

AN AMERICAN WORKER

A New Musical

By Tom Attea

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CAST OF CHARACTERS

BRIAN, a steel worker, late twenties, early thirties

DEB, Brian's girlfriend and then wife

JACK, steel worker

DEKE, steel worker

DON, CEO of Union Steel

ED, Brian's father

FRANK, union negotiator

JEN, young woman

Other workers, managers, and family members

SONGS

ACT I

AN AMERICAN WORKER.....BRIAN AND OTHER WORKERS
 IT'S HARD TO SEE HOW IT PAYS.....DON AND OTHER MANAGERS
 I'M GLAD I WAS BORN.....BRIAN
 WHAT'S IT MATTER?.....DEB
 WHO'S STANDING UP OR US TODAY?.....BRIAN
 I'LL FIND A WAY.....ED
 A SPACE MADE WITH LOVE.....DEB

ACT II

AMERICAN INGENUITY.....BRIAN
 FAT CHANCE.....JEN
 A GREAT BIG HOLE..... JACK
 IF NOT YOU, WHO?.....DEB
 SOMETHIN' NEW.....BRIAN
 HANG ONTO YOUR DREAMS.....DEAK
 REPRISE.....CAST

SETTINGS

Company picnic

Streamside hill

Brian and Deb's living room, dining room, bedroom

Street, curbside

Negotiating table

Gate to Union Steel

Park bench

PRODUCTION NOTES

A small town in southwest Pennsylvania, dependent on a single steel mill.

ACT I

SCENE 1

*A company picnic. Banner reads: Union Steel
75th Annual Picnic." Don Gainor, the CEO, on
platform with other white-collar executives.
Workers listening, while eating hotdogs,
hamburgers, ice cream, and sipping beverages.*

DON

And so welcome to this year's annual company picnic, as we celebrate 75 years of Union Steel as a vital member of the community and the great importance of you and your families to Union Steel.

JACK

(calls out)

Who are you kiddin', buddy?

DEKE

You don't give a fiddler's damn about us! Or we woulda been back on the job a long time ago.

Strike signs come up in the crowd. "On Strike!"
"Pay Raises, Not Pay Cuts!" "Protect Our
Pensions!" "Proud To Be Union!" "United We
Stand!"

JACK

Ratify the new contract!

BRIAN

(to Jack and Deke)

Come on, guys. Let the man speak.

DON

Now, now, gentlemen, let's not let anything get in the way of our traditional annual s get-together. Let's use it as an occasion for improved relations among us all.

DON (CONT'D)

(over hubbub)

I assure you, nobody wants the best for you and Union Steel more than I do. We all live in Unionville -- management and workers alike. But we all have to be realistic!

JACK

You take the pay cut!

Crowd roars its approval.

DON

(raises arms)

OK, folks. Let's all just have a wonderful day!

More boos.

Lights go down and come up on Brian and Deb, walking along. He's eating a hot dog.

DEB

What do you think's gonna happen, Brian?

BRIAN

Oh, it'll all sort itself out, Deb. Always does.

DEB

You sure about that?

BRIAN

Sure, I am. We gave enough back during the last strike. It's time for the company to step up to the plate.

DEB

I hope you're right. How many hot dogs you had by now?

BRIAN

What's it matter? I melt the fat off at the blast furnace -- at least, when we're not on strike.

DEB

I move my butt, too.

BRIAN

If we get hitched, you'll have better things to do than work checkout at the supermarket.

DEB

Like what?

BRIAN

(gives her rear a squeeze)

You know what.

DEB

Stop it! You know I don't like you doin' things like that in public.

BRIAN

OK, OK. Sometimes I can't help it. I love bein' with you.

DEB

I love bein' with you, too, Brian. Just don't embarrass me in public.

BRIAN

I don't see anybody lookin'.

DEB

Don't matter. Private stuff is private. If we do get married, I'm not sure I want to be a homebody for the rest of my life.

BRIAN

You can do whatever you want. I just want you to be happy. That's what two people together are supposed to do, ain't it? Help each other be whoever they wanna be. But let me ask ya. What's ten bucks an hour at the Shop 'n' Save, compared to bein' at home with me? I make enough for both of us.

DEB

You mean when you're not out on strike. My daddy told me, "Never marry a steelworker."

BRIAN

Really? Now, why would he say that? Half the people in this town work at the mill.

DEB

Said you ain't got no future and I should look for an independent businessman like him.

BRIAN

What, a plumber?

DEB

What's wrong with bein' a plumber?

BRIAN

Nothin'. Just ain't my chosen line of work.

(flexes muscles)

I am a man of steel.

DEB

I can do that, too.

(flexes her muscles)

BRIAN

(squeezes the muscle in her arm)

Wow, talk about steel. Don't worry, Deb. The mill ain't goin' nowhere. It was good for my grandfather, good for my pappy, and it'll be good for me.

DEB

I hope you're right.

BRIAN

Oh, stop worryin', Deb. I'm not just an ordinary worker anyway.

DEB

You ain't?

BRIAN

Nope. Neither are these other guys.

DEB

Then what are ya?

BRIAN

I'll tell ya.

(sings)

I'M NOT JUST A WORKER.

(points to other guys)

AND YOU'RE NOT JUST A WORKER.

(speaks)

Ain't that right, fellas?

JACK

What you talkin' about, Brian?

BRIAN

You know, Jack.

(sings)

I GOT SOMETHIN'

AND YOU GOT SOMETHIN'

NOBODY ELSE IN THE WHOLE WIDE WORLD

GOT GOIN' FOR THEM,

EXCEPT EVERY OTHER WORKER

WHO'S LUCKY TO BE

RIGHT HERE IN THE LAND OF THE FREE!

(spoken)

I'm an American worker.

OTHER WORKERS

Cool, Brian! Yeah, man! You got that right!

BRIAN

(spoken)

So don't just stand there. Come on and sing along.

BRIAN & OTHER WORKERS

AMERICAN WORKER!

I'M AN AMERICAN WORKER!

Others join in.

BRIAN & WORKERS

A WORKER WHO'S PROUD TO BE
ON THE JOB IN THE LAND OF THE FREE --

BRIAN

NOW, WE HEAR IT SAID WE'RE NOT WORTH
THE WAGES WE DEMAND
AND THE UNIONS SHOULD DISBAND.
YEAH, WE'RE ALL SO WEAK AND "UNSKILLED"
WE ONLY MANAGED TO BUILD
THE GREATEST NATION ON EARTH!

BRIAN & OTHER WORKERS

AMERICAN WORKER!
I'M AN AMERICAN WORKER!
A WORKER WHO'S PROUD TO BE
ON THE JOB IN THE LAND OF THE FREE!

BRIAN

WE'RE TOLD TO COMPARE OUR PAY
WITH WORKERS OVERSEAS,
SO WE'LL ACCEPT A FREEZE.
BUT MANAGEMENT HAS IGNORED
THAT THOSE WORKERS COULD NEVER AFFORD

TO LIVE IN THE USA.

YEP, THEY'RE RIGHT. WE CAN'T COMPETE

WITH LABOR THAT'S DIRT-CHEAP.

BUT WE EARN OUR KEEP, 'CAUSE WE MAKE

STEEL THAT DOESN'T BEND OR BREAK --

BEAMS THAT MAKE SKYSCRAPERS RISE

THAT DON'T COME TUMBLIN' DOWN

AND BRIDGES YOU CAN DRIVE

ACROSS AND NOT DREAD YOU'LL DROWN.

WE MAKE STEEL TUBES AND PIPES

THAT CARRY OIL AND GAS

CLEAR ACROSS THE USA

AND DON'T CRACK LIKE THEY'RE MADE OF GLASS.

AND WE MAKE ROLLED STEEL THAT GETS SHAPED

INTO CARS AND TRUCKS AND TRAINS,

AND ALL KINDS OF MODERN THINGS

THAT DON'T BUCKLE UNDER STRAINS --

ALL OF WHICH EXPLAINS

WHY I'M PROUD TO BE

Don and other executives show up and observe.
When the workers are done, Don steps forward.

ONE OF THE MANY WHO MADE
THIS LAND WHAT IT IS FROM THE START,
WITH MY MIND, TWO HANDS AND HEART,
AND ALL WE DO IS APPEAL
THROUGH OUR UNION FOR A SQUARE DEAL,
SO WE GET FAIRLY PAID --
AS AN AMERICAN WORKER.
(mothers for others to join him)
A WORKER WHO'S PROUD TO BE
ON THE JOB IN THE LAND OF THE FREE --
ON THE JOB IN THE LAND OF THE FREE!

DON

I wholeheartedly agree. You men are the best workers in the entire world! You're productive, you're stable, you're square shooters. And I appreciate you more than you can believe. But running the company just isn't what it used to be.

(sings)

I CARE FOR THE WORKINGMAN
AND THE WORKING WOMAN ...
(other managers join in)

DON & OTHER MANAGERS

WE CARE FOR THE WORKINGMAN,
AND THE WORKING WOMAN, AS MUCH
AS YOU FELLAS DO, WHICH IS WHY

WE KEEP UP ON TOPICS SUCH
AS THE GLOBAL MARKETPLACE
AND IT'S INFLUENCE ON THE PRICE
OF STEEL. BUT, TOUGH AS IT IS,
WE CAN'T BE OVERLY NICE.

JUST CONSIDER THE MUCH LOWER COST
OF MAKING ALL KINDS OF STEEL
IN OTHER COUNTRIES WHERE
LABOR'S A FAR BETTER DEAL.

DON

THAT'S WHY TODAY ...

Other managers join in.

DON & OTHER MANAGERS

... WE REGRET TO SAY
IT'S HARD TO SEE HOW IT PAYS
TO GIVE YOUR WORKERS A RAISE.

Workers boo.

DON

Please, please, gentlemen, I'm only talking about your own long-term good and the survival of Union Steel.

OTHERS

You mean, your fat-cat salary! Who are you kiddin', buddy? Freeze your own pay!
Deny yourself a bonus!

DON

(spoken)

Gentlemen, please!

(sings)

YOU KNOW WE HAVE TO COMPETE.
AND BUYERS WON'T PAY MORE
FOR WHAT THEY CAN GET FOR LESS,
THOUGH IT'S FROM A FOREIGN SHORE.

DON & MANAGERS

THAT'S WHY TODAY,
WE REGRET TO SAY,
IT'S HARD TO SEE HOW IT PAYS
TO GIVE YOUR WORKERS A RAISE.

DON & OTHER MANAGERS

(singing and dancing)

DUMPING, DUMPING, DUMPING!
WE'RE ALL THE VICTIMS OF DUMPING!
FOREIGN COMPANIES SELLING GOODS
FOR LESS THAN THEY COST TO MAKE
AND GIVING US A THUMPING, THUMPING,
THUMPING!
OF COURSE, IT'S UNFAIR, UNFAIR, UNFAIR!

AND IF THEY DRIVE US OUT,
 THEIR PRICES ARE SURE TO GO UP!
 SO BUYER, BEWARE, BEWARE!

WE WISH WE COULD SAY MORE RELIEF
 FROM WASHINGTON COULD BE
 ON THE WAY BUT IT SEEMS AS LIKELY
 AS CONGRESSIONAL HARMONY.

THAT'S WHY TODAY
 WE REGRET TO SAY,
 IT'S HARD TO SEE HOW IT PAYS
 TO GIVE YOUR WORKERS A RAISE!
 VERY SORRY TO SAY,
 IT'S HARD TO SEE HOW IT PAYS
 TO GIVE YOUR WORKERS A RAISE!

Management applauds the CEO enthusiastically,
 while the workers boo, hiss.

WORKERS

(raise signs)

Strike! Strike! On strike! No more concessions! United we stand!

DON

OK, OK, you all just have a great day!

Don and other managers depart.

JACK

What do you think, Brian?

BRIAN

Nothin' to worry about, Jack. We got the union, ain't we?

JACK

Yeah, but it ain't what it used to be.

Frank, a union representative, hears him.

FRANK

What do you mean, Jack? I'm in there fightin' for your wages and benefits every day.

