

THE BOSS

By

PETER HOWARD

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MADE IN GREAT BRITAIN

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INTRODUCTION

The Boss was first produced at the World Assembly for Moral Re-Armament at Caux, Switzerland, in September, 1953. Since then it has been presented by different casts in Britain, France, Germany, Italy, Switzerland, Holland, Sweden, in Southern Rhodesia, South Africa, Nigeria and the Gold Coast, in the United States and in Brazil.

In Europe, *The Boss* has been given in some of the key steel and coal centres of the continent. It was invited to Aachen by Mr. Helmuth Burckhardt, then Chairman of the Advisory Council to the High Authority of the Schuman Plan. Subsequent performances in the State Opera House at Hamburg were introduced by Mr. Ole Björn Kraft, recently Foreign Minister of Denmark and Chairman of NATO, who said, "Today the unity of Europe is a question of life and death. MRA is a force capable of uniting all people and first of all the peoples of Western Europe." M. Robert Schuman attended showings of the play in French in the steel centre of Thionville, and later it was given in both French and German in Luxembourg where it was attended by members of the Cabinet and many of the leading personalities of the Schuman Plan High Authority. As a result, *The Boss* was invited to the Saar by the Prime Minister and other leaders.

The German cast of *The Boss* was twice invited to Holland. At the first showings in Delft in March, 1954, given on the invitation of the Mayor and other distinguished leaders of the Resistance, the audiences of a thousand rose spontaneously to their feet to applaud the cast. The Dutch Invitation Committee said, "This play demonstrates in an impressive way the solution

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to the ideological struggle in the world. It is a positive contribution to the unity of Europe." The play was later given in Amsterdam and Utrecht.

In Southern Rhodesia, the African première of *The Boss* took place in Salisbury on the eve of the opening of the new Central African Federal Parliament. It was attended by the Prime Minister, Sir Godfrey Huggins, and more than half the members of the new Parliament, European, African and Indian, the first time the theatre had been used for a multi-racial audience. *The Boss* was presented in the City Hall of Capetown before an inter-racial audience of 2,000 people, and also played to inter-racial audiences in many other parts of South Africa.

In Great Britain *The Boss* has been played in many of the industrial centres, as well as in London and Edinburgh. It has been given in the South Wales mining valleys, in Birmingham and other Midland cities, in Bristol, on Merseyside, Liverpool and Manchester and on Clydeside.

CHARACTERS

DANIEL IRONBANK	-							<i>Chairman and Managing Director of Ironbank's Ltd.</i>
MRS. IRONBANK	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	<i>His wife</i>
PETER IRONBANK	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	<i>Their son</i>
BIGGS	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	<i>The butler</i>
MISS SOAMES	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	<i>Mr. Ironbank's secretary</i>
OAKRIB	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	<i>Convenor of shop stewards at Ironbank's</i>
URCH	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	<i>A shop steward</i>
COOLCREEK	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	<i>A trade union organiser</i>

The action takes place in the home of
Daniel Ironbank at the present time

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The scene is the study of Daniel Ironbank, a rich and successful man. His job is to make machinery, and you have the feeling that his machines are as solid, swift, and effective as the man himself. His study is neat and his desk empty, as the rooms and desks usually are of those who can afford to employ trained staff to look after them. At the same time there are signs of a woman's art throughout the room—flowers, one or two colourful pictures to offset the groups of business friends and certificates of industrial merit that hang on the wall. There are a few chairs, mostly businesslike, one or two comfortable. As the curtain rises, Mrs. Ironbank is seen arranging the tie of the great man himself. She gives it a final pat.

MRS. IRONBANK There.

IRONBANK Thank you, my dear. You know it's an amazing thing. I can build in my plant a machine that'll cut steel to the accuracy of a thousandth of an inch—but I need you to tie my tie properly.

MRS. IRONBANK Nonsense, Dan. You know very well you can tie it yourself. You just enjoy being made a fuss of. That's all.

IRONBANK Well, perhaps I do. But don't you dare tell anybody. If the men got to hear of it they'd think I was turning soft in my old age. You can't be soft and successful in business, you know.

MRS. IRONBANK Is that so? Then when will you realise you owe all your success to me?

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IRONBANK How do you work that out ?

MRS. IRONBANK (*laughing at him*) I've seen less and less of you these last years. And you've become more and more successful. I used to think it was all the hard work that got the results. Now I realise that it's just the removal of my softer influences from your life that makes you so successful at the plant.

IRONBANK Let me tell you something, Mrs. Ironbank. I am not going to the plant at all today.

MRS. IRONBANK Oh, Dan, that's marvellous ! Can you really manage it ? You haven't stayed away from the plant since that time six years ago when you fell downstairs and broke your ankle.

IRONBANK My dear, a son doesn't come back from war every day of the week. I'm going to stay right here with you until Peter arrives. And then we'll celebrate. I've only got one thing that *must* be done today, but I've asked some of the men to come here and see me about it.

(*Looking at his watch*) They won't be many minutes now. Then we'll have the day free for Peter.

(*Enter Biggs the butler. He is the quintessence of butlerdom. He has a great sheaf of letters in his hand*)

BIGGS Good morning, madam. Good morning, sir. Your car is at the front door ready to take you to the office, sir. Miss Soames is ready to leave with you, sir. Here are your letters, sir. One for you, madam.

IRONBANK (*Slightly mimicking him*) Thank you, Biggs. Tell the chauffeur he can have a holiday, Biggs. A whole day

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off, Biggs. And show Miss Soames in here, Biggs. Quickly, Biggs.

BIGGS (*Imperturbably*) Certainly, sir. (*Exit*)

MRS. IRONBANK You must not tease Biggs, Dan. You almost made him blush.

IRONBANK Biggs blush? He hasn't blushed for years and you know it. Butlers never blush. Young women in our day used to practise the art of blushing. (*As Mrs. I. shakes her head*) You know very well you did—for hours—before the looking glass. That's how you caught me. It was part of your stock-in-trade.

(*Enter Miss Soames. She is the typical efficient secretary. She is dressed for the journey to the office. She carries in her hand a folder and a cheque book*)

MISS SOAMES Biggs told me you want me, Mr. Ironbank? There are a few letters and cheques that should be signed before you go to the office.

IRONBANK No.

MISS SOAMES It will only take a moment.

IRONBANK Miss Soames, *No, no, no, no, no*. And when I say *no*, I mean *no*.

MRS. IRONBANK Don't worry, Miss Soames. One of these days he'll forget himself and say "Yes".

IRONBANK You see how I get treated at home, Miss Soames. No, seriously; I am not doing any work today at all. Not one letter. Not one telephone call. Not one decision. I'm keeping myself free all day long.

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MRS. IRONBANK I thought you said some of the men were coming here.

IRONBANK Yes. They are due now. But once I'm through with them I want the rest of the day clear. Will you see to it, Miss Soames ?

MISS SOAMES Certainly, Mr. Ironbank. And I'm so glad Peter is coming home, Mrs. Ironbank. It's wonderful news.
(Enter Biggs)

BIGGS A Mr. Oakrib and some other gentlemen from the factory are at the door, sir. They say you asked them to come, sir.

IRONBANK Good. The sooner we start, the sooner we'll finish. Show them in, Biggs. *(Exit Biggs)*

MRS. IRONBANK Miss Soames and I will leave you, dear. Don't you think she might have a day off, too ?

IRONBANK I'm afraid not. She'll have to stay at the office telling everyone on the phone that I'm not available. She spends most of her time doing that, even when I am there.
(Exeunt Mrs. I. and Miss S. Ironbank goes to his desk, and from the top drawer pulls a folder with the facts of the case that he has to present to the men, and is refreshing his memory with it as the door opens and Biggs enters)

BIGGS Mr. Oakrib and party, sir. *(Exit Biggs. Tom Oakrib is typical of the best type of worker, solid and sincere. Urch is a toady, who sucks up to everybody. Coolcreek is smooth and inconspicuous. He keeps a back-seat all through the interview which now takes place. He has little to say so long as Urch and*

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Oakrib are there. But he misses nothing, and takes an occasional note)

IRONBANK *(Coming forward and shaking hands)* Morning, Oakrib. Morning, Urch. Sorry to drag you over here. But I expect it's a change from the machine room, even if it's a visit to the boss's home, eh?

URCH It's a pleasure to come here, Mr. Ironbank, sir.

OAKRIB Don't think you've met Mr. Coolcreek, sir. He's the new agent to our union. We brought him along, as you said it was something affecting union matters you wanted to discuss.

IRONBANK Good to know you, Coolcreek. I've heard of you. Won't you all sit down? *(They arrange themselves)* Smoke? *(He offers cigarettes)*. Now I've got some bad news to break to you—bad for you and bad for me.

OAKRIB We guessed it would be bad news, sir. We knew you wouldn't bring us here for nothing.

