

THESE SHINING LIVES

BY MELANIE MARNICH



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THESE SHINING LIVES received its World Premiere at Baltimore Center Stage
in Baltimore, Maryland, on April 30, 2008,
Irene Lewis, Artistic Director; Michael Ross, Managing Director.

It was developed at Baltimore Center Stage in Baltimore, Maryland,
as part of their First Look Festival; The History Theatre in St. Paul, Minnesota;
as part of their Raw Stages Festival; Northlight Theatre in Skokie, Illinois;
Primary Stages as part of their Primetime Reading Series;
and TheatreWorks in Palo Alto, California, as part of their New Works Festival.

It was commissioned by Northlight Theatre in Skokie, Illinois.

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THESE SHINING LIVES received its World Premiere at Baltimore Center Stage (Irene Lewis, Artistic Director; Michael Ross, Managing Director) in Baltimore, Maryland, on April 30, 2008. It was directed by David Schweizer; the set design was by Alexander Dodge; the costume design was by Anita Yavich; the lighting design was by Justin Townsend; the original music and sound design were by Rob Milburn and Michael Bodeen; the speech consultant was Deena Burke; the dramaturgy was by Gavin Wirt; and the production stage manager was Mike Schleifer. The cast was as follows:

CATHERINE DONOHUE Emma Joan Roberts
FRANCES Kate Gleason
CHARLOTTE Kelly McAndrew
PEARL Cheryl Lynn Bowers
TOM DONOHUE Jonathan C. Kaplan
MR. REED Erik Lochtefeld

CHARACTERS

CATHERINE DONOHUE — Plays only herself.

FRANCES — Also plays Reporter 2, an Official.

CHARLOTTE — Also plays Reporter 1.

PEARL — Also plays Daughter, Judge 2.

TOM DONOHUE, her husband — Also plays Dr. Rountree, Dr. Dalisch.

MR. REED — Also plays Radio Announcer, Company Doctor, Son, Judge, Leonard Grossman.

Everyone is in their mid- to late twenties. Mr. Reed can be older.

STYLE

This play is at times choral, at times docudrama, at times just a play. It should be delivered with spirit, energy and verve — and the women are the embodiment of this. DO NOT play these women as victims in any way. They have more strength than that. They never sink into sentimentality or weakness.

TRANSITIONS

Although individual scenes are indicated, it's mostly for the sake of organization. The play and its transitions need to be absolutely fluid, like music, like a song.

SOURCES

Mullner, Ross, PhD, MPH. *Radium Dial Worker Tragedy*. American Public Health Association, 1999. (Specific information was used with permission from Dr. Mullner.)

Also:

Clark, Claudia. *Radium Girls: Women and Industrial Health Reform, 1910 – 1935*. The University of North Carolina Press, 1997.
Chicago Daily Times
Chicago Herald and Examiner
Chicago Tribune
New York Times
New Jersey World
The Journal of the American Medical Association
The Journal of the American Dental Association

TIME

1920s and 1930s.

This play, although inspired by real people and actual events, is a work of creative nonfiction. It moves between fact and fiction, between reality and imagination, to create a theatrical world.

*If one woman were to tell the truth about her life,
The world would split open.*

—Muriel Rukeyser

THESE SHINING LIVES

1

Darkness.

The ticking of a clock.

Stars sparkle across the night sky ...

The ticking continues.

Light up on Catherine.

CATHERINE. This isn't a fairy tale, though it starts like one.
It's not a tragedy, though it ends like one.

It's something else.
We're something else.

We're the wonder.
We're the curiosity.
The heroes.
The cure.
The failures.
The alchemy.
We're progress and history.
We're news.
We're the new world.

But we're just girls who wanted to work.

Ordinary girls.

I live in Ottawa, Illinois.
In a brick house on a quiet street.

I grow tomatoes and peas and pansies.

I have two children that I love.

I have a husband that I love.

When he touches me, I know I can fly.

They say you see your life flash before your eyes.
That you see a light.

That you move toward it.

But you don't.

You see your story.

Beginning and middle.

As they were written.

And the end.

As it comes.

And when you've told it, then you can rest.

Then you can go home.

Then your real work is done.

I'm Catherine Wolfe Donohue.

And I'm telling you now. (*The ticking of the clock takes us into ... music. Something from the time period. A slide appears.*)

*SLIDE: Chicago in the Gilded Age
The Roaring '20s*

The other women appear ...

FRANCES. Jazz is playing on Halsted. The White Sox are playing at Comisky.
PEARL. And a company opened in the Marshall Field's Annex. The Radium Dial Company.

FRANCES. It hired women like us. It was the job of the century, the job of our dreams.

CHARLOTTE. By 1922, it had moved to Ottawa, Illinois, where more than one thousand women worked during the next eleven years. CATHERINE. And we started like this.

2

Catherine at home, getting ready for her first day of work.

Tom enters.

TOM. Well, aren't you the prettiest thing.

CATHERINE. What time is it?

TOM. Early.

CATHERINE. I think I'm going to be late.

TOM. You're fine.

CATHERINE. The time.

TOM. Guess.

CATHERINE. To-om.

TOM. Guess wrong, I kiss you. Guess right, you kiss me.

CATHERINE. It's morning.

TOM. It sure is. Guess,

CATHERINE. Seven ... fifteen? (*He kisses her. Trying to get dressed in spite of his very active ... affection.*) Mm. You smell good. Seventy? (*He kisses her.)*

TOM. You smell better.

CATHERINE. Quarter of eight? (*He kisses her.*) Am I getting close? TOM. You were right the first time. (*He moves in for another kiss — she dodges him.)*

CATHERINE. Be honest. Tell me. How do I look?

TOM. You could stop a clock. Which could be a problem at this

FRANCES. Mayor "Big Bill" Thompson is running the city.
CHARLOTTE. So are Johnny Torio and Al Capone.

new place.

CATHERINE. Do I look like a girl worth eight cents a watch? Because that's what they get paid. Some of them make over eight dollars a day.

TOM. (Surprised — right down to his ego.) You're pulling my leg. CATHERINE. Not bad for a bunch of girls, huh? Who knows. Maybe I'll make more than you someday.

TOM. Ouch.

CATHERINE. Tom. I'm kidding.

TOM. Are you?

CATHERINE. Of course. TOM. I know I don't make a ton of money. But I do okay. We're getting by.

CATHERINE. We're barely getting by.

TOM. That comment could make an insecure guy insecure.

CATHERINE. We need to do better than "barely."

TOM. I could pick up an extra shift.

CATHERINE. They work you like a dog already.

TOM. I'm just saying, you don't have to do this.

CATHERINE. Yes, I do. We could use the money.

TOM. Anyone could use —

CATHERINE. Fine. We need the money. (*That hurt. So she tries to soften it ...*) It'll be easy on both of us. My mom's staying with the babies during the day ... (*Looking for a clock.*) She should be here in a few —

TOM. She's gonna spoil them.

CATHERINE. Good. They should be spoiled. They're babies.

TOM. You only worked part-time before. This eight-hours-a-day stuff. Not the same thing.

CATHERINE. I know.

TOM. Making good money doesn't come cheap. Work that pays well costs you something. You, sitting at a table all day ... Maybe they try and make it sound fun. But trust me, they call it "work" for a reason. CATHERINE. Not this job. Everyone I talk to says it's a piece of cake. All the girls on the block applied for it. I just got lucky. Besides, I'll just do it for a while, till we get on our feet. Then I'll quit.

TOM. Really? You'll walk away from it?

CATHERINE. Don't worry. I don't want to be some, some career girl. I'm a wife. I'm a mom. But for a little while ...

TOM. Go ahead. Finish the sentence.

CATHERINE. I want to know what it feels like to make eight dollars a week. I want to know. Just once. I want to be that person. For a while. (*She drops something.*) I'm nervous, I guess.

TOM. They're gonna love you.

CATHERINE. But what if I'm no good at it? What if I'm lousy? What if I'm —

TOM. Come here.

CATHERINE. Hm?

TOM. Come here. (*She takes a step.*) Closer. (*She takes a step.*) Chin up.

CATHERINE. (*Lifting her face to be kissed.*) You're just trying to kiss me again.

TOM. For once I'm not. (*He reaches out and fixes the collar of her dress.*) There ya go.

CATHERINE. Thanks.

TOM. You know, I look at you every day before I leave. In the kitchen. In the bathroom. In the bed. Wherever. I take a picture of you, just by looking at you. A different one every day. And I take it with me up there, on the girders and beams. And the guys, they always ask me why I'm smiling. They say "Hey, Tommy, is it the view? Beautiful, ain't it?" And I say "Yeah. Ain't it, though."

CATHERINE. (*In a bit of a swoon.*) How did I find you?

TOM. Just lucky, I guess.

CATHERINE. Tom?

TOM. Yeah?

CATHERINE. Just ... Tell me I can do this. Because I'm not so sure if —

TOM. You can do anything you put your mind to.

CATHERINE. Just this. Tell me I can do this. Tell me I'll be good enough.

TOM. You can do it. But you won't be good enough. You'll be great. (*A quick kiss.*) There. Now go make some money. (*He turns her around and slaps her on the behind.*)

Pearl, Frances, and Charlotte sit at their desks, painting watch dials.

They all wear smocks over their dresses.

From a radio on their table, music . . .

They point the tip of their paint brushes between their lips, dip the brush in the paint, and paint the dials. They paint, sing, hum, happily. They love the companionship, camaraderie.

CHARLOTTE. (*In a rush of storytelling.*) ... And I told him, "I absolutely intend to strike this match. And I can smoke if I want to. All the girls are doing it. You live in a *cave*? Haven't you picked up a *magazine*?" And I threw my *Collier's* at him, pointed to the picture of the girl in the Chesterfields ad and said, "There. Isn't she sharp?" Besides, if men can do it, so can we, right? I can smoke all night and all day if I want to except that I have to work and that's using my hands, which wouldn't leave them *free* to smoke, but if I could, I would. I'd smoke and drink gin and shimmy and he said, "Charlotte, you'd look like a harlot," and he didn't even think that was funny. That fellas so tight, if you put a piece of coal up his —

(*Rufus Reed, the supervisor, has entered with Catherine right at the end of Charlotte's bit.*)

MR. REED. (*Cutting off Charlotte.*) If Mae West lived in Illinois and painted warches, shed be Charlotte.

CHARLOTTE. (*Teasingly.*) I heard that, Mr. Reed.

MR. REED. You know I mean it as a compliment.

CHARLOTTE. You know I take it as one.

MR. REED. Morning, girls.

PEARL/FRANCES. (*Happily.*) Morning, Mr. Reed. (*Frances turns off the radio.*)

PEARL. Whatcha gor there, Mr. Reed?

MR. REED. Girls, I'd like you to meet Catherine Donohue.

CATHERINE. Hello.

PEARL. Hi. I'm Pearl.

MR. REED. Pearl's your girl if you want to hear a joke.

PEARL. (*Giggling.*) Oh no, not really, no, well, yes. Did you hear the one about —

MR. REED. Then there's Frances.

FRANCES. (*A little wave.*) Welcome.

MR. REED. She's the moral backbone of this gang.

FRANCES. (*With a nod towards Charlotte.*) Got my work cut out for me, with this one here.

MR. REED. The one she's referring to is Charlotte, of course. (*Charlotte gives a little nod.*) Charlotte's been known to ear our young. The last new girl begged for mercy after three days at this table.

CHARLOTTE. Not true, Mr. Reed. Not true at all. Is it, girls?

FRANCES. Is the pope Catholic?

CHARLOTTE. Interesting haircut.

CATHERINE. Thanks. I bobbed it.

CHARLOTTE. Wasn't a compliment.

FRANCES. Here we go . . .

CHARLOTTE. That hair. Not too bad. Sorta makes you look like whatshername, the sassy movie star, big star, I love *her*, who is she, that one, you know, she was just in a movie with whosits.

PEARL/FRANCES. Louise Brooks. CHARLOTTE. Brooks. Louise Brooks. Yeah. Her. Wears her hair like that. Looks good on her. Maybe it looks okay on you. Maybe. Makes you look young. I'll give you that.

