

ANOTHER VOICE. Is on the blink! *(The gunman looks grave.)*

FATT. Stand up and show yourself, you damn red! Be a man, let's see that you look like! *(Waits in vain.)* Yellow from the word, go! Red and yellow makes a dirty color, boys. I got my eyes on four or five of them in the union here. What the hell'll they do for you? Pull you out and run away when trouble starts. Give those birds a chance and they'll have your sisters and wives in the whorehouses, like they done in Russia. They'll tear Christ off his bleeding cross. They'll wreck your homes and throw your babies in the river. You think that's bunk? Read the papers! Now listen, we can't stay here all night. I gave you the facts in the case. You boys got hot suppers to go to and—

ANOTHER VOICE. Says you!

GUNMAN. Sit down, Punk!

ANOTHER VOICE. Where's Lefty? *(Now this question is taken up by the others in unison. Fatt pounds with gavel.)*

FATT. That's what I wanna know. Where's your pal, Lefty? You elected him chairman — where the hell did he disappear?

VOICES. We want Lefty! Lefty! Lefty!

FATT. *(Pounding.)* What the hell is this — a circus? You got the committee here. This bunch of cowboys you elected. *(Pointing to man on extreme right exit.)*

MAN. Benjamin.

FATT. Yeah, Doc Benjamin. *(Pointing to other men in circle in seated order.)* Benjamin, Miller, Stein, Mitchell, Phillips, Keller. It ain't my fault, Lefty took a run-out powder. If you guys—

A GOOD VOICE. What's the committee say?

OTHERS. The committee! Let's hear from the committee! *(Fatt tries to quiet the crowd, but one of the seated men suddenly comes to the front. The gunman moves over to C., but Fatt says.)*

FATT. Sure, let him talk. Let's hear what the red boys gotta say! *(Various shouts are coming from the audience. Fatt insolently goes back to his seat in the middle of the circle. He sits on his raised platform and relights his cigar. The gunman goes back to his post. Joe, the new speaker, raises his hand for quiet. Gets it quickly. He is sore.)*

JOE. You boys know me. I ain't a red boy one bit! Here I'm carryin' a shrapnel that big I picked up in the war. And maybe I don't know it when it rains! Don't tell me red! You know what we are? The black and blue boys! We been kicked around so long we're black and blue from head to toes. But I guess anyone who says straight out he don't like it, he's a red boy to the leaders of the union. What's this crap about goin' home to hot suppers? I'm asking to your faces how many's got hot suppers to go home to? Anyone who's sure of his next meal, raise your hand! A certain gent sitting behind me can raise them both. But not in front here! And that's why we're talking strike — to get a living wage!

VOICE. Where's Lefty?

JOE. I honest to God don't know, but he didn't take no run-out powder. That Wop's got more guts than a slaughter house. Maybe a traffic jam got him, but he'll be here. But don't let this red stuff scare you. Unless fighting for a living scares you. We gotta make up our minds. My wife made up my mind last week if you want the truth. It's plain as the nose on Sol Feinberg's face we need a strike. There's us comin' home every night — eight, ten hours on the cab. "God," the wife says, "eighty cents ain't money — don't buy beans almost. You're workin' for the company," she says to me, "Joe, you ain't workin' for me or the family no more!" She says to me, "If you don't start..."

BEGIN

I. JOE AND EDNA

The lights fade out and a white spot picks out the playing space within the space of seated men. The seated men are very dimly visible in the outer dark, but more prominent is Fatt smoking his cigar and often blowing the smoke in the lighted circle.

A tired but attractive woman of thirty comes into the room, drying her hands on an apron. She stands there sullenly as Joe

comes in from the other side, home from work. For a moment they stand and look at each other in silence.

JOE. Where's all the furniture, honey? :
EDNA. They took it away. No installments paid.
JOE. When?
EDNA. Three o'clock.
JOE. They can't do that.
EDNA. Can't? They did it.
JOE. Why, the palookas, we paid three-quarters.
EDNA. The man said read the contract.
JOE. We must have signed a phoney....
EDNA. It's a regular contract and you signed it.
JOE. Don't be so sour, Edna... *(Tries to embrace her.)*
EDNA. Do it in the movies, Joe — they pay Clark Gable big money for it.
JOE. This is a heituvu house to come home to. Take my word!
EDNA. Take MY word! Whose fault is it?
JOE. Must you start that stuff again?
EDNA. Maybe you'd like to talk about books?
JOE. I'd like to slap you in the mouth!
EDNA. No you won't.
JOE. *(Sheepishly.)* Jeez, Edna, you get me sore some time....
EDNA. But just look at me — I'm laughing all over!
JOE. Don't insult me. Can I help it if times are bad? What the hell do you want me to do, jump off a bridge or something?
EDNA. Don't yell. I just put the kids to bed so they won't know they missed a meal. If I don't have Emmy's shoes soled tomorrow, she can't go to school. In the meantime let her sleep.
JOE. Honey, I rode the wheels off the chariot today. I cruised around five hours without a call. It's conditions.
EDNA. Tell it to the A & P!
JOE. I booked two-twenty on the clock. A lady with a dog was lit... she gave me a quarter tip by mistake. If you'd only listen to me — we're rolling in wealth.

