

BREAD AND ROSES

By Timothy Krause

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BREAD AND ROSES

Winner, New Play Award, Portland Civic Theatre Guild, Portland,
Oregon, 2024

CAST: 3 Women, 2 Men

ELLEN CURTIS:	20s, mill floor lady, well-spoken, thoughtful
CATHERINE O'BRIEN:	20s, fiery Irish millworker and union agitator
WERKA MAKOWSKA:	40s, a Polish immigrant millworker and widow
JOSEPH WESTBROOK:	30s, a new mill manager of upper middle- class family
MICHAEL THOMAS:	20s, a new mill inspector of lower-middle class family
TIME:	Act I: Afternoon, January 11, 1912 Act II: The following morning
PLACE:	A handwork room of Marston Mills, a textile factory in Lawrence, Massachusetts

BREAD AND ROSES

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ACT I

Before the lights even come up, the heavy sound of the looms and other factory machinery is heard. The sound fills the stage more and more until it is deafening. There are some vocalizations as unseen workers try to communicate over the noise. As the lights come up, they reveal the suggestion of a second-floor handwork room with a wall of tall windows that look down upon the mill's central yard. The center of the room is a cluttered hive of work tables, chairs, boxes, crates, shelving, fabric and notions. CATHERINE and WERKA are working next to each other. ELLEN enters with supplies. A bell signaling the end of a shift rings. The looms gradually slow to a stop while a low, dull rhythm from looms on other floors continues.

ELLEN. Two more bells!

CATHERINE. I know! I can't wait for this shift to end.

WERKA. Ellen, Ellen, I am very sorry I no arrive early this morning. You know I want show you the dress before we start work.

ELLEN. That's fine, Werka [*pronounced VAIR-kah*]. Truly. We still have time. There's still plenty of time to finish. And I'm certainly not going to wear a wedding dress on the factory floor, am I?

CATHERINE. Was it Mirko? [*pronounced MEEHR-kaw*]

WERKA. Again. The matron, Mrs. Anna, bless her, she stay with my boy. And by grace of god, she sit with him for some time today. If he sleep, she come and go, do things in other rooms. But I say her, I beg her, do not go long. My Mirko, he no is well. He no is well.

BREAD AND ROSES

ELLEN. Have you taken him to see a doctor?

WERKA. I want this, visit doctor. I wish this. But is impossible.

CATHERINE. Maybe now is the time, since we be finishing early today.

WERKA. Yes. Maybe now. Thank you, Catherine. Thank you. You are very kind. You and Ellen.

ELLEN. It's the money, isn't it?

WERKA. It is--We are two--Mirko and me. We no need much, but--

ELLEN. Catherine, send me down another box there.

WERKA. Little Mirko He is good boy ... very good boy. He only want go to school. He only want be a boy, to play--not a man to work.

CATHERINE. (*Passing Ellen a box of materials.*) Ellen, here. Oh, Werka, is it that bad? Really?

WERKA. I finish wedding dress for Ellen, then everything all right. We are good. For a while.

ELLEN. I haven't seen the dress since last week! It must be beautiful!

CATHERINE. I can't wait. Oh, Ellen, imagine!

ELLEN. And I'm planning to pay you the extra amount that I promised, straightaway, for having it done so early. As soon as we get our envelopes today, then you meet me back up here with the dress. All right?

WERKA. Yes. Yes. And then I must to leave quick. Mrs. Anna, she no stay late, and Mirko is much work for dinner.

ELLEN. It must be comforting to know you can count on your friends and neighbors through difficult times like these, that you're not alone in this--I don't know--this swarming beehive.

WERKA. Oh, like bees, we are strong together, all of us.

CATHERINE. Amen! (*The bell rings again.*) Only one more!

ELLEN. Hand to heart, I tell you, sometimes I hear bells in my sleep!

CATHERINE. Wedding bells!

ELLEN. Really, Catherine, I suspect that you are even more excited than I!

BREAD AND ROSES

CATHERINE. Oh, 'tis true! But it is exciting, isn't it? Don't you think so? You getting married and all. And with Werka's wedding dress, you are going to look so beautiful! The lace, the beads, the embroidery!

ELLEN. I am just grateful that she is letting me wear it. It is an honor. It's a treasure, and I know it's not an easy thing.

WERKA. No, no. No is difficult. I pinch here, I sew there. The dress fit you better than me!

ELLEN. I mean, it must bring up memories, memories of your husband.

WERKA. Oh, memories ... those memories. They are all GOOD memories, and I welcome them, all of them.

CATHERINE. And now we will make new memories for a new future, our best future.

ELLEN. A new future, yes. And you are going to be the best maid of honor, I am certain of that.

CATHERINE. But are you for certain my blue dress is all right? Maybe I could borrow something from the housemother? Maybe I could find something different if only I--

ELLEN. Do not give it another thought.

WERKA. Bride must be brightest star.

ELLEN. That's right!

CATHERINE. (*Joking.*) Aye, if you must. And a bonnie bride you will be.

ELLEN. Your blue dress is a good color for you.

CATHERINE. It is, isn't it? When I look at the mirror, I see--Well, I feel different. Mighty powerful. As if I could take over the world.

WERKA. Listen to you!

CATHERINE. Oh, I can't wait--I just can't wait for Oscar to see me. Now he's never seen me in my blue dress. But I'm quite sure he's going to like it. I'm quite sure. Don't you think so?

ELLEN. Why wouldn't he like your dress? He already loves you!

BREAD AND ROSES

CATHERINE. (*Blushing.*) Please!

WERKA. What? You no think is true?

ELLEN. (*After a short beat.*) Well?

WERKA. Oscar walk with you, work to home, every night.

CATHERINE. And Mr. Westbrook, he walks Ellen home every night as well.

ELLEN. At least my Joseph has the excuse that he works here.

CATHERINE. But not tonight. Oscar, he has work to do until late. Something about “closing the books” on last year’s accounts. He’s a company man, but I suppose there ought to be comfort enough in that.

ELLEN. Catherine, you have a very special man in Oscar. He’ll keep you company all right!

CATHERINE. But you’re the one getting married! What a change!

WERKA. Both of you, give thanks for things, for times like now. Or maybe you forget how important they are to you.

CATHERINE. Who? Oscar? And Mr. Westbrook?

ELLEN. Well, I won’t lie. Joseph is becoming more and more important to this company and to the city of Lawrence, even.

CATHERINE. But to you!

ELLEN. Yes, of course, to me, too. I am looking forward to becoming *Mrs.* Joseph Westbrook instead of old Eleanor Curtis.

CATHERINE. I never thought I would hear a lass complain about coming from the Curtis family!

WERKA. Your father, I think he is sad to give you away.

CATHERINE. Now you have never said much about your family, Ellen. When do we get to meet them? When will they arrive?

ELLEN. My family?

WERKA. And her mother, she must be very proud. Even if Mr. Westbrook, he--

CATHERINE. None of that now, Werka. Bite your tongue.

BREAD AND ROSES

ELLEN. Oh, go on. I know that we haven't known each other for very long, but let us have no secrets among us.

WERKA. Well, always he is mill manager to me. Probably I no can look at him in other way. I just cannot--

CATHERINE. People get to make their own choices.

WERKA. But I am mother too. Someone make my child happy, then I am also happy. Must be. Somehow, in some way. So is your mother, too, yes?

CATHERINE. When will they be coming to Lawrence? Your parents?

