

Agate Keller

WAITING FOR LEFTY

As the curtain goes up we see a bare stage. On it are sitting six or seven men in a semi-circle. Lolling against the proscenium Down Left is a young man chewing a toothpick: a gunman. A fat man of porcine appearance is talking directly to the audience. In other words he is the head of a union and the men ranged behind him are a committee of workers. They are now seated in interesting different attitudes and present a wide diversity of type, as we shall soon see. The fat man is hot and heavy under the collar, near the end of a long talk, but not too hot: he is well fed and confident. His name is Harry Fatt.

FATT. You're so wrong I ain't laughing. Any guy with eyes to read knows it. Look at the textile strike — out like lions and in like lambs. Take the San Francisco tie-up — starvation and broken heads. The steel boys wanted to walk out too, but they changed their minds. It's the trend of the times, that's what it is. All we workers got a good man behind us now. He's top man of the country — looking out for our interests — the man in the White House is the one I'm referrin' to. That's why the times ain't ripe for a strike. He's working day and night—

VOICE. *(From the audience.)* For who? *(The gunman stirs himself.)*

FATT. For you! The records prove it. If this was the Hoover régime, would I say don't go out, boys? Not on your tin-type! But things is different now. You read the papers as well as me. You know it. And that's why I'm against the strike. Because we gotta stand behind the man who's standin' behind us! The whole country—

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 gol 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 whore houses, 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 end.)*

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, "Joel you ain't workin' for me or the family no more!" She says to me, "If you don't start..."

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 helluva 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*

members of the strike committee. "She will... she will... it happens that way," etc. This group should be used throughout for various comments, political, emotional and as general chorus. Whispering... The fat boss now blows a heavy cloud of smoke into the scene.)

JOE. (Finally.) Well, I guess I ain't got a leg to stand on.

EDNA. No?

JOE. (Suddenly mad.) No, you lousy tart, no! Get the hell out of here. Go pick up that bull-thrower on the corner and stop at some cushy hotel downtown. He's probably been coming here every morning and laying you while I hacked my guts out!

EDNA. You're crawling like a worm!

JOE. You'll be crawling in a minute.

EDNA. You don't scare me that much! (Indicates a half inch on her finger.)

JOE. That is what I slaved for!

EDNA. Tell it to your boss!

JOE. He don't give a damn for you or me!

EDNA. That's what I say.

JOE. Don't change the subject!

EDNA. This is the subject, the *exact subject!* Your boss makes this subject. I never saw him in my life, but he's putting ideas in my head a mile a minute. He's giving your kids that fancy disease called the rickets. He's making a jelly-fish outa you and putting wrinkles in my face. This is the subject every inch of the way! He's throwing me into Bud Haas' lap. When in hell will you get wise—

JOE. I'm not so dumb as you think! But you are talking like a red.

EDNA. I don't know what that means. But when a man knocks you down you get up and kiss his fist! You gutless piece of boloney.

JOE. One man can't—

EDNA. (With great joy.) I don't say one man! I say a hundred, a thousand, a whole million, I say. But start in your own union. Get those hack boys together! Sweep out those racketeers like a pile of dirt! Stand up like men and fight for the crying kids and wives.

Goddamnit! I'm tired of slavery and sleepless nights.

JOE. *(With her.)* Sure, sure!...

EDNA. Yes. Get brass toes on your shoes and know where to kick!

JOE. *(Suddenly jumping up and kissing his wife full on the mouth.)* Listen, Edna, I'm goin' down to 174th Street to look up Lefty Costello. Lefty was saying the other day ... *(He suddenly stops.)* How about this Hass guy?

EDNA. Get out of here!

JOE. I'll be back! *(Runs out. For a moment Edna stands triumphant. There is a blackout and when the regular lights come up, Joe Mitchell is concluding what he has been saying.)* You guys know this stuff better than me. We gotta walk out! *(Abruptly he turns and goes back to his seat.)*

Blackout

II. LAB ASSISTANT EPISODE

Discovered: Miller, a lab assistant, looking around; and Fayette, an industrialist.

FAYETTE. Like it?

MILLER. Very much. I've never seen an office like this outside the movies.

FAYETTE. Yes, I often wonder if interior decorators and bathroom fixture people don't get all their ideas from Hollywood. Our country's extraordinary that way. Soap, cosmetics, electric refrigerators — just let Mrs. Consumer know they're used by the Crawfords and Garbos — more volume of sale than one plant can handle!