JACK

Sure, Frank. But how much longer can we hold out?

(to others)

I don't know about you guys, but after bein' out for three months, my bank account is pretty much tapped out.

DEKE

Whose ain't?

FRANK

Just hang in there a while longer, men. If anyone can negotiate a fair deal for ya and get you back on the job, it's your union negotiating committee.

JACK

I sure as hell hope you're right, Frank.

DEKE

(raises beer)

I'll drink to that. Here's to the union!

BRIAN

(raises glass)

And to Frankie -- the fearless leader of our negotiating team.

Lights fade down.

END OF ACT I

SCENE 1

ACT I

SCENE 2

Brian and Deb, lying on a high bank, looking down into a stream.

BRIAN

Pretty place, ain't it?

DEB

Yeah, nice and peaceful, too.

BRIAN

Great escape from all the commotion. You know, ever since I was a junior in high school, I used to come here every Sunday mornin' -- I mean, weather permittin'.

DEB

Why'd you do that?

BRIAN

Oh, just to pass the time, when my mother told me I had to go to church.

DEB

You mean, you didn't go, even back then?

BRIAN

Not since I learned to count my blessings, just like my grandma always told me I should. I'd just drive out here and sit on the bank, lookin' down at the stream and the trout finnin' in deep green water. Bein' part of all this natural beauty made me feel holier than listenin' to somebody tell me for the umpteenth time we're all sinners who have to be saved.

DEB

Well, that's what the church says, ain't it?

BRIAN

Yeah, I know. But maybe that's part of why we have so many problems in the world. Maybe it's because people decided this life is second best. So most of 'em treat this beautiful earth and other people like they're second-rate. I mean, what if we decided this life is the best thing we can know? My guess is then we'd start fixin' things.

DEB

You always try to put a positive spin on things, Brian.

BRIAN

Yeah, I've noticed that about myself. It's like some people will look around at the wild flowers and see the bees, so they worry about gettin' stung. Me -- I think what amazing creatures the little things are. And guess what?

DEB

What, Brian?

BRIAN

Next to the trout down there, you're the greatest blessing I ever had.

DEB

Next to the trout? How can you compare me to a bunch of fish?

BRIAN

Just kiddin', Deb. Here's what I mean.

(sings)

WHEN I GOT TO A CERTAIN POINT IN LIFE
I REALIZED I COULD MAKE A CHOICE
BY BALANCING THE TOUGH TIMES I'VE HAD
WITH ALL THE REASONS I HAVE TO REJOICE.

LIKE WATCHING MY FAVORITE STREAM,
SO SMOOTH AND DEEP, FLOW ALONG
AND SEEIN' YOU SITTIN' BY ME,
AS SURE AS THIS IS A SONG,
I'M GLAD I WAS BORN.

THE SAME WAY SEEIN' THE GRASS
AND THE TREES, LIKE A HEAVEN OF GREEN,
WHEN I LOOK INTO YOUR BRIGHT EYES
AND FEEL MY HEART CAREEN,
I'M GLAD I WAS BORN.

SURE, I'VE HAD MY SHARE OF PAIN
AND SOMETIMES I'LL COMPLAIN,
BUT, LOOKING OVER MY LIFE,
THE GOOD TIMES AND THE STRIFE,
I DON'T HAVE TO CONTRIVE
REASONS I'M GLAD I'M ALIVE.

JUST LIKE WHEN I LIE ON MY BACK
AND GAZE AT THE BLUE SUMMER SKY
AND YOU LYIN' NEXT TO ME,
I KNOW AS SURE AS BIRDS FLY --
I'M GLAD THAT I WAS BORN.
AND, BY THE WAY,

I'M KIND OF GLAD THAT YOU,
MY DARLIN' DEB, WERE BORN, TOO.

DEB

Kind of glad?

BRIAN

OK. Very, very glad. The truth is, you're the best thing that ever happened to me. You know that?

DEB

You're the best thing for me, too. I never felt that way about another man.

BRIAN

I feel different when I'm near you, too. Got hormones runnin' around all through my body, makin' me feel kind of tingly inside.

(kisses her)

Now I feel even more like that. So much like that I thought I might see how you feel about bein' the best wife I could ever have.

(takes engagement ring from pocket and
gives it to her)

So what do you think?

DEB

(opens box)

Oh, Brian, it's beautiful. You have to say it, though.

BRIAN

Say what?

DEB

If you can't figure it out, I might not say what you want me to.

BRIAN

Well, that's a very persuasive argument. So let me see if I can understand what you mean.

DEB

Come on, silly. Say it.

BRIAN

Oh, I now I got it. Will you marry me?

DEB

That depends. I want you to promise always to remain the really positive and thoughtful person you are.

BRIAN

That's easy. You got it.

DEB

Then you got me.

BRIAN

Oh.

DEB

What do you mean, "Oh"? That's all you can say, when I said I'd marry you?

BRIAN

You mean you're not gonna just say yes? I said, "Will you marry me," didn't I?

DEB

All right, I'll say it. Yes.

BRIAN

Whoopie! You know that's the best single word I ever heard. You really will be the best wife I could ever dream of. Well, won't ya?

DEB

Of course, I will, silly.

BRIAN

I'll be the best husband, too. Mind if we seal the deal with a kiss?

DEB

Sounds right to me.

They kiss and lie down together, as the lights fade down.

END OF ACT I

SCENE 2

ACT I

SCENE 3

Street, curbside. Deke on his motorcycle, talking with Jen.

DEKE

Come on, Jen. Hop on.

JEN

No way. I ain't gonna let no asphalt scrape the skin off my legs.

DEKE

I ain't never had an accident.

JEN

I hope it stays that way, for your sake, Deke. Anyways, I can't take you seriously.

DEKE

Why not?

JEN

You like to play the field. I seen you with so many women it makes my head spin.

DEKE

Well, there's a reason. I don't have a single friend who got hitched who's happy. Do you?

JEN

You just haven't met the right woman yet.

DEKE

Well, that just might be the case. You supposed to be her?

JEN

I didn't say that. You did. But you can think about it.

DEKE

Maybe I will.

JEN

Anyways, how you gonna be fit for marryin' when you run around on your motorcycle all day and half the night? I'd be worried sick somethin' would happen to you.

DEKE

You like thinkin' that way, don't ya?

JEN

What way?

DEKE

Thinkin' we was, uh, hitched.

JEN

That's for me to know and for you to find out.

END OF ACT I

SCENE 3

ACT I

SCENE 4

Dining room, middle class home. Brian, Deb and Ed. Meal in progress. Birthday cake in front of Ed.. Brian raises glass and toasts Ed.

BRIAN

To my dear Dad, on his 82nd birthday -- still the greatest guy I ever met.

Deb claps.

BRIAN (CONT'D)

(raises glass of champagne)

Here's to you, Dad -- the original man of steel.

BRIAN

So how about a speech, Dad?

DEB

Speech! Speech!

Ed rises slowly.

ED

Thank you, son. And thank you, Deb. And here's to you two on your upcoming wedding. May you be as happy as your mother and I were, God rest her soul. I'd also like to say, current strike aside, may Union Steel be as good for you as it's been for me. Imagine a company givin' a high-school dropout like me a lifetime career and a pretty darn good pension, too.

BRIAN

I'll drink to that.

(raises glass)

DEB

So will I.

All drink, as the lights fade down.

END OF ACT I

SCENE 4

ACT I

SCENE 5

*Brian's and Deb's living room. He enters and
throws down a strike sign.*

BRIAN

Hi, sweetheart, I'm home.

DEB

(enters)

Hi, darlin'. I was just makin' dinner.

BRIAN

(taps her tummy and gives her a kiss)

Good. I'm starvin'. How's Ed, Junior?

DEB

Doin' fine, honey. Any developments?

BRIAN

Not yet. Management just keeps sayin' if they give into our demands, the company won't be able to compete with cheap foreign steel. They keep using the term "dumpin'" to dump on us.

DEB

It's ain't fair. What do they want -- blood?

BRIAN

Every last thing they can get. What the hell do they expect us to do, live on the same kind of wages as workers in developin' nations? But don't worry, sweetheart. We're gonna win this time around.

DEB

But this strike's been goin' on for over six months now.

BRIAN

Yep, pretty soon gonna be the longest strike in the history of the company. But gotta draw the line somewhere. Or what the hell's the use of even gettin' up and goin' to work?

DEB

Don't you trouble yourself, honey. If necessary, I can go back to work.

BRIAN

You ain't never gonna have to do that, Deb. Especially not now. Can't risk you standin' on your feet for eight or ten hours a day when you're pregnant.

DEB

But what if there isn't a settlement soon? We still gotta eat and the bank account's gettin' mighty low.

BRIAN

Oh, stop worryin', will ya?

DEB

How can I? We're totally dependent on that old mill. The whole town is.

BRIAN

Yeah, they sure got us by the you know what.

DEB

They sure do. That's why I think you should reconsider.

(sings; sassy)

WE'RE IN LOVE AND TOGETHER,

SO WHAT'S IT MATTER WHETHER

YOU GO TO WORK OR I GO TO WORK

YOU AT THE MILL, ME A CHECK-OUT CLERK?

I MEAN, WHAT'S IT MATTER

WHO DOES THE SHOPPIN'

OR WHO DOES THE MOPPIN'?

WHO PAYS THE BILLS

OR PICKS UP THE PILLS?

WHO MAKES THE TOAST

OR BAKES THE ROAST?

WHO COOKS THE FISH

OR WHO CLEANS A DISH?

WHO STEAMS THE BEANS

OR WASHES THE JEANS?

WE'RE IN LOVE AND TOGETHER,

SO WHAT'S IT MATTER WHETHER --

YOU FRY THE EGGS OR I FRY THE EGGS,

OR WHO TOSSES OUT THE COFFEE DREGS?

WHO MAKES THE BED

OR JUST SLEEPS THERE INSTEAD?

WHO FRIES A STEAK

OR BAKES A CAKE?

WHO SLICES THE SQUASH

OR, OH, MY GOSH,

WHO WATERS THE PLANTS

AND TRAPS THE ANTS?

THE ONLY THING THAT MATTERS,
IS DOING WHATEVER IT TAKES
TO BE THERE FOR EACH OTHER,
REGARDLESS OF THE BREAKS. .

WE'RE IN LOVE AND TOGETHER,
SO WHAT'S IT MATTER WHETHER
I GO BACK TO WORK RIGHT NOW
AND YOU'RE STILL NOT BACK AT WORK
EVEN WHEN THE BABY'S BORN
AND DRIVIN' US BERSERK?
WHAT'S IT MATTER
WHO WARMS UP THE FORMULA
AND HEARS HIS FIRST DA, DA
OR EVEN HIS FIRST MA, MA?
WHO FEEDS HIM BANANAS AND PEARS,
OR GIVES HIM HIS TEDDY BEARS?
WHO GETS TO GRIPE
WHEN HE NEEDS A WIPE?
WHO SAYS COOCHIE-COO,

AND, DEAR ME, OH, WHEW!

WHO GETS UP AT NIGHT

WHEN HE GIVES US A FRIGHT?

SINCE WE'RE IN LOVE AND TOGETHER,

IT REALLY DOESN'T MATTER WHETHER

YOU DO THAT OR I DO THIS,

IF WE STILL FIND TIME TO KISS.

AND, OH, GEE,

IF WE

JUST STAY IN LOVE AND TOGETHER?

BRIAN

I especially like the part about still findin' time to kiss. But I'm tellin' you everything's gonna be OK. Besides, no matter what happens, I'll find a way to take care of us. Trust me on that.

DEB

But, Brian --

BRIAN

-- You ain't goin' back to work when you're pregnant. And that's that! As our parents used to say, I'm only thinkin' about your own good.

DEB

OK, Mr. Smarty Pants. You can have your way. But that strike better be over soon. Because I ain't offerin' no guarantees!

END OF ACT I

SCENE 5

ACT I

SCENE 6

Workers, including Brian, Deke, and Jack, demonstrating outside of plant, carrying signs: “On strike!” “No more concessions!” “Protect our Health Care!” “Don’t mess with our pension fund!” “United we stand!”

