

# Curse of the One Percent

By Ken Sonenclar

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Money doesn't mind if we say it's evil, it goes from strength to strength.  
It's a fiction, an addiction, and a tacit conspiracy.

— **Martin Amis**

## Cast

**Jamie Byrne:** Male, 22 (fresh out of Cornell). Smart. A reformed bro. An athlete's body. Played lacrosse freshman year; quit after a concussion. At JP Morgan investment bank. Father runs a residential construction/home remodeling company in New Jersey. Born in Ireland but moved with his family to New Jersey as an infant. Oldest of six. First in his family to go to college.

**Neha (pronounced NAY-ha) Malhotra:** Female, 22 (fresh out of Cornell). First year at NYU Medical School. Grounded. Plans to be a Geriatrician. Parents are both immigrant doctors from India who settled on Michigan's upper peninsula.

**Isaiah Churchman:** Male, 22 (fresh out of Princeton). At Lazard investment bank. A child of privilege. Self-assured and occasionally brash but does the right thing. Father is a successful corporate CEO and investor; sits on many boards. African-American. From New York City.

**Landon Lee:** Male, 22 (fresh out of Harvard). At Goldman Sachs. Whip-smart but smug and obnoxious. Korean heritage. From Los Angeles.

**Gloria Engel:** Female, 40's or 50's. Executive Recruiter/counselor at Maximus Search Partners. Specializes in top-tier Wall Street recruitment. Hard-driving; no time for laggards. Any ethnicity.

**Jackson Wu:** Male, 26. Yama Global Capital vice president interviewing Jamie on his day there. (Can be the same actor playing Landon Lee.)

**Florian Holt:** Male, 50-ish, white-ish. Founder/Managing Partner of Yama Global Capital, most envied boutique investment firm in the world. Roots in private equity, but runs enormously successful venture capital & hedge funds as well. Billionaire several times over. A legend but also a mystery. Nationality unclear and background a raft of rumors. Possibly ex-military or intelligence.

## 1

*We're in the kitchen/den of an open-plan luxury apartment, high above Brooklyn. An enormous picture window frames a to-die-for view of lower Manhattan and New York Harbor. The Statue of Liberty rises in the distance. Still, the place shows little flair or taste and not much furniture since the three tenants are all just out of college and moved in maybe three months ago. The living area is dominated by a big sectional couch. An electronic drum set sits off to the side.*

*It's a Friday night. Sometime after 10pm. It's clearly Halloween or thereabouts since decorations abound, including a life-sized monster – Frankenstein or the Mummy will do – that stands just inside the front door and serves as a coat rack.*

*Isaiah wears a skeleton costume with a Mexican-style Day of the Dead mask flipped up like a welder's visor. He sits perched in a high-top chair at the big kitchen island. He is texting on his mobile. Jamie is dressed as a vampire, including a cape, his hair slicked back. He is repairing a kitchen cabinet on one of the long countertops. His toolbox sits atop the counter and he carefully applies some glue to bind two pieces of the cabinet. Isaiah and Jamie each have an open beer at hand.*

ISAIAH

*(looking at Jamie, who is absorbed in his repair work)*

Why the hell are you doing that?

JAMIE

Why do you care?

ISAIAH

Because this ain't no fifth-floor walkup. This building's got a whole crew to fix that shit, 24-7.

*Jamie closely inspects the repair, running his fingertips over the edges, eyeballing that the pieces are perfectly aligned. He's clearly practiced at this.*

JAMIE

I'm sure. But I find it relaxing. And I know what I'm doing.

ISAIAH

Whenever anything broke in my house growing up my mother would tell my father to call a man.

JAMIE

*(still absorbed in the work)*

That's a real ball crusher.

ISAIAH

Yeah, I suppose. But we had four houses, so some shit always needed fixing.

JAMIE

*(Jamie gently lays the cabinet flat on the counter.)*

Don't touch this. It needs to dry.

ISAIAH

Whatever.

*Jamie picks a sheet of paper off the counter and glances at it as he turns his attention to Isaiah.*

JAMIE

Ready for another go?

ISAIAH

Not in the least.

JAMIE

Look, man, your headhunter told you the same shit as mine: One strike and you're out.

Pack your knives and go. But if you don't/ give a...

ISAIAH

I didn't say that. Just give me a second.

JAMIE

And try not to look like the Knicks just lost in OT.

ISAIAH

The Knicks just lost in OT, so I can look any damn way I want.

*(takes a swig of beer)*

When are we going out?

JAMIE

Later...

*(changes tone to mimic a corporate interviewer)*

So tell me about yourself, young man.

ISAIAH

*(Takes a moment to put on his game face)*

Dalton... Princeton -- Dulles Prize winner. Interned after sophomore year at Morgan Stanley, after junior year at Lazard. Now an Associate at Lazard in Mergers & Acquisitions.

JAMIE

*(regular voice)*

You don't need to keep it tight as a Tweet, man. This is the big fat open-ended softball. You should knock it out of the park.

*(resuming interviewer's patronizing tone)*

I can read... Isaiah. Tell me something more... Were you the first in your family to go to college?

ISAIAH

*(triggered and bristling)*

What? Do I look like my family just got off the boat? That's you, bro, not me.