ELLEN. I'm afraid that my family will not be attending the wedding.

WERKA. What? No family? On wedding day?

ELLEN. No. No family.

WERKA. Why no family? How far is Philadelphia? Catherine?

CATHERINE. No, Philadelphia to Lawrence is not so far to travel.

WERKA. No, no for wedding. Ellen?

ELLEN. It's not that far to travel, no, but it's much to ask in other ways.

CATHERINE. It's not far, but it's not free, either.

ELLEN. It's not the expense.

WERKA. Then what?

ELLEN. I'm afraid my lovely parents--Well, the situation with my family is difficult. Philadelphia life, the Main Line, well, it's not as easy as one might think. That's why I left.

CATHERINE. And you went to Boston. What's wrong with that?

ELLEN. By myself. I was but 19. Off to Boston. No aunts, no uncles--not even a second cousin as a chaperone. I was a rebel, but to my family, I'm afraid, I was a bit of a scandal. It's not what someone in my position would do.

WERKA. Your position? Do you mean your job? Like now, a floor lady?

CATHERINE. Her position in society, not at the mill.

WERKA. Society?

BREAD AND ROSES

ELLEN. It was complicated. I suppose it still is. But I needed a change. It wasn't the life for me, neither in Philadelphia, nor in Boston, really.

WERKA. Now you are in Lawrence, and we are happy. Is good. No?

ELLEN. It's been quite a whirlwind, this past month.

CATHERINE. And at first, we had all been wondering how you stepped into the role of floor lady on your first day! Then we learned of your connection to Mr. Westbrook, and--

WERKA. I no understand. You no have to work. And still, here you are.

ELLEN. I wanted to work. I wanted change, but I also needed to take care of myself. Joseph agreed, so long as we were together. That's how I came to Lawrence, and I don't regret it. Boston was--

CATHERINE. Was it exciting? I can just picture you as a working girl in some grand office near Copley Square--just like me--headstrong as ever and off on her own adventure.

ELLEN. It may have started out that way, but now, after what feels like a century--well, as I said, so much is different now. Things don't always turn out the way you imagine them to be, do they? Sometimes I feel like a different person.

CATHERINE. (*Teasing.*) Now you've ended up here! In Lawrence! Oh, how you have fallen, Ellen. Oh, how the Main Line mighty have fallen.

ELLEN. Let us say only this: A woman is nothing if not resilient.

CATHERINE. Amen!

WERKA. But no more new place, no more change. You are going be married. And married to son of mill owner! Maybe--I no like him much, but I see his money. Like Catherine say, that mean "comfort."

ELLEN. Oh, I know you have your doubts, Werka, but--

WERKA. (*Carefully quoting Catherine.*) "People get to make their own choices."

CATHERINE. At least Mr. Westbrook, his family will be here, won't they? Boston is so close. What are they like? Do you know them well?

BREAD AND ROSES

ELLEN. No, I'm afraid. I haven't even met them yet.

WERKA. What? How is possible? Why Mr. Westbrook no take you to his parents?

ELLEN. Oh--oh, they were traveling--spending the holidays out of the country. Then our plans came together so suddenly, and now we're here in Lawrence.

CATHERINE. The Westbrooks of Boston--they're also quite the name, you know. Westbrook and Curtis--sounds like some fancy company, doesn't it?

WERKA. Why is your wedding here, in Lawrence? Why no Boston? Or Philadelphia?

ELLEN. Joseph's mother is--well, his father will be here, and that is all that matters. As for the others, well--"People get to make their own choices." And I, for one--I certainly cannot deny them that.

WERKA. This separation, this wide space of family--is only--

CATHERINE. People have their reasons.

WERKA. Reasons? Responsibilities!

CATHERINE. Things change. People change.

ELLEN. People like the Westbrooks tend to stay in the city and send their sons out to the towns like Lawrence, to run the mills.

WERKA. But family! Is important! You want family, yes, Ellen? Yes?

ELLEN. Well, yes, of course. Of course.

CATHERINE. I thank god Oscar, he isn't ready to be a father--but a husband? There are so many things we could do together!

WERKA. (*To Ellen.*) How many children you want? Five? Six? You are so young, probably you have many more. Maybe eight! Or ten!

CATHERINE. Werka!

WERKA. What? When you have large family, you have someone to take care of you, when you are old.

BREAD AND ROSES

CATHERINE. Children are something special. You don't just go around--

ELLEN. I would like to have children, yes, when we're settled. Joseph and I are both so busy these days, and the Westbrooks would want to have their grandchildren near them in the city, I'm sure, in Boston.

(The bell rings again.)

WERKA. There it is. Finally. Last bell. End of day.

ELLEN. Bring me those boxes, and I'll put them away.

CATHERINE. I'll do it. Go fetch your pay so Werka can go home to little Mirko. Really. I don't mind.

WERKA. Honest, I am afraid to look in my envelope this week.

ELLEN. It still feels odd to be leaving this early, doesn't it?

CATHERINE. And what do you think will happen with our hours cut like this?

ELLEN. I'm not sure.

CATHERINE. Hasn't Joseph told you anything?

ELLEN. Do you think all we do is talk?

CATHERINE. Sometimes that's all you should do!

WERKA. We can all learn from that one, Ellen.

CATHERINE. You know that I have no experience in these matters!

WERKA. Ha! I am old, but I see, I hear, I know.

CATHERINE. Listen, give my best to Mrs. Anna--and give little Mirko a big hug from me.

WERKA. Of course.

CATHERINE. I know he will be better soon.

WERKA. Yes, with the lord's blessing.

CATHERINE. So are you two ready?

ELLEN. Almost. I just have to put these spools away. *(Ellen exits.)*

CATHERINE. *(Calling after Ellen.)* Oh, leave it for tomorrow. Leave it!

BREAD AND ROSES

WERKA. (*Reciting the proverb she has memorized.*) “If a job is worth doing, it is worth doing well.”

CATHERINE. As if I should care so much about this mill.

WERKA. Until you say “yes” to Oscar, you need care more for your job.

CATHERINE. No one cares for their job. They just care for the money. Managers care for how little money they spend. Workers care for how much money they earn. It’s all about changing money for time and time for money.

WERKA. But is necessary these days.

(*MICHAEL enters with a clipboard and pencil in hand. He begins to inspect the work that has been done during this shift, and he makes notes on the forms on this clipboard.*)

CATHERINE. (*Clearly talking about Michael.*) I know. And sometimes they want a little more than we can give.

MICHAEL. How did we do this morning, girls? Where’s the floor lady? Where’s Miss Curtis?

CATHERINE. It all looks well enough to me.

WERKA. Let Mr. Thomas count the stock. I no want he miss one.

MICHAEL. You seem short on your numbers here.

WERKA. No--no, no is possible. I count. Two times I count.

MICHAEL. Maybe they count differently where you’re from.

CATHERINE. Mr. Thomas!

MICHAEL. Or maybe you counted them twice in order to double the bonus.

CATHERINE. Pardon me, but that’s no way to talk--

MICHAEL. That’s just the thing. Talking. I think you girls have been talking more than you have been working. All that talk probably led to an error in your tallies.

CATHERINE. But we need that bonus. We’ve earned it.

BREAD AND ROSES

MICHAEL. And look at this. Look at the poor quality of work here. This here is inferior work, girls. And there's no bonus for inferior work. You know that. Maybe this passed for your old managers, but now it's got to meet with my inspection. My approval. Do you see?

