

BUSINESS

Characters:

Leonard “Leo” Thorsen Jr., *a man in his mid-thirties. Majority owner of TTI.*

Jake Lowell, *a man in his mid-thirties. Minority owner of TTI.*

Dennis “Denny” Markson, *a man in his late-forties. Minority owner of TTI.*

Bob, *VP of HCA*

Alma, *Denny’s wife.*

Shannon, *Leo’s Girl Friday.*

Act One takes place in a small hotel conference room. Friday afternoon.

Act Two takes place in Denny and Alma’s kitchen that night.

Act Three takes place in Denny and Alma’s kitchen the following night.

Act One

Conference room. Small table. Three chairs. Coffee and cups on a side table. Leo is on the phone.

(Jake walks in.)

Jake Bob?

Leo *(To Jake.)* Yeah. *(Into phone.)* Yeah, come tomorrow. At 8. Before your people show up. We’ll take care of you. *(Hangs up.)*

(Leo and Jake grab some coffee. Talk while sipping)

Jake He’s driving your Beamer now?

Leo Handed him the keys. For a dollar. He drove it. Loved it.

Jake Grease his wheels. He’ll grease ours.

Leo What goes around comes around.

Jake Small price to pay. What are you driving now?

Leo Escalade. Company car. On the books. You’ll get one now. He coughed up a 30% down payment on three proposals.

Jake How’d you know he’d play ball?

Leo He hung around the booth. All five days. Chatting me up 'bout wife, kid's tuition, cars ...6 mil budget.

Jake Two wheels of industry. Just talkin' ...

Leo ... talkin' (*simultaneous with 'talkin'.*) mutual interests.

Jake So. (*Pause.*) The VP of HCA just signed off on 3.2 mil worth of equipment?

Leo After we did the dance. To make him look good. I came in high. After some back and forth with their PA I lowered the price. To our mutual interests. Bob 'll be here tomorrow before his people arrive. I'll give him his cut. In cash.

Jake Using legit Advertising Expense? Right? Or, the third wheel will come flying off.

Leo Advertising Expense? Some of it. It'll be spread it around ...accounting runarounds. Smoke and mirrors. Our accounting firm has a lucrative consulting contract. They'll play ball. You don't want to know. (*Pause.*) This inner circle stuff. Denny mustn't know. He's... he's ...

Jake ...he's a church goer. Who needs the fear of Leo put into him.

Leo That's right! Bend him over. Insert the business end of my rod. Give him the ole time religion. Up the wazoo.

Jake Thy rod and staff shall confront thee.

Leo What's that old song "Them that's got" ...got when the getting's good.

Jake (*singing.*) ..." the strong gets more, while the weak ones fade. Empty pockets don't ever make the grade".

Leo Remember. Loose lips ...

Jake ...sink the gravy train. I know. I know.

Leo That's right!

Jake I know nuttin' about nuttin'.

Leo We have to put a fire under his ass. When these orders hit, he has to produce. Or, the gravy train goes south.

Jake You know what I am thinking?

Leo What?

Jake With Bob in pocket. (*Waves arm.*) We build a huge plant. Overhead cranes. Mills. Lathes. The whole shebang.

Leo Damn right! We go big. Go D&B. Go public.

Jake Sounds like a plan.

Leo Oh! Listen. I've made Shannon advertising manager. She'll be tight with Bob. Keep tabs on Denny. Her desk will be across from Denny's office.

Jake How long have you two been together?

Leo Ahh ... a couple of years. She moved in last week.

Jake A family man now?

Leo Hell no! I keep my options open. She's a fallback.

Jake I see. No downside.

Leo The downside is Denny. He's beta. We've got to flip him Alpha!

Jake Give him some balls.

Leo I'll stick my foot so far up his ass (**Denny enters the room**) they'll be pushed out. (**Leo to Jake**) Here we go.

Denny What's this all about?

Leo A meeting of the minds. Grab some coffee and sit down.

(The three fill their cups and sit down.)

Leo Look. We're concerned.

Denny About what?

Leo You.

Denny Me? What about?

Leo You need to talk to your people. They're all over the place.

Denny Meaning?

Leo You're the engineering manager. Manage them.

Denny I have.

Leo The hell you do! I come in. They're sitting around talking. They're not focused! They need to give a damn!

Denny A damn about what?

Leo They can talk on their own time. You need to direct them. Push them to get the work out.

Denny I check with each of them. The work is getting done.

Leo Bullshit! We are a week late on assembly. Jake was supposed to start a week ago!

Denny There is an issue. Our supplier couldn't do the turnaround time. Jake knows.

(Jake looks out the window)

Leo Get a different supplier.

