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The Objector

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The Objector . . .

. . . John Weber

CHARACTERS: (in order of appearance)
RUTH ANDERSON—mother of Arne, wife of attorney GERALD ANDERSON.
MR. GERALD ANDERSON—father of ARNE, husband of RUTH.
ARNE ANDERSON—the son and the conscientious objector.
REV. JOHN BARTLETT—ARNE'S religious counselor.

SETTING: The living room of the Anderson house. It is obviously the living room of a rather well-to-do family, for it is richly furnished. One wall is a fireplace, but it hasn't been used for a long time, and an expensive television console sits partly in it. Over the mantle hangs a rifle, polished and wickedly beautiful, occupying the place of honor. On the mantle are a few war souveniers. On the walls are pictures of flowers, vividly contrasting with pictures of war scenes from the last World War. On one table is a picture of Mr. and Mrs. Anderson, Mr. Anderson dressed in the uniform of Colonel in the army. On another table is a picture of Arne, his high school graduation picture. In one corner sits a spinet piano. The room is in very good taste in all respects.

A door on stage left opens into Mr. Anderson's den. An arch on stage right leads to the vestibule and the front door, and also upstairs.

TIME: Early 1951, early in the evening.

As the curtain rises, RUTH ANDERSON is standing in the middle of the room. Immediately the door bell rings, and she walks to the door, coming back with the mail. She finds a letter she has been waiting for and quickly opens it. Before she starts reading she realizes something, quickly puts down the letter, sorts out a newspaper and several letters, and takes them over to the bookcase next to the door of the den. She then returns to her letter.

While she is reading, GERALD ANDERSON opens the door of his den, and strides out into the room.

GERALD: Mail in?
RUTH: (still reading) Yes, dear.
GERALD sees mail and begins to sort it. He is a very tall man of about fifty, with silver hair and a handsome face. He is the town's
most prominent lawyer, and looks the part to the utmost. He fingers the pipe he is smoking, revealing that he is nervous about something, but is trying to hide it.

GERALD: Here it is. The letter from that Scott case witness. *(Reads the beginning)* I knew it! He was lying! I knew it, but no one would listen. I'm a good judge of men! Well, that will settle it without any question at all. *(Walks around nervously)* What time is it?

RUTH: *(Still reading)* Not quite seven.

GERALD: How can you stand there and take this so calmly?

RUTH: Honestly, dear, you act as if Arne were sort of a traitor.

(ARNE walks in. He is tall, slender, and studious looking, a person who instantly commands respect. He is eighteen years old.)

GERALD: Anyone mind if I play a little?

ARNE: It's all right with me.

ARNE walks to his piano, and lovingly fondles the keys, running up and down the keyboard. He begins playing softly the "Moonlight Sonata."

RUTH: *(Looking up)* Dear, must you play that now?

ARNE stops playing, glances at his mother, then closes the piano.

The door bell rings.

GERALD: Perhaps you'd better get that, Son. *(ARNE goes to the door)* At least he's on time.

ARNE: *(Offstage voices)* Hi-ya John. Thanks for coming. Let me take your coat.

JOHN: I'm glad to be here. *(Lower)* Do you think there's any chance?

ARNE: Nope.

JOHN: Well, we'll hope. Where there's a will there's a way.

They walk into the room together. Since RUTH and GERALD are standing together on the other side of the room, they form two groups. JOHN BARTLETT is a man who creates a serene and confident impression immediately. He is quiet in manner, about thirty, and just the type of young minister everyone admires. He represents the ideal man of God.

ARNE: John, this is my mother and father. Mom and Dad, this is John Bartlett.

RUTH: *(A little over-graciously)* I'm glad to know you, Reverend.

GERALD: Glad to know you Bartlett. Shall we sit down.

*RUTH and GERALD sit on the couch; JOHN and ARNE sit*
on the chairs facing them, JOHN nearest the audience.

JOHN: Mister Anderson, I regret that I have to make this discussion briefer than I would like to, but I have—

GERALD (taking command of the situation as a good lawyer does) Now, Reverend, we are concerned with some unorthodox and crackpot ideas that Arne has gotten into his head. I don’t know where he’s gotten them, but I strongly suspect they come from you. And I want to say right here and now that I regard them as unpatriotic and dangerous, and possibly even a little Communistic. Fortunately, such ideas don’t exist in our (turns to RUTH and back) church, and had I known that they were in yours, I never would have permitted Arne to go there. I want to make it plain that I’m dead set against any type of appeasement.