FRANCES. She is young.

CATHERINE. I am young. CHARLOTTE. Either way, that's a hairdo that can take years off of any girl. You married? Kids?

FRANCES. Don't snoop, Charlotte.

CHARLOTTE. Just a question.

CATHERINE. A boy and a girl. Twins. Billy and Sally. My husband's name is Tom.

CHARLOTTE. Tom. Nice name, Tom. Tom sounds like —

MR. REED. Charlotte?

CHARLOTTE. Yes, Mr. Reed?

MR. REED. You want to translate some of your talking into explaining how it's done?

CHARLOTTE. How what's done, Mr. Reed?

MR. REED. Painting the dials, Charlotte. You know, that thing you do by accident between words.

CHARLOTTE. I don't know, Mr. Reed ...

MR. REED. Mrs. Donohue isn't here to take your job, Charlotte. I gave her one of her own. (*Pearl and Frances put down their work to look at Charlotte. Finally ...*)

CHARLOTTE. (*Demonstrating.*) Alright. It's easy. See? You take your little brush here, swirl it between your lips to make a point, then dip it into the powder here ...

CATHERINE. Why does it shine?

FRANCES. There's a little radium in there.

PEARL. Just a smidge.

CHARLOTTE. Paying attention, Mrs. Donaldson?

CATHERINE. Donohue.

CHARLOTTE. Point ... dip ...

CATHERINE. Uh-huh.

CHARLOTTE. And then you ... paint. Like this. (*Charlotte is a brilliantly quick painter. An artist, really.*)

FRANCES. It's a lip, dip, paint routine. Easy. (*Catherine tries it. Pearl coaches her.*)

PEARL. Lip ... Dip ... Paint. You got it.

CATHERINE. It tastes ... awful.

FRANCES. You get used to it.

CATHERINE. Is it okay?

MR. REED. Is what okay, Mrs. Donohue?

CATHERINE. Getting this stuff in our mouths.

MR. REED. It's more than okay. It's medicinal.

*SLIDE: Dr. Rowntree
In the Journal of the American Medical Association*

Light up on Dr. Rowntree.

DR. ROWNTREE. (*Presenting a small, glowing vial of "radium solution for drinking."*) The value of radium is unquestionably established for ailments of all kinds ...

FRANCES. It's all the rage. Radium clinics all over Chicago, you

know. Cures just about everything.

DR. ROWNTREE. Sciatica, neuralgia ... (*Then a rapid listing of diseases cured by radium.*)

MR. REED. Lumbago ...

DR. ROWNTREE. Bronchitis.

MR. REED. Pneumonia.

DR. ROWNTREE. Arteriosclerosis.

MR. REED. Gout.

DR. ROWNTREE. Vasomotor disturbances ...

PEARL. People who can afford it are lining up.

DR. ROWNTREE. ... And chronic constipation.

MR. REED. Nothing short of miraculous. (*Light out on Dr. Rowntree.*)

PEARL. Then again, you don't have to put the brush in your mouth.

FRANCES. You can just roll it on the edge of the dish.

PEARL. But it's faster if you do.

MR. REED. And since you get paid by the watch ...

CATHERINE. How many watches do you paint a day?

MR. REED. Tell her, girls.

FRANCES. About ... one hundred, one-twenty ...

PEARL. Same here. More when there's something I want to buy.

CHARLOTTE. An average day, about one-fifty. A good day, two

hundred.

MR. REED. Believe it or not, Charlotte's one of the stars of Radium Dial. She's got fast hands.

FRANCES. She's fast in general.

CHARLOTTE. Just a natural, I guess, Mr. Reed. Born with the gift of — (*Mr. Reed drops a box of clock faces on the desk, cutting Charlotte off, much to her irritation, which lasts about a second.*)

MR. REED. Here's the routine. You start with these Big Ben alarm clocks. Big Ben, big faces, see? Think of them as your *large* canvas. Get good at those, we move you to these ... (*He pulls out a box of pocket watch faces.*) Pocket watches. Think of these as your *medium* canvas. After those, you're onto these ... (*He pulls out a box of wristwatch faces.*) The *fine* art. The wristwatches. You get one month. End of the month, if you're good, you got a job. If you're not, you don't. That's the way it works. Think you can do it?

CATHERINE. Oh, I can do it.

MR. REED. You sure?

CATHERINE. I'm sure. (*Charlotte reaches for Catherine's hands,*

holds them, scrutinizes them.

CHARLOTTE. Huh. Will ya look at this.

CATHERINE. What?

CHARLOTTE. She'll be great, Mr. Reed.

MR. REED. You read palms, Charlotte?

CHARLOTTE. Bones. I read bones. See? She has the bones of an artist. She'll be aces. (*Dropping Catherine's hands.*) You'll see. (*The women keep working as Catherine speaks.*)

CATHERINE. (*To audience as she paints a clock face.*) And I was.

My twos swooped and dipped.

My fives were flawless.

My eights could've been in a museum.

And my twelves? (*She shows Mr. Reed the piece she was working on.*

He examines it closely.

MR. REED. Aces is right. Welcome, Mrs. Donohue. You're gonna love it here.

CATHERINE. I walked home that night in the dark.

A girl walks differently when she's making money.

I thought to myself, ten years ago a girl like me couldn't even vote, let alone make this kind of money. Couldn't do better than her father and just as good as her husband. Couldn't even smoke, as Charlotte would point out.

But now?

I never dreamed I'd have a now of my own that looked this good.

Tom met me on the corner that night.

He took one look at me and said —

TOM. Your hair.

CATHERINE. (*Touching her hair.*) What.

TOM. It's shining. Your dress. (*She touches her dress.*) It's shining.

Your hands, your eyelashes, your mouth. You glow.

CATHERINE. It's the dust. From the paint. For the watches. Is it

... scary?

TOM. It's beautiful. You left home this morning looking terrific. You came home sparkling like an angel. Work doesn't usually do that for a person, you know? That's one helluva job you got yourself, Katie. Did you like it?

CATHERINE. (*Not wanting to say she loved it.*) It was ... okay.

TOM. And the other girls? You like them?

CATHERINE. They were ... interesting.

TOM. Bears the alternative, I guess.

CATHERINE. True ... (*He's got something else on his mind. He steps behind her, wraps his arms around her.*) That night, in bed, with the lights off, he touched my neck.

TOM. You know, I used to have a watch like the ones you're making.

CATHERINE. You did not.

TOM. Sure did. When I was in France, in the war, they gave us these watches. Painted like the ones you're painting. Glowed in the dark. Some nights, they were the only light we had. Thought I told you about this.

CATHERINE. Mmm, no.

TOM. No matter how scared we were, it kept us human, somehow, just knowing the time.

CATHERINE. Bet you were brave, weren't you?

TOM. Nah ... Well, yeah. The thing is, back then I always thought that time and hope were different. That one was made of mystery. The other was made of luck. But now I know they're the same. Both made with paint and brush and by a woman's two hands.

CATHERINE. This man. He kissed me. (*He kisses her hands.*) This man. He touched my cheek.

TOM. Look at you.

CATHERINE. (*Girls blushing.*) Stop. (*He touches her more. Giggling.*) Stop.

TOM. I can see you even in the dark.

CATHERINE. (*Liking it.*) Don't stop. Oh.

TOM. You, the girl with the face of time.

CATHERINE. Oh. Who wouldn't love this job? (*And they kiss Deeply.*)

4

CATHERINE. You know, Tom was right. Work does cost you something ... and home's never really the same. It was hard being away from our babies. I never got used to it. Maybe I missed them more than they missed me. As for the women at work, I found our Mr. Reed had left out a few details. He had said that Pearl told jokes.

PEARL. Why don't chickens like people?

CATHERINE. He didn't mention that they were painful. And that we'd laugh anyway.

PEARL. Because they bear eggs!

CATHERINE. He said that Frances was the moral backbone of the place.

FRANCES. I saw Dolly Francisco with her new baby. No husband, though. No husband at all. Dirty shame. Tsk, tsk, tsk. CATHERINE. He didn't say it's one of the most flexible backbones in town.

FRANCES. Cutest baby you'll ever see. I knit her some boorries. And a tiny bonnet. And a little sweater. And a blanket. And a teeny —

CATHERINE. As for Charlotte, he said she was tough.

CHARLOTTE. Your dust is floating into my space. I can't paint with your dust floating into my space.

CATHERINE. And that ...

CHARLOTTE. Clean your desk if you wanna keep it.

CATHERINE. Was an understatement. But we didn't mind any of it. We knew what we were all there for. We made good money. We made a good team.

It's now a few months later.

The women at work, toward the end of the day.

There are trays of watch dials next to each of them. As they work, they fill the trays with painted watches.

CHARLOTTE. Five bucks says the Polish guy who works in the basement's in love with Madeline who works on the second floor. Five bucks.

PEARL. (*Turning the radio up.*) Shhh! I love this song. (*Charlotte turns the radio off.*)

CHARLOTTE. Six bucks. Six bucks says he's in love with her.

FRANCES. Doesn't matter. Madeline's in love with the German guy who works at the sausage place on the corner.

CATHERINE. I know him. He's in love with the Swedish girl who works at the pastry shop.

CHARLOTTE. My cousin's friends with her. She doesn't know the German guy exists. She's only got eyes for the Russian who sells the papers.

FRANCES. If we could hear ourselves ...

PEARL. What?

FRANCES. Gossip, gossip, gossip.

PEARL. We're not gossiping.

FRANCES. What then?

PEARL. We're sharing viral information about our surroundings. It's crucial to our survival.

FRANCES. It's gossip. Gossip is the devil's radio.

CHARLOTTE. Well, I like his station. And if you ask me, that's why the workplace was invented. To give us all somewhere to talk.

What are we supposed to do? Sit here and be *quiet*?

FRANCES. God forbid. Hey, look at you, Katie. You're painting as fast as Charlotte.

CATHERINE. Almost.

CHARLOTTE. Never gonna happen.

FRANCES. Not so sure about that.

PEARL. Frannie? How many you finish today?

FRANCES. (*Finishing a watch.*) One twenty-five. (*Charlotte whistles through her teeth at that number.*) You?

PEARL. (*Finishing a watch.*) One thirty-eight. (*Pearl gets up and does a little success dance. The women cheer.*) Thank you, thank you. Hey, that reminds me. What did the chipmunk say to the —

FRANCES. (*Cutting off Pearl.*) Great day on the job, girls.

CHARLOTTE. You know, I look at each of those watches and I don't see hours or minutes or numbers.

FRANCES. No?

CHARLOTTE. Nope. I see dollar signs.

PEARL. I think it's called "inspiration."

CHARLOTTE. It's called motivation.

FRANCES. When did it start, the dollar signs thing?

CHARLOTTE. First payday. When I felt my money in my purse.

PEARL. Then you walked across the street and spent it all on a pair of gloves.

CHARLOTTE. Worth every penny.

FRANCES. I remember those gloves ...

PEARL. Whar about you, Katie? You see dollar signs yet?

CATHERINE. Just numbers.

PEARL. FRANCES.
Bo-ring. Dull, dull, dull.

CATHERINE. And a pair of black patent leather shoes in the window at Forsyth's.

FRANCES. PEARL.
Oooood! I love those!

CATHERINE. It's weird, but you know what I'm seeing right now?

PEARL. What's that, honey?

CATHERINE. A banana split and four spoons down at Snyder's. Come on, girls. I'm buying.

FRANCES. Beats cooking dinner.

CATHERINE. Charlotte?

CHARLOTTE. I can't. Got plans. Someone's waiting for me. (*They all give her a look.*) Whar? Quit givin' me the hairy eyeball. Knock it off.

CATHERINE. You're lying.

CHARLOTTE. What?

CATHERINE. You don't have plans. You just don't want to go out with me.

CHARLOTTE. (*Caught in the lie.*) Pfft. That's crazy.

CATHERINE. Maybe you read bones. But I read eyes. You can't lie to me, Charlotte. You've got nothing waiting for you but maybe a magazine and a cup of coffee.

FRANCES. PEARL.
Oooocoo. Oh-oh.

