

These Shining Lives

1

Darkness. The ticking of a clock. 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. But we're just girls who wanted to work. Ordinary girls. 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. I'm Catherine Wolfe Donohue. And I'm telling you now. (*Ticking of a clock takes us into music.*)

The other women appear...

FRANCES. Mayor "Big Bill" Thompson is running the city.

CHARLOTTE. So are Johnny Torio and Al Capone.

FRANCES. Jazz is playing on Halsted..

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. 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. Seven... fifteen? (*He kisses her. Trying to get dressed in spite of his very active... affection.*)

Seven-thirty? (*He kisses her.*) 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. How do I look?

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

CATHERINE. Do I look like a girl worth eight cents a watch? Because that's what they get paid.

Who knows. Maybe I'll make more than you someday.

TOM. Ouch

CATHERINE. Tom. I'm kidding.

TOM. Making good money doesn't come cheap. Work that pays well costs you something. 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. I'm nervous.

TOM. They're gonna love you.

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

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 won't be good enough. You'll be great. *(A quick kiss.)* There. Now go make some money. *(He slaps her on the behind.)*

3

Pearl, Frances, and Charlotte sit at their desks, painting watch dials, smocks over their dresses. 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 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... *(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 watches, she'd 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.)*

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.

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

FRANCES. *(With a nod towards Charlotte.)* Got my work cut out for me.

MR. REED. The one she's referring to is Charlotte, of course. *(Charlotte gives a little nod.)* Charlotte's been known to eat 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.

CHARLOTTE. Wasn't a compliment.

MR. REED. Charlotte? 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. *(Demonstrating.)* Alright. It's easy. See? You take your little brush here, twirl 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. And then you ... paint. Like this. (*Charlotte is a brilliantly quick painter. An artist, really.*)

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

CATHERINE. It tastes ... awful. Is it okay? Getting this stuff in our mouths.

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

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?

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

PEARL. Same here.

CHARLOTTE. An average a 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 get one month. End of the month, if you're good, you got a job. If you're not, you don't. Think you can do it?

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. See? She has the bones of an artist. She'll be aces. (*Dropping Catherine's hands.*) (*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.

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. As for the women at work, I found out Mr. Reed has left out a few details. He 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 beat eggs!

CATHERINE. He said that Francis was the moral backbone.

FRANCES. I saw Dolly Francisco with her new baby. No husband, though. Dirty shame. Tsk,tsk, tsk.

CATHERINE. He didn't say that it was one of the most flexible backbones in town

FRANCES. Cutest baby you'll ever see. I knit her some booties and a bonnet and a sweater.

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

CHARLOTTE. Your dust is 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 made good money. We made a good team.

SCENE 5.

PEARL. Frannie? How many you finish today?

FRANCES. (*Finishing a watch.*) One twenty-five. You?

PEARL. (*Finishing a watch.*) One thirty-eight.

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. What about you, Katie?. You see dollar signs yet?

CATHERINE. Just numbers.

PEARL; Booring

CATHERINE. And a pair black patent leather shoes at Forsyth's.

FRANCES. Oooooo!

PEARL. I love those!

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

PEARL. What's that, honey?

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

FRANCES. Beats cooking dinner.

PEARL. Now you're talkin'.

CATHERINE. Charlotte?

CHARLOTTE. I can't. Got plans. Someone's waiting for me. (*they all give her a look.*) What? 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. You've got nothing waiting for you but maybe a magazine and a cup of coffee.

FRANCES. Oooooooooo.

PEARL. 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. That's good.

PEARL. 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. I better get the damn cherry... (*And she exits.*)

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*.

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. It wasn't supposed to go so fast.

7

TOM: The kids..?

CATHERINE: Read themselves to sleep. The beauty of a good bedtime story. I'm beat.

TOM: Maybe *you* need a bedtime story.

CATHERINE: Maybe I do.

TOM: Well, once upon a time, there was a handsome guy. Dashing, even. Named Tom. He wasn't only dashing, he was funny and smart and swell.

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. And one day, this guy, sees a girl.

CATHERINE: Is that the truth?

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

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

TOM: 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... "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 accidently 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, she saw her past, present, and everything to come all swirled together, like in a crystal ball. 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.
(And she leads him off to the bedroom.)

