



THE BOSS

Opening credits

Picture puzzles are questioning the reliability of cognition.

Exposition

Multimillionaire Victor K., a man in his prime, has a life many people are dreaming of. Being an influential businessman, he is successful in every respect. Apart from his wife who descends from one of the best families, he has, at least, one attractive mistress at his disposal, and as a man's man he is even able to cope with criminals at any time; he intervenes in bodily conflicts, and he occasionally prevents depressed people from leaping to their deaths.

Snap-shots from a successful man's life:

– Victor K. in important negotiations with some evidently influential, presumably Russian businessmen.

– Victor K. being a special guest to the official opening of a new building of public utility. His financial contribution to the realization of that project is being appreciated. He is taken with public applause and flash lights. A high society's garden party afterwards allows him to exchange pleasantries with the who's who. A favourable scene of him dancing with his wife is fixed to a snap-shot which is, shortly after, to be seen as a high-gloss picture in a magazine ...

– ... that an, at best, scantily dressed woman is inattentively paging through.

That's Natasha, Victor's mistress, a dark-haired beauty with the appearance of a Playboy model.

– The door of a visibly expensive bar opens and, by a swing as picturesque as if he had rehearsed it, Victor K. sends a harasser out of the inn. A photo reporter who happens (?) to witness that scene takes a picture of it and launches it to the front page of a tabloid under the headline "*Money Makes the World Go Round*".

– Hidden by the paper, and surrounded by a flock of employees, personal assistant Silvia Berger is quoting from the article: "*Moral courage of well known industrial magnate Victor K. prevents quarrel from escalating in a bustling city centre bar. Victor K. presents a cinematic show!*"

Stage 1 | Blackmail

Even a successful life, however, is not always illuminated by the sun. Monotony and boredom are bothering the boss in his everyday life. His need of variety doesn't stop fuelling his desire for new adventures ...

... which he is to have when he receives a blackmail letter with some awkward photographs enclosed. That incident finally provides his life with an unexpected (yet desired) thrill, for it means a sudden menace both to his social reputation and to his matrimony.

There's evidence that Victor would be well advised not to trust his mistress, Natasha, nor his closest employee, Roman, who is looking both after his employer's



interests and Natasha. Roman does like the idea of being the very man to pull wires backstage. That's why doesn't inform his boss about contacting the blackmailers and negotiating matters with some "business partners" from Eastern Europe who apparently are willing to be recruited for affairs of all kinds.

But on the occasion of handing a certain amount of money over to a blonde call girl and her procurer, regarded by them as a simple advance payment, he realizes that things are on the verge of outgrowing himself. Not only Roman comes under pressure, also Natasha receives unpleasant visitors. She is torn: on the one hand she is scared for the boss, on the other hand she is afraid he could unveil Roman's scheme. The boss isn't totally unsuspecting after all; he has realized, indeed, that there is something happening behind his back.

After all, she loses the fight against the voice of her conscience and decides to tell Victor the truth ... however it's only half the truth: she talks about a "friend" of hers, a call girl, being involved in a blackmail affair that concerns a wealthy industrialist and that she wants to get out of because the matter appears to have become too dangerous. Victor decides to take matters into his own hands and urges Natasha to arrange a „rendezvous“ with the blonde call girl.

Victor pretends to be a "client" and tries to sound the call girl. But soon he gets to talking about details he normally couldn't know about. The blonde feels duped. When she rashly runs away, Victor can manage to follow her unseen and he watches her disappearing into a house. Victor does not think at all that he has been lured into a trap. Entering a seemingly vacant flat he is confronted with the blackmailer who doesn't hesitate to come to business; he faces him with incriminating items. The situation escalates. The blackmailer pulls a revolver and ... suddenly the armed Natasha appears in the doorway. By intervening she could demonstrate imposingly that she is on Victor's side: she shoots the blackmailer.

Since a blackmail letter has been found in one of the dead man's pockets, the police soon begins to investigate in Victor's office building. Roman is confronted with a photograph of the victim, recognizes his "business partner" Medvedev and directs the detective's attention to Natasha as

having been in touch with that man. At Natasha's apartment they discover the murder weapon, and so she is detained.

In order to save her hide she accuses Victor of having committed the murder. Although he considers these reproaches as completely ridiculous, Victor is arrested, for he neither is able to produce an alibi nor to explain his fingerprints being on the weapon in question. Instead, according to the policemen's opinion, he has had a fine motive for the crime. The suspicious facts provides the detectives not only with a complete chain of evidence but also enough reason to keep Victor in prison.