IRONBANK I had a notification yesterday from the government. In view of conditions, they have cancelled most of their future contracts for heavy war equipment with us. As you know, we have our warehouses stocked up to the roof. I'm afraid it means we shall have to put men off.

OAKRIB How many men?

IRONBANK We shall have to get rid of at least a thousand, I'm afraid, Oakrib.

OAKRIB How soon?

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IRONBANK I've worked out the figures. (*Consults his folder*)

We must drop a thousand in the next six weeks. We'll have to start with two hundred this week. I want it done in the best possible way. Those we took on last, go first. Don't disturb any of our old hands.

URCH I'm sure you'll do your best for us, sir.

COOLCREEK Can we have the figures on which this decision is based, Mr. Ironbank ?

IRONBANK I'm afraid I can't do that, Coolcreek. The directors would not agree to it. You'll just have to trust me.

URCH Oh, we do, sir !

OAKRIB The men won't like it.

IRONBANK Of course they won't. Neither do I. In business, things often happen that none of us like. You know that. Mind you, I hope it will only be a transitional phase. We'll transfer as quickly as possible to civilian output, and perhaps we can begin to take men on again by the end of the year.

OAKRIB (*As if Ironbank had not spoken*) The men won't like it. I don't like it myself. You say we must trust you, sir. This sort of thing does not make for trust.

IRONBANK (*Pricked by the tone of Oakrib*) Look here, Oakrib, I don't think that's the right tone to take. I don't think I deserve it. We've worked together a long time. How long is it ?

OAKRIB I started thirty-four years ago with you, sir. We came out of the army at the end of the first war the same week.

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IRONBANK Of course we did. You and I are old soldiers, Oakrib. Don't let's fall out now.

URCH I'm sure we can all do the best we can without unpleasantness.

OAKRIB Unpleasantness? One thousand families out of work in the next few weeks. Do you think they'll find it pleasant?

URCH I just meant that if we back each other up the best we can, we needn't fall out with each other.

OAKRIB But I don't think the men will want to back up Mr. Ironbank in this decision. I'm not sure it's the right decision. We may have to fall out this time.

IRONBANK For God's sake, Oakrib, be sensible. You know soldiering. My job at the head of Ironbanks is like a general's job. I've got eight thousand men on my hands. I've got a board of directors and the shareholders to think about. Putting it in a wider way, I've got the interests of the country to consider. They tell us they want us to make war machinery. We take on more men and go to it. Then they tell us to stop. I have to give the orders. I send in men here. I take 'em out there. I no more enjoy doing it than a general enjoys ordering men to battle. But it has to be done.

OAKRIB I understand that, sir. The thing is, whose war are you fighting when you fire a thousand men?

IRONBANK Whose war? We're all in this together, man.

OAKRIB Are we? You give your orders, sir. A thousand

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men lose their work. It means suffering for them. Some of them will go to rot. They'll never get another job. Some of their children will go short of grub. It's not their war you're fighting, is it, sir? At least *they* don't stand to win anything.

URCH This does nobody any good. Oakrib is upset this morning, sir. This sort of talk only makes more trouble.

OAKRIB (*Ignoring Urch*) It is a battle all right. But don't you worry about it. Whatever happens to me and my mates, things will go on much the same around this house, sir. You'll have your car and your butler, your food and drink—even in the worst of it, you'll not be missing much. And neither will your wife. I don't say I grudge it you. I respect you and Mrs. Ironbank. But I don't look at things just the way you do—and you can't expect it of me.

IRONBANK (*Standing up*) See here, Oakrib. Don't let's talk any more about this now. Let's leave the whole thing over till tomorrow. It's a shock to you as it was to me. I well understand how you feel.

COOLCREEK Perhaps you don't understand all he feels, Mr. Ironbank.

IRONBANK After all, I've known him a good bit longer than you have, Coolcreek. His boy and mine have been away fighting overseas together for the last eighteen months. They're in the same regiment, just as Oakrib and I were. (*Turning to Oakrib*) My son likes your boy very much. He says he's doing splendidly out there. My son gets home today, you know.

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OAKRIB I'm glad, sir.

IRONBANK Will your boy be coming soon?

OAKRIB He won't be home, sir.

IRONBANK Oh, he's bound to get home soon, surely!

OAKRIB No, sir, he'll not be back.

IRONBANK What do you mean—he won't be back? He's all right, isn't he?

OAKRIB He's never coming home, sir. Mrs. Oakrib and I got the telegram first thing this morning.

IRONBANK (*As the realisation sinks in*) Good God, man! I am sorry.

OAKRIB Yes, sir. I think you are. And yet, you're responsible for it.

IRONBANK Me? Pull yourself together, Oakrib. You don't know what you're saying.

OAKRIB Yes, I do. I don't mean you as a man, sir, of course. I've been in the mud and blood with you. You'd risk your life in wanting to save my son and me. I don't doubt it. Just the same, you and your crowd have got my boy's death on your hands. And I can't forget it.

IRONBANK You must be mad.

OAKRIB No, sir. I've begun to see things straight for the first time in my life. Mr. Coolcreek here helped me to do it. That's all.

IRONBANK What's Coolcreek been saying to you?

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OAKRIB It's a matter of common sense once you see it. Fellows like myself and my son, sir,—well, you look on us as soldiers. You said so yourself just now. "I'm like a general," you said. "I send men in here. I take 'em out there." Well, sir, if you're that kind of a soldier sometimes you feel like some kind of a slave, especially when a thousand of you have to be fired. Then war comes. Fellows like myself, sir, we'll fight for what's good and decent. You know that. But so often credits and customers and profit are the real motives of war—all wrapped up in fine phrases about democracy and freedom. Fellows like us, we don't rightly understand. But we obey. So the slaves go overseas from one part of the great machine you and your crowd run to attend to another part of it. By order. And by order that boy of mine and millions like him will never come home again.

IRONBANK You've no right to say these things. My own son has been fighting there with yours.

OAKRIB I know that. You believe in that great machine of yours, sir. You're ready to sacrifice your own son as well as mine to keep it running. I grant you that.

IRONBANK You'd better go, Oakrib. We'll talk some more tomorrow. We shan't get far like this.

OAKRIB I'm going. But I warn you, sir, the men won't go along with this decision you've told us about. We'll fight a war all right, but on different sides from you, sir. We'll strike the whole plant if you fire a thousand of us.

(Oakrib leaves with Urch trailing behind him)

URCH *(To Oakrib)* Don't let's leave like this. *(To Ironbank)*

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Oh, I'm sorry, sir! Thank you, sir, I'm sure we'll work things out. He's very upset about his son, sir. You'll understand. (Exit Urch)

(Ironbank stands for a moment, shaken by his feelings. Then he walks slowly to his desk, puts back the folder with the business details of it in the drawer. As he turns, he sees Coolcreek still sitting quietly watching him)

IRONBANK Haven't you gone? You've certainly done a job with Oakrib. I never expected to hear a man like him say things like that to me.

COOLCREEK Well, I'm glad you don't blame him. He's a good fellow, Oakrib. And he respects you as a man. He likes you.

IRONBANK Likes me? It was true. Look what you've done to him now.

COOLCREEK Don't blame me. It's my work.

IRONBANK Work? An agent for a Trade Union? Honestly, Coolcreek, some of you fellows don't know what real work is. If you worked with your hands for a bit, your thinking might be more wholesome.

COOLCREEK I work all right. I work a twenty-four hour day.

IRONBANK Nonsense.

COOLCREEK It's true.

IRONBANK Nobody works twenty-four hours a day. It's impossible. It's against union rules.

COOLCREEK Well, I do.

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IRONBANK How can you ?

COOLCREEK I work in sickness and health, sleeping and waking, summer and winter, night and day. You see, I'm a professional revolutionary.

IRONBANK I thought as much. You spend your life poisoning the minds of men like Oakrib.

COOLCREEK I don't think it's poison. Really I don't. I'm a revolutionary because I believe in the necessity and value of revolution.

IRONBANK There's no value and no necessity for Oakrib to say the things he said to me.

COOLCREEK I felt for you. I've got a son of my own. I understand how Oakrib feels—but also how you feel, too.

IRONBANK You're a most extraordinary fellow, Coolcreek. I don't think you're a real revolutionary at all.

COOLCREEK Oh, I promise you I am! I want to see all your crowd smashed. It's got to happen. But I don't dislike you as people. You're as much the creature of economic circumstances as those thousand men you are going to try and fire.

IRONBANK How can you believe all this stuff ?

COOLCREEK See here, Mr. Ironbank. You're a successful man. You came from nothing or practically nothing. You've earned every penny with sweat, skill and guts. I give you credit for it. You believe in things—things like machines and money and motor-cars—things you can smell

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and see and handle. You don't believe in much else, do you ?

IRONBANK Certainly I do. I may not be all that I should be as a man, but I still go to church every Sunday. Haven't missed for years.