Denny Kathleen is calling around.

Leo Kathleen doesn't know squat. Manager her!

Denny I told her to farm out the work. Piecemeal ...and within budget. That's not an easy ...

Leo Nobody said it was easy! We don't pay her to do easy! C'mon!

Denny She's on top of it.

Leo I want you on top of her! Make it happen!

Jake HCA is coming next week. With a progress payment. And nothing is assembled! We'll have to do smoke and mirrors ... to get the payment.

Leo We have EXPO expenses to pay for. Overhead. Keep to the plan.

Denny Mau-mauing the engineers?

Leo The PLAN. The milestone payments. We get them or Kathleen doesn't get paid.

Jake We have more business coming in. HCA business.

Leo Their VP is bending over backward to make it happen. If you and your people don't make it happen ...

Jake ...the gravy train goes south!

Denny Alrighty then.

Leo You don't see it. Do you? Jake sees it! (*Leos juts his hand toward Jake. Jake nods his head*)

Denny What am I not seeing?

Leo Get your engineers' asses in gear. Pat 'em on the head. Kick 'em in the ass. We need more out of them. We're paying them good money.

Denny I don't think we are on the same page. Much less the same universe.

Leo Jeesus! Denny! Don't eff with me. I see what they are like. Why can't you?

Denny Well, for one very good reason. (*Leo stands up. Leans over the table into Jakes's face*)

Leo What's that?

Denny I am on the road. Over sixty percent of the time.

Leo Then call in every day! Motivate your people! I expect you to do both!

Denny I talk to them. From the field ... the startup!

Leo Well yeah! You are the eff-ing engineering manager. I am sales. Jake is manufacturing.

Denny Equipment that works also sells - repeat sales. I manufacture sales.

Leo I gave you a company phone. Handle things. Handle your people!

Denny That phone! It rings all the time. All day. All night. On the road. At home. Troubleshooting calls. Scheduling calls. I am taking call calls calls. I am making calls. To “my people”.

Leo Look! You have a wife and five kids at home. How ya gonna take care of them if your people screw up?

Jake We need to count on you. See ...?

Denny Yeah ...I see ...I see a moronic squeeze.

(Leo tries to slap Denny. Denny moves back)

Denny You want a piece of me? Go to where I’ve been. Startups in South Korea. Five miles from the DMZ. Saskatchewan. Twenty below. Vancouver. Constant Rain. Atlanta ...from here to Timbuktu.... 16 to 18-hour days. Airports. Tarmacs

(Leo sits down)

Leo That’s your job. Doing what it takes. As Jake and I do.

Denny Hmm

Jake What does that ...don’t eff with us.

Denny You don’t see it do you? You two. Drinking and pimping. God knows what else. For business.

Leo Listen smartass! Sales and manufacturing require human interface. Client and vendor negotiation. It’s cut-throat out there. Give them what they want. They return the favor.

Denny By leveraging the hell them into hell?

Leo Listen smartass church boy! Jake and I manage the day to day affairs. You manage your people! Tell them they can be replaced! It’s cut-throat for them too.

Denny Shannon. Who’s your muse replacing?

(Leo sits down.)

Leo (to Jake) I’ve brought Shannon on to manage advertising.

Denny Advertising? *(Leans in to Leo)* Isn’t that *your* job?

Leo I am also CEO. Shannon works under me.

Denny I bet she does.

Leo What do you mean by that?

Denny You two ...what? ...two years? That’s all I mean by that.

Leo It’s none of your business.

Denny It is now. Another expense. Another paycheck in your pocket.

Leo She does what I tell her. That's how things get done! Your BUSINESS is to manage your people! Have them do what I tell you!

Denny I see. You eff your people. I eff mine.

Leo Fucking right! Here's another reality check. Jake, here, (*nods to Jake*) borrowed money. From his grandfather. We both put in seed money. You put in zip.

Denny Zip you put a value on. Technical experience. You couldn't startup without me. You still can't do what it takes without me. ...I'm to kowtow to money?

Leo I own 76%. The lion's share. I decide what's what who does what who gets what.

Denny You want me to put money in?

Leo We want your due diligence!

Denny Paid in full! Thirteen years of my life.

Leo My friggin' investment is paid in full! Jake's investment. Paid in full! For the gravy train. Pull your weight!

Jake All we're sayings is ...we want to count on you. You're ... we both think ... you're not on top of things.

Denny I'm on top of everything but my wife these days.

Leo Denny, c'mon. We're dead serious. You ...your people are loose cannons.

Jake We want to know where your head is at. Are you with us 100 percent?

Leo Two-hundred percent!