Frank and other members of the union negotiating team show up.

BRIAN

How’d it go, Frank?

JACK

Ya didn’t cave, did ya?

FRANK

You know me better ’n’ that. We stood our ground.

DEKE

So let’s hear how the meetin’ went.

FRANK

I wish I could report the kind of news we’ve all be fightin’ for -- and you all deserve to hear. But management just kind of pulled the rug out from under us.

BRIAN

Whaddaya mean, Frank?

JACK

Come on. We can take it.

FRANK

It makes me sick in my stomach to say it. They threatened to shut down the company.

BRIAN

That don’t make any sense, Frank.

DEKE

What about all our jobs?

JACK

Well, I hate to admit it, but maybe we should give some on our demands.

DEKE

After all this time?

JACK

Anything's better 'n' nothin', ain't it, Deke?

BRIAN

What you're all sayin' just don't make any sense. Come on, Frankie. We're not goin' down without a fight, are we?

FRANK

Your union'll do everything we can to prevent the closure. But right now management is holdin' all the cards.

Lights fade down

END OF ACT I

SCENE 6

ACT I

SCENE 7

Living room. Brian looking out the window. Deb behind him.

DEB

I don't know why you won't talk about it. Everybody else is.

BRIAN

Because it ain't worth talkin' about.

(turns to her)

The company just likes to issue threats to break the strike. Happens during every strike.

DEB

Doesn't sound like just a threat to anybody else.

BRIAN

I'm tellin' ya, it's nothin' but a tactic. Or why did they agree to another meeting with the union tomorrow? You'll see. We'll give a little, they'll give a little, and then the strike will be over.

DEB

I wish I was as certain about it as you are.

BRIAN

That's been the pattern, ain't it? We give and give and then, after they decide they extracted everything they possibly can, they make a deal.

DEB

Bastards!

BRIAN

Ain't really that this time around. Too much cheap steel is floodin' the market.

DEB

You'd think the U. S. Government would do more to protect us?

BRIAN

Well, the government has levied some tariffs. But apparently not enough to protect Union Steel. Management says every time they appeal for more protection, their voices land on deaf ears. Seems the Department of Commerce got other priorities. And, as you know, my sweet, most politicians don't really give a damn about the average worker anymore, no matter what they say. We ain't important enough, especially when it comes to fund raisin'.

(sings)

EVERYBODY THINKS THEY KNOW WHAT'S
IMPORTANT

AND THEY CAN'T WAIT TO HAVE THEIR SAY.

BUT WHAT ABOUT THE AMERICAN WORKER?

WHO'S STANDING UP FOR US TODAY?

MANAGEMENT WILL ALWAYS TELL YOU

WHAT MATTERS MOST IS THE BOTTOM LINE.

THEY FORGET HOW MUCH THEIR SUCCESS IS DUE

TO THE PEOPLE ON THE ASSEMBLY LINE.

POLITICIANS WILL USUALLY TELL YOU

THEY CARE ABOUT THE MIDDLE CLASS.

BUT THEY ACT AS IF THEY DON'T HAVE A CLUE

THERE AIN'T MANY VOTES IN THE WEALTHY
CLASS.

EVERYBODY THINKS THEY KNOW WHAT'S
IMPORTANT

AND THEY CAN'T WAIT TO HAVE THEIR SAY.

BUT WHAT ABOUT THE AMERICAN WORKER?

WHO'S STANDING UP FOR US TODAY?

WHY CAN'T MORE PEOPLE SEE

THE IMPORTANCE OF THE WORKING MAN,

NOT JUST BECAUSE WE EASILY

OUTNUMBER ANYONE ELSE,

BUT BECAUSE WE'RE THE ONES WHO CAN

GET AN IDEA DONE,

SO IT DON'T JUST REMAIN A PLAN.

(to Deb, spoken)

Don't look at me that way. I mean the working woman, too.

(sings)

IT TAKES A WORKER TO MAKE THE STEEL

OR ANY OTHER MATERIAL

THAT GOES INTO ANYTHING

FROM A PIN TO AN AUTOMOBILE.

AND HOW'S A HOUSE GET BUILT,

OR, FOR THAT MATTER,

ANY STRUCTURE AT ALL --

AT LEAST, ONE THAT DON'T TILT
AND COLLAPSE -- WITHOUT SOMEONE
TO DRIVE THE NAILS STRAIGHT IN
AND TIGHTEN ALL THE BOLTS
UNTIL THE JOB IS DONE.

AND WHAT'S AS DEAD AS A STONE
(holds up cell phone)

WITHOUT THE POWER-LINE WORKERS
TO HELP KEEP THE DARN THING CHARGED
BUT THIS FANCY, HIGH-TECH PHONE?

BUT EVEN A WORKER WHO WILL TELL YOU
THE UNION'S WHAT COUNTS , NOT JUST HIMSELF,.
CAN FORGET ITS IMPORTANCE . THEN WHAT DOES
HE DO?
DECIDES IT'S EVERY MAN FOR HIMSELF.

EVERYBODY SURE THINKS THEY KNOW WHAT'S
IMPORTANT

AND THEY CAN'T WAIT TO HAVE THEIR SAY.

BUT WHAT ABOUT THE AMERICAN WORKER?

WHO'S STANDIN' UP FOR US TODAY?

WHO'S STANDIN' UP FOR US TODAY?

DEB

Ain't it the truth, Brian? Hardly anybody in high places seems to care anymore.

BRIAN

All I can say is, good thing we got the union. "United we stand!"

END OF ACT I

SCENE 7

ACT I

SCENE 8

Meeting with management, across a bargaining table.

DON

You've known me for a long time, Frank. When I say something, I mean it. The company simply cannot go on bleedin' money the way it has for the past ten years.

FRANK

Didn't I say we'd make the concessions you're demanding? We're willin' to do whatever it takes to get our workers back on the job.

DON

I appreciate that. We all do. But the unmovable object is we haven't been able to compete successfully in the global market. And it's not just Union Steel. American steel in general has been on the ropes for decades.

FRANK

I'm well aware of the facts, Don. But you don't just decide to shut down the mill after 75 years. Union Steel is deserves better. As you and I know, it's the lifeblood of this entire community.

DON

Yes, and thanks to their efforts, the company has had a great run, and I'm proud to have been part of it. But by now pretty much all the blood has been sucked out of it.

FRANK

You mean it's been sucked out of the workers.

DON

They've been paid fair wages and benefits all along. Yet you called another strike. What you and your union members refuse to understand is, workers don't create jobs. They take jobs.

FRANK

Ain't true at all. The steel they make creates jobs -- jobs for people to make other things. And the wages they spend create jobs, too.

DON

Too late anyway you slice it, Frank. I told you. We've exhausted all our lines of credit, and the banks are at the gate. Sure, some big American steel companies are getting by. But even U. S. Steel was recently bumped from the Dow 100. Given the current economic and political climate, a smaller company like us doesn't have a prayer.

FRANK

I refuse to accept that conclusion.

DON

I know, Frank. But that's reality.

Lights fade down.

END OF ACT I

SCENE 8

ACT I

SCENE 9

*Meeting. Frank and other union leaders at table.
Workers in chairs. Strike signs, lying around.*

JACK

What do you mean, “That’s all she wrote”?

DEKE

We caved on everything, didn’t we?

FRANK

We all did our level best. But it is what it is, gentlemen. As I told you, the CEO said, “That’s reality.”

BRIAN

I can’t believe what I’m hearin’, Frank. You’re great at negotiating. That’s why you were elected to represent us. You gotta talk sense to him and the rest of management. They can’t just shut down the mill and throw us away like a pair of old shoes.

FRANK

My sentiments exactly, Brian. That’s why I did everything but fall on my knees.

BRIAN

Well, fuckin’ fall on ‘em, if you have to. You gotta stop this craziness. You and I, our wives and kids, all of us depend on Union.

DEKE

Maybe we shoulda caved sooner.

JACK

Oh, come off it, Deke. Who the hell ever thought it would come down to this?

BRIAN

Look, Frankie. You, me, Jack, Deke -- all of us are in this together. We can’t just lie down and die. You gotta go back in there and talk sense to them.

FRANK

You want me to give it another try? Fine. In fact, I'll give it one right now, and all of you can bear witness to how I do.

(holds up cellphone and dials)

Here's one for Old Glory -- on speakerphone, so you all can hear what we're up against.

Lights come up on Don in his office, sitting with other members of management. Phone rings. Picks up.

FRANK

Hi, Don. It's Frank.

DON

What's up?

FRANK

Look, I'm in the middle of a meeting with the members. I told them about the pending closure, and they've asked me to reiterate that we're willin' to go all out to save the mill. You name the terms, and we'll live with 'em.

(holds out phone)

DON

That's highly commendable, Frank. And tell all the workers I said so. But we've consulted with our legal team, and the only option left is to wind down the company.

WORKERS

Boo! Like hell! Screw you, buddy! Scum bag!

FRANK

(raises hand to silence them)

Come on, Don. There's gotta be another answer. Just hold off until --

DON

-- Wouldn't make a difference, Frank. We've got to liquidate the assets and pay what we can to our creditors. Like it or not, it's game over.

FRANK

But, Don --

DON

Sorry, Frank. I said, game over!

(hangs up; sighs)

Lights go down on Don.

DEKE

What do they want us to do, Frank, kiss their asses on Main Street?

JACK

Apparently, multiple times.

BRIAN

I ain't buyin' into this at all.

FRANK

Anyone here who thinks he can do better, I'll give you his direct line.

END OF ACT I

SCENE 9

ACT I

SCENE 10

Living room. Brian, Deb, and Ed.

ED

(to Deb)

Mind if I talk to Brian alone for a minute?

DEB

Not at all, Dad. I was just gonna do the laundry when you stopped by, anyway.

(gets up; gives Ed a small kiss)

You're invited to stay for dinner if you like.

ED

Thanks, Debra. I'll think about it.

She leaves.

BRIAN

What's goin' on, Dad?

ED

The company just made it official.

(takes letter from pocket and holds it out)

BRIAN

(takes letter; reads)

This is goddamn fuckin' awful, Dad. I can't believe it! In fact, I can't believe a ton of the shit that's happenin'.

ED

Neither can I, son. Seems pretty much like the end of the road, at least, for me financially.

BRIAN

Don't say that, Dad.

ED

Why not? Like the letter says, all retirement benefits are cancelled. Pretty stiff blow after slavin' away there for over 40 years. I'll tell ya that much. Not sure what to do. But don't worry, son. I'll figure out somethin'. Maybe get some kind of part-time work.

BRIAN

You can't do that. Your heart ain't strong enough.

ED

I'm not an invalid. I just never thought I'd have to think about findin' work at my age. But, to tell ya the truth, I'm more worried about you. You're just startin' out. You got a wife and kid on the way. What are you gonna do?

BRIAN

Don't have a clue. I'm still tryin' to digest what happened. But count on it. I'll figure somethin' out. Somethin' that works for all of us.

ED

I know you will, Son. Just don't worry about me. I'll find some way to get by.

(Sings)

SURE, I'M OLDER THAN I WAS YESTERDAY

BUT I'LL GET BY; I'LL FIND A WAY.

I'M STILL YOUNGER THAN I'LL BE TOMORROW.

SO IF ANYONE THINKS I'M A RETIREE

WHO'S LOSES HIS HOME AND EATS BALONEY,

I SURE AS HELL DISAGREE.

MY BACK'S NOT AS STRONG AND MY HAIR MAY BE
GRAY,

BUT I'LL GET BY; I'LL FIND A WAY.

I'VE GOT A GOOD MIND AND THIS PAIR OF HANDS,

AND I NEVER HEARD THE WORD DEFEAT.

SO YOU CAN BE SURE, WHEN ALL'S SAID AND DONE,

WHATEVER HAPPENS, I'LL LAND ON MY FEET.

I JUST NEVER THOUGHT AT THIS STAGE

I'D HAVE TO WORRY ABOUT SUCH THINGS.