COOLCREEK Oh, I know all that ! But it's quite possible to go to church for years without believing in a thing. I did it myself for a long time. It's funny how few people suspect you of being a revolutionary if only you go to church. It's a splendid cover. No, the question I asked you, Mr. Ironbank, is whether you *believed* in all you hear at church ?

IRONBANK (*Very uneasy and defensively*) Of course I believe in it. That is—I may not believe in every detail. But I believe that religion, faith, God,—call it what you like—is absolutely necessary. It's the cement of society.

COOLCREEK That's fair enough. You think society needs cement. I think it needs dynamite. But there's no need for us to quarrel on account of it. We're both sincere men.

IRONBANK It's hard to believe that a sincere man wants to dynamite society.

COOLCREEK Not at all. Look here. We both agree that society needs something. Otherwise you wouldn't be hunting around for some cement. Society's just like a building. The roof's a bit leaky, the walls are not too solid and the foundations have slipped a long way in the last hundred years or so. You have a pretty comfortable room in the old building, Mr. Ironbank. Some of us don't. You want to buy a few bags of cement cheap in church on

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Sunday if you can, and patch the place up so that at any rate it will last your time. I and my friends don't think the job can be done on the cheap. We have decided to dynamite the whole place to dust and start again from scratch.

IRONBANK It sounds fine, Coolcreek. But you don't care how many people are still living in the house when you blow it to dust. That's the point. You mean to dynamite us, too.

COOLCREEK You're not quite fair there, Mr. Ironbank. Some of us may want to see your lot dynamited. Speaking for myself, I wouldn't like to blow people up at all. We've given everyone notice to quit the building. We've told 'em what's going to happen. If they stay on, it's their own risk. But take a man like yourself. I like you very much indeed. Really I do. I wouldn't have stayed behind to have this word with you if that was not true.

IRONBANK Yet you've poisoned Oakrib against me. You're the man who put it in his heart to strike the plant.

COOLCREEK That's true enough.

IRONBANK What good can it do? It'll only cause more suffering.

COOLCREEK That's true also. But every strike plays our game. And the suffering creates the bitterness that is our main dynamite.

IRONBANK It's a damnable business. I don't think Oakrib will do it. He's too decent a fellow.

COOLCREEK Oakrib *is* a decent fellow. Decency is all right. It keeps people happy and changes nothing. I'm not afraid

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of it. Decency in a man and a nation is rather like a dummy in a child's mouth. You hand it out quietly when there looks like being a row. It keeps people quiet but it's not the real thing. No. Oakrib was a decent fellow. He was one of the millions of people in this country so drugged with a sense of their own decency that they never do anything effective—until I got hold of him, and took him in hand.

IRONBANK He won't lead the men out on strike. He's got too much common sense.

COOLCREEK He'll take them out, all right, when I tell him to do it. He's got common sense as you say, and he can never resist my main argument. It's one that never fails.

IRONBANK What's that?

COOLCREEK You, of course.

IRONBANK Me?

COOLCREEK Certainly. You always help so much. You always react exactly the way we expect and exactly the way we suspect.

IRONBANK I look after my people well. Everyone knows that. Oakrib knows it.

COOLCREEK Of course you do, Mr. Ironbank. You're a decent fellow just like Oakrib. I agree with that. But you're as ineffective at this game as he used to be. You do so many of the right things from the wrong motive and in the wrong way. You're licked from the start. You see, you're only concerned to keep your own business running. How can you think and plan adequately to deal with people like

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myself who are working as a global force for world revolution? You're trying to cement your own corner. We're out to dynamite the globe. You said you were like a general. Well, you're like a general fighting a world war with only a parish map in your hands. It just can't be done.
(Enter Mrs. Ironbank, running)

MRS. IRONBANK Dan, he's here, he's here! (Seeing Coolcreek)
Oh, I'm so sorry, I thought you were alone.
(Enter Biggs)

BIGGS Mr. Peter is just coming up the stairs, sir.
(Biggs holds the door open. Enter Peter Ironbank, a young fellow of about 25, taut, trim and electric. He puts a small bag he is carrying on the floor, throws his coat and hat on a chair and flings his arms around his mother. Exit Biggs)

PETER Mother, it's wonderful to see you again. You look marvellous.

MRS. IRONBANK (Holding him at arm's length and looking at him)
My dear, you've lost a lot of weight. You're so much thinner.

IRONBANK It's what usually happens after a few months on army rations, Mother. Nothing that good home cooking won't put right.

PETER (Turning to him) Father, so very good to be home!

COOLCREEK Well, if you'll excuse me, Mr. Ironbank, I must be going along now.

IRONBANK Oh, Peter, I don't think you've met Coolcreek. He's the new Trade Union agent for the plant.

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PETER How do you do ?

COOLCREEK Very well, thank you. And truly glad to see you safely home, if I may say so.

MRS. IRONBANK (*Going forward and shaking hands*) I don't think I've had the pleasure of meeting you before, Mr. Coolcreek.

IRONBANK Be careful of Coolcreek. He's been telling me he wants to dynamite us all.

MRS. IRONBANK Oh does he ? Perhaps I can teach you how to make him shift without such drastic treatment.

COOLCREEK It's a real pleasure to meet you, Mrs. Ironbank. Well, goodbye, Mr. Ironbank. Goodbye, all.

PETER Wait a minute. You're the very man for me. You'll know where Tom Oakrib is.

IRONBANK Oakrib ? What do you want him for ?

PETER I've got to see him at once.

IRONBANK Oh, for Heaven's sake, Peter! You've only just got home. Can't it wait ?

PETER I've got a message for Tom from his boy. All of you must hear it.

COOLCREEK If you'll come down to the plant with me, I know just where to find him.

MRS. IRONBANK Oh, no! Can't Tom Oakrib come up here ?

THE BOSS

I'm sure Mr. Coolcreek would fetch him. Don't go off as soon as you've got home, Peter.

COOLCREEK (*To Mr. Ironbank*) Do you agree?

IRONBANK Very well.

COOLCREEK I'll be back with him in half-an-hour. (*Goes*)

PETER I'm sorry to be a nuisance. But I promised young Oakrib that I'd see his father first thing when I got home. If it had not been for Oakrib's son, I should not have got home at all. You see, he saved my life.

CURTAIN

ACT II

ACT II

The scene is the same as Act I, the time about half an hour later. Mrs. Ironbank is writing a letter on her husband's desk as the curtain rises. Ironbank comes in.

IRONBANK Where's Peter now ?

MRS. IRONBANK Upstairs in his room. He's unpacking his bags. He wanted to be left alone till Oakrib gets here.

IRONBANK Oakrib and I had a bit of a difference this morning.

MRS. IRONBANK Why ?

IRONBANK We have to put off some men at the plant. Oakrib, naturally enough, doesn't like it. Neither do I. But he said some strong things to me. Very strong things indeed.

MRS. IRONBANK Let's forget about all that. After all, it's a terrible day for him with this news about his son. Think what we should be feeling if it were our Peter.

IRONBANK I know, my dear. I can forget it all right. The question is whether he will.

(Enter Biggs)

BIGGS That Mr. Oakrib is back again, sir. With a Mr. Coolcreek and Mr. Urch, sir.

IRONBANK Show them in.

(Exit Biggs)

MRS. IRONBANK I'll go and tell Peter they're here.

(She goes. After a moment Biggs opens the door, saying)

THE BOSS

The gentlemen, sir. (*Ushers Oakrib, Urch and Coolcreek in. Then goes*)

OAKRIB I wouldn't have come back today, sir, if Mr. Coolcreek here hadn't brought word that you wanted to see me.

URCH I came along too, sir. We all thought it best. I'm sure there's some way of straightening things out without unpleasantness. (*Glancing from Oakrib to Ironbank and adding hurriedly and nervously, as he sees their stormy faces*) If you see what I mean.

IRONBANK It's not me that wants to see you, Oakrib, it's my son. Insisted on sending for you at once. He wouldn't say anything to us until you came. I don't know just what he has in mind. Please sit down, Oakrib.

(*Enter Peter, followed by Mrs. Ironbank. He goes straight up to Oakrib. Takes both his hands*)

PETER Tom, I'm damned sorry. It's not much to say, but I mean it.

OAKRIB (*Taking his hands away*) I'm sure of that.

PETER I had to see you. He asked me to. You see I was with him when it happened.

OAKRIB For God's sake, tell me what *did* happen?

MRS. IRONBANK (*Putting her hand on Oakrib's sleeve*) Let's sit down, shall we? Can't we all sit down? It will make it easier, you know. (*They sit slowly, all except Peter. He stands in the centre of the stage while he tells his story*)

PETER Your son and I were good friends, Tom.

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OAKRIB (*Bitterly*) He was a corporal. You're a captain, sir, no doubt you know each other. But not much chance of being friends unless things have changed a lot since my day, which I don't think they have.

PETER But we were friends, really we were. We thought alike on so many things.

COOLCREEK Thought alike?

