

Year-End

by C. P. Boyko

BUZZING OF THE intercom, followed by knocking at the door. Two janitors, a man and a woman, enter. Noise from the factory floor while the door is open.

Male janitor. "Ain't here."

Female janitor. "Good. Maybe we'll get done on time for a change."

They relax, taking possession of the room. It is a plush office, with a view of the factory's vast ceiling through the window.

Male janitor. "I don't mind overtime."

Female janitor. "A born janitor, all right."

Male janitor. "What's that supposed to mean? Don't muss those papers."

She shifts some papers on the desk. "A born slave."

Male janitor. "I just happen to like getting paid time and a half's all."

She sits in the chair behind the desk. "They throw you some scraps, you forget you're a dog."

Male janitor. "Aw, don't start. Janitor's a good clean job. —You know what I mean."

Female janitor, reading a page. "Seven thousand dollars for transportation!"

Male janitor. "Transportation of what?"

Female janitor. "How should I know? Of him, probably. Him and his secretary. All over God knows where and back again."

Male janitor, sitting at the conference table. "Boss gotta travel, I guess."

Female janitor. "Ever hear of a telephone?"

Male janitor. "What do you think it's like, being boss? Running meetings. Organizing things. Bossing."

Female janitor. “Degrading. Shouldn’t even be offices like this. All this for one person!”

Male janitor. “Aw. I think’d be fun.”

Female janitor. “Seven thousand dollars.” She stands, covertly replacing the papers. “I’ll tell you one thing you don’t know. This might be the last time I ever clean this office.”

He stands and begins tidying and dusting. “I don’t see you cleaning it now.”

Female janitor. “And I do know what you mean: you mean it’s honest, necessary work. Like farming, and cooking, and teaching, and building—and cleaning. So how come everyone looks down on us?”

Male janitor. “Aw, don’t start.”

Female janitor. “You’re part the problem: a dog who wants to be master. A slave who only wants his own slaves. Your hope’s what fuels the whole apparatus. When you gonna wake up? We need to get rid of slaves and masters and dogs and bosses altogether.”

Male janitor. “You sound like a churchman.” Laughs. “You sound just like a Church man.”

Female janitor. “At least Matheson Church and the union’s willing to fight for our rights.”

Male janitor. “Bite for ’em, you mean—the hand that feeds.”

Female janitor. “And you sound just like Babcock. At least coming from him it’s self-preservation. You, you lick the foot that kicks you. A foot-licking lackey, that’s what you are.”

Male janitor. “I ain’t gonna let you rile me up.”

Female janitor. “Exactly your problem.”

Male janitor. “I ain’t gonna get riled up. It ain’t healthy.”

Female janitor. “Working in these conditions—”

Male janitor. “I don’t know if your union’s gonna do any good, or it’s just gonna get us all fired. One thing I do know. Getting riled up ain’t healthy for a life. Since the union came in, you all look sicker and unhappier. And uglier.”

Sid Babcock enters. The janitors start.

Sid. "You can leave."

Female janitor. "Yes, sir."

Male janitor. "Should we come back, or—"

Sid. "Straightaway! There's a shareholders' meeting begins in five minutes!"

Male janitor. "Yes, sir."

Sid. "Take the garbage at least!"

Female janitor. "Yes, sir." They take the garbage and go out.

Sid paces, muttering and gesturing. He uses the intercom on the desk.

Receptionist. "Yes?"

Sid. "Can you bring me the recentest quarterlies, please?"

Receptionist. "Yes, sir."

Sid. "Oh, forget it, I've got 'em."

Receptionist. "All right."

He flips through papers, then again uses the intercom. "Get me Pensilby."

Receptionist. "Just a second." Pause. "Uh, she's not at her desk at the moment."

Sid. "Where in hell is she at?"

Receptionist, after a pause. "I'm not sure, sir."

Sid. "Inexcusable." He disengages, then again engages the intercom. "Daize is around, I suppose? There's a couple of things that I'd like to review with her. Well? Are you there?" There is no answer. "Why the hell in the name of the holy today is this happening here?" He goes to the door and throws it open. "Is there anyone working today? Where is Daize?"

Daize Glied enters, papers in hand. "Sid?"

Sid. "Close the door. Did you finish the list?"

She hands him a sheet of paper. "Here are the thirty-one names."

He glances at it. "Which is what we decided?"

Daize. "Other things equal, that brings us by year-end to ten and a quarter."

Sid. "All our youngest employees?"

Daize. "Leaving out those with dependents."

Sid. "Is Renfrento not union?"

Daize. "So is Parhada, and others. We don't want to look like we're playing at favorites."

Sid. "Take them off. We don't need to give Church an excuse to start rousing the rabble again. And besides, our apparent collusion with them will make them seem complicit with us in the layoffs. With luck, we discredit 'em." He hands the paper back, and watches over Daize's shoulder as she sits at the conference table, making changes. "Good. Then tomorrow we'll hand out the first of the slips at the afternoon shift-change. On their way out the gate."

Daize. "Might it be better to mail them?"

Sid. "Well, perhaps. I suppose if they're all in one place when receiving the news, there's increased chance of trouble. We'll deliver them during the day. We can use the new courier service."

Daize. "Sure."

Sid. "Then that's everything now."

Daize begins to stand.

Sid gestures for her to remain seated. "You can stay for the meeting. For taking the minutes." He looks at his watch and begins pacing again. "I won't bend over backwards to kiss owner ass for one tenth a percent. We'll reach ten twenty-five by year-end. They should know the ordeal that we've had. Even getting these bums to all work a full day has been, lately, a feat. For the union I need not apologize. Maybe it seems a concession, but it cost us no money. And now they just tiff with themselves. If they can't get a raise, it's not me, it's the union to blame. I perhaps should myself have imposed it: that haven of sinecure; nest of red tape and committees fissiparous; creep-hole of delegates, stewards, and cronies! By God, I detest them, the unions! Their members deserve them, the knobs. To be asking for raises, with sales low as this? Their delusion's astoundingly deep. Course, the owners, those glorified landlords, are worse. They want ten and a quarter percent, while still more competition from all the world over, obtuse to the industry's glut, yet comes slithering in every month. I can't *give* the shit hardly away. My old buyers are ordering less, and they ask me for discounts on top.

And those pinchfart suppliers, and the shipping consortiums, they live in the same world of dreams, renegotiate contracts at twice what inflation is. We have accomplished no less than a miracle, all things considered. So no, I won't grovel, nor will I abase myself; no, not for tenths of percentages. Ten twenty-five! We did less than that last year."

Daize. "Less overall, and in any one quarter."

Sid. "They perhaps will opine that I earlier should have resorted to layoffs. But those are my kin, in a manner of speaking; my people. I feel I'm responsible for 'em. They've some of 'em been with the company longer than my twenty years. Unashamed, I admit that I care. If mistake I have made, it's I've been insufficiently cruel. I'm old-fashioned—outmoded, perhaps. If I'm hard as a boss, if my thumps I don't curb, if my words I don't blunt, it's because I know people improve under pressure. But deep in my heart, I'm a softy. A director directs, but he also protects his employees. Commanders command, but they don't send their men to their deaths for no reason. Dismiss me, court-martial me, over a tenth a percent, if you must. I'd take positive pride in so gross an injustice; I'd wallow for years; I could gnaw on the marrowy bone of my martyrdom through to my dotage, with relish. So fuck 'em. I care not one shred what they think. They know nothing about how to superintend. They can suck out the shit from my ass. Am I right?" The intercom buzzes. "Right; all right. Thanks, Daize." He answers the intercom. "Yes?"

Receptionist. "Ms. Ottavia Farr-Mp, the shareholders' representative, is here for the meeting, sir."

Sid. "Send her in, by all means." To Daize. "You can stay; take the minutes."

Daize. "Sure."

The receptionist opens the door for Ottavia Farr-Mp, who enters.

Ottavia. "Good afternoon. Well?"

Sid laughs. "It's a pleasure to see you again, Miz Farr-Mp. You remember Daize Glied . . ."

Ottavia. "I'm sure that I must."

Daize. "How do you do."

Ottavia sits at the head of the conference table. “If you’re quite ready.”

Sid. “Well, perhaps we should wait just a few minutes more till the others arrive.”

Ottavia. “This is everyone.”

Sid. “Were the owners not able to come, then?”

Ottavia. “They sent me; I’m their representative. I speak for them all.”

Sid sits. “And Rebecka, and Tonio, and Glen—how’ve they been?”

Ottavia. “If their personal well-being is what you refer to, it’s no business of mine, and still less of yours. If their financial well-being, it is no business of yours, except insofar as it pertains to this factory, which is what we’re here to discuss, starting now, or so I do hope.”

The intercom buzzes.

Sid. “But of course. Just one moment, please.” He crosses to the desk and answers. “Yes?”

Receptionist. “Matheson Church and some others here to see you, sir.”

Sid. “We’re just now in the midst of the shareholders’ meeting. They can wait till tomorrow.”

Receptionist. “Yes, sir.”

Sid. “No more calls, interruptions, or visitors, please.”

Receptionist. “All right.”

Sid returns to the table. “My apologies.”

Ottavia. “Now perhaps we can with the pleasantries dispense, and proceed to matters fiscal.” She withdraws a page from a folder. “Ten point sixteen net percent profit is point zero nine net percent short.”

Sid. “I’ll explain.”

Ottavia. “The figure alone speaks with adequate eloquence, thank you. I’m not here to chide you, or to shrieve you. I’m no shareholder, but I doubt that they have any interest in explanations or in excuses. I’m here to tell you—it won’t take long—that you’ve done yourself a disservice. Ten and a quarter was a waymark only, not a destination. You have neglected it to your own cost. You’ll find it harder now to reach ten and a half by year-end.”

Sid. “And a half!”

Ottavia. “Correct, by year-end. That is, and has been, the shareholders’ goal.”

Daize. “In the fourth quarter, you mean?”

Ottavia. “Most certainly not. For the total year.”

Sid. “That’s impossible.”

Ottavia. “The shareholders, I gather, believe it to be possible. In any case, your failure to reach it will not prove that it wasn’t; it only will prove that *you* weren’t able to do it.”

Sid. “It’s undoable. No one could do it. This product, this equipment, this staff! If you’d any idea what we’ve struggled with lately—”

Ottavia. “I’m not remotely even curious. It is you who is responsible for operational considerations; it’s what you’re paid for. It bores me even to say this out loud. Do your job, or the shareholders appoint somebody who will. That’s all there’s to it.” She closes the folder, leaving the paper on the table.

Sid. “Let me get this thing straight. You are threatening me with replacement . . .” The intercom buzzes. “Goddamn it.” Sid crosses to the desk.

Ottavia. “It’s not a threat, just a statement of fact.”

Sid speaks into the intercom. “Wha’d I say? Hold my calls! We’re’n the middle of this.”

Ottavia. “We can end it here.”

Sid. “Now just hold on a minute or two. I have been with this company twenty-plus years, I have built from the ground up this factory; now you intend to replace me because some fantastical margin which can never be met won’t be met?”

Ottavia. “You don’t understand; communication only flows one way between you and me. I’m the shareholders’ representative to you, and not your representative to the shareholders. Talking to me is a waste of your breath. Hearing you’s a waste of my attention. As for the product, we know of this-size factories reaching eleven point five.”

Sid. “You don’t surely mean this year.”

Ottavia crosses to the door. “This year, this world, this industry, this life. Though it’s not my job to say so, you should try to do better.”

Sid. "But why didn't they say to begin with that ten and a half was the goal?"