CHARLOTTE. Tell ya what. Let's make a bet. You painted more watches than me. I go for the banana split. I painted more watches than you, I go my merry way.

CATHERINE. Fair enough.

CHARLOTTE. (*Lifting her box onto her desk.*) One forty-nine.

FRANCES. PEARL.
That's good. Nice, Charlotte.

(*Catherine lifts her box onto her desk.*)

CATHERINE. One fifty-one. (*Frances and Pearl applaud. Charlotte rolls her eyes.*)

CHARLOTTE. Yeah, yeah, yeah. (*The women start to exit. Charlotte lingers behind as the others walk out ...*)

CATHERINE. (*Exiting.*) You're gonna like me yet, Charlotte Purcell.

CHARLOTTE. (*Barely under her breath.*) I better get the damn cherry ... (*And she exits.*)

5

Catherine and Tom's kitchen.

Tom is setting the table for dinner. He's not thrilled about it.
Catherine enters.

CATHERINE. Hi. (*She gives him a peck on the cheek.*) You bear me home.

TOM. Wasn't hard. You're late.

CATHERINE. I know. I'm sorry. TOM. Your mom just left. The kids didn't take their nap, so they're monsters. Hungry monsters. I haven't had time to make dinner, so ...

CATHERINE. We worked overtime just a bit, then we — TOM. (*Indicating something on Catherine's cheek.*) What's that?

CATHERINE. What?

TOM. (*Pointing.*) There. (*She touches her face.*) What is that? (*He looks closer.*) Mud?

CATHERINE. Oh. Um. It's. Um. Hot fudge.

TOM. Hot fudge.

CATHERINE. Yeah.

TOM. I'm not even gonna ask. (*And he starts tossing the silverware on the table.*)

CATHERINE. Me and the girls ... TOM. I didn't know where you were, then it got dark, and the kids were going crazy ...

CATHERINE. We just stopped for a quick one on the way home. TOM. A quick one?

CATHERINE. A quick, um, banana split.

TOM. A banana split.

CATHERINE. Not a *whole* one. We shared.

TOM. You split a split?

CATHERINE. Yeah.

TOM. Glad you gor time for that. (*He finishes tossing silverware and plates on the table.*) Dinner's not going to be good. I didn't really know how to —

CATHERINE. You're acting like a baby.

TOM. You're acting like a guy.

CATHERINE. You come home late sometimes.

TOM. Exactly.

CATHERINE. So?

TOM. So my late is different than your late.

CATHERINE. Oh, I don't think your late is all that different from my late. (*And a ridiculous fight ensues.*)

TOM. Oh yeah? I'm late, nothing happens. You're late, this place falls apart, the kids go nuts, I gotta scramble — !
CATHERINE. No no no! I'm late, you just have to do what I do every night, only I don't complain about it!

TOM. It better not happen again!

CATHERINE. So what if it does?! Then what?!

TOM. (*Trying to come up with a lame threat.*) Then I'll — !

CATHERINE. What? You'll go home to my mother?!

TOM. I just might!

CATHERINE. Fine!

TOM. Fine!

CATHERINE. Fine! (*They retreat to their corners. Then Catherine pulls a small box out of her handbag.*) A little something. To make up for it. (*She hands it to him.*)
TOM. For me?

CATHERINE. Yeah. Open it. Go ahead.

TOM. You know, don't think you can come home late whenever you want, and just bribe me with gifts. I'm not that kind of girl. (*He opens the box and sees the gift.*) Wait. Yeah, I am. (*He takes a pocket watch out of the box.*) Wow. You just bought me off with a pocket watch.

CATHERINE. I painted it. The numbers. You know. I hope it's nicer than the one you used to have.

TOM. It's ... perfect.

CATHERINE. You said, back on my first day on the job, to be careful, because work can cost you something. Remember saying that?

TOM. I do.

CATHERINE. Nor this job. It's not like work at all.

6

CATHERINE. We made a list. Things that shine.

PEARL. The money in my pocketbook.

CATHERINE. Which feels great.

CHARLOTTE. Valentino. Rudolph Valentino. In *The Sheik*. And *The Son of the Sheik*. And *Passion's Playground*. And Fairbanks. Oooo, Douglas Fairbanks. And that other one, you know the one, with the hair and the chin and the great —
PEARL. That pair of pearl earrings at Marshall Field's.
FRANCES. Lake Michigan.

PEARL. On a Saturday.

CATHERINE. In July.

CHARLOTTE. Gin in a glass at that place off the alley on Diversey. Which I don't know about. Really. I don't.
PEARL. And time in our hands.
FRANCES. Time in our eyes.
CHARLOTTE. Time at our feet.
CATHERINE. Time in the air.
PEARL. On our dresses.
FRANCES. In our hair.
CHARLOTTE. In us.
PEARL. Time.
FRANCES. And time again.
CATHERINE. It wasn't supposed to be this easy.
If wasn't supposed to go so fast.

Lights up on ...

A radio announcer standing at an old-fashioned microphone on a stand (or one that hangs from the ceiling) as if he's an M.C. on a radio show of the era. A snare pitchman.

Frances, Pearl, and Charlotte transform into a trio of performers and stand at a microphone near him ... sort of like the Andrews Sisters.

RADIO ANNOUNCER. And tonight's radio hour was brought to you by our sponsor, Westclox, makers of exceptional timepieces for ladies and gentlemen. Keeping you right in style, right on time. (*The women sing the following words, turning them into a quick jingle ...*)

FRANCES/PEARL/CHARLOTTE. (Singing, harmonizing.) *Right on time ...*
RADIO ANNOUNCER. (In his best pitchman voice.) Westclox creates the right watches for you and me. Why? Their luminous watches offer you protection, confidence and fashion, even in the dark of night. Only Westclox famous "night and day" watches can boast that they're painted with radium — and never a cheap substitute. It's the finest radium guaranteed to keep glowing for twelve years or more. Over a million customers can't be wrong! They wear only Westclox. And Westclox wears only radium.

FRANCES/PEARL/CHARLOTTE. (Harmonizing) *Ray-de-yummmmm ... (Music up as the radio show quickly disappears ...)*

TOM. Yeah, we do.

CATHERINE. I'm beat.

TOM. Maybe *you* need a bedtime story.

CATHERINE. Maybe I do.

TOM. Well, once upon a time, there was a guy. A *handsome* guy. Dashing, even. A dashing guy named Tom. He wasn't only dashing, he was funny and smart and swell in general. An all-around amazing kind of dashing guy.

CATHERINE. That part gets better every time you tell it.

TOM. Don't interrupt. And this amazing, dashing guy made his living welding steel in the sky. Hundreds of feet in the air. He was that kind of guy.

CATHERINE. A not-afraid-of-heights kind of guy?

TOM. A loves-the-heights kind of guy.

CATHERINE. Ah.

TOM. And one day, this guy, in a rare moment with his feet actually on the ground, sees a girl.

CATHERINE. He just spots her?

TOM. Nor "just." Because there is no "just" with this girl. Because this girl is special. This girl is like no other girl this guy has ever known.

CATHERINE. Is that the truth?

TOM. The truth. Because this girl, this magnificent creature, walks like she's in the clouds, looks like she's made of gold and silver and silk ...

CATHERINE. Even though she was wearing wool?

TOM. Didn't matter to this guy if she was wearing tire rubber. Because this girl wasn't just beautiful. This girl looks like an answered prayer.

CATHERINE. And this guy, he did a lot of praying?

TOM. In his own way.

CATHERINE. And this girl, did she notice this guy?

TOM. Hell, no. Which didn't stop this guy. Because, as I may have mentioned, he was amazing. And this guy, he walks up to the girl while she's waiting for the trolley and says ...

CATHERINE. Amazing guy that he is ...

TOM. "Hey, you want a stick of gum?" To which the girl replied ...

CATHERINE. "Get away from me."

TOM. To which the guy said, "Come on ... Just a stick."

CATHERINE. To which she said, "Go away or I'll scream."
TOM. To which he said, "It's Wrigley's gum. Which means it's locally grown. Come on. Be a Peach. Support your local gum farmers."

CATHERINE. Which made her laugh. And when she laughed, she accidentally saw his eyes, which she was trying to avoid.

TOM. But what happened then?

CATHERINE. Oh, you know.

TOM. Mm ... I forgot.

CATHERINE. She saw his eyes, and in them, between the blue and green flecks of light, she saw her past, present and everything to come all swirled together, like in a crystal ball. His eyes were like that. They held her world. They told the future.

TOM. And the girl ...

CATHERINE. Knew it was the truth. And now ...

TOM. The boy and the girl have a boy and a girl of their own.

CATHERINE. Who are sound asleep.

TOM. That's some bedtime story.

CATHERINE. A very grown-up bedtime story, I think.

TOM. And why's that?

CATHERINE. (*She takes his hand.*) Because it involves a very grown-up kind of bed.

TOM. Oh does it, now.

CATHERINE. (*As she pulls him toward her.*) Yes, it does ...

TOM. (*Laughing.*) Sometimes I wonder if your job has made you a little ... (*He's implying she's gotten a little racier, sexier ...*)

CATHERINE. I think it has. Still want me to quit?

TOM. Not right now. (*And she leads him off to the bedroom.*)

As Catherine, Pearl, Charlotte, and Frances approach from the distance, we hear Pearl singing "By the Sea." As they walk onto the beach, carrying an umbrella, picnic basket, and blanket ...

PEARL. (*Singing wonderfully.*)

By the sea, by the sea, by the beautiful sea!

You and me, you and me, oh how happy we'll be!

When each wave comes a-rolling in

We will duck or swim,

And we'll float and / fool around the water ...

(Frances starts singing at the above / out of tune and oblivious to the fact. Pearl quickly stops singing, thrown off by Frances' dissonance.)

FRANCES. (*Singing, picking up where Pearl left off ...*)

... Fool around the water

Over and under, and then up for air,

Pa is rich, Ma is rich, so now what do we care?

I love to be beside your side, beside the —

(Charlotte cuts her off.)

CHARLOTTE. Frances, Frances, shush already. You're scaring all the kids with that voice.

FRANCES. My church choir director says I have perfect pitch.

CHARLOTTE. Due respect, your church choir director is —

CATHERINE. (*Cutting Charlotte off.*) This spot look good to you, girls?

CHARLOTTE. PEARL. FRANCES.

Fine by me. Perfect.

FRANCES. Good sun.

(They drop their stuff.)

CHARLOTTE. (*Looking out over the lake, talking mostly to herself.*) Whatta day, huh? I've never had a Saturday like this.

FRANCES. PEARN.

Never in my life. Me, either.

CHARLOTTE. No laundry ...

FRANCES. No cleaning ...

PEARL. No baking ...

CHARLOTTE. I left my mom next to the radio with a box of Necco wafers and a pot of tea. Could take hours before she even notices I'm gone.

FRANCES. Nice of your brother to lend you his car, Pearl.

The shore of Lake Michigan.

The sound of waves.

Of people.

PEARL. Yeah, well, just don't tell him he did, okay?

FRANCES. You *stole* his car?

PEARL. Technically, I borrowed it.

FRANCES. You didn't ask?

PEARL. I'm a little fuzzy on the specifics.

CATHERINE. "Borrowed without asking" equals "stolen," last time I checked.

PEARL. I can't ger bogged down in those details right now, Katie.

CHARLOTTE. This is easy street, I tell you.

CATHERINE. I'm impressed. I didn't even know you knew how to drive.

FRANCES. Yeah. When did you learn?

PEARL. (Proudly.) My first lesson's next week. (*Frances and Catherine share a look.*)

CHARLOTTE. Queens for a day. Nothing to do but pretend we're ladies of leisure.

FRANCES. (*Finally marking Charlotte's chatter.*) What are you talking about, Char?

CHARLOTTE. All this. It's a kick in the pants, ain't it, girls?

FRANCES. The lake?

CHARLOTTE. It's a Great Lake, Frannie. Show some respect. A Great Lake ... A great day ...

PEARL. I think it must be one of the most beautiful bodies of water in the world. Not that I've seen many, but ...