WERKA. We no have enough time, sir.

MICHAEL. What do you mean "no have enough time"?

CATHERINE. You come in here--probably right out of some middle-brow prep school--and after only one week you think you know how to run a mill for the Westbrooks. Well, you're starting off on the wrong foot if you think you can cut our hours and then expect us to meet the same amount of work!

WERKA. (*Surprised at Catherine's tone.*) Catherine!

MICHAEL. Only your schedule has changed, not your quotas.

CATHERINE. One day you'll see how just unfit you are.

MICHAEL. (*Suggestively.*) One day I'd like to show you.

CATHERINE. (*Flustered.*) Werka, will you get our wraps? Please.

(*Werka looks at Michael but says nothing. She turns and starts to exit, but stops when Michael speaks to her again.*)

MICHAEL. How's that boy of yours, Mrs. Makowski?

CATHERINE. Is Makowska. Makowska. He need doctor. He need medicine.

MICHAEL. (*Not looking up from his clipboard.*) That's a shame. But I don't see that happening. Do you?

WERKA. I find way.

MICHAEL. But there is nothing more to do here at the mill. The Commonwealth of Massachusetts has seen to that, hasn't it? So where will you get the money?

WERKA. Please, Mr. Thomas. Again, count.

MICHAEL. Listen. Your shift is over. And so is your boy's job if he doesn't return. And soon.

BREAD AND ROSES

WERKA. No. He no can to return here. He need doctor. He need something more, more than me. And I find way.

MICHAEL. Listen, if you want my advice ... Spend your pennies on food, Mrs. Makowska, not on false faith. You gotta let the living live and let the-

CATHERINE. Mr. Thomas!

WERKA. Today is payday. You no care, but I have money today. No worry from you about me, or about my son.

MICHAEL. I just don't know what is going to change. Your numbers aren't here. There will be no bonus this week, Mrs. Makowska. No bonus.

WERKA. From the dress. You don't know! Wedding dress for Ellen, for Miss Curtis. I sew it. For her. My dress. For her wedding. To Mr.

Westbrook. So I have money.

MICHAEL. Keep it, then! I saw your boy last week. When I sent him home. And a doctor isn't going to do him any good anyway. Food, not false promises, I tell you. Choose wisely.

CATHERINE. Don't listen to him. There must be something else. There's always something else that--

MICHAEL. Yes, there's always something else you can do. And you know what I would do? I would call on the priest and save my money for a coffin. Does that sound harsh? Well, your son isn't coming back here, that's for sure. He's sick, that's true, and I will not allow him to spread disease throughout this mill. It's part of my job as your new inspector.

WERKA. Yes, inspect, Mr. Thomas. You are inspector, but you are no the manager. You are no the boss. You are no control. *(Werka drops her tools and exits abruptly. A beat. Then Catherine silently crosses to Michael. A boldness comes over her. She takes the clipboard and tosses it onto a worktable. Michael is amused at the sudden overture. Catherine steps in to Michael, holds his face in her hands, appearing nearly to strangle him. Michael closes his eyes as she kisses him. When she stops, she slowly pulls*

BREAD AND ROSES

from him and turns around to face away. With his eyes still closed, Michael lets out a slow, deep breath. He smirks.)

CATHERINE. (*Making busy work with a basket of goods.*) There. Now did that meet your high standards?

MICHAEL. Quality, yes.

CATHERINE. Good, then.

MICHAEL. But I'm still looking for quantity, Catherine.

CATHERINE. Tell me something, Michael. How many women does it take to keep this mill running?

MICHAEL. It takes just one man.

CATHERINE. Joseph Westbrook?

MICHAEL. (*Shaking his head, laughing.*) That's a good one, that's a good one. You're a cherry, Catherine. A sour little cherry.

CATHERINE. Would you rather think it takes only one Michael Thomas?

MICHAEL. You had better believe it. Joe's a nice fella to some--in fact, he's been rather unnaturally nice to me--but he could be as well sitting on his nanny's lap in Boston, and the mill runs just the same. Oh, he wants to be like his daddy--it's all he lives for--but it's all a false front. And if you ask me, he doesn't have any guts because he doesn't have any backbone.

CATHERINE. Now is that what I should tell Ellen?

MICHAEL. (*Laughing again.*) Don't you think she already knows?
(*Ellen enters.*)

ELLEN. I'm ready now--Oh, hello, uh, Mr. Thomas, is it?

MICHAEL. (*In a suspicious tone.*) Good afternoon, Floor Lady Curtis.

ELLEN. (*Giving Michael a strange look.*) Everything is all closed up now. I've seen to it.

MICHAEL. Good. Very good. Very, very good. Exactly what a floor lady ought to do. Now, Miss O'Brien, why don't you go and fetch your wrap? And that of Miss Curtis, too.

BREAD AND ROSES

ELLEN. Thank you, but we can just pick them up when we are ready to leave.

MICHAEL. (*To Ellen.*) But I would like to speak with the floor lady. Alone.

ELLEN. Oh.

MICHAEL. Miss O'Brien?

CATHERINE. Ellen?

ELLEN. Well, alright. Yes. Thank you. I'll--I'll meet you in just a moment.

CATHERINE. (*Pointedly.*) No bonus this week. We didn't make the quota. (*Catherine exits.*)

MICHAEL. Well. Sit down, Eleanor. Please. Now that we are finally alone, we need to have a little talk. (*Ellen gives Michael a strange look, but sits on one of the stools. After a slight pause, Michael shakes his head and chuckles to himself.*) Who do you think you are? And what are you doing here?

ELLEN. I'm sure I have no idea what you're talking about.

MICHAEL. Please.

ELLEN. What?

MICHAEL. You've ignored me for the whole week that I've been here, and why it's taken this long to finally have this little conversation, I don't know.

ELLEN. Excuse me?

MICHAEL. Come now. This isn't where we pretend to be strangers.

ELLEN. What have you to do with me? Are you not here at the behest of Mr. Westbrook? Maybe you should be talking to him.

MICHAEL. We are indeed beholden to that man in different ways, but I don't think we share dissimilar desires.

ELLEN. I don't remember us sharing any similar desires.

BREAD AND ROSES

MICHAEL. (*Crossing to Ellen from behind and leaning in to nuzzle her neck softly.*) Tell me you don't remember this.

ELLEN. (*Breaking away.*) There is no excuse--

MICHAEL. (*Grabbing Ellen and holding her.*) For what?

ELLEN. For this behavior!

MICHAEL. (*Laughing.*) No, no. There's no excuse for love, Eleanor.

ELLEN. Is that what you wanted to speak to me about? Love? That's rather impertinent.

MICHAEL. Why did you leave? Why did you run away? I looked for you. Again and again. When the other girls said you left Boston, I thought maybe you were back in Philadelphia. I was tempted to go there myself, to look after my investment. I did, after all, accrue some interest.

ELLEN. I owe you nothing.

MICHAEL. But then I spoke with Joe's father at the office, in Boston, and he said Joe sent for you. But that didn't seem to make any sense to me. How long have you even known each other? Oh, wait, I remember because I was the one who introduced you. Last month. At a holiday party. In my home. And now I find you here?

ELLEN. Am I to understand that you are following me?