I THOUGHT I COULD LIVE AT PEACE AT MY AGE,

REGARDLESS OF WHAT THE FUTURE BRINGS.

BUT YOU CAN BE SURE THAT, COME WHAT MAY,

I WILL GET BY; I'LL FIND A WAY.

I NEVER LET ANYTHING BEAT ME DOWN

AND I'M NOT ABOUT TO LET IT NOW.

THE ONLY THING IS, I'M NOT SURE HOW --

BUT I'LL FIND A WAY; I'M JUST NOT SURE HOW.

(chuckles; spoken)

Maybe I'll get a job as one of them greeters at Walmart.

BRIAN

Oh, sure. And stand on your feet all day. Don't talk nonsense. I'll take care of everything.

ED

But, Son --

BRIAN

-- I said, I'll take care of it. You may be the original man of steel. But I inherited enough of it to get us through this disaster. Trust me on that. OK?

END OF ACT I

SCENE 10

ACT I

SCENE 11

Gate to the mill, closed. Two guards present, Al and Phil. Brian enters.

BRIAN

Hi, guys. What's up?

AL

Not much, Brian. What's on your mind?

BRIAN

Just thought I'd pay a visit, for old times sake.

PHIL

Sure, ya did.

AL

Ain't ya heard? Union Steel is no more.

BRIAN

I gotta talk to someone. Someone with influence. Don't you understand? With things goin' the way they are, your jobs ain't gonna last forever, either.

AL

Ain't nobody left to talk to, Brian. Place is empty, except for a skeleton custodial staff.
(moves to close gate)

BRIAN

Whaddaya doin', Al?

PHIL

Sorry, Brian.

BRIAN

I been workin' at this mill for over ten years - and now I can't even come through the gate?

AL

It's not up to us, Brian.

PHIL

No choice, Brian. We got no choice.

BRIAN

(clinging to the gate as they close it)

You can't do this. Not to me. A ten-year vet.

AL

Sorry, Brian.

(points to sign)

Like the sign says, "No Admittance."

PHIL

Go on home, Brian. Just go on home.

AL

Get used to it, fella.

The gate closes and locks shut with him hanging on it, weeping. Semblance of the crucifixion.

BRIAN

(as he hangs there)

You don't understand. I gotta talk to someone. Don't you hear me? Doesn't anybody hear me?

Lights fade down.

END OF ACT I

SCENE 11

ACT I

SCENE 12

Deke on his motorcycle. Jen beside it.

JEN

What you doin' pullin' me out of the hair salon in the middle of my workday.

DEKE

I didn't see no customers.

JEN

I got plenty of appointments. They're just comin' in later.

DEKE

I'm sure you do. All kinds of women in this town still have money to spend on their hair.

JEN

You implyin' I'm lyin'?

DEKE

Would I ever do that? But I do suspect that business may be down just a tad.

JEN

What business is it of yours?

DEKE

Not much, I guess. I won't keep ya long. I just came here to make an announcement. Somethin' I got no choice about.

JEN

What's that?

DEKE

This here's your last chance.

JEN

To do what?

DEKE

Go for a spin on my bike.

JEN

Why's that?

DEKE

Just get on it and I'll tell you.

JEN

How many times do I have to tell you ridin' on that thing ain't for me?

DEKE

I just want you to sit on it.

JEN

Why?

DEKE

Just get on it and I'll tell you.

JEN

You promise you won't go anywhere?

DEKE

You have my word. I won't even start the engine.

JEN

All right, then.

(he puts out his hand and helps her get on
the motorcycle behind him)

DEKE

Ain't ya gonna put your arms around me?

JEN

I guess.

(puts her arms around him)

How's that?

DEKE

Feels good. Mighty good.

JEN

Now what's your big announcement?

DEKE

I have arrived at a major crossroads in my life.

JEN

'Cause the mill closed?

DEKE

Yeah.

JEN

You ain't the only one at a crossroads.

DEKE

No, I ain't. But what I got to say ain't about other people. It's about me. I went to the unemployment office yesterday.

JEN

I hear there was a line outside.

DEKE

Clear around the block. Anyway, when I saw how much I'm gonna get, I realized I ain't gonna be able to cover certain things.

JEN

Like what?

DEKE

Well, the biggest thing is my mortgage.

JEN

What about your bike? You payin' it off, too?

DEKE

Nope. Own it free and clear. Which brings me to the reason for my visit. I want you to be the second one to know.

JEN

The second one? Who's the first?

DEKE

Me. I had a talk with myself and arrived at an inescapable conclusion. I have to sell my bike.

JEN

That's the last thing I thought I'd ever hear you say. Seems to me like it's about the most important thing in the world to you.

DEKE

No, it ain't. You are.

JEN

Go on. I know better 'n' that. If you ever had to make a choice, I can see you now, headin' off into the sunset and leavin' me standin' in the dust.

DEKE

Ain't true.

JEN

Sure, it ain't.

DEKE

Well, it ain't. Anyway, the reason I'm doin' it is, I don't have much of a choice. Mill ain't gonna reopen, at least, not anytime soon. And, much as I like my bike, it ain't much fun in the rain and snow.

JEN

No, it ain't. But, even if you wanna sell it, who's got the money to buy it?

DEKE

I spoke to the dealer, and he said he'll take it back. Says he can sell it at an auction near Pittsburgh.

JEN

But, Deke, ain't sellin' it gonna break your heart?

DEKE

It ain't exactly easy. Even gonna be harder than sittin' here with ya, tellin' ya I gotta do it.

JEN

I'm sorry, Deke. I really am.

DEKE

It's what you always wanted, ain't it?

JEN

Yeah. But I sure didn't want it to happen this way.

DEKE

Sure you don't wanna go for one last ride with me?

JEN

All right. A short one. Just take me back up the street to the salon.

DEKE

That's only half a block.

JEN

It's a ride, ain't it?

DEKE

All right. Hang on, girl.

Starts motorcycle, as the lights fade down.

END OF ACT I

SCENE 12

ACT I

SCENE 13

Bedroom. Brian is under the covers. Deb is standing by the bed.

DEB

It's eleven a. m., Brian. When you gonna get out of bed?

BRIAN

(from under the covers)

Why? Ain't got nothin' to do.

DEB

(sits on edge of bed; puts hand on him)

What do you mean? You got the most important thing of all to do. You got to go to the unemployment office.

BRIAN

(groans)

I can't stand it.

DEB

Well, you got to stand it, because we got to eat -- at least, until you get another job. Come on, now. Bet you're the last worker in the mill to go down and apply for it. I know it's hard. But you'll feel much better once you know the benefits are comin' in. It's what we need to eat and give you time to find other work. So come on, dear. Take the pressure off yourself and me and just get it done.

BRIAN

I've been workin' at the mill since I got out of high school, and this is what it all comes to? Bein' on the dole?

DEB

I know it's hard, sweetheart. You're such a proud man. But you paid in. You earned your unemployment. Ain't nothing embarrassing about collectin' on what you earned.

BRIAN

I just need a job. A respectable job.

DEB

Then get up and go look for one. You can't sleep forever. At some point, you got to move your butt.

BRIAN

Don't remind me.

DEB

Come on, Brian. What am I supposed to do, beg you? It ain't fair. Besides, I thought you was a man of steel. Now, look at you. Actin' like some wimp.

BRIAN

I ain't no frickin' wimp.

DEB

Then prove it. Can't ya see? I'm worried sick about how we're gonna make ends meet.

BRIAN

All right. I'll go this afternoon. I just need to lie here a little more and absorb what happened. My mind is totally buzzed. I never thought the mill would shut down for good.

DEB

Well, that's the thing about you, Brian, and one reason I love you. You always looked on the bright side. Time you got back to doin' that. You can't let what happened change who you are. Then what happened really will get the best of you.

BRIAN

You're right.

(sits up)

I'll tell you what I can't get over. I trusted. I trusted the company to be there for me. I didn't go lookin' to start my own business.

DEB

I know. So did most of the other people in this town. That's what I told my daddy when it happened and he said, "I told you so." Now, come on, Brian. You don't want him to pay us a visit and kick your butt, do you?

BRIAN

Your dad, kick my butt? Only in his dreams.

DEB

You don't have to worry about that anyway. He told me I made my bed and I can sleep in it. Seems he'll never understand how much I love the bed I made.

(sings)

A SPACE MADE WITH LOVE,
WE LIVE IN A SPECIAL SPACE,
A WONDERFUL PLACE
WE MADE WITH OUR LOVE.

IT'S A LITTLE PARADISE
THAT LETS US LIVE ABOVE
THE TROUBLES OF THE WORLD,
AND WE MADE IT WITH OUR LOVE --
A SPACE WHERE WE WANT TO STAY
AND NEVER LET ANYTHING
TAKE IT AWAY.

IT'S A SPACE JUST FOR YOU AND ME,
WHERE WE LIVE IN A SPECIAL GLOW,
AND WHERE WE GET TO BE,
NO MATTER WHERE WE GO.
BUT OUR HOME, WHAT WE CALL
OUR HOME, IS THE BEST PLACE OF ALL

FOR THE SPECIAL SPACE
 WE MADE WITH OUR LOVE
 I'M THINKING OF
 THE KIND OF SACRED PLACE
 WE MADE WITH OUR LOVE.

THERE'S NOT ANOTHER PLACE IN TOWN
 OR EVEN IN THE WHOLE UNIVERSE
 I'D RATHER BE THAN IN THE BEAUTIFUL SPACE,
 THE SPACE WE MADE WITH OUR LOVE.

BRIAN

You break my heart. You know that?

DEB

Good. Then give me your hand. I'll help you up.
 (puts out hand)

BRIAN

(puts up hand and grabs hers; stands)

Thanks.

(moves shoulders as if loosening up)

Well, another day, another dollar. At least, that's the way it used to be.

Cell phone rings. He picks it up off the night table.

BRIAN (CONT'D)

Hello.

(shocked)

No ... Don't tell me that!... I'll be right over.

(clicks off)

It's the hospital. Dad just had a stroke. An ambulance took him there.

DEB

Oh, that's awful. Truly awful. I'm so sorry, dear.

BRIAN

Gotta get to the hospital right away.

DEB

I'll come with you.

BRIAN

Too much pressure. Losin' his pension just put too much pressure on him.

Lights fade down.

END OF ACT I

ACT II

SCENE 1

*Bar. Jack and Deke at table with beers.
Bartender at work nearby.*

JACK

(raises glass)

Well, Deke, old buddy, here's to unemployment checks.

DEKE

May they keep on comin' forever.

(they toast)

What a lousy fuckin' way to live!

JACK

Yep. Who woulda thought we'd ever come to this?

DEKE

Whole town's dyin', Jack. Department store closed, movie theater closed, people losin' their homes right and left. I don't know about you. But I can't pay my mortgage no more.

JACK

Who the hell can?

Brian enters.

JACK

Hey, look who's here, Brian. The last optimist in town.

DEKE

Don't tell me you're still lookin' for a job.

BRIAN

What else am I supposed to do? Just sit around a booze it up.

JACK

Well, given the immediate options, it don't seem like the worst possible activity. How's your dad doin'?

BRIAN

Recuperatin'. Still gotta walk with a cane.

DEKE

At least, the stroke didn't kill him.

JACK

So tell me. How ya doin' on the job front? Turn up anything at all?

BRIAN

Not yet. But don't count me out. Don't be too quick to count yourselves out, either. Listen to me. We got a secret weapon and never forget it.

JACK

Sure we do. Then where the hell is it?

DEKE

Ass hole.

BRIAN

So you say. But, I'm tellin' ya, it's true. True as I'm here before your eyes.
(does a quick dance step; sings)

PUT ASIDE YOUR FEARS!

FORGET DEFEAT!

WE GOT ALL IT TAKES

TO GET BACK ON OUR FEET

RIGHT BETWEEN OUR EARS.

AMERICAN INGENUITY!

WE'VE GOT AMERICAN INGENUITY!

