

MARKLEY
Act I
ROEDER
LEE

my easel set up in the kitchen, and a drop cloth on the floor, my paints all over the table. And yer dinner nowhere in sight. What would ya say then?

TOM. Better be a picture of me yer paintin'.

GRACE. I know what ya'd say. Where's my dinner? That's what ya'd say! Where's my dinner.

TOM. Well, sure. But I'd still admire the paintin'. Just want to look at it on a full stomach is all. *(He gets his arms around her.)*

TOM. So how'd I do? Pick the right wallpaper?

GRACE. I don't know. Maybe I'll go look at stripes.

TOM. Stripes! Polka dots! I don't care! Let's just get married, Grace! Yer plenty old enough! Tell yer Ma we ain't waitin' no more—we'll just run off!

GRACE. Tommy! We are not runnin' off. We're gonna do it right! A nice church weddin' with flowers and music. And then a week at the seashore. Just us! And after that, we get set up in our own place. You'll see. It'll be worth the wait. *(He gets a kiss.)*

TOM. Yer mouth hurt ya?

GRACE. Yeah. The dentist wants to pull another tooth. In the back.

TOM. Well. What's a tooth?

(He kisses her cheek. Cross to:)

SCENE 5

(Roeder's office. MARKLEY, ROEDER and LEE. MARKLEY is reading a letter.)

MARKLEY. Hazel Kuser. Any connection to the others?

LEE. Only by virtue of employment.

ROEDER. Except she's got a good lawyer.

LEE. Knows how to write a good letter anyway, that lawyer.

MARKLEY. And she no longer works here?

LEE. Left six months ago.

ROEDER. This makes four now.

LEE. Three.

ROEDER. Four if you count the Maggia girl.

LEE. I wouldn't include her.

ROEDER. She worked here.

LEE. She also worked other places. And what she died from—you couldn't pick up here. At least, I don't think you can.

ROEDER. That's not funny, Charlie. Besides, that's just idle talk.

LEE. In my experience, there's usually something to the idle talk. When it comes to girls like that.

MARKLEY. From a large family, wasn't she?

LEE. Italians. The conditions they live in! Ten, twelve people in three rooms. It's a wonder they don't all die of one infection or another.

MARKLEY. Three, then. And how many dead?

ROEDER. Only Miss Maggia. But I haven't heard from her people.

MARKLEY. It's too late for them anyway. The statute of limitations is two years. But Miss Kuser is another story. She's in a position to make some trouble now.

ROEDER. In all the time I've been here. No one has so much as slipped on the floor. And now this.

LEE. We're talking about four girls. Out of how many hundreds that we've employed?

ROEDER. Six, seven hundred. Over the years.

LEE. And some of them were sick when they got here.

One girl you hired was a complete cripple. Couldn't even climb the stairs. Her father carried her up to the studio every morning.

ROEDER. It didn't make any difference to me how she got up the stairs—she was a fast worker and a very sweet little girl.

LEE. But she was in poor health.

ROEDER. She needed the work.

MARKLEY. Arthur. Charlie.

ROEDER. And not just for the money. To feel productive. To have a purpose. That's what work does, Charlie. It gives us a purpose. I don't see any reason why we should stop hiring girls like that.

LEE. When they get sick and try to blame us for it—you might want to reconsider that policy.

ROEDER. Let's see what Dr. Drinker has to say.

MARKLEY. Dr. Drinker?

LEE. Some professor at the Harvard School of Industrial Hygiene.

ROEDER. He chairs the department. And he's agreed to take a look at our operations.

LEE. Don't you think we're jumping the gun a bit, hiring him?

ROEDER. We've had six girls quit this week. And Mrs. MacNeil tells me there could be more.

LEE. Girls come and go all the time.

ROEDER. It's never been like this. These girls are terrified. We've got to do something to calm them.

LEE. Letting Drinker examine them? That sounds to me like a recipe for mass hysteria.

ROEDER. We'll tell them it's a routine physical. Edward?

MARKLEY. Companies give physicals all the time.

ROEDER. Then Drinker will start next month.

MARKLEY. In the meantime, I recommend we make an offer to Miss Kuser.

ROEDER. Settle?

LEE. There's no proof her problems are connected to us.

MARKLEY. If she sues—believe me, you won't like the publicity it brings. And neither will your investors.

LEE. You think this will affect the stock offering?

MARKLEY. Don't you?

ROEDER. Wonderful. We'll open at thirty and close at ten.

MARKLEY. Or not open at all.

LEE. But if we give this girl something—that will keep her quiet?

MARKLEY. It would be a condition of the settlement.

LEE. Maybe we better do it.

ROEDER. Suppose that lawyer has a racket going? He finds sick girls and talks them into making suits. Then we reward him for his larceny.

LEE. Unless...Miss Kuser genuinely believes she got sick here.

MARKLEY. It could be like Charlie said. She comes from a large, immigrant family. Not well educated. Not a lot of resources.

LEE. A few hundred dollars would make a big difference to a girl like that.

MARKLEY. Certainly. Pay a few doctor's bills. Buy some medicine. From the sound of that letter, I don't think the girl has long to live anyway.

ROEDER. So it would be a gesture of decency, then.

MARKLEY. Exactly.