MILLER. I'm afraid it isn't that easy, Mr. Fayette.

FAYETTE. No, you're right — gross exaggeration on my part.

Competition is cutthroat today. Market's up flush against a stone wall. The astronomers had better hurry — open Mars to trade expansion.

MILLER. Or it will be just too bad!

FAYETTE. Cigar?

MILLER. Thank you, don't smoke.

FAYETTE. Drink?

MILLER. Ditto, Mr. Fayette.

FAYETTE. I like sobriety in my workers ... the trained ones, I mean. The pollacks and niggers, they're better drunk — keeps them out of mischief. Wondering why I had you come over?

MILLER. If you don't mind my saying — very much.

FAYETTE. *(Patting him on the knee.)* I like your work.

MILLER. Thanks.

FAYETTE. No reason why a talented young man like yourself shouldn't string along with us — a growing concern. Loyalty is well repaid in our organization. Did you see Siegfried this morning?

MILLER. He hasn't been in the laboratory all day.

FAYETTE. I told him yesterday to raise you twenty dollars a month. Starts this week.

MILLER. You don't know how happy my wife'll be.

FAYETTE. Oh, I can appreciate it. *(He laughs.)*

MILLER. Was that all, Mr. Fayette?

FAYETTE. Yes, except that we're switching you to laboratory A tomorrow. Siegfried knows about it. That's why I had you in. The new work is very important. Siegfried recommended you very highly as a man to trust. You'll work directly under Dr. Brenner. Make you happy?

MILLER. Very. He's an important chemist!

FAYETTE. *(Leaning over seriously.)* We think so, Miller. We think so to the extent of asking you to stay within the building throughout the time you work with him.

MILLER. You mean sleep and eat in?

FAYETTE. Yes...

MILLER. It can be arranged.

FAYETTE. Fine. You'll go far, Miller.

MILLER. May I ask the nature of the new work?
FAYETTE. (*Looking around first.*) Poison gas..
MILLER. Poison!
FAYETTE. Orders from above. I don't have to tell you from where. New type poison gas for modern warfare.
MILLER. I see.
FAYETTE. You didn't know a new war was that close, did you?
MILLER. I guess I didn't.
FAYETTE. I don't have to stress the importance of absolute secrecy.
MILLER. I understand!
FAYETTE. The world is an armed camp today. One match sets the whole world blazing in forty-eight hours. Uncle Sam won't be caught napping!
MILLER. (*Addressing his pencil.*) They say 12 million men were killed in that last one and 20 million more wounded or missing.
FAYETTE. That's not our worry. If big business went sentimental over human life there wouldn't be big business of any sort!
MILLER. My brother and two cousins went in the last one.
FAYETTE. They died in a good cause.
MILLER. My mother says "no!"
FAYETTE. She won't worry about you this time. You're too valuable behind the front.
MILLER. That's right.
FAYETTE. All right, Miller. See Siegfried for further orders.
MILLER. You should have seen my brother — he could ride a bike without hands..
FAYETTE. You'd better move some clothes and shaving tools in tomorrow. Remember what I said — you're with a growing organization.
MILLER. He could run the hundred yards in 9:8 flat..
FAYETTE. Who?
MILLER. My brother. He's in the Meuse-Argonne Cemetery. Mama went there in 1926..
FAYETTE. Yes, those things stick. How's your handwriting.

Miller, fairly legible?

MILLER. Fairly so.

FAYETTE. Once a week I'd like a little report from you.

MILLER. What sort of report?

FAYETTE. Just a few hundred words once a week on Dr. Bren-
ner's progress.

MILLER. Don't you think it might be better coming from the
Doctor?

FAYETTE. I didn't ask you that.

MILLER. Sorry.

FAYETTE. I want to know what progress he's making, the
reports to be purely confidential — between you and me.

MILLER. You mean I'm to watch him?

FAYETTE. Yes!

MILLER. I guess I can't do that...

FAYETTE. Thirty a month raise...

MILLER. You said twenty...

FAYETTE. Thirty!

MILLER. Guess I'm not built that way.

FAYETTE. Forty...

MILLER. Spying's not in my line, Mr. Fayette!