Denny Is this all about ...not hanging with you guys? You two not having a warm fuzzy?

Leo It wouldn't hurt. Once in a while. To sort things out.

Denny I did once. You tried to hook me up with some woman. I don't do those percentages. I am married.

Leo We're not asking to cheat on Alma. We're ...

Jake ...We're asking ...we feel ... we're not on the same page. You're not plugged ...

Denny I'm Unplugged? I'm Unplugged?

Leo You're not plugged in! You are not marshalling *your people*! I come in the room. They are talking. Put their noses to the grind. They need to produce or get the hell out!

Denny We have good people. From good schools. Kathleen ...

Leo That fucking Kathleen! She thinks she knows things. What a mouth on her!

Denny She's a great mechanical engineer. She's learned a lot. I don't have to stand over her.

Leo That fucking Vince. He's on YouTube when I walk in.

Denny He's on hiring probation. I'll talk to him.

Leo No! Fire him! Make it happen! I want his ass out the door today!

Denny OK.

Leo This is what we are talking about. You're soft. You give him the benefit of the doubt. He'll never be of benefit. Did you think coddling ...Listen! We have to run a tight ship. We don't have the time or money to carry Vincs. Right Jake?

Jake We have to do what we have to do. That's business.

Leo Damn straight!

(Leo gets up. Heads for the door in a huff.)

Leo Deal with Vince. Kick some asses. I've got someone coming in tomorrow at 10. I want all of your people in their chairs at 9 tomorrow. I don't care if it is Saturday. Make it happen. This guy's bending over backward for us. We have to do the same. ...You're in Topeka Monday starting up this guy's equipment. Make it happen. *(Jake gets up. Follows Leo out the door)*

(Denny sits at the table. Stares off. After a minute his cell phone rings)

Denny *(Into phone)* What's up Alma? *(listens)* Yeah yeah yeah. Tell me about it when I get home. Did you do what I asked? I told you Why not? C'mon. C'mon. No excuses. Do it now. ... *(listens)* Pick up Chinese? You couldn't fix dinner? We can't keep buying meals. *(listens)* Yeah. Yeah. Bye.

(Denny begins to pound his head on the table)

Act Two:

(Denny walks in the kitchen door)

Denny Wow! What a day!

Alma You should've seen the day I had. Chipper ran off after some dog.

Denny Wasn't he on a leash?

Alma I took it off at the door and he took off. I had to run down the street after him.

Denny C'mon Alma. You know can't unleash him until he's inside.

Alma I was distracted. Nick was crying. He fell off his bike. Scrapped the whole side of his arm. Billy and Jeff were fighting. Mary was pouting about something.

Denny Manage them. Just manage them. Or I knock some heads together.

Alma I need some money. Anna needs school clothes. Jeff needs shoes for school. I wear the same outfit to church every Sunday ...

Denny Whoa whoa whoa. I'll decide who gets what how much and when. I have to keep an eye on the cash flow.

Alma Hold it. Where's the food Mr. Cash Flow?

Denny The food? Oh ... I was ...

Alma I can't count on you.

Denny I'll go now.

Alma Wait. Leo called.

Denny I just saw him ...what did he want?

Alma He and Shannon and Jake want to take us to dinner tomorrow night.

Denny What did you say?

Alma I told him that I am taking the kids camping this weekend.

Denny Again? For how long?

Alma Two weeks. Come with us. You're a partner. You can tell Leo you need some time off.

Denny There's a lot of things that I want to tell Leo. But taking time off now isn't one of them. I leave town on Monday for five days. Another startup.

Alma What *is* going on? Why do they want to take us out?

Denny They want to get to you to get to me. Those snakes!

Alma They think they can manipulate me?

Denny They think they can make up for my time on the road. Wine and dine you. Give you a taste of the gravy train. They want you on board. And me not holding them back.

Alma Holding them back? Don't they think you're doing your share? How can that be? You're never home.

Denny We had a shareholder meeting today. I got reamed. I was reminded ONCE AGAIN that Leo put in cash for his 76% and Jake borrowed money for his 12% and MY 12%. ... MY 12% is to be paid with 200% effort.

Alma 200%? I wish I had that from you. They must've counted on you for the 12%.

Denny They had to. You know ...before we were married when Leo, Jake and I started TTI ...I was the one ...I was hands on ...I did the accounting. I set up the CAD system. I welded, wired, assembled, painted, engineered, created schematics, loaded equipment onto the truck, did the startups. I worked my ass off for the business. They ...they delegated by default. They had to. Nothing's changed. Leo sits in his office typing up proposals. His sidekick Jake walks around with his hands in his pockets saying "I know nuttin' about nuttin'".