MICHAEL. You shouldn't have left me. I know you always had doubts, that you questioned my true intentions, but I provided for you when you needed it the most. When you were one step away from--well, which is worse? Walking the streets or walking home with your tail between your legs, doubly ashamed of the choices you made? (*Ellen turns away silently. A beat. Michael crosses to her again and puts his arms around her from behind.*)

ELLEN. (*Trying to pull away.*) Take your hands off of me.

MICHAEL. He can't love you the way that I can. You do know that, don't you?

ELLEN. You are nothing but a schoolboy!

BREAD AND ROSES

MICHAEL. I was a schoolboy who could afford a very good tutor.

ELLEN. Why did you follow me? What do you think you want from me here?

MICHAEL. Well, let us only say this: I don't believe Mr. Joseph Westbrook--senior, that is--hires women like you at Marston Mills. Any other woman would have been sent back to Boston on the next train--

ELLEN. If you are about finished--

MICHAEL. And then when I heard about a wedding! Well, I was surprised there was a church that would let you in the doors! Not when the sacred institution of marriage is merely another transaction.

ELLEN. What is the point of this harassment?

MICHAEL. Tell me one thing, why are you dragging the great Mr. Westbrook--a man as banal to me as he is blind to the world--why are you dragging that man down into the mud with you--no, nay, not mud, quicksand! How much does he even know about you?

ELLEN. I have no secrets from him.

MICHAEL. Don't you?

ELLEN. (*Firmly.*) No.

(*Catherine and Werka appear in the doorway, unseen, with coats in hand.*)

MICHAEL. Then I don't suppose he will mind if I call on you some evening, will he? It might be a little late at night, but it's really none of his business ... (*Ellen is silent. Catherine comes forward.*)

CATHERINE. Are you distributing the payroll today or not?

(*JOSEPH enters.*)

JOSEPH. Ladies, ladies. Mr. Thomas cannot wait all day for the women of Room 24. If you want your disbursement--

ELLEN. I'm sorry, Mr. Westbrook. We were only cleaning up.

CATHERINE. (*To Michael.*) A job well done, you know.

WERKA. And a clean workplace. "Cleanliness is next to godliness." And all of us can be more close to the lord.

BREAD AND ROSES

MICHAEL. (*To Catherine.*) Don't ever be fresh with me again, Miss O'Brien. (*Michael hands Catherine her pay envelope and continues to Werka to do the same.*) Mrs. Makowska. (*Michael crosses to between Ellen and Joseph.*) And I imagine that the pay for Mrs. Westbrook ... could just as well go to Mr. Westbrook.

(*Michael laughs and slaps Ellen's pay envelope into Joseph's hand.*)

ELLEN. Please--it's still Miss Curtis.

MICHAEL. (*Winking at her.*) And for such a short time.

JOSEPH. Go on, Michael. Go upstairs and finish off this shift. I'll meet with you later.

MICHAEL. (*Smirking, nodding to the women as he exits.*) Sure, sure. Ladies.

JOSEPH. Eleanor--

ELLEN. (*Trying to take the envelope from Joseph, but he doesn't let go.*) This isn't funny.

WERKA. Ellen, maybe we meet outside? I meet you in the yard with the dress.

ELLEN. (*Frustrated and embarrassed.*) Uh, yes. I'll meet you outside. Thank you, Werka.

WERKA. Let us go, Catherine. I walk with you downstairs.

CATHERINE. (*Still unsettled.*) Good afternoon, Mr. Westbrook.

JOSEPH. Ladies. (*Catherine and Werka exit.*)

ELLEN. (*Frustrated with Joseph.*) What is it?

JOSEPH. Last night. It has been all I can think about.

ELLEN. Let's not talk about that here. (*Ellen begins to collect items to tidy the room.*)

JOSEPH. Eleanor.

ELLEN. You're in my way.

JOSEPH. What? What is going on? Have the winds changed? Tell me you don't love me. Tell me you don't want me.

BREAD AND ROSES

ELLEN. And what if I did?

JOSEPH. What if you did, indeed! (*Joseph and Ellen embrace. They kiss.*)
Do you love me, Eleanor? Will you marry me, Eleanor? Will we grow old
in each other's arms ... Eleanor?

ELLEN. Everyone here calls me Ellen.

JOSEPH. I'll never make you any less than you are. And you ... are
Eleanor ... to me.

ELLEN. (*Changing the subject.*) Werka has finished my dress. She is
waiting to show it to me now.

JOSEPH. Shall we take a look?

ELLEN. Not you! Not yet!

JOSEPH. How can you be so old-fashioned? That wedding dress isn't
going to hide anything I haven't already seen.

ELLEN. Just let me have this.

JOSEPH. Of course.

ELLEN. I intend to offer Werka the gratuity I mentioned last night. She
needs it. Now more than ever.

JOSEPH. Be careful with charity. It's the least profitable investment a
man can make.

ELLEN. Well, I am not a man, and it is not charity. Besides, how can I
not? With her poor little boy--

JOSEPH. How is he?

ELLEN. Not well. The woman at the boarding house was at home with
him today.

JOSEPH. Is he getting better? When does she think he will be coming
back to work?

ELLEN. Joseph!

JOSEPH. Children, Eleanor, they are a dime a dozen in Lawrence. If he
does not return soon, he may just be joining the back of the line.

ELLEN. I know, but--

BREAD AND ROSES

JOSEPH. But what?

ELLEN. It's not some revolving door.

JOSEPH. It's business.

ELLEN. You have never cared much for children, have you?

JOSEPH. Nor you. ... Or have you?

ELLEN. I just thought that--Well, I thought that you'd care more for his health.

JOSEPH. The Makowska boy? Why?

ELLEN. (*Frustrated.*) Why? Really?

JOSEPH. I do care, Eleanor. I do. This factory--this awesome machine--it runs on people that I care about. When they work, they earn an honest living. When they're at home--when they're sick--well, no one profits from that.

ELLEN. I should say not.

JOSEPH. Will you have dinner with me tonight?

ELLEN. Catherine is expecting me to accompany her to Bastaldi's.

JOSEPH. Where is Oscar?

ELLEN. She's trying to teach Oscar a lesson.

JOSEPH. How's that?

ELLEN. By not seeing him this evening.

JOSEPH. Are you serious?

ELLEN. Completely. You know he'll follow us there, to Bastaldi's.

JOSEPH. He will.

ELLEN. And you know he'll be tripping all over himself to ask her to dance.

JOSEPH. And when he does? Then what?

ELLEN. She'll give in.

JOSEPH. She always does.

ELLEN. But only because she wants to.

JOSEPH. Women only do what they want to.

BREAD AND ROSES

ELLEN. Give us half a chance, and we'll surprise you with what we do.

JOSEPH. I hate surprises. You can't trust them. Surprises are not good for business, and I cannot risk anything at the mill right now or my father will call me back to Boston.

ELLEN. So...?

JOSEPH. (*Reluctantly.*) So, here. (*Joseph hands Ellen her pay envelope.*) Surprise me then.

ELLEN. (*Taking the pay envelope.*) When you least expect it.

JOSEPH. (*Nodding in agreement.*) When I least expect it.

ELLEN. (*Opening her envelope and counting her pay.*) Joseph ...

JOSEPH. (*Not paying attention to her.*) It's been a good year for Marston Mills. I should think we might even take our honeymoon overseas ... when time--and father--permit, of course. Then we'll turn our focus to Philadelphia--

ELLEN. What is going on here?

JOSEPH. The honeymoon? I thought you might like to get away.