JOHN: (unruffled) Mr. Anderson, there are several misconceptions that I believe you have, but the most important that I’d like to correct you on is your conception of the relations and differences of pacifism and appeasement.

GERALD: They’re one and the same thing.

JOHN: (calmly) No, I don’t think they are. First of all, let me agree with you that to follow appeasement principles is to follow the road of destruction. (GERALD and RUTH smile) But pacifism is a bit different from appeasement—

GERALD: I don’t think so.

JOHN: —in that pacifism does not mean giving in to every demand of an aggressor; indeed, it follows your principles to the point of war, and there it stops. Perhaps if I called it Christian Pacifism, my meaning in this discussion would be clearer.

RUTH: I fail to see how you can put the two words “Christian” and “pacifism” together.

ARNE: Sure you can, Mom, because—

GERALD: Arne, I must ask you to keep silent. This is a discussion between Reverend Bartlett and your mother and me.

JOHN: But, Mr. Anderson, since it is Arne’s views that are under discussion, isn’t it only fair that he be allowed to speak.

GERALD: (appearing not to have heard) Very well, Reverend, for the discussion this evening, I’ll accept your definitions.

RUTH: Reverend, suppose a man came to your house, forced his way in, and had every intent of attacking your wife. What would you do?

JOHN: I would forcibly restrain him and probably call the police.

GERALD: (triumphantly) But that isn’t pacifism then. (This is a lawyer’s speech) You’re being very inconsistent in many places, Re-
verend. First of all, you said you would forcibly restrain him. Second, you said you’d call the police. Neither of these is compatible with pacifism.

ARNE: But, Dad, as John said before, pacifism follows your principles except it stops short of killing people. Wouldn’t you at least try to stop him before shooting him?

GERALD: No! I should say I wouldn’t. I’d take no chances! (Leaps, up, takes the gun from the mantle) I’d take this and make sure that he didn’t do any harm. (points the gun at JOHN, who is completely calm)

RUTH: But what about the—

GERALD: Yes, Arne, what about the police? (puts gun away) You don’t believe in an army, but you believe in a police force. There’s no difference between the two.

ARNE: Yes, there is, Dad. A police force—

GERALD: Arne!

ARNE (cracking a little but going on) A police force is maintained for the rights and peace of men and to keep order.

GERALD: So is an army!

ARNE: An army does not single out the individuals that are doing the wrong; it moves on and even glories in mass murders. It kills indiscriminately the good along with the bad.

GERALD: Bah!

JOHN: Mr. Anderson, I see that you were in the army. (nods toward the picture) May I ask in what capacity you served?

GERALD: I was a Colonel.

JOHN: Yes, I see, but how did you serve? By that, I mean, were you in the lines, or in the air, or where did you fight? (GERALD suddenly becomes very nervous)

ARNE: (bitterly) Why don’t you tell him, Dad? (GERALD is still searching for a reply) Then I will.

GERALD: Arne!

ARNE: He was a DESK colonel. He never even saw a German or a Jap. He sat behind a desk for all of the war.

JOHN: Well, Mr. Anderson, (takes a meaningful glance at all the war souvenirs and gun) if you will permit me to say so, I don’t believe you know war as I do.

GERALD: (scornfully) And what do you know about war?

JOHN: I served as a medic in the front lines. I know the horrors of war as only a medic can know them. I saw Americans and Germans, horribly mutilated, but lying side by side, both thinking of home. I saw a man who had had his arm ripped off by a shell. I saw men
do "courageous" deeds as a result of fear—fear alone. I saw men, supposed enemies, discuss in a hospital their respective homes and loves, the things common to both of them, no matter what their nationality or the side of the trench they had fought on. What do I know about war? I know this: war is evil, war is horrible, and wars are not according to the laws of God, and wars do not settle anything.

GERALD: Wars bring peace.

ARNE: (softly) And yet there are wars.

GERALD: (casting a baleful glance at his son) And you, (to JOHN) you who call yourself a man of God, you have given my son these ideas that have—have—

RUTH: Turned him against his parents.

JOHN: I'd like to correct you on that, if I may. It was a complete surprise, although a pleasant one, when Arne came to me to find out what steps he should take in getting his conscientious objector classification for the draft. What ideas he had before, I have not changed. Neither did I originate them.

RUTH: I don't believe you. There is nothing in his background here at his home to give him such fanciful ideas.

ARNE: Nevertheless, it is true: John is not responsible, for my thoughts.

GERALD: And where did you get them?