FAYETTE. You use ugly words, Mr. Miller!

MILLER. For ugly activity? Yes!

FAYETTE. Think about it, Miller. Your chances are ex-
cellent..

MILLER. No..

FAYETTE. You're doing something for your country. Assuring
the United States that when those goddamn Japs start a ruckus
we'll have offensive weapons to back us up! Don't you read your
newspapers, Miller?

MILLER. Nothing but Andy Gump.

FAYETTE. If you were on the inside you'd know I'm talking cold
sober truth! Now, I'm not asking you to make up your mind on the
spot. Think about it over your lunch period.

MILLER. No.

FAYETTE. Made up your mind already?

MILLER. Afraid so.
FAYETTE. You understand consequences?
MILLER. I lose my raise — And my job!
FAYETTE. (*Simultaneously.*) And your job!
MILLER. (*Simultaneously.*) You misunderstand — Rather dig
ditches first!
FAYETTE. That's a big job for foreigners.
MILLER. But sneaking — and making poison gas — that's
for Americans?
FAYETTE. It's up to you.
MILLER. My mind's made up.
FAYETTE. No hard feelings?
MILLER. Sure hard feelings! I'm not the civilized type, Mr.
Fayette. Nothing suave or sophisticated about me. Plenty of hard
feelings! Enough to want to bust you and all your kind square in the
mouth! (*Does exactly that.*)

Blackout

III. THE YOUNG HACK AND HIS GIRL

*Opens with girl and brother. Florence waiting for Sid to take
her to a dance.*

FLORENCE. I gotta right to have something out of life. I don't
smoke, I don't drink. So if Sid wants to take me to a dance, I'll go.
Maybe if you was in love you wouldn't talk so hard.
IRV. I'm saying it for your good.
FLORENCE. Don't be so good to me.
IRV. Mom's sick in bed and you'll be worryin' her to the grave.

She don't want that boy hanging around the house and she don't want you meeting him in Crotona Park.

FLORENCE. I'll meet him anytime I like!

IRV. If you do, yours truly'll take care of it in his own way. With just one hand, too!

FLORENCE. Why are you all so set against him?

IRV. Mom told you ten times — it ain't him. It's that he ain't got nothing. Sure, we know he's serious, that he's stuck on you. But that don't cut no ice.

FLORENCE. Taxi drivers used to make good money.

IRV. Today they're makin' five and six dollars a week. Maybe you wanta raise a family on that. Then you'll be back here living with us again and I'll be supporting two families in one. Well ... over my dead body.

FLORENCE. Irv, I don't care — I love him!

IRV. You're a little kid with half-baked ideas!

FLORENCE. I stand there behind the counter the whole day. I think about him—

IRV. If you thought more about Mom it would be better.

FLORENCE. Don't I take care of her every night when I come home? Don't I cook supper and iron your shirts and ... you give me a pain in the neck, too. Don't try to shut me up! I bring a few dollars in the house, too. Don't you see I want something else out of life. Sure, I want romance, love, babies. I want everything in life I can get.

IRV. You take care of Mom and watch your step!

FLORENCE. And if I don't?

IRV. Yours truly'll watch it for you!

FLORENCE. You can talk that way to a girl..

IRV. I'll talk that way to your boy friend, too, and it won't be with words! Florrie, if you had a pair of eyes you'd see it's for your own good we're talking. This ain't no time to get married. Maybe later—

FLORENCE. "Maybe later" never comes for me, though. Why don't we send Mom to a hospital? She can die in peace there instead of looking at the clock on the mantelpiece all day.

IRV. That needs money. Which we don't have!

FLORENCE. Money, money, money!

IRV. Don't change the subject.

FLORENCE. This is the subject

IRV. You gonna stop seeing him? *(She turns away.)* Jesus, kiddie, I remember when you were a baby with curls down your back. Now I gotta stand here yellin' at you like this.

FLORENCE. I'll talk to him, Irv.

IRV. When?

FLORENCE. I asked him to come here tonight. We'll talk it over.

IRV. Don't get soft with him. Nowadays is no time to be soft. You gotta be hard as a rock or go under.

FLORENCE. I found that out. There's the bell. Take the egg off the stove I boiled for Mom. Leave us alone Irv. *(Sid comes in — the two men look at each other for a second. Irv exits.)*

SID. *(Enters.)* Hello, Florrie.