ELLEN. The pay! Joseph! The pay is short!

JOSEPH. I don't really know the details of every individual disbursement. If there's a problem--

ELLEN. Don't lie to me, Joseph.

JOSEPH. Look, you knew it was going to happen. It's the new law. The company had to do something.

ELLEN. But didn't you try to stop it?

JOSEPH. How?

ELLEN. You're the mill manager.

JOSEPH. Was I supposed to single you out with some special favor? You drew the line when you came here. Remember? So what was I supposed to do? Arrange for some special bonus ... some special payment for the boss's girl?

ELLEN. Don't make it sound like that.

BREAD AND ROSES

JOSEPH. It's not my fault.

ELLEN. Well, this is some fine news.

JOSEPH. Don't be so upset. When we are married, you won't even need a salary. You know that. I'll take care of you, of both of us.

ELLEN. Like you take care of your employees?

JOSEPH. But I do.

ELLEN. Like you take care of Mirko Makowski?

JOSEPH. You don't understand.

ELLEN. Really? Truly?

JOSEPH. How many hours did you work last week?

ELLEN. Too many to recall.

JOSEPH. (*Repeating the question with a greater edge.*) How many hours did you work last week?

ELLEN. Fifty-six.

JOSEPH. Fifty-six. I see. And this week? How many hours did you work this week?

ELLEN. Stop playing games.

JOSEPH. Fifty-six?

ELLEN. Fifty-four! The new law says women work only fifty-four.

JOSEPH. And so you were paid for fifty-four hours.

ELLEN. What are we supposed to do?

JOSEPH. It's only two hours.

ELLEN. Joseph, for you, two hours is one lunch. For most of the women here, two hours might be lunch for the whole week. At the very least, it's the difference between living and merely being alive. It's disrespectful!

JOSEPH. It's politics. It's economics.

ELLEN. That's right. It's economics. The women here couldn't live on what they had to begin with!

BREAD AND ROSES

JOSEPH. And it's this simple. It's a negotiation. If the unions want one thing, then they've got to give up something else. Why should you be paid for work you're not doing? How does that make any sense?

ELLEN. Where did this come from?

JOSEPH. It's called compromise. And it came straight from the unions!

ELLEN. Why are you acting like a typical selfish manager?

JOSEPH. But I am a manager, aren't I?

ELLEN. But do you manage people or machines?

JOSEPH. I regard my people just as I regard my machinery.

ELLEN. The company asks for more and more work for less and less pay. These ladies can't keep up. Nobody could! I've only been here a short time, but I can see that, clearly. And how could they?

JOSEPH. The higher the wages, the more leisure--and the more idleness. It's true. It's true! That's all you get for what you spend.

ELLEN. Those are your father's words.

JOSEPH. You know it, I know it.

ELLEN. The more I work with you, the more I know this: you are a different man here. Lawrence is changing you. I don't remember you being like this when we were in Boston.

JOSEPH. I haven't changed.

ELLEN. Something has happened.

JOSEPH. Maybe you are finally listening to me.

ELLEN. Maybe you are finally telling me the truth.

JOSEPH. Maybe you're just getting cold feet about this whole arrangement.

ELLEN. Would that surprise you? If you're going around making bad things worse? Have you ever worked up here, Joseph? Up here, or in the heat and dust and noise of the third floor? Or anywhere outside of your office? Have you ever given one ounce of sweat to this--this living machine?

BREAD AND ROSES

JOSEPH. I put my time in, let me tell you. All through my childhood, I was sent here, every summer, and--

ELLEN. Oh, sure. Parties, Meetings. Playing the darling of Marston Mills, a prince in waiting. Any invitation your father could get you--

JOSEPH. Trust me, it wasn't like that. But that's who you fell in love with, isn't it? Don't you remember? The one you thought was your savior? Because that's what you said? Remember?

ELLEN. Savior?

JOSEPH. Savior.

ELLEN. I don't believe in saving or being saved.

JOSEPH. A savior to pull you back from your errant ways, to bring you back into your family. You were out there. You were scared. You wanted to go home. Home to all the grand parties and pretty estates and the old world of the Main Line.

ELLEN. That's not true.

JOSEPH. You've become such a stranger to that world that now you need an invitation, an escort--You need me as much as I need you. Who else can help explain Cinderella's sudden departure from the grand ball?

ELLEN. Don't call me that.

JOSEPH. If the shoe fits ...

ELLEN. Life there wasn't all parties, and it wasn't all pretty. Believe me. I should know. It wasn't that different from Lawrence.

JOSEPH. (*Laughing.*) Lawrence!

ELLEN. Sometimes it's sweat and sickness. It's greed working a poor boy halfway to his death. And sometimes--sometimes it's giving in when you should just say no. Money has a certain effect, Joseph.

JOSEPH. I see.

ELLEN. Money has a certain effect.

JOSEPH. And sometimes your loneliness blinds your high and mighty morals ... doesn't it, Eleanor?

BREAD AND ROSES

ELLEN. (*After a moment, digging in.*) Marston Mills pays \$8.76 per week. Do you know what you get for your \$8.76 a week?

JOSEPH. (*Insincerely, impatiently.*) No, tell me. Tell me about my big investment in humanity.

ELLEN. You get Catherine--

JOSEPH. Catherine O'Brien!

ELLEN. Yes, Catherine! Smart and political and always on top.

JOSEPH. (*Smirking.*) No doubt.

ELLEN. (*Ignoring his remark.*) Catherine could run this mill herself, but what hope have you given her for any self-respect? All she can hope for is a husband to take her away from these machines starving for attention to a family starving for food. Catherine's so lonely, so afraid, so insecure, but she hides it all from the likes of you--and especially that lech Mr. Thomas, who will undoubtedly take advantage of her inexperience.

JOSEPH. Oh, don't tell Oscar, but I would be surprised if that much hasn't already occurred.

ELLEN. And all along, let me tell you, Catherine kills herself to do more, to produce more than any of us here, not to win some token bonus but just to give herself some worth, something her family never afforded her--and that is something you should understand because that is something you have in common.

JOSEPH. Thank you for your armchair analysis.

ELLEN. And Werka!

JOSEPH. Ah, Mrs. Makowska. She has been with the company so long, she's nearly family.

ELLEN. She's a widow! Struggling to keep her head above water, trying to keep her son from the claws of consumption.

JOSEPH. "The claws of consumption"! Such drama!

ELLEN. Don't mock me. Werka would work eighty hours if she could, tearing her hands to pieces just to send that boy to a doctor. And then she

BREAD AND ROSES

goes home and those same tired hands delicately piece together the most beautiful wedding gown I have ever seen. For me! For you! And this, knowing full well that this--this sort of happiness--however fictional it might be--that it's now only a part of her past.

JOSEPH. What about you? What do you get for your \$8.76?

ELLEN. Don't start--

JOSEPH. You have now an honest job, for one. Maybe for the first time in your life. Even a supervisory job of sorts. And you're welcome for that. And there are people here who care about you. People who know your name, for that matter. For a change. Again, you're welcome.

ELLEN. Please don't put words in my mouth.

JOSEPH. Think of where you are now. The road back to Philadelphia is not that far off now. And I thought that's what you wanted. I thought that's what we were planning all along. If you didn't want to come to Lawrence--if you didn't want to trust me as your husband--

ELLEN. I never said that.

JOSEPH. You've said so many things.

ELLEN. And you have not said enough.

