

LEFTY

*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.

Goddamn! 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.