EDNA. Yeah? How much?
JOE. I had "coffee and—" in a beanery. *(Hands her silver coins.)* A buck four.
EDNA. The second month's rent is due tomorrow.
JOE. Don't look at me that way, Edna.
EDNA. I'm looking through you, not at you.... Everything was gonna be ducky! A cottage by the waterfall, roses in Picardy. You're a four-star-bust! If you think I'm standing for it much longer, you're crazy as a bedbug.
JOE. I'd get another job if I could. There's no work — you know it.
EDNA. I only know we're at the bottom of the ocean.
JOE. What can I do?
EDNA. Who's the man in the family, you or me?
JOE. That's no answer. Get down to brass tacks. Christ, gimme a break, too! A coffee and java all day. I'm hungry, too, Babe. I'd work my fingers to the bone if—
EDNA. I'll open a can of salmon.
JOE. Not now. Tell me what to do!
EDNA. I'm not God!
JOE. Jeez, I wish I was a kid again and didn't have to think about the next minute.
EDNA. But you're not a kid and you do have to think about the next minute. You got two blondie kids sleeping in the next room. They need food and clothes. I'm not mentioning anything else— But we're stalled like a flivver in the snow. For five years I laid awake at night listening to my heart pound. For God's sake, do something, Joe, get wise. Maybe get your buddies together, maybe go on strike for better money. Poppa did it during the war and they won out. I'm turning into a sour old nag.
JOE. *(Defending himself.)* Strikes don't work!
EDNA. Who told you?
JOE. Besides that means not a nickel a week while we're out. Then when it's over they don't take you back.
EDNA. Suppose they don't! What's to lose?
JOE. Well, we're averaging six-seven dollars a week now.

EDNA. That just pays for the rent.

JOE. That is something, Edna.

EDNA. It isn't. They'll push you down to three and four a week before you know it. Then you'll say, "That's somethin'," too!

JOE. There's too many cabs on the street, that's the whole damn trouble.

EDNA. Let the company worry about that, you big fool! If their cabs didn't make a profit, they'd take them off the streets. Or maybe you think they're in business just to pay Joe Mitchell's rent!

JOE. You don't know a-b-c, Edna.

EDNA. I know this — your boss is making suckers outa you boys every minute. Yes, and suckers out of all the wives and the poor innocent kids who'll grow up with crooked spines and sick bones. Sure, I see it in the papers, how good orange juice is for kids. But damnit our kids get colds one on top of the other. They look like little ghosts. Betty never saw a grapefruit. I took her to the store last week and she pointed to a stack of grapefruits. "What's that!" she said. My God, Joe — the world is supposed to be for all of us.

JOE. You'll wake them up.

EDNA. I don't care, as long as I can maybe wake you up.

JOE. Don't insult me. One man can't make a strike.

EDNA. Who says one? You got hundreds in your rotten union!

JOE. The union ain't rotten.

EDNA. No? Then what are they doing? Collecting dues and patting your back?

JOE. They're making plans.

EDNA. What kind?

JOE. They don't tell us.

EDNA. It's too damn bad about you. They don't tell little Joey what's happening in his bitsie union. What do you think it is — a ping pong game?

JOE. You know they're racketeers. The guys at the top would shoot you for a nickel.

EDNA. Why do you stand for that stuff?

JOE. Don't you wanna see me alive?

EDNA. *(After a deep pause.)* No ... I don't think I do, Joe. Not if you can lift a finger to do something about it, and don't. No, I don't care.

JOE. Honey, you don't understand what—

EDNA. And any other hackie that won't fight ... let them all be ground to hamburger!

JOE. It's one thing to—

EDNA. Take your hand away! Only they don't grind me to little pieces! I got different plans. *(Starts to take off her apron.)*

JOE. Where are you going?

EDNA. None of your business.

JOE. What's up your sleeve?

EDNA. My arm'd be up my sleeve, darling, if I had a sleeve to wear. *(Puts neatly folded apron on back of chair.)*

JOE. Tell me!

EDNA. Tell you what?

JOE. Where are you going?

EDNA. Don't you remember my old boy friend?

JOE. Who?

EDNA. Bud Haas. He still has my picture in his watch. He earns a living.

JOE. What the hell are you talking about?

EDNA. I heard worse than I'm talking about.

JOE. Have you seen Bud since we got married?

EDNA. Maybe.

JOE. If I thought ... *(He stands looking at her.)*

EDNA. See much? Listen, boy friend, if you think I won't do this it just means you can't see straight.

JOE. Stop talking bull!

EDNA. This isn't five years ago, Joe.

JOE. You mean you'd leave me and the kids?

EDNA. I'd leave you like a shot!

JOE. No..

EDNA. Yes! *(Joe turns away, sitting in a chair with his back to her. Outside the lighted circle of the playing stage we hear the other seated*