Lawyer Graser, J. D. has, indeed, to mobilize all his brilliancy and all his influence to effect Victor's release on bail. Shortly after, Roman is – not least because of his accomplice Natasha entangles herself more and more in contradictions – found guilty of having organized the blackmail.

Since he is able to convince his boss that he doesn't intend to use the incriminating facts against him and credibly assures to act always on Victor's behalf, so Victor entrusts his lawyer with pleading Roman's case in court and to make a special arrangement with the senior prosecutor.

Nevertheless, in court the judge doesn't know anything about a special agreement either and Roman is put through the hoops by an unexpectedly aggressive prosecutor.

When Victor, called to the witness stand, tells his version of the affairs, there's more and more evidence that some things are not what they seemed to be. While explaining the position the defendant holds in his enterprise he exculpates him from the prosecution: Roman heads an ensemble of actors and script writers who have no other purpose than supplying the life of the bored boss with variety. Roman, the director, stages Victor's life! The blackmail affair was, of course, part of that play as well, and the murder was, according to Victor, nothing else but a contretemps. Prosecutor, judge, and spectators are surprised in equal measure about the story told to them. While the spectators are uttering their disapproval ("*... duping the public that way ...!*"), the prosecutor wonders audibly what murder witness K. is talking about.

At the latest when Vladimir Medvedev enters the witness stand and admits without hesitation that he was hired by the defendant as an actor and points out that the notable fact of himself being still alive depends on blank cartridges which evidently don't cause anybody's death, nobody is now left unaware of that the murder was also part of the production. Since there was neither a blackmail nor a murder the proceedings against Roman will be closed.

Returning to the office building, the director of that play is getting a standing ovation ("*Great show!*"). Even Victor cannot but exceptionally appreciate Roman's



work, since the past days were delectably exciting. However, he feels duped. Yet he conceals the feeling of being defeated he is tortured by, particularly as he wants to pay back. Solely towards Natasha he expresses his disappointment, because she just faked her loyalty as well as her feelings. Natasha doesn't see any problem. After all, it is exactly what she is paid for.

Stage 2 | Making of a life

For Victor's life has to go on somehow or other, the latest preproduction is already in full swing. Besides script discussions, castings, and rehearsals there are also debates about the budget and fights for roles taking place. The backstage glimpse does not only reveal technicians standing uselessly about but also make-up artists and costume designers assiduously hurrying. Scenes from the previous events are flickering from numerous screens and the director explains how he

is managing to stage the life of his boss. – "The making of a life".

The boss' life will go further colourfully – at least, as far as the aspirants' hair and skin colours are concerned. Everyone is determined to play a role in the prospective life of the boss; they do not mind which one. An aspirant would like to be hired as a mistress not only because of her real talent for such a role but also because of her routine. Indeed, life seems to be the best preparation for film business. According to their experience on the margins of life, many candidates are born to be dumb actors. While one shows off his experience ("I have always been a dumb actor"), another is recommended by his lack of experience ("I never played a role in the life").

Several fights for roles reveal that any similarity to a real film production would not be purely coincidental. Natasha uses any opportunity to tell the newcomers that the leading role is already given to herself being well-established as the boss' mistress – which, according to her, isn't acting only. – Yes, fiction has indeed been mixed up with "true life"! Or – maybe – rather with illusion? Or, at the end, with dreams? One of the actors is dreaming of his role every night and, waking up, again and again he is disappointed about reality which is not dreamlike at all.

Neither as being dreamlike the boss considers the striking deficits of the script, the obviously incomplete plausibility, nor the

annoying lack of realism in his director's ideas. He won't tolerate the presumption of himself being as naïve as an ordinary audience is: believing everything it sees. He also criticises that his screenwriters are prepared to make use of "the dream factory's" repertoire far too often, with the effect of boring him, since it is always the same film to be run in Hollywood. And he adds that Hollywood films are inimitable concerning lack of plausibility, of which the highly praised Hitchcock is a particularly perfect example.