JAMIE

*(dancing around and sounding like a leprechaun)*

Aye, that's right. How could I forget?

*(Drops the accent)*

Stay cool, man. I'm just trying to rattle you.

*Isaiah's eyes widen as he leans back and stares at Jamie. He takes a swig of beer. Not clear if he's amused or angry.*

ISAIAH

My father was a fucking Rhodes Scholar.

JAMIE

Really? Well that's between you and your therapist.

*NEHA enters the kitchen. She is dressed like a physician – white coat, stethoscope and old-fashioned black doctor’s bag. She comes over to Jamie and they kiss. They’re obviously a couple.*

JAMIE

*(ironically)*

That’s creative.

NEHA

*(looking down at her outfit)*

What’s the matter with it?

JAMIE

Uh... not really a stretch.... You’re in med school.

*A phone rings. Everyone glances to see if it’s theirs.*

NEHA

Right. And you’re an investment banker. When are you changing for the party?

*Jamie mocks a silent laugh but he then reads the phone display and his eyes widen. He holds a finger up to Neha not to talk and presses the phone to his ear.*

JAMIE

*(into the phone)*

Hey, Gloria.

*Listens for a few seconds*

What? No... For real?... Tomorrow? What the hell?

*He listens for another few seconds, repeating the highlights.*

8AM. At the Core Club. Right... I’ll be there.

*Jamie ends the call.*

*(to Isaiah)*

It’s on!

ISAIAH

Can’t be.

JAMIE

I swear.

NEHA  
What's on?

JAMIE  
*(to Isaiah, ignoring Neha)*  
She's emailing me details. I'm meeting her first for some last-minute coaching.

ISAIAH  
She's on her game.

NEHA  
Who is?

JAMIE  
*(to Isaiah)*  
My heart's pounding.

NEHA  
*(frustrated)*  
What's going on?

JAMIE  
Interviews. For private equity.

NEHA  
*A job interview?*

ISAIAH  
I can't believe it's this damn weekend. I really thought we'd have another month.

JAMIE  
It's earlier every year, just like they say. As soon as one firm jumps, they all pile on.

ISAIAH  
Yeah, well, why haven't I heard anything yet?  
*(Just then Isaiah's phone rings and he answers.)*  
Hello.  
*(Isaiah looks madly for something to write with and on. Jamie tosses him a pen and Isaiah jots notes on a paper napkin.)*



ISAIAH

*(into the phone)*

Yes, of course I'll make it. That's great. I'll see you there.

*(He ends the call and pumps his fist.)*

Who's *the man*?

*Jamie reaches toward Isaiah and they bump fists.*

NEHA

I don't get this. You're interviewing for new jobs? The two of you just started working.

What? Eight weeks ago?

ISAIAH

Six.

NEHA

That's crazy.

*The apartment's front door opens and LANDON enters. He's in a suit, looking sharp, schlepping an overstuffed briefcase.*

LANDON

*(shouting to no one in particular)*

I'm home, dweebs!

*Everyone ignores him as he tosses his overcoat across the Coatrack/Monster's outstretched arms and heads into his bedroom.*

NEHA

How can you interview for something else? You haven't *done* anything yet.

JAMIE

It's definitely weird. But they want us.

NEHA

Even if they do. Why are you leaving?

ISAIAH

Investment banks are for losers, Neha. In case Jamie hasn't told you.

NEHA

What are you talking about?

ISAIAH

Well, banking's not a *career*.... It's just a place to hang until you find something better.

*Neha looks at Jamie, who nods his agreement.*

NEHA

*(to Jamie)*

J.P. Morgan is just a place to hang? You almost had a breakdown getting this job. How many interviews did you have?

JAMIE

Uh, twelve.

NEHA

You bought a Zegna suit you couldn't afford because you said you needed to look the part. And you told me, I don't know how many times, that they thought you were garbage.

JAMIE

Pretty sure I said "trash."

NEHA

And you were clear you didn't want to work there anyway.

*(imitating Jamie)*

I'D NEVER WORK FOR THOSE PATRONIZING ASSHOLES!

JAMIE

I meant it at the time.

NEHA

And after one interview that you were sure was the end of the line, I had to take you to the ER after you punched a hole in the wall.

ISAIAH

You punched out a wall?

JAMIE

It was in the frat house. No one noticed.

NEHA

He fractured a knuckle.

ISAIAH

Jesus!

NEHA

But then they made you an offer and you were delirious. You *cried*.

ISAIAH

A man can cry.

NEHA

Yes, we know a man can cry, Isaiah. That's not my point.

JAMIE

Banking's a dead end.

ISAIAH

You do NOT want to turn 30 and be helping some 22-year-old sell his company to Apple for \$4 billion. Very awkward.

NEHA

Awkward?

*(to Jamie)*

They're paying you two-hundred-and-twenty-thousand dollars a year.

ISAIAH

*(to Jamie, sounding hurt)*

You told me one-ninety, bro.