FRANCES. (*Noticing something down the beach with a gasp.*) There are some girls down there showing a little leg. And a lot of chest. Don't look. (*They all look in the same direction at the same time.*)

CHARLOTTE. Try pretending it's Monte Carlo. Wherever that is. CATHERINE. You hang a left out of Peoria.

CHARLOTTE. Let's try pretending we're the kind of ladies who would *go* to Monte Carlo. (*They think what that might entail, then Charlotte, Catherine, and Pearl hike their skirts up a bit to show their legs. Frances pulls her dress down, to cover more of herself.*)

FRANCES. First car theft ... Now excessive flesh ...

CHARLOTTE. (*To Pearl and Catherine.*) Who here invited Grandma, anyway?

FRANCES. You did. Matter of fact, I was the first one you called. (*Catherine and Pearl feign being insulted.*)

CATHERINE. Heeeeey!

CHARLOTTE. Ladies, ladies, ladies. (*Charlotte reveals a tiny flask and takes swing.*) So ... Anyone want a little hooch?

CATHERINE. Char!

CHARLOTTE. It's 1928. We can vote. We can smoke. We can kiss in public.

FRANCES. (*Taking the flask from Charlotte.*) We're not supposed to, to ... imbibe.

CHARLOTTE. Yes, we are! (*Taking the flask back.*) That's why they made it illegal. So we'd do it like *crazy*.

FRANCES. Well, not on a public beach!

PEARL. (*With a nod to the flask.*) Where'd you get that?

CHARLOTTE. My brother has a friend who has a brother who's a flatfoot on the south side. Where they have all the fun. Trust me. Not that I'd know. I say we celebrate. (*She takes a drink.*)

FRANCES. Celebrate what?

CHARLOTTE. I dunno ... Pearl's promotion to car thief.

PEARL. Don't advertise it, Char. CHARLOTTE. When I first met you, you couldn't even think about a swear word without going to confession. Now you're stealing —

FRANCES. Must be your positive influence on her. CHARLOTTE. Doubt it, but I'll take credit for it anyway. (*And she takes another drink.*) This place is looking more like Monte Carlo every second. (*Noticing a guy on the beach and waving.*) Or maybe just Carlo. I think I'm getting drunk. (*Catherine takes the flask away from Charlotte.*) Anyone bring anything edible? (*Pearl unwraps some sandwiches.*)

PEARL. (*Offering.*) I brought chicken sandwiches. Who wants one?

CATHERINE. FRANCES. CHARLOTTE.
Me. Me. Dark meat?

(*All the women take a sandwich and eat.*) CHARLOTTE. Speaking of which ... Is it just me, or is Al Capone one of the sexiest men in the ciry?

FRANCES. Just you. Hey, how's that perfect husband of yours, Katie?

CATHERINE. Still perfect.

CHARLOTTE. Pfft!

CATHERINE. Excuse me?

CHARLOTTE. You can't bullshit a bullshitter. No man is perfect. *No way, no how.* They are flawed by design.

FRANCES. Someone take her gin away from her. (*Pearl does. And*

sneaks a sip.)

CHARLOTTE. I'm completely sober. Sober enough to know you skimped on the mayo, Pearl. Jeez. (*Pearl grabs Charlotte's sandwich from her; which is fine by Charlotte.*) I am right, aren't I, Katie? I've been around the block enough to know there's no such thing as a "perfect" guy. At best, they hold a vague resemblance to "useful." Right, girls? Katie?

CATHERINE. Tom is great. He's ... great. He still wonders when I'm going to quit. My job. He thinks I'm going to quit eventually. FRANCES. Why would he think that? (*Catherine shrugs.*) You didn't tell him you would, did you?

CATHERINE. When I started, I said I thought it would only be for a while. That I'd quit when he was making more money. Now he's making more money ...

PEARL. You can't quit! You can't! It would break up the team! Oh, Katie. I can't imagine ... (*At that, Pearl sings from the flask.*)

CATHERINE. I wouldn't quit in a million years. Couldn't imagine life without that job. Crazy, huh?

FRANCES. Me, either.

PEARL. Me, either.

CHARLOTTE. Hey, anyone know what day Monday is?

FRANCES. (*To Pearl, regarding Charlotte's sandwich.*) If she's not gonna eat that. (*Pearl hands her the sandwich.*)

CHARLOTTE. Our anniversary. It'll be six years. All of us together. Katie started work six years ago this Monday.

CATHERINE. You of all people remember?

CHARLOTTE. Of course. It was a dark day in Charlotte Purcell history.

CATHERINE. I told you you'd like me someday.

CHARLOTTE. Don't go overboard, kiddo.

PEARL. (*Referring to flask.*) This is good stuff. Hey. Quick. More things that shine.

FRANCES. (*Taking the flask from Pearl.*) This sun.

CATHERINE. This water.

CHARLOTTE. This sand.

CATHERINE. This day.

CHARLOTTE. (*Taking the flask and drinking.*) Hey, girls, to us. And so six more years.

CATHERINE. (*Taking flask and toasting.*) And to six years after that. CATHERINE. It is.

TOM. How are the kids? The kids good today? Your mom have any trouble with them? Because when I left this morning, they were being little monsters. Cute little monsters. I mean, they're our

FRANCES. (*Taking flask, roasting.*) And six years after that.

PEARL. (*Taking flask, roasting.*) And six years after that. To us.

CHARLOTTE. We must be doing something right to have a day like this. Heaven, isn't it? (*Charlotte hums "By the Sea."*)

CATHERINE. And like that, time passes.

FRANCES. Time passed.

PEARL. Before our eyes.

CATHERINE. Before we noticed. (*Charlotte stops humming. The sound of the waves, of the other people, fade away.*)

9

SLIDE: 218,723 watches later ...

Catherine and Tom's kitchen.

Tom comes home from work.

TOM. (*To Catherine, offstage.*) Katie? Hey, honey. I'm home. Hey. Helluva day. Helluva day. Hor, hor, hor, and no break till one. Kopinski is talking strike. Gianelli reminds him we don't even have a union. Kehoe calls them both commies. And I drop my lunch off the twenty-second story. I could eat a horse. Two. Two horses and a cow. You wanna start dinner? I'll get the kids. Katie? You here? (*Catherine enters. She's worried, distracted. He doesn't notice.*) There she is. (*He kisses her.*) How was work?

CATHERINE. (*Not so sure.*) Fine. Fine.

TOM. You make us rich? How many watches you paint today?

CATHERINE. One seventy-five.

TOM. They're lucky to have you. Hope they know that. You're a one-woman assembly line. Time really is money around that place, isn't it?

CATHERINE. It is.

TOM. How are the kids? The kids good today? Your mom have any trouble with them? Because when I left this morning, they were being little monsters. Cute little monsters. I mean, they're our

little monsters. But I gotta admit, I was worried. Your mom, due respect, ain't as spry as she used to be. Where are they now? They're quiet. Which usually means trouble.

CATHERINE. They're fine. Reading to each other.
TOM. A couple of little professors. Smart kids. Think they take after you or me? (*He laughs ... she doesn't respond.*) So you hungry? You want me to start dinner? You look tired, no offense. Let me do the cooking. I'll whip up the best fried bologna sandwiches —

CATHERINE. Tom?

TOM. Yeah?
CATHERINE. Look at me.

TOM. (*A little worried.*) Oooookaaayyy ...
CATHERINE. Really look.

TOM. I am.
CATHERINE. You see something? Something different?

TOM. Just my beautiful Katie.

CATHERINE. You don't see anything different?

TOM. No, I don't.

CATHERINE. You're sure.

TOM. Scout's honor.

CATHERINE. Turn off the light.

TOM. Whar?

CATHERINE. Turn off the light.

TOM. Why —

CATHERINE. Just turn it off! (*He does. Darkness. She holds up her hands, shows him her palms. They're luminous. The other women appear. Light shines from all their hands. They speak, overlapping ...*)

CHARLOTTE. It won't come off.

FRANCES. Can't come off.

PEARL. Never come off.

(*He tries to rub Catherine's hands clean. Doesn't work.*)

CATHERINE. I tried.

TOM. (*Scared, but covering it.*) It's just the dust. Like always.

CATHERINE. But it's not just *on* my skin anymore. It's *in* my skin.

TOM. I'll wear off.

CATHERINE. Don't you think it's *wrong*?

TOM. No. I — I don't know. They say it's fine ...

CATHERINE. This is my *body*. Tom. It's in my body.

TOM. Let's not borrow trouble, okay? If they say it's fine, it's —

CATHERINE. I ache, Tom. My bones. My legs, my back. I'm scared.

TOM. Maybe this job's getting too hard for you. Maybe you're just tired like any working stiff.

CATHERINE. I'm not some little *doll*, Tom! It's not too hard for me! There's something wrong and I don't know what it is!

TOM. Your hands are dirty! So what? (*He tries to turn from her.*)

CATHERINE. Don't you dare walk away from me!

TOM. (*Losing his temper.*) Listen, I'm tired, too! Dead on my feet! If this job's getting to you, don't come home and take it out on me, okay? Every day I'm up there doing the high-wire act, worried that I might make one wrong move and that'll be it. That I won't be coming home at the end of the day. That I won't see you and the kids again just because I moved an inch in the wrong direction. I told you the day you started that work is *work*! That's what people like them pay people like us for! So we ache! So we're tired! They get their money's worth and we get some cash! That's the deal, Katie! That's what you signed up for! Remember, you wanted this job! (*A beat of quiet.*)

CATHERINE. I'm not making this up. I'm steady as the day is long. And I'm telling you. There's something wrong with me. And I'm scared. (*And she exists.*)

10

CATHERINE. The definition of a company doctor? A doctor who takes care of the company. (*In the Company Doctor's office.*)

COMPANY DOCTOR. Catherine?

CATHERINE. Yes.

COMPANY DOCTOR. Mrs. Catherine Wolfe Donohue?

CATHERINE. Yes.

COMPANY DOCTOR. You work for ...

CATHERINE. The company. Radium Dial. You know that. That's why I'm here.

COMPANY DOCTOR. Certain questions ... Just a matter of procedure.

CATHERINE. Sorry.

COMPANY DOCTOR. And you have a ... complaint?

CATHERINE. There's something wrong.

COMPANY DOCTOR. Mm.

CATHERINE. With my leg. My foot. Ankle. Moving up to here.

COMPANY DOCTOR. Arthritis is my guess.

CATHERINE. I'm too young for arthritis.

COMPANY DOCTOR. Weak blood.

CATHERINE. It's not weak blood.

COMPANY DOCTOR. I'm prescribing aspirin.

CATHERINE. I've been taking aspirin. It doesn't work. I — I need to figure out what's wrong.

COMPANY DOCTOR. You're young. You're strong. You're a mother. You're a wife. You have a family to take care of. You're perfectly healthy. You're fine.

CATHERINE. At work they gave us a test. They had us breathe into a machine. A meter.

COMPANY DOCTOR. Standard procedure.

CATHERINE. Standard procedure for what?

COMPANY DOCTOR. For the company.

CATHERINE. What was the test *for*?

COMPANY DOCTOR. Employers give employees tests all the time. In the best interest of the workers. In the best interest of their health. Everyone wants a healthy workforce. The company has an investment in you. But maybe you're not cut out for this work. Maybe you're not as strong as —

CATHERINE. How can you say that! I'm a good worker!

COMPANY DOCTOR. Listen. Mrs. Donohue. You're doing your job. I'm doing mine. We work for the same people. We can make trouble. Or we can take care of ourselves and get along. You're the picture of health. You're a beautiful young woman. There's nothing wrong with you. You want to know about the test? I'll tell you. Some people, some people think companies make workers sick. But sometimes people are already sick when they get hired. And they try and pawn it off on the company. My job is to sort the cranks from the real McCoys.

CATHERINE. I thought you were a doctor, not a sorcer.

COMPANY DOCTOR. As a doctor, sorting's my job.

CATHERINE. I wasn't sick when I started.

COMPANY DOCTOR. Didn't say you were.