WHEN WE FIND OURSELVES

CAUGHT IN A BIND

WE DON'T GIVE UP.

WE KNOW WE CAN FIND --

BEYOND ALL DOUBT --

A WAY TO GET OUT!

AMERICAN INGENUITY!

WE'VE GOT AMERICAN INGENUITY!

WHEN YOU LOSE YOUR JOB,

HOLD ONTO HOPE,

NOT BY A THREAD,

BUT WITH A BULL ROPE,

AND KEEP IT IN TOW,

NEVER LET IT GO!

FORGET THE ODDS,

WE NEVER GIVE IN,

BECAUSE WE'VE GOT

WHAT IT TAKES TO WIN.

JUST LIKE STEEL RODS,

WE DON'T BEND WITH THE BREEZE,

OR LET TOUGH TIMES

BRING US TO OUR KNEES.

AMERICAN INGENUITY!

WE'VE GOT AMERICAN INGENUITY!

WHEN YOU HAVE TO COUNT

WHY YOU SHOULD BE STRONG,

COUNT YOUR MUSCLES AND SKILLS

BUT DON'T TAKE LONG

TO ADD IN THE SMARTS

IN OUR MINDS AND HEARTS

CALLED AMERICAN INGENUITY.

WE'VE GOT AMERICAN INGENUITY.

AMERICAN INGENUITY!

JACK

Well, Brian, I ain't gonna sit here and deny that. But you gotta face it. There ain't no jobs to be had.

DEKE

Least ways, not any job fit for a grown man.

JACK

(motions to bar tender)

Bring the man a Bud Light.

BRIAN

Thanks.

(sits)

JACK

At least, we still got enough money for an occasional beer. Ain't that right, Deke?

DEKE

Got something that works even better 'n' that.

BRIAN

Sleep? I been doin' a bit more of that myself.

DEKE

Who the hell can sleep? I wangled a prescription for pain relievers. As you know, I have a bad back.

BRIAN

Since when?

DEKE

Since I decided I needed one. Either of you guys want some? Got codeine in 'em.

JACK

I'll try anything.

DEKE

(takes one out of his RX bottle and gives
it to Jack; to Brian)

How about you, bub?

BRIAN

No, thanks. Ain't come to that yet.

DEKE

Just let me know if you change your mind. I got three refills left.

BRIAN

You shouldn't be takin' those damn things and drinkin', too.

DEKE

Why not?

BRIAN

Don't wanna kick the bucket, do you?

DEKE

I can't be that lucky.

JACK

Tell me more about your pappy.

BRIAN

Still ain't as clear-headed as he used to be. Knows he lost his pension, but ain't sure what that means. It's a long road back.

JACK

We know what that means.

DEKE

Mighty sad, my friend. But maybe not rememberin' ain't all bad. Excuse me. I gotta take a leak.

(stands)

Be back shortly.

(staggers off)

BRIAN

I worry about him.

JACK

We all do. Sold his motorcycle. Broke his heart to lose it. Next thing you know, it'll be his house. What about you? You got a wife and pretty soon you're gonna have another mouth to feed.

BRIAN

I'll figure out something.

JACK

Well, I'll tell ya, I think this is the first time I'm really happy that I'm divorced. Did I ever tell you why?

BRIAN

No.

JACK

That's because I never talk about it. Wanna know?

BRIAN

I thought you never talk about it.

JACK

You probably wouldn't either, if such a thing happened to you. But I'll tell you anyway. Ruth couldn't cook worth a damn, so I sent her to a French cookin' school.

DEKE

French? That's pretty fancy, ain't it, Jack?

JACK

Only one I could find within drivin' distance. Anyway, off she went and in no time her cookin' improved. But just when I was thinkin', now I'm set, she told me she was leavin' me.

BRIAN

Why would she want to do that?

JACK

She fell in love with the son of the owner of the cookin' school.

BRIAN

Really?

JACK

Yeah. And she was goin' off to Paris with him.

BRIAN

Paris? That don't sound like Ruth.

JACK

Well, ya know what love can do to a person. Anyway, she got pregnant by him and had a kid -- a son she's crazy about. But the prick never married her.

BRIAN

Why not?

JACK

Guess he was just usin' her. Playboy, maybe. Anyway, pretty soon after the kid was born, he run off with another woman.

DEKE

If she run off to Paris, how do you know all that, Jack?

JACK

'Cause she emailed me and told me. Sent me a pile of smilin' pictures and videos of her and her son, too. Know why? 'Cause she was buildin' up to askin' if she could come back.

BRIAN

What'd you tell her?

JACK

"Sorry, sweetheart, but no thanks." I figured if she left me once, she'd probably do it again. So why set myself up for more heartache.

BRIAN

So what's she doin' now?

JACK

Workin' at a French bakery, while she waits for the next sucker to come along.

BRIAN

Well, maybe one of these days you'll meet another woman.

JACK

Don't bet on it. One trip down the aisle was enough for me.

BRIAN

Well, I been lucky that way. Deb makes me feel that when nature created women she sort of kissed men on the forehead.

JACK

That depends on what kind of woman you end up with. In my case, nature kicked me in the ass. Let me ask ya somethin'. What are we gonna do if this strike ain't settled soon? I don't know about you, but I'm kinda runnin' low on funds. Unemployment benefits ain't exactly a livin' wage.

BRIAN

I plan to have a job way before I'm broke.

JACK

No wonder I admire you, Brian. You're the most positive son-of-a-bitch who ever lived.

BRAIN

That ain't all bad, is it?

JACK

Hell, no. I just don't know where you get it from. Got any offers?

BRIAN

Not yet. All I turned up so far is Burger Kind is lookin' for someone to scrub the floors.

JACK

You can have that one, Brian. I'd rather be fuckin' dead.

BRIAN

Me, too. Maybe gotta move on. Look somewhere beyond this one-horse town.

JACK

Like where? We done spent our whole lives in this burg.

BRIAN

Haven't got a clue, Jack. Gotta be some way to get back on track, though.

JACK

When you find it, be sure to let me know.

Deke comes back, staggering a bit.

JACK (CONT'D)

You all right, Deke?

DEKE

Yeah.

(sits back down)

You two solve all the problems of the world yet?

JACK

Yeah. Every damn one of them. Now, life is perfect.

DEKE

Like hell.

(puts his head down on the table, as if
he's going to sleep)

BRIAN

You OK, Deke?

(no response; touches him)

I said, you OK?

JACK

I think he fell asleep.

(shakes him)

Deke, wake up, old sport!

(still no response)

BRIAN

Deke, what'd you do to yourself?

(to Jack)

Look, blood on his arm.

Bartender shows up. Holds up syringe.

BARTENDER

I just went to the john myself -- and found this on the floor.

BRIAN

Damn! I guess the pain relievers weren't enough.

(shakes Deke)

Deke! Wake up!

BARTENDER

I better call an ambulance.

END OF ACT II

SCENE 1

ACT II

SCENE 2

Brian's home. He and Deb are having dinner.

DEB

How's Deke?

BRIAN

Back home, recuperatin'.

DEB

Too bad they ain't got an antidote for what really ails him.

BRIAN

It ain't particular to him. He's just havin' a harder time dealin' with the situation.

DEB

Seems to be the case. I'll tell ya this. If Deke don't get himself right, one day they're gonna cart him off to the boneyard. Where do you think he got the heroin? I didn't even know there was any in this town.

BRIAN

Easy enough. You just have to make a trip to the wrong side of town. Only now it seems that every side of Unionville is the wrong side.

DEB

Gettin' worse every day, too. Which leads me to my next topic.

BRIAN

Mind lettin' me in on it?

DEB

I was just comin' to it. I've been thinkin' about our own situation.

BRIAN

Yeah?

DEB

Unemployment's scheduled to run out in two weeks, ain't it?

BRIAN

So?

DEB

I've been thinkin', I don't want you to have anymore pressure on you than you already do. The last thing we need is for you to have a stroke, too.

BRIAN

I get crazed every time I think about it. What happened damn near killed Dad.

DEB

I know, sweetie. But he's comin' along. I want to talk about you. You ain't made of steel, either. I don't care what you say. I want to help.

BRIAN

How do you propose to do that?

DEB

You promise me you won't get upset?

BRIAN

Depends on what you say, don't it?

DEB

Well, there ain't no way to soft pedal it. I was thinkin' again of goin' back to work.

BRIAN

We already been down that road. Besides, you're seven months pregnant now.

DEB

We gotta do somethin'. It's a lot better 'n' starvin' to death.

BRIAN

Trust me. That ain't gonna happen.

DEB

It ain't? What are we gonna do when the unemployment dries up? Winter's comin' soon. How we gonna pay for heat? How we even gonna pay for the doctor and the hospital when the baby comes?

BRIAN

That's my worry. I'm doin' everything humanly possible. I go to the unemployment damn near every day to see if anything's cookin'. I've gone door to door to about every business that's left standin'. Ain't no jobs to be had for miles around.

DEB

I know you tried everything, darlin'. Just ain't nothin' comin' your way. I don't want you to get all riled up, but I called the supermarket today. They said they'd take me back.

BRIAN

I won't allow it. You can't stand on your feet for eight hours a day. What do you want, a miscarriage?

DEB

Somebody here has to pay the bills, don't they?

Lights fade down.

END OF ACT II

SCENE 2

ACT II

SCENE 3

Chair at hair salon. Jen sitting in the chair, reading a magazine. Deke enters.

DEKE

Why, hello there, Jen.

JEN

Oh, hi, Deke.

(stands)

What you doin' here?

DEKE

Just dropped by to see how you're doin'.

JEN

Better 'n' you, Deke.

DEKE

I don't know about that. Don't look overly busy in here.

JEN

It don't take a genius to figure that out. Now, you better just run along.

DEKE

Why? You scared a customer might come in? Don't seem like there's much danger of that.

JEN

At least, I'm dealin' with the downturn, unlike some people I know. What you on today? Poppin' pills? Shootin' up? Or both?

DEKE

Nothin'. I'm sober as a judge.

(reaches for her but misses)

How come you don't want nothin' to do with me anymore, Jen?

JEN

'Cause you done lost it, Deke. You ain't yourself at all anymore.

DEKE

I ain't? You sure it ain't because I'm broke?

JEN

Not at all. It's 'cause you shown your true colors, Deke. You turned out to be somethin' I never thought was possible.

DEKE

You don't say? What's that?

JEN

You wanna know? I'll tell ya. You turned out to be a weakling.

DEKE

A weakling? Me?

(flexes arm muscles)

JEN

I know you got muscles. I mean, you shown yourself to have a weak character. Go on now, just skedaddle!

DEKE

Guess you don't like me much anymore, huh?

JEN

You ain't doin' yourself any favors in that regard. I'll tell you that. Now, just be on your way, before I do get a customer.

(points to exit)

DEKE

OK. Whatever you say, Jen. You're the boss, at least, for the time being.

(staggers a bit)

JEN

Deke, listen to me. I want you to go home and sleep it off. Ya hear me?

DEKE

What I got can't be slept off.

JEN

Why not give it a try? It's better 'n' staggerin' around town in a daze and gettin' hit by a car.

DEKE

All right, then. Toodle-oo, girl. By the way, we mighta made a good match.

JEN

'Bout time ya realized that. Only now it's too late.

DEKE

Is it?

JEN

It sure does seem like it.

DEKE

What if I get myself right again? Maybe we could still have the life you was dreamin' of.

JEN

I wish. But with the way things have been goin'? Don't seem too likely, Deke.

(sings)

YOU COME BACK NOW

WHEN YOU MADE A MESS

OF WHAT WE HAD

AND EXPECT A CARESS?

FAT CHANCE,

MY WAYWARD FRIEND,

AND FAT CHANCE

THIS AIN'T THE END.

YOU STAND THERE AND THINK

YOU CAN STILL BE
THE LOVE OF MY LIFE
AND EXPECT I'LL AGREE.
FAT CHANCE,
MY BONKERS FRIEND,
AND FAT CHANCE
THIS AIN'T THE END.