OAKRIB My son and you?

PETER Yes. You see we used to exchange bits of news from home. We saw a lot of each other. One day when I asked him how his family were, he showed me a letter he'd had from you. It mentioned you, Mr. Coolcreek.

COOLCREEK What did it say about me?

PETER You'd been talking to Tom here about the state of the world. About the need for a revolution of the whole, bloody, rotten system—at least, those were the words Tom said you said.

OAKRIB He said it all right. And he meant it. I mean it too.

PETER In that letter to your son, Tom, you spoke of injustice. You actually mentioned my name. I don't know if you remember?

OAKRIB I remember.

PETER You said you didn't see why I should go to a school and university and then be an officer in the army just because Dad is rich, while your son had to start work in the plant at the age of fourteen and sweat it out as a corporal.

THE BOSS

URCH That sort of thing doesn't help, Tom. Really it doesn't. You should never have said it.

OAKRIB For God's sake, shut up, Urch! (*To Peter*) Did my boy really show you that letter?

PETER He did. He lent me the books you've been sending him, too. He showed me every letter you wrote him for the last six months. All the things you've been thinking and feeling, Tom.

OAKRIB I didn't expect you'd be seeing them. They weren't written for you. But, by God, I'm glad you saw them!

PETER So am I. You see I agreed with every word of them.

IRONBANK Agreed with it? Peter, you don't mean to say you fell for that stuff?

MRS. IRONBANK Please, dear. I want to hear all that Peter and Mr. Oakrib have to say to us.

PETER Of course, I agreed. If you're out in the open with the enemy trying to kill you, with nothing but blood and hell and fear around you, it makes you kind of take stock—think out all your values again. I and your son talked a lot together these last months, Tom. We made up our minds to start together, to come back home and work with you. We were out for something absolutely new in the world.

IRONBANK You never said a word about all this in your letters.

PETER No, Father. I wanted to tell you about it face to face. when and if I got home.

ACT II

OAKRIB I thought you were going to tell me what happened to my boy.

PETER We were out on night patrol together. We were going home soon. We both thought it would be our last patrol. We made a joke or two about it as we started out. We were near the enemy around midnight. There was just a glimmer of the moon. Not much. Suddenly somebody threw something at us. I flung myself down flat on the ground. A flare went up. I saw a grenade a yard away from me. Your son hurled himself on it just before the flare went out. Then the grenade exploded. It was the bravest thing I have ever seen.

COOLCREEK (*After a long pause*) Was he blown to bits?

PETER I don't think he felt any pain.

OAKRIB Thank God for that.

PETER He just whispered to me, "Peter, better me than you. You'll do much for the workers with all that damned education of yours." Then he sort of grinned. I could just see him in the moonlight. "Tell Dad," he said. "Stick with him." Then he died.
(*There is another long pause*)

MRS. IRONBANK Mr. Oakrib, I don't know what to say to you. What can I say? All I know is, you must be proud of your son.

OAKRIB Proud? Yes, I've always been proud of him. Pride doesn't help much, though, when the boy's dead.

PETER I found this among his things, Tom. It's not much—

THE BOSS

just the start of a letter to you. It was on his sleeping bag when I got back. I thought you'd like it right away. *(He hands a slip of paper to Oakrib. But Oakrib is too moved to read it, and hands it back to Peter)*

PETER *(Reading)* "Dear Dad. Thanks for your letters. Keep sending them. They do put life into a fellow and give some meaning to this whole bloody, crazy mess. Tell Mum not to worry. I'll be back soon, and then we'll get on with the real job—to end for ever this heartless, brainless . . ." *(He pauses)*

OAKRIB Go on.

PETER That's where it ends, Tom. That's where he had to go out on patrol.

OAKRIB So that's where it ends.

PETER No, Tom. That's where it begins.

MRS. IRONBANK Can I come and see Mrs. Oakrib?

OAKRIB That would be good of you, Mrs. Ironbank. But later on, if you don't mind. Not today, not for some time yet. She can't see anybody now.

IRONBANK I'd like to help, Oakrib, if you'd let me.

OAKRIB How can you help?

IRONBANK Well, it's an awkward thing to say, but at times like this if there are any little extras that are needed—you know what it is. Anyway, you and Mrs. Oakrib must certainly call on me for any assistance you may need in—

OAKRIB *(Breaking in furiously)* Money! That's all you can

ACT II

think of. That's your God. You buy the sweat of the workers with it and now, by God, you think you can pay for our blood with it, too !

MRS. IRONBANK Don't talk like that, Mr. Oakrib.

URCH Come away, Tom, do.

OAKRIB (*Shaking him off*) He offered me money. You all heard him. Money—money for Mrs. Oakrib and me. Yes, I'll come away, Urch, but I've had enough of this. We'll have a showdown here and now. We'll see whether all this fine talk of your boy means anything, or whether it's just a lot of hot air.

PETER What do you mean, Tom ?

OAKRIB Just this. Your father is going to fire a thousand men from the plant. He told me so this morning.

URCH Don't let's start up all that again now. Let's leave it till tomorrow. Please.

OAKRIB Tomorrow I am going to strike the plant. We'll take the whole lot out. That's right, isn't it, Coolcreek ?

COOLCREEK That's right. That's all you can do now.

OAKRIB (*To Peter*) This is the thing my son spoke to you about. Justice. The struggle for the rights of the workers throughout the world. My son believed in it. He believed in you, too, if what you've told me is true. And I think it is. It sounds just like my boy. He paid for your future with his blood, just as your father paid for your past, your school, your university, with his money. My son, if he were here,

THE BOSS

would be with me. Where do you stand? I'm going back to the plant to talk to the workers there. There'll be a mass meeting to vote on this strike. We'll give you a chance to speak. You can tell your father's own workers what you really believe, what you told us this morning. If you're with me, you'll join me. If not, stay here with your father and welcome home, I'm sure.

(Oakrib sweeps out, followed by Urch making deprecatory gestures to indicate how difficult everyone and everything is)

COOLCREEK *(To Mrs. Ironbank)* I'm sorry your son has had a homecoming like this, Mrs. Ironbank, truly I am. You must be proud of him, as Oakrib was of his boy. He'll decide aright, never fear.

IRONBANK What do you mean—decide aright? What is there to decide about? You don't think my own boy would side with others against me, do you?

COOLCREEK Goodbye, Mr. Ironbank—and good luck. *(He goes)* *(Peter looks first at his mother, then to his father, then he moves slowly towards the door)*

MRS. IRONBANK Where are you going, Peter?

PETER Where do you think, Mother?

IRONBANK You can't leave us like this, Peter. I simply don't believe it. I won't.

PETER Don't make it harder for yourself—or for me, Father. I don't find it easy, but I must stand with Oakrib in this business.

IRONBANK Young Oakrib saved your life. Thank God he

ACT II

did. But you'd have saved his, you know you would. You'd have fallen on the grenade yourself if you'd seen it first.

PETER Perhaps I would. Perhaps I wouldn't. It's hard to say what you'll do in a moment like that.

IRONBANK Anyway, it's natural that you should feel churned up inside, emotionally upset by it all. But that doesn't mean that from a sense of duty you have to do what you know in your heart is the wrong thing—to side with Oakrib against your own father.

PETER It's not that at all. Can't you see? I really do believe in the things these men stand for.

IRONBANK You know nothing about it except what Oakrib just told you.

PETER Of course I do, Dad. At least I know enough to feel plenty about it. A thousand men out of a job—without a chance to discuss or explain or hear the reasons. From one day to the next their pay packet goes down the drain, and fear comes walking through the front door. That's not what young Oakrib saved my life for. And you know it.

IRONBANK Don't say another word. Think of your Mother's feelings if you won't consider mine.

MRS. IRONBANK No. let him say what he really feels, dear. My feelings are all right, really they are. Women are much tougher than you think, you know.

PETER Good old Mother. You understand. (*Turning again to Mr. Ironbank*) Father, I wish I could explain to you. I wish

THE BOSS

I could explain to myself. I still don't understand how it's possible to love anyone as much as I love you, and at the same time to hate everything he stands for.

IRONBANK Hate what I stand for ?

PETER Yes. I hate it. And all my life so far I've stood for it myself. Look here, Father. You're what they call a self-made man, aren't you ?

IRONBANK Yes, I am. And proud of it. What's wrong with that ?

PETER Nothing. You're right to be proud of it. But what did you do for me ?

MRS. IRONBANK Your father did everything for you, Peter. He gave you the best education this country offers. He wanted you to have the chances he'd never had himself in life.

PETER I know. I'm grateful for the idea and all that you both meant to do for me. But look what happened.

IRONBANK What *has* happened to you ? You're out of your senses, if you ask me.

