

To See the Stars

By Cynthia Mercati

One Act Adaptation by Cindy Couch

Based on the actual events of the “Uprising of the 20,000”

Time: 1909-1910

Place: New York City

Characters:

Anya Rosen, 17

Bridget Feeney, Irish, 18

Ruth, Russian/Jewish, 18

Clara, 16, Tuberculosis

Teresa, 17, Italian/ Pregnant girl/Agnes

Margaret/Prison Matron/ Mother/ Society Girl / Sonia

Lenore Van Meer, 20's, society/Woman 1

Violet Vandercort, 20's, society/ Woman 3

Joe Russo

Martin Roth, 20's, factory boss

Patrick Lannon/Man 1/thug/ Newsboy 1

Benjamin Ziegler/ Man 2/ thug/ factory owner /Newsboy 2

Jonathan Stolle/Man 3/factory man/

Union Man 2/thug/Cohen/ Coleman

Judge Powell/Man 4/thug

Union Man 1/ Man 5/thug /boyfriend/Newsboy 3

Scene 1

The girls are on stage at rise.

Anya

In the black winter of 1909

Bridget

When we froze and bled on the picket line

Ruth

We showed the world that women could fight

Clara

That women could fight for justice!

Fade out.

The sounds of a street (horses, clanging trolley cars and shouts of push-carts vendors.)

Scene 2

Fade in.

There is a Hurdy Gurdy man and a young girl dancing. A housewife with a shawl over her head, a basket on her arm, an Hasidic Jew, a boy with a baseball bat over his arm swiping a piece of fruit as he dashes by causing further uproar, a girl jumping rope, a man rolling a barrel through the street shouting herring, fresh herring. “Muddled speeches” are said during the next lines. The vendors are urging people to buy!

"Good Fruit! Bargains on Fruit"

"Big Fish, Little Fish, Blue Fish, white fish"

"Good used clothes for sale, used shoes, used corsets."

"Sabbath candles,"

"Homemade bread, good and cheap."

"Pickled meat, smoked meat."

"Buy! Not from him, from me"

Anya, Bridget, Clara, Ruth, Teresa, and Margaret enter through the crowd, talking as they move toward the factory. Additional factory girls may be added. The noise fades under their voices, but the City Crowd, kibitzers all, join in their conversation, a natural part of city life. Anya says nothing at first, her frustration building.

Bridget

It's not fair! Six days a week we work at Johannsen's. For four bloody dollars a week!

Margaret

As if we'd make more anyplace else!

Clara

Afraid of being overheard, Clara's protest is softer, as she looks around at who might be listening

If we're a minute late in the morning, they dock us.

Margaret

As if it's better anyplace else!

Ruth

It's not fair that we have to pay Mr. Roth to rent the machines we sew on, the crates we sit on....

Bridget

Crates, mind you, not chairs!

Ruth

The very oil that makes our machines run! And needles and thread. And, if we don't pay up, we're sacked!

Man 1

So, you've got to kick back some dough to the floor boss, so what?

Man 4

That's how things work.

Bridget

But if we get sick....

Ruth

We're sacked anyway!

Bridget

And that's how it is six bloody days a week, twelve bloody hours a day!

Man 3

You're just factory girls!

Ruth

Proudly

We're shirtwaist girls!

Man 1

What's that?

Ruth

Indicating the shirtwaist she wears.

This is a shirtwaist!

Margaret

A cheap shirtwaist!

Ruth

Answering her right back
Just like yours!

Bridget

Indicating Anya and Clara
They make the sleeves

Bridget

Indicating herself
I make the collars and cuffs!

Ruth

I make the buttonholes

Girls (*Except Teresa*)

Indicating Teresa
And she snips the thread!

Teresa

Making a scissors like motion with one hand
Snip! Snip! Snip!

Man 2

You're still just factory girls! And immigrants too, most of ya!

Woman 1

So am I!

Man 5

And me!

Ruth

Me, too!

Bridget

What of it?

Teresa

Si, what of it?

Man 3

If you don't like how it is, go back to the old country!

Ruth

Never!

Bridget

I came to America for a finer life!

Margaret

And have you found it, that finer life?

Bridget

Not yet, but I will!

Margaret

You'll wear cheap clothes and eat cheap food, and if you lose this job because of your big mouth, you'll have to take home piecework ... and earn less than you do now!

Bridget

Maybe things will be different for me!

Man 4

Things don't get any different for people like us!

Anya

Bursting out with it

They could... if we make them different!

Man 3

Sure, you could marry a millionaire!

Teresa

S`i ! I will marry Mr. Sears and Roebuck!

Martin Roth, the factory boss, enters. He carries his lunch and newspaper. At the sight of him, the girls are instantly subdued. They hate him, but they also fear him, and he enjoys their fear. He speaks to them now with nasty condescension.

All

Greeting is staggered.

Good morning, Mr. Roth.

Roth

Thought I heard some angry voices just now.

Margaret

Not from me, Mr. Roth!

Bridget

Muttering

Apple polisher

Roth

What was that, Bridget?