ARNE: (a bit sarcastically) By reading. I read about a man once. I'm sure you've heard of him, Father. His name was Jesus.

RUTH: Oh, but that was hundreds of years ago, dear; everyone knows that His ideas are not practical nowadays. (Both ARNE and JOHN are surprised for the first time. There is a long silence.)

GERALD: If the Russians came over here, you would let them?

ARNE: Yes, if the alternative is killing.

GERALD: (to JOHN) And what would you do?

JOHN: I would fight! (GERALD and RUTH start) But I would not fight with a gun; (GERALD glances at the gun) I would fight from my pulpit; I would live my own normal life. I would fight, if you please, by the Spirit. "Not my might, nor by power, but by my Spirit shall you fight." And sooner or later, the Spirit will win.

GERALD: Bah!

ARNE: And I would follow as nearly as I could.

GERALD: (Completely losing his temper) Shut up! Shut up!

RUTH: (to JOHN) Reverend, what we want to know before you leave is what Arne is going to have to do to receive his draft classification of conscientious objector?

JOHN: When he receives his classification questionnaire he must
sign a blank requesting the special form for conscientious objectors, and then—

GERALD: He shall not sign it! I shall see to that!
ARNE: I shall sign it!
RUTH: You are too young.
JOHN: (very quietly) He is old enough to go to war.
GERALD: Bartlett, perhaps you'd better leave.
JOHN: (Looks are ARNE, ARNE nods) Yes, perhaps I'd better.
RUTH: I'll get your coat.
ARNE: I'll get it.
GERALD: Stay here! (RUTH goes out)

ARNE walks to get JOHN'S coat. GERALD steps in front of him. ARNE tries to step around him. GERALD slaps him. JOHN rises quickly from his chair. GERALD looks sharply at him. RUTH appears at the door with JOHN'S coat. There is a long, tense silence. GERALD stands glaring at JOHN. ARNE and JOHN look at each other and both relax. RUTH is standing stunned in the door with the coat.

ARNE: (to JOHN) I'll see you later.
GERALD: You will not!

GERALD and JOHN look at each other with complete understanding. They know they'll meet again. So does GERALD. JOHN walks to the still stunned RUTH, takes his coat.

JOHN: Thank you. (to GERALD) Good night, sir. (GERALD does not reply; JOHN smiles at ARNE, turns, and exits.)
RUTH: Really, GERALD, I—
GERALD (to ARNE) What does a parent do when he loses control of his son?
ARNE: (very quietly) Strange it is that of all the people I've argued my case with my parents should be the most intolerant.
RUTH: Arne!
ARNE: You've decided many things for me. But one of the things which a parent cannot decide for his children is their religious faith. Now, if you both will excuse me, I'm very tired, and I want to go to bed.

He walks to the door. GERALD stands in the way.
ARNE: Please, Dad.

Startled, GERALD steps aside. ARNE exits, GERALD turns to stop him. It is too late. Both RUTH and GERALD walk separately out into the room, each not wanting to look at the other. Both are completely deflated.

CURTAIN
SCENE II

The setting is unchanged, except that the civilian picture of ARNE has been replaced with a picture of him in an army uniform. The picture is in an extremely elaborate gold frame. RUTH is sitting on the couch reading a pamphlet. She is bothered about something. GERALD is sitting in a chair smoking a cigar.

RUTH: Seems sort of lonely doesn't it?
GERALD: Dear, must you bother me when I'm reading?
RUTH: Sorry.
She goes back to her reading. Now it is GERALD who is nervous. There is a pause.
GERALD: Ruth?
RUTH: Dear, must you bother me when I'm reading?
GERALD: Alright, alright, (Pause) I don't quite know what I want to say.
RUTH: Seems sort of lonely doesn't it?
GERALD: Yes.
RUTH: Well, we can be proud of Arne. He seems to be making quite a name for himself, according to the reports your Sergeant Mann sends to us.
GERALD: (Strides over, picks up the picture, holds it at arm's length) My son! An army man! Not a cheap coward, but a soldier! And thank God he's given up those crazy thoughts of appeasement.
RUTH: (uncomfortably) Dear?
GERALD: (sharply) Yes?
RUTH: Nothing.
GERALD: Are you still worrying about what I told the draft board?
RUTH: I can't help it. It wasn't true, you know, all that about his constantly beating up the younger kids around him.
GERALD: Never mind what I told them. I know what's best for Arne. I said if I could help it, he'd never get his C. O. classification, and, by God, he didn't!
RUTH: (pensively) I still remember the look on his face when he answered the phone and was told he hadn't made it. He had such a look of resolution, it—it frightened me.
GERALD: And he wouldn't speak for days. (Laughs)
RUTH: Have you noticed that Reverend Bartlett seems to avoid us?
GERALD: I have. Probably because he's ashamed to see us after failing to pervert our son.
RUTH: Odd. I got a different impression. Like he had something important to tell us, but couldn’t.
GERALD: Bah! Don’t let that Bible-toting preacher worry you.
RUTH: Yet, I can’t help wondering...
GERALD: Well stop. Sergeant Mann hasn’t noticed anything unusual, and as soon as the old fox does, we’ll hear about it. (RUTH is still uncertain)