PETER No, Father. Thanks to young Oakrib, I've come to my senses, at last. You sent me to an expensive school, where they taught me I was better than people who didn't go to a school of that sort. You sent me to an expensive university, where they trained my brain to argue my conscience out of existence. I was educated to believe that what I wanted in the world was the right thing for me to have. That expensive school and that expensive university turned out a cheap

ACT II

sort of fellow—I expected a good job in your business as my right—

IRONBANK (*Interrupting*) There's nothing wrong with that. Peter, you're going to run that business after I'm gone. It's natural.

PETER Maybe, Father. But I don't think so. Anyway, the point is that all the advantages you gave me left me with one burning ambition—to make a success of my own life. Success became my motive in everything I did.

IRONBANK It's a better motive than failure.

PETER Is it? It ends in failure, anyway. Out there with young Oakrib, Father, the dangers of war sharpened my thinking and the boredom of war gave me a chance to use it. I saw how the ambition of millions of fellows like me leads to indifference. We just don't care about anybody else but ourselves, and we end up by believing in nobody and nothing except ourselves either.

IRONBANK You're *not* like that, Peter. It's a travesty, these things you are saying.

PETER I am—or at any rate I was till young Oakrib talked some sense into me. . . . You're like that, too, you know, Father.

MRS. IRONBANK Oh, Peter, don't say things like that to your father!

PETER I don't want to, Mother. But it's time they were said. How else can I explain what I feel to him? Success comes first with him, too—he puts it before people. He doesn't

THE BOSS

care for anyone but himself. Otherwise how could he fire a thousand men and think so little of it? He doesn't believe in anything except how right he is—otherwise he'd give others a chance to say what they feel before he announced his decisions.

IRONBANK Have you anything else to say to me?

PETER I don't think so. Except perhaps this. I'm going to go to Oakrib now. I'm with him in this fight. I promised his son, and I'm going to keep that promise. I wish you'd let me tell him for you that in the circumstances of my return, in the circumstances of his son's death if you like, you'll reconsider your decision.

IRONBANK I see. Well, if you think I'm going to be blackmailed by you or by anybody else into doing something that cuts across all sound business principles, and all sound sense, you must think again. You're crazy. That sort of thing would ruin Ironbanks. I'll not have it.

PETER Ironbanks are going to ruin a thousand families anyway. You're going to have that, aren't you?

IRONBANK Business is business, dammit. You just don't understand these things. I do. I know Ironbanks. I built it up from nothing. I know the way things have always been done, the way they've got to be done—and how . . .

(Peter, during the last utterance of Mr. Ironbank, has been moving towards the door. He is already through it before his father has finished and Mr. Ironbank has to shout the last words towards a door that softly closes as he finishes. Mr. Ironbank sits down slumped in his chair. Mrs. Ironbank rises, goes over and strokes his brow)

ACT II

MRS. IRONBANK Yes, dear, you've lost half your audience.

IRONBANK For God's sake, don't you start.

MRS. IRONBANK There, now you'll be feeling better.

IRONBANK I feel like hell.

MRS. IRONBANK You'll feel better in a minute.

IRONBANK I hope so, Mother ; I don't know what I'd do without you.

MRS. IRONBANK I don't know either, dear. But I'm there all right. Don't worry.

IRONBANK Peter isn't there, though. What a hell of a day ! And we'd been so looking forward to it. *(After a pause)* Of course the boy will get over all this. It's just a phase, or something. Don't you think so ?

MRS. IRONBANK I'm not so sure. Actually, I'm not sure that I really want him to get over it.

IRONBANK What ? For Heaven's sake don't tell me that you agree with all this stuff.

MRS. IRONBANK No, dear. I don't agree with all of it. Of course not.

IRONBANK Thank God for that, anyway.

MRS. IRONBANK I think he was all worked up, or he would never have said some of the things to you that he did. And, of course, it's absolutely silly to think that all this bitterness and resentment will do anything except make other people resentful and bitter, too. All the same, dear, I don't think

THE BOSS

I've ever been more proud of our son than I am right now.

IRONBANK Did you say "*Proud*"?

MRS. IRONBANK Yes, dear. Women *are* funny. You've often said so. It's true, just the same. I suppose there must be thousands of boys like our Peter in the world, and probably a good many hundreds of husbands just like you.

IRONBANK There's nothing funny about that, is there?

MRS. IRONBANK No, dear. Except that I believe I've got the finest husband and the finest son in the whole world.

IRONBANK I don't see what this has got to do with being proud of Peter. He upset me terribly. He talked as if he was ashamed of me.

MRS. IRONBANK No, dear. He didn't mean it that way. I know he didn't. But Peter did something this morning that was very brave. He challenged all our values and all his own. He smashed them to bits in front of us. And I am proud of him because as he talked I realised I should have done the same thing myself, years and years ago.

IRONBANK Do you mean to say you feel the way that Peter feels?

MRS. IRONBANK No, no. But I understand what he feels. And more than that, I see how responsible I am for what he is going through and what you are going through, too, today.

IRONBANK Nonsense. You've been a wonderful mother to that boy—and a wonderful wife to me.

MRS. IRONBANK No dear. That's just the trouble. It's so easy to

ACT II

make you men think we women are so wonderful. And we do it—so long as you keep on behaving the way that suits us best. But we aren't wonderful at all. We're selfish and soft—at least I've begun to see in the last half hour how soft and selfish I have been—and just plain stupid, too.

IRONBANK That's not true.

MRS. IRONBANK It is. When we got married, we weren't well off. It's so long ago. Remember ?

IRONBANK Of course I do. I was afraid I'd not be able to pay all the bills.

MRS. IRONBANK But I was always more afraid of it than you were. I wanted comfort. I wanted security. Above all, I wanted a pleasant life. I've been such a fool. I see how hopelessly confused my motives have been ever since we got married. I've appeased you and pleased you and pressed you and pushed you every inch of the way. Why, I've believed for years that our happiness depended on your success in business.

IRONBANK Well, doesn't it ? Be sensible. We haven't done so badly out of Ironbanks.

MRS. IRONBANK You've done marvellously. But success has been my god—and yours, too, if you're honest. Now our boy has revolted against it. And he's right. He's absolutely right. It's a respectable, profitable, comfortable god—and as false as hell.

IRONBANK You're upsetting yourself.

MRS. IRONBANK You mean I am upsetting you, Dan.

THE BOSS

IRONBANK You certainly are. I should have thought today of all days you'd have stood by me.

MRS. IRONBANK I'll stand by you all right. But it's not much good standing by you, if we're both standing in the wrong place.

IRONBANK You're all of you trying to shake me. First Tom Oakrib, then that fellow, Coolcreek. Then Peter, and now even you. I tell you, I will not be shaken.

MRS. IRONBANK We need to be shaken, both of us. If we're not upset in the right way, Mr. Coolcreek really will take his dynamite and upset us permanently.

IRONBANK You needn't take that talk too seriously.

MRS. IRONBANK I take it very seriously indeed.

IRONBANK I can handle Coolcreek—and Oakrib, too. Surely you see that?

MRS. IRONBANK I see that they've done something to our Peter that neither you or I were able to handle.

IRONBANK Now, don't say that.

MRS. IRONBANK Look here, Dan. You've probably got as much ability in that head of yours as Coolcreek and Oakrib put together. I know that.

IRONBANK Well, then?

MRS. IRONBANK But they've captured Peter. We've got to face it, and they'll beat us every time if we go on like this.

IRONBANK Why?

ACT II

MRS. IRONBANK Because we have made a god of success. Because we only think in terms of the things our god has taught us to worship—profits, production, wages, man-hours—you know all the things you talk about, think about, dream about all life long.

IRONBANK Dash it all, woman, they're the things that make business run.

MRS. IRONBANK No, that's where you're wrong, Dan. We're out of date and we don't know it. I'm beginning to see things much more clearly. Ideas are the things Coolcreek trades in. He's given an idea to Oakrib and to our son Peter. It's an idea that is licking you. It's an idea that will stop the plant tomorrow unless you and I can think of a better one.

IRONBANK Ideas? That's a new line of country for me. I haven't had a new idea, except for the plant, for a good many years now. I'm afraid I've been pretty well satisfied with the ideas I've had in the past. I suppose you can't teach an old dog new tricks.

MRS. IRONBANK You're not an old dog, Dan. And we've got to learn new tricks and learn them fast. It's not just the plant. It's our son. He's such a fine boy, Dan. We've got to give him something better than he's got at present. We've failed him so hopelessly. We can't afford to fail him now.

IRONBANK Do you really think we've failed him, Mother?

MRS. IRONBANK You know we have, Dan. I believe by tomorrow morning we'll have thought out something that will make Mr. Coolcreek's dynamite sound silly, even to him.

THE BOSS

IRONBANK My God, that's the first thing you've said to me that I really like. What do you propose?

MRS. IRONBANK Dan, I propose that I go upstairs right now and change into some old clothes, and we'll spend today in the country together.

IRONBANK But the plant . . .

MRS. IRONBANK You'll do much more harm than good in the plant right now. Besides you're taking the day off. Don't you remember?