JOSEPH. Well, you're not going back, not to Boston. And to be honest what is there for you in Philadelphia? Nothing. So it oughtn't matter. This really ought not matter to you.

ELLEN. Shouldn't it?

JOSEPH. It's two hours--

ELLEN. It's two hours pay! Two hours of goodwill this place can afford.

JOSEPH. Two hours you would value to spend at home, with your husband, I dare say.

ELLEN. My husband wouldn't be at home anyway. He'd be at the bank--counting all the money he's saving while maintaining quotas for reduced pay! Now I understand why you said so little about this new measure.

JOSEPH. Listen, because I do love you, I respect your opinion.

BREAD AND ROSES

ELLEN. You what?

JOSEPH. That's more than a lot of men would admit.

ELLEN. That's more than a lot of women would believe.

JOSEPH. Look, I don't own this company. Marston Mills is my family, my father, but it's not me. It's not us.

ELLEN. So what are we then?

JOSEPH. I guess a lot of things you still loathe. A lot of things you ran away from. And a lot of promises you still need to make good on.

ELLEN. But how long will I be in your debt?

JOSEPH. I guess we're just not far enough from Boston--far enough away--are we?

ELLEN. I can't get far enough away to forget ... because you keep putting me in my place.

JOSEPH. (*Leaning in to kiss her neck.*) Then let me remind you of the things you still enjoy.

ELLEN. How do you know what you enjoy when you spend your whole damned life trying to please others?

JOSEPH. You're with me now.

ELLEN. Is there a whole lot of difference?

JOSEPH. Then what is it you really want?

ELLEN. I want things to change.

JOSEPH. How?

ELLEN. Well--

JOSEPH. You proposed to me. How is that for a change? And I know you only proposed to me when I told you who I was and what I did. And when you saw another way back to your family.

ELLEN. I don't care about my family.

JOSEPH. When you saw a road home. A path back to--well, let's say some dignity. Because what else is the Main Line but dignity?

BREAD AND ROSES

ELLEN. It's not as if I want to go back to Philadelphia or Boston. But I want my life to be different. There's got to be a difference. I want to make a difference.

JOSEPH. You were different.

ELLEN. How different was I from any other--

JOSEPH. I think you did fall in love with me, but let's be honest: It wasn't even money that you wanted. It was some other reality.

ELLEN. Can you blame me for dreaming?

(By this point, the sound of looms on other floors has faded out slowly, unnoticeably, so that the scene ultimately ends in contrasting silence.)

JOSEPH. You went fishing for a young playboy. Rich, yes, if you can trust an inheritance. Rich and with stature to lift you back up so that you could snub your nose at those family who would have turned up their nose at you. And now you want the honest man, the true husband, the good father. A real gentleman.

ELLEN. Maybe so. I don't know.

JOSEPH. No, you don't know. But I can tell you this.

ELLEN. What?

JOSEPH. You'll be hard pressed to find them all in the same package.

ELLEN. And you know this from your experience?

JOSEPH. I have observed a great deal in my short time on this Earth.

ELLEN. About gentlemen?

JOSEPH. About ladies. About women. About the difference between the two.

WERKA. *(Calling from offstage.)* Ellen! Ellen! Are you still here?

ELLEN. *(Calling to Werka offstage.)* Up here, Werka. I'm still in the workroom.

JOSEPH. We'll speak more of this tonight at dinner.

ELLEN. I told you that I am going to Bastaldi's. Catherine's expecting me.

BREAD AND ROSES

WERKA. (*Calling from offstage.*) Ellen!

JOSEPH. I think we should talk. I will call for you at seven.

ELLEN. Joseph!

WERKA. (*Entering, a little out of breath, waving her pay envelope, not seeing Joseph.*) Oh, Ellen! Ellen! Do you open envelope? Do you see?

ELLEN. Yes, I know.

WERKA. What are we going to do? It is short pay! Short pay!

ELLEN. (*Taking Werka into her arms.*) Werka ...

WERKA. I no understand. Everything is already too hard. What I do? What I do now? When Mirko no work, when is just me, I--

JOSEPH. Mrs. Makowska, I heard about your boy. If there is anything I can do for the two of you, please let me know.

WERKA. You? What do you for me?

JOSEPH. Well, if your boy can come back to work soon, then I'm sure the company could--

WERKA. (*Waving her pay envelope.*) The company do enough right here, Mr. Westbrook!

ELLEN. (*Opening her own pay envelope.*) Oh, Werka, I'm sorry, but I don't have enough now to pay you the entire amount I owe you. Not yet.

WERKA. What?

ELLEN. Well, I didn't expect to be cut--and I was counting on the bonus, too. That is how I was going to pay you.

WERKA. So you--you no have money for me?

ELLEN. (*Handing Werka a few bills from her pay envelope.*) Not all of it, not yet. But here, please take this much. Until we figure something out. All right?

JOSEPH. (*Pulling out a money clip, retrieving a bill, and handing it to Werka.*) And from me. Here. Please. To help your son. He's a good boy. I remember him. Always a smile on his face.

WERKA. No.

BREAD AND ROSES

JOSEPH. Please. A good investment if I ever saw one.

WERKA. Mirko no return to this place.

JOSEPH. We will take care of him. Trust me.

WERKA. I take care of him, Mr. Westbrook.

ELLEN. Joseph, please. Put it away.

(Joseph slides the bill into his pocket.)

WERKA. I am sorry, Ellen, dear. I know he is your--your--but this company--it no buy my child. Mirko no is--no is some sacrifice on this--this altar, this altar of business.

ELLEN. I know.

WERKA. My husband, after he died, I still able to live.

ELLEN. He was a good man, I'm sure. A generous man to have such a family.

JOSEPH. Mr. Makowski was a good worker. He was among the best on his line.

WERKA. Nobody tell him. You no tell him.

ELLEN. Why don't I go downstairs with you now? I'll pick up the dress and walk you home. Just to say hello to Mirko.

WERKA. I make do. You have things to do. I am sure. I can not--I will not--

ELLEN. No, no. I have no plans.

JOSEPH. Eleanor--

ELLEN. Yes, Joseph?

JOSEPH. *(Relenting after a slight pause.)* Will I see you tomorrow morning?

ELLEN. Of course. As always. *(Catherine enters, excited, not immediately seeing Joseph.)*

CATHERINE. Ellen! Ellen! Oh, Ellen--did you hear? Did you--
(Catherine stops short at the sight of Joseph.) Oh, Mr. Westbrook. I--I didn't know that you were still here.

BREAD AND ROSES

JOSEPH. What is the matter?

CATHERINE. Why, uh--

ELLEN. Are you alright? What is going on?

CATHERINE. They're all ... well ... everyone is upset about the pay. Everyone got a cut, you know. They looked in their envelopes and--

WERKA. We no deserve this, Mr. Westbrook.

CATHERINE. And the third floor has gone crazy! Listen! Nothing!

JOSEPH. What do you mean?

CATHERINE. The looms are not running. They've all stopped working.

WERKA. It is short pay.

CATHERINE. When they heard about the pay cut for our shift--and no bonus--they stopped working. They shut off the machines!

JOSEPH. They what?

CATHERINE. They are running around the room now, tipping over all the crates and breaking the machinery and destroying the whole place.

JOSEPH. Where's Thomas? Why isn't he up there?

CATHERINE. I haven't seen him since he left here. (*Noises and commotion are heard from the floor above.*)

ELLEN. It sounds like it is getting out of hand.

