pray God nothing serious has happened to him crossing the Hudson River. If anything happened to him, we would certainly be inconsolable and have to move into a less desirable residence district.

The fact is I don't know what'll become of us. Here it is the middle of August and the coldest day of the year. It's simply freezing; the dogs are sticking to the sidewalks; can anybody explain that? No.

But I'm not surprised. The whole world's at sixes and sevens, and why the house hasn't fallen down about our ears long ago is a miracle to me.

A fragment of the right wall leans precariously over the stage. SABINA looks at it nervously and it slowly rights itself.

Every night this same anxiety as to whether the master will get home safely: whether he'll bring home anything to eat. In the midst of life we are in the midst of death, a truer word was never said.

The fragment of scenery flies up into the lofts. SABINA is struck dumb with surprise, shrugs her shoulders and starts dusting MR. ANTROBUS' chair, including the under side.

Of course, Mr. Antrobus is a very fine man, an excellent husband and father, a pillar of the church, and has all the best interests of the community at heart. Of course, every muscle goes tight every time he passes a policeman; but what I think

is that there are certain charges that ought not to be made, and I think I may add, ought not to be allowed to be made; we're all human; who isn't?

She dusts MRS. ANTROBUS' rocking chair.

Mrs. Antrobus is as fine a woman as you could hope to see. She lives only for her children; and if it would be any benefit to her children she'd see the rest of us stretched out dead at her feet without turning a hair,—that's the truth. If you want to know anything more about Mrs. Antrobus, just go and look at a tigress, and look hard.

As to the children-

Well, Henry Antrobus is a real, clean-cut American boy. He'll graduate from High School one of these days, if they make the alphabet any easier.—Henry, when he has a stone in his hand, has a perfect aim; he can hit anything from a bird to an older brother—Oh! I didn't mean to say that!—but it certainly was an unfortunate accident, and it was very hard getting the police out of the house.

Mr. and Mrs. Antrobus' daughter is named Gladys. She'll make some good man a good wife some day, if he'll just come down off the movie screen and ask her.

So here we are!

We've managed to survive for some time now, catch as catch can, the fat and the lean, and if the dinosaurs don't trample us to death, and if the grasshoppers don't eat up our garden, we'll all live to see better days, knock on wood.

Each new child that's born to the Antrobuses seems to them to be sufficient reason for the whole universe's being set in motion; and each new child that dies seems to them to have

been spared a whole world of sorrow, and what the end of it will be is still very much an open question.

We've rattled along, hot and cold, for some time now-

A portion of the wall above the door, right, flies up into the air and disappears.

-and my advice to you is not to inquire into why or whither, but just enjoy your ice cream while it's on your plate,—that's my philosophy.

Don't forget that a few years ago we came through the depression by the skin of our teeth! One more tight squeeze like that and where will we be?

This is a cue line. SABINA looks angrily at the kitchen door and repeats:

. . . we came through the depression by the skin of our teeth; one more tight squeeze like that and where will we be?

Flustered, she looks through the opening in the right wall; then goes to the window and reopens the Act.

Oh, oh, oh! Six o'clock and the master not home yet. Pray God nothing has happened to him crossing the Hudson. Here it is the middle of August and the coldest day of the year. It's simply freezing; the dogs are sticking. One more tight squeeze like that and where will we be?

VOICE:

Off stage.

Make up something! Invent something!

SABINA:

Well . . . uh . . . this certainly is a fine American home . . . and—uh . . . everybody's very happy . . . and—uh . . .

Suddenly flings pretense to the winds and coming downstage says with indignation:

I can't invent any words for this play, and I'm glad I can't. I hate this play and every word in it.

As for me, I don't understand a single word of it, anyway, all about the troubles the human race has gone through, there's a subject for you.

Besides the author hasn't made up his silly mind as to whether we're all living back in caves or in New Jersey today, and that's the way it is all the way through.

Oh-why can't we have plays like we used to have—Peg o'. My Heart, and Smilin' Thru, and The Bat, good entertainment with a message you can take home with you?

I took this hateful job because I had to. For two years I've sat up in my room living on a sandwich and a cup of tea a day, waiting for better times in the theatre. And look at me now: I—I who've played Rain and the Barretts of Wimpole Street and First Lady—God in Heaven!

#### MR. FITZPATRICK:

The STAGE MANAGER puts his head out from the hole in the scenery.

Miss Somerset!! Miss Somerset!

#### SABINA:

Oh! Anyway!—nothing matters! It'll all be the same in a hundred years.

Loudly.

We came through the depression by the skin of our teeth,—that's true!—one more tight squeeze like that and where will we be?