IRONBANK But my dear . . .

MRS. IRONBANK (*As Biggs comes in*) Here's Biggs with some coffee for you. Think it over. I'm going to change my clothes anyway.

(*She goes*)

BIGGS Your coffee, sir.

IRONBANK (*To himself*) Hell and damnation!

BIGGS Yes, sir.

IRONBANK Biggs, you're the only person left around here who agrees with me.

BIGGS Yes, sir.

IRONBANK You never feel like kicking anyone, do you, Biggs?

BIGGS I usually restrain the impulse, sir.

IRONBANK Biggs, I wish you'd kick me now, good and hard.

BIGGS Excuse me, sir.

ACT II

IRONBANK You heard me.

BIGGS I could hardly do that, sir. I hope I know my place, sir.

IRONBANK That's the trouble. I have been surrounded so long by people who all know their place, that I have been too damn certain I knew mine.

BIGGS I couldn't ask for a more considerate employer, sir.

IRONBANK Oh, shut up, Biggs ! The trouble is, if I am not to be the Boss any longer, who the devil is ?

BIGGS (*As he goes*) I wouldn't know, sir. I think you'd better talk to Mrs. Ironbank about that, sir.

CURTAIN

ACT III

ACT III

The scene is the same as before. It is the following morning. After the curtain rises there is a pause. Then Biggs enters with clean ashtrays, etc., which he sets and arranges. Enter Miss Soames who begins to arrange the chairs for a conference with the men, which Ironbank has called for the morning.

MISS SOAMES When you've finished with the ashtrays, could you help me with the chairs, Biggs ?

BIGGS Certainly, Miss. But it looks as if it's going to be a stormy meeting and that's a fact. (*He begins to help with the chairs*)

MISS SOAMES What makes you say that?

BIGGS I happened to be down in the town last night, after my work, partaking of a little refreshment, and I heard the noise of yelling and shouting from the Union Hall. Curiosity impelled me, Miss, and I went along to see what it was all about. The whole place was in an uproar, Miss. Some were for Mr. Ironbank, some for Oakrib, and that new chap, Coolcreek. Some wanted a strike and some were sticking up for the old common-sense way. It looked like the Old Guard was going to win after all, Miss, when they called on Mr. Peter to speak.

MISS SOAMES Mr. Peter ?

BIGGS There were plenty of boos and catcalls to start with, on account of Mr. Peter being who he was, if you understand

THE BOSS

what I mean, Miss. But when they heard what he had to say, and he read that letter from Oakrib's son, and he pledged himself to carry on the young fellow's fight, you could have heard a pin drop. It was all over, bar the voting. The strike's on.

(Enter Peter)

PETER Good morning, Miss Soames. Good morning, Biggs.

BIGGS Good morning, Mr. Peter.

PETER What are you up to? Just the same old Biggs, gossiping away as usual, I'll bet. You know, Miss Soames, I think Biggs wouldn't know what to do with himself half the day if he stopped gossiping.

BIGGS (*As a distant bell sounds*) Excuse me, Mr. Peter. There's the bell. I think that may be the men from the plant, Mr. Peter. (*Exit Biggs*)

PETER What are all the chairs for?

MISS SOAMES Your father told me to put some chairs out ready for Mr. Oakrib and his friends.

PETER It's a funny thing, Father getting them back here again. Do you have any idea what he has in mind, Miss Soames? (*As she shakes her head*) Oh, well, I suppose even if you did, you wouldn't tell me—after yesterday, I mean.
(*Enter Biggs with Oakrib, Coolcreek and Urch*)

BIGGS Mr. Oakrib and party, Mr. Peter.

PETER Hello, Tom. Hello, Urch. Glad to see you, Cool-

ACT III

creek. (*They all exchange greetings*) Biggs, will you tell my father that his guests are here?

(*Exit Biggs*)

OAKRIB I don't know so much about guests, Peter. I don't feel like a guest. I feel like an enemy. I can't make out why your Dad wanted us up here again. Yesterday I could understand. He expected you to come back. He didn't want to be out when you arrived. But to have us back again this morning—it's just not natural. I don't like it. I wish I hadn't come.

URCH Don't upset yourself before we start, Tom. I think it's very considerate of Mr. Ironbank to see us in his home instead of at the plant.

OAKRIB Urch, you make me sick.

COOLCREEK Steady, Tom. Let's keep all our steam for Ironbank. After all, it was the skill and sweat of the workers that built places like this. No reason why we shouldn't look at the inside of them from time to time.

OAKRIB (*Looking around*) I hadn't thought of it that way.

PETER Anyway, I'm mighty glad to see you all here.
(*Enter Ironbank in time to hear Peter's last sentence*)

IRONBANK So am I, gentlemen. I'm really pleased you were able to come this morning.

MRS. IRONBANK (*Who has entered behind her husband*) And so am I. Won't you all sit down?

OAKRIB (*As they settle into chairs*) It's good of you to say so,

THE BOSS

Mrs. Ironbank—and you, sir. But I'd just as soon get our business done as quickly as possible and get away, if you don't mind. The men will get uneasy if we're up here too long. They don't understand it. And neither do I.

URCH Don't start off like that. It doesn't help at all.

MISS SOAMES Do you want me to stay, Mr. Ironbank ?

IRONBANK You may as well stay, Miss Soames. Oh, just slip outside and ask Biggs to come in, too. I want everyone to hear what I've got to say this morning.

(Exit Miss Soames) It won't take long, Oakrib. But it's important. At least, it's important to me.

OAKRIB Is it about the men and the strike ?

IRONBANK Yes, it is. But first of all it's about my son.

PETER About me ? Look here, Father, it's no good going over the same ground again, it will only upset you and me and all of us. I told you how I felt yesterday. And I still feel it.

MRS. IRONBANK No, Peter. It's not at all that kind of thing your father is going to say.

(Enter Miss Soames, with Biggs)

BIGGS You wanted me, sir ?

IRONBANK Yes, sit down, Miss Soames. Sit down, Biggs.

BIGGS Sit down, sir ? Oh no, sir ! it wouldn't be right. I'd much prefer not, sir, if you don't mind.

COOLCREEK Come on, sit down like the rest of us, man.

ACT III

BIGGS (*To Ironbank*) If you don't mind, sir, I'll stay standing. I find it far more natural, sir.
(*Stationing himself in the background*)

COOLCREEK (*Laughingly, to Oakrib*) It'll take more than a revolution to shake the butlers of this life, Tom. There's a sort of permanence about them. I don't think dynamite will shift their sense of duty, we'll just have to get used to them standing around the same as usual when our day comes, I suppose.

MISS SOAMES Do you want me to take a note of what is said, Mr. Ironbank?

OAKRIB (*Jumping up*) If it's going to be that sort of discussion, I'm leaving. We'll have it at the plant. We'll have our legal adviser there. Come on, boys, let's get out.

MRS. IRONBANK Sit down, Mr. Oakrib. There's no need to get so excited. Really there isn't. No notes are going to be taken, are there, Dan?

IRONBANK Anyone can take a note who wants to. I'm not taking any, neither is Miss Soames. (*Oakrib sits*) I wanted to tell you all what has happened since yesterday. It's been the most remarkable twenty-four hours of my life. It concerns us all.

URCH It sounds most interesting, sir, if I may say so.

IRONBANK I was tremendously disturbed yesterday.

OAKRIB You weren't the only one.

IRONBANK I know that. But after you all left, Oakrib, Mrs.

THE BOSS

Ironbank here said one or two things to me which started me thinking more than I've ever thought before in the whole of my life.

MRS. IRONBANK I really believe that's true. He stayed awake all night long, didn't you, Dan ?

IRONBANK I did. All night long. You know it's the first time for years I've really taken the time to think. I've been so busy running things, telling people what's got to be done, and where and how and why.

PETER What exactly were you thinking about last night, Father ?

IRONBANK Many things. It was a still, silent night. Once or twice I heard the trains whirling by, miles and miles away. That was all. But I found my mind moving into places it had never been before. The thoughts were clear. It was a new experience for me. It was almost as if a voice inside of me was speaking.

COOLCREEK Voices inside of you at night ? Forgive me for saying so, Mr. Ironbank, but I hardly think that's the way we are going to settle our business.

MRS. IRONBANK Don't be too sure, Mr. Coolcreek. It may be the only way we can settle it.

IRONBANK You see, Coolcreek, I know the way you look at things. If I thought you'd understand, I'd say it was the voice of God that was talking to me last night—saying things I could have heard years and years ago, if I'd taken the trouble and time to listen.

ACT III

OAKRIB Look here, sir, we're practical men. We have practical things to handle. I think we'd better leave now, and see you at the plant later in the day. You'll see it's for the best.

URCH Perhaps you're not quite yourself, sir. (*Half rising*)

IRONBANK I am quite myself. Never more so. And you'll kindly sit there and hear me out without a lot of interruption.