Natasha is not contented either. She criticises not to have been informed about Roman's scheme ("When the cops arrived, I was at the end of my tether!"). The showing of the police interrogation scene deprives Natasha of any point, for it makes clear that she will perform best if she doesn't have to perform. Yet, from her point of view, Roman is going much too far doubting also her loyalty. To perform a schemer's role, as designated by the script, didn't match her very temper. In the future, she wants to perform her role much more according to her own ideas. She wants to be the real mistress, spending more time with the boss and being treated far better. This, of course, wouldn't be anything else but a redefinition not only of her own but also of the boss' role. Such a change of the script is categorically refused by Roman: "It's not the actor who designs his role, it's the role that designs him!" ... and Natasha's role is designed as the mistress' role. The director has reason to deliver a

keynote address to the actors' staff. He explains the special characteristics of this very production:

"You must always be aware that you're actors. Never mix up your roles with reality! You are pawns in a game. That's your profession. That's what you are being paid for very well. So stick to the script, which is daily updated by our screenwriters in hours of sudatory work! I am not able to schedule every incident because our boss insists on being free in his own actions. Well, it is his very life, and he's paying for it. Fiction and reality are mixed up, that's life! You'll have to face some surprising and – sometimes – unpleasant situations which may become dangerous. But in spite of all those adventures nobody will really run in danger at all. Myself, being the director, I will never lose control, you may take that for granted! Since you cannot know our boss' reactions in advance you'll have to be ready to improvise. You'll have to internalize the very features of your roles. You'll have to abandon your own private characters and to become your very roles themselves. That is the one and only way to act properly, that's the way to make your employer's life become a real reality, that's the way to make the script become his very life. And don't forget: It is our only job to make that fiction becomes reality. Thanks a lot for your attention."

A quarrel arises when the accountant unfolds the production costs: Screenwriters, costumes, locations, luxury flats,



hotel rooms, prison cells, a court room, police detectives, a prosecutor, a judge, blondes and murder victims, wannabee actors, Natasha's monthly salary, and, finally, the chauffeur. That's much more than even a very wealthy man has at his disposal in the petty cash. A special point is the chauffeur being responsible for a racy car pursuit due to which several urban districts have been destroyed irreparably. Since the damage is not covered by the insurance it will be one of the first measures to bring down costs to subtract this amount from his wage.

Stage 3 | A staged life

Certainly, this measure is only a deliberate direction of incidence of the director who wants to maneuver the actors in certain situations they will believe to be real, to find out potential interdependencies between fiction and life.

Since nothing unforeseen is going to happen for a while, it becomes clear that "real

life" is rather boring. Instead of having adventures Victor has to deal with his actors' affectivities, because their private problems have some impact to the roles themselves and some actors also make use of their roles to profit in their real lives. Solely Natasha is a singular case sui generis: for a long time, she is not able any more to realize whether she's real or just playing. After having terminated her engagement in a fit of rage she cannot overcome the loss of limelight. Now she threatens Victor that she would inform his wife in case that he won't leave the apartment to her at least. Victor feels impelled to a passionate reconciliation. For Natasha is too happy about, she has to be admonished once again not to take her role too seriously.

By his egomaniac affectation, the boss has antagonized a lot of people both in his real and his fictional life. There's hardly chance to see whom he has to regard as a serious menace. At least, the chauffeur takes the liberty of impertinence since he had to put up with a salary cut. Victor is not willing to accept such a comportment any longer and orders Roman to dismiss that man.

Stage 4 | Kidnapped

Of course a fired employee needn't observe the rules any longer. The chauffeur makes use of his final tour by kidnapping his (ex-)boss. Suddenly, Victor finds himself tied up and gagged in an empty factory building. While the chauffeur announces his ransom demand by

phone, his henchmen guard the abductee, who regards his director's latest idea as a rather thrilling one and enjoys his new role as a kidnap victim very much. The chauffeur, however, rejoices in the reverse distribution of power and brings Victor back to reality by some punches. Deeply impressed Victor listens the words of the kidnapper: *"We don't want to play only what you'd like us to play! Do you think that actors are not entitled to live a real life of their own?"*

But while he himself is still looking forward to an exciting adventure, his director is already having an upset discussion with his staff. Roman isn't going to conform to the ransom demand and alarms the police. But the director isn't the only one to lose control; the kidnapper is as well, for his Russian henchman are less interested in ransom than in the boss' death. When the situation in the factory building escalates, Victor realizes that the game has become serious. While task forces attack the building, the boss frees himself from his bonds and escapes by a window.

Stage 5 | All the world's a stage

While a fierce gun battle is still raging in the factory building, Roman has already ordered Champaign. The latest masterpiece has to be celebrated! Once again he succeeded in outsmarting his boss, for the kidnapping was, of course, only staged. Until then the employees have been worried; now they breathe a sigh of relief. They pop the corks, the

Champaign is bubbling, glasses and joy are effervescing.