Ottavia. "I'm sure I don't know. But if you would like a piece of advice, which comes not from the shareholders, but from me as a private individual, you might consider making a habit of exceeding the expectations you're given, instead of underperforming, making excuses, and hoping to be forgiven, like a schoolboy who shirks as much homework as he dares. Goodbye, and see you again in six months."

As she opens the door, Matheson Church, Lea Pensilby, the receptionist, the female janitor (still holding a bag of garbage), and others stumble into the doorway.

Sid. "If you'd wait just a minute . . . Oh, out of her way, you damn fools!"

Ottavia. "Excuse me. Goodbye." Ottavia exits.

Sid. "Now you all can get out of my office."

Matheson. "We have some things to say first, Mister Babcock."

Sid. "You can say them tomorrow. The morning. Now buzz."

He pushes them out the door and closes it. He and Daize exchange a look. Knocking at the door.

Sid. "For the sake of the holy!" He yanks the door open. "The hell do you want?"

Matheson. "We've come to say the union membership's decided that the time has come for us to take job action—to proceed to strike."

Sid. "You're not serious."

Lea. "If demands aren't met. We've come to read you our demands first."

Matheson. "We've suffered long enough indignity, abuse, and inequality. A dawn begins to newly rise; we workers, these, the people, are its flaming harbinger—the sun's first gaudy, not-yet-scorching rays. But full ungentle noon will straight succeed this soft matutinal diplomacy, if this time you don't give us what we want."

Lea. "Matheson, just read 'im the demands now."

Sid, to Lea and the receptionist. “It’s not possible; tell me that *you* haven’t joined.”

Lea. “We are representing sixty-seven—sixty-eight percent of clerical, of janitorial, and support staff.”

The receptionist nods.

Janitor. “That’s right.”

Sid. “It’s outrageous to me. What complaint in the world could you possibly have?” To Matheson. “As for you, I allowed you your union, and this is the way I’m repaid?”

Matheson. “You gave us nothing. Unions form, they aren’t bestowed. They coalesce, self-organized. They swell up from the poisoned ground, don’t drop from out the toxic sky. They’re nature’s force, immunological reactions to oppressiveness. We made the union from ourselves, we made ourselves the union. No one could have stopped us—least of any, you.”

Sid. “I most certainly could’ve!”

Matheson. “The tide has turned, and leaves exposed what was submerged: our power. History is on our side. Inexorable gravity—”

Lea. “You permitted them to form a union, but what good is it? Negotiations stall. Two months already passed, and still no closer to a contract. Small surprise, when you refuse their each and every asking.”

Sid. “I refuse them because they’re ridiculous, Lea.”

Lea. “Oh, just read ’im the demands already.”

Matheson consults a piece of paper. “The first of our demands is this. We ask—insist—that management and foremen will begin to treat us with respect.”

Sid groans. “And just how are you measuring that?”

Matheson. “From this point on, they’ll tell us what needs doing, not what to do. Our supervisors will assist, and guide, and supervise, not spy, and reprimand, and punish. They will treat us not like children, but like colleagues. And for every word correcting us, we want two words of praise. They will address us by our first names. As for us, we find the *sirs* and *ma’ams* demeaning, and we will not use them anymore. The same applies to all those deferential honorifics: *Miz*, and *Missus*, *Mister*. We will smile when

we are smiled at, or we feel like smiling, not on your command. We'll be allowed to go to toilet as the need arises, too."

Sid. "It's a line of assembly! It cannot be stopped for a piss!"

Lea. "Forewomen and foremen can cover for 'em."

Matheson. "Respect. That's first, our item number one."

Sid. "Is this really your goal with the union? To make of politeness a law? And to legislate craps?"

Lea. "Go on, Matheson."

Sid. "Oh, continue, I beg."

Matheson. "Demand the second is democracy. From now on, every worker's thoughts, ideas, opinions, views should be solicited on every matter bearing on our work environment, production quality, our work hours, hiring, firing, benefits and holidays, and company direction . . ."

Sid. "You, in short, want to manage the place by yourselves."

Lea. "No. Discussion. Input. Contribution. Take into account our attitudes, and give consideration to our judgements."

Matheson. "We want an end to hierarchy, want decisions made collectively. There's not an inessential person here; we each have part to play, and each unique perspective. We want to see this fact substantiated in votes for every man and woman. No pronunciamientos, edicts, or decrees, but surveys, referenda, plebiscites, and factory-wide consultation shall henceforth determine our directive bulk."

Sid. "So the helmsman should ask of the cooks in the galley and the engine-room stokers what way he should steer."

Matheson. "Allowing for analogy, why not? We're all upon the selfsame ship, which not one knot of speed achieves, indeed, which naught—N-A-U-G-H-T—that's nothing—yes, which nautically *naught* achieves without the all of us aboard. Why shouldn't we have all some say about the course we plot?"

Sid. "There was never a ship in a mutinous state that so much as left port. And desist with the tub-thumping demagogue's word-pyrotechnics. You're not on the soapbox."

Matheson. “My righteous indignation is a fuel that feeds my fiery eloquence. Could I control me, modulate me, bowdlerize or summarize me, I would be revealed the panderer you paint me. All unchecked, uncheckable, my logorrheic rage escapes me left and right, at night or day, at work or play, in public or alone. So long as our demands remain unmet, I’ll vomit speech like birds at dawn belch song.”

The others have come further into the office. The receptionist wipes dust from a framed certificate. The janitor peers at the sheet of paper on the table. Daize snatches it away.

Sid. “Keep your hands to yourselves! This is my office still!” To Matheson. “So it’s mutiny, anarchy, chaos you want; duly noted. Now finish your spiel and be done.”

Matheson. “A common misconception. Anarchy’s not lawlessness. It’s only bosslessness. We’re done with rulers, masters, potentates . . .”

Sid. “But you cannot have rules without rulers! You need to have orders for order! And men do no work without foremen! The boss, like adversity, brings out the best in employees. For each self-propelled, independent, industrious worker, there’s ten would-be shirkers—those scrimshanking, goldbricking, dog-fucking, featherbed slobs you must constantly watch, and who need to be goaded, and threatened, and yes, sometimes punished. — Your speechification infects me, goddamn you.”

Matheson. “It’s there you’re wrong. When freed from tyranny—”

Sid guffaws. “When from tyranny freed!”

Matheson. “The worker, when from their oppression freed, does, like a cramped and pallid flower from which a stone’s been lifted, stretch and grow towards the sky in natural, productive self-expansion. What makes work work? Outside force imposed—it may be duty, hunger, fear—that makes work necessary. Do but lift that pressure, render optional what was obligatory, and your work becomes your play—and no one ever tired of play. We shall work better, harder, for sheer joy, when work’s a choice and not an odious chore.”

Sid. “You’re deluded! You really think anyone comes for their shift if they don’t need the money? What keeps the world turning’s not actualization of selves, but the hunger of stomachs.”

Janitor. “Next thing, he’ll say he’s doing us all a favor keeping us hungry.”

Sid. “It’s a factory, not the soul’s playground or gym. I’ve no clue why I even am listening to this.”

Matheson. “Because you must. Our fourth demand is noise reduction.”

Lea. “Third. You missed the third demand.”

Sid. “Two’s enough. I’ll begin by reducing *your* noise. You can vacate my office now. Out! I will talk to you all—or to three, at the most—in the morning.”

Matheson. “We’re not yet done. You know what happens if we leave.”

Receptionist. “Mr. Babcock . . .”

Janitor. “It’s a job action.”

Sid. “I’m not calling a vote here! Vamoose!”

Matheson, to Lea. “Let’s show him.”

Sid. “No one listens and everyone talks. Noise! Noise! Noise! That’s democracy for you. If any of you’d ever served on committees, or sat on a board of directors, you’d know that it’s noise, not decision, that’s collectively made. Because everyone speaks, no one hears, and the loudest shouts carry the day. Yes, democracy’s only disorganization. What the hell are you doing?”

Lea has slid open the window. Noise from the shop floor. Matheson steps to the window.

Matheson. “Maltreated, unappreciated drones! You toiling, abject, subjugated throng! Suppressed by equals, and by lesser men surpassed, you slaves in all but name, arise! Defy! Throw off the half your shackles, so to show it can be done—to show they’re made of mind, not steel!”

He makes a grand slicing motion. Some of the machinery grinds and clatters to a stop.

Sid. “What the fuck have you done? Ignoramuses! Fools!”

Lea. “That’s reminder why you’re listening to us: because our strike is really ready.”

Sid. “It’s been years those machines were last stopped.”

Matheson slides the window shut. “We haven’t finished.”

Janitor, to the receptionist. “Straight hot how! We’re just getting started.”

Sid, muttering. “Pack of Luddites. Benighted, ungrateful, uncaring . . .”

Lea. “Read the rest.”

Matheson. “Our third demand is safety.”

Sid. “What on earth here’s unsafe?”

Lea. “Everything!”

Matheson. “I’ll itemize. The ceiling fans should be replaced. Last week, in the propellant room, a blade fell, nearly killing Radar Houghpt.”

Sid. “Was he wearing his helmet?”

Matheson. “We want to see installed some cages round annealers, guardrails round conveyor belts, and by the gangway, barriers, before an arm is lost, or someone’s burned, or falls and breaks their neck. The oldest crimpers, too, are operating hot, which yet’ll cause autoignition, costing eyes—or lives.”

Sid. “I need help understanding. You’re saying you want to be treated like adults, but still you want Dad to protect you from harm. Keep your arms the hell out of conveyor belts. Shit! Don’t collide with annealers. Wear your goggles! Be careful. Remember the sign: Stay alert, stay alive. We can upgrade machines, we can pack every man in excelsior, shield each sharp corner with bubble wrap, but if you flout regulations, you’re careless, you’re stupid, the whole goddamn factory could, any minute, explode. Every life’s on the line at all times! If I dreamed there was anyone couldn’t be trusted, I’d fire ’em; I wouldn’t have hired ’em. It seems that I’ve got more respect for you all than you do for yourselves.”

Lea. “Sure, when money’s to be saved.”

Sid. “There’s no money to save! As accountant, you know that we’re struggling to hold what we’ve got, that we run at full pelt to stay put. Were

there money to spare, I would buy you all platinum wristwatches, teeth made of gold, electronic fur coats, pearls of string, and convertible aerodynamical hats for your feet, but there *is* no more money unless there's more sales! And repairs, yes, cost money! That's math!"

Matheson. "And Lea, as our accountant, also knows the factory makes ten point sixteen net percent in profit."

Daize. "That is a little misleading . . ."

Sid. "That is none of their business. That's none of your business! What the hell do you know about profit, percents, net or gross? D'you suppose that it goes in my pocket? It keeps this place running. Materials, freight, and the rent, electricity, payroll . . . It's profit that keeps you in jobs. If it's oxygen, we're short of breath—and I'm wasting my own. In this industry, ten sixteen's nothing. It bores me to say this out loud. It's a waste of attention to listen to you. Twenty years I have fought on behalf of you stumps, and you don't even realize; you make me fight *you*! Mister Matheson Church, who has worked here three years—on the floor! And Lea Pensilby! After thirteen in the office you ought to know better! And you! I gave all of you livelihoods!, paychecks!, intent! Your ingratitude's second to ignorance only."

Matheson. "We're still not finished, Mister Babcock—Sid."

Sid. "I don't care. Have it framed, have it hung on the wall. Roll it up, shove it up your collective behind. I've been here twenty years, long as any of you puny glorified janitors; longer than them, bloated glorified landlords. I've tripled our sales and I've doubled our staff. Just the person to oust, with a job action looming. Delightful. Divine. —Go on strike? Great idea! See how *you* like it: *I'm* goddamn going on strike. Yes, we'll see who the hell's indispensable. I fucking quit. I concede, as director outgoing, to every demand. And I grant all your wishes; worse, power to grant all your own. I bequeath to you infinite rope; may you fashion a noose to contain every neck. Yes, the factory's yours; may it crush you. Get out of my way. You can all go to hell. With your net percent profit." He pauses on the threshold. "Go shower yourselves with my shit." Sid exits.