8

The shore of Lake Michigan. The sound of Waves. Of people. 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.) 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's 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. 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: PEARL:
Never in my life. Me, either.

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

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: 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. Ladies, ladies, ladies (Charlotte reveals a tiny flask and takes a swig) So...anyone want a little hooch.

FRANCES (taking flask from Charlotte) We're not supposed to, to imbibe.

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

(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 city}

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

CATHERINE. Tom is great. He still wonders when I'm going to quit?

PEARL. You can't quit! It would break up the team.

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

FRANCES. Me either

PEARL. Me either.

CHARLOTTE. Hey, anyone know what day Monday is?...Our anniversary. It'll be six years. 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 kid.

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

CATHERINE: And like that, time passes.

FRANCES. Time passed.

PEARL. Before our eyes.

CATHERINE. Before we noticed

9: 218, 723 watches later

TOM. (to Catherine offstage) Katie? Hey, honey. I'm home. Helluva a day. Hey 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. Katie? You here? *(Catherine enters. She's worried, distracted. He doesn't notice)* There she is. How many watches you paint today?

CATHERINE: One seventy five

TOM. They're lucky to have you. You're a one woman assembly line. How are the kids? Your mom

CATHERINE. Tom?

TOM. Yeah?

CATHERINE. Look at me.

TOM (a little worried) Ooooooaaaaayyy...

CATHERINE. You don't see anything different?

TOM. No, I don't.

CATHERINE. Turn off the light.

TOM. What?

CATHERINE. Just turn it off! *(He does. Darkness. She holds up her hands. They're luminous. The other women appear. Light shines from 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.)

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. Don't you think it's wrong?

TOM. They say it's fine. Let's not borrow trouble, okay?

CATHERINE. I ache, Tom. My bones.

TOM. Maybe this job's getting too hard for you

CATHERINE. I'm not some little doll, Tom! 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! If this job's getting to you, don't come home and take it out on me. Every day I'm up there doing the high wire act, worried that I might make one wrong move and that'll be it. 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! That's the deal Katie! That's what you signed up for. Remember, you wanted this job! (*a beat*)

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. Am. Scared. (*she exits*)

10: Company Doctor

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

COMPANY DOCTOR. Mrs. Catherine Wolfe Donohue?

CATHERINE. Yes.

COMPANY DOCTOR. You work for ...

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

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. 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. Listen Mrs. Donahue. 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.

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 *I* nerves. (*Lights out on Company Doctor and up on Charlotte, Pearl, and Frances at work. Catherine joins them.*)

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

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

PEARL. I went last week. To the doctor.

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 arms, 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. Not really, Mr. Reed.

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

CHARLOTTE. We're fine, Mr. Reed.

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

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

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

CHARLOTTE. Katie?

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

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

11

In the middle of the night. Catherine sits in her kitchen. In the dark. Tom enters sleepily.

TOM. I had a nightmare that I woke up in the middle of the night and you were gone. And Then I woke up. And you really were gone.

CATHERINE. Sorry. I couldn't sleep.

CATHERINE. 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? If you'd actually believe me instead of making excuses. There's something wrong.

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

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. I'm so tired.

TOM. Don't go to work tomorrow.

CATHERINE. I have to. They fired some girls for the being sick. It's different around there, now. It's scary.

TOM. Then maybe we find you another job.

CATHERINE. *You* don't understand. These girls . . . 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.

PEARL. Valentino. I love Rudolph Valentino.

CHARLOTTE. I already called dibs on him.

CATHERINE. Now it's around 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 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. Put a hot water bottle on it.

CHARLOTTE. Put ice on it.

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

PEARL. Rheumatism.

CATHERINE. Why are you all sounding like the doctor? I need to tell you. My foot feels like it's breaking. I couldn't lift my little girl last night. I could barely walk to her. I could barely cross the room. Anyone else? *(Silence.)*

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

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

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. The women all start painting.)*

MR. REED. Good morning, ladies. *(A lackluster chorus of "good mornings" from the women. He registers this . . . and then plows on.)* I know – that you ladies have had a few concerns lately. There's been some gossip. And the company wants to let you know – Here you go. *(He hands out the letters to the women.)*

FRANCES. What's this?