Alma You deserve a break. Come with us camping.

Denny I wish I could. Like you said. They're counting on me. There is no business without me. No TTI. OUR life is counting on me. The mortgage. Five hungry mouths ...broken teeth, braces, bicycles.... pool passes ...new clothes...all counting on me.

Alma Another startup. Can't Leo or Jake do this instead of going to dinner?

Denny No. They can't. They don't have a clue. I engineered the control system. I make it work.

Alma Maybe they should go with you. Learn how.

Denny They delegate. They expect. They're not hands on.

Alma You're an owner in the company. Delegate someone else.

Denny They *expect* me to pay my dues. I own 12% of TTI and they own 200% of me. Nothing's changed in thirteen years.

Alma You've changed. We've changed. You provide for us. But you don't love us.

Denny How can you say that?

Alma You are not there for us. For me. How do you expect me to manage? I am at my wits end. You're never around. So what's there to even like?

Denny Alma ...I ...I ...I'm just one

Alma We are one. If we can't be one then the marriage is over. I'll take your money and walk away. I'll find someone I can depend on.

Denny Don't say that Alma. We have to I have to ...I'm going for the food. (*Heads for the door*)

Alma (*Picks up note from table.*) Wait! Some guy named Bob called. He wants to talk to you tonight. Said it's urgent. He called three times.

Denny Probably about the startup on Monday. I'll call him ...

(**Denny leaves**)

Act Three:

Denny *is sitting at the kitchen table reading papers. There is knocking at the front door (off stage). He turns papers over and slumps down on the table holding his head. After a minute there is knocking at the kitchen door.*

(**Denny** *slowly gets up. Stumbles to the door. Looks through the window.*)

Denny (*Through the door*) I don't need this right now. Go away!

Leo (*Through the door*) Hey! Let us in.

Denny Ahhhh..... (*He opens the door. Goes to a chair. Slumps down. Leo, Jake and Shannon come in.*)

Leo We're here to take you out. I have a limo outside.

Shannon Where's Alma?

Denny (*Lifts head from the table*) She's camping.

Jake What happened to you this morning? Where were you?

Shannon You don't look well. You're white as a ghost.

Denny I'm in no mood ...just go ...

Leo A stiff drink will take care of this.

Denny (*Grabs head and slumps down*) I don't feel ...

Leo C'mon man. We have a reservation. A limo. Pull yourself together.

Shannon (*Puts hand on Leo's chest*) Hold on Leo. (*To Denny*) Tell us what happened. We can make it better.

Denny (*Face in the table*) Ohhhh... Ohhhh! I don't feel like talking.

Jake Something happened. You weren't like this yesterday.

Shannon Get him some water Leo.

(*Leo finds a glass and fills it with water. Places it on the table in front of Denny.*)

Denny Ohhhh... My head is killing me. (*Lifts head. Takes a drink.*)

Leo We're you out partying last night? The hair of the dog will ...C'mon man. We'll fix you up.

Denny (*Face in the table*) Listen you idiot! I wasn't drinking.

Leo Hey! What the hell is wrong with you? Snap out of it. There's a start up on Monday.

Jake Are you ill? Something going on with you and Alma?

Shannon Back off guys. Let him talk. Just let him talk.

Denny (*To Shannon*) Do you have something for head pain?

(*Shannon goes through her purse. Finds some pills. Places two before Denny. He swallows the pills. Puts head back down on the table.*)

Leo So. What's going on? You owe it to us. I set all this up.

(*Denny slowly lifts his head. Rubs his temples.*)

Denny I owe you nothing. You want to know what happened?

Leo Tell us so that we can get on with the evening. (*Looks at watch*) Our reservation ...

Denny Go without me. Now I feel sick to my stomach.

Jake Must have been those pills.

Shannon They're supposed to relieve pain ...

Denny A hit and run ...

Leo What?! You hit somebody and took off?

Denny No. Moron. A BMW ...driving like crazy ...whipped around the corner ...headed straight for me I hit the brakes ... my head hit the steering wheel. My neck is killing me. *(Rubs his neck)*

Shannon You should be in the hospital.

Leo A BMW?

Denny That's what I said. Isn't it?

Leo When did this happen?

Denny This morning.

Leo Where did this happen?

Denny Does it freakin' matter? *(Gets up and stumbles to the sink. Puts head in sink.)*

(Shannon comes over and tries to comfort Denny.)

Leo Where did this happen?

(Denny pulls himself up from the sink.)

Denny Down the street from the office ... I was coming in for the dog and pony show.... Wait! Was that you? You drive a BMW.

Leo I drive an Escalade. I sold the BMW.