Bridget

Wide-eyed guilelessness

You heard never a word from me, Mr. Roth.

Roth

You girls should go down on your knees and thank Mr. Johanssen for keeping you on!

Anya

Should we?

Roth

Warning and moves toward her. Clara begins to cough, but tries to stifle it. New York's crawlin with girls who need jobs. Girls who talk nice to their bosses and don't sass back. I fire you today. I can hire another girl just like you tomorrow!

He grabs one of Anya's hands and jerks it aloft. He directs his comments to all of them.

A pair of hands, that's all you are!

Dropping his hold on Anya, he turns on Teresa. Clara coughs uncontrollably

Dirty immigrants! It don't make no difference to me who gets your four bucks a week... but I bet it makes a big difference to you.

He turns on Clara now. Head down, too frightened to look him in the eyes, Clara tries and fails to hide a cough.

If you keep coughin' and it keeps botherin me, what do you think I just might have to do?

He looks at her and laughs, enjoying her discomfort.

I just might have to let you go.

Anya

Protectively, pulling Clara away.
It's just a cold.

Roth

It's almost time for work, girls. Don't be late. And don't forget what I said.
He exits into the factory.

Anya

Every morning we walk up those rickety stairs. We sit at those machines. Backs bent, heads down.

Bridget

Mouths shut.

Ruth

Maybe we're all cowards.

Anya

And maybe that's because we haven't given ourselves the chance to be anything else! I'm tired of waking up with nothing to look forward to!
Nothing to tell me that tomorrow's going to be better.

Margaret

Because it won't!

Anya

But it could be! We have to fight back!

Margaret

There isn't any way!

Anya

We can strike!

This sets off an immediate buzz in the crowd and among the girls.

Margaret

I won't listen to any strike talk!

Anya

I read in the TIMES that a shirtwaist factory in Philadelphia went on strike – and now the girls only work ten hours a day! And they make six dollars a week!

Woman 3

Indicating the girls

A few days on the picket line, and they'll be beggin' for their jobs back.

Ruth

Maybe we could win a strike, maybe we couldn't. But I do know I don't want my mother's life! Too poor to buy an ice cream cone... too tired to take a walk in the park. I want more.

Margaret

Don't you think I want more than what I got?
Turns away from the girls and says honestly
I'm too scared to come home without a pay envelope.

Girls begin talking excitedly

Clara

I went out to the fire escape last night. Just so I could breathe. In the winter, we freeze. And I thought, why is it like this? I'm scared too. I'm scared of losing my job. I'm scared of getting sicker. But if you ask me to, Anya, I'll march up and down in front of that factory.

Anya

We can do anything's in us to do!

Margaret

Anya Rosen, you're a dreamer!

Lights down; spot up on Anya.

Anya

She speaks to the audience. I've heard that all my life! Ever since I was a little girl, people have been telling me to be some other way than what I am! Especially Papa.

Remembering

Sometimes, when he came home from work, he'd find me sitting on the stoop. Talking politics with the men. He'd grab me and say, "Girls don't discuss!"

Scene 3

Union meeting, August at night.

Lights come up on the Union hall, a shabby smoky place at the rear of a saloon. From off we hear a tinny piano playing. A low roar of people.

Men enter union meeting hall. Some men wear yarmulkes and a few wear derbies. Patrick Lannon, the chairman, stands at the table. Joe sits beside him. Other men sit or stand.

Anya sits apart from the others.

Lannon

If that's all the business, I declare this meetin' of Local 25.

Anya

Quickly standing.

I have business!

Union Man 1

Come on, adjourn the meeting!

Anya

But, I waited all night! I raised my hand. But you never called on me.

Joe

To Lannon

Give her a chance, Pat.

Lannon

Reluctantly sits

Say what ya gotta say, but make it snappy.

Anya

My name is Anya Rosen. I work at Johanssen's Shirtwaist Factory. It isn't fair the way they treat us there!

Union Man 1

Interrupting

And where is it fair?

Lannon

We represent the skilled workers in the garment industry! The cutters
and the pressers! And the tailors!

Anya

But only men have those jobs!

Union Man 2

That's right!

Anya

But I'm a shirtwaist maker... I make ladies' clothes. Just like the hun-
dreds of other shirtwaist girls in this city! And we need help from this
union ... to go out on strike!

This sets off a flurry of scornful comments from the union men

Lannon

This union has enough problems without tryin' to organize a bunch of
girls.

He slaps the gavel down. Meetin' adjourned!

Anya

Trying desperately to make her position as the men stand and exit.

If we talk to each other while we're working... we're sacked! Every day
they search us to make sure we haven't stolen anything! We have to beg
for permission to go to the bathroom... and then there's just one toilet!

For two hundred of us! And it's always filthy...

Lannon

abruptly

You're a girl... clean the toilet yourself!

Slams on his cap and exits.

Anya

Yelling after him.

Pig-headed, that's what you are!

Joe

Alone in the union hall now except for Anya

Did you walk here, Miss Rosen?

Anya

What do you think?

Joe

And your father let you do that?

Anya

My father's dead, Mr.....