After a stunned pause, the janitor returns the garbage bag she has been holding to the garbage can.

Janitor. "And you can take out your own garbage from now on, too."

Lea. "What just happened?"

Matheson. "It's over. We have won."

The janitor hugs the receptionist.

Lea. "We weren't finished reading the demands yet."

Matheson. "There's now no need. They're all accepted." To Daize. "Or's there anything that you would like to say?"

Daize. "What do you mean?"

Matheson. "The charter, my associate tells me, lists as vice-director one Daize Glied."

Lea. "Not the charter . . ."

Daize. "That was a joke, I assure you, of Sid's. Or a gesture, quite empty: a title in lieu of a raise, or more duties, or perks. I am only, was only, director's assistant—his helper or personal aide sort of thing, it was."

Matheson. "You're not allegiant to our former boss, or loyal to the status quo?"

Daize. "Only to what is the best for the company. Not that it matters what *I* want. It's *you* who's in charge now, apparently."

Lea. "We who are. And you as well are."

Matheson. "And yet, it seems to me we hardly need, with no executives, executive assistants anymore. Perhaps the best thing for the company would be for all superfluous employees to resign."

Lea. "Don't be vengeful, Matheson. For crying skies, it's not a coup or revolution. Let's not start with purges, reigns of terror, or beheadings."

Matheson. "You're right, of course. At least today, this hour of triumph, shall no stain of bloodshed see."

Union member, at the door. "Hey, Matheson, what's going on? We saw Mister Babcock storm stomping out of here in a huff. Are we going on strike, or what?"

Matheson. "I'll tell you all together; first you'll shut down everything, and gather round below."

Union member exits, shouting: "Shut it down! We're going on strike!"

Lea. "That decision should've been a joint one. They're already treating him like he's the new director."

At a nod from Matheson, the janitor slides open the window. The last machines wind down and stop, leaving a warm, ticking, echoing silence.

Lea. "Shouldn't we discuss first what you're saying?"

Matheson. "I'll know what's in my heart when out it spills across my tongue, but not before. I feel it's much; its swelling spate distends my throat with ache like tears unshed. I'll shout; I must. —My brothers, sisters, friends! Accomplices and colleagues; partners, comrades, kin—rejoice! We've overcome! The factory is ours! The tyrant's left the plant—for good. The threat of our consolidated might, the sight of our united wrath, sufficed to cow, dishearten, overpower him. Our matchless force in solidarity prevailed. We hardly dared to hope for such complete success. My joy's a measure of my proud amazement; gratitude betrays surprise; but shouldn't I have known that we would be victorious? For it's only when divided that we're conquered; only when disorganized exploited. Conquest, though, and exploitation sow revolt; stung pride, balked need, and desperation unify inevitably, joining all against their common enemy: the profiteers who sell sweat-labor cheap—and, worse, treat cheap, to justify their victimizing bent, the ones whose sweat they sell. From this day forth, we'll set our price ourselves, and reap our own rewards. Let this day mark the birth of our cooperative! There much remains to do; with freedom comes responsibility, and with responsibility comes work, and sacrifice. But, unlike former pains, which smarted like a whip inflicted, these shall make us pleased and proud, as muscles sore from voluntary exercise are felt as promise, growth, and strength incipient. We have shed the rank excrescence; here's to clean and streamlined health! The dictatorial head is lopped; long live the body! Now we walk in tandem, not on one another's backs. We chatter not in raucous counterpoint, but sing in one harmonious unison!"

Matheson leads the workers in song. "We'll smash the system, break the bars, the apparatus blast; no longer will we be content to be the least and last!

“You’ll keep us down no longer, for together we’re much stronger!
You’ll keep us in no fetters, for together we’ve no better!

“We’re the best! You’re the worst! You’re the last! We’re the first!

“Your power, this very hour! Give it us!”

Matheson speaks over the singers. “We’ll celebrate this breaking dawn with toasts and tipping! To the pub! Let no one treat, but all one tab divide! Come, Lea, and Daize—no more ‘Miz Glied’—teetotaling’s forbidden. Intoxicating triumph we’ll enhance with ale—or simulate with ale, perhaps, until it’s felt for real?”

Lea. “Everyone can’t leave at once. There’s safety regulations for a shutdown, surely. Stations to secure, machines to power off, and doors to lock, at least? I hardly know; it’s never happened, to my knowledge.”

Matheson. “We’ll leave all that to those responsible. Assume each person knows their job. You’re not in charge, remember? No one is! Besides, we’re not abandoning the factory completely, I should guess. Let’s not forget the thirty-two percent of clerical, custodial, and support staff who withheld support, and whom you do not represent. Let them hold down the fort!”

Daize, rummaging in the filing cabinet. “I’ll stay behind and ensure that procedures are followed correctly.”

Lea. “I’ll stay too. I’ll join you later, Matheson. Promise. After all, there’s still so much we haven’t figured out . . . The fifth and sixth of our demands, for instance, which we never thought he’d grant us . . .”

Matheson. “Tomorrow’s soon enough to change the world. Let’s leave things as they are for one day more.” Matheson exits with the others, singing.

Daize withdraws papers from the cabinet. “Here. And a copy for you.”

Lea. “Right. What’s first?”

Daize. “First is the coolant controller, which hopefully someone’s already put into its standby mode.”

Lea. “What a mess.”

As they exit, Daize begins to shut the door behind them, but on second thought leaves it open.

THE OFFICE HAS become a workers' lounge, as evidenced by disarrayed chairs, and clothing and scraps of food and garbage lying about. The desk has been cleared of papers, which have been replaced by a chess board and microwave. The filing cabinet hangs open, as does the door. A poster on the wall reads CLEANLINESS IS NEXT TO SOLIDARITY. A worker in overalls sits at the conference table, eating from a plastic container. The two janitors enter.

Male janitor, to the worker. "You here for the quarterly meeting?"

The worker makes a sarcastic gesture towards his meal.

Male janitor. "Well, there's gonna be a meeting in here in a few minutes, so you maybe gonna want to leave before it starts."

Female janitor. "Leave 'im alone."

Male janitor. "Aw, I'm only saying."

The worker finishes eating without haste, and exits.

Male janitor. "Pull yourself a chair up. We're first ones here. Maybe they let me take the minutes."

Female janitor. "I gotta say, I find your newfound enthusiasm a little hard to digest."

Male janitor. "Heh. Get me a few new marketable skills and take me to someplace maybe where they pay me more."

Female janitor. "You're the worst kind of opportunist! You shouldn't been allowed in the union."

Male janitor. "I ain't had me a raise since this hullabaloo started."

Female janitor. “That was only three months ago! And before that, when did you ever see a raise? Besides, that wasn’t a raise. That was wage equalization. Some folks lost money.”

Male janitor. “And they should’ve taken themselves elsewhere—like what I plan to do.”

A couple of workers enter, laughing and chatting. “Thing took hold of his entire arm, right up to the shoulder there! No shit!”

Female janitor. “You all here for the meeting?”

Worker. “You kidding. Another fucking meeting?”

Male janitor. “This one’s the quarterly. Wanna get here early and get a good seat.”

The workers exchange a look and exit.

Female janitor. “What I’d like to know is where your loyalty’s at. They ain’t been training you around in different jobs just so you can take your trained-up ass someplace else. And you think they’re gonna ask your opinion or give you a vote at some other company?”

Male janitor. “They sure maybe might, if they know I been asked for my vote in the past. That’s called resumé. And I’m getting me some steel-shiny resumé.”

Female janitor. “You never should’ve been allowed in. You and all the other latecomer bandwagon-jumpers looking out for themselves. Sometimes I don’t know what Matheson Church is thinking.”

Male janitor. “I could be loyal maybe to these bonuses he been talking about.”

Female janitor. “Those’re gonna be for the hardest workers—not you. It’s another kind of equalization, actually. Some work’s harder than other work, even if you do put in the same number hours.”

Male janitor. “Way I hear it, it’s the union will decide who works hardest.”

Female janitor. “So? Who else would decide?”

Male janitor. “Well, I’m union now, ain’t I? So maybe I decide it’s *I’m* who’s working hardest.”

Female janitor. “And maybe I joined the union before you, and maybe I got a different view on the matter.”

Male janitor. “Aw.”

Female janitor. “Anyway, you’re half right. Janitor’s among the hardest work there is, and people still treat us like second-class. Probably I wouldn’t doubt it’s the harder you work, the more the soft and lazy people gotta look down on you—way to try and maintain their own self-respect. Only way to fix that’s to pay us a little more. Get some of that prestige up. Should be called prestige equalization, really.”

Male janitor. “All I know’s buy me some nice new shoes. These getting pretty ratty. No prestige in that.”

Lea and Daize enter.

Lea. “It’s projected loss, until we’re out of stock. It’s maddening, however. Really aggravating. Aren’t we all supposed to be this unified collective, working for each other, for ourselves? A happy family?”

Daize. “Sid used to say that too.”

Lea. “That’s because he saw himself as father, with a father’s power, and infallible. All paternalists think they’re paternal. There’s a grain of righteousness within the adolescent’s peeved rebelliousness, when taking little somethings from the old man’s wallet. But to pilfer from your siblings? From yourselves? It’s lunacy, obtuseness.”

A worker enters.

Lea. “You here for the meeting?”

Worker. “Oh, is that now?”

Lea. “Starting in about five minutes. Will you come back then?”

Worker. “Oh, I can’t in five minutes, sorry.”

Lea. “Never mind. But close the door behind you, will you?” To the janitors. “And’re you here for the meeting?”

Male janitor. “Sure as sharks eat fish!”

Lea. “Wonderful, but will you let us have the room until it starts? We’ve got some things that need discussing. I appreciate it.”

Male janitor. “All right, no problem, can do.” The janitors exit, closing the door behind them.

Lea. “Nine point ninety-seven’s not so measly. We have fallen under ten, four other times, four other quarters, over five years. Thus, this quarter’s round the twentieth, twenty-fourth percentile. But you go back ten, it’s right around the average. Not so lousy. I should even say it’s quite within the range of normal fluctuation. Taking in consideration all the drastic changes we’ve experienced, the upheaval undergone, the transformation we’ve been able to achieve these past three months, one’s bound to say that it’s a miracle we’ve done so well. I’m not ashamed of nine point ninety-seven—though I do wish it were better. —Did you talk to whatsisname, the guy who never cared for Sid, your contact at Horizon Techware?”

Daize. “Selton Faraj. Yes, this morning, at length. Says they won’t place an order unless we can drop down to fifty a case.”

Lea. “Has he lost his reason?”

Daize. “All the departments, he says, he supplies, have been downsized, or will be, or worry they soon will be. Money is scarce these days.”

Lea. “Isn’t crime increasing? What’s the matter with this country?”

Daize. “That’s the perception, in any case. Violence in crime is apparently down, though, according to him. Law and order’s unpopular just at the moment, he says. Individual freedom’s the catchword right now—independence, autonomy. So the departments’re feeling the squeeze in their budgets.”

Lea. “What we need’s a thumping civil war. —Of course I’m only joking.”

A worker enters. “Oh.”

Lea. “Hi. You coming for the meeting?”

Worker. “No thanks.” The worker exits.

Daize. “Maybe I could’ve persuaded him better in person.”