CATHERINE. This is new. This is different. It keeps me up at night. I can't sleep. I can't —

COMPANY DOCTOR. Nerves. Sounds like a classic case of / nerves. (*Lights out on Company Doctor and up on Charlotte, Pearl, and Frances at work. Catherine joins them.*)

CHARLOTTE. (*Overlapping at /*) Nerves?!

CATHERINE. Nerves. He said I have a case of nerves.

FRANCES. He's the one who's got nerve.

PEARL. I went last week. To the doctor.

CATHERINE. You *did*?

FRANCES. You haven't been feeling well?

PEARL. Not really.

CATHERINE. Why didn't you say something?

PEARL. Why didn't you? (*Point taken.*)

CATHERINE. What did he say?

PEARL. Aspirin. He said to take aspirin.

FRANCES. I saw him two weeks ago.

PEARL. You did?

FRANCES. Yeah.

CATHERINE. Aspirin.

FRANCES. Aspirin.

CHARLOTTE. I went a few days ago.

CATHERINE. You should've said something.

CHARLOTTE. Shoulda, woulda, coulda. Figured it was my business. Besides, he told me to get —

PEARL. Aspirin?

CHARLOTTE. An enema.

CATHERINE. You're kidding.

CHARLOTTE. I would not kid about an enema. Believe me.

FRANCES. Did ... you...?

CHARLOTTE. Even I have my limits. Besides, I told him the pain was in my arm, not in my — (*Rufus Reed enters.*)

MR. REED. Ladies?

CATHERINE/CHARLOTTE/PEARL/FRANCES. Good morning, Mr. Reed.

MR. REED. Good morning. (*They work. Silence.*) You're awfully quiet today. (*Silence.*) Cat got your tongues?

CHARLOTTE. Nor really, Mr. Reed.

MR. REED. Knew I could count on you to pipe up, Charlotte. Thought maybe you were all under the weather.

Thought maybe you didn't feel so good.

Thought maybe that's it.

CHARLOTTE. We're fine, Mr. Reed.

FRANCES. Fine.

CATHERINE. Fine.

PEARL. Fine. See? (*And she turns on the radio ... like everything's normal ...*)

MR. REED. That's good. Because the doctor stopped in this morning. He's worried about you. Should he be? Should I be?

ALL WOMEN. No, Mr. Reed.

MR. REED. You're looking thin, Catherine.

CATHERINE. I'm fine, Mr. Reed. The kids, you know, they run me ragged.

MR. REED. You'd tell me, wouldn't you? If there was something, anything?

CATHERINE. Of course.

MR. REED. Because you could, you know, tell me.

CATHERINE. I'm aces.

MR. REED. You were out one day last week. And once, a few weeks earlier.

CATHERINE. Just a little flu I caught from my girl. You know kids, they catch everything and give it to their parents.

MR. REED. And the rest of you?

CHARLOTTE/PEARL/FRANCES. Great. Fine. Swell. (*And ad lib.*)

MR. REED. That's good. I'm glad to hear it. I'd break my heart if there were anything wrong. Break my heart. (*He looks at the watches Catherine has just painted.*) Your nines, Catherine. Watch your nines. They're not so good.

CATHERINE. Yes, Mr. Reed. (*They wait until he exits. Showing her work to Pearl.*) What's wrong with them?

PEARL. They're perfect, Katie. It's him.

FRANCES. What do we do now?

PEARL. What can we do?

CATHERINE. Work, I guess.

FRANCES. So then let's work.

CHARLOTTE. Katie?

CATHERINE. Yeah, Charlotte?

CHARLOTTE. (*This isn't easy for her.*) I'd watch our for him. Mr. Reed. He knows who buttered his bread. And it's not us.

PEARL. Work, Charlotte.

CHARLOTTE. I think —

PEARL. (*More sharply.*) Leave it alone, Charlotte.

CHARLOTTE. The party just might be over.

PEARL. Charlotte!

CHARLOTTE. I'm just saying —

PEARL. Please —! (*She starts to cry*)

FRANCES. Bite your tongue, Charlotte. For once, bite your tongue. (*Charlotte tries to work, stops, then tries again and keeps going.*)

SLIDE: *The women of Radium Dial Company were painting 4,300 watch dials every day. More than 1 million each year.*

MR. REED.

11

In the middle of the night.

Catherine sits in her kitchen. In the dark.

Tom enters sleepily.

TOM. I had a nightmare. I dreamed that I woke up in the middle of the night and you were gone. Just gone. And I couldn't find you anywhere. Then I woke up. And you really were gone.

CATHERINE. Sorry. I couldn't sleep.

TOM. You don't feel good? What?

CATHERINE. It —

TOM. Hm?

CATHERINE. It hurts.

TOM. What hurts?

CATHERINE. My — My foot. Inside. My leg. Inside. There's this pain, moving up my body, settling into parts of me. It feels —

TOM. Maybe it's the cold, the damp.

CATHERINE. You know what would be great? What would really help?

TOM. What?

CATHERINE. If you'd actually believe me instead of making excuses. There's something wrong. It's not the weather. I'm not working too hard. There's something real happening and I don't know what it is.

TOM. Listen. I'm sorry. I'm sorry about the other night. If something was really wrong, I couldn't take it. I really couldn't.

CATHERINE. I'm not sure I could.

TOM. We'll go see the doctor. Together. Maybe he'll listen if I'm there.

CATHERINE. It's not that he didn't listen. It's that he lied.

TOM. Then we'll find someone else.

CATHERINE. It's too expensive.

TOM. I'll pick up some extra hours. Work weekends. It'll be okay.

CATHERINE. Tom?

TOM. What, Katie.

CATHERINE. If something were to happen, could you find me in the dark? Far away?

TOM. Your face.

CATHERINE. Yes.

TOM. Your hair.

CATHERINE. Yes.

TOM. Your lips, eyes, fingers.

CATHERINE. Yes.

TOM. I can see every inch. From the minute I met you, I knew I'd always be able to see you, day or night, from a million miles away. My nightmare is not being able to find you. I'm not gonna let that happen.

CATHERINE. God, I'm so tired.

TOM. Don't go to work tomorrow. Hell with them.

CATHERINE. I have to. They fired some girls for being sick. It's different around there, now. Mr. Reed is different. It's scary. Some girls go home on Friday, they don't come back on Monday.

TOM. Who'd they let go?

CATHERINE. Inez, Olive, Sadie, Margaret.

TOM. Then quit.

CATHERINE. I don't want to quit. I want to feel better.

TOM. Then maybe we find you another job. Any place would

'hire you in a snap.

CATHERINE. I don't think I can leave my friends there. I'd feel like I'm deserting them.

TOM. I think they'd understand.

CATHERINE. You don't understand. These girls ... They broke the mold. I feel like we grew up together. More than that. I can't leave them.

TOM. Listen ... it's late. We're both beat. Come back to bed.

CATHERINE. No. No. I'm up now.

12

Lights up on the women at work. Lip, dip, paint, talk.

CHARLOTTE. Mah-jongg.

CATHERINE. I'm just asking.

CHARLOTTE. Mah-jongg and bridge. I love mah-jongg and bridge.

FRANCES. Parcheesi.

PEARL. Valentino. I love Rudolph Valentino.

CHARLOTTE. I already called dibs on him.

CATHERINE. Now it's around the ankle. My left ankle. Sometimes my right.

PEARL. I play mah-jongg every Tuesday.

FRANCES. With who?

CATHERINE. But really, it's mostly the left.

PEARL. My mother-in-law.

FRANCES. You don't.

PEARL. I do.

CATHERINE. Is anyone listening?

CHARLOTTE. You sprained your ankle. Just twisted it or something.

CATHERINE. I didn't sprain it. It hurts. It just started hurting on its own.

FRANCES. Sounds like a sprain. Like you stepped funny.

CATHERINE. It hurts all the time. There's something wrong with it.

PEARL. Hot water bottle. Put a hot water bottle on it.

CHARLOTTE. Or ice. Put ice on it.

FRANCES. Hot and cold. Off and on. That's what I'd do.

CATHERINE. But it hurts in a funny way. Inside. In the bone.

PEARL. Rheumatism.

CATHERINE. Why are you all sounding like the doctor?

CHARLOTTE. *By the sea, by the beautiful sea!*

You and me, you and me, oh how / happy we'll be!

CATHERINE. (*Interrupting on the 1.*) Tom's worried, too.

CHARLOTTE. (*Singing*) *When each wave / comes a-rolling in*

FRANCES. (*Interrupting on the 1.*) You're fine. You're fine.

CHARLOTTE. *We will duck or swim,*

And well float and fool around / the water ...

CATHERINE. (*Interrupting on the 1.*) What I'm saying is, I think

something's wrong. (*The song ends. Silence. They keep working.*)

Something's wrong and I'm scared. Am I the only one? (*Silence.*)

Charlotte starts to sing again, softly.

CHARLOTTE. (*Singing*) Over and under and then up —

CATHERINE. What about you, Char?

CHARLOTTE. (*Singing*) — And then up for air

CATHERINE. Pearl?

CHARLOTTE. (*Singing, faltering*) Pa is rich, Ma is rich —

CATHERINE. Frances?

CHARLOTTE. (*Singing*) So now what do we care ... (*Silence.*)

They all stop working.

CATHERINE. I need to tell you.

My foot feels like it's breaking.

Inside my skin.

My bones are breaking.

I couldn't lift my little girl last night.

I could barely walk to her.

I could barely cross the room.

I couldn't stand at the oven.

I couldn't make the bed.

Anyone else? (*Silence.*)

PEARL. I bleed. I'm bleeding. (*Silence.*)

FRANCES. My teeth. They ache. (*Silence.*)

PEARL. I can't find a doctor who knows what's wrong.

FRANCES. I can't find a doctor who will listen.

CHARLOTTE. (*Singing softly, starting to work.*)
I love to be beside your side, beside the sea,

(They all start working.)

Beside the seaside, by the beautiful sea ...

(Charlotte continues to hum.)

PEARL. (*Losing it.*) CHARLOTTE! (*This stops Charlotte; singing cold.*) You said once, you read bones.

CHARLOTTE. I do.

PEARL. What are they saying now?

CHARLOTTE. It's in my arm. What you have. It's in my arm. (*She tries to hum again. Stops. Then starts again. Mr. Reed enters, carrying a handful of letters. The women all start painting.*)

MR. REED. Good morning, ladies. (*A lackluster chorus of "good morning" from the women. He registers this ... and then plows on.*) You know

— and I know — that you ladies have had a few concerns lately. There's been some gossip. Harmless, but gossip has a way of getting

around. And the company wants to let you know — They want to say — Well. Here you go. (*He hands out the letters to the women.*)

FRANCES. What's this?

MR. REED. Clarification. From the company. In response to said gossip, misguided chatter, et cetera, et cetera. An official promise you can hang your hats on, girls. Listen up and put your minds at ease. They want you to know they're careful. That we use nothing

that could cause you harm. (*Reading from the letter.*)

"In the best interest of our employees' safety, Radium Dial does not compromise its product or the health of our workers by using materials of low quality. Radium Dial uses material that contains pure radium *only*. If we at any time had reason to believe that any condition of the work endangered the well-being of our employees, we would have suspended operations. The health of the employees of the Radium Dial Company is always foremost in the minds of its officials. Most sincerely, Joseph A. Kelly, president."

There it is. The truth in black and white. So you can rest easy. This company, it's a good company. I know you girls know that. Take a few extra minutes at lunch. Relax. It's a beautiful day out there. Enjoy. Have a good day, girls. (*And he leaves.*)

FRANCES. Are you biting your tongue, Char?

CHARLOTTE. Yes.

FRANCES. Don't do it for me. Not any more.

CHARLOTTE. It's bad enough when a man lies behind your back. But when he lies to your face?

PEARL. What, Char?

CHARLOTTE. You know he's made a deal with the devil.

13

CATHERINE. We made another list. Things that stopped shining.

PEARL. Our days.

FRANCES. Our nights.

CHARLOTTE. Our sleep.

PEARL. Our dreams.

FRANCES. Our time.

CHARLOTTE. Our selves. (Catherine approaches Mr. Reed in his office.)

CATHERINE. Mr. Reed?