Enter MRS. ANTROBUS, a mother.

#### MRS, ANTROBUS:

Sabina, you've let the fire go out.

#### SABINA:

In a lather.

One-thing-and-another; don't-know-whether-my-wits-areupside-or-down; might-as-well-be-dead-as-alive-in-a-houseall-sixes-and-sevens. . . .

#### MRS. ANTROBUS:

You've let the fire go out. Here it is the coldest day of the year right in the middle of August, and you've let the fire go out.

#### SABINA:

Mrs. Antrobus, I'd like to give my two weeks' notice, Mrs. Antrobus. A girl like I can get a situation in a home where they're rich erough to have a fire in every room, Mrs. Antrobus, and a girl don't have to carry the responsibility of the whole house on her two shoulders. And a home without children, Mrs. Antrobus, because children are a thing only a parent can stand, and a truer word was never said; and a home, Mrs. Antrobus, where the master of the house don't pinch decent, self-respecting girls when he meets them in a dark

corridor. I mention no names and make no charges. So you have my notice, Mrs. Antrobus. I hope that's perfectly clear.

#### MRS. ANTROBUS:

You've let the fire go out!—Have you milked the mammoth?

#### SABINA:

I don't understand a word of this play.—Yes, I've milked the mammoth.

## MRS. ANTROBUS:

Until Mr. Antrobus comes home we have no food and we have no fire. You'd better go over to the neighbors and borrow some fire.

## SABINA:

Mrs. Antrobus! I can't! I'd die on the way, you know I would. It's worse than January. The dogs are sticking to the sidewalks. I'd die.

#### MRS. ANTROBUS:

Very well, I'll go.

#### SABINA:

Even more distraught, coming forward and sinking on her knees.

You'd never come back alive; we'd all perish; if you weren't here, we'd just perish. How do we know Mr. Antrobus'll be back? We don't know. If you go out, I'll just kill myself.

#### MRS. ANTROBUS:

Get up, Sabina.

#### SABINA:

Every night it's the same thing. Will he come back safe, or won't he? Will we starve to death, or freeze to death, or boil to death or will we be killed by burglars? I don't know why we go on living. I don't know why we go on living at all. It's easier being dead.

She flings her arms on the table and buries her head in them. In each of the succeeding speeches she flings her head up—and sometimes her hands—then quickly buries her head again.

#### MRS. ANTROBUS:

The same thing! Always throwing up the sponge, Sabina. Always announcing your own death. But give you a new hat—or a plate of ice cream—or a ticket to the movies, and you want to live forever.

#### SABINA:

You don't care whether we live or die; all you care about is those children. If it would be any benefit to them you'd be glad to see us all stretched out dead.

#### MRS. ANTROBUS:

Well, maybe I would.

#### SABINA:

And what do they care about? Themselves—that's all they care thout.

Shrilly.

They make fun of you behind your back. Don't tell me: they're ashamed of you. Half the time, they pretend they're someone else's children. Little thanks you get from them.

#### MRS. ANTROBUS:

I'm not asking for any thanks.

#### SABINA:

And Mr. Antrobus—you don't understand him. All that work he does—trying to discover the alphabet and the multiplication table. Whenever he tries to learn anything you fight against it.

#### MRS. ANTROBUS:

Oh, Sabina, I know you.

When Mr. Antrobus raped you home from your Sabine hills, he did it to insult me.

He did it for your pretty face, and to insult me.

You were the new wife, weren't you?

For a year or two you lay on your bed all day and polished the nails on your hands and feet:

You made puff-balls of the combings of your hair and you blew them up to the ceiling.

And I washed your underclothes and I made you chicken broths.

I bore children and between my very groans I stirred the cream that you'd put on your face.

But I knew you wouldn't last.

You didn't last.

#### SABINA:

But it was I who encouraged Mr. Antrobus to make the alphabet. I'm sorry to say it, Mrs. Antrobus, but you're not a beautiful woman, and you can never know what a man could do if he tried. It's girls like I who inspire the multiplication table.

I'm sorry to say it, but you're not a beautiful woman, Mrs. Antrobus, and that's the God's truth.

## MRS. ANTROBUS:

And you didn't last—you sank to the kitchen. And what do you do there? You let the fire go out!

No wonder to you it seems easier being dead.

Reading and writing and counting on your fingers is all very well in their way,—but I keep the home going.

## MRS. ANTROBUS:

-There's that dinosaur on the front lawn again. -Shoo! Go away. Go away.

The baby dinosaur puts his head in the window.

#### DINOSAUR:

It's cold.

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