FLORENCE. Hello, Honey. You're looking tired.

SID. Naw, I just need a shave.

FLORENCE. Well, draw your chair up to the fire and I'll ring for brandy and soda ... like in the movies.

SID. If this was the movies I'd bring a big bunch of roses.

FLORENCE. How big?

SID. Fifty or sixty dozen — the kind with long, long stems — big as that...

FLORENCE. You dope...

SID. Your Paris gown is beautiful.

FLORENCE. *(Acting grandly.)* Yes, Percy, velvet panels are coming back again. Madame La Farge told me today that Queen Marie herself designed it.

SID. Gee...!

FLORENCE. Every princess in the Balkans is wearing one like this. *(Poses grandly.)*

SID. Hold it. *(Does a nose camera — thumbing nose and imitating grinding of camera with other hand. Suddenly she falls out of the posture and swiftly goes to him, to embrace him, to kiss him with love. Finally.)*

SID. You look tired, Florrie.

FLORENCE. Naw, I just need a shave. *(She laughs tremulously.)*

SID. You worried about your mother?

FLORENCE. No.

SID. What's on your mind?

FLORENCE. The French and Indian War.

SID. What's on your mind?

FLORENCE. I got us on my mind, Sid. Night and day, Sid!

SID. I smacked a beer truck today. Did I get hell! I was driving along thinking of US, too. You don't have to say it — I know what's on your mind. I'm rat poison around here.

FLORENCE. Not to me...

SID. I know to who... and I know why. I don't blame them. We're engaged now for three years...

FLORENCE. That's a long time...

SID. My brother Sam joined the navy this morning — get a break that way. They'll send him down to Cuba with the hootchy-kootchy girls. He don't know from nothing, that dumb basket ball player!

FLORENCE. Don't you do that.

SID. Don't you worry, I'm not the kind who runs away. But I'm so tired of being a dog. Baby, I could choke. I don't even have to ask what's going on in your mind. I know from the word go, 'cause I'm thinking the same things, too.

FLORENCE. It's yes or no — nothing in between.

SID. The answer is no — a big electric sign looking down on Broadway!

FLORENCE. We wanted to have kids...

SID. But that sort of life ain't for the dogs which is us. Christ, Baby! I get like thunder in my chest when we're together. If we went off together I could maybe look the world straight in the face, spit in its eye like a man should do. Goddamnit, it's trying to be a man on the earth. Two in life together.

FLORENCE. But something wants us to be lonely like that — crawling alone in the dark. Or they want us trapped.

SID. Sure, the big shot money men want us like that.

FLORENCE. Highly insulting us—

SID. Keeping us in the dark about what is wrong with us in the money sense. They got the power and mean to be damn sure they keep it. They know if they give in just an inch, all the dogs like us will be down on them together — an ocean knocking them to hell and back and each singing cuckoo with stars coming from their nose and ears. I'm not raving, Florrie—

FLORENCE. I know you're not, I know.

SID. I don't have the words to tell you what I feel. I never finished school..

FLORENCE. I know...

SID. But it's relative, like the professors say. We worked like hell to send him to college — my kid brother Sam, I mean — and look what he done — joined the navy! The damn fool don't see the cards is stacked for all of us. The money man dealing himself a hot royal flush. Then giving you and me a phony hand like a pair of tens or something. Then keep on losing the pots 'cause the cards is stacked against you. Then he says, what's the matter you can't win — no stuff on the ball, he says to you. And kids like my brother believe it 'cause they don't know better. For all their education, they don't know from nothing. But wait a minute! Don't he come around and say to you — this millionaire with a jazz band — listen Sam or Sid or what's-your-name, you're no good, but here's a chance. The whole world'll know who you are. Yes sir, he says, get up on that ship and fight those bastards who's making the world a lousy place to live in. The Japs, the Turks, the Greeks. Take this gun — kill the slobs like a real hero, he says, a real American. Be a hero! And the guy you're poking at? A real louse, just like you, 'cause they don't let him catch more than a pair of tens, too. On that foreign soil he's a guy like me and Sam, a guy who wants his baby like you and hot sun on his face! They'll teach Sam to point the guns the wrong way, that dumb basket ball player!

FLORENCE. I got a lump in my throat, Honey.

SID. You and me — we never even had a room to sit in somewhere.