Denny Some nut in a BMW almost killed me.

Leo Did you file a police report?

Denny I was too sick to do anything. I just came home.

Jake Your car?

Denny That damn BMW clipped my front fender. Took off my mirror. Then took off.

Leo Did you get the license number?

Denny I got nothing but this damn headache a pain in the neck and a busted car.

Shannon *(To Leo)* Do you think it was ...

Leo It was probably some yuppie woman. *(simultaneous with "it was")* You know how they drive.

Denny I don't know who it was. I wasn't seeing straight. I just wanted to sleep. So I came home.

Shannon You must have a concussion. And whiplash. We need to get you to a hospital. Does Alma know?

Denny Alma's camping. I feel weak and sick to my stomach. *(He stumbles over to the chair and slumps down)* I'm broken.

Leo We need to talk about Monday

Denny Monday? To hell with Monday!

Jake We are counting on you. C'mon. We'll take you to the hospital. You'll feel better by Monday.

Leo I'll pay for the damage to your car. In fact, I buy you a company car. Monday has to happen. We've got payroll next Friday.

(Leo walks over and tries to get Denny up.)

Denny *(Rubbing his temples)* Lay off! You don't see it do you?

Leo See what?

Denny I'm not like you but I am! ...That makes no sense But it does!

Jake You're not in your right mind. C'mon. We'll take you to a doctor.

Denny I'm not what I was ...or did I become what I was ...Oh God ... *(Folds his arms. Lays his head on the table)*

(Long pause.)

Shannon Is he asleep? Wake him up. We need to get him to the hospital. *(Walks over to Denny. Tries to rouse him.)*

Leo C'mon. Let's not go into this. We'll get you patched up and ready for Monday.

Denny *(pulls his head up)* Thirteen years. Thirteen years of Mondays. ...and it's rolled back down again. My head is bursting! What did you give me?

Shannon Ummm. Midol.

Leo You'll be a new woman soon. *(laughs. Pats Denny on the head.)*

Shannon Leo! C'mon Denny. We'll take you to the emergency room.

(Leo picks a note from the table.)

Leo Who's ...? *(to Jake)* This number looks ...

Denny Alma took call. I'll call him back when I feel better. Probably about the startup.

(Leo puts the number in pocket)

Denny You guys go on. Go about your business. I'll be fine.

Leo And Monday?

Denny I'll do what I have to do. That's business. Right?

Leo Alright. That's what I wanted to hear. *(Puts the note back on the table)* We'll leave you alone. *(to Jake and Shannon)* C'mon.

Jake *(Pats Denny on the back.)* That's what Jesus would do. Right Denny? Take care of business. Just saying.

(The three leave.)

(Denny goes to door. Looks out. Headlights fade. Returns to the table. Picks up phone. Dials.)

Denny Hey... *(listens)* Yeah. A week from Monday works for me. I have some things to take care of before We both do. *(listens)* I'll bring everything ... *(listens)* Yeah. Good! The startup ... *(listens)* Yeah. All in. Next Monday. Hey listen to this ... I was in a Chinese restaurant last night ...this was after we talked. Anyway, I'm waiting for takeout. I break open this fortune cookie. It says *The harder you work the luckier you get* but what I'm hearing is *What would Machiavelli do?* *(listens)* Yeah. Right out of the blue. A moment of overwhelming clarity. And that's when I called you back. *(listens)* Yeah right! *(listens)* MIH Consulting Group? MIH? *(listens)* Ah. *Make it Happen Consulting*. That works. Better than what I came up with: *Shrewd as Serpents Consulting*. *(listens)* Hey listen. They were here tonight. *(listens)* Yeah. More of the same. I had to come up with something quick. I told them that my head ...I was in a hit and run some crazy person driving a BMW sideswiped my car. *(listens)* No....but they must have thought ... Don't worry. I'm not pressing charges *(laughs)* No harm. No fowl. *(listens)* Yeah. I'm cashing in my chips, my 12% on Monday. What's that? You sold the BMW yesterday for 10 grand?! *(listens)* That's right! More seed money! *(listens)* Wow! Did you transfer title? *(listens)* So you're free and clear. *(listens)* Yeah. I was sure he'd start calling you the moment they left. *(listens)* Good. He'll find out on Monday *(listens)* OK Bob. We'll talk when I get back. Get the ball rolling. I'm going up to surprise Alma and the kids ... *(listens)* Talk to you then. Bye. *(hangs up. Sets phone down. Downs water. Grabs backpack. Turns out the light. Goes out the door.)*

(LIGHTS DIM)

END

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(aka, Jennifer A. Johnson)