*While the dialog continues, Landon returns to the kitchen. He's in a Bozo outfit, including giant shoes. He is holding a curly orange wig and a round red nose. He opens the refrigerator, pulls out a pitcher of martinis, pours one into a classic martini glass and drops in a few olives. He is about to ask something but instead walks over to Jamie's toolbox on the counter and takes out a vial of glue. He dabs some onto the nose and edges of the wig and slips both on.*

NEHA

I didn't know you were so unhappy.

JAMIE

I'm not unhappy. I mean, my boss is a dick, like I've told you, but he's not the worst there. I've just been talking to people. This headhunter for one.

NEHA

Gloria?

JAMIE

Plus Isaiah and some others. I didn't know this was a possibility until after I started the job. But from everything I've heard I think this could be a much better fit for me. There's a real opportunity to build things.

NEHA

Why haven't you mentioned it before?

JAMIE

Uh, I have. Those super early breakfasts I've been going to. I told you they were for new opportunities.

NEHA

I thought you meant for the job you have. You could have shared more if you really wanted me to know.

JAMIE

Maybe. But Jesus, we've barely seen each other lately. You're either in class or at the hospital or dissecting winos.

NEHA

Seriously? When was the last time you were home before me? Then it's Powerpoints 'til 2AM. And they're not winos.

LANDON

*(spinning around to reveal his completed costume, speaking with the guttural voice Michael Keaton used in Beetlejuice)*

It's showtime!

ISAIAH

Shut up, Landon. Who are you, anyway? Asian Bozo?

LANDON

What about it? Why don't you switch costumes with Jamie? You'd be better as Blacula.

ISAIAH

You look creepy as shit, man. You carry an ax with that outfit?

LANDON

I might. Don't walk in front of me.

JAMIE

*(to Landon)*

Hey, chill out. Ready for this, Landon? We've both got PE meetings tomorrow morning.

LANDON

*(incredulous)*

Really? The two of you?

ISAIAH

*(to Landon)*

You?

LANDON

Of course. 8AM at the Harvard Club.

NEHA

So you're all doing this.

JAMIE

*(to Neha)*

Look. If I had your brain I wouldn't be at the bank to begin with.

NEHA

You'd be in med school?

JAMIE

What?

*(a moment of confusion)*

No, of course not. I'd be at Google – or maybe OpenAI.

NEHA

Med school's for losers now too?

JAMIE

I didn't say that. I mean especially not for you. You've got a purpose. You've got your whole life planned.

NEHA

Hardly.

JAMIE

What? Now who's keeping secrets? All you've ever told me is that you want to care for old folks.

LANDON

Geriatrics? That's a growth industry. In fact the numbers are staggering.

NEHA

Nothing has changed. That's still my goal. Just remember we're taking Neena and Siddh trick-or-treating tomorrow afternoon.

JAMIE

Uh... Right.... Can't do it. This will be all day.

LANDON

*(without irony)*

Unless you crash and burn early.

*Jamie flips Landon the bird without looking at him.*

LANDON

Totally possible.

JAMIE

And it continues into Sunday if it goes well.

LANDON

I'll take the under on that.

ISAIAH

It's pretty damn intense, Neha. Either you get an offer by Sunday night or you don't.

LANDON

And return to your grunt work at the bank, slapped down like a bitch, your prospects severely diminished. Like one of the lesser Bennet Sisters.

NEHA

*(to Jamie)*

But you agreed to this a month ago.

LANDON

*(to Jamie)*

You're probably better off taking the kids, dude. Coming out of Ithaca College and all, your odds are pretty damn slim as it is.

JAMIE

Cornell, jerkoff, not Ithaca.

LANDON

Is there a difference?

JAMIE

*(to Neha, ignoring Landon)*

What do you want me to say? I'm really sorry but I don't make the schedule.

*Beat*

Christ! That reminds me. I have to text my Dad. I told him I'd work tomorrow morning. He's framing a new house. I hope he won't be too mad.

NEHA

I have never seen your father mad at you.

JAMIE

*(as he texts)*

Not true. But it sucks anyway. It's supposed to be gorgeous tomorrow and I was looking forward to it after staring at screens all week.

LANDON

Weird your father's a builder. So Main Street.

JAMIE

I thought your parents run a restaurant.

LANDON

They do. You should go do your framing and your babysitting. That way no one has a disappointing day.

NEHA

These interviews are only this weekend?

ISAIAH

For anyplace worth working at, yeah.

JAMIE

The firms recruiting this weekend are the Yale and Harvard of private equity.

ISAIAH

And Princeton.

LANDON

Another reason to take the kids. Wait until the spring. That's when the Ithaca of firms comes recruiting.

*Jamie angrily turns and grabs a fistful of the clown suit around Landon's neck.*

LANDON

Hey, I'm not a wall, man.

JAMIE

You're about as useful.

*Jamie rips Landon's Bozo nose off and flicks it away.*

LANDON

Ouch!

*Landon retrieves the nose and reattaches it.*



ISAIAH

Pour yourself another drink, Landon.

NEHA

*(to Jamie)*

I still don't get it. You know how many people would give anything to have the jobs you three have right now?

ISAIAH

Neha, nobody says you can't make a living as a banker. Buy yourself a nice place here in the city, uptown or down, and a vacation house on the Vineyard. Small one, anyway.

LANDON

Write checks big enough for Senators to return your calls.