I'D SAY OUR TRASHED ROMANCE
HAS ABOUT AS MUCH OF A CHANCE
AS HEROIN OR SOME PILL
HAS OF OPENIN' THE MILL,
OR GETTIN' SOME COMPANY,
WHATEVER IT MIGHT BE,
TO PICK THIS HEART-BREAKIN' TOWN
TO COME IN AND SETTLE DOWN,
WHICH SEEMS SORT OF LIKE ASKIN' SUNLIGHT
TO SHOW UP AND SHINE AT MIDNIGHT.

BUT IF YA GET YOURSELF RIGHT
YOU GOT AN OPEN INVITE

TO COME BACK AND SEE
WHAT JUST MIGHT BE.
BUT, IF YOU NEVER DO,
JUST ASSUME YOU AND I ARE THROUGH.

SO WHAT ARE THE ODDS
YOU'LL MAKE A COMEBACK?
'BOUT THE SAME AS THIS TOWN
GETTIN' BACK ON TRACK.
FAT CHANCE,
MY DEAR, SWEET FRIEND,
AND FAT CHANCE
THIS AIN'T THE END --
YEAH, FAT CHANCE!

(spoken)

Tell ya what, though, Deke. If you do ever stop beatin' up on yourself, you're welcome to come around and ask me how I feel again.

DEKE

Well, whaddaya know? Despite what I become, you still got a soft spot for me, don't ya?

JEN

(hard for her to say)

No comment. Now, go on, Deke. Out ya go. And, Deke.

DEKE

Yeah?

JEN

You take good care now.

Lights fade down.

END OF ACT II

SCENE 3

ACT II

SCENE 4

Park bench. Deke is lying on it. Jack is sitting beside him.

JACK

(pats Deke's shoulder)

I'm sorry she busted up with ya, Deke.

DEKE

Don't matter that much, anyway. I couldn't afford to take her out for a drink or anything else now. Not even to McDonald's. We all been dealt one helluva hand of cards, I'll tell you that.

JACK

Seems to be the case, don't it? I been thinkin'. The only difference between a billionaire, leadin' a cushy life, and a bum on the street is money. Can't let it tear you up totally, though. Gotta see it for what it is. When you got money, people kiss your ass. When you don't, they bite you in the ass. That's OK, as long as you never let it get above your ass.

DEKE

Got any idea how to do that?

JACK

Not really.

(muses)

You know, Deke. Sometimes I think, what would life have been like if we had been born in another place -- maybe someplace far off, like, say, Hawaii. Imagine us, just lyin' on the beach, sippin' milk from coconuts with a straw and maybe ridin' them big waves on a surfboard, like ya see on TV. Now, don't that sound lovely?

(no response; Deke snores a bit. Jack pats his head)

Good old Deke. Off to la-la land again. Well, can't say as I blame you. Not a helluva lot to wake up for. The world has made its decision about us, my friend. We're useless. Fuckin' useless. And what the hell can we do about it? I'll tell you what.

(takes jar of pills from pocket)

Pop another one of your knockout drops, that's what.

Now, I'm a pill head, just like you. That's what we become, Deke, two pill heads. And it don't look like there's any remedy in site. No remedy at all.

Brian enters.

JACK (CONT'D)

Why, look who's here? The world's most optimistic person. How you doin', good buddy?

BRIAN

Not as good as I'd like to be.

JACK

How can you say that? You supposed to be the last person on earth I'd hear somethin' negative from.

BRIAN

(sits down; motions to Deke)

He alive or dead?

JACK

Alive, at least, the last time I checked.

(shakes him)

Hey, Deke, old friend, come on, wake up. So's I know you're still kickin'.

Deke stirs. Groans.

JACK

(pats him)

Good, Deke. That's about the most we're likely to get out of him right now. Been terrible hard on him since he lost his home. Was just a little place, too. Barely room for one person. I used to joke if I got an erection in his house I'd be crushed to death by the walls. So I invited him to come and stay with me, at least, as long as I can hang onto my humble abode. But, hey, when you can't pay up, you ain't no different than a bum on the street. No secure floor for anybody in this country. None at all. It's like everybody's walkin' around in a room with an invisible trapdoor. Unless, of course, you're a billionaire. Which none of us seems in immediate danger of becomin' Gotta love dear old Deke, though. A fine, hard-workin' man once, like all of us. So how you doin', Brian? Tell me you finally gave up, so I can feel better about givin' up myself.

BRIAN

Sorry. I ain't, at least, not yet. Just pissed off as hell.

JACK

Why's that? The many gainful employment opportunities you've been able to locate?

BRIAN

Yeah, and turned 'em all down, too. Turned down at least a dozen job offers within the last hour.

JACK

Sure, you did. In another life.

BRIAN

I'll tell you what's eatin' me up. Deb went back to work. Seven months pregnant, and she's standing at the supermarket, checkin' out whoever can still afford to shop for food.

JACK

Lotta people usin' food stamps.

BRIAN

Yep. Seems to be the usual case.

JACK

I'm sorry, good buddy. Her havin' to work's gotta get to ya. But look at it this way. At least, you got somethin' comin' in. Me and old Deke here, we're broke. Flat-out broke. Wanna feel better?

BRIAN

What's on your mind?

JACK

You're feelin' kind of bummed out too, ain't ya?

BRIAN

Well, it all wears on ya. I never thought bein' outa work could take such a toll on ya. Financial pressure is one wicked son-of-a-bitch.

JACK

Enough to kill a man, ain't it?

BRIAN

Ain't overly pleasant, I'll tell ya that.

JACK

(holds out the pills)

Come on, Brian, take it easy on yourself and take one. It makes your pain fly away like a little birdie in the park. Just flies away and leaves you feelin' no pain, no pain at all.

BRIAN

You shootin' up now, too?

JACK

No, sir. At least, not yet. That's Deke's territory. Ain't it, Deke?

(no response)

BRIAN

(takes pills)

I could use one right now. Got some water?

JACK

Right down the path at the fountain. But just swallow the damn thing. Work up some saliva and it'll start to dissolve. Then down the hatch it goes. And pretty soon you gonna feel much, much better about everything.

BRIAN

(throws the pill in his mouth)

Thanks. How long's it take to work?

JACK

Not too long. Ten, twenty minutes. Pretty soon your pain is gonna fly away, just like mine flies the coop every time I pop one.

BRIAN

Mind if I take a few?

JACK

Be my guest. Now that Deke has a bad back, he gets as many as he wants.

BRIAN

(pours a lot into his hand)

Thanks.

JACK

That's quite a few, ain't it?

BRIAN

Want me to put some back?

JACK

Hell no. Gotta share the good stuff, right?

BRIAN

Thanks, Jack. Just in case I need another one later.

(rubs back of neck)

Damn! I got a tension headache that just won't go away.

JACK

You wait a few minutes, and you ain't gonna feel nothin' at all my friend. Just gonna kind of nod out, like you're sleepwalkin'. Gives ya a kind of detachment that lets ya stagger from one day to the next and on into the future, whatever the hell that may turn out to be. Who knows, maybe somethin' good'll happen again one day. Yeah, maybe one day we'll all wake up and be happy again. Happy and proud, strong and productive, like we used to be. Wouldn't that be somethin', Brian, if once again we was workin' at good jobs -- if we was American workers again, makin' a fair wage and livin' good lives in the greatest nation on earth?

BRIAN

Well, we were not so long ago, weren't we? And still might be again.

JACK

Yeah, once we were on top of the world. Hell, we could do damn near anything. Now we're lucky we can make it from one day to the next.

(sings)

I NEVER THOUGHT I'D COME

TO FEEL THE WAY I DO.

BUT I'LL TELL YA TRUE,

I'M FEELIN' KIND OF NUMB.

I GOT A GREAT BIG HOLE,

A GREAT BIG HOLE,
KIND OF LIKE A SINKHOLE,
WHERE I USED TO HAVE A SOUL.

JUST A BIG EMPTY SPACE,
KIND OF LIKE NO PLACE,
NO PLACE AT ALL,
'CAUSE IT'S BEEN SO LONG
SINCE I COULD STAND TALL.

YEAH, I GOT A GREAT BIG HOLE,
A GREAT BIG HOLE,
KIND OF LIKE A SINKHOLE,
WHERE IS USED TO HAVE A SOUL.

USED TO WORKIN' ALL DAY
TO MAKE MY PAY.
NOW, JUST GRIPE AND STEW
ABOUT WHAT WENT WRONG.
NOTHIN' ELSE TO DO.

WE TOOK WHAT I CALL
A PRETTY HARD FALL.
FEEL A CERTAIN AMOUNT
HOW ONCE WE WERE STRONG,
BUT SEEM DOWN FOR THE COUNT.

I GOT A GREAT BIG HOLE,
YEAH, A GREAT BIG HOLE,
KIND OF LIKE A SINKHOLE,
WHERE I USED TO HAVE A SOUL.

I ALWAYS HAD A JOB,
WAS REAL GOOD AT IT, TOO,
BUT NOW I'M JUST A POOR SLOB,
MOANIN' ABOUT BEIN' THROUGH.

YEAH, I GOT A GREAT BIG HOLE,
A GREAT BIG HOLE,
KIND OF LIKE A SINKHOLE
WHERE I USED TO HAVE A SOUL.
NOTHIN' BUT A GREAT BIG HOLE

WHERE I USED TO HAVE A SOUL,

A GREAT BIG HOLE.

BRIAN

All we need's a break, Jack. One goddam lousy break.

JACK

What kind of break could it be? Excuse me. But I'm afraid I'm a little low on high hopes right now.

BRIAN

Oh, I don't know. Maybe if things get bad enough, the government'll do more to protect us. Maybe some companies will realize we're still a good bet, too.

JACK

Maybe so. But, to tell ya the truth, don't seem very damn likely to me, at least, not in the foreseeable future. This country ain't made up of workers anywhere near as much as it was. We become, to a great extent, just shoppers.

BRIAN

Ain't that the truth, Jack. But we're still the best damned workforce in the world.

JACK

Yes, we are. The hardest workin', dumb-ass dedicated bunch of sweat hogs there ever was and likely ever will be, except maybe them slaves who built the goddam pyramids. Which only makes matters worse, don't it?

BRIAN

It ain't the most pleasant thought, I'll tell ya that. You know, I read somewhere about an idea called economic patriotism. I like that a lot. Means patriotism ain't just about everyday guys like you and me, goin' off to fight and die for freedom. It means American businesses startin' to put the country first, too.

JACK

Brian, what are you smokin'? About all big companies give a damn about it turnin' a profit for their stockholders and sockin' away the big salaries and bonuses for the top executives. Why, a lot of companies that are right here in the good old USA are even claimin' they're located in other countries so they can save on taxes.

BRIAN

That's a frickin' disgrace. Damn near almost seems like treason, don't it?

JACK

Ain't quite like plantin' the flag on top of Iwo Jima, I'll tell ya that.

BRIAN

You won't get no argument from me.

JACK

Worst thing is, I bet if a guy at the top ever tried to do the right thing for the average worker, like maybe give us some stock, too, he'd probably get replaced for not squeezin' every last drop out of sweat out of his labor force and passin' it on to the fat cats.

BRIAN

Yeah, probably. Don't seem to be an excess of wisdom afoot in the financial sector right now. So that only leaves the government.

JACK

Oh, come on, Brian. We can't even get leaders today who are worthy of what this country is supposed to be. And, if ya happen to get one, he just gets overridden by the others. The sorry truth is, most of the people in public office these days seem to be just a bunch of self-interested shits whose primary mission just seems to stay in office.

BRIAN

Often seems so, don't it? Maybe if enough workers wised up and stopped bein' baited by their prejudices to vote against his own self-interest, we'd get enough people in Washington to get somethin' done on our behalf.

JACK

Looks like it's gonna be a long wait, my friend.

BRIAN

Yep. But that don't make the question go away. How do you protect the American worker? Or are we supposed to lose our jobs till the playin' field is perfectly flat and we're willing to slave away for the same lousy wages as people in developin' countries? Pennies an hour. Goddam pennies an hour to try and get by in America. And say it came to that. What kind of country would it be? I'll tell you this. It ain't one I'd want to live in.