But the police interrupts the celebrating staff and delivers the sad message of the boss having lost his life. By escaping audaciously from the factory building he fell into the deepness. Exaltation gives way to a heartfelt grief. Some instantaneous obituaries are composed which, as usual, are prone to idealize the defunct: *"He left the stage at the peak of his splendour, etc."*

Epilogue | Final curtain

Game over. The camera is zooming out. A film set appears. The director is giving final instructions (*"That's it! It's all in the can."*) The staff begins to remove the setting.

Whether Victor K. has really died remains undefined. Obviously he doesn't appear any more. There are no conclusions about his destiny to be drawn from the fact that some of the "killed" kidnappers are to be seen within the surroundings of the setting. Of course, the police operation was a staged scene. But the setting is in high spirits anyway, which might insinuate that the boss has survived. – Is it really important? All his life has been a simple motion picture!



The boundaries of illusion and reality

In his famous “Allegory of the Cave” Plato sketches the scenario of a group of people who, imprisoned in a cave, are watching a shadow play on the wall in front of them. They are convinced that the “things” they can see are “real things”, but, as a matter of fact, those shadows are nothing else but images of the things themselves. The cave is a metaphor of the world as perceived by the senses.

A cinema audience, while gazing at the screen with fascination, is usually aware of being shown a fictional play. Nevertheless it will be dedicated to the occurrences presented, always prepared to be abducted to a fictional world, in order to escape from a rather monotonous reality.

But evidently it is not quite as easy to distinguish fiction from facts reliably:

When Howard Hawks made his Warner Bros. Film TO HAVE AND TO HAVE NOT (based on Ernest Hemingway’s famous novel) in 1944, there was a remarkable feeling of tension on the set; the leading actors couldn’t conceal being attracted by each other, and that erotic atmosphere can be noticed within the film still nowadays. As we know very well, Humphrey Bogart and Lauren Bacall became lovers even beyond the shooting. The film presented a romantic affair which continued in real life as well. To what extent was the story we can watch on the screen only a play, to what extent was it reality?

Things usually are supposed to be less confusing from the very moment the audience has left the cinema: The former spectators will be “actors” themselves now, since they think that they have returned to “real life”. But, according to Plato’s “Allegory of the Cave”, dazzled by the light of the sun, we still don’t see anything but an image of reality. Besides that, it is the subjectivity of our point of view which clouds our perception of the things, and so we cannot recognize but only a certain part of reality. And quite a lot of things we consider to be real are only imaginary too. To what extent are our experiences really “real”? Don’t we have to face a lot of jugglery in real life as well?

While watching the film THE BOSS, one will have to ask this question from the very beginning, when the door of an inn opens and Victor K. evicts a troublemaker by a punch as picturesque as if it had

been rehearsed. The front page headline of a tabloid hails him as a hero and glorifies his moral courage as exemplary. We will have to take literally the underline which states that “Victor K. presents a cinematic show”, for the troublemaker was an actor; indeed, the situation was arranged entirely. The world, however will never know – well, at least the world within the film ...

Victor K. organizes his life as anyone else does. But there’s a slight difference: He is anxious not to miss any highlight. The matter is enormously expensive: A complete film crew spends feverishly its every day work on making stories come true which, for anybody else, don’t get beyond mere cinema experiences. It’s a life in the manner of Hollywood, and Victor K. plays the leading role. In order to have the staged life provided with the unpredictability of real life, he doesn’t want to be informed about the situations he will have to face. Of course, staged situations mingle with “ordinary” occurrences. The boundaries between reality and production have to vanish necessarily. Neither the actors nor the protagonist can ever be sure if they are in a “real” or in a “staged” situation. It is no wonder that, in this scheme, even the spectator goes astray again and again.

THE BOSS is a film that will raise some questions: Who plays a part – and to whom? Who is “real”, who is just a paid actor? Who is responsible for the blackmail letter? Much more: is it real itself?

In what way does the staged play cause effects on real life (and vice versa)? Last but not least, does Victor K. really lose his life? And, since his life is nothing but a staged play: Is that question of any importance at all? Some of those questions won’t be answered; some new will rise as well: Are there – and to what extent – real boundaries between facts and fiction? Does a “staged reality” have any chance at all to become reality, or have we got to admit that it has always been as “real” as “real life itself”? There is good reason to doubt that famous statement of German philosopher Adorno: “There is no right life in the wrong one”.