ISAIAH

Sit courtside at the Garden.

NEHA

And that's not enough?

ISAIAH

Courtside seats? Hell no. I want the owner's box.

LANDON

That's all?

ISAIAH

No, I also want Beyonce and JZ to sing at my birthday party.

JAMIE

There's more to it, though. It's not just about the money.

NEHA

*(sarcastic)*

Oh, really?

JAMIE

I'm serious. I know the job at the bank pays well.

NEHA

Uh, crazy well.

JAMIE

Yes, but it's not what I thought it would be. I mean, I knew the hours would suck and I'd be treated like shit. I was prepared for that/

ISAIAH

/As prepared as you can get until it's in your face.

JAMIE

Right. But the reality is even worse. It's mind-numbing. There's no inspiration, it's all perspiration.

LANDON

Perhaps poetry is your calling.

ISAIAH

Jamie's right. It sucks the soul out of you. And in the end you're just pushing paper.

NEHA

(to Isaiah)

So you're not looking to get out for the money either?

ISAIAH

Who said that? Of course I'm getting out for the money, which can be almost infinite if you know what you're doing and get a little lucky. But the fact remains that any idiot can do what we're doing now.

LANDON

*(extends his arms towards Jamie and Isaiah)*

I submit exhibits A and B.

*(Isaiah reaches out and smacks Landon in the back of the head.)*

Ow!

*(beat)*

I don't think Daisy would appreciate being called an idiot.

NEHA

Who's Daisy? She's getting out of the bank too?

ISAIAH

She would if she had any arms or legs.

NEHA

What?

*(to Jamie)*

Something else you haven't mentioned? You have a quadriplegic co-worker?

JAMIE

What? No no. She's my AI assistant.

NEHA

She's a piece of software?

JAMIE

Yeah. Daisy. Dependable AI SYstem. Every firm has its own version.

LANDON

Ours is Laila.

ISAIAH

We've got Gail. But I usually call her Melainia, at least when we're alone. She digs it.

NEHA

Why are they all women?

LANDON

The usual stuff. Great attention to detail, excellent people skills, superior emotional intelligence – artificial, but still superior.

ISAIAH

Superior to yours, jackass.

JAMIE

Plus Daisy can do everything I do, only 10 times better and a thousand times faster.

LANDON

You're giving yourself too much credit.

JAMIE

This week she generated an unbelievable pitch deck in three minutes. A hundred and eighty slides, all with beautiful graphics and charts and pictures. She wrote them faster than I could read them.

LANDON

*(singing)*

Daisy, Daisy, give me your answer, do. I'm half useless all on account of you.

JAMIE

She's also starting to freak me out.

ISAIAH

Wait, what? You haven't told me this.

JAMIE

Well, one morning last week — it was still early, about 10AM, but I was starving.

NEHA

Maybe because you never eat breakfast?

JAMIE

I know, but I usually make it to lunch without a problem. But not that morning. So I ask Daisy for some breakfast ideas.

NEHA

It had suggestions?

LANDON

I believe her preferred pronoun is "she".

JAMIE

Endless suggestions. All kinds of berries and whole grains and superfoods. Very healthy. But then I thought I'd throw her a curveball. I told her thanks for all the ideas, but I decided instead to have pot roast and mashed potatoes.

NEHA

She didn't like that?

ISAIAH

She melted down?

JAMIE

She asked me if I was being executed.

ISAIAH

Fuck me.

*Beat*

But she can't pick up Chinese at 1AM when the delivery guy has gone home.

JAMIE

That's true. I kick her ass at anything that requires crossing the street.

LANDON

Probably not for long. I had a robot hand probe my butt last week.

ISAIAH

I told you to swipe left on that one.

NEHA

Why don't they fire you all then?

ISAIAH

I'm sure they will if business takes a dive. Most of us, anyway.

JAMIE

My theory is that management still thinks they need some humans who understand how things actually work – the fundamentals, at least. That would be us.

ISAIAH

So our turn will come if we can swallow 20 years of humiliating drudgery first.

LANDON

That's surprisingly perceptive of you. You hear it on some podcast?

ISAIAH

But even if you survive the meat grinder and make it to the top at the bank you'll never be a player. Just an advisor.... a supporting actor. Never the straw that stirs the drink.

LANDON

And you think you're the straw?

ISAIAH

If you're the competition, damn right!

JAMIE

Can you guys not kill each other for five minutes?

LANDON

Who? Me and my Biff?

*(Landon throws an arm around Isaiah's shoulder and pulls him close. Isaiah looks at him as if he's insane.)*

Of course.

JAMIE

Then do you mind going on ahead? Neha and I will catch up.

ISAIAH

*(to Jamie, as he nears the door)*

You owe me.

*Landon and Isaiah leave.*

JAMIE

Hey, I'm sorry.

NEHA

No, I'm sorry.

JAMIE

I should not have been so secretive.

NEHA

That's true.

JAMIE

I fought so hard to get this job and I thought I'd love it. But I don't, which is sort of embarrassing.

NEHA

When you were beating yourself up during all the interviews, it looked to me like getting the job just became the end in itself. I should have said something then but you never talked about what the job was or what you'd be doing.