Lea. “Can’t afford to fly you clear across the continent whenever there’s a contract needs negotiating. Makes us look a little desperate, too, I’d think. It’s better, surely, to appear unneedy, and a little bit aloof. Suggest to him that we’ve less need of him than he has need of us. Besides, we can’t go low as fifty. It’d set a precedent.”

Daize. “You’ve the decision to make.”

Lea. “Or you don’t agree? If your opinion’s we should sell at fifty, I’ll present both sides and bring it to a vote.”

Daize. “Anything sold’d reduce excess stock—though the thieving is doing that too—and help transfer some numbers to ledgers’ black sides.”

Lea. “Yes, I’d feel much better if our books looked better. But I’m hopeful we can get to ten point ten by end of year. The owners cannot hardly be displeased with that. And with the workers happier, the future of the company is solidier than ever. Anyway, they’ve tasted freedom, and are dead against all interference. No, the owners wouldn’t dare appoint a new director, risking costly turmoil, if we manage ten point ten, or somewhat better, overall, and by year-end. Or don’t you think so?”

Daize, hesitating. “May I speak frankly?”

Lea. “Naturally. I value— Your opinion’s always valued.”

Daize. “Really you shouldn’t put every least question to vote. It’s confusing to people, and tiring, and leads to these meetings interminable, which is why they’re so clearly unpopular.”

Lea. “There are still a couple minutes left yet.”

Daize. “You’re in a better position than anyone, nearly, for making decisions: you’re expert, and knowledgeable, and your vision is clear. But you open instead every matter to endless and fruitless discussion. The average employee knows nothing, moreover cares nothing, of selling a case at fifteen, or five hundred, or fifty.”

Lea. “You and I can understand, so we can surely help them understand it also.”

Daize. “What is the point of that? Wisdom’s no precious, rare, widely distributed ore you accumulate only from numerous mines. It’s a clarity born of a ripened and orderly calm—so’s more commonly found in the sole individual, less in cacophonous crowds. Even three people—two—even one person sometimes must dally and dither. Why multiply muddle, inflicting on everyone else your uncertainty?”

The two laughing workers reenter.

Worker. “Oh, right, the meeting. Sorry.” They exit.

Daize. “When you’re explaining, they listen—because you are better informed, more experienced, et cetera. But then they await, often vainly, your guidance, your reasoned opinion. I won’t resurrect my old arguments why we officially, formally ought to appoint you director. However, I’ll say this much only: they want your direction, Lea—want to be told how to vote! Why then force them to vote at all? Rather, just tell ’em post-facto what you have decided—and why, if you must. They would thank you, I’m sure.”

Lea. “Maybe, but I cannot work that way, for it’d violate collectivism’s principles: I mean non-hierarchy—anarchy; transparency; democracy. —Often I recall that second day, the day we really took control, the morning after Sid walked out. That morning I let Matheson persuade me equalizing wages—fifth of our demands—would prove too radical, unpopular, extreme, would be defeated if we put it to a referendum, and for all the reasons he adduced: that people more fear change than evil that’s familiar; that we gauge our value only, know our stature only, in comparison with others, and would rather be untall than in a heightless world, would rather be a nobody in midst of somebodies than merely be an anyone, an everyone; that every vote entails a modicum of chance, of risk, and equal wage was too important to be left to chance; that people can’t be trusted to discern and choose what’s best for ’em.”

Daize. “That’s an assertion I wouldn’t expect from a populist.”

Lea. “All my faith’s the opposite direction, with enlightened self-determination. Only blinders, ignorance, and barriers prompt our wrongly choosing. Wealthiness and privilege are insupportable with open eyes. There’s few could eat an apple, less enjoy, beneath a starveling’s gaze. The sight of suffering others, their dejection, their abasement, doesn’t cheer or puff us up, but only sickens and dispirits us—and sickens most who benefit the most. The high, no less than low, would gain if lowliness with highness were, in one sharp blow, eradicated. You and I, for instance, had our wages lowered; now there’s none resent us, none whom we despise. We’re better off. And aren’t the shop-floor workers?”

A knock at the door, which they ignore.

Daize. “Matheson Church has a different opinion these days, it seems.”

Lea. “Proof that autocratic, unilateral, oligarchic governance, when even well-intentioned, poisons hearts of those who govern. Half I blame myself for letting him eschew the vote. The only hope for lasting true community of loving and cooperating souls is perfect parity of income—that’s my creed. But I betrayed my faith by implementing it by fiat. I had hoped that ends would expiate for means. Decrees, however, even those decreeing equal freedoms, do perpetuate a hierarchy, which is always built on caste, obedience, inequality. By that same token, every democratic vote, including those relinquishing democracy, do cultivate equality, respect, and freedom. We were lazy shepherds, building sheepfolds; we were nervous, fearful parents nurturing polite propriety with muzzles. Now, today, I’d rather let the factory make joint mistakes than foist on ’em by force or stealth the right decision.”

Daize. “Doesn’t seem different from Sid’s abdication for spite—no offense.”

Lea. “Had he done it for the proper reasons, I’d have said it was heroic.” A knock at the door. “Crying heaven, what d’you want?” The male janitor half enters. “Get out! And leave that door unopened till the meeting’s started! Please and thank you!” The janitor closes the door. “When’s this stupid meeting going to start? And where is Matheson? Or doesn’t he think union members have a stake in things like fiscal quarterlies, which only are our lifeblood’s laboratory test results? No, why should anyone find any interest in ’em? Matheson! The problem with decrees personified, is Colleague Church! Beginning from day one, they like a savior treated him, and now he’s all-too-willing master. What the hell does a collective need a union for still, anyway? Without a management, what labor-management relations can there be? There’s no exploitive bosses left to fight! But he continues with his reckless windbag rhetoric, a child repeating witlessly a once-precious cuss which drew a startled laugh when fresh. A warrior chieftain, he continues rattling spears long after battles have been won, bemused by peace, and loath to yield authority. I wouldn’t doubt this bonus business only’s something meant to keep him grandly busy.”

Daize. “Full-time crusaders require crusades.”

Lea. "So, a tethered dog, he digs and paws to mud his own backyard. I understand what people mean by saying a successful revolution's first concern is getting rid of revolutionaries. Sometimes I could wish we had a guillotine—but he'd have used it first on us, undoubtedly."

Daize. "Let me return, at the risk of displeasing you, to the directorship—which, I believe, in your hands, could be power to neutralize Matheson. He like an enemy treats you already; he's calling for war. Well, an army needs generals."

Lea. "No, no leaders! That's a crucial tenet. I renounce that, I'm as bad as he is."

Daize. "Sometimes to save your abode you must leave it."

Lea. "But you don't protect your valuables by smashing them upon the burglar's head. I know it's me who started metaphoring, but let's stop. They carry us away. This isn't war or home invasion, and the union's not a junta—yet. There are no enemies here, only baffled friends. And I'm no leader. I despise both leaders and, increasingly of late, the led."

Daize. "What more desirable trait in a leader? Those feelings prevent your corruption, prohibit your power's abuse."

Lea. "Let it be. This revolution will be saved without inverting or debasing or betraying it; or else we'll let it die a sinless infant's death. —Well, look who's come to join us!"

Matheson, entering. "Hello. I hope I'm not too late to vote."

Daize. "What are we voting on?"

Matheson. "Whatever. Always there's so much to vote on, isn't there? Today I come prepared. I'm representing eighty-seven of our union members. Here's their signatures."

Lea. "What is this? The maximum allowed a deputy is five deputed votes, and only then when the deputers cannot come themselves, for whatsoever reason."

Matheson. "They've all good reasons: either they're asleep, at work, or at the union hall."

Daize. "Meaning the pub!"

Matheson. “And, point of fact, I only represent these five deputers, as you call ’em; but themselves they represent five others each, which transfer with the deputation; then, those twenty-five in turn are deputies for fifty-some, whose votes all transfer with the transfer of their own.”

Lea. “Transfers aren’t subsumed that way; your limit absolute is five.”

Matheson. “We tweaked that rule. We thought the language was ambivalent. Three words inserted, one removed, was all it took. We’ll find this more efficient, don’t you think? And comfortable. It’s always hard to shoe-horn everyone inside this room. But now, how little space our eighty-seven voters take—with you two, eighty-nine.”

Lea. “Don’t be flippant. We have barely managed quorum for two months now.”

Matheson. “A flattering adversity: it shows the faith of our constituents. The price of able governance is apathy.”

Daize. “Anyway, changes to charter amendments aren’t valid unless you’ve got supermajority.”

Matheson. “We held a meeting—I’m surprised the two of you weren’t there—and changed that rule as well.”

Lea. “But you cannot change those regulations lacking absolute two-thirds majority!”

Matheson. “A simple two of every three, in fact, of those both present and allowed to vote.”

Lea. “You’re precisely wrong; it’s absolute: two-thirds of all who’re eligible. Also, you are obligated to announce all meetings that pertain to charter changes one week in advance, by bulletin board, and by post, or telephone, or leaflet.”

Matheson. “We also changed those rules, which wasted time.”

Lea. “None of this is legal. All these things the charter quite explicitly prohibits.”

Daize. “What’d I tell you? He’s staging a coup.”

Matheson. “Inaccurate. We’re asking only that our eighty-seven votes be recognized.”

Lea. “You keep mentioning a vote. But what vote?”

Matheson. “There isn’t always votes? You do so love ’em, I assumed there’d be at least a few. But if, however, your agenda’s blank, there is one little matter we could put upon the table for discussion’s sake.”

Daize, studying the signatures. “This is more signatures than your whole membership.”

Matheson. “It actually’s our total membership. We lately’ve grown significantly more.”

Daize. “Carmihhal Palst is support staff! Edwina van Sowt and Alfredo Mafal are receiving, and Ben Yi’s a foreman!”

Matheson. “He’s called a supervisor now, and feels a bit disgruntled by the loss of his prestige, and pay, and power. Nor is he alone in that, a feeling widely shared.”

Lea. “You dismay and bewilder me. You court the very same support staff formerly you vilified, enlisting to your cause the disaffected victims of your cause! You’re playing pharmacist to those you’ve poisoned!”

Matheson. “We’re widening the revolution’s scope and draw, while staying true to principles.”

Lea. “Nonsense! You are buying their allegiance; you are bribing them with promises of bonuses—that is, return to wages being stratified. Let’s never mind a moment it’s a Ponzi pyramid, in which the earliest comers only profit; my concern’s its diametric treason to those very principles so glibly you espouse—i.e., equality in everything, especially in wages. That was our foundation stone, our flagship—fifth of our demands, but first important.”

Matheson. “I’m grateful that you bring that matter up, that our agendas have some overlap; the bonuses were just the thing I thought perhaps we’d vote on. Let me rectify a misconception first, or titivate a frowzy memory. I never felt that equalizing wages was a real objective, for it seemed impractical, and probably impracticable, and, like your beloved plebiscites, belike to spark invidious division, too.”

Lea. “That’s what happens under different wages!”

Matheson. “Your disagreement rather proves my point. The question’s still contentious, as I knew it would be then. But I permitted its inclusion—”

Lea. “You permitted!”

Matheson. “I advocated its inclusion for that very reason. Its exorbitance precisely was its pricelessness as chip for bargaining: a thing ostensibly held sacred which, surrendered, might exact some valuable concessions. You’ll admit, we never really dreamed that Sid would grant us wage equality! When haggling, start by always asking double what you want.”

Lea. “You’re rewriting history. You never wanted equal wages? Why insist we push it through without a vote, then?”