MR. REED. Clarification. From the company. *(Reading from the letter.)*

"In the best interest of our employee's safety, Radium Dial uses material that contains pure radium *only*. If we at any time had reason to believe that 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. Sincerely, Joseph A. Kelly, president."

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.

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? Pearl said you wanted to see me.
MR. REED. I'm sorry. I have to let you go. You're missing too much work, Mrs. Donohue.
CATHERINE. No! Only a few days. No more, I promise. Just let me –
MR. REED. (*Cutting her off.*) I'm sorry. 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?
CATHERINE. It's this job! There's something that's making us all –
MR. REED. You have to leave now.
CATHERINE. What about Pearl? Charlotte? Frances?
MR. REED. Whoever can't do their job will be asked to leave. They said I could offer you a week's pay. If I hear of any other job somewhere else, I'll let you know.
CATHERINE. Mr. Reed. There haven't been any jobs for two years!
MR. REED. (*Holding out an envelope.*) Here. Take it.
CATHERINE. (*She hesitates, then takes it. She looks inside.*) There's more than a week's pay in here.
MR. REED. There's some from me. Just a few bucks. I'm sorry 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.*)

14

CATHERINE. The company doctor was a lair. But no other doctor in our town would see us. So we had to go to the city... To find the one doctor who would risk his name.

Dr. Dalitsch

CATHERINE. The only problem with him was, he was honest.
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 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 the malignancy of your hip and necrosis of your jaw –To the best of my knowledge, this is a direct result of radium poisoning.

CATHERINE. Radium poisoning is ... (Silence.)... Is ...
DR.DALITSCH. Terminal. In all your cases. *(Pearl and Frances start to cry*

CATHERINE.— Maybe Dr. Dalitsch is wrong, Charlotte, There's still a chance that —
CHARLOTTE. *(Breaking, harshly.)* STOP IT, KATIE! Just shut up! You can't make it better, okay?! So stop trying with your silly optimism. It's ridiculous. Grow up. They did this to us and they knew it! They threw us away for a few watches! 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.)* I better get home.

15

CATHERINE. That night, my girl and boy came to me.
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. I'm 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. Go to bed now. Go to sleep. I'll take away the clocks. They can't touch you as long as I'm here.

CATHERINE.*(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.)*

16

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 when he fired 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. We're playing for pennies ... not sob stories. You in or not.
PEARL. I'm in. *(She tosses a poker chip on the table.)* Come on, Char. You cried. Admit it. When Mr. Reed called you in.
FRANCES. She was the last one of us left. She's not gonna fess up.
PEARL. Come clean, Char. Did you cry or not? CHARLOTTE. Worse. I was struck dumb. I couldn't say a thing. First time in my life, words failed me.
FRANCES. Words failed you?

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

CATHERINE. (*Reminding her.*) Not pity, Char. I'm in. (*She tosses a chip in.*)

CATHERINE. Frances?

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

CHARLOTTE. I'm gonna raise you ... (*She tosses in a chip.*)

PEARL. You girls hear about Marie

FRANCES. CATHERINE.CHARLOTTE. yes

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.

CHARLOTTE. Enough, girls, okay? (*Cutting her off.*) We can keep whining or we can actually do something.

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.

CHARLOTTE. What about the other part?

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

CHARLOTTE. Tell ya what, Katie. I win, I 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 put up a fight – or lie down and die. Because that's our choice as I see it. (*A beat.*) Okay?

CATHERINE. Okay. Okay. I can't believe I'm saying this ... But, you're on. (*Frances crosses herself.*)

CHARLOTTE. (*Laying her cards on the table.*) Three aces. (*Catherine puts her head in her hands.*) Sore loser? (*Pearl takes Catherin'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. 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 up on Leonard Grossman, vivid, avuncular, aggressive.*)

GROSSMAN. (*Overlapping on the line.*) Those sons of bitches – Sorry, ladies, sorry.

Leonard Grossman. Attorney at Law

CATHERINE. Leonard Grossman. Specialties: workmen's compensation, compassion for the working class, and general outrage.