JAMIE

You're right.

NEHA

All that said, though, you haven't given it much of a chance.

JAMIE

I know, but talking to some guys who've been there three or four years, they all say this is it. It doesn't get better or different any time soon. And I should have told you before. But this new thing feels like a lifeline.

NEHA

Then go for it. But I won't lie to you. I'm disappointed about tomorrow.

JAMIE

About Siddh and Neena?

NEHA

Believe it or not my niece and nephew like you a lot. They got on the phone yesterday just to tell me how excited they were to see you.

JAMIE

Are you trying to depress me? It worked. If you have a silver bullet, shoot me now.

NEHA

Silver bullets are for werewolves, not vampires.

JAMIE

I should probably know that.

NEHA

But I can decapitate you. That's foolproof with your kind.

JAMIE

Vampires or bankers?

NEHA

Both. And I've gotten pretty good at it in anatomy. It's all about the angle.

JAMIE

I'm sure.

NEHA

And then burn your body.

JAMIE

Jesus. Is this on the med-school curriculum?

*Beat*

You know, back at school, when so many people we knew were snapping.

NEHA

You never knew who wasn't returning from Christmas break.

JAMIE

Or whose parents drove up to take them to dinner and never made it back.

NEHA

At least nobody we knew jumped into the gorge.

JAMIE

Only because the fence was too high. But I used to think that you and me, us, that we had our shit together. Four years straight through. Not a single breakdown between us. But now I'm not so sure.

NEHA

*(concerned)*

You thinking about the gorge?



JAMIE

Ha! No. But I'm not sure how all this is supposed to work. It was a lot easier six months ago.

NEHA

I know. The biggest thing on your mind was finding a weekend gig for your band.

JAMIE

Oh God, don't remind me.

*(Jamie walks over to the drum set. Neha follows)*

NEHA

I haven't heard you play for a while.

JAMIE

I know. I'm barely even listening to music anymore.

*Neha drapes her stethoscope around Jamie's neck and pulls him close to kiss.*

NEHA

Let's forget all this for one night and have some fun. OK?

*Jamie vigorously nods his head.*

And by the way, you were wrong about my costume.

JAMIE

What? You're not a doctor?

NEHA

I'm a vampire slayer.

*Jamie runs for the door, with Neha right behind him..*

*Stage fades to dark.*

## 2

*At center stage, a table for two in the Core Club's dining room, though we see no other tables. Gloria Engel, Jamie's headhunter, is seated, having coffee while she reads the Financial Times. She's dressed for the weekend, Lululemon and sneakers, but with an ultra-expensive handbag at her side. Jamie walks into the scene and stands by the table. Jamie is in a suit – his Zegna, but looks somewhat bedraggled. Gloria puts down her newspaper when she finally notices him.*

JAMIE

Hi, Gloria... I thought you said 8. I'm sorry if I'm late.

GLORIA

You're not late. I've been here since 6. It's a big weekend.

*She motions for him to sit, which he does, and gives him the once-over.*

What did you do last night? You look like you just pried your eyes open with a claw hammer.

JAMIE

A Halloween party.

GLORIA

Did you sleep at all?

JAMIE

I was really wired thinking about today.

GLORIA

After going to bed when?

JAMIE

I don't know. 2?

GLORIA

Maybe 4?

JAMIE

*(hesitant)*

Maybe.

GLORIA  
Jamie/

JAMIE  
/I'll be fine.

GLORIA  
I thought you were one of the adults in the room, Jamie. That's why I chose to work with you.... Tell me. Are you one of the adults?

*Jamie opens his mouth to respond as Gloria's phone rings. Not the default iPhone ring, but some frightening ringtone or song. She answers and listens for a moment.*

GLORIA  
*(into the phone)*  
Look, Stefan, I'm your headhunter, not your mother – but of course the blue tie!

*She slaps the phone down on the table and shakes her head in frustration.*

*(to Jamie)*  
At least you can dress yourself.

JAMIE  
Doing my best.

*Beat*

So can I ask what's lined up?

GLORIA  
Not enough. My expectation was I'd have several firms ready to see you. But I got three passes yesterday evening.

JAMIE  
That's disappointing.

GLORIA  
For both of us.

JAMIE

How come you didn't tell me when you called last night?

GLORIA

Should I have? You're a stresser, Jamie, and you would only have gotten even less sleep than you did, if that's possible. I don't see any value in that.

JAMIE

Did any of them say why?

GLORIA

It doesn't matter.

JAMIE

It might be helpful to me.

GLORIA

It wouldn't.

JAMIE

Was it that bad?

GLORIA

Just put it aside. No one shares honest feedback so I don't ask. The lawyers cut their tongues out if they say too much. Twenty years ago I might have gotten something useful. Not necessarily pleasant, but useful. Not any more.

JAMIE

*(clearly dispirited)*

If you say so.

GLORIA

Hey, let's man up here! You walk in like that and you're DOA.

JAMIE

*(He straightens up)*

Ok, then where am I walking into?

GLORIA

Just one place – but it's a good one. Yama wants to see you.

JAMIE

Yama?

GLORIA

I know. I was surprised too.

JAMIE

That's some honest feedback.