MR. REED. Ah, Mrs. Donohue. Come in, come in.

CATHERINE. Pearl said you wanted to see me.

MR. REED. Sit. You wanna sit down? Have a seat.

CATHERINE. I'm fine, thank you.

MR. REED. I don't want — This isn't —

CATHERINE. What, Mr. Reed?

MR. REED. I'm sorry. I have to do this.

CATHERINE. Do what? (No response.) Do what, Mr. Reed?

MR. REED. I'm sorry.

CATHERINE. For...?

MR. REED. I have to let you go.

CATHERINE. What?

MR. REED. I'm letting you —

CATHERINE. Please. You... can't.

MR. REED. I have to.

CATHERINE. But you can't. You can't do this to me. There's no reason —

MR. REED. I'm so sorry.

CATHERINE. Why?

MR. REED. You're missing too much work, Mrs. Donohue.

CATHERINE. No! Only a few days. Not that many.

MR. REED. More than a few.

CATHERINE. No more, I promise, no more. Just let me —

MR. REED. (Cutting her off.) We run a certain kind of business, Mrs. Donohue. We work a certain way. This is a good place for girls. For healthy girls. I'm sorry. I didn't have to explain this much.

CATHERINE. You didn't *explain* —

MR. REED. But I thought you deserve it.

CATHERINE. I deserve it?!

MR. REED. You've been a good worker. You've been —

CATHERINE. You're really firing me?

MR. REED. You've been a great asset to —

CATHERINE. For being sick?

MR. REED. A truly wonderful worker until these past few months —

CATHERINE. It's this *job*! There's something that's making us all —

MR. REED. I'm asking you —

CATHERINE. Mr. Reed, please —

MR. REED. You have to leave now.

CATHERINE. What about Pearl? Charlotte? Frances? What about them? What about all the other girls?

MR. REED. Whoever can't do their job will be asked to leave.

CATHERINE. Mr. Reed —

MR. REED. I'm sorry.

CATHERINE. You can't.

MR. REED. They said I could offer you a week's pay. You should take ~~it~~ ^{it} hear of any other jobs somewhere else, I'll let you know.

CATHERINE. There aren't any more jobs! Haven't you heard, Mr. Reed? There haven't been any jobs for two years! There's nowhere for me to go!

MR. REED. (Holding out an envelope.) Here. Take it.

CATHERINE. No.

MR. REED. It's yours. You should have it. (She hesitates, then takes ~~it~~ ^{it} *both hands inside*)

CATHERINE. There's more than a week's pay in here.

MR. REED. There's some from me. Just a few bucks. I remember the day you started, Katie. I liked you. You fit right in. And you did so well. I suggest you don't start now. I'm sorry you got sick.

THE SON. I have to let you go. It's my job. It's business, you know.

CATHERINE. No, it's not. It's a crime. (She tosses the envelope on the floor and walks out.)

CATHERINE. No.

DR DALITSCH. I'm sorry. If you have questions ...

CATHERINE. You said radium.

DR DALITSCH. Yes.

CATHERINE. Nothing else.

DR DALITSCH. No. You work at Radium Dial?

CATHERINE. Worked. Yes.

DR DALITSCH. For how long?

CATHERINE. Nine years. 1922 to 1931.

DR DALITSCH. Did they warn you?

ALL WOMEN. No.

DR DALITSCH. Did they protect you?

ALL WOMEN. No.

DR DALITSCH. Did they ever tell you —

ALL WOMEN. No.

DR DALITSCH. I see.

CATHERINE. Tell me.

DR DALITSCH. Yes?

CATHERINE. Radium poisoning is ... (*Silence.*)

CATHERINE. Is ...

DR DALITSCH. Irreversible.

CATHERINE. Meaning ...

DR DALITSCH. Incurable.

CATHERINE. Meaning ...

DR DALITSCH. How do you want me to say it?

CHARLOTTE. Like we can take it.

DR DALITSCH. Terminal. In all your cases. (*Pearl and Frances*

Charlotte) Is there anything you want to say? Before I go on?

CATHERINE. No. Yes. I — They knew, didn't they? God. They

How ...

FRANCES. Twice.

DR DALITSCH. When.

CHARLOTTE. Nineteen twenty-four and twenty-eight.

DR DALITSCH. Did they tell you the results?

CATHERINE. No.

DR DALITSCH. Did you ask?

PEARL. We just —

FRANCES. We didn't.

CHARLOTTE. We just did our jobs.

SLIDE: Dr. Dalitsch

CATHERINE. To find the one doctor who would risk his name.

CATHERINE. The company doctor was a liar. But no other doctors in our town would see us. So we had to go to the city.

SLIDE: Dr. Dalitsch

DR DALITSCH. (*To Frances.*) ... It seems that with the severe pain in your legs, the hard ridge that has formed along the underside of your jaw, together with — Frances? Do you understand?

FRANCES. (*In shock.*) Yes. (*Light up on Pearl.*)

DR DALITSCH. ... Your fractured jaw resulting from a tooth extraction and the subsequent infection in the tooth's socket, in addition to anemia — Pearl, are you listening?

PEARL. Yes. (*Light up on Charlotte.*)

DR DALITSCH. ... The amputation of your arm that will eventually be necessary due to the sarcoma throughout your entire — Charlotte? Would you like to sit down, Charlotte?

CHARLOTTE. No. No, I — (*She sits.*)

DR DALITSCH. Catherine?

CATHERINE. Yes?

DR DALITSCH. ... The fainting spells and destruction of your teeth being connected to — connected to the malignancy of your hip and necrosis of your jaw — Necrosis meaning — Necrosis means ... localized death of living tissue. To the best of my knowledge, this is a direct result of radium. Of radium poisoning. Of of exposure to and ingestion of ... radium. Has anyone said this to you before?

CATHERINE. Whar do we do now?
DR. DALITSCH. I don't know. I'll treat you. I'll help you. I just don't know how yet.

CHARLOTTE. You're sure. That it's radium.

DR. DALITSCH. There's no question.
PEARL. God.

FRANCES. My God.

CATHERINE. You're the only one, you know. Who would say it's radium.

DR. DALITSCH. How many doctors have you seen?

FRANCES. A few.
CHARLOTTE. A lot.

PEARL. Aspirin. All they gave us was aspirin.
CATHERINE. What can you give us?

DR. DALITSCH. I'll tell you the truth. Always. It's the best I can do.
PEARL. Then we'll take it. (*Pearl, Frances, and Dr. Dalitsch exit. Charlotte and Catherine remain, shaken by their news, walk home ...*)

CHARLOTTE. (*Trying to cover her fear.*) Well. Knock me over with a feather.

CATHERINE. I'm almost sorry we saw him. I feel like ... Maybe it still wouldn't be real if he didn't name it, you know? Maybe — Maybe what he said — Maybe some other doctor would know what to do and wouldn't be so — Maybe Dr. Dalitsch is wrong, Charlotte. There's still a chance that —
CHARLOTTE. (*Breaking, harshly.*) STOP IT, KATIE! Jesus Christ! Just shut up! You can't make it better, okay?! So stop trying with your silly optimism. It's ridiculous. God. Grow up. They did this to us! They did this and they knew it! They threw us away for a few warches! That's what we're worth! That's what you're worth! So spare me the "maybe this" and "maybe that," okay?! It does me no good!

CATHERINE. We're on the same side, Charlotte.

CHARLOTTE. I'm — I'm so sorry. I just don't — I don't have anyone else to — (*A shift to her real heartbreak.*) Who's gonna take care of my mom, Katie? Who's gonna take care of her? (*She starts to cry. Catherine tries to hold her, carefully. It lasts, for a second. Then Charlotte brushes off her and her tears. Pulling herself together.*) Okay. That's that, then. I better get home. You, too. Big day today, huh? (*As she runs offstage.*) I'll see you later. (*And she's gone.*)

Catherine at home with her son and her daughter.
Actors playing children should not act childish, only innocent.

CATHERINE. That night, my girl and boy came to me.

DAUGHTER. Mom?

CATHERINE. Yes?

DAUGHTER. Read with us.

CATHERINE. I can't right now.

SON. Mom?

CATHERINE. What?

SON. Sing with us.

CATHERINE. I can't right now.

DAUGHTER. Mom? Walk with us.

CATHERINE. No —

DAUGHTER. Why not?

CATHERINE. Because —

SON. Why not?

CATHERINE. I have something to do.

DAUGHTER. I have something.

Everyone going to go through the house and find every clock, every watch, and smash them to pieces.

DAUGHTER. Why, Mom?

CATHERINE. Because I don't want time to know you're here. Because I want it to leave you alone.

Because I've seen it and I know what it looks like.
SON. Mom?

CATHERINE. What.

SON. What does it look like?

CATHERINE. (*Thinks.*) Like the scariest thing of all. SON. Like a ghost?

CATHERINE. No.

DAUGHTER. Like the devil?

CATHERINE. No. Like a child.

SON. Is that why you look at us that way?

CATHERINE. No.

It's why I can't stop.
Go to bed now.

Go to sleep.
I'll take away the clocks.

I'll make them stop.
They can't touch you as long as I'm here.

SON. Mom —

CATHERINE (*Losing it.*) Leave me alone.

I'm sick and tired of —
I can't talk to you right now.

Don't look at me like that.
Don't.

(*Silence.*)

This is the sound of a mother's heart breaking.
(*Silence.*)

This is the sound of her falling apart.
(*Silence.*)

This is the sound of time running out.
(*Silence.*)

This is the sound of time running out.
(*Silence.*)

Of her.
(*Tom enters.*)

TOM. It's late, Katie.

CATHERINE. I know.

TOM. This guy, this doctor, he might be wrong, too. You ever think of that?

CATHERINE. No. He's right. About all of us.

TOM. From now on, all I want you to think about is getting better. I'll do everything. You just get better. That's all you have to do. Okay?

CATHERINE. Take care of anything you want, nothing's going to make me better. We know what's wrong. We know how it ends.

Right? I am going to die. We can say it. Go ahead. Say it. (Silence.)

Say it! (*He won't.*) Coward.

TOM. I'm with you. I always will be. But that doesn't mean I have to take everything you dish out. (*He starts to leave.*)

CATHERINE. Tom? Can you tell me what I should do?

TOM. I got no idea, Katie.

CATHERINE's kitchen.

CATHERINE, Charlotte, Pearl, and Frances playing poker at the table.

CATHERINE finishes dealing a hand.

FRANCES: At least you had the nerve to say something to him. Threatened you, Katie. I just started to cry.

PEARL: I cried. Then I threw his pencil sharpener at him.

CHARLOTTE: This is a poker party, girls. Not a pity party.

CATHERINE: Charlotte.

CHARLOTTE: I'm just saying. We're playing for pennies ... not substances. You in or not.

PEARL: I'm in. (*She tosses a poker chip on the table.*) Come on, Char. You girls Admit it. When Mr. Reed called you in.

FRANCES: We wouldn't know, would we? She was the last one of us left. She's not gonna fess up.

PEARL: Come clean, Char. Did you cry or not cry? Anyone wanna take bets on that?

CHARLOTTE: Worse. I was struck dumb. I couldn't say a thing. Not a thing. First time in my life, words failed me.

FRANCES: Words fail you? Hell must've frozen over.

CHARLOTTE: maybe pigs flew. I'll take three ...

CHARLOTTE. (*Dealing Pearl three cards.*) The only person more compromised than me was Mr. Reed. Complete silence. Then I cried. All of us. Not a second thought.

CATHERINE. (*Reminding her.*) No pity, Char. I'm in. (*She tosses*

CHARLOTTE: Just stating a fact.

CATHERINE: Frances?

FRANCES: I'm in. (*She tosses in a chip.*)

PEARL: You girls hear about Marie?

CATHERINE/FRANCES/CHARLOTTE: Yes.

CHARLOTTE. I'm gonna raise you ... (*She tosses a chip.*)
PEARL. I'm out. (*She folds.*) It's awful. Horrible. She was so ...

CHARLOTTE. Preety?
PEARL. Young. I was going to say.
FRANCES. And Marguerite?

PEARL. What about Marguerite?