Joe

Joe Russo. And if your father was alive, would he want you here where
no decent woman belongs?

Anya

You mean I need to be protected from the cigar smoke and swearing...
but it's perfectly all right for me to sit in a dirty firetrap twelve hours a
day!

Joe

Firmly

When we started this local, we had four bucks in the treasury. We're
struggling to survive... we can't waste our time on a bunch of fly-by-
night females!

Anya

You don't know anything about how it is for us!
Joe Page 23 I know what it is to bust your back to get ahead.. to drag
yourself to night school for eight years! The Union's job is to make
things better for working men!

Anya

And who's going to make it better for working women?

Joe

That's why women get married!

Anya

Intense

My mother stands over a washtub scrubbing other people's clothes.
Every day my sisters- two little girls – haul the clean water up five
flights. All for a few pennies! Other than that, all we have for food and
rent and heat and medicine is the four dollars a week I bring home!

Joe

And you're telling me it's like that for all the girls in the factory?

Anya

I'm telling you for most of them it's worse!

Joe

Maybe you should come to the next meeting, explain some things.

Anya

And get insulted again? If you won't help us, we'll just have to organ-
ize ourselves!

Joe

In disbelief.

Go out on strike on your own? A bunch of young girls!
He examines her stubborn face.
Anya Rosen, you're a dreamer!

Scene 4

Lights down, spot up on Clara.

Clara

She speaks to the audience, her words punctuated with coughing.
White lung they call it. Tuberculosis. The doctor says it strikes people
when their living is hard. When the body doesn't get enough nourish-
ment. On the floor, we put mattresses for the boarders to sleep. The
family just piles up in the kitchen. Our water comes from outside, six
floors down. The toilets are down there too. When I get sick to my
stomach, it's a long way to walk.
When my father has a good day, we go to the moving pictures. You can
watch them over and over. And pretend you're somewhere else.

Black out

*During Clara's speech factory girls have entered from different angles
and meet in front of factory. Movement is in slow motion. Following
Clara's speech, men come in and cross to factory.*

The lights come up on a small area directly in front of the factory.

*Anya, Ruth, Bridget, Teresa, and Clara are picketing. Extra factory
girls can be added. Some carry signs.*

Girls

Unison, repeated

" Justice! Fairness! We are striking for human treatment!

Some march arm in arm. Others march alone. The girls ad lib comments to each other, their excitement high. Then from the audience, through the aisles, the THUGS enter, led by Jonathan Stolle. They carry billy clubs, brandishing them menacingly, ad-libbing rude catcalls about the girls. At the sight of them, the girls cluster together uneasily, murmuring in low voices, frightened, but trying not to be. Stolle yells up to them.

Stolle

Time to move on into work, Ladies!
Anya moves to confront Stolle, full of bravado.

Anya

Quickly

Orderly picketing of the workplace is a legal right! Guaranteed by New York state law!

Ruth

Pushing forward to flank Anya
You could look it up!

Stolle

Maybe I'll just do that sometimes!
Crossing onto the stage, his men following him, his voice and manner... and theirs.. becoming more threatening.
But right now, I got orders to clear you girls off the street!

Anya

We're workers... like you! Underpaid, living in tenements! Why not fight with us?

Bridget

Takes a few steps to confront him
We're gonna stand fast!

Thug 1

To Bridget

You got a pretty big mouth on you for a girl... and a mick!

Bridget

Takes a few steps to confront him

I got a pretty big fist, too!

She swings. Thug 2 grabs Bridget, holding her around the waist as she struggles to free herself, kicking and yelling, the men laughing. Anya moves on the Thugs, screaming and hitting out at them. Ruth tries to pull her back. Thug 3 shoves Teresa so hard she stumbles, pulled to safety by the girls. Thug 1 shoves Bridget. In a fury, Bridget is held back by the other girls. Roth enters, shoving Agnes and Sonia in ahead of him. The two girls are obviously frightened and confused. Roth ready and willing to do anything he has to, to get them into the factory.

Roth

Quickly

What are you waitin' for?
You want to work, or not?

Sonia runs into the factory, crying as Roth grabs Agnes by the arm, trying to shove her off as well. Agnes Pulls away from him

Agnes

Not like this! Gimme a sign.

The girls cheer as Agnes moves to join them. Agnes is given a sign, and embraced by several of the girls as Margaret enters. She's brittle, defiant, the others disbelieving.

Bridget

Margaret, don't ever say you're one of them!

Roth

Grabbing Margaret by the arm, he pulls her roughly forward Come on, get goin!

Margaret

Jerking away, angrily
Take your hands off me!

Roth

Watch your mouth! I can put my hands wherever I like!

Anya

Is that how you want to be talked to, Margaret?

Margaret

Pa said if I come home without a job.. I don't come home.
Margaret looks at Roth with loathing.
She quickly runs into the factory.

Roth

This is your last chance. What's it gonna be?

The girls turn away from him in silence. Roth exits and the lights dim as the Thugs rush the girls, so we're left to hear and imagine the melee.

