

WAITING
FOR LEFTY
AND OTHER PLAYS

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WITH A PREFACE BY
THE AUTHOR

With an Introduction
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WAITING FOR LEFTY

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I don't know it when it rains! Don't tell me what we are? The black and blue boy around so long we're black and blue from guess anyone who says straight out he's a boy to the leaders of the union. What's this home to hot suppers? I'm asking to your faces how many hot suppers to go home to? Anyone who's sure of his head, 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 . . ."

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?

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 witsie 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: This 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 Haas 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*):

JOE: 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.

FAY: Like it?

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

FAY: 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!

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

FAY: 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.

MILL: Or it will be just too bad!

FAY: Cigar?

from
PARADISE LOST

PIKE: Monkey dust! Gibberish! What do we do when we hear some old bat outa hell say she is ready to give over every fine boy to be blown to hell in another obscene war?! What do we do?!

LEO: Mr. Pike, I think you better not excite yourself.

PIKE: Idiots out prowling the dynamite dumps by night! One struck match and we all blow to hell!

GUS: Better sit. You're lookin' pale around the gills.

PIKE: Who are we, Mr. Gordon? If we remain silent while they make the next war—who then are we with our silence? Accomplices, Citizen! Let me talk out my heart! Don't stop me! Citizens, they have taken our sons and mangled them to death! They have left us lonely in our old age. The bellyrobbers have taken clothes from our backs. We slept in subway toilets here. In Arkansas we picked fruit. I followed the crops north and dreamed of a warmer sun. We lived on and hoped. We lived on garbage dumps. Two of us found canned prunes, ate them and were poisoned for weeks. One died. Now I can't die. But we gave up to despair and life took quiet years. We worked a little. Nights I drank myself insensible. Punched my own mouth. Yes, first American ancestors and me. The circle's complete. Running away, stealing away to stick the ostrich head in sand. Living on a boat as night watchman, tied to shore, not here nor there! The American jitters! Idealism! (*Punches himself violently.*) There's for idealism! For those blue-gutted Yankee Doodle bastards are making other wars while we sleep. And if we remain silent while they make this war, we are the guilty ones. For we are the people, and the people is the government, and tear them down from their high places if they dast do what they did in 1914 to '18. (*Slowly sits tremblingly.*)

LEO (*softly*): We cancel our experience. This is an American habit.

GUS: No logic . . .

LEO: But what is to be done?

PIKE: I don't know . . . I mean I don't know . . .

LEO: I will find out how to do as I think.

GUS (*drinking and laughing*): We're decayin', fallin' apart minute by minute.

PIKE: All these years one thing kept me sane: I looked at the telegraph poles. "All those wires are going some place," I told myself. Our country is the biggest and best pig-sty in the world!

GUS: I don't know no better place, Mr. P.

PIKE: I do. All picked out for me: the bottom of the ocean. Very quiet there, the light is soft, food is free . . .

LEO: Without life you cannot help change the world.

PIKE: You have life; do you help change it?

LEO: We do our best . . .

PIKE: Not good enough. I'll put your furnace to bed. (*Exits.*)

GUS: "C'est la guerre!" (*Drinks.*) As a young man I was always figgering in terms of millions. The way I seen it, the one who invented the clothes-pin made a million and why couldn't I? I worked and worked, and finally I got it: a better clothes-pin than anyone ever seen before. But she didn't have no logic, my invention. They cost twelve cents apiece to make. It was about this time I said to myself, "Gus Michaels, what's the use?" So I let my brains fall right back in my head, and I ain't used them since! (*PEARL plays piano upstairs.*) And when the last day comes—by ice or fire—she'll be up there playin' away. Lunes, martes, miercoles, she don't stop. That's how we say Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday in Spanish. You don't hear a word I'm sayin', Mr. G.

LEO: What?

GUS: "And as the Arabs of the desert fold up their tents and steal silently away" . . . (*Tiptoes across the room, saying several times "Shhh-shhh"—salutes BEN's statue; says in drunken admiration "How like a god!" Utters another "Shhh" and quietly tiptoes from the room. LEO is completely self-absorbed.*)

Slow Curtain