JOSEPH. No, it's nothing.

ELLEN. Two hours, Joseph! Think of that! In less than that time, you may not have any mill left to manage.

JOSEPH. Nothing is happening. I'm sure Thomas and the others are already seeing to it.

WERKA. We leave now!

CATHERINE. The women, they are all talking about a strike.

ELLEN. Really? A strike?

JOSEPH. The company will not tolerate a strike. My father won't hear of it. Not at Marston Mills.

BREAD AND ROSES

CATHERINE. (*Emboldened by the riot, with attitude.*) You tell them that, Mr. Westbrook. Tell them, because if there isn't going to be a strike, they're going to need all that equipment in good working order.

JOSEPH. Fine. I'm going up there. Eleanor, walk these ladies home, and I'll see you tomorrow. Do you hear me? You will stay inside tonight.

ELLEN. Oh, I think you have your hands full already without worrying about us.

JOSEPH. Go home. All of you. Go home and stay there until you hear the morning bell. I don't imagine this to be serious, but I don't want to take any risks. Do you understand me? (*Crossing to Ellen, kissing her quickly on the cheek, and holding her hand.*) Listen to me. I will take care of you, if you let me. I promise. (*Ellen doesn't answer. Joseph exits quickly. Ellen crosses to a stool and sits, slumping.*)

CATHERINE. What do we do now?

WERKA. Is safe we leave?

CATHERINE. We can't just sit here.

ELLEN. Then what do you think we should do?

CATHERINE. Let's go down to the yard. Let's see what they're all planning to do.

WERKA. I no stay. Mrs. Anna no wait for me. She say she no wait for me.

ELLEN. (*Looking out a window.*) There's already a number of people down there, in the yard.

CATHERINE. The third floor, it was crazy! Insane! They were cutting the machine belts, throwing boxes, ripping fabric--it was a mess, everything a mess.

ELLEN. Don't they know they're playing with fire?

CATHERINE. It looked awful. And seriously, Ellen, I think there's going to be a strike.

ELLEN. Joseph didn't seem to think there was that much to worry about.

BREAD AND ROSES

CATHERINE. He ordered us to go home and stay inside. That means that he is afraid of something.

WERKA. Why he worry? About strike? He find others like us--probably worse for money. So they take anything. They do anything.

ELLEN. I don't think a strike could last, could it?

CATHERINE. It might be the only way.

WERKA. What say Mr. Westbrook? About short pay?

ELLEN. Oh, nothing. Nothing right, at least.

CATHERINE. What does that mean?

ELLEN. It seems he thinks there is nothing wrong in how this company is run. And it's all money to him. More than I had thought.

CATHERINE. Money to them and not to us.

WERKA. Girls, walk with me. I need you walk with me.

CATHERINE. It doesn't really look safe out there, Werka.

(Singing is heard from the yard below.)

ELLEN. What's that?

CATHERINE. Are they striking?

WERKA. No! They sing! Why they sing?

CATHERINE. Solidarity, girls! It's the union! Let's go! Let's go down there! Now!

ELLEN. No!

CATHERINE. What do you mean no? What do you want to do then?

WERKA. *(Looking out the window.)* So many! So fast!

ELLEN. I mean to say, what can we do, really?

CATHERINE. We can find out what everyone else is thinking, what they are going to do.

ELLEN. I am not going to follow a union blindly. I don't know them. They don't me. Why would I trust them? They are only strangers to me, and we all cut our own deal.

WERKA. I no strike. I need money. For Mirko.

BREAD AND ROSES

CATHERINE. But is it worth it--what we do for money?

WERKA. I am old. What is worth? Nothing matter to me.

CATHERINE. Everything should matter! Especially to you!

WERKA. Mirko, he need stay strong. He need eat. Me, I am one--only one--take care him. This company no care, but I care. I have responsibility to him.

CATHERINE. But isn't it better to starve fighting than to starve working?

WERKA. I thought the new law to help us. I thought, good, I have more time for my son. Maybe I sleep and feel better and make more for bigger bonus.

ELLEN. The law is good. It's business that's bad.

CATHERINE. (*Confiding.*) Ellen, I won't give in to this. I promise you that. Not this time.

WERKA. You must find your place, Catherine. We all must find our place.

CATHERINE. Oscar could support me. I know that. But I don't want to rely on a man to--

WERKA. If your place is with Oscar, then go to Oscar.

CATHERINE. What I mean to say is, he's a nice man--and I would love him and all, but--this isn't fair to us. A marriage of convenience? Not fair, not fair to either of us.

WERKA. Maybe is all you can do.

ELLEN. I think that's probably what the men want us to think, even Joseph.

CATHERINE. What happened? What did he say to you?

ELLEN. I'm not sure it was anything different than he has said all along. I think I'm just finally hearing what he's saying. I'm finally seeing what he is doing.

WERKA. Mr. Westbrook, he was nice boy ... until he became man.

BREAD AND ROSES

CATHERINE. He certainly has ambition. He has risen quite fast in his father's company.

WERKA. What is the word? Shrewd. He is shrewd man. He wants; he gets.

CATHERINE. He has probably always gotten what he wanted.

ELLEN. That's what I am afraid of.

WERKA. Ellen, Mr. Westbrook--and you--have you--alone with him?

CATHERINE. What are you getting at?

WERKA. What you say--no is only 37 cents, no? Is it? This?

ELLEN. It's nothing.

WERKA. Listen to me ... Things happen. Sometimes we choose. Sometimes it choose us.

CATHERINE. Leave her alone.

WERKA. I speak it ... because I know it.

ELLEN. That's it. Girls, take your things.

WERKA. What are you going to do, Ellen?

ELLEN. What are you going to do, Werka? Because you don't have a choice, do you?

WERKA. I make my choice a long time ago. When I am your age. A different choice? Then I no am in this place.

CATHERINE. If there is a strike, will you cross the picket line tomorrow?

ELLEN. Oh, it won't go that far ... will it?

CATHERINE. Will you march with them down the streets?

WERKA. March?

ELLEN. Here in Lawrence?

CATHERINE. You heard what has happened in Skowhegan and Danbury, haven't you?

ELLEN. Not the same. Lawrence is much bigger. The girls here--they're just letting off a little steam. Like you said. Aren't they?

BREAD AND ROSES

CATHERINE. You know every girl on this floor has had her blood boiling from one thing or another.

WERKA. And these 37 cents, we no can to lose.

CATHERINE. (*Looking out the window.*) Today they shout and scream. But tomorrow, they will strike. Trust me.

ELLEN. If men like Joseph have given in to greed, what can we do?

WERKA. We do only right for us.

CATHERINE. We need to stay together. We need to speak as one.

WERKA. How can one voice come from so many?

CATHERINE. I've heard the union, the leaders. I've understood the arguments. You see, the power of the mill owners is based on property. And because they own property, they've got in their hands these laws, the army--

WERKA. Everything!

CATHERINE. But in spite of all that, we've got something still more powerful. We--ourselves, the workers--our power is our common interest. We should be--we must be united!

ELLEN. United? So we all can get arrested together, too?

CATHERINE. It's not always a disgrace to be arrested. Sometimes it's an honor to be arrested.

ELLEN. But things must remain calm; things must remain orderly and safe. We can't possibly hope to gain anything with violence. I hope we remember that. Violence means the loss of power. You hurt someone else, and you hurt yourself.