JACK

You got that right, buddy. I realize people in those other countries gotta eat, too. But not by lettin' 'em take all the bread off our table.

BRIAN

You'd think there'd be a way for us to make a decent livin' while allowin' 'em time to catch up.

JACK

Well, we'll know it if we ever hear it, won't we, buddy?

BRIAN

Yep. You know what I think we need? Some kind of setup that puts the lives of a country's people first. Puts all kinds of life first. Before money. Before anything else. Or we're just gonna keep hurtin' ourselves and everything else.

JACK

I ain't gonna disagree. But personally I ain't got a clue what the answer is. Tell me, how you feelin' now?

BRIAN

A little woozy. But I am startin' to feel kind of relaxed. Been a long time since the kinks in the back of my neck started to ease up. Feels like springs in a wind-up toy, cranked to the nines, finally easin' up a bit.

(rubs back of neck)

Boing, boing, boing! The damn kinks seem to be poppin' free one after the other.

JACK

Good, Brian. I'm glad you decided to partake of our current remedy. As you'll see, the result ain't perfect. You just kind of doze along life's uncertain path. But it's a hell of a lot better than walkin' off a cliff every day and hittin' rock bottom.

BRIAN

Yeah, maybe so. Seems to me what happened is like bein' shot point blank. Right between the eyeballs. And you know what amazes me most of all? I didn't see it comin'. Didn't see it comin' at all.

JACK

Who did, Brian? Not one of us did. Ain't that right, Deke?

(no answer; pats him)

Good for you, Deke. Just keep sleepin', old buddy.

Sleepin' your way through the hell on earth we been relegated to.

(to Brian)

Know what? Maybe he's better off than all of us. Yeah, good old Deke. He don't feel no pain anymore, no pain at all.

Lights fade down.

END OF ACT II

SCENE 4

ACT II

SCENE 5

Living room. Brian is asleep on the couch. Deb enters.

DEB

Hi, sweetheart. I'm home.

BRIAN

(sits up; groggily)

Hi, babe.

DEB

Anything wrong?

BRIAN

No. Just takin' a nap.

DEB

Dinner ready?

BRIAN

Not just yet.

DEB

(sits down beside him)

I'm worried about you, dear.

BRIAN

No need to be. I'll cook dinner now.

(tries to stand; loses balance and sits back down)

Whoa!

DEB

What's wrong? You take somethin', Brian? Of course, you did. Don't tell me you're gonna become a pill head, too? It ain't like you. You're better than that, Brian, and you know it.

BRIAN

I'm doin' the best I can.

DEB

Are ya? How you gonna find work if you're half asleep?

BRIAN

You tell me where there's a job in this broken-down, bum-fuckin' town, and I'll go apply for it. No prospects. I ain't got no prospects at all. Leastwise, not in this burg.

DEB

Then maybe you got to look elsewhere.

BRIAN

I thought of that a long time ago. But where?

DEB

How should I know? I love you, Brian. I need you to be strong. Promise me you'll be strong. We gotta protect what we have, baby. Protect it with all we got.

BRIAN

You're right, Deb. But what can I do? I feel useless. Right at this particular moment, completely fuckin' useless.

Lights fade down.

END OF ACT II

SCENE 5

ACT II

SCENE 6

In front of the gates to the plant. Jack and Deke.

JACK

Did ya ever think ya'd see a site like this, Deke? Why, I remember when the whole sky used to be filled with smoke as far as you could see. Smoke from the ovens so thick you could hardly make out the blue sign on top of the mill. You remember that, Deke?

DEKE

Yeah. Now look. Not a trace. Can see the sign clear as can be. Only now it ain't lit up no more. Sky's just clear blue, like there was never even a steel mill here. Kind of sterile lookin', ain't it?

JACK

Dead, if ask me.

DEKE

Yep. Dead as a doornail. Nothin' to be done about it, though. Time for that's long gone.

JACK

Yeah. You and me, we belong to a previous generation. American men who used to have good, steady jobs. Jobs right out of high school and right through to retirement. Members of the prosperous middle class. Could afford a home and raise a family. Maybe even send your kids to college. Live a relaxed old age.

DEKE

Seems almost like a dream, don't it, Jack?

JACK

Yeah. And don't look like the good life is comin' back any too soon, either.

DEKE

At least, not around this part of the country. Steel, coal -- whatever we was doin', America don't do nearly as much of anymore.

JACK

No, it doesn't. Like they say, we primarily got a service economy now. Can you believe that shit?

How you gonna be the most powerful nation on earth when you're in the service business, instead of makin' things other countries want to buy?

(mimics)

Do you like the presentation we done for ya, your highness? If by some chance you're not completely pleased with it, we'll be happy to go back and do the whole thing over again.

(back to self)

And, unfortunately, this here particular town shows how far down the wrong road America has gone. It's fallin' apart, fallin' apart right before our eyes. And I don't see how it can get back to what it was. Maybe time for us to think about movin' on, too, Deke. Try a new place.

DEKE

What kind of place? This here is America, givin' away the store as far as the eye can see.

JACK

You got that right. East, west, north or south. Well, it ain't the America I grew up in, pal. It's become the land of the wealthy few and the home of the countless busted.

DEKE

Yeah. No middle. That's the trouble, ain't it? Middle's erodin' away, just like a sand castle on a beach when a big wave comes in and smacks it. And smacks it again. And again -- till there ain't even a sign it was ever there.

JACK

I guess that's it, Deke. And what makes it even worse is, I don't see how the situation is gonna improve anytime soon.

DEKE

Seems unlikely, don't it? Why, look there, Jack. Sun is startin' to set now. Sky is gettin' red. Kind of reminds you of a blast furnace when it's roarin' away, don't it?

JACK

Yeah, kinda. And soon it'll be gone, just like the furnaces at Union Steel. Well, whattdaya say we mosey along, my friend?

DEKE

Where to?

JACK

How should I know?

DEKE

Well, then let's go.

JACK

We'll figure it out, Deke. Someday we'll figure it all out.

Deke loses his balance a bit.

JACK (CONT'D)

You can put your arm on my shoulder if you need to.

DEKE

Thanks, Jack. You're my friend, you know that? My best pal in the entire world.

JACK

You're my best friend, too, Deke. Friends through thick and thin. Yep, at least, we still got that. Come on now, let's head on out of here. I can't stand lookin' at the mill anymore, anyway.

DEKE

Kind of upsettin', ain't it?

JACK

Yeah, you could say that. Off we go, to see the Wizard of Oz.

DEKE

What wizard?

JACK

Just funnin' ya, Deke. Don't matter. Like most other things these days, don't seem to matter one iota.

They walk off slowly, Jack supporting Deke, as the lights fade down.

END OF ACT I

SCENE 6

ACT II

SCENE 7

Lights come up. Brian is lying on the living room floor, with a syringe by his arm. Deb enters. Sees him and runs to him. Kneels.

DEB

Brian, what's wrong?

(sees needle)

Aw, Jesus Christ! Not shootin' up too!

BRIAN

Wha?

DEB

I thought you swore off the pills. And now you're shootin' up instead? You get that shit from Deke?

BRIAN

(groggily)

None of your business. Just leave me alone.

DEB

How can you say that to me? This is Deb -- the woman you're supposed to love and the mother-to-be of your child.

He pushes her away and falls back down on the floor.

DEB

You pushed me. You know that? Seven months pregnant and just back from a full day's work and you pushed me. Well, I ain't gonna stand for it, Brian. No sir, not this good, hard-workin' woman.

(takes his face in her hands)

Look at me, honey. We got a kid on the way. It don't matter whether or not you got a job. He's gonna need a father. You hear me? A father! Not a goddam junkie.

BRIAN

Please, just fuck off!

DEB

Fuck off? Did you say “fuck off”? You think you can talk like that to me? Well, you’re fuckin’ wrong!

She gets up and goes to the kitchen. She comes back.

DEB

Look at me, Brian. I ain’t gonna be stuck with a man who gives up on himself. Unless you straighten up, I’m leaving you. Leavin’ you on the next express.

BRIAN

What?

DEB

I said I’m leavin’ ya.

BRIAN

Like hell!

DEB

(pulls out a butcher’s knife)

That’s what you know! You see this? You don’t get off drugs and get back to bein’ the man I married, I gonna do somethin’ truly awful.

(points knife at tummy)

I’m gonna kill the baby. Kill your baby and my baby -- kill him and kill myself in the process. Because you don’t deserve us. You don’t deserve to be a father. You don’t deserve to be a husband. You hear me? You don’t deserve nothin’ at all! Now, tell me, you gonna stop all this nonsense or not?

(lets knife go down a bit)

You ain’t no drugged-out loser, Brian. You’re a winner, at least, you was. Just got to get back to the man you were. ‘Member when you told me -- you never have to worry, Deb, ‘cause I’m not just a worker. I’m an American worker. A man of steel. So don’t count me out. Now, look at you. Down for the count. It don’t have to be this way, Brian. You can be that man again,. You just have to want to. Do you hear me? You just have to want to be the man you always was, no matter what the world tries to do to ya. The man you always was, not some drugged-out loser who don’t deserve nothin’, nothin’ in this world.

(holds up knife again)

Now tell me, what’s it gonna be?

Or I'm gonna drive this knife right into your baby and into myself. And you ain't gonna have nothin', nothin' in this world for the rest of your life but our blood on your hands!

BRIAN

(still groggy)

All right. Don't get carried away, for Christ's sake. I'll find a way.

DEB

Don't bull shit me, Brian. Swear to God you will stop what you've been doin' to yourself and start to think about your family again. Come on, say it. I swear to God I'm gonna stop all this nonsense.

BRIAN

Swear to God.

DEB

You promise me you mean it!

BRIAN

Yeah. I mean, I mean it.

DEB

(drops knife)

Thank God for small favors.

(falls on her knees and holds him)

Oh, sweetie, we can't go on like this. I need somethin' from you. Need it bad.

I NEED YOU TO BE

THE MAN YOU WAS.

NEED YOU TO BE

THAT MAN SO BAD.

DON'T YOU SEE?

IF NOT YOU, WHO

AM I SUPPOSED TO LOVE,

TO LOVE AND HOLD ABOVE

ANY MAN I EVER KNEW?

IF NOT YOU, WHO

THE PEOPLE IN THIS TOWN

GONNA SEE'S NOT BEATEN DOWN,

SO THEY HAVE SOMEONE TO LOOK TO?

WHEN YOU'RE THE MAN YOU WAS,

'STEAD OF DECIDIN' YOU'RE THROUGH,

AIN'T NO OTHER MAN ALIVE

CAN HOLD A CANDLE TO YOU?

IF NOT YOU, WHO

IS OUR SON GONNA HAVE TO CALL

HIS DAD FROM THE TIME HE CAN CRAWL

TILL HE'S A GROWN MAN LIKE YOU?

AIN'T NO ONE IF NOT YOU --

NO ONE IN THIS WORLD

IF NOT YOU.

DEB

Now, promise me you won't go back on your word. Promise me, Brian.

BRIAN

I just did, didn't I? Mind if I just sleep it off.

DEB

Not here, sweetheart. You come to bed. Come on, I'll help you up. And when you wake up, I want you to be back to the man I married, the good, strong man I took as my husband.

She helps him up and helps him walk toward the bedroom.

Lights fade down.

END OF ACT II

SCENE 7

ACT II

SCENE 8

*Living room. Ed, seated, a cane by his chair.
Brian and Deb seated opposite them.*

BRIAN

So what's the big news, Dad?

ED

I just want you to know you don't have to worry about me anymore.

BRIAN

Who said I was worryin'?

ED

I know you were, Son, and that's one reason I done it.

BRIAN

What?

ED

Signed up for one of them reverse mortgages.

BRIAN

You can't do that. You own that home outright. You never want to risk losin' it. Not at this stage of your life.

ED

I know such a thing can be risky. But not at my age. Got full equity in it. I figured it out to the penny. By the time I take out the value, I'll be a hundred and five years old. And, given the current state of my health, I expect to depart somewhat before then.