GLORIA

I mean happily surprised. Yama is strangely random about who they bring in. Maybe because they're more than private equity. They run hedge and venture funds as well. So I've given up trying to handicap them. But it's Carlisle, Blackstone and Yama at the top of the heap. In any order you want. Of course Yama's a boutique compared to the other two but their returns and their influence are beyond... beyond.

JAMIE

Then I'm excited. Thank you.

GLORIA

You've gone through the materials I gave you?

JAMIE

Every day for the past two weeks.

GLORIA

You've got thoughtful answers to the likely questions?

JAMIE

Memorized – and more thoughtful than I've ever been.

GLORIA

And you're prepared to crunch some numbers? They're bound to run you through several modeling exercises.

JAMIE

Bring it on.

GLORIA

I just wish you weren't exhausted.

JAMIE

I'm not. I swear.

GLORIA

If they like you it will be a long day. Every test and interview will be a step up – more difficult and hazardous than the previous. And you can wash out at any time.

JAMIE

Sounds like *Top Gun*.

GLORIA

That's exactly what it is, except no one is going to call you Maniac or Cannibal or whatever – but don't object if they do. They also love people with language skills. They're totally global. Their CEO is here but they're also in Palo Alto, Oxford, Singapore and Tel Aviv. Remind me if you have any languages.

JAMIE

I took two years of Gaelic at Cornell.

GLORIA

Really? Gaelic? That'll be great if they want to acquire the 14th century.

JAMIE

Uh... how about high school Spanish?

GLORIA

Ok, like I said, they're random. But they like something about you. You're my only client this cycle who they asked to see. In fact it's been three years since I sent anyone into Yama.

JAMIE

Anything special I need to do there?

GLORIA

Yes, don't tell them what you *think* they want to hear. That's the last thing they are looking for. And that's not some throwaway or generic advice. Yama prides itself – no,

it's more than that – they're obsessive about transparency and honesty. Their founder wrote a book maybe 10 years ago – Maxims, it was called, like 600 pages – about the power of truth.

JAMIE

That sounds like a good thing.

GLORIA

He argues that only when an organization and every person working there is 100 percent open and honest can you get the whole team truly motivated and rowing in the same direction. And when you do that you can blaze your own path without guilt and accomplish anything, no matter what the rest of the world thinks.

JAMIE

Wow. I wish I'd read it.

GLORIA

No need. I just told you the whole thing. It could have been a pamphlet.

JAMIE

OK. I get it. Anything else?

GLORIA

Yes, be perfect.

## 3

*A foosball table on stage, the short end facing the audience. Somehow it should seem that this is just one piece of equipment in a game lounge.*

*Jamie enters alongside Jackson Wu, a Yama Associate. Wu wears chinos and a collared shirt. He is a few years older than Jamie, who has lost his suit jacket and tie, and his shirt collar is unbuttoned. He is carrying a takeaway cup of coffee.*

JAMIE

That was some spread.

JACKSON

Yeah. All the chefs here are Beard-award winners.

JAMIE

No idea what that is, but it must be good.

JACKSON

You'll know how good when you see lunch. That was the mid-morning snack.

JAMIE

And It's all free?

JACKSON

All you can eat. All day every day.

JAMIE

This coffee's fantastic.

JACKSON

She's the highest-paid barista in the United States.

JAMIE

I didn't expect a game room either.

JACKSON

It's all the same thing. We can't lose great people because of a fun gap.



JAMIE

It's like an arms race.

JACKSON

Not like – it is. Just instead of nukes we kill 'em with truffles.

JAMIE

That's all it takes?

JACKSON

Look, the all-stars we're after want three things: coin, upside and fun. So what are your options? You can do a startup. Little coin, possible but unlikely upside since whatever brilliant idea you come up with 20 other people had it two years ago and they've already hoovered up the best funding. But great fun. Bring your dog to work and that shit. Everybody should do one.

JAMIE

Did you?

JACKSON

No... Or you can go to one of the big boys – Meta, Microsoft, whatever. Good coin and some fun, but the upside is history, and even worse you're working alongside people who've banked the upside you'll never see and rub it in your face by inviting you to the Hamptons house you'll never own.

JAMIE

Plus you have to be some sort of tech wizard.

JACKSON

You're a funny guy. I like that. But seriously, none of those places have invented anything in years, maybe decades. If they need something new they buy it.

JAMIE

With help from their bankers.

JACKSON

Right. So you could do the investment banking thing. Pretty decent coin, as you know, but limited upside and no fun – maybe negative fun – usually because your boss is a prick who thinks the world is a frat and feels entitled to abuse you just the way he was abused when he first pledged the bank.

JAMIE

I was in a frat.

JACKSON

So was I. But we all need to grow up sometime, right? And all in all, not a great set of choices.

JAMIE

Those are *all* the options?

JACKSON

Did I miss something? Why else would you bother getting an Ivy League economics degree?

JAMIE

Where were you a banker?

JACKSON

My therapist says I should not speak the name. That's my trigger and it still takes up half my sessions. But at least it led me here, where you can have it all. Superior coin, awesome upside, and serious fun.

*Jackson motions toward the foosball table.*

Play?

JAMIE

Sure. But it's been a while. First to seven?