CATHERINE. Then we should go.

WERKA. Where?

CATHERINE. We should go down there and hear what they have to say.

WERKA. What?!

BREAD AND ROSES

CATHERINE. Someone will have a plan of action, a way to harness the energy of all this frustration, a way for it to work for us, not against us. Together. That's what a union is all about, isn't it?

ELLEN. I just couldn't join the union. Could you, Werka?

CATHERINE. Let them take 37 cents today and see what we take home next week. Or next month.

ELLEN. I don't think this is just about money, though. I think we all realize it's about more than that. The money just tips the scales.

CATHERINE. But how do you make the mill owners see that? How do you make them realize that it's just a--a--company. A company is not a person. It's a business. Its only purpose is to take advantage of everyone else just to make money--for people who already have money!

JOSEPH. *(Entering in time to overhear the last of Catherine's speech, taking a cigar from his pocket, removing the band and tossing it aside, then lighting a cigar and throwing the match on the floor, a bit exasperated and growing increasingly upset and frustrated that things are getting out of his control.)* You have hit the nail right on the head. We are a business. We are here to make money. Because when we make money, then we can pay you money for your work. You can either be a part of making money, or you can wish you had money. I guess today is your day to make that choice.

CATHERINE. What does he mean, Ellen?

JOSEPH. I mean that you're going to have to decide many things in the next few minutes. Many serious things about your very life. Each of you will.

CATHERINE. So, it is serious then. It really is happening. There will be a strike.

ELLEN. Joseph, please. I think we're all very frightened already and, well, we should just head on out. All right?

BREAD AND ROSES

JOSEPH. Sure. Of course. Miss O'Brien, you head on out now, head on home to your empty room at the boarding house. Take some time to think about how you will pay your rent if you decide to stop at some picket line tomorrow morning. Think about where you will live when you're evicted from company housing tomorrow afternoon.

CATHERINE. When I look in this envelope, and when I look at the faces of my sisters down there in that yard, I don't care anymore, because what do I really have to risk? Only people with money have something to lose, and that's why they sell themselves short every time.

JOSEPH. And this will be a difficult choice for Mrs. Makowska, too. With your boy so sick, how can you even think about joining those other women down there in the yard? How can you jeopardize his future? He will die of starvation before he dies from tuberculosis. Family must come first, Mrs. Makowska. It must.

WERKA. You, Mr. Westbrook, you should no to speak of family.

JOSEPH. Come now. I didn't kill your husband.

WERKA. Marston Mills, it kill my husband!

JOSEPH. And I didn't make your boy sick.

WERKA. How many children sick from this filthy place?

CATHERINE. This is what I mean, girls. This is what it means to be united: "The grievance of one is the grievance of all."

JOSEPH. Quote the union, Miss O'Brien, and pay the cost. You strike here and now--any one of you--and you won't be working at any mill in Lawrence. (*To Ellen.*) And I mean that.

CATHERINE. Don't threaten us!

JOSEPH. It's not me. It's the truth. Marston Mills has as much power as the river out there. Power over machinery and power over people and power over politics. When someone gets in the way, it's just grist for the mill, as they say.

CATHERINE. No one goes back to work unless we all go back together.

BREAD AND ROSES

ELLEN. We're not starting some riot.

JOSEPH. It doesn't matter if you do. The militia is already on its way.

WERKA. Militia? Girls, I leave now. With you or no with you.

JOSEPH. Look out the window.

CATHERINE. Why?

ELLEN. (*Looking out the window, hearing the crowd outside grow louder.*) Oh, my lord, it's too late, isn't it? Too late to step back ...

WERKA. Mrs. Anna is waiting.

JOSEPH. Look out the window.

CATHERINE. (*Looking out the window.*) It is too late ...

ELLEN. (*To Werka.*) I'm sure she has everything under control. I'm sure Mirko is just fine. Don't worry.

WERKA. Why? What is out there?

JOSEPH. Something that should never have happened.

WERKA. Oh!

JOSEPH. My god, they are tearing down the fence--And the children, Mrs. Makowska, are being lost in the stampede. Are those your sisters out there? Or are they strangers to you now?

WERKA. (*Falling to a chair in tears.*) My child! My Mirko! (*Catherine moves to Werka's side and puts her arm around her. Something is heard hitting against the outside wall. Then again. Ellen turns to close the window when a rock comes crashing through the window. Catherine screams. Ellen turns to see Joseph drop his cigar, pick up the rock, and hurl it back out the window.*)

JOSEPH. (*Yelling out the window.*) God damn you! All of you! Why don't you understand? You can't do this! You can't strike!

ELLEN. Joseph! (*Another rock comes crashing through the window near Ellen and hits her in the temple. She collapses to the floor. Joseph rushes to her side and pulls her away from the window.*)

WERKA. Ellen!

BREAD AND ROSES

CATHERINE. Oh, my god!

JOSEPH. Move back! Move away from the windows!

CATHERINE. Are you all right?

JOSEPH. (*Propping Ellen up against a crate.*) Look at me!

WERKA. Oh, my lord, what is this?

CATHERINE. It's starting.

JOSEPH. Move back from the windows!

ELLEN. (*Coming to.*) Joseph ...?

JOSEPH. Are you all right? How do you feel?

ELLEN. I'm fine, but I think I'm--

CATHERINE. She's bleeding. (*Werkka hands Catherine fabric scraps, which she applies to Ellen's wound.*)

WERKA. Here, Catherine. Take this.

JOSEPH. Eleanor. Oh, god. ... Oh, Ellen, I'm sorry. I'm so sorry. It wasn't supposed to lead to this. The board said there wouldn't be a riot, there wouldn't be a strike.

ELLEN. I just need to close my eyes for a moment.

WERKA. No! No, Ellen! You must stay awake! (*Another rock comes crashing through a window, and more are heard hitting the outside walls.*)

CATHERINE. Mr. Westbrook!

JOSEPH. Stay back. We will be alright if we just stay away from the windows.

CATHERINE. Can you get up? Do you think you can walk?

ELLEN. I think so.

CATHERINE. Werkka? It's time. We're going down there.

WERKA. Down there?

JOSEPH. No. You're not going anywhere. The militia will be here soon, and then it could very well get worse before it gets better.

CATHERINE. (*Crossing to exit, pointing toward Joseph.*) But think about it, girls! They're fighting him, not us!

BREAD AND ROSES

JOSEPH. There's no use fighting at all.

WERKA. Here. Take my hand.*c(The women move toward the exit.)*

JOSEPH. No. Don't do it. Don't leave. It's safer here. Eleanor, people like you will only get hurt! *(A fire springs to life where Joseph dropped his cigar. Ellen screams. Joseph stumbles to the fire and at first tries to stomp it out, unsuccessfully.)*

WERKA. We must go now!

JOSEPH. *(Now trying to put out the fire with his coat.)* Come back. I can put this out. It's safer to stay in here.

CATHERINE. Ellen!

JOSEPH. Stay with me! I'll take care of you! I promise!*c(Catherine leads Werka, followed by Ellen, to the exit. As Joseph continues to try to put out the fire, more rocks pummel the outside walls and some come through the windows. Catherine and Werka exit. Ellen sees another rock hit Joseph in the back, causing him to fall to his knees as flames of the fire shoot up.)*

END OF ACT I

***THE PLAY IS NOT OVER!! TO FIND OUT HOW IT ENDS—
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