Matheson. “That’s proof I never thought it popular. Perhaps enthusiastic victory beguiled my judgement. When resistance of a sudden disappears, you sometimes lurch a farther forward step than your intent. We were condemned by unforeseen success to occupy each fortress we’d besieged, or risk appearing insincere. The air then crackled with excitement of reform, remember; many were electrified, and surely would have been dissatisfied with any less than too much. Were it not for wage equality, they might’ve asked for five-day weekends, or to retrofit the factory to manufacture doggie treats instead.”

Daize. “Stunning. You open your mouth saying one thing, and close it concluding the opposite.”

Matheson. “I’ll clarify. That moment, I thought wage equality was likely popular enough to pass if voted on. Although I’d reservations, I could see no way to squelch it while still saving face. I thought it better then to force it through without the factious, fractious ructions votes foment.”

Lea. “But you didn’t say that at the time, then.”

Matheson. “Not sharing your besotted love of ballots, I may have primed and pruned my words to please you better. Trying as I was to make you seize the very thing you most desired, I felt no guilt at using rhetoric. I would have *shared* if I had aired my doubts to you. Your tragic flaw—and virtue too—is balance, Lea. It keeps you upright—and immobile, for to walk one has to fall a little forward, intermittently. Excessive open-mindedness will make the mind a clangorous bazaar; and too much evenhandedness makes maladroit, undextrous hands. To spare you anguish and deliberation, I presented you the coin’s most shiny side alone. I do the same thing with

the union, and they thank me for it. More than for alternatives or choices, people yearn for certainty, for passion—for direction. Man's a horse who's skittish out of blinkers. Face it, Lea. If we'd've voted on the equal wage, the first thing you'd've done is candidly enumerate the disadvantages!"

Lea. "All this rationalizing tortuously's needless. All your 'rhetoric,' which I'd call disingenuous manipulation, is explained more well by greed than kindness. Your supporters' wages then were mostly underneath the mean. They wanted money then, they want more money now. You promise it."

Matheson. "And what's so wrong with wanting money? Shame, with equal justice, plants for wanting soil, or fish for wanting ocean, birds for worms or cats for milk or cows for hay, as shame a person wanting money, which is food to them and drink, and air to breathe, and clothes to wear, and bath and bed and home. Money's earth on which to stand; and it's the fulcrum and the lever we uproot the mountains with. Yes, money's freedom, possibility, potential. Money is the harnessed fire of sunlight, which bestirs our dust. It is the effervescing creativity of dreams, the fructifying kernel sown in richest chaos. Breaking hackneyed chains of habit, it's the smeared uncertainty emancipating quantum particles, the coil of flurried energy asleep in hidebound atoms. It's the sultry wind of agitation howling through the caves of frigid matter. Money is the will ascendant, soul triumphant, spirit regnant. The universe without it is a void, a barren clockwork prison winding down deterministically to entropy. The lack of money is paralysis, disease, decay, and death."

Lea. "Who now lacks? We've all a living income."

Matheson. "We less want more than chance for more. A pay unchanged, unchangeable, is like a dole or pension granted, and for granted taken—by very regularity unfelt. To seem reward, a wage must fluctuate, or threaten to at least, contingent on performance. Opportunity for more implies its opposite: the same will seem like less, and everyone will toe the line more sprightly. A floor for wages does more damage to morale, in honesty, than even ceiling, since it guarantees the slacker equal recompense to

all, and saps the motivation either through complacency or resentful bitterness.”

Daize. “Who is a slacker? We turn out more product than ever before; we’re not selling it fast enough.”

Matheson. “That revolutionary fervor wanes, or will before too long. Our victories, like constant temperature, or sight or noise unvaried, also fade from consciousness. Each little bonus will to whom receives it seem a little revolution won.”

Lea. “Tell me, by and large these revolutions all will go to union members, won’t they?”

Matheson. “They’ll go to those by union members deemed the most deserving: those who hardest work, whose work is hardest, who most earn respect assisting and inspiring colleagues, and whose efforts seem essential to all.”

Lea. “How perniciously unequal wages lead us back to classism and status hierarchies! Who here’s inessential?”

Matheson. “We all have roles to play, of course; but can a factory spare manufacturers and be a factory? And is it fair a worker on the shop floor, toiling hunched above a noisy, sweltry, greasy belt conveyor should be paid the same as one who sits, legs crossed, in comfy offices, and answers phones, or taps with polished nails a calculator’s buttons all day long?”

Lea. “Do you glorify or denigrate our sedentary paperwork? If we’re so lucky, cozy, spoiled, then why don’t shop-floor workers volunteer for more rotation?”

Matheson. “Because we’d feel uneasy in such ease; because we’d lose our coworkers’ respect.”

Lea. “If you think our work is so distasteful and ignoble, then it’s we who surely should receive the greater pay for putting up with it. And idly tapping buttons!—that’s your understanding, is it, of the work performed by Daize and I? You ninny! When’s the last time you were on the shop floor? What exactly is it that you do here, Colleague Matheson? Collectives don’t need unions! Why don’t you get back to real work!”

Matheson. "I see how much the union's needed, when I see how little's changed. You sound like Sid."

Lea. "You're the one who sounds like Sid!"

Matheson. "And you have never worked a single day upon the shop floor, Colleague Pensilby."

Lea. "Not for lack of willingness. If only I had time, if others could be trained to take my place, I'd gladly work with hands for once instead of head! To turn a crank, pull levers, heave a handle, lift a weighty box, become myself machinery: how pleasant, for a change! To come home aching from exertion, neither stiff nor cramped from immobility! Variety's as good as holiday, and I would welcome any break in my routine. I'm sure my desk, or Sandy's phones, or janitorial broom, would offer you the same relief. And when at last we're doing one another's jobs, we'll value and be valued by each other as we now ourselves each value."

Matheson. "I'm sorry, but you couldn't do what we do; and my men and women wouldn't want to do what you do—push a mop or paper. And there's an end to your utopian dream of sharing jobs like sisters sharing skirts. Besides, it's inefficient! Factories replaced the cottage industries because a congregated group could mass-produce more quickly by dividing labor up."

Daize. "Sometimes there's droplets of sense in his verbiage."

Matheson. "Degrading specialists to generalists not only blunts the worker's skills, negates his individual talents, in effect erases his unique identity; it also rewrites history—denies the revolution called industrial, and thus is anti-revolutionary."

Daize. "Soon, though, they're carried away by the floodwater."

A knock at the door, and Sid enters.

Daize. "Keep that door shut!"

Sid. "I'm unable to otherwise enter, my dear."

Matheson. "It's Sid!"

Daize and Lea. "Sid!"

Sid. "I'm relieved you remember my face."

Lea. "It's been three months only."

Sid. “But undoubted oblivious, memorable months. I imagine them heady with challenge, adventure, and expansion of self. You look ruddy and lithe and well-rested and supple, like heroes afoot at a world-building dawn, when the best is brought out of the commonest folk. How’s the company doing?”

Matheson. “We’re in the middle of a quarterly.”

Sid. “I’d be happy to join you. It’s open to all, I suppose?”

Lea. “Currently employed employees only.”

Sid. “But there’s some of those waiting outside in the hall.”

Daize. “Leave that door shut.”

Lea. “It’s a subcommittee meeting, sort of.”

Sid. “Subcommittee or quarterly meeting, which one?”

Matheson. “A caucus, representative, we thresh apart the coarsest chaff and grain before we all together do the winnowing.”

Daize. “If representing a current employee—or eighty—you’re welcome to stay, but not otherwise.”

Sid. “Representative only for one am I: me.”

Matheson. “You quit.”

Sid. “A vacation recuperative—doctor’s command. Here’s a note for your files.”

Lea. “You resigned!”

Sid. “You must misrecollect. When I left, there was no resignation officially, nothing in ink. Without signing, I can’t have resigned. Nor did you ever send me a notice of being dismissed.”

Lea. “What about that check we sent by courier!”

Matheson. “You sent a check? For what!”

Daize. “Don’t be a turnip. For salary owed, and for holiday pay he’d accrued. Not a penny more.”

Sid. “I admire the changes you’ve made to the place. It’s a lounge for employees? It has that aroma.”

Daize. “Whether or not you received it, we sent you a letter of severance. We’ve copies.”

Matheson, to Lea. “We really did?”

Lea, to Matheson. “We’re as capable as him of frowzy memory, if necessary.”

Sid. “How are sales?”

Matheson. “They’ve never been so good.”

Sid. “Yet the stockrooms, I noticed, are chock to the brim.”

Matheson. “With orders placed and ready to be shipped.”

Sid. “He’s more knowledgeable than before of such things. A promotion? —Of course not: you’re all, so I’ve heard, on a level these days. ‘No more masters,’ correct?”

Matheson. “We’ve instituted job rotation, so we all know more about most everything.”

Lea. “Who’s been letting you inside the stockrooms?”

Sid. “There’s a few still around of my faithful old friends, a few loyal, obedient daughters and sons. They admitted, did some of them, under their breath, as if sadly accustomed to spies, that they thought that the changes around here’d been carried too far.”

Matheson. “While others feel we haven’t yet gone far enough. So what?”

Sid. “It’s a taste, though you’re none of you managers now, of the manager’s foremost dilemma: you can’t ever please all your workers at once.”

Matheson. “That credo, like all pessimistic faiths, does guarantee itself. But every day we’re nearer still to pleasing everyone—much nearer than you managed, manager!”

Daize. “Since you’ve no business here, please be so kind as to leave us to ours.”

Sid. “I neglected to mention receiving a call from Ottavia Farr-Mp in the morning today.”

Matheson. “Who’s that? And wha’d she have to say to you?”

Sid. “Representing the owners, she’d little to say that was nice—rather poured the hot grease in my ear, I’m afraid. But the owners apparently think that this plant has still got a director, you see.”

Daize. “They are mistaken in thinking it you.”

Sid. "Is that so? You perhaps have forgotten to send 'em a putative copy of putative letter?"

Daize. "How could it matter if even we had? It's not going to work, what you're up to."

Matheson. "What is it that he's up to? What's the scheme?"

Daize. "Ten or more people here heard you resign; and two dozen more witnesses watched you walk out; and a hundred and thirty will swear that you haven't set foot for three months in the factory. Prudently, our constitution addressed absenteeism: regular workers have contracts which terminate after a ninety-day unexplained leave. You've been gone ninety-one. And in any event, it is thirty days only for absent directors, whose title devolves to the old vice-director then."

Matheson. "Was that not you?"

Sid. "Convalescent, I told you, not absent . . ."

Daize. "Prove it in court. In the meantime, you'll find that you've lost your authority, squandered your eminence. Captains their ships don't abandon, commanders their troops, or they cease to be captains, commanders. A leader's who leads; and a ruler who abdicates denigrates not just himself but his throne, and all royalty ever. A boss should be seat of a company's consciousness; quitting's lobotomy, psychical suicide, self-vivisection—the treasonous head that secedes from the body. You've forfeited all of your rights, be they moral or legal, to leadership. No one'll still take your orders here. Many in fact will be ready to swear that you're trespassing even. Reality's formed by consensus, and you're the minority."

Matheson. "Our new director's Daize! How nothing's changed."

Lea. "Shush! It's only a formality."

Sid. "But you misunderstand me. I offer to help."

Daize. "We have been doing just fine on our own, thank you."

Sid. "You call nine ninety-seven just fine!"

Lea. "That's a market blip, and well within the range of normal fluctuation."

Sid. "There's no need for assuming this martyrdom, Daize. An ideal is no thing that exists in the world, but idea—or a poltergeist haunting the

brain's lumber-room, which makes move without sensible cause limbs, eyes, tongue. Why give tribute to phantoms, or make yourselves victims for sacrifice unto unseen and unseeable gods? And this combative stance that you take's inappropriate. Please understand, I'm not scheming, or creeping, or weaseling in. I am willing to make you all partners, or if you prefer, vice-directors. You've shown yourselves apt and ingenious, committed and plucky. But still, you're no businessmen, nor businesswomen. And Daize, you're correct that I hadn't a right to let fall on your shoulders the burden that rightly was mine. I'm for making amends, and reclaiming my risk."