FLORENCE. The park was nice...

SID. In winter? The hallways ... I'm glad we never got together. This way we don't know what we missed.

FLORENCE. *(In a burst.)* Sid, I'll go with you — we'll get a room somewhere.

SID. Naw ... they're right. If we can't climb higher that this together — we better stay apart.

FLORENCE. I swear to God I wouldn't care.

SID. You would, you would — in a year, two years, you'd curse the day. I seen it happen.

FLORENCE. Oh, Sid...

SID. Sure, I know. We got the blues, Babe — the 1935 blues. I'm talkin' this way 'cause I love you. If I didn't, I wouldn't care...

FLORENCE. We'll work together, we'll—

SID. How about the backwash? Your family needs your nine bucks. My family—

FLORENCE. I don't care for them!

SID. You're making it up, Florrie. Little Florrie Canary in a cage.

FLORENCE. Don't make fun of me.

SID. I'm not, Baby.

FLORENCE. Yes, you're laughing at me.

SID. I'm not. *(They stand looking at each other, unable to speak. Finally, he turns to a small portable phonograph and plays a cheap, sad, dance tune. He makes a motion with his hand; she comes to him. They begin to dance slowly. They hold each other tightly, almost as though they would merge into each other. The music stops, but the scratching record continues to the end of the scene. They stop dancing. He finally looses her clutch and seats her on the couch, where she sits, tense and expectant.)*

SID. Hello, Babe.

FLORENCE. Hello. *(For a brief time they stand as though in a dream.)*

SID. *(Finally.)* Good-bye, Babe. *(He waits for an answer, but she is silent. They look at each other.)* Did you ever see my Pat Rooney imitation? *(He whistles Rosy O'Grady and soft-shoes to it. He asks:)*

Don't you like it?
FLORENCE. *(Finally.)* No. *(Buries her face in her hands. Suddenly he falls on his knees and buries his face in her lap.)*

Blackout

IV. LABOR SPY EPISODE

FATT. You don't know how we work for you. Shooting off your mouth won't help. Hell, don't you guys ever look at the records like me? Look in your own industry. See what happened when the hacks walked in Philly three months ago! Where's Philly? A thousand miles away? An hour's ride on the train.

VOICE. Two hours!

FATT. Two hours ... what the hell's the difference. Let's hear from someone who's got the practical experience to back him up. Fellers, there's a man here who's seen the whole parade in Philly, walked out with his pals, got knocked down like the rest — and blacklisted after they went back. That's why he's here. He's got a mighty interestin' word to say. *(Announces.)* Tom Clayton! *(As Clayton starts up from the audience, Fatt gives him a hand which is sparsely followed in the audience. Clayton comes forward.)* Fellers, this is a man with practical strike experience — Tom Clayton from little ole Philly.

CLAYTON. *(A thin, modest individual.)* Fellers, I don't mind your booing. If I thought it would help us hacks get better living conditions, I'd let you walk all over me, cut me up to little pieces. I'm one of you myself. But what I wanna say is that Harry Fatt's right. I only been working here in the big town five weeks, but I know conditions just like the rest of you. You know how it is — don't take long to feel the sore spots, no matter where you park.

CLEAR VOICE. *(From audience.)* Sit down!

CLAYTON. But Fatt's right. Our officers is right. The time ain't ripe. Like a fruit don't fall off the tree until it's ripe.

CLEAR VOICE. Sit down, you fruit!

FATT. *(On his feet.)* Take care of him, boys.

VOICE. *(In audience, struggling.)* No one takes care of me. *(Struggle in house and finally the owner of the voice runs up on stage, says to speaker:)*

SAME VOICE. Where the hell did you pick up that name! Clayton! This rat's name is Clancy, from the old Clancys, way back! Fruit! I almost wet myself listening to that one!

FATT. *(Gunman with him.)* This ain't a barn! What the hell do you think you're doing here!

SAME VOICE. Exposing a rat

FATT. You can't get away with this. Throw him the hell outa here.

VOICE. *(Preparing to stand his ground.)* Try it yourself ... When this bozo throws that slop around. You know who he is? That's a company spy.

FATT. Who the hell are you to make—

VOICE. I paid dues in this union for four years, that's who's me! I gotta right and this pussy-footed rat ain't coming in here with ideas like that. You know his record. Lemme say it out—

FATT. You'll prove all this or I'll bust you in every hack outfit in town!