The girls are screaming, crying out in terror, trying to help one another, the men shouting, grabbing the signs and breaking them, pushing at the girls and beating them with their billy clubs. Additional noise either from offstage or taped may be added. The lights go down and through the continuing noise of the skirmish, we hear the sound of a police wagon. Then the noise of the city comes up full, continuing to the next scene.

(At different times, girls take off their top layer of skirts and shirts to reveal tattered and soiled clothing.)

Scene 5

The city jail. The next day.

The noise o the city is heard as before. Dim light comes up on the jail, located on a platform, stripes of light falling over it to indicate bars. Anya, Ruth, Clara, Bridget and Teresa sit huddled together, dazed, disbelieving. They're bruised, clothes torn, hair disordered. The noise of the city fades as full light comes up on the jail. Joe enters. He speaks to the matron, then takes in the scene for a beat.

Joe

So you tried it on your own.

Bridget

Moves toward him
And are you one of them bloody strikebreakers?

Anya

Quickly standing; angrily intercepting Bridget.
This is Joe Russo. From the Ladies Garment Workers' Union.
Bridget shakes hands with Joe warily.

Ruth

Ruth extends her hand to Joe.
Who told you we were in here, Mr. Russo?

Joe

Your wildcat strike's in all the morning papers.

Bridget

In wonder
Bridget Feeney in the papers? Right along with Mrs. Vanderbilt?

Joe

Dryly
And the obituaries.

Ruth

The Matron said we couldn't have any visitors.

Joe

Grins
I told her I was your lawyer.

Anya

Joe reaches out to shake her hand, and she crosses her arms.
We don't need a lawyer!

Ruth

Interrupting
Yes, we do!

Anya

Grudgingly
We need a lawyer, but not you!

Joe

Joe considers their plight, and we see an idea germinating.
There's plenty of 'em for sale.... The Matron said they'd let you out if you paid your fine.

Ruth

Ten dollars or ten days. For each one of us.

Bridget

Disheartened
As if we have ten bloody dollars between us.

Clara

Dejected and coughing
That's nine more nights.
Clara's words end in a coughing spasm.

Anya and Teresa go to her. Anya puts her arm around her. Joe motions for the matron. He tips his hat at Bridget as he leaves.

Joe

You don't have a lawyer. You do have a law student.
Lights and music indicate time passing.

Matron

Entering
Rise and shine, Ladies! Your fine's been paid!

The girls are disbelieving. Bridget quickly begins gathering their belongings.

Anya
Stands
But who.....

Matron
She grabs Teresa roughly by the arm, jerking her to her feet.
I just work here. Come on, Eyetie, get a move on!

Teresa
Jerking away. They help Clara up.
Take your hands off me!

Matron
To Anya
Move on! We've got other tenants waitin for the room!

Joe
Joe grabs Anya's arm.
I asked around about Johanssen's, some of the other shirtwaist factories, too. It's all like you said.

Anya
Retorts
And you were surprised?

Joe
He really looks at her. Concern and respect for her shows.

Find a rich husband, Anya... then you can quit the factory. Have a decent life! I'm only here to tell you I'm sorry it ended this way.

Anya
It's not ended! I'm going back on strike!

Joe
Teresa helps Claire out, and Bridget waits, studying the conversation between Joe and Anya.

Those thugs were just giving you a warning. Next time they'll split your skulls open!

Anya
Quickly
I'm not afraid!

Joe
You should be! Earnestly I knew a boy once. He was picketing his factory. Those hired gorillas beat him up so bad, he couldn't walk for months.

Anya
And was he scared off, that boy you know? Awareness of what he has said, shows. Kindly, she asks- Did he back down?

Joe
Clearly uncomfortable
That doesn't matter. It is different for a woman!
Joe exits.

Anya
No, it's not! I want to do more than survive. Right now we're just dust on the ground. But I want to see the stars!

Lights down. Spot on Bridget who speaks to the audience. All freeze during the beginning of Bridget's speech and slowly return to the picket line.

Bridget

"My family's still back in County Monohan. We've got a farm there, a piddling poor thing to raise a family on. I loved a boy back home, but didn't he get in too thick with the rebels? They shipped him away to Australia. I visited him in jail on his last day in Ireland. "Will you wait for me?" I looked into those eyes, I got the shivers up and down my spine. And I said, "Not on your life!" *She laughs.* It's women have to be the practical ones in this world, isn't it? As soon as I saved enough for passage to America, I sailed right away, with Ma crying all the way to the docks. The day we got out of jail, we went right back on the picket line. And hasn't Mr. Joe Russo been droppin' 'round. And isn't he thinkin that we deserve more and better and that we shouldn't be givin up? In America, if you keep your guts up, you've got a chance!"

Scene 6

Lights up on the Cooper Union Hall, November 21, Cohen enters with several toadies. Everyone is on stage. The girls are chattering excitedly. Benjamin Cohen, a pompous man, stands at the podium. He bangs the gavel once or twice and begins speaking. The City Crowd has become our spectators.

Cohen

People cheer before he speaks and cheer following this statement. On behalf of the International Ladies Garment Workers' Union, I welcome all of you to Cooper Union Hall! This meeting was called because of the continuing wildcat strike.