CURTAIN

SCENE III

The curtain rises on the same setting. In the center of the room is a big army trunk, with half of its contents strewn on the floor. GERALD and RUTH are sorting through the rest of it. RUTH has been crying.
GERALD: Here’s a diary.
RUTH: (taking it) Do you think we ought to read it?
GERALD: Why not? (Still sorting)
RUTH: He never used to keep a diary.
GERALD: War does strange things to men. (Stops, realizing what he has said, then goes back to work)
RUTH: (Holding a pair of boots) Goodness, Korea must have cold winters. Look at these boots!
GERALD: Here’s his Bible.
RUTH: Worn, isn’t it?
GERALD: Yes, the rest of the junk isn’t any good. (Closes the lid. Sees RUTH still looking at the Bible, takes it, and carelessly tosses it into the trunk also.) This too. (Hauls trunk to one side) Have Clair haul it out tomorrow. (Sees RUTH crying again) Now, dear, please don’t start that again.
RUTH: I can’t help it. He was our only son, Gerald.
GERALD: (Puts his arm around her) But no man could want a better death, fighting for his country. I’ll bet he showed the dirty Reds a thing or two before he died. (Walks over, picks up the picture) Son, I’m proud of you!
RUTH: I suppose so, but somehow that isn’t much comfort now. (Bells rings) I’ll get it. (Goes to door, comes back) Special delivery, dear. Do you have any change for a tip?
GERALD: (Hands her a bill) Here, give him this. (RUTH goes out)
RUTH: (returning with the letter and a small package) It’s from Sergeant Mann.
GERALD: Read it; I’ll be right back. (Goes into his den:)
RUTH reads the letter, getting more and more agitated as she goes
GERALD re-enters with his pipe, about to light it. Seeing the look on RUTH’s face, he takes the letter and reads it.

GERALD: “Dear Colonel Anderson. Undoubtedly you have received by now the reports concerning Arne’s death. However, there are a few things I would like to add to them.

I was not there when Arne was killed, but since he was extremely well liked by all the men, I heard about it quickly, and rushed to talk to some of the witnesses. They told a story of true heroism. Arne had apparently been shooting with the rest of the men when one of them was wounded in the eye. Arne bound up the man’s wound and was about to return to his foxhole when a shell landed less than six feet from him, killing him instantly. This you know.

This you do not know. While talking to the men, I asked them how often Arne had fired. After some confusion, all agreed that they hadn’t heard him fire once, but none were sure, for it had been in a battle. Curious, I took Arne’s gun to ballistics, and they told me the gun hadn’t ever been fired! I went to the company morgue, and examined his ammunition belt. It was empty. Arne had gone into the front lines, unarmed, and with no possibility of arming himself. He would not kill, and he died.

When going through his pockets, I found his little New Testament. The dog-ear is Arne’s; so is the underlining of a verse. I suggest you read it.

I hope, sir, that in death, you will understand your son more than you obviously did in life. Sincerely, Sergeant Robert Mann.”

GERALD is thunderstruck. RUTH is deadly calm. Pause.

GERALD: Read the passage.

RUTH: “Not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit shall you fight.”

RUTH goes upstairs. GERALD looks at the Bible. Even now he has not cracked.

RUTH comes downstairs with ARNE’s civilian photograph. She takes the army photo and places it on the mantle, and puts the other in its place. GERALD watches. She takes the Bible from him, and places it next to the picture.

RUTH: We’ll put your army picture with your father’s war memoirs, for it’s as artificial as the rest of them. I prefer to remember you like this, (looks at the picture) even if it does all too well remind
me of my own disbelief and intolerance. Could I have another chance, perhaps I could understand.

She looks at GERALD. GERALD can’t meet her eyes. She turns and walks upstairs. GERALD looks at the pictures for a long moment, then putting a match to his still unlighted pipe, he follows his wife.

CURTAIN