GROSSMAN. This is disgusting. An absolute crying shame. We can't go to court with all of you all at the same time. We want Clarity. Bluntly put, who's the biggest mess? (*They all look at each other. No one wants to admit this. They all look at Catherine.*) I'm going to need specifics.

CATHERINE. Specifically, I've been diagnosed with bone cancer, necrosis of the jaw, and extreme radium poisoning.

GROSSMAN. We can get those bastards. I know we can. But they'll put you through the wringer, Mrs. Donohue. Are you up for it? Or do you want to think about it? Take all the time you need. (*Lights out on Grossman.*)

CATHERINE. That day, we walked down Michigan Avenue. We turned and headed toward the lake. (The sound of waves). 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.

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

PEARL. It sounds awful

CATHERINE. Disappearing. Without anyone knowing the truth. That just seems...wrong.

CHARLOTTE. Katie. 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.

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

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

FRANCES. It doesn't have to be you. It doesn't

CATHERINE. Shhh....Can you hear it?

PEARL. What?

CATHERINE. The quiet. I needed that. One last time. Now I'm ready.

17

CATHERINE. Our case went to court. Our story went to press. And the press went to town. *(The world changes from private to public to public and sensational.)*

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. The women are currently flinging their accusations before the Illinois Industrial Commission. 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 /)*...Seven hundred dollars apiece.

CATHERINE. It's embarrassing.

TOM. If I had a penny for every lie they told...

CATHERINE. They're just trying to sell papers.

TOM. All my life, I kept my nose clean. And now this. To sell a few headlines.

CATHERINE. I'm sorry. I feel like I'm taking you down with me.

TOM. I'm going over to Denny's house. Helping him fix his roof for a few extra dollars. You mind?

CATHERINE. No.

Tom. Call me if you need. *(He kisses her on the head)*

FRANCES. Katie? *(Frances and Pearl enter.)* Sorry, just us "disgruntled" 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.

CATHERINE. I miss seeing you girls every day.

FRANCES. We miss you, too.

(Charlotte enter.)

CHARLOTTE. *(To Frances and Pearl.)* Girls, you mind? Just a minute?

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

CHARLOTTE. Listen, this lawsuit's changed things. In one of the stores today, I ran into Jenny. She turned away from me. Actually hurt my feelings.

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

CHARLOTTE. Yeah, well, the old Charlotte was younger then. How they treating you?

CATHERINE. Most of the neighbors aren't talking to me, either. Except for the occasional insult.

CATHERINE. When did everyone we know become strangers?

CHARLOTTE. They say you just want sympathy.

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.

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

CHARLOTTE. Catherine Donohue? You're my hero.

18

Night. Catherine in a chair.

CATHERINE. Tom? Tom! *(A light snaps on. Tom enters.)* It's happening. I'm –

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

Catherine. Tom? 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.

19

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

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

CATHERINE. Nineteen.

GROSSMAN. And your specific work was to...

CATHERINE. I painted watch faces with a radium compound. We'd point the brush between our teeth, dip it in the powder. But it got everywhere. My hands glowed. My clothes glowed.

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. 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. *(Tom laughs. Reed dosen't.)* You look...good Mr. Reed.

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

MR REED. Mr. Donohue-

TOM. I'm just wondering. Katie made eight cents a watch. We thought that 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 didn't know.

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

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

TOM. You serve?In the war.

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

TOM. I did. I signed up.. A guy comes back from something like that, and he can't believe in God. But when I first saw Katie, the only thing I thought when I saw her face was that there has to be a God, because he made her. *(Tom starts to cry.)* I was going to grow old with this woman. I was going to die with her.

Could you tell me how to live my life now?

20

CATHERINE. I won my case six times. The Radium Dial Company appealed six times. After losing all six times, 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 the clock.

CATHERINE. On the shore of the lake with my friends that last time, I thought of my boy and girl and of the man I love. I walked to the water. I walked in.. Small waves and grace all around. Faith at the edge of the world. 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.

CATHERINE. All looking back at me. For that moment, while time turned its face, we were all there. And we were shining.

The ticking becomes a heartbeat. For a few beats.

Then it stops.Silence. For a few beats. Then...

The sound of the waves on the lake.