Bridget

And a bloody miracle it is, too!
The girls cheer loudly and there are shouted ad libs, pro and con, people standing up to argue with each other. Cohen bangs the gavel several times.

Cohen

I admire the young ladies' enthusiasm, but no male workers have ever won a full-scale strike of such size! Women are simply not capable of bearing the relentless, exhausting demands of a lengthy strike!

Ruth

The girls stand as they speak
We've been bearing those demands for months already!

Bridget

We went out in August, and it's November now! The rain is soakin' through our shoes and the cold is shakin' our bones, but we haven't given up!

Cohen

And what happens in winter?

Bridget

Anger! That's what will keep us warm!
Several other girls jump up, cheering, ad-libbing agreement. Bridget gradually becomes incensed.

Cohen

Women should be led... not lead! Therefore, I move that this union refuse to listen to demands for a general strike!

Bridget

The girls try to hold her back.

I move that we not listen to another bloody word out of your mouth!

Lannon

Standing

You can't move anything! You're not a member of this union!

Bridget

She looks at the other girls for support

Then I'll join... we'll join...

Lannon

Self- satisfied

And I suppose you've all got the dollar fifty it takes to join up?

Joe

Standing

Of course they don't! But they can pay off their dues ten cents a week, just like the rest of us! They're garment workers... they have a right to be in the Garment Workers' Union!

Bridget

Quickly crosses to the podium and slaps down a dime, pointedly speaking to Cohen.

There's my first dime! And don't go wastin' it! It's the last money I've got!

Joe

Crosses to the podium Most of you know me, but for those who don't... I'm Joe Russo, an organizer for this union. The only way these girls can get better treatment is to tie up the shirtwaist trade...and the

only way to do that is if our union calls a general strike against the entire industry!

Crowd response, both pro and con

I say it's time one of the girls stood up here and spoke to us!

Anya Rosen!

Cohen

Just who is Anya Rosen?

Bridget

She's the girl who started this strike, you ignorant man!

Anya

Crowd cheers between each statement.

The time for talk is over! It's time to ask for what we want... and to fight to get it!

Man 1

Standing

This is ridiculous!

Man 2

Also standing

How can these girls know what they want? They're just children!

Anya

If we're old enough to sweat out our guts out twelve hours a day, six days a week, why aren't we old enough to say what we want? And what we want is justice! And fairness!

Man 4

Standing

That's what we all want!

Woman 1

Standing to yell it out

Justice! Fairness!

Anya

If we call an industry-wide strike... if we can hold out... It's not just the shirtwaist girls who'll win, it's all of you!

Crowd

Justice! Fairness!

Joe

As a member of the International Ladies Garment Workers' Union, I move that starting tomorrow morning, the union support a general strike of all the girls in all the shirtwaist factories in New York City!

Cohen

Quickly

I hear no seconds! If there are no seconds, the motion dies!

Man 5

I second it!

Man 4

I second it!

Now all the men stand, one by one, and second the motion. The last one to stand is Lannon.

Lannon

With some reluctance

I... second it.

Joe

The motion is carried!

Wild cheering erupts, people stamp their feet, wave their hats and handkerchiefs.

Crowd

Justice! Fairness!

Girls cross right to factory.

Scene 7

Outside the factory, December

Light comes up on the small area directly in front of the factory.

Anya, Bridget, Ruth, Teresa, and Clara are picketing. Other Factory girls can be added. They wear bits and pieces of shabby winter wear: shawls, hats, gloves. They're obviously cold and worn, also very hungry. As Violet and Lenore cross down from the platform, the girls call out to them.

Bridget

Are you out slumming?

Lenore

Earnestly

It isn't like that for me. I got a degree in social work, from Vassar, so I could help women.

Bridget

Well, wasn't that grand of you!

Anya And what kind of women are we?with our patched clothes
and our silly dreams?

Violet

You're fighting for a better life... well, that's what we want to do too!

Lenore

You've got it all wrong. This isn't about money!

Bridget

Everythin's about your money!

Lenore

I got a job... in a steam laundry! So I could see what it's like, making a
living using my hands!

Violet

Every night, Lenore goes back to a cold-water flat in a tenement five
flights up!

Lenore

My mother married my father because her parents told her to. Now he
tells her what to do! And that's what they want for me. But I want
something different!

Bridget

Such a grand speech.

Lenore

If you let us stand with you, we can prove all women – rich and poor –
can lead independent lives!

Anya

Words! That's all you're giving us!

Clara

That's all you gave us, Anya, at first.

Bridget

I bet they'd run like rabbits at the first sign of the police or the thugs!

Clara

We didn't. Why would they?

Anya

Because they're not like us!

Clara

Being rich doesn't make them better than us... it doesn't make them
worse!

Her intensity starts up her cough. She is choking

Anya

You're making yourself sick, Clara!

Clara

Struggling to speak

I don't care! They've come to us as friends... and we need friends!

Bridget

They don't have it in 'em to stick it out!

Lenore

We can learn to be strong. Let us learn!

Ruth

You want to learn how to spend the night in jail and come right back on the line for more?