VOICE. I gotta right. I gotta right. Looka *him*, he don't say boo!

CLAYTON. You're a liar and I never seen you before in my life!

VOICE. Boys, he spent two years in the coal fields breaking up any organization he touched. Fifty guys he put in jail. He's ranged up and down the east coast — shipping, textiles, steel — he's been in everything you can name. Right now—

CLAYTON. That's a lie!

VOICE. Right now he's working for that Bergman outfit on Columbus Circle who furnishes rats for any outfit in the country, before, during, and after strikes. *(The man who is the hero of the next*

episode goes down to his side with other committee men.)

CLAYTON. He's trying to break up the meeting, fellers!

VOICE. We won't search you for credentials..

CLAYTON. I got nothing to hide. Your own secretary knows I'm straight.

VOICE. Sure. Boys, you know who this sonovabitch is?

CLAYTON. I never seen you before in my life!!

VOICE. Boys, I slept with him in the same bed sixteen years.

HE'S MY OWN LOUSY BROTHER!!

FATT. *(After pause.)* Is this true? *(No answer from Clayton.)*

VOICE. *(To Clayton.)* Scram, before I break your neck! *(Clayton scrams down center aisle. Voice says, watching him:)* Remember his map — he can't change that — Clancy! *(Standing in his place says:)* Too bad you didn't know about this, Fatt! *(After a pause.)* The Clancy family tree is bearing nuts! *(Standing isolated clear on the stage is the hero of the next episode.)*

Blackout

V. INTERNE EPISODE

Dr. Barnes, an elderly distinguished man, is speaking on the telephone. He wears a white coat.

BARNES. No, I gave you my opinion twice. You outvoted me. You did this to Dr. Benjamin yourself. That is why you can tell him yourself. *(Hangs up phone, angrily. As he is about to pour himself a drink from a bottle on the table, a knock is heard.)* Who is it?

BENJAMIN. *(Without.)* Can I see you a minute, please?

BARNES. *(Hiding the bottle.)* Come in, Dr. Benjamin, come in.

BENJAMIN. It's important — excuse me — they've got Leeds up there in my place — He's operating on Mrs. Lewis — the hys-

terectomy—it's my job. I washed up, prepared ... they told me at the last minute. I don't mind being replaced, Doctor, but Leeds is a damn fool! He shouldn't be permitted—

BARNES. *(Dryly.)* Leeds is the nephew of Senator Leeds.

BENJAMIN. He's incompetent as hell.

BARNES. *(Obviously changing subject, picks up lab. jar.)* They're doing splendid work in brain surgery these days. This is a very fine specimen...

BENJAMIN. I'm sorry, I thought you might be interested.

BARNES. *(Still examining jar.)* Well, I am, young man, I am! Only remember it's a charity case!

BENJAMIN. Of course. They wouldn't allow it for a second, otherwise.

BARNES. Her life is in danger?

BENJAMIN. Of course! You know how serious the case is!

BARNES. Turn your gimlet eyes elsewhere, Doctor. Jiggling around like a cricket on a hot grill won't help. Doctors don't run these hospitals. He's the Senator's nephew and there he stays.

BENJAMIN. It's too bad.

BARNES. I'm not calling you down either. *(Plopping down jar suddenly.)* Goddamnit, do you think it's my fault?

BENJAMIN. *(About to leave.)* I know ... I'm sorry.

BARNES. Just a minute. Sit down.

BENJAMIN. Sorry, I can't sit.

BARNES. Stand then!

BENJAMIN. *(Sits.)* Understand, Dr. Barnes, I don't mind being replaced at the last minute this way, but ... well, this flagrant bit of class distinction — because she's poor—

BARNES. Be careful of words like that — "class distinction." Don't belong here. Lots of energy, you brilliant young men, but idiots. Discretion! Ever hear that word?

BENJAMIN. Too radical?

BARNES. Precisely. And some day like in Germany, it might cost you your head.

BENJAMIN. Not to mention my job.

