

W.P.A. FEDERAL
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PRESENTS

POWER

BY ARTHUR ARENT



RITZ
THEATRE
48th STREET
West of Broadway

Power, Scene 15

SCENE FIFTEEN
(The Tennessee Valley)

CHARACTERS

Prologue

LOUDSPEAKER

A-Farmer and wife

WIFE

FARMER

B-City man and wife

HUSBAND

WIFE

C-Farmer and Electric Company Manager

MANAGER

FARMER

D-City Man and Public Utilities Commissioner

COMMISSIONER

MAN

E-Parade and TVA Song

CLERK

PARADERS

PROLOGUE

(Movies of Tennessee Valley come on scrim. They are integrated with the following LOUDSPEAKER announcements:)

LOUDSPEAKER: In the Tennessee Valley.... Parts of seven States, 40,000 square miles, two million people. All living in a region blighted by the misuse of land, and by the wash of small streams carrying away the fertile topsoil. In these cabins, life has changed but little since some pioneer wagon broke down a century ago, and for them this became the promised land. Occupations - when they exist at all - are primitive, a throwback to an earlier America. Here stand the results of poor land, limited diet, insufficient schooling, inadequate medical care, no plumbing, industry, agriculture or electrification! (Front traveler curtain opens. Light comes up very slowly on FARMER and WIFE, left, while movies are still on) Meanwhile, the entire country seeks cheap electric power, and the demand for a cost yardstick comes from every section. In the Tennessee Valley, 1933. (Scrim goes up.)

SCENE FIFTEEN-A

(Farmer and Wife)

(FARMER seated at cut-out table on which is a lighted kerosene lamp. He is reading; WIFE is kneeling, measuring a knitted sock to his foot, carrying out the action as seen in the last movie flash.)

WIFE: [Fictional character] Beats me how you see to read in that light.

FARMER: [Ibid.] What's the matter with it?

WIFE: What's the matter with it? You're squinting down your nose like you had a bug on the end of it!

FARMER: Same light I been usin' for the last twenty years.

WIFE: Yeah, and look at you now. Them glasses are thick enough to fry eggs under if we ever got any sun in this dump!

FARMER (quietly): Andy Jackson used a lamp like this, Nora.

WIFE: Then it was just too bad for Andy. Besides, they didn't have electricity in them days.

FARMER (folding paper and putting it down): Maybe I better read durin' the day.

WIFE: How?

FARMER: What d'you mean, how?

WIFE: How you gonna read when you're out there plowin' from sunup to dark?

FARMER: Maybe I better quit readin.

WIFE: That's right. Don't do nothing about it. Just give in and don't make no fuss, and everybody'll love you.

FARMER: What you want me to do, Nora? The wick's up as high as it'll go.

WIFE: Never mind the wick! How about a couple of nice little electric lights around here?

FARMER: Now, we been all over that before. And there ain't nothin' I can do about it.

WIFE: Ain't there?

FARMER: You heard what Joe Frank said. His farm's bigger'n mine. He can use more lights, and the company told him, nothin' doin'.

WIFE: So, you and Joe are gettin' up a little club to read in the daytime, eh? (She rises) Suppose they told you you couldn't have any air, would you stop breathin'?

FARMER: What's that got to do with it?

WIFE: Light's just as important as air.

FARMER: Sure it is, but...

WIFE: Don't "but" me! Why don't you go out and do somethin' about it?

FARMER: Nora, if they don't want to string lights out to my farm I can't make 'em.
(FARMER rises.)

WIFE: Who said you can't? Who says you can't go up there and raise holy blazes until they give 'em to you! Tell 'em you're an American citizen! Tell 'em you're sick and tired of lookin' at fans and heaters and vacuums and dish-washin' machines in catalogues, that you'd like to use 'em for a change! Tell 'em... (She stops)... What the hell do you think Andy Jackson you're always talkin' about would do in a case like this! (As he stands, convinced, she claps his hat on his head, and gives him a push) Now go on out and tell 'em somethin'!

(FARMER exits.)

Blackout

SCENE FIFTEEN-B

(City Man and Wife)

LOUDSPEAKER: In nearby Chattanooga. (Lights come up on HUSBAND and WIFE. City dwellers are seated at table on which is an electric lamp. He reads and she peels potatoes.)

HUSBAND: Well, here it is. First of the month. (Picks up envelope from table, reads bill, emits a long whistle) Six ninety-two! Say, what do you do with the juice around here, eat it?

WIFE (Flippantly): No, darling. We burn it.

HUSBAND: But good Lord, I only pay thirty-five dollars a month rent for this whole house!

WIFE: What's that got to do with it?

HUSBAND: It seems all out of proportion, one-fifth for electricity. If this keeps up I'll have to cut down my life insurance.

WIFE: That'll be nice.

HUSBAND: Of course, if I had the kind of wife who turned the lights off when she walked out of a room I wouldn't have to. (Rises, stands left of table.)

WIFE: I did that once and you almost broke your leg going back into it.

HUSBAND: Well, we've got to cut down. Our bills shouldn't be more than three dollars a month.

WIFE: That's what I say.

HUSBAND: Don't say anything, do something about it!

WIFE: All right, let's throw out the radio.

HUSBAND: How can I hear any football games if you do that? Let's stop using the vacuum.

WIFE: And me get down on my hands and knees? Not on your life!

HUSBAND: How about the washing machine? You used to send the stuff out.