JACKSON

Make it five. I have to deliver you to someone else in a few minutes.

*The remainder of the scene is acted out as they play foosball.*

JACKSON

So let me ask you the kind of question you're probably expecting.

JAMIE

I'm ready.

JACKSON

Somehow or other you are given an elephant. Don't ask how. It doesn't matter. But it's a big-ass bull elephant. The kind Hannibal rode across the Alps. Now, you can't give it away or sell it, so what do you do with it?

JAMIE

Can I keep it?

JACKSON

You're 22 and live in Brooklyn, so no.

*Jamie scores a quick goal. Jackson is surprised but takes it mostly in stride.*

JAMIE

Whoa!

JACKSON

I haven't walked into a hustle, have I? It's on me if I did. No knock on you.

JAMIE

Just dumb luck, I swear.

JACKSON

We'll see. But what about the elephant?

JAMIE

Oh yeah. Well, how about if I become a magician and make it disappear.

JACKSON

Hmm. Good answer, but that was easy. Let's try this. Did you really quit lacrosse freshman year because of a concussion or were you just not good enough?

*Jamie is startled by the question and takes his eyes off the table just long enough for Jackson to score.*

Yes!

JAMIE

Uhh..., it was real alright. Put me in the hospital for a week. They thought I might have to withdraw from school, but I hung in. I was dazed and confused for another week,

though who knows if anyone noticed. But I was plenty good enough. Not saying I was the best because I wasn't. But I was good enough to start. I'd already had one concussion in high school and I wasn't going to chance taking another shot to the head and getting really damaged.

JACKSON

You didn't feel an obligation to your teammates? You let them down, after all.

JAMIE

*(once again, slightly distracted)*

I didn't see it that way.

*Jackson scores again.*

JACKSON

That's two.

JAMIE

I'm no use to the team if I'm worried about getting hit and can't give it my all.

JACKSON

You could have played after you recovered.

JAMIE

Hey, playing college ball is not a suicide pact. Did you play?

JACKSON

Lax? No. I don't have the build. But I skied at Dartmouth.

JAMIE

I mean a team sport. Not one where you just ride the same bus.

JACKSON

No.

*Jamie scores.*

JAMIE

Yes! We're even again.

JACKSON

Did you tell the coach yourself you were quitting or did you let your doctors or your parents do the dirty work?

JAMIE

*(some annoyance in his voice)*

I did it, of course.

*(Jamie scores)*

That's three.

JACKSON

*(frustrated)*

I can count. How did the coach take it? Did he push back? Try to talk you out of it?

JAMIE

He tried. He thought I should give it some time before making the decision.

JACKSON

You held firm?

JAMIE

My mind was made up. It was the right thing to do and I needed to move on.

JACKSON

You like delivering bad news?

JAMIE

Like it? Not really. Who does?

JACKSON

Around here? It's a rite of passage.

JAMIE

What does that mean?

*Jackson scores*

JACKSON

*(breaking into a touchdown dance)*

Oh yeah. Who's your Daddy?

JAMIE

It's only 3-3. You're nobody's Daddy yet. What do you mean about a rite of passage?

JACKSON

You understand that not every investment we make is a home run from day one.

JAMIE

Sure. No one bats a thousand.

JACKSON

But when you get into bed with us, when you take our money, that's a serious thing.

JAMIE

Are you quoting Tony Soprano?

JACKSON

Maybe, but he and his crew were amateurs – dumb money. We only put money to work in things we know a lot about. A real lot. We're smart money. And money is only the beginning. You join with us and you get a true partner – a big brother. We do everything we can to make sure you – we – succeed. We help you hire the best people and dispose of the losers. We make all the introductions you need – from Army generals to pharmaceutical CEOs, from network news producers to government regulators.

JAMIE

The deep state.

JACKSON

The deepest.

*Jackson scores.*

JACKSON

That's 4-3.

*(cups his ear to hear a distant sound)*

I think I hear a fat lady singing.

JAMIE

Don't go popping the champagne just yet.

*Jamie scores*

JACKSON

*(testily)*

Nice shot. Next goal wins. But like I said, Not everything goes right all the time.

JAMIE

The companies you invest in still need to get the job done.

JACKSON

Exactly right. So when an investment goes off the rails, we take action. And that may mean tossing our partner to the curb.

JAMIE

Like any big brother would.

JACKSON

Right... Maybe not the best analogy. But these are entrepreneurs who put their life's blood into their business and sadly in the end they fail. Either they can't see what needs to be done or they do see it and don't have the guts or the energy or the smarts to make it happen. This is also on us, because when we invested in the first place what we really bet on was them. Plus the problem may not even be their fault. I mean, a pandemic sends the world into lockdown or relations with China fall off a cliff. Shit happens. And running their business may have already cost them their marriage and their kids and now you're taking away their dreams and their entire sense of self worth. Are you up for that?

JAMIE

Uh... Is this on day one?

JACKSON

Ha! No, but your turn will come soon enough.

*Jamie takes a moment to visualize the picture Jackson has painted.*

JAMIE

It's just business, right?

JACKSON

Now who's quoting mobsters?