BARNES. So they told you?
BENJAMIN. Told me what?
BARNES. They're closing Ward C next month. I don't have to tell you the hospital isn't self-supporting. Until last year that board of trustees met deficits ... You can guess the rest. At a board meeting Tuesday, our fine feathered friends discovered they couldn't meet the last quarter's deficit — a neat little sum well over \$100,000. If the hospital is to continue at all, its damn—
BENJAMIN. Necessary to close another charity ward!
BARNES. So they say ... *(A wait.)*
BENJAMIN. But that's not all?
BARNES. *(Ashamed.)* Have to cut down on staff too...
BENJAMIN. That's too bad. Does it touch me?
BARNES. Afraid it does.
BENJAMIN. But after all I'm top man here. I don't mean I'm better than others, but I've worked harder.
BARNES. And shown more promise...
BENJAMIN. I always supposed they'd cut from the bottom first.
BARNES. Usually.
BENJAMIN. But in this case?
BARNES. Complications.
BENJAMIN. For instance? *(Barnes hesitant.)*
BARNES. I like you, Benjamin. It's one ripping shame.
BENJAMIN. I'm no sensitive plant — what's the answer?
BARNES. An old disease, malignant, tumescent. We need an anti toxin for it.
BENJAMIN. I see.
BARNES. What?
BENJAMIN. I met that disease before — at Harvard first.
BARNES. You have seniority here, Benjamin.
BENJAMIN. But I'm a Jew! *(Barnes nods his head in agreement. Benjamin stands there a moment and blows his nose.)*
BARNES. *(Blows his nose.)* Microbes!
BENJAMIN. Pressure from above?

BARNES. Don't think Kennedy and I didn't fight for you!

BENJAMIN. Such discrimination, with all those wealthy brother Jews on the board?

BARNES. I've remarked before — doesn't seem to be much difference between wealthy Jews and rich Gentiles. Cut from the same piece!

BENJAMIN. For myself I don't feel sorry. My parents gave up an awful lot to get me this far. They ran a little dry goods shop in the Bronx until their pitiful savings went in the crash last year. Poppa's peddling neckties ... Saul Ezra Benjamin — a man who's read Spinoza all his life.

BARNES. Doctors don't run medicine in this country. The men who know their jobs don't run anything here, except the motormen on trolley cars. I've seen medicine change — plenty — anesthesia, sterilization — but not because of rich men — *in spite of them!* In a rich man's country your true self's buried deep. Microbes! Less ... vermin! See this ankle, this delicate sensitive hand? Four hundred years to breed that. Out of a revolutionary background! Spirit of '76! Ancestors froze at Valley Forge! What's it all mean! Slops! The honest workers were sold out then, in '76. The Constitution's for rich men then and now. Slops! *(The phone rings. Barnes, angrily.)* Dr. Barnes. *(Listens a moment, looks at Benjamin.)* I see. *(Hangs up, turns slowly to the younger Doctor.)* They lost your patient. *(Benjamin stands solid with the shock of this news but finally hurls his operation gloves to the floor.)* That's right ... that's right. Young, hot, go and do it! I'm very ancient, fossil, but life's ahead of you, Dr. Benjamin, and when you fire the first shot say, "This one's for old Doc Barnes!" Too much dignity — bullets. Don't shoot vermin! Step on them! If I didn't have an invalid daughter — *(Barnes goes back to his seat, blows his nose in silence.)* I have said my piece, Benjamin.

BENJAMIN. Lots of things I wasn't certain of. Many things these radicals say ... you don't believe theories until they happen to you.

BARNES. You lost a lot today, but you won a great point.

BENJAMIN. Yes, to know I'm right? To really begin believing in something? Not to say, "What a world!", but to say, "Change the

world!" I wanted to go to Russia. Last week I was thinking about it — the wonderful opportunity to do good work in their socialized medicine—

BARNES. Beautiful, beautiful!

BENJAMIN. To be able to work—

BARNES. Why don't you go? I might be able—

BENJAMIN. Nothing's nearer what I'd like to do!

BARNES. Do it!

BENJAMIN. No! Our work's here — America! I'm scared ... What future's ahead, I don't know. Get some job to keep alive — maybe drive a cab — and study and work and learn my place—

BARNES. And step down hard!

BENJAMIN. Fight! Maybe get killed, but goddamn! We'll go ahead! (*Benjamin stands with clenched fist raised high.*)

Blackout

AGATE. *Ladies and Gentlemen*, and don't let anyone tell you we ain't got some ladies in this sea of upturned faces! Only they're wearin' pants. Well, maybe I don't know a thing; maybe I fell outa the cradle when I was a kid and ain't been right since — you can't tell!

