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Opening extract from
The Iron Man

Written by
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Published by
Faber Children's Books

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FABER AND FABER has published children's books since 1929. Some of our very first publications included *Old Possum's Book of Practical Cats* by T.S. Eliot starring the now world-famous Macavity, and *The Iron Man* by Ted Hughes. Our catalogue at the time said that 'it is by reading such books that children learn the difference between the shoddy and the genuine'. We still believe in the power of reading to transform children's lives.

First published in 1968 by Faber and Faber Limited
Bloomsbury House, 74–77 Great Russell Street
London WC1B 3DA

This edition first published in 2013

Designed and typeset by Crow Books

Printed and bound in Great Britain by
CPI Group (UK), Croydon CR0 4YY

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ISBN 978–0–571–30224–6



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The Coming of the Iron Man

The Iron Man came to the top of
the cliff.

How far had he walked? Nobody
knows. Where had he come from?
Nobody knows. How was he made?

1

Nobody knows.

Taller than a house, the Iron Man stood at the top of the cliff, on the very brink, in the darkness.

The wind sang through his iron fingers. His great iron head, shaped like a dustbin but as big as a bedroom, slowly turned to the right, slowly turned to the left. His iron ears turned, this way, that way. He was hearing the sea. His eyes, like headlamps, glowed white, then red, then infra-red, searching the sea. Never before had the

Iron Man seen the sea.

He swayed in the strong wind that pressed against his back. He swayed forward, on the brink of the high cliff.

And his right foot, his enormous iron right foot, lifted – up, out, into space, and the Iron Man stepped forward, off the cliff, into nothingness.

CRRRAAAASSSSSSH!

Down the cliff the Iron Man came toppling, head over heels.

CRASH!
CRASH!
CRASH!

From rock to rock, snag to snag,
tumbling slowly. And as he crashed
and crashed and crashed

His iron legs fell off.

His iron arms broke off, and the
hands broke off the arms.

His great iron ears fell off and his
eyes fell out.

His great iron head fell off.

All the separate pieces tumbled,
scattered, crashing, bumping, clanging,
down on to the rocky beach far below.

A few rocks tumbled with him.

Then

Silence.

Only the sound of the sea, chewing
away at the edge of the rocky beach,
where the bits and pieces of the Iron
Man lay scattered far and wide, silent
and unmoving.

Only one of the iron hands, lying
beside an old sand-logged washed-up

seaman's boot, waved its fingers for a minute, like a crab on its back. Then it lay still.

While the stars went on wheeling through the sky and the wind went on tugging at the grass on the cliff-top and the sea went on boiling and booming.

Nobody knew the Iron Man had fallen.

Night passed.

Just before dawn, as the darkness grew blue and the shapes of the

rocks separated from each other, two seagulls flew crying over the rocks. They landed on a patch of sand. They had two chicks in a nest on the cliff. Now they were searching for food.

One of the seagulls flew up –
Aaaaaark! He had seen something.
He glided low over the sharp rocks.
He landed and picked something up.
Something shiny, round and hard.
It was one of the Iron Man's eyes. He brought it back to his mate. They both looked at this strange thing. And the

eye looked at them. It rolled from side to side looking first at one gull, then at the other. The gulls, peering at it, thought it was a strange kind of clam, peeping at them from its shell.

Then the other gull flew up, wheeled around and landed and picked something up. Some awkward, heavy thing. The gull flew low and slowly, dragging the heavy thing. Finally, the gull dropped it beside the eye. This new thing had five legs. It moved. The gulls thought it was a

strange kind of crab. They thought they had found a strange crab and a strange clam. They did not know they had found the Iron Man's eye and the Iron Man's right hand.

But as soon as the eye and the hand got together the eye looked at the hand. Its light glowed blue. The hand stood up on three fingers and its thumb, and craned its forefinger like a long nose. It felt around. It touched the eye. Gleefully it picked up the eye, and tucked it under its middle finger.