FRANCES. She had to move back home. I'm out. (*She folds.*) Her and her husband, they lost everything. Doctor's bills, hospital bills, medicine ... They lost their house. They had to move back in with her mom and dad. Now they all pitch in to take care of her.

CATHERINE. Same with Mary Ellen.

FRANCES. I heard.

CATHERINE. And Helen and Inez and Margaret and —

CHARLOTTE. (*Cutting her off.*) Enough, girls, okay? Enough. We all know we feel awful about this whole mess. We can whine about it till the cows come home. We have whined about it till the cows came home. So do you mind if I make a suggestion?

FRANCES. I think it kind of depends on whether you —

CHARLOTTE. (*Cutting her off.*) We can keep whining or we can actually do something.

FRANCES. Like what?

CHARLOTTE. I don't know. Something ... gutsy. It's not like we got a lot to lose.

PEARL. I don't have the stomach for it.

CHARLOTTE. I'm not saying I do, but ...

PEARL. What are you saying?

CHARLOTTE. The company's counting on us just going away quietly, right? Maybe we should make a little noise.

PEARL. You're suggesting ...

CHARLOTTE. We could put up a bit of a fight. God knows we've earned it.

FRANCES. PEARL.

Charlotte ... Noooooo ...

CHARLOTTE. I'm just saying ...

FRANCES. What do you think, Katie?

CATHERINE. A big part of me wants to take my family, leave town, change my name, and pretend for as long as I can that none of this happened.

PEARL/FRANCES. *[Ad lib in agreement.]*
CHARLOTTE. What about the other part?

CATHERINE. It wonders what it would feel like to hire the best lawyer I could find.

PEARL. You would sue? You really would?

CATHERINE. No. I don't know. Women like me don't stir up trouble. We play nice and do what we're told.

CHARLOTTE. Tell ya what, Katie. Let's make this game interesting. I'm gonna decide what we're going to do. You win, you decide. Okay?

PEARL. What exactly do you mean by "what we're going to do?"

CHARLOTTE. If we're going to pur up a fight — or lie down and die. Because that's our choice as I see it. (*A beat.*) Okay?

CATHERINE. No no no no. I can't.

CHARLOTTE. You're really gonna leave it up to me?

PEARL. Katie?

FRANCES. (*To Pearl.*) Shh.

CATHERINE. Okay. Okay. I can't believe I'm saying this ... But, you know, Frances crosses herself)

CHARLOTTE. (*Laying her cards on the table.*) Three aces. Catherine pushes her head in her hands.) Sore loser? (Pearl takes Catherine's cards and places them on the table.)

PEARL. Full house.

FRANCES. I'll be damned.

CHARLOTTE. (*In shock.*) You won. I can't believe it. Of all times, you won.

CATHERINE. I don't want to decide this. I really, really don't. Somebody else should do this. Not me. I just — I really can't. I'm not cut out for it. You know that. Char, you're the one. You do this. Come on.

CHARLOTTE. I lost fair and square.

CATHERINE. Okay. Okay. Then. Forgive me, but ... I think we do the only thing we can do.

FRANCES. Which is ...

CATHERINE. Fix our hair, stand up straight, and go get / those sons of [Light upon Leonard Grossman, vivid, avuncular, aggressive.]

CROSSMAN. (*Overlapping on the 1.) Those sons of bitches — Sorry, ladies, sorry.*

*SLIDE: Leonard Grossman
Attorney at Law*

We walked past it.

We sat on the beach.

In our favorite spot.

FRANCES. Remember the last time we were here?

CATHERINE. It's been years.

PEARL. It was nice.

CHARLOTTE. It's still nice.

FRANCES. It's just ... different.

PEARL. Still beautiful, though.

CHARLOTTE. Still makes me think of other places.

CATHERINE. Makes me think about what Mr. Grossman said. No more peace. No more privacy. Everything out there. In the papers. In public. For everyone to see.

PEARL. It sounds awful.

CHARLOTTE. Yeah. But it beats the thing I'm afraid of.

PEARL. What's that, honey?

CHARLOTTE. Being invisible. Disappearing. Without anyone knowing the truth. That just seems ... wrong.

CHARLOTTE. Katie?

CATHERINE. Hm.

CHARLOTTE. You know you can stop. You can back out. You don't have to do this. I may be a smart aleck, I may have a big mouth. But I'm not a fighter. I don't think I'd be any good at this.

CATHERINE. You don't have to be.

PEARL. She's just saying. It's okay with all of us if you change your mind.

CHARLOTTE. I know. But that won't fix anything.

PEARL. Nothing will fix this. That's the problem.

CATHERINE. No. But someone has to let people know it's broken.

CHARLOTTE. It doesn't have to be you. It doesn't have to be any of us. We could just —

CHARLOTTE. Shhh ...

FRANCES. What?

CATHERINE. There. Can you hear it?

PEARL. What?

CATHERINE. ... The quiet. Just the waves on the lake. Just for a minute. There. There. I needed that. One last time. Now I'm ready. (The sound of waves.)

We turned and headed toward the lake.
(The sound of waves.)
We walked to the pier.

DR. DALITSCH. I'd rather not say in the presence of the witness.
 GROSSMAN. You've already spoken to Mrs. Donohue about her condition?

DR. DALITSCH. Yes.

GROSSMAN. So she won't be surprised here.

DR. DALITSCH. No.

GROSSMAN. So I'll ask you again, is it your opinion that Mrs. Donohue's condition is fatal?

DR. DALITSCH. Mrs. Donohue might live for several months under the proper treatment.

GROSSMAN. And she is suffering from the effects of what illness?

DR. DALITSCH. Radium poisoning.

GROSSMAN. Acquired through ... in your belief ...

DR. DALITSCH. Her work at Radium Dial.

REPORTER 1. (*Undaunted by the actual testimony*) The women press on with their charges in spite of community pressure to step aside. They insist on fighting ...

REPORTER 2. ... Grasping for a payday, which may in fact be less than / seven hundred dollars apiece. (*Lights up on Tom reading the paper to Catherine.*)

TOM. (*Overlapping at 1/*) ... Seven hundred dollars apiece.

CATHERINE. God, it's embarrassing.

TOM. It's bullshit. Complete bullshit. If I had a penny for every lie they've told ...

CATHERINE. They're just trying to sell papers.

TOM. They're trying to ruin you.

CATHERINE. Grossman warned us.

TOM. Yeah, but did you ever think it would sound like this? CATHERINE. Of course not.

TOM. Our *name* is in the paper. Every day. Our good name. All my life, I kept my nose clean. And now this. To sell a few headlines. The guys at work ... You really find out who your pals are in a time like this. I'll say that much.

CATHERINE. I'm sorry. I feel like I'm taking you down with me. (*Silence from him.*) Do you want me to stop? (*A beat.*)

TOM. What if I said yes? (*She doesn't answer. They wait each other out for a second, then ...*) If you don't need me, I'm going over to Denny's house. Helping him fix his roof for a few extra dollars. You mind?

CATHERINE. No.

CATHERINE. Our case went to court.

Our story went to press.

And the press went to town.

(*The world changes from private to public and sensational.*)

SLIDE OF MASTHEAD: CHICAGO DAILY TIMES

March 17, 1936

SLIDE OF HEADLINE: WOMEN WORKERS CRY WOLF?

REPORTER 1. A travesty is unfolding just outside of Chicago, where several disgruntled women are accusing a beloved company of foul play.

REPORTER 2. The women allege that the company, Radium Dial, knowingly compromised their health, safety, and lives.

REPORTER 1. Each of these women was fired several years ago for poor performance.

REPORTER 2. In contrast, Radium Dial is known for its impeccable success and for paying generous wages to unskilled workers.

REPORTER 1. The women are currently flinging their accusations before the Illinois Industrial Commission.

REPORTER 2. The key figure in the case — CATHERINE. Mrs. Catherine Donohue, 520 East Superior Street.

REPORTER 2. — Had just completed testimony when Dr. Dalitsch from Chicago was summoned to the strand. The women's lawyer, Mr. Grossman, questioned him.

GROSSMAN. Dr. Dalitsch, from your examination of Mrs. Donohue what would you say as to her condition — is it temporary or permanent?

DR. DALITSCH. Permanent.
 GROSSMAN. In your opinion, is it fatal?

TOM. What should I do? With the paper?
CATHERINE. Burn it. Burn every newspaper in town for all I care.
TOM. Your kerosene or mine? (*A slight smile between them. With a wink.*) Made you smile. Call if you need me. (*He kisses her on the head and leaves. She watches him go, then — from inside the house.*)

FRANCES. Katie? Katie? You up? (*Frances and Pearl enter.*) Sorry; just us “disgrunded women.”

CATHERINE. Ah. You read it, too?

FRANCES. Who could resist? The best fiction writing this side of the Mississippi. How you feeling today?

CATHERINE. Been better, been worse.

PEARL. Hey, this'll make you feel better. Knock knock. (*Frances gives Pearl an “oh, stop it” kind of wave.*)

FRANCES. (*Exasperated.*) Pearl.

PEARL. But this is a good one! Knock knock.

CATHERINE. Okay. Knock knock.

PEARL. No. I said “Knock knock” Now you say —

CATHERINE. Who's there?

PEARL. Aardvark.

CATHERINE. Aardvark who?

PEARL. Aardvark a million miles for one of your smiles! (*A beat.*)

FRANCES. We didn't actually walk here, we took the trolley, but ... (*Catherine laughs in spite of herself*)

PEARL. See! I made you smile! I knew I could do it. Told you, Frances, told you.

CATHERINE. You know I love you, Pearl, but that was awful.

PEARL. I worked on it for days.

FRANCES. She's been practicing on me. I don't know what's worse. Today's headlines — or her punchlines.

PEARL. Wait wait. I have another. Knock —

FRANCES. No, you don't.

CATHERINE. As bad as the jokes are, I miss seeing you girls every day.

FRANCES. We miss you, too.

PEARL. (*To Frances.*) Maybe I should do my “Why'd the chicken cross —”

FRANCES. No, you shouldn't. (*To Catherine.*) We hope it's okay, just stopping in, but —

PEARL. We took some liberties. With your pantry. We know Tom's got his hands full, and it's hard for you to get to the store so ...

FRANCES. We picked up a few things. Left them in your kitchen. Charlotte's putting it all away.

CATHERINE. You shouldn't —

PEARL. It's not much. Really. Not much at all. (*And they quickly rattle off their shopping list.*)

FRANCES. A few pounds of ham.

PEARL. Kidney beans.

FRANCES. Lima beans.

PEARL. Fresh and dried green beans.

FRANCES. Noodles.

PEARL. Potatoes.

FRANCES. Tomatoes.

PEARL. Apples.

FRANCES. Onions.

PEARL. Spinach.

FRANCES. Rhubarb.

PEARL. Bread.

FRANCES. Flour.

PEARL. Sugar.

FRANCES. Butter.

PEARL. Eggs.

FRANCES. An exotic pear.

PEARL. Ten pounds of bacon.

FRANCES. And two white nightgowns. Starched.

CATHERINE. I can't accept all that! It's too much. I know you all meant well, but I can't — (*Charlotte enters, wiping her hands, during Catherine's last line.*)

CHARLOTTE. You can and you will and we're not going to hear another word about it. (*To Frances and Pearl.*) Girls, you mind? Just a minute?

FRANCES. Of course. (*Frances steers Pearl toward the kitchen. Pearl stops.*)

PEARL. (*To all the women.*) You know the *really* funny thing that happened today? For a minute, it felt like we'd been together forever. Forever. Isn't that something? (*And she and Frances go to the kitchen.*)

CHARLOTTE. Your pantry —

CATHERINE. It's a mess. I didn't think anyone would —

CHARLOTTE. It smells like you.

CATHERINE. Oh, you're gonna make me cry.

CHARLOTTE. That's not why I'm here. Listen, I know you know

it, but this law suit's changed things. In one of the stores today, I ran into Jenny. I said hello. She turned away from me. Yesterday, Doris acted like she didn't know me. Actually hurt my feelings.

CATHERINE. That wouldn't have bothered the old Charlotte.