VOICE. Sit down, cockeye!

AGATE. Who's paying you for those remarks, Buddy? — Moscow Gold? Maybe I got a *glass eye*, but it come from working in a factory at the age of eleven. They hooked it out because they didn't have a shield on the works. But I wear it like a medal 'cause it tells the world where I belong — deep down in the working class! We had delegates in the union there — all kinds of secretaries and treasurers ... walkin' delegates, but not with blisters on their feet! Oh no! On their fat little ass from sitting on cushions and raking in mazuma. (*Secretary and gunman remonstrate in words and actions here.*) Sit down, boys. I'm just sayin' that about unions in general. I know it ain't true here! Why no, our officers is all aces. Why, I seen

our own secretary Fatt walk outa his way not to step on a cockroach.
No boys, don't think—

FATT. *(Breaking in.)* You're out of order!

AGATE. *(To audience.)* Am I outa order?

ALI. No, no. Speak. Go on, etc.

AGATE. Yes, our officers is all aces. But I'm a member here — and no experience in Philly either! Today I couldn't wear my union button. The damnest thing happened. When I take the old coat off the wall, I see she's smoking, I'm a sonovagun if the old union button isn't on fire! Yep, the old celluloid was makin' the most god-awful stink: the landlady come up and give me hell! You know what happened? That old union button just blushed itself to death! Ashamed! Can you beat it?

FATT. Sit down, Keller! Nobody's interested!

AGATE. Yes they are!

GUNMAN. Sit down like he tells you!

AGATE. *(Continuing to audience.)* And when I finish — *(His speech is broken by Fatt and Gunman who physically handle him. He breaks away and gets to other side of stage. The two are about to make for him when some of the committee men come forward and get in between the struggling parties. Agate's shirt has been torn. To audience.)* What's the answer, boys? The answer is, if we're reds because we wanna strike, then we take over their salute too! Know how they do it? *(Makes Communist salute.)* What is it? An uppercut! The good old uppercut to the chin! Hell, some of us boys ain't even got a shirt to our backs. What's the boss class tryin' to do — make a nudist colony outa us? *(The audience laughs and suddenly Agate comes to the middle of the stage so that the other cabmen back him up in a strong clump.)* Don't laugh! Nothing's funny! This is your life and mine! It's skull and bones every incha the road! Christ, we're dyin' by inches! For what? For the debutant-ees to have their sweet comin' out parties in the Ritz! Poppa's got a daughter she's gotta get her picture in the papers. Christ, they make 'em with our blood. Joe said it. Slow death or fight. It's war! *(Throughout this whole speech Agate is backed up by the other six workers, so that from their activity it is plain that the whole group of them are saying these things. Several of them may take*

alternate lines out of this long last speech.) You Edna, God love your mouth! Sid and Florrie, the other boys, old Doc Barnes — fight with us for right! It's war! Working class, unite and fight! Tear down the slaughter house of our old lives! Let freedom really ring. These slick slobbs stand here telling us about bogeymen. That's a new one for the kids — the reds is bogeymen! But the man who got me food in 1932, he called me Comrade! The one who picked me up where I bled — he called me Comrade too! What are we waiting for... Don't wait for Lefty! He might never come. Every minute — *(This is broken into by a man who has dashed up the center aisle from the back of the house. He runs up on stage, says:)*

MAN. Boys, they just found Lefty!

OTHERS. What? What? What?

SOME. Shhh...Shhh...

MAN. They found Lefty...

AGATE. Where?

MAN. Behind the car barns with a bullet in his head!

AGATE. *(Crying.)* Hear it, boys, hear it? Hell, listen to me! Coast to coast! HELLO AMERICA! HELLO. WE'RE STORM-BIRDS OF THE WORKING-CLASS. WORKERS OF THE WORLD ... OUR BONES AND BLOOD! And when we die they'll know what we did to make a new world! Christ, cut us up to little pieces. We'll die for what is right! Put fruit trees where our ashes are! *(To audience.)* Well, what's the answer?

ALL. STRIKE!

AGATE. LOUDER!

ALL. STRIKE!

AGATE AND OTHERS. *(On stage.)* AGAIN!

ALL. STRIKE, STRIKE, STRIKE!!!

Curtain