MRS. IRONBANK Don't worry, Dan, they'll listen.

COOLCREEK As you see, Mr. Ironbank's quite himself again. Let's hear him out. I don't believe in God or voices or any such things, you men know that. It may be an act of faith to believe in God. It's certainly an act of lunacy, to my way of thinking, to believe in a God that made you but can't talk to you. Go ahead, Mr. Ironbank.

IRONBANK I was thinking of you, Peter. We've been such good friends. But yesterday I was really angry with you for the first time in my life. Last night I saw why.

PETER I'm sorry to make you angry, Father. But I just don't look at things the way you do.

IRONBANK That wasn't the reason at all.

MRS. IRONBANK Why not tell them what you told me this morning, Dan?

IRONBANK I will. I saw, Peter, that I've tried to boss your life exactly as I've tried to boss the plant. I've handled you as I've handled the men—or everyone else for that matter. I've

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always taken it for granted that I knew best. I planned your life for you as if it were my own. And it's not my own. It's yours. I've wanted to run it for you. And I'm damned sorry.

PETER It's not been like that, Father.

IRONBANK Yes it has, son, what made me angry yesterday was not that you disagreed with us but that my control over you was broken. I suddenly realised I couldn't play providence with you any more—and I hated that like hell.

PETER I don't know what to say to you. Somehow you make me feel a worm—the things I said yesterday, I mean.

MRS. IRONBANK No, Peter. You were right to say them. They needed saying.

IRONBANK I'm glad you said them. Really I am. It's done something for us that probably nothing else could have done.

OAKRIB By God, sir! You've got courage if you'll allow me to say so. I never thought I'd hear you say things like that to anybody, let alone your own son.

IRONBANK It's very overdue. And I've got something to say to you, Oakrib, that I want the others to hear.

OAKRIB What is it?

IRONBANK The way I spoke to you yesterday.

OAKRIB I'd rather not discuss it, sir, if you don't mind.

IRONBANK There's nothing to discuss. It's just that, in the night, as I thought of my son—and of your son, too, Oakrib

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—I felt more deeply ashamed than I have for years of the way I offered you money. Offering money at a moment like that. It showed me more clearly than anything else the way men like myself think. We've come to believe that enough money can settle almost anything, even the loss of a son.

OAKRIB I just can't take much more of this.

MRS. IRONBANK You've been splendid, Mr. Oakrib, all of us understand what you're going through.

OAKRIB You don't. None of you do. That's the hell of it.

PETER Tom, hold up now. Hold steady.

COOLCREEK Feelings are real. Real as rain. But it doesn't do to be ruled by them, Tom.

MRS. IRONBANK Can't you tell us what it is we don't understand, Mr. Oakrib?

OAKRIB I haven't been able to tell my own wife, yet. It would be a funny thing to tell all of you, wouldn't it?

MRS. IRONBANK We'd understand, you know.

OAKRIB After hearing Mr. Ironbank talk to Peter this morning I believe you would.

MRS. IRONBANK Tell us.

OAKRIB When that telegram came about my boy, yesterday, I just felt numb inside. Couldn't feel anything. It was as if someone else was walking around and listening and talking. I just wasn't there at all.

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IRONBANK I can understand that, Oakrib.

OAKRIB Then you gave us news of putting off a thousand men. I began to feel things again then, sir. I feel it again as I talk about it. One thousand families thrown on the scrap heap through no fault of theirs. It makes me mad.

IRONBANK We'll have something to say about that in a minute, Oakrib. Go on.

OAKRIB Then Peter here told us how my boy died. It was a terrible thing for me to hear.

URCH We all understand that.

OAKRIB You don't, you fool. You don't understand anything. If it hadn't been for me, my own boy would never have been on patrol that night at all.

COOLCREEK How can you say a thing like that?

OAKRIB Three months ago they offered him a commission. He wrote to me about it. I told him to turn it down. I never even gave the boy's mother a chance to say what she felt about it. I said he'd be more use to the workers if he stuck to the ranks. So he turned it down.

PETER He was quite happy about that, Tom. He didn't really much want to be an officer.

OAKRIB That's not the point. The point is that I told him to turn down the commission because I was thinking of myself. I wondered what the fellows at the plant would think—yes, and what you'd say, Coolcreek, if I was talking about the class struggle while my son became an officer. I thought you'd laugh at me.

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COOLCREEK We shouldn't have laughed.

OAKRIB Maybe not. But it's the only thing I've been able to think about since Peter told me how my son died. It's been beating like a hammer in my heart.

MRS. IRONBANK You did what you felt was best. Don't torment yourself with it, Mr. Oakrib.

OAKRIB Yes, I did what I felt was best. Just as Mr. Ironbank here did what he felt was best with Peter. By God, when I heard you saying the things you said just now, sir, I realised I'd bossed my own son around just the same as you boss us workers. It's the thing I hate most in the world. And it's what I've done to the person I loved best in the world.

PETER He loved you too, Tom. And he thought it was the right decision. He told me so.

COOLCREEK You'll feel better now you've come out with it.

OAKRIB I've still got to tell my wife.

MRS. IRONBANK She'll understand—and she'll help, Mr. Oakrib. Wives understand a lot more than husbands ever imagine. The thing that hurts them is when their husbands don't tell them the real truth.

OAKRIB I'll tell her. I'll tell her as soon as we are out of here.

COOLCREEK Perhaps it would be best if we got on to the business of the plant, Mr. Ironbank. You mentioned just now you had something to say about it.

IRONBANK Yes, I have. I spent a lot of the time during the night thinking about you, Coolcreek.

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COOLCREEK Me? It must have been more like a nightmare than a dream, I'm afraid, Mr. Ironbank.

IRONBANK Not at all. You see, you've captured the thinking of my son as well as of men like Oakrib. I've begun to see why.

PETER Maybe it's because he thinks the right way, Father.

IRONBANK You mean justice for the workers and all that sort of thing? (*Peter nods*) No, it goes far beyond that. Coolcreek has captured you not so much with his opinions. It's his commitment that's done it. He's given you something far bigger to live for than I ever did. I see that now.

COOLCREEK What have I given him that you haven't?

IRONBANK You've wanted to revolutionise the world, Coolcreek. I haven't. You've been spending your life as a twenty-four hour a day revolutionary. I've been spending my life trying to look after my own show. You've begun to give my son an ideology. I never had one to give him.

COOLCREEK (*To Peter*) I like this father of yours, Peter. I told you so yesterday. I'll tell you today that he's one of the most intelligent industrialists I ever met. So many of them are just plain stupid.

IRONBANK I don't agree with your views, Coolcreek. But I admire your passion. As for your vision, it doesn't go far enough. I see it now. It's narrow.

PETER It's the biggest vision I've ever struck.

IRONBANK Maybe. But there's a bigger.

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COOLCREEK Where ?

IRONBANK Look here. Men like myself are made, not born.
You agree ?

MRS. IRONBANK I don't think I've quite understood you, dear.
You must have been born sometime, you know.

IRONBANK I mean that we went to the top in industry because
of our skill, our hard work, our initiative. We worked our
way there. We didn't inherit our position. We carved it.

URCH Certainly, sir. Where would Ironbanks be without
you ?

COOLCREEK It's true of most of your crowd. Not of all by
any means.

IRONBANK Right. But you'd agree that some of the best
brains in the world are at the head of industry ?

COOLCREEK Certainly. But how do you use your brains ?

IRONBANK All we think of is bigger, better business. We've
never entered the field of ideology at all. The left wing
has taken over. We've let it go by default. Our thinking
and our living has just been plain irrelevant. We stopped
thinking relevantly at least fifty years ago.

COOLCREEK You're the first industrialist I've ever heard
admitting it. It's true enough. It's our greatest strength.

IRONBANK Of course, we might start thinking relevantly
again.

THE BOSS

COOLCREEK Interesting—but improbable.

OAKRIB I'm not sure I understand all this, sir. What's it got to do with the situation at the plant?

IRONBANK It's got everything to do with it. See here, Coolcreek, what's your interest in getting Oakrib to strike because a thousand men are fired?

PETER He thinks it wrong—just like I do.

MRS. IRONBANK It's more than that, isn't it, Mr. Coolcreek?

COOLCREEK I do think it's wrong. But if we had a strike every time something was wrong there'd be no business done in most plants most of the year.

URCH What exactly is it, then, that you're after?

COOLCREEK You've been honest this morning, Mr. Ironbank. I never heard an industrialist so honest before—or anyone else, for that matter. So I'll be honest with you. This strike at Ironbanks is only one of hundreds that are going to be called right across the country. This week we're pulling out every plant where the men are being fired.

IRONBANK Why?

COOLCREEK It's a simple matter. The orders which make it necessary to cut down come from the Government. We mean to show our strength, to prove to the Government that they can't do anything if we don't like it. It's not industry that we're primarily interested in over this strike.

OAKRIB It's these thousand families I'm interested in.