Bridget

You'll have to be strong enough to get by on a cup of coffee and a bowl of soup a day?

Lenore

Shocked

I.... thought the union was helping you....

Anya

That's all they can afford. Over seven hundred of us have been arrested! The union's gone broke paying our jail fines.

Clara

They're asking for a chance! Isn't that what we're striking for?

Anya

If we lose this strike, their lives will go on just the way they always have. We can't depend on people like that! This is our world.... And our fight!

Bridget

Indicating off

Get along with you now.

Lenore

Taking off her coat, tries to give it to Clara.
Please... at least take my coat! You're ill....

Anya

Grabbing the coat, thrusts it back at Lenore.

We're not charity cases!

The lights dim on the girls as they keep picketing. Violet and Lenore exit. Scattershot spots come up on various places on the platforms as various people speak to the audience.

Roth

Mr. Johannsen's got a new plan. From now on, when the girls get arrested, they're going to trial!

Scene 8

December day. At rise: Judge Fisher sits behind a desk, the bailiff to one side, Roth and Stolle are seated together on a bench. Bridget, Clara, and Ruth are also seated together. Anya stands before the judge. Again, the city crowd serves as spectators. Lenore and Violet are seated together. Joe, Patrick Lannon, the Union men, Teresa and any other Factory Girls are seated together.

Judge

Banging the gavel.

Miss Rosen, do you really expect this court to believe that New York City policemen arrest innocent people?

Bridget

We don't expect to be believed, but that's the way of it!

Judge

Young woman, you are out of order!

Bridget

standing

I might as well be back in Ireland!

Judge

That can be arranged!

Muttering, Bridget sits.

Anya

Your Honor, we weren't doing anything illegal! Peaceful picketing of the workplace is a guaranteed right!

Judge

I do not need an immigrant's kid to tell me the law!

You are on strike against God!

Roth

Quickly standing

May I speak, your Honor?

Judge

He nods.

Of course, Mr. Roth.

Roth

With long suffering patience

You can see how these girls are.

Loud jeering and ad libs greet this statement.

So, sure, now and again, we bring in a little.... Outside help.... To try and talk some sense into the girls. But there's nothin violent about any of it.

Judge

Do you have a witness to your statements, Mr. Roth!

Roth

Yanks Stolle to his feet, then pulls the black derby off Stolle's head. Indeed I do! Mr. Jonathan Stole!

Joe

Shoving his way to the bench.

I object!

Judge

Mr. Russo, You're not qualified to act as legal counsel.

Joe

These girls need someone to speak for them!

Judge

Then let them hire someone.

Lannon

The Union did hire someone!

And you wouldn't let him speak either!

Judge

I told you I had to conduct a further investigation of his credentials.

Joe

You mean you had to trump up some phony excuse to keep him out!

Judge

Icily

Insult me again, Mr. Russo, and I will personally see to it that you never practice law in this state.

Angrily, Joe backs down and sits.

Mr. Stolle, do you swear that what Mr. Roth has said is true?

Stolle

Grabbing his derby back to hold it over his heart

I absolutely one hundred percent swear!

Roth

Confidentially

The thing of it is, Your Honor, these girls.... hang around the streets, getting all...

Judge

Equally chummy

Are you saying these girls are a public nuisance?

Roth

What I'm saying is, I can't see a nickel's worth of difference between these strikers.... And streetwalkers.

The court breaks into noise, the scripted lines and the ad libs coming together, the Bailiff calling for silence, the Judge banging the gavel.

Woman 1

Liar!

Bridget

That's a lie!

Man 5

You filthy liar!

Teresa

You have no right to say that!

Violet

Liar!

Lenore

How dare you say that?

Judge

Order! I will have order!

The room quiets, although mumbling and muttering persists as people sit down

I am ready to pass sentence!

Now, quickly, Lenore and Violet push forward to the Judge.

Lenore

Your Honor, we request permission to address the bench!

Judge

With nervous shock

Miss Van Meer

Violet

And Miss Vandercort

Judge

Almost stuttering in nervousness

Ladies, please, I'm sure your families wouldn't want you to be involved.... In these proceedings!

He leans over the desk to hiss at the girls, indicating MOVE

You can leave through my chambers... no one even need to know you were here!

Lenore

We want everyone to know we're here. We are in sympathy with the strikers. We demand to be sentenced with them!

Anya

You don't know what's going to happen!

Violet

We said we'd stand with you and we will.

Judge

But there are extenuating Circumstances.....

Violet

Our families' money, you mean.

Judge

I mean I have no reason to put you in jail!

Violet

Then we will give you one.
The litany of abuse overlaps with the judge's protest
Judge Powell, you are an immoral, unscrupulous.....

Judge

Standing

How dare you.....

Violet

Law- breaking, bribe-taking...

Judge

You're in contempt!

Lenore

In his face... with unexpected spirit

Boring old windbag!

Judge

I shall give you your wish, Ladies!
Will the defendants please rise?

Clara, Ruth, and Bridget stand with Anya flanked by Lenore and Violet. The judge goes on, addressing them in his most judge-like manner.