BRIAN

You sure you figured the numbers right?

ED

Yeah. I may have become something of a lame brain, but I can still count. I got even better news.

BRIAN

What?

ED

I did the numbers so, if you need me to, I can help you and Deb make ends meet.

DEB

That's so thoughtful, Dad.

(to Brian)

Sorry, Brian. But he really is the original man of steel.

ED

Thank ya, Deb. But your husband has his share of steel, too. Just one more thing to keep in mind when I hit the sod. You and Deb will get whatever equity I don't use up. I put it in writin'.

BRIAN

Thanks, Dad. But don't even talk about checkin' out, OK? I need you around for a long time to come. You were my inspiration, and you're still my inspiration.

ED

Thanks. So, tell me, how's the job search goin'?

BRIAN

Well, pretty interestin' lately. I decided, thanks to my lovely wife's proddin', that there ain't no future in this town anymore, at least, as far as we can tell.

ED

Well, it's hard to face, but now that the mill's gone, that don't take a whole lot of brain power to figure out. Been lookin' elsewhere?

BRIAN

Yes, I have.

ED

Like where? Hope not too far away.

BRIAN

Just wanna get into somethin' with a future, so I'm thinkin' about the energy boom.

ED

Frackin'?

BRIAN

Yeah. Sounds like the future to me, not the past we been locked up in. Gonna take a lot of man power to make the most of it, and I aim to be part of it.

(sings)

IF I SEE CHANGE ALL AROUND

BUT JUST STAY STUCK IN THE PAST,

HOPIN' SOMEHOW IT WILL LAST,

I'M STANDIN' ON SHAKY GROUND.

AND THAT AIN'T FOR ME.

NO, SIREE!

I GOT SOMETHIN' BETTER TO DO,

AND THAT'S TO LEARN SOMETHIN' NEW.

I DON'T CARE HOW CHANGE MAKES

THINGS DIFFERENT FROM WHAT I KNEW,

IF I JUST DON'T DECIDE I'M THROUGH,

I'LL MAKE MY OWN DAMN BREAKS.

SOUNDS RIGHT TO ME,

YES, SIREE!

THAT'S WHAT I'M GOIN' TO DO.

GO AHEAD AND LEARN SOMETHIN' NEW.

I FIGURE I'LL BE AS NEW
 AS THE TIMES I'M IN,
 IF I'M JUST SOMEONE WHO GREW
 WITH THE TIMES HE'S IN.

IT TOOK ME A WHILE TO DECIDE,
 BUT AFTER I GET IT DONE,
 I CAN SIT BACK AND SAY I WON
 AND HUNG ONTO MY PRIDE.
 YOU GOTTA AGREE!

YES, SIREE,
 THAT'S WHAT I'M GOIN' TO DO.
 HEAD OUT AND LEARN SOMETHIN' NEW.

ED

But ain't that occurin' way out in the Dakotas somewhere? I don't want you two to move that far away, especially with little Ed due soon. I've never been a grandfather before.

BRIAN

Actually, I don't think we'll have to move that far away. I've been lookin' into it, and there's some frackin' goin' on right here in Pennsylvania, too.

ED

Good. That's a big relief. I tell you, it's a new world. And, if I know you, Son, you're gonna come out on top of it.

BRIAN

Well, I'm gonna give it one helluva try. I decided there ain't no security in hope without a solid foundation. Time to move on out into the future.

ED

Yeah, I guess the time when you could lead a settled life in this country is pretty much over. Just punch a clock for forty or so years and then plunk yourself down in a rockin' chair. It's a shame. Makes life kind of rough, always uncertain and havin' to change careers and homes -- and just when you'd think, with all the technical advances, life would be gettin' easier.

BRIAN

Yep. Well, Dad, I guess that's the way the cookie crumbles, ain't it?

Lights fade down.

END OF ACT II

SCENE 8

ACT II

SCENE 9

Bar. Jack and Deke are sitting at a table. Jack is looking at his smartphone.

JACK

Sunken ditch!

DEKE

What's up?

JACK

Look at this goddam headline that just popped on. The Chinese are gonna buy Union Steel.

DEKE

The Chinese? Why, them's one of the countries that cost us our jobs.

JACK

Yeah, I know. Let me see what else it says. "Given the productivity and stability of the American workforce and the savings on shipping costs, the spokesman for the company said they can make steel in the United States cost effectively."

(looks up)

Goddam right they can!

DEKE

Fuckin' A! What else does it day?

JACK

Lemme see.

(reads a few moments)

I'll be damned. It says they plan to hire the former employees of Union Steel.

DEKE

Well, can ya beat that? Probably for shit wages, though. I ain't gonna workin' for no slave wages.

Brian enters.

JACK

Hey, Brian. Did you hear the news?

BRIAN

What?

JACK

The fuckin' Chinese are gonna buy the mill and reopen it.

BRIAN

You've got to be kiddin'!

JACK

No, no, look, it says so right here.

(points to article)

Just showed up on the website of the Unionville Courier. Best part is, they're gonna rehire us.

BRIAN

Son of a bitch!

JACK

That's exactly what I said. Jesus, can you imagine working for the Chinese?

BRIAN

No way. First, they help kill off the company with their goddam cheap steel. Then they show up, like a bunch of goddam vultures, and I'm supposed let them eat my heart out? Fuckin' bow down and work for them? Sounds fuckin' humiliatin' to me, downright un-American.

JACK

I don't know about that. A job's a job, ain't it?

DEKE

I think we should cut them some slack. After all, they're the ones who realized we're a valuable commodity, ain't they?

JACK

Good point, Deke. I know it all sounds crazy. But, hey, when was the last time today's world didn't sound crazy?

DEKE

You got that right. Crazy as hell. Before I lost my home to the bank, I used to say I don't even go outside anymore without peekin' first. Never can tell. Judgin' by what I see on the news, might be some crazed person on the roof with an assault rifle, waitin' to pick me off.

BRIAN

Well, what do you expect from a world that thinks this life is second best and the sooner you leave it, the better off you'll be? You want a prime example. Look at the Middle East. Since when has it become acceptable for people to blow themselves and other people up in the name of religion. Don't they get it? If there really is only one God, it's the God of us all, ain't it? And, considerin' they all departed this world at the same instant, a suicide bomber is gonna show up at heaven's gate at the same time as the victims. If God really is great, guess where that stupid-ass bomber is likely to spend eternity? It ain't the paradise of his dreams, I'll tell ya that much.

JACK

Whatever you say, Brian. But come on. Let's get back down to earth. Everything considered, I don't see as we have much choice, anyway. So let's look on the bright side. It's your favorite activity, ain't it? This could mean a whole new life for the town.

BRIAN

Yeah, I guess. Can't knock that. But, personally, I've been lookin' into the energy boom.

DEKE

Ain't that way out in North Dakota?

BRIAN

Not all of it. I been researchin' the subject, and there's plenty of it right here in good old PA, just not right around here.

JACK

But you're part of this town, Brian. You can't just pick up and leave.

DEKE

Your friends are here. So's your family. Anyways, ain't that frackin' supposed to hurt the environment?

BRIAN

I'm sure the process'll improve over time. And it's a lot better than dependin' for oil on countries that are still livin' in the Middle Ages, ain't it?

But I will take that aspect into consideration. Considerin' workin' in solar or wind, too. Whatever pays the bills. That article say when they're gonna start to hire?

JACK

Says within sixty days.

DEKE

Holy smoke! I could be gainfully employed again in just two months!

JACK

Sounds like opportunity knockin' to me. Frankly, I'm gonna be just like the people who buy cheap steel, no matter where it comes from. I don't give a damn about who I'm workin' for. Could be frickin' Martians, for all I care. Gotta put bread on the table. And look at it this way, Brian. The more they own things right here in America, the less likely they are to bomb us.

BRIAN

They couldn't bomb us if they tried. We got the greatest military in the world. We'd wipe 'em off the map.

JACK

Well, let's hope it don't come to that. At least, trade wars are a relatively peaceful enterprise. I tell you, it really is a global economy now, ain't it?

DEKE

I ain't complainin', at least, not this time around. Come to think of it, we might even find we like some of them Chinese people.

JACK

Don't see how they could be much worse than the management that shut down the mill.

DEKE

Ain't that the truth, buddy?

JACK

Well, at least, they got deep enough pockets to reopen the place. I'll tell you, the morning they start hiring, I'll be in line. How about you, Deke?

DEKE

Might even sleep outside the gate overnight, so we're first in line. They give me half a shot, I might even get myself right again.

BRIAN

About time. I did it. You can do it, too.

JACK

So what's it gonna be, Brian -- movin' on into somethin' you don't know dick about or stayin' right here in your hometown?

BRIAN

Well, I have to think about it. But I can tell you right now. This world sure ain't short on surprises. As soon as you think you got everything figured out, every damn thing changes.

DEKE

Yeah. Sure seems so. And after the wringer we been through. Kinda tells you somethin', though. Even when you come up against the most damn disturbin' events you can imagine, don't turn on yourself. Just find a way to go with the flow until you get through the frickin' rapids, 'cause somewhere ahead, even if you can't see where, is another stretch of calm water -- some nice, smooth, lovely pool just to splash around in and jump for joy like you was a kid again. Yes, siree. The evidence is now in. The day after you do something stupid to yourself, whatever drove you to it is likely to change.

(sings)

WHEN YOU'RE FEELIN' TOTALLY HOPELESS AND
WEAK,

TAKE SOME HARD-EARNED ADVICE FROM GOOD
OLD DEKE.

WHEN YOU THINK YOUR JOB IS PRETTY GREAT,

BUT MANAGEMENT LOCKS THE FACTORY GATE,

WHEN YOU KNOW THERE AIN'T NO GOIN' BACK,

AND YOUR BILLS ARE PILIN' UP IN A STACK,

HANG ONTO YOUR DREAMS,

HARD AS IT SEEMS,

HANG ONTO YOUR DREAMS.

WHEN YOU'RE FEELING PAIN SO LONG AND DEEP

ABOUT ALL YOU WANT TO DO IS SLEEP,

GO AHEAD AND NAP BUT DON'T JUST LIE

THERE DAY AFTER DAY AND WISH YOU COULD DIE.

HANG ONTO YOUR DREAMS.

HARD AS IT SEEMS,

HANG ONTO YOUR DREAMS.

AND WHATEVER YOU DO,

REMEMBER THAT YOU

OWE IT TO YOURSELF

NOT TO KILL YOURSELF.

I KNOW IT SOUNDS STRANGE,

BUT A DAY OR SO

AFTER YOU DO IT,

WHAT DROVE YOU TO IT

WILL PROBABLY CHANGE.

WHEN EVERYONE YOU KNOW IS DOWN,

LIKE A TWISTER JUST RIPPED THROUGH THE
CENTER OF TOWN,

DON'T JUST THROW UP YOUR HANDS AND SAY

WE CAN'T REBUILD ALL IT BLEW AWAY.

HANG ONTO YOUR DREAMS.

(Jen enters and takes his hand)

WHEN YOU'RE FEELIN' WEAK,

LISTEN TO DEAK,

AND HANG ONTO YOUR DREAMS.

HARD AS IT SEEMS,

HANG ONTO YOUR DREAMS.

HANG ONTO YOUR DREAMS!

END OF ACT II

REPRISE

CAST

AMERICAN WORKER!

I'M AN AMERICAN WORKER --

ONE OF THE MANY WHO MADE

THIS LAND WHAT IT IS FROM THE START,

WITH MY MIND, TWO HANDS AND HEART,

AND ALL WE DO IS APPEAL

THROUGH THE UNION --

AND TO THE COUNTRY

WE'RE ALL PART OF

AND WE ALL LOVE --

FOR A SQUARE DEAL,

SO WE GET FAIRLY PAID --

AS AN AMERICAN WORKER.

A WORKER WHO'S PROUD TO BE

ON THE JOB IN THE LAND OF THE FREE --

ON THE JOB IN THE LAND OF THE FREE!

THE END