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COOLCREEK Yes, Tom. But I and my friends are interested in every family all over the world. We need power on a world scale to produce world revolution. Everything we plan, everything we think, everything we say and do is towards that end. We're going to change the foreign policy of the Government through this series of strikes. They're going to discover they can't move a finger without our sanction. From now on, no government in this country will dare to take a line in foreign policy which doesn't suit us. They'll know we can halt industry and wreck the national economy if they try. We're going to get this country's foreign policy run the way we want it.

URCH You never told us all this at the plant.

COOLCREEK Most of you wouldn't get the point, even if you were told it.

MRS. IRONBANK Perhaps some of the men wouldn't like the point, if they understood it, Mr. Coolcreek.

COOLCREEK That's so, Mrs. Ironbank. Some of them go farther if they don't see where they're going. It doesn't do in a revolution to tell everybody everything.

BIGGS If you'll excuse me, sir?

IRONBANK What is it, Biggs?

BIGGS Will it be all the same to you if I change my mind and accept your suggestion of sitting down, sir?

PETER Sit down, Biggs, old boy.

COOLCREEK (*Chuckling*) I was wrong. I see that in spite of

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a lifetime of training even butlers wilt and weaken slightly at the knees when they hear the real facts of revolution.

BIGGS (*As he sits down*) That wasn't it at all, sir, if I may say so. But standing there I felt an almost irresistible urge to kick you, sir. Something I haven't felt since I was a boy. A sort of tingle in the toe would describe it. I was afraid if I didn't sit down, I might forget myself so far as to do it, sir. I'm sorry, sir.

COOLCREEK (*Delighted*) Well, if we can get butlers to start kicking people in their master's house, that will be a real revolution.

IRONBANK You know, that's right.

URCH You must be joking, Mr. Ironbank, sir.

IRONBANK I was never more serious in my life.

MRS. IRONBANK I don't see it will help much if we start kicking each other, will it, Dan ?

IRONBANK No. But if Biggs kicked someone it would be a real revolution in his character. And that's the only revolution worth a damn. It's the only revolution that will really work. That's why Coolcreek's vision here is so limited.

PETER How do you mean ?

IRONBANK Coolcreek here says the world is like an old building. He wants to blow it up, and build something new. The trouble is there'll still be quarrels about who is to have the best rooms in it, and there'll be rumblings of bitterness

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from those who live in the basement. Dynamite will not destroy selfishness. That's your weakness, Coolcreek. You don't dare to deal with selfishness. You actually exploit it. You have to use human nature as you find it, that's your raw material. And without a change in the raw material your new building will be much the same as the old.

COOLCREEK We'll see. It's true, dynamite won't change selfishness. I've not found anything yet that will, though.

IRONBANK I have. I found it last night.

OAKRIB Where is it then, sir? I don't get it. If it's not selfish to put one thousand families out of work, I don't know what is.

IRONBANK They won't be out of work.

PETER What do you mean?

URCH I knew Mr. Ironbank would find some way out of this. What did I tell you?

OAKRIB Have you got other work for them?

IRONBANK No, I'm going to keep on every man we've got. Not one man gets fired.

COOLCREEK Just as I thought. You can keep them on without loss. I knew it all the time.

IRONBANK Not at all. I'll show you the books, if my board of directors agree. It's something that, economically speaking, we just can't afford to do.

OAKRIB I never doubted *that*, sir.

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IRONBANK Industrially speaking, it's lunacy to keep the men on. Ideologically speaking, it's lunacy to fire them. Ironbanks might weather this strike. But I don't think the country can weather the sort of thing you told us, Coolcreek. I'm going to put ideology before profit from now on.

MRS. IRONBANK It only means putting people first, doesn't it, dear?

IRONBANK Yes. But all people. Not my lot or your lot. It means thinking and living for the whole nation. For everybody in the world.

COOLCREEK Those are big words, Mr. Ironbank. True words, too, as I see things. But what exactly are you going to do about it? Keeping a thousand men on at a loss to Ironbanks won't exactly change everything, you know.

IRONBANK Miss Soames, will you please tell Coolcreek and Oakrib and all of us what I was doing before they got here this morning?

MISS SOAMES Dictating letters, Mr. Ironbank.

IRONBANK Well, go on. Tell them what we did.

MISS SOAMES You sent a letter to all your directors calling a full meeting in three days' time. You said in it that you wished to discuss an entirely new policy for Ironbanks.

IRONBANK Go on.

MISS SOAMES You sent a letter to each of the sixteen leading

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men of the Federation of Industries asking them to meet with you next week.

IRONBANK Go on.

MISS SOAMES You wrote to the Minister of Trade, who cancelled the Government contract with you, asking for an appointment the day after tomorrow.

IRONBANK Is that all, Miss Soames ?

MISS SOAMES That's all you dictated, Mr. Ironbank.

IRONBANK Yes. But I wrote four personal letters, to the Prime Minister and to three other men I know best in the Government, asking to see them as soon as they can spare the time. I've been working ever since seven o'clock this morning. No forty-hour week for revolutionaries like you and me, eh, Coolcreek ?

COOLCREEK. That's fine. But what's in your mind ? What are you going to tell them ?

IRONBANK I'm going to tell them all the things I've seen and learned in the last twenty-four hours. I'm going to give them all an ideology, or bust.

OAKRIB You'll be wasting your time with most of them, sir. The politicians just don't think that way.

IRONBANK You're right. We've got to teach them. Who will if we don't ?

PETER Gosh, Father ! I didn't know you had it in you.

THE BOSS

MRS. IRONBANK There's a lot more in your father, and in men like him, than they ever let their sons or the world see.

IRONBANK I've seen at least who's responsible for the nation. Why, it's all of us. I've damned the politicians. Which of us hasn't?

PETER Yes, and they've deserved most of it.

IRONBANK Perhaps they have. I've always thought they didn't much care what happened to business so long as they could keep their crowd in power. But I didn't much care what happened in Government so long as Ironbanks kept on making a profit. We're both alike. They in their small corner, I in mine.

MRS. IRONBANK And from what Mr. Coolcreek has told us this morning, he's going to use your industry to force the Government to do what he and his friends want. You both seem to have played into his hands.

COOLCREEK You can't blame me for that, Mrs. Ironbank. It's so easy.

MRS. IRONBANK I don't blame you. But I'm beginning to understand you.

IRONBANK We've got to learn to think beyond profits and parties. We've got to take on a responsibility bigger than sectional or national interest. We've got to match every decision to the ideological struggle in the world.

COOLCREEK You know we could use a man like you in our revolution, Mr. Ironbank.

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IRONBANK There's room for everyone in any worthwhile revolution, Coolcreek. Let's take on the world and take it on together.

PETER I'm with you, Dad, if you really mean it. You do mean it, don't you?

OAKRIB He means it all right. I see that. You can tell it from the way he talks.

IRONBANK I want you to come with me to the directors' meeting if you will, Oakrib. I'll need your help with them. Peter, too, if you'll come. Will you?

PETER I'll be proud to be with you, Father.

IRONBANK I want you to come with me to the industrial men and the Cabinet men. And I want you there too, Coolcreek. What about it?

COOLCREEK Not me.

MRS. IRONBANK Why not?

COOLCREEK If this thing is real, and I believe it is real, I'll have to do a whole lot of new thinking myself, Mrs. Ironbank. Changing men like him—well, it's something fresh. You see, I've read so many revolutionary books for so long that I've almost stopped thinking for myself at all. Actually, I believe your husband and I are much alike.

MRS. IRONBANK (*Laughing*) That certainly is a fresh thought, Mr. Coolcreek.

COOLCREEK No. You see, your husband and men like him

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have spent the last fifty years thinking of little except Capital. I and my friends have thought of little except Karl Marx. If men like Mr. Ironbank take on a responsibility for putting the nation and the world right, then both of us are out of date together.

OAKRIB Go with him to see the Cabinet, man. You might help him to get them to see sense.

COOLCREEK I'm not sure I'm ready for the Cabinet yet.

URCH That's the first time I ever heard you say you weren't ready for anybody—not meaning any offence, if you understand me.

OAKRIB Thank God for all you told us, sir, anyway.

MRS. IRONBANK Yes, thank God is right. Your boy will understand, you know.

OAKRIB I must go to my wife now.

MRS. IRONBANK I'll come with you, if I may.

PETER So will I, Tom.

OAKRIB I'll be glad to have both of you.

PETER That voice in your heart last night, Father. Do you really think it was God?

IRONBANK I believe it was. We'll make it the new boss around here anyway, and for the whole world. What do you say, Coolcreek?

COOLCREEK I don't know what to say. I don't know much

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about God, that's the truth. What I do know, I haven't much liked up till now. But if He can turn a man like you into a world revolutionary, Mr. Ironbank, if He does that sort of thing, then I and all my friends will just have to reconsider Him. That's for certain.

CURTAIN