Before I pass sentence, I am giving fair warning to all strikers. In view of their conduct on the picket line, and what I have seen and heard in this courtroom, they will serve two months... with no possibility of parole... at the women's workhouse on Blackwell's Island!

There's an immediate reaction to this, triumphant shouts from Roth and Stolle, disbelieving cries from the others. Through and above it all we hear shouts of...

Crowd

THE TOMBS! The Strikers are going to the TOMBS!

Joe

Pushing his way up to the Judge
Blackwell's Island is filled with dopers, drunks and prostitutes.....

Judge

Interrupts

And now it's going to be filled with strikers! *BANGS THE GAVEL* Bailiff, remove the prisoners! *SMUGLY*. Have a pleasant two months, girls.

As the judge shakes hands with Roth and Stolle, the Bailiff rounds up Anya, Bridget, Clara, Ruth, Lenore, and Violet, and tries to herd them off, people embracing them as they go. Joe breaks through to Anya as, simultaneously, she looks for him, her words, coming out in a rush.

Anya

I was so full of brave words, Joe! Now I'm scared.... As scared as you said I should be....

Joe

You'll make it through this.

Anya and factory girls exit behind set and cross to Tombs. Men exit at different areas.

Scene 9

Martin Roth stands in a spot outside the factory, January 1910. Evening. He speaks to the audience.

Roth

Sixth floor of a tenement. No heat, no runnin water. That's where Martin Roth comes from. Just like the girls in the factory. One day Ma told us she couldn't go on feedin everyone. Rosie had her doll. PAUSE No heat at the orphanage neither. I hate the sound of coughin. It takes me back. No place in this world for Martin Roth and his sister. Rosie was the one person I could count on. I went to see Ma once. You never shoulda give me and Rosie away. She didn't shed a tear. She had a new husband ... a bunch of new brats. When I heard they needed a boss at Johannsen's, I knew I could keep those girls in line. Because I'm one of them. That's when Rosie left me. She said as long as I was a factory boss, she didn't want to see me. Those girls. ... They're tryin to take my power away. But I won't let em. maybe.... When this is over.... Rosie will see me again.

Light comes up on the city crowd. Some still call out their wares, for the east side is a bazaar that never closes. But the noise is muted. The others stand huddled around a barrel in which a fire has been lit, warming their hands. Joe stands with them. A society girl lingers near the factory, she picks up a forgotten picket sign.

Scene 10

Inside the Tombs, January night.

Hazy half light comes up on a cell Inside the Tombs where Anya is seated on a cot. Bridget, Ruth, Clara, Lenore, and Violet surround her. The girls are excited, happy, their words coming quickly. Clara is no longer coughing, but strong and well.

Girls have a choreographed dance with clothes, trays of food. All action is abstract. No words are spoken. Girls are happy until Anya says, "But we won..." Girls turn into FURIES attacking Anya.

Bridget, Ruth, Clara, Lenore, and Violet

Viciously right to her

It's a dream, Anya Rosen.... And you're a dreamer!

Blackout and scream.

The lights come up. It's the middle of the night, the girls lying on their cots. Clara is obviously weaker, sicker, her cough more penetrating.

She has difficulty even rising from her cot.

Ruth

Comforting her

It's all right, Anya, you were just having a nightmare.

Anya

No, it was a good dream!

They all cling to this hope. Reality hits them again, full force. Clara breaks into coughing

Bridget

It's the dreams that make it hard. You think you are in one place and when you wake, you're in another! I keep dreamin I'm back in County Monohan, and everythin is green.

Ruth

The worst of it is the dreams.

Violet

The food's the worst of it.

Ruth

The way your stomach twists in knots.

Clara

Struggles to speak through her cough.

Violet goes to her, stroking her hair, comforting her.

The cold is the worst of it.

Bridget

Six of us... one bucket for a toilet!

Clara

Remember the girl who was with us, those first days?

She had the white lung, too. Remember?

Bridget

She'll be in potter's field now.

Clara

I promised I wouldn't forget her. Now I'm asking you, all of you, promise you won't forget us!

Without self pity... only stating a fact

I'm never going to get out of here.

Anya

Clara, I'm sorry you're in here. That's the worst of it for me. Knowing you're getting sicker every day.

Ruth

When we win the strike, you can make it all right!

Anya

Take what you get and keep your mouth shut. People were right. But I thought I knew. But now... I don't know why we even tried.

Anya

All I ever gave you were dreams

Bridget

It's dreams brought me to America, Anya... that sent me to the picket line!

Anya

Dreams aren't enough.

Bridget

Kneels beside Anya

Dreams are what you go on, when there's nothing else left.

Bridget

Standing

Then let's sing of your dream! They're waitin for the sound of our tears!
But I say we give them the sound of our singin!

*Bridget begins stamping her feet, pounding on the walls, clapping.
With a sudden bold move, Violet joins her in making noise, shouting out
her words with defiance*

I sing the songs of the overflowin bucket!

Ruth

I sing of the jail! And the thugs!