WIFE: Yeah, and your shirts came back without cuffs. Remember?

HUSBAND: Well, we've got to do something. You got any ideas?

WIFE: I got one.

HUSBAND: What is it?

WIFE: Did it ever occur to you that maybe those electric companies are charging too much?

HUSBAND: Sure it did. But what can I do about it? Bump my head against the wall?

WIFE: No, but you can complain to the State Electric Commission.

HUSBAND: Look, dear. I'm just one little consumer. How can I fight a utility?

WIFE: Tell the Commission. That's what they're there for.

HUSBAND: Why, they won't even listen to me.

WIFE (rises): Make 'em. Tell 'em that your taxes are paying their salaries. Tell 'em that that's what they're there for, to regulate things. Tell 'em you're sick and tired of making dividends for somebody else and it's about time the little fellow got a look-in some place. And tell 'em... (She stops)... tell 'em you'll be damned if you'll give up

listening to those football games on Saturday afternoon! (She thrusts hat at him)
Now get goin'! (He does.)

Blackout

SCENE FIFTEEN-C

(Farmer and Electric Company Manager)

(Lights come up on desk. MANAGER of Electric Company is seated at desk. FARMER, left of desk, stands.)

FARMER: [Fictional character] My God, I've got to have lights, I tell you!

MANAGER: [Ibid.] Certainly, Mr. Parker. You can have all the lights you want. All you've got to do is pay for the cost of poles and wires.

FARMER: But I haven't got four hundred dollars! And my farm's mortgaged up to the hilt already. (Desperately) Can't you see? If I could only get juice I could get me an electric churn and make enough money to pay for the poles!

MANAGER: I'm sorry, Mr. Parker, but that's the way we operate. I'm afraid I can't do a thing for you.

FARMER: And I got to go on livin' the rest of my life with a kerosene lamp and a hand churn like my grandfather did when he came here?

MANAGER: Until you can raise the cost of the equipment.

FARMER (desperately): Isn't there anybody else I can talk to?

MANAGER: I'm the manager here. There's nobody else.

FARMER: Isn't there any other company I can go to?

MANAGER: We're the only one in this part of the State.

FARMER: Then when you turn me down I'm finished?

MANAGER: That's right. (A pause.)

FARMER: By God, the Government ought to do something about this!

Blackout

SCENE FIFTEEN-D

(City Man and Commissioner)

(Lights up on desk. COMMISSIONER seated, MAN standing, right of desk.)

MAN: [Fictional character] Mr. Commissioner, my electric bills are too high!

COMMISSIONER: [Ibid.] Have you had your meter tested?

MAN: Yes, I've had it tested twice. The meter's all right, but the bills are too high just the same.

COMMISSIONER: Mr. Clark, you're not paying one cent more for your electricity than anybody else.

MAN: I know that! That's what the trouble is, we're all paying too much!

COMMISSIONER: Mr. Clark, the company that sells you is working on a margin of seven to eight per cent. We consider that a fair profit. And so will you, if you're a business man.

MAN: Look, Mr. Commissioner. I'm not asking you to argue with me on behalf of the utilities. I am a taxpayer! I'm paying your salary I want you to go and argue with them! What's the Commission for, if it's not to help guys like me?

COMMISSIONER: Mr. Clark, the law permits any private enterprise to make a fair return on its investment.

MAN: It does, eh?

COMMISSIONER: And the law permits any company to charge any rate so long as that fair profit is maintained.

MAN: It does, eh? Well, tell me this: If laws like that are made for utilities, why aren't laws made to help people like me?

(General lighting on entire stage reveals FARMER, his WIFE, and CITY WIFE in their former positions.)

FARMER'S WIFE: And me!

CITY WIFE: And me!

FARMER: And me!

Blackout

SCENE FIFTEEN-E

(Parade and TVA Song)

LOUDSPEAKER: May 18th, 1933. The United States Government answers. [New York Times, May 19, 1933.]

(Lights pick up CLERK of Senate.)

CLERK (reads): The Tennessee Valley Authority is created for the purpose of: one, flood control of the Tennessee River Basin; two, elimination of soil erosion, and three, the social and economic rehabilitation of the swampland and hill people of this district; four, the generation and distribution of cheap electric power and the establishment of a cost yardstick. (As the CLERK reaches the words "the social and economic rehabilitation" orchestra plays the TVA song very softly. When the CLERK reaches the words "cost yardstick" lights fade on him. A motion picture of TVA activities and water flowing over the Norris Dam appears on the scrim, and through the scrim and on projection curtain upstage. A parade of men and women comes on stage behind scrim, singing the TVA song. Many of them carry lanterns. Red, yellow and amber side lights pick up the parade. They circle the stage and continue the song until act curtain falls, which comes down on movie of second large waterfall.)

THE TVA SONG: [Used with permission of copyright owner, Jean Thomas.]

My name is William Edwards,
I live down Cove Creek Way;
I'm working on the project
They call the TVA.
The Government begun it
When I was but a child,
And now they are in earnest
And Tennessee's gone wild.

All up and down the valley
They heard the glad alarm;
The Government means business-
It's working like a charm.
Oh, see them boys a-comin',
Their Government they trust,
Just hear their hammers ringin',
They'll build that dam or bust!

For things are surely movin',
Down here in Tennessee;
Good times for all the Valley,
For Sally and for me.

Curtain

Movie continues on front curtain until end of film.