CHARLOTTE. Yeah, well, the old Charlotte was younger then.

CATHERINE. How they treating you?

CHARLOTTE. Most of the neighbors aren't talking to me, either. Except for the occasional insult. Lizzy said I should be ashamed of myself. A guy at Tom's work asked him why he can't control his wife. Said this is what he gets for having a wife that worked.

CHARLOTTE. Father Mackey said that we're wrong. For doing this. For backing you. That we're just asking for trouble. That we're embarrassing the town. That the company was the best thing to happen to this place and that what you're doing, what we're doing, ruined it for everyone.

CATHERINE. When did everyone we know become strangers?

CHARLOTTE. You know what they all think, don't you?

CATHERINE. I think I know, but tell me anyway.

CHARLOTTE. They say you just want money.

CATHERINE. There isn't any money. Or don't they read that part.

CHARLOTTE. I think they ignore it. They're saying you want the publicity.

CATHERINE. It would be funny if it weren't so insulting.

CHARLOTTE. That you want sympathy.

CATHERINE. There are easier ways, they ever think of that?

CHARLOTTE. That you want to be thanked. That you want pity.

CATHERINE. Maybe the headlines make it seem that way.

CHARLOTTE. Maybe.

CATHERINE. They want me to want sympathy, pity. Because I think they're scared of what I really want.

CHARLOTTE. Tell me what that is. Because when I get up in the morning and put my body back together, I pray you know what you're doing. (*Catherine thinks for a second, then ...*)

CATHERINE. (*Firmly*) I want to win.

CHARLOTTE. I'd have a backup plan.

CATHERINE. Well, at least I'll go down swinging.

CHARLOTTE. I put you up to this.

CATHERINE. I lost a bet, fair and square.

CHARLOTTE. I'm sorry. I knew it would be hard. I didn't know it would be horrible. I'm so sorry. I just ... I want to apologize.

CATHERINE. It was up to me. I chose this.

CHARLOTTE. The old Katie wouldn't be able to do it.

CATHERINE. She was younger then, too. (*A beat.*)

CHARLOTTE. Catherine Donohue?

CATHERINE. Yeah?

CHARLOTTE. You're my hero.

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Night.

Catherine in a chair.

CATHERINE. This is me dying, isn't it?

This is me dying.

This is me.

This.

Is it.

Tom!

(*A light snaps on. Tom enters.*)

It's happened.

It's happening.

I'm —

TOM. Shhh ... Just a bad dream.

CATHERINE. I wasn't sleeping. I'm telling you. It's happening.

TOM. Look. Look at me? You see me? You see this mug staring at you?

CATHERINE. Yes.

TOM. Touch me. Here. Touch me. (*He takes her hand and places it on his chest.*) You feel me?

CATHERINE. Yes.

TOM. Then you're still here. See? You feel this. (*He kisses the palm of her hand.*) You feel this. (*He kisses her face.*) You're still here.

CATHERINE. Tom?

TOM. Shh ...

CATHERINE. Don't let the kids forget me.

TOM. How could they?

CATHERINE. Don't you forget me. Please?

TOM. Katie.

CATHERINE. This shouldn't happen to you. You, left alone with two kids. Tom?

TOM. Yeah?

CATHERINE. I'm not afraid of death. Really, I'm not. I'm just afraid of how I'll get there.

TOM. No one on earth can hold a candle to you. No one in heaven will come close.

Judge 2.

REPORTER 1. Mrs. Donohue came to the hearing today supported by her husband and a friend. Once healthy and alert, she weighed only 71 pounds and could hardly stand alone.

REPORTER 2. In her testimony, she explained with the guidance of her attorney.

GROSSMAN. You were what age when you started working for the company?

CATHERINE. Nineteen.

JUDGE 2. Mrs. Donohue, please speak clearly for the record.

CATHERINE. Yes, your honor.

JUDGE 2. Thank you.

GROSSMAN. And your specific work was to ...

CATHERINE. I painted watch faces with a powder, a radium compound. We'd point the brush between our teeth, dip it in water, then in the powder. But it got everywhere. My hands glowed. My clothes, hanging in a dark closet, glowed. When I walked home at night, I glowed.

JUDGE 2. From the radium powder?

CATHERINE. Yes, your honor.

REPORTER 2. Shortly before her testimony ended, Mrs. Donohue took out of her purse a small jewelry box. (*Catherine reveals a small box, holds it out.*)

GROSSMAN. Can you tell the courtroom what exactly is in this box, Mrs. Donohue?

CATHERINE. Two pieces of bone.

JUDGE 2. Bones of what? Mrs. Donohue?

CATHERINE. They're mine. They were removed from my jaw.

REPORTER 1. At this point, Mr. Donohue, husband of Catherine, wept. (*As the crowd disperses, ...*)

TOM. (*Stopping Rufus Reed.*) Mr. Reed. Mr. Reed?

MR. REED. (*Nervously.*) Yes?

TOM. What'd ya think? I was gonna hit you? Huh? (*Tom laughs. Reed doesn't.*) You look ... good, Mr. Reed.

MR. REED. Um, thank you, Mr. Donohue.

TOM. Nice shoes. Nice suit.

MR. REED. Thank you.

TOM. You look — You look like a successful man. Like a real success.

MR. REED. Well, I —

TOM. How many watches did it take to buy all that, huh?

MR. REED. Mr. Donohue —

TOM. I'm just wondering. Because, I'm trying to make it all add up. Katie made eight cents a watch. We thought that was a lot. We thought we were living like kings. But one look at you, and I know who the king really is.

MR. REED. I just worked there, too. I just did my job. I didn't know.

TOM. I'm so tired, I don't even care that you're lying to me right now.

MR. REED. They lied to me, too, Mr. Donohue.

TOM. Yeah. But at a certain point, you knew. You knew.

MR. REED. (*Trying to get past Tom.*) Excuse me, please. (*Tom gets in front of him.*)

TOM. You serve?

MR. REED. What?

TOM. In the war. Did you serve, fight?

MR. REED. Uh, no. No, I didn't.

TOM. Didn't get drafted? Didn't enlist?

MR. REED. No.

SLIDE OF MASTHEAD: CHICAGO HERALD
AND EXAMINER
February 12, 1938

TOM. I did. I signed up. Seems like a million years ago. I saw things that no human being should ever have to see. A guy comes back from something like that, and he can't believe in God. It's impossible. That's what anyone'll tell you. I was raised to believe in God and the saints and in miracles. But then there was this war and after it, I couldn't believe in anything good. But when I first saw Katie, the first thing, the only thing I thought when I saw her face was that there had to be a God, because he made her. That was the only explanation. And I was a praying man again.

Talk about a miracle. Do you know they pulled bones out of her body while she was still alive. Lifted them right out.

(Tom starts to cry.)

I was going to grow old with this woman. I was going to die with her.

Maybe I have.

Could you tell me how to live my life now? Could you tell me what I'm going to do with all this goddamn time? (Pulling himself together.) I have to go.

I have to see my kids.

I have to get home before they go to bed.

I sing to them. They sing to me.

A lullaby.

Even though we're all too old for it.

It's our little routine.

It makes us feel better.

It's just something we do.

(He turns to go, stops.)

Sir? Just so you know ...

Every morning I wake up and wonder if today's the day I'm going to kill Rufus Reed.

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CATHERINE. I won my case six times. The Radium Dial Company appealed six times. After losing all six, the company appealed one last time, to the United States Supreme Court. Finally —

FRANCES. The Illinois Industrial Commission awarded Catherine \$5,661 on July 6, 1938.

PEARL. She died 21 days later.

CHARLOTTE. After fighting the company for seven years. FRANCES. Her case changed Illinois law so that companies could finally be held responsible for the safety of their workers.

PEARL. She was a test.

CHARLOTTE. She was an experiment. FRANCES. She weighed sixty-five pounds.

We hear the ticking of a clock.

The ticking becomes a heartbeat.

For a few beats.

Then it stops.

Silence. For a few beats. Then ...

The sound of waves on the lake.

CATHERINE. There is a God. And he's made of time. There's a devil, and he's made of time. There are angels, miracles, and sins, and they're all made of hours.

On the shore of the lake with my friends that last time.

I watched the kids play and thought of my boy and girl. I watched the husbands and wives and thought of the man I love. I walked to the water.

I walked in.
I stood there.
Small waves and grace all around.
Faith at the edge of the world.
And I think, lucky me, that I still believe in it all.
After all of this.

And then a gift.
A million clocks stopped in the city.
Watches closed their eyes.
Their hands folded.
Their faces slept.

The earth stopped turning.
And time stood still for just a minute, just for us.

The moon came out.

(*The moon emerges, the luminous face of a numberless clock.*)

The stars came out.

(*The sky twinkles with a few stars of luminous numbers, fugitive hours
that have run away from clocks.*)

Time was kind, after all.

And I knew I was blessed to have held so much of it in my hands.
In the quiet, in the water, I could see my face.

Next to mine, the faces of everyone I love.

The faces of my friends.

(*Lights up on Charlotte, Frances, and Pearl.*)

CHARLOTTE. Charlotte Purcell.

FRANCES. Frances O'Connoll.

PEARL. Pearl Payne. (*A few more stars of numbers come out and
twinkle.*)

CATHERINE. Of the other women who worked so well.

FRANCES. Inez Vallar.

PEARL. Marguerite Glacinski.

CHARLOTTE. Helen Munch. (*More stars.*)

CATHERINE. Their beautiful bodies,

PEARL. Mary Tonielli.

CHARLOTTE. Olive Witt.

FRANCES. Sadie Pray.

CATHERINE. And any mercy they were shown.

CHARLOTTE. Mary Ellen Cruse.

FRANCES. Margaret Looney.

PEARL. Mary Robinson. (*More stars appear.*)

CATHERINE. And so many more.
All looking back at me.
For that moment while time turned its face, we were all there.
(*The sky is filled with a million galaxy of incandescent numbers.*)
And we were shining.

The women.

The water.

The night sky made of time.

The end.

End of Play

PROPERTY LIST

Warch-painting tools: paintbrushes, bowls of water, pots of

radium powder

Boxes of watch faces

Box of pocket watch faces

Box of clock faces

Trays of painted watches

Radio

Vial of radium liquid

Silverware and plates

Handbag 1

Small box containing pock

Old-fashioned microphones

Coffee pot and 2 cups

Umbrella 1

Picnic basket with sandwich

Blanket

Flask

Letters

Envelope of cash

Playing cards

Poker chips

Newspaper

Small jewelry box with bo

SOUND EFFECTS

Period music from a radio
Ticking of a clock
Waves people on the beach
Ticking of a clock & running into a heartbeat

THESE SHINING LIVES

by Melanie Marnich

2M, 4W

THESE SHINING LIVES chronicles the strength and determination of women considered expendable in their day, exploring their true story and its continued resonance. Catherine and her friends are dying, it's true; but theirs is a story of survival in its most transcendent sense, as they refuse to allow the company that stole their health to kill their spirits — or endanger the lives of those who come after them.

"[Marnich] has an ear for warm, natural dialogue that echoes snarky quips and truisms . . . the play's linguistic honesty satisfies." —Time Out

". . . has a humanistic glow . . . clockwork precision . . . an initially comic and ultimately tragic look at how individual women find employment within a system more concerned with profit than safety." —Variety

"Perfect, touching and wistful . . . beautifully tragic." —Talkin' Broadway

". . . subtly stylized language and a sensibility that's delicately oddball, even when probing troubling topics." —The Washington Post

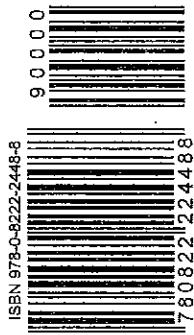
"The stakes could not be more vividly portrayed. [Catherine's] courage shines brighter as her body weakens. Still, we leave the theater aching from the impact of this true tale, which only gains power from the artifice of its telling." —ExpressMilwaukee.com

THESE SHINING LIVES

BY MELANIE MARNICH



Also by Melanie Marnich
GONE GOTH
A SLEEPING COUNTRY



★
DRAMATISTS
PLAY SERVICE
INC.