Matheson. "The only risks we run are freedom's risks: enlightenment, responsibility, mistakes which earn us wisdom, not regret."

Sid. "I refer to the owners' year-end ultimatum."

Daize, to Lea and Matheson. "We are expected to reach ten point five percent profit by end of the year, says Ottavia."

Lea. "What! Since when?"

Matheson. "'Since when'? So what?"

Sid. "Did you fail to inform them? Collectives can't thrive in such secrecy, Daize."

Daize. "If we do not, they'll appoint a director who's able to."

Lea. "Meanwhile, fire the old—whoever that should happen at year-end to be."

Matheson. "They cannot do it. We now run the place."

Sid. "But they own it, you nozzle."

Daize. "That's why there can be, there will be, no bonuses—nor for that matter the costly rotation of jobs. We'll be needing each dollar that's coming in."

Matheson. "Could someone tell me please, not him, why we should care what ultimatums or demands the owners make? No longer do we have or recognize directors. Let them fire which one of us they wish; we'll hire 'em back. Let them appoint whomever they desire; we will ignore 'em, flout 'em—go on strike!"

Sid. "The perennial solution, the nostrum you dote on."

Matheson. "And why are you still here? Our colleague asked you several times to leave."

Daize. "Some new director can disarrange everything, Matheson: reinstate wage differentials, or outlaw collectives, or even dismantle the union; demote or dismiss the whole mass of us—probably will, when they learn what's been happening."

Matheson. "We'll stay and work, regardless who they sack."

Daize. "Work without pay?"

Matheson. "Unless they pay us, we'll refuse to work."

Sid. "How hermetically sealed is his system of thought!"

Daize. "What if they sell it, or close it, the factory?"

Matheson. "We'll lock ourselves inside!"

Daize. "They can arrest us. It isn't our property."

Matheson. "We'll fight the cops if they don't take our side! We'll start a civil war, oppressed against oppressors! Fuck the owners, fuck the law! And fuck this messenger and lackey, who returns with promises to save us from his bosses by becoming boss again!"

Lea. "Don't you get it, Matheson? They own the factory. Unless they get their profits, they're within their rights to wrest from us its management. Consider it like rent: we pay, or else we'll be evicted. One, or all of us, the end result's the same: our revolution limping to a standstill."

Matheson. "You're all colluding, all the same! As soon as your own neck's beneath the tyrant's heel, you turn collaborationist, and stoop and scrape, and lick the polish from their boots! You're sell-outs, all of you, without a bone of revolution in your skeletons! You're welcomed back, sir, Mister Babcock. We'll resume the conversation where we left it ninety days ago. The union, you'll recall, was on the verge of striking. Now we strike. These thugs of yours have been apprised of our demands. Until you recognize our eighty-seven votes, and institute our bonuses, there's no machines will run, and no machinists pass inside the gates. We'll reckon now accounts, and learn who's least dispensable, and who most otiose. Enjoy paralysis and impotence! Good luck increasing profits with no staff! Be sure to send the owners our hello!" Matheson exits.

The male janitor enters.

Lea. "Go away! The meeting's over!"

The male janitor exits.

Sid. "It's a tough situation you're in. But I know what I'd do, were I you. Should I tell my idea?"

Daize. "Thanks, but instead I'll tell you what you should've three months ago done. With the layoffs you should've gone through. Yes, we'd planned to lay off a few people. Just think: he permitted their threat of a walkout to frustrate his lockout!—a toddler who covets a toy till it's given him. Matheson Church is now offering twice the same gift. We'll accept it with gratitude secretly; openly, though, with bad grace. We allow him to think that this hurts us. Our pride has been stung. So we dig in our heels, set our teeth, cross our arms, make provocative show of not yielding an inch. If they're starting to weaken too early—they can't have much cash in their strike fund—we rile 'em with insults, aspersions, inflame 'em with threats of replacement, arrest, litigation, thus keeping the picket line bristling, and Matheson ever declaiming. If lucky, we'll pare from the payroll two hundred and seventy months workers' wages, which betters the hundred and eighty we'd hoped for from layoffs. Then next year, we'll bring in some scabs who are young and unskilled, who we'll get at half price; while the overpaid up-pity strikers, we leave them to wither and freeze—taking none of 'em back whatsoever, not ever, not even as scabs. There's another of Matheson's gifts to us: death of the union. We meanwhile with skeleton crew keep the factory running at idle. We offer support staff and foremen a raise, or a token reversal of equalization, with promise of more in the future. We minimize output; we've plenty in stock, Sid's correct, that needs selling. We give away cases at fifty, even dump 'em at loss if need be—while committing to no guarantees for the new year. Shut up; I'm not finished. We naturally cancel all purchasing, let our supply contracts lapse, at whatever the penalty; we'll renegotiate everything after year-end. The annealers and crimpers in need of replacing, we sell 'em for scrap, and buy new ones next year. We offload to the city that parcel of foreshore, postponing those upgrades for now to the docks. As a matter of fact, we sell everything isn't nailed down. We'll find buyers, and

dictate our price, since we'll promise to buy it all back in the new year at profit to them. We can even start pawning the windows right out of the walls, for the chattels need never change hands. As for next year, it's gonna be hell; but for us, for the moment, the future has no real existence; our profit in short-term is everything. Drowning, a swimmer can't think of conserving her breath. But we'll make it to shore; we'll survive. Let the new year take care of itself. —So you see, Sid, you've nothing to teach us, and nothing to bring to the feast but your mouth.”

Sid. “I perceive that I should have allowed you more power.”

Daize. “No, for I always had plenty of that. It was only esteem that I lacked; but it's lacking no longer. For everyone, since your departure, now knows who exactly is running this company, who in the past ran it for you: your secretary, and your accountant.”

Lea. “Flattering.”

Sid. “Could you really have thought that I didn't esteem you? How paltry our glances, our handshakes, our words. We're ‘the animal gifted with language’? Pfuh! Man is the beast that communicates least. Let me mend my ineloquence. Daize, I esteem you. Rehire me. Allow me to work underneath you, beside you—whatever. I need to come back to work. Home, and this uniform structureless holiday, kills me. D'you know what it's like, to so suddenly slip from the engine of life, like a cog from its axle? The machinery, horribly, runs on without you. Where yesterday a hundred and thirty and more individuals needed your stewardship, help, and largesse, there's today only one estranged wife who depends on largesse. There were yesterday phones that were ringing at three in the morning; today, none at noon. You were piloting industry then, and were serving the nation by saving from crime our metropolises; now you're as good as a ghost in society—giving as little, as much still desiring. There danced through your banking accounts many millions of figures each week; but today, numbers dribble, excreted like wind from a sack, from your personal savings. I feel as if sloughed. But I'm full still of blood and sensation! I want to come back. Take me back. I esteem you. I need to get out of the house or I'll shrivel and die.”

Daize. "Pleading with me is no use. The dictatorship's over. We now make decisions collectively. Lea, what do you think?"

Lea. "Me? I only work here."

Daize. "Lea is abstaining. I vote that we cannot this moment afford an expansion of staff. And with no other voters with eligibility present, the motion is carried. I'm sorry, Sid. Surely there's many more factories, companies eager to garner experience like yours. If you're sick of your home, try your wife's for a change, maybe."

Sid. "I am waiting to hear still what you have to say, Lea. We always together worked well, did we not?"

Lea. "I agree with Daize, Sid. You're redundant."

Sid. "Then I'll leave." Sid exits.

A pause.

Daize. "Nothing was personal. Never were you what I wanted to oust, but your doctrines. And never was I what I wanted to save, but the factory. I've no belief in anarchic equality. People don't know what to do with equality, Lea. Look at Matheson: never content. When you flatten the landscape, the hills feel belittled, and stomach it badly; the valleys enjoy being raised, and want higher to rise, even higher than mountains were formerly. That is the nature of humans. We constantly measure ourselves by the people around us. We scarcely can stand at a mirror without our comparing the sight to the image we hold of ourselves in our minds. There was something that demagogue, Matheson, said that I thought not entirely inapt: that they wanted the chance to get more. It's the chance, not the more, that is valuable, whether in money or power. The rich aren't more glad or more blessed than the poor, but the poor won't believe it: they need the exemplary fable; their hope of acquiring that wealth is what makes them the gladder and blessedder truly. What's equalization—of wages, position, or rank? Simultaneous snuffing of hundreds of dreams. We should, arrogant in our satiety, hesitate robbing from others their stimulant hunger. I started as typist here, lowly and scorned, but impressed my superiors' superiors, and proved my ability, step after step, until finally, seven promotions and seven years later, I found myself working so closely with Sid that my hands seemed to come out

his sleeves. When I watched you dismantle the ladder I'd climbed, I felt hobbled, afflicted, negated: my history, all my accomplishments canceled, erased! Yet I never intrigued, never sabotaged. Always I gave you the benefit of my experience. I couldn't do less. Situation impossible: wanting your system to fail, but you, Lea, to succeed; helping the factory prosper, but hoping its management foundered. Two unreconcilable aims, incompatibly clashing inside me, their dissonance loosing, untuning my nerves. Only now that I speak do I sound my distress to its depths. What relief to let air in by letting air out! I'll yet turn politician, provided I'm always permitted to talk cleansing truth. But you're silent—upset and annoyed with me. Say something.”

Lea. “Not upset, only thinking.”

Daize. “Thinking of what?”

Lea. “That you're right.”

Daize. “Right? What about?”

Lea. “That abodes can be returned to, vases be repaired—and generals retired. —I'll be director, I've decided.”

Daize. “Oh. I'm surprised.”

Lea begins rummaging in the filing cabinet. “If there's seventy percent of staff that needs to permanently be laid off—but lied to first, manipulated, used, then flicked aside like dirt—I'd rather it was me than you, an epigone of Sid's, who did it to 'em. But if we achieve, by miracle, that ten point five by end of year, I stay director—calling when I please for votes or meetings; maybe hiring back the union members who defect. The grudges that a rift will sow, emotions it'll rouse, will better serve to crumble and to bury Colleague Church's tainted congregation than a noble, proud, and unified defeat. I'll take whoever's desperate, broken, and repentant back—which they will have to be, to take scabs' wages. But we've little choice; that's what we'll have to pay 'em. For we'll be in even direr trouble next year: having sold the windows out the walls, we're due a shivery winter; also, after getting ten point five, the owners might as well demand eleven. But we'll weed those thistles when they've sprouted. First comes first, and second second. Here's the form I'm looking for.” She withdraws a paper from the filing cabinet. “Your name was on it all along. I thought I knew each file, what every

drawer contained. This job begins to overrun one person's shallow brim. We might in January—fate allowing—contemplate the hiring, or the training, of an aide. Sign here, and here, and here too.”

Daize. “Do you believe it is possible really to reach ten point five?”

Lea. “Almost definitely not. The risk, though, should be mine. We can't afford to lose your expertise, now can we? And the blame is mine as well, and shall adhere to me and me alone for every, each dismissal.”

Daize signs. “Don't be too hard on us. This will need witnesses. What could we otherwise do, after all, colleague?”

Lea. “Nothing.” She puts the form in her pocket. “I will have it witnessed later. Now, my first decision as director—almost our collective's first: You're fired.”

Daize. “That's the directorly spirit. You're serious?”