Bridget

And the judge and Mr. Mighty Johannsen

Violet

*Violet and Bridget link arms and do a jig step.
Let's sing the songs of the nights!*

Lenore

Beating out the rhythm of her words with her fist.

And the mornings! Because each time I wake up, I know there's something inside they can't break! Not the Tombs – not my parents! Every morning, I get stronger! *(Pause)* I sing the song of strength!

Ruth

I sing the song of – possibilities!

Bridget

Of new chances!

Violet

Of a new life!

Clara

The girls cluster around Clara's cot as she struggles to speak, still making their noise but dropping the volume so they can hear her.

For the first time in my life, I stood up and I did something... and I was scared... and I did it anyway! As she lies back down on the cot. I sing the song of strength.

Anya

*Anya stands, filled with new strength. She joins the girls.
Are you watching, Clara? We're dancing.... In the tombs!
Sing with us, Clara!*

*She reaches out her hands to Clara. but there is no response. Anya
touches her.*

Clara? Clara!

Scene 11

A room in the Tombs, January day .Anya is on the floor. Joe enters from UL. Joe stands over her.

Joe

Anya. Anya. You're free.

Anya

Clara's dead....

Joe

I know. *(Pause)* Anya, the Van Meers and Vandercorts have brought corruption charges against Judge Powell. Your sentences have been overturned. All of you can get out.

Anya

But the strike! I can't go back to work! Did we fight for nothing? The same wages...the same hours...

Joe

Cutting her off

The papers are full of the strike!

Light on the top platform as newsboys and McAlister Coleman, reporter, shout out their headlines and stories, the words almost overlapping, the newsboys waving their papers as they cross back and forth on the platform.

Coleman

For the first time life, I saw real hunger on the faces of my fellow Americans in the richest city in the world!

Newsboy 1

Pictures inside! Thugs swingin' at strikers...

Newsboy 2

Judge convicted of graft. Read all about it!

Joe

He takes Anya's hands

Anya, if we can keep the strike going until spring, we have a real chance.

Anya

Spring's the busy season for the factories....

Joe

He interrupts, enthusiastic

But this year, unless they settle with the union, they won't have anyone to fill the orders.

Anya

Aren't the factories bringing in scabs?

Joe

They're trying. But our girls are talking them into joining the strike!

Spot up on Teresa on the platform calling out.

Teresa

They're paying you starvation wages to work yourself to the bone in a filthy factory! Join us! Starve in the fresh air!

Joe

A lot of the strikebreakers are walking out.

Anya

Before you came in just now I kept askin'. Why did we do it, why did we even try?

Joe

And now you know?

Anya

The boy you told me about, the one who was beaten so badly he couldn't walk, that was you, wasn't it? And you went back on strike.

Joe

I was scared to death. For the first time in my life, I stood up and I did something. But it's still only a chance, Anya

Anya

Even if we lose..... we've already won. *PAUSE* Because for the first time in our lives... we've seen the stars!

Ruth, Bridget, Lenore, Violet

Spots come up on Ruth, Bridget, Lenore, Violet. Their whispered words are urgent, strong. continuing into the darkness to become a chant, the words called out with the same definite, deliberate, insistent... building... rhythm:

Justice! Fairness!

The chant continues into the next scene. Joe looks at his pocket watch, looks at Anya tentatively, and hugs her.

Scene 12

Outside the factory, February day. At rise. Lights up on Stolle, a thug, and Roth. Roth stands apart from the other two, dwelling on his own thoughts.

At first the chant comes from offstage, then the girls begin appearing one or two at a time, in every corner space, place, on every level, and then the chant comes from offstage and on, until all the factory girls are on stage. The chant begins throughout, until the men are imprisoned by the girls and their words.

Girls

Girls Justice! Fairness!

Stolle

We're into February now....

Thug

Micks marchin' with Eyeties! Rich marchin' with the poor.

Stolle

Go home... get married!

Thug

We beat 'em, and they're still at it!

Chanting fades

Roth

He crosses to the men, who became increasingly alarmed at his manner and words.

Rosie walked the picket line. She got sent to the Tombs. The warden said she wasn't in the Tombs no more. *(Pause)* They buried her in Potters Field. My SISTER told them she didn't have any family. *(Pause)* I KNOW what they're fighting for...Justice...Fairness.
He goes off, leaving other men. Spot fades.

Girls

Chanting continues.
Justice! Fairness!

Joe

Rushing onstage in the midst of the girls
The owners want to settle! They're offering wages of six dollars a week, for ten hours a day... and overtime, if you work longer!

Anya

And the kickbacks to the factory boss?

Joe

No more kickbacks...and no more renting your machines. From now on you sit on chairs!

Lannon

Enters briskly
All in favor?

Men

Union men enter from right and left, joining in a shouted
AYE!

Cheers erupt

Scene 13

Outside the factory, March day. The same music and noise we heard at the beginning of the play comes up on the same city scene. The various people of the city crowd cross downstage to deliver these lines, speaking right to the audience

Anya

In the bitter winter

Ruth

Of 1909

Bridget

When we bled

Lenore

And died on the picket line.

Violet

We showed the world

Teresa

That women could fight

Anya

For justice