Lea. “As a gravestone. I can offer two weeks' severance pay, but not two weeks', two days', two hours' work. I don't intend offense, but I would rather have you not around. Your influence is bad for me, I reckon.”

Daize. “If I repudiate, challenge you, fight this thing?”

Lea. “That would hardly be what's best, now would it, for the company? By splitting us, you're splitting our minority supporters, guaranteeing full ascendancy to Matheson, and making certain that we fail to satisfy the ultimatum, therefore burdening the factory with some unknown and callow new director.”

Daize. “So, I'm to choose between tyrants familiar and strange; one a plebeian, one a patrician; the one wants to fire me, the other might possibly not. A decision I shouldn't find difficult.”

Lea. “That's not quite how I perceive it. If you want to fight, I'll get the union on my side by telling them your schemes. If somehow you survive the next three months, the owners will replace you anyway. There isn't any future for you here, no more for you than Sid. You're out of allies, Daize. Your only choice is whether I'm allowed to implement your plan in peace. And if you quietly resign, perhaps I'll write a reference that you can show employers.”

Daize. “Maybe I'll make the identical threat to you.”

Lea. “Keep in mind this paper in my pocket, which at my discretion can be copied or destroyed. That means that I decide whose neck lies at year-end beneath the saber.”

Daize. “What if I take from your pocket that paper?”

Lea. “Try. We’ll learn who’s stronger.”

A pause.

The laughing coworkers enter. “Hey, good news! We’re going on strike!”

“Smash the system! Fuck the owners!”

They exit.

Daize takes a step towards Lea, and holds out her hand. Lea shakes it.

Daize. “I have decided I’m sick of this place. There’s no need for a duplicate autocrat, anyway.”

Lea. “Or, I hope, for even one much longer.”

Daize. “Maybe I’ll come to the shareholders’ meeting to see how you’ve done at year-end. I’ll be curious.” Daize exits.

Lea withdraws the form from her pocket, and buries it deep in the filing cabinet. Then she too exits.

BUZZING OF THE intercom, followed by knocking at the door. The female janitor enters with a vacuum cleaner, which she puts to use.

The office has reverted to its former tidiness. The desk is back in use, and the poster is gone.

Knocking at the door. The male janitor enters. The female janitor turns off the vacuum cleaner.

Female janitor. "Look who crosses the picket line!"

Male janitor. "Aw, don't start. —She around?"

Female janitor. "Ain't seen her. You got something to say to her?"

Male janitor. "Think she'll be around?"

Female janitor. "There's some meeting starting soon. Might as well pull yourself a chair up and wait." She resumes vacuuming.

Male janitor, sitting briefly. "Do you think she'll . . ."

Female janitor, turning off the vacuum cleaner. "What?"

Male janitor. "Never mind."

Female janitor. "She might." She resumes vacuuming.

Male janitor. "Might what?"

She stops vacuuming. "What?"

Male janitor. "You said she might."

Female janitor. "What's the question?"

Male janitor. "Aw, cut the corn. Think she'll give me my old job back?"

Female janitor. "If she does, it'll be at half pay."

Male janitor. "That's all right. I expected that. I just need something coming in, or my sister's like to toss me out the house. Half's more anyway than the union's paying."

Female janitor. "I thought the union was out of strike fund."

Male janitor. "That's what I'm telling you."

Female janitor. "She'll make you sign a paper."

Male janitor. "Shit, I'd about sign a hot turd right now, if'd help."

Female janitor. "Making you promise not to join up to any more unions."

Male janitor. "And wha'd any union ever do for me but rile me and mix my brains about and lose me a perfect good job?"

Female janitor. "And get you equalized, and trained, and a little more respect. No, nothing much." She resumes vacuuming.

Male janitor. "Sure, before all them latecomers jumped onto the bandwagon and spoiled things for the rest of us. Before Church started making deals with the foremen and managers."

She turns off the vacuum cleaner. "What?"

Male janitor. "Never mind. Just that I wouldn't be surprised if Matheson Church was in the boss's pocket after all and all along."

Female janitor. "I thought so too for a while. But that's just the moth calling poison what the caterpillar called cabbage. Matheson's only stupid and stubborn, and too in love with his own voice. Straight how: you don't call a strike in the midst a recession." She resumes vacuuming, while the male janitor paces. She turns off the vacuum cleaner. "Why don't you take over?"

Male janitor. "Me?"

Female janitor. "Maybe she'll be more inclined favorable if you're already doing the work."

Male janitor. "Bless your whole heart."

Female janitor. "Don't go getting sticky. I could use the help. To me you're just free labor."

He vacuums while she dusts and tidies.

Lea enters. The male janitor plies the vacuum cleaner with increased gusto.

Lea picks up the phone, shouting over the noise from the vacuum cleaner. "Sandy? Tell Faraj I'll call him back at seven his time. Make it

seven-thirty . . . Move tomorrow's lunch to two, and have the taxi meet me at the restaurant at quarter after three . . . If possible, an aisle seat . . . You will have to talk to Palst. Be firm: 'Decision's final,' and the rest. He's brought it on himself, and half expects it . . . You've as much authority as I do, or as anyone. Remember that. You've my complete support . . . Let's leave Renfrento till I'm back; I know how best to handle him . . . Review the lading from last year; it shouldn't come to more than thirty-seven hundred, I should guess . . . Just sign my name. That's right . . . She's here, in person? Send her in. And bring an extra copy—make it three or four—of those financials. Sandy: thank you."

Daize enters, holding copies of the financial reports. "Must I congratulate you?"

Lea. "Check the final page; the summary's there."

Daize puts the reports on the conference table. "Now there's no need. Invitations so prompt prove a homeowners' pride. My sincerest of compliments." They shake hands.

Lea. "Good to see you."

Daize. "Didn't I promise I'd come to the shareholders' meeting? — These janitors still have the shock-brigade fervor. But couldn't they pause for a meeting's length?"

Lea. "They've their work to do, like you or I have."

Female janitor. "That's okay, Miz Pensilby. We're finished now. I said, we're finished now!"

Male janitor, turning off the vacuum cleaner. "That's right. All done. Everything slicked and squared, sheveled and ruly."

Lea. "Then your own authority discharges you. But first, my thanks." She shakes the male janitor's hand. "We'll speak tomorrow."

Male janitor. "It'll be an honor, Miz Pensilby."

Lea. "Don't forget to take the garbage with you."

The janitors take the garbage and exit.

Daize. "Even 'an honor, Miz Pensilby'!"

Lea. "Yes. It's awful, isn't it? Some honor! He will beg, and I'll bestow his job back, but at half his former pay. A teacher, parent, or policeman

must have sometime made him grovel for a favor. Now it's second nature. All society, all upbringing's our enemy. To think, I used to think it Sid! — But how have you been?"

Daize. "Though there's a petty and rancorous part of me still that'd like to declare that you ruined my life, it'd be an untruth. I am excellent."

Lea. "Then that cookie factory did hire you?"

Daize. "No, but another. Your letter was helpful. That 'supervised over a hundred employees' was most what impressed them, I think. I now supervise, anyway, over two hundred—and earn more than double what Sid at his highest munificence deemed I was worth. Not that money is everything."

Lea. "No, but as the lazy person's index to importance, income is the closest thing to praise most unimaginative bosses have to give. I'm pleased to hear you're valued—and that you, where Sid collapsed, have fallen firmly on your feet, and bounced back."

The intercom buzzes.

Daize. "Maybe because I'd less distance to fall than him."

A knock at the door. Matheson and Sid enter, followed by the receptionist.

Receptionist. "I'm sorry, Lea. They said you were expecting them."

Lea. "Sandy, thank you; that's all right." The receptionist exits. "A lie, but all the same, uncanny. I've not said nor thought your name but once in ninety days, and that was half a minute prior to your entrance, Sid. Perhaps you were expected—never, though, with Colleague Church beside you."

Matheson. "You're right to quail: your monocratic reign of terror lies upon its bed of death; its final breaths are numbered fewer than the hours in a winter's afternoon."

Lea. "Did I quail?"

Sid. "Let's not start, Colleague Matheson, thumping our chests. It's delightful to see you, Miz Pensilby, and a surprise wholly welcome to find here Miz Glied. You are both looking splendid as ever. I trust the appearance expresses the inner content?"

Daize. "If it were so, your expression would seem to be that of a snake that has swallowed a cockatoo."

Sid. "If you see what I feel, it is gratitude here on my face. If I thought that she'd take it, I'd give Lea my hand and congratulate her. Ten point five by year-end! Now the new year begins with no need for the owners to send a replacement director."

Lea. "I begin to sniff your plot's malodor."

Daize. "Lea is director; there's documents proving it."

Sid. "I have seventy-five faithful friends who'll attest that they're forgeries; more, that I never resigned."

Matheson. "You glower now, but I'm inured to that. Perhaps you should've made concessions; showed some willingness to compromise, or yield; negotiated, not neglected all our deadlines and ignored all our demands."

Lea. "Just like Sid did—or have you forgotten?"

Matheson. "He now perceives the proletariat's might."

Sid. "That's a fact."

Matheson. "Besides, a lion's less repugnant than a lamb that roars. He never was a traitor."

The intercom buzzes.

Sid. "And this lion, moreover, is learning to bleat."

A knock at the door. The receptionist enters, followed by Ottavia Farr-Mp.

Receptionist. "Miz Farr-Mp is here for the meeting, Miz Pensilby." Exits.

Ottavia. "Good afternoon, all. Why don't we begin? This shouldn't take long." She sits at the head of the conference table.

Matheson. "We can't begin until the owners come."

Lea. "Miz Farr-Mp's their delegate. And Mister Church here is, or represents, the union."

Sid. "Introductions are needed, I see, all the more since there's been some confusion of late with regard to our various roles at the factory here . . ."

Ottavia. "That will not at all be necessary. I'm here today in courtesy only, on behalf of the shareholders—or the former shareholders, I should in-

stead say. As of midnight last night, the factory has been sold to a conglomerate, the name of which will mean nothing to any of you, I'm sure, but suffice it to say they have controlling interests in a score of industries, a thousand companies in every market all around the world. Congratulations. You're part of a much larger family now, a syndicate of corporations, one whose sales in the aggregate exceed the gross domestic product of many small countries, and whose owners are among the richest and most powerful people anywhere today."

Matheson. "You sold the factory?"

Ottavia withdraws a page from a folder. "Naturally, the new owners have chosen to appoint their own director; I bring a list of what he needs from you Monday." Ottavia stands.

Sid. "But we did what you asked! We achieved ten point five!"

Daize. "You!"

Sid. "I said 'we'! It's an outrage, in any event."

Lea. "I suppose you always meant to sell it?—that the boosted profits only meant to make it more attractive for the purchase?"

Ottavia. "I cannot divine what my clients, the former shareholders of your company, intended or did not intend to do. But they didn't break any promise: They said they'd replace your director if ten point five wasn't reached. They never said they'd keep him if it was."

Sid. "What a mouthful of cowshit! A warning implies a condition, a chance of escaping its threat, or it ceases to be ultimatum, but harm guaranteed. It's like saying our laws let us lock away criminals *and* law-abiders in jail. It's like shooting a man for not burgling your house. It's a joke; it's a punchline. It's crap."

Matheson. "We weren't consulted, so we won't comply."

Ottavia. "Their actions need no justification; but supposing that they did intend to sell all along, you hardly helped them raise the price with this strike and these picketers thronged outside your gates. Every time I step inside them, this place seems upon the verge of self-combustion. If you can't control your staff, it's little wonder you cannot control your profits. I would hardly blame anyone, old or new owners, if they tore this building down and

sold it for scrap. But nobody asks me my opinion. Gratuitously I squander it here. My words, I see, fall like rain on desert, so I'll waste no more. Good day—and good luck making your good luck.”

Matheson. “Until we come to some agreement, till we're granted what we're asking, no one leaves.”

Ottavia. “But this matter no longer concerns me.” Ottavia exits.

Matheson. “She will return, or, rather, be returned.”

Lea, looking at the page on the table. “Shouldn't I have somehow seen this coming?”

Sid. “What contemptible, underhand treatment. From Glen and Rebecka and Tonio I'd never expect it.”

Daize. “How is it worse than what you'd meant to do to poor Lea?”

Sid. “I was only reversing what you'd done to me!”

Daize. “Don't you remember? You quit—half a year ago!”

Matheson. “That never happened. Nobody resigned, and nobody was fired. Hell, there was no strike. If she can sell the factory, impose on us some dictatorial new director, we can then impose on her the past that we prefer—and future too. Before she's back, let's get our story straight.” To Daize. “Do you, for instance, work here still—again?”

Lea. “The financial statements and reports will take all weekend to compile alone. And look! He wants a list of all employees, with their past and present salaries, too.”

Matheson. “You see! We draft our own reality.”

Sid. “So this upstart can better dismantle it. Sure, he'll sack first who he deems to be most overpaid.”

Ottavia enters, escorted by two workers.

Workers. “This one wants to talk to you, boss.” They exit, standing guard outside the door.

Matheson. “You're ready to negotiate now terms?”

Ottavia. “You're the hooligan responsible for this enormity? I'll see you're thrown in prison for this, with your hired ruffians, before the day's end.”

Matheson. "I told you: no one leaves until we reach together some agreement mutual."

Daize. "What're you doing, sequestering us forcibly?"

Ottavia. "There's a cordon of armed hoodlums around the factory; we're being held hostage. Do you have any idea who I am?"

Matheson. "Some big-shot owners' representative? We never properly were introduced."

Lea. "When you say that they are armed, you mean they're . . .?"

Ottavia. "Armed! With guns and knives, like vigilantes!"

Daize. "Now we know who has been raiding the stockrooms."

Lea. "Matheson, this isn't safe. One spark, and . . ."

Sid. "I had nothing to do with this, any of this. It's important that everyone realize that."

Matheson. "Don't fret. I've given firm instructions not to shoot inside the gates—unless provoked. But no one will provoke; you're too outnumbered. Today we see a microcosm here, in fact, of macroeconomics: one or two exploiting profiteers, and scores of workers, human livestock, burden beasts, the many who by few are milked till dry. Acculturation's slow hypnosis, a philosopher once said. It must be; what but mesmerism, magnetism, mind control, and lies could else subdue the herd, which could betrample anytime their herders? Today we break the trance, and demonstrate the might that's dormant in majorities."

Ottavia. "I will not submit to any speeches. You can kidnap, shoot me, knife me, beat or rape me, but you can't force me to listen to you bloviate socialist claptrap."

Lea. "Matheson, your quarrel is with only me. These others have no part in all this."

Matheson. "No, everyone is implicated now, the highest chief executive down to the lowliest of janitors; and no one leaves until we've built a better world."

Ottavia. "Fevered lunatic! The world makes people, and not vice versa. The flora in your guts have as much chance of changing you as you changing the world. You confuse for wholes what are only parts. Trust the whole

to know what's best for itself. The only thing the world wants from you is for you to pursue your own interests—*that* is what makes *it* strong.”

Matheson. “The cancer cell thinks he’s the highest purpose—”

Ottavia. “I’m not debating! How much do you make—your yearly income? I can guess. I don’t allow my socio-economical inferiors, still less my abductors, the privilege of contradicting me. I’ve heard it all a thousand times before. But have you, any of you, ever known, ever even met a real rich person? I don’t mean any millionaire, but a mogul, a tycoon, a fiscal sun round which there orbit a million millionaires like dotting planets; I’m talking about the superrich, whose wealth exceeds your dreams’ imagination. Of course you’ve never, or for the status quo you would have more respect, because you’d realize it’s based on meritocracy. The superrich rule the world because they’re super clever, wise, and energetic, supremely nimble, staunch, fervid, and strong. They’re healthier and lovelier even than average people; they’re superhuman. When once you’ve met a truly rich person, the poor appear like lank imitations, pallid specters, mere dry offscourings, dust. Instead of being grateful that the rich exist, instead of praising them, thanking them for stirring your lumpen listlessness to some semblance of life, for carrying you about on their heels like pollen, you curse their weightiness and anathemize their interference!”

Lea. “What a lot of nonsense she does prattle.”

Sid. “Let’s not anyone provoke anyone else, and remember this all’s a big misunderstanding.”

Ottavia. “This cow’s uprising you preach is but the hallucination of a parasite who thinks he’ll survive without any host.”

Matheson. “The idle owner is the parasite!”

Ottavia. “You call them idle! They who orchestrate economies, who steer corporations, who engineer and doctor the commerce that keeps us alive! They who’d die of shame before they’d so shirk their obligations to humanity by hunkering down on a picket line!”

Matheson. “They suck the marrow from the workers’ bones!”

Ottavia. “And if they do, the more should you thank them for stimulating, enlivening, and whetting and honing you with the rough rasp of adver-

sity—for putting before your eyes the image of a better life, indeed, a better you.”

A gunshot is heard.

Sid. “What the fuck! That was down on the floor!”

Matheson exits, and Sid goes to the window.

Ottavia. “You’d be plutocides, and kill off the rich, but in the process you’d exterminate your own potential; you’d excise your own organs before they’re even fully grown. You’d topple trees like termites, but from spite, not need—when you could yourselves become trees!”

Daize. “Everyone can’t all be plutocrat millionaires.”

Ottavia. “Doesn’t that make it more desirable? By narrow roads one gets to high places; worthwhile things are won with difficulty. What value would jewels have if they adorned every décolletage? Who’d cherish gold if our streets were gilded, or pearls if pearls were common as pebbles? I would rather make precious things more scarce, therefore more precious, than dilute their worth with ubiquity. I would concentrate vaster fortunes in even fewer hands. I would have richer rich and poorer poor! More giddy heights and more abysmal depths! Let us undergo every experience the human frame can support, play every note that the human instrument can sound. Let’s have women and men span the gamut from base to noble, from mud to ether, from insects to gods.”

Matheson enters. “A false alarm.”

Sid. “We’ll be killed by your dogshit alarms.”

Ottavia, lifting the telephone from the desk. “Did the universe, the creative force, lift itself from ooze primordial and differentiate, individuate, distribute itself in countless discrete parcels, but so we could undo its work? Your insurrection’s metaphysical, not political. You cannot have light without shadow, wave without particle, pleasure without pain. Your attack on the rich is an attack on disparity and imbalance, which is the force that drives, the ambidextrous engine that propels the cosmos onward. You’re worse than Satans! You’d depose the Tao, unweave the tensile fibers of the stars!”

She strikes Matheson over the head with the telephone. He collapses.

Daize. "What are you doing!"

Lea. "Matheson!"

Sid. "What the fuck!"

Ottavia. "You'd wage war against individuals, and boil this many-flavored earth down to insipidest pap. The only freedom's individual freedom; you'd use yours to demolish the very system that gives it to you. The alternative to free and open competition's not utopia, but totalitarian police-statism. You'd bloat government till each citizen's her own probation officer, a bureaucratic functionary in charge of her life-file. You'd make an anthill of society; of men and women, robots who'd never spurn their programming."

Matheson gets to his feet. "How dare you hit me in the head."

Lea. "Take it easy."

Daize. "How do you feel? If you're dizzy, you'd better sit."

Matheson. "My brains feel curdled, like a bowl of words."

Sid. "He's all right."

Ottavia. "In the end, you're steeped in hypocrisy; you embody it. 'Equality's your battle cry, but how poorly paid are your waitresses and maids, your babysitters and your hairdressers? Do you know or care who makes your shoes, or what their profit is? Do you support your children's teachers' strikes? For that matter, how much allowance do you give your children for cleaning your homes and washing your clothes? You think you're livestock; do you ever ask what quality of life your livestock and meat animals have? Indeed, you endorse the food chain and the paramount place you hold in it every time you swat a fly or eat a fine cheese. The fact is that life feeds on other life. You cannot clear a pleasant path through the forest without your massacring scores of ecologies. Well, the rich eat the poor; be happy to feed your superiors." She throws open the door. "Your leader is hurt. I'm going for help." She exits.

Worker. "Boss?"

Matheson. "Oh, let her go. She's quite insane." The worker closes the door. "I can't believe she hit me in the head! That proves, if proof were needed, that the ruling class is doomed, and knows it: they'll defend them-

selves like cornered vermin, rearing, hissing, tooth and nail—and telephone. The powers that be will soon have been the powers that were. That day can't come too soon for me; I'm suddenly quite tired. But first: the war that fumigates them from their filthy nests and corridors of backstairs influence and leaves the world pristine again, and disinfected, new. I'll get me to the gates. The flunky cops will be here soon. We'll see who's better armed. To think that she called *us* totalitarians!"

Lea. "Matheson, you're still a bit unsteady, in your walk and in your thoughts. As far as I'm concerned, the strike is over, ended with your total triumph, every one of your demands fulfilled. You'll have your jobs back Monday, at whatever wage you think is safest, bearing our new management in mind; I even am inclined, before I'm fired, to write you checks for three months' back pay, since this whole commotion was incited by the ultimatum fraudulently foisted on us by Ottavia and the former owners. Sid and Daize by rights are welcome to their old positions too—or let them take whatever title pleases them. We might as well be all directors or all presidents, to make the new one's task of sifting us more difficult. But stand your little army down, and hide your weapons quickly. We will vouch that Miz Farr-Mp assaulted you quite motivelessly. Also, you should have a doctor check you."

Sid. "You could have a concussion, it's true."

Matheson. "All right. I do feel rather strange." He sits at the desk. "We won?"

Lea. "Yes. It's over."

Matheson. "That's good." He faints.

Lea. "Call an ambulance." She opens the door. "You both come in here."

The workers enter. "What happened?"

Lea. "Mister Church was wounded by that woman."

Sid. "He has probably got a concussion, we think."

Daize. "Telephone's broken. I'll use the receptionist's." She exits.

Lea. "He's in need of medical attention, which will soon arrive. Before it does, for crying heaven, ditch your guns. Or better yet, go home. The strike is done; we gave you everything. You work again on Monday."

Worker. "Thank God."

Other worker. "I told you it would work."

Worker. "Still, I wish I could've shot this baby once." They exit.

Sid. "I'll escort them outside, and make sure that they leave, and in safety. —You mean what you said 'bout my job?"

Lea. "What's it matter anymore what I say?"

Sid. "But you'll tell the director I never resigned?"

Lea. "If you like, sure."

Sid. "And that equalization of wages still holds?"

Lea. "Sure. Your salary's as low as mine is."

Sid. "Then you're still my accountant, the best that there is. We won't lap any shit from this asshole. We'll stand all together, support one another. Without us, he's nothing. He can't run the place by himself."

Lea. "If he gives us any fuss, we'll strike him."

Sid. "That's the stuff." Sid exits.

Lea touches Matheson's head.

Daize enters. "Shouldn't be long till the ambulance gets here. He's bleeding a bit, but we shouldn't compress it, in case there is swelling. Some ice would be harmless, though."

Lea. "You should go. What's left to do, I'll handle."

Daize. "Call me if ever you need other witnesses."

Daize exits, shutting the door behind her.

Lea opens the door. Then, consulting Ottavia's paper, she removes files from the filing cabinet and, as the sound of a siren grows louder, tears them to shreds.