*With one savage twist of the rod he's clutching, Jamie scores the winning goal.*

Jackson

Motherfucker!

*Jamie extends his hand to Jackson and they shake.*

JAMIE

Good game, man.

JACKSON

(reluctantly)

Yeah, good game.

*Jackson checks his watch.*

JACKSON

Right on time. Let's go. Just one more question. You leave this interview today, and on your way down to the subway you buy a lottery ticket. You find out tonight that you won 10 million bucks. What do you do next?

JAMIE

Jesus.

JACKSON

Be honest.

JAMIE

Yeah, I'm thinking.

*They exit the game room together.*



## 4

*It's late Saturday night, midnight or thereabouts in the apartment.*

*Isaiah is sprawled across one end of the big sectional couch, watching the Knicks play the Lakers. There are open bottles of expensive Japanese whiskey and Trader Joe's Two-Buck Chuck on the coffee table, alongside a stack of 16 oz. red plastic cups. He's a mix of drunk, manic and exhausted, and over-involved in the game, as usual, yelling at the screen with every Knicks screw-up or Laker basket.*

*Jamie enters through the apartment door, sees Isaiah and heads toward him. He's cradling a brown paper bag, which he puts on the coffee table and pulls out a six-pack of Heineken in cans. He flops down on the couch, grabs one of the cans and pulls it open. He drains it in one gulp, crushes it, drops it on the table and immediately opens a second, which he just holds in his hand. He'll keep drinking, albeit more slowly, through the scene. Isaiah mutes the TV.*

ISAIAH

Some fucking day, huh?

JAMIE

I didn't know I could be this tired. I felt better after high-school rugby tournaments where all I did was get kicked in the nuts for 12 hours.

*ISAIAH takes a joint from a box on the table and lights up. He takes a deep toke and passes it to Jamie, who follows suit. They pass it back and forth.*

JAMIE

Is Neha here?

ISAIAH

She was when I got back. She and Landon were watching *Love Island* or some shit. She said you texted you didn't know when you'd make it home. They went out to eat.

JAMIE

What? She went to dinner with Landon?

ISAIAH

I offered her chips and the Knicks but she preferred his company.

JAMIE

I'd chew off my arm first.

ISAIAH

He pays the rent on time, dude.

JAMIE

When did they leave?

ISAIAH

About 10.

JAMIE

That's two hours ago.

ISAIAH

Maybe a little more.

JAMIE

Fuck... And I suppose he's already got an offer?

ISAIAH

He didn't say and I didn't want to give him the pleasure of asking.

*Jamie takes another hit of the joint and stares off into space as Isaiah pours more whiskey into his red cup.*

JAMIE

Don't think I've seen that bottle before.

ISAIAH

Picked it up on my way home.

*Jamie lifts it up and sees it's two-thirds empty.*

JAMIE

You went to town on it.

ISAIAH

It was not a great day.

JAMIE

I figured it had to be either amazing or awful. I'm sorry, man.

ISAIAH

Yeah, well, like they say, life comes down to choices. And I did not choose wisely.

JAMIE

What happened?

ISAIAH

Three firms wanted to meet me so I spent half an hour with each of them this morning. Just preliminaries, but they all invited me back for the afternoon.

JAMIE

Nice to be wanted.

ISAIAH

It was. But Carlisle was the best and the most enthusiastic, so I told the others thanks but no thanks. I met the Carlisle people for lunch.

JAMIE

That sounds good.

ISAIAH

Except that when I tell you that lunch was the high point of a day that still lasted another five hours, you can guess where things went.

JAMIE

You couldn't have been in a nosedive the whole afternoon. They put you through any tests? You must have aced those.

ISAIAH

That was the easy part. I had 45 minutes to build a couple of buy-out models, one with too little data, the other with too much..

JAMIE

That's not a lot of time.

ISAIAH

It was enough. They just want to make sure you can walk the walk. I mean, it's not as if we're actually gonna do that shit anymore. We just have to keep an eye on the AI for fuck-ups and write good prompts.

JAMIE

True.

ISAIAH

But then came 12 interviews in six hours, including two double-teams and one triple-team.

JAMIE

You must have felt like LeBron.

ISAIAH

I was slicin' and dicin' when I needed to.

ISAIAH

The real surprise was the number of brothers.

JAMIE

A lot? That's a good thing, no?

ISAIAH

Yeah, but there were so many I was wondering if they were paid actors.

JAMIE

Did you ask?

ISAIAH

Yeah, right.

JAMIE

Maybe they were androids.

ISAIAH

And they're just brought out as needed, but otherwise kept in a closet like folding chairs?

JAMIE

Right. And they've got another closet with women robots and another with Hispanic robots.

ISAIAH

Gimme that weed. You've had enough.

*Jamie hands what's left of the joint to Isaiah, who stubs it out.*

JAMIE

And a room with white robots.

ISAIAH

Why the hell would they need that?

JAMIE

Yeah, they probably don't.

ISAIAH

They also hardly fed me. Protein bars and coffee. I think that's all part of it. See how you function with deprivation.

JAMIE

*(sarcastically)*

Amazing you survived.

ISAIAH

Not funny, man. I was wiped after the final interview and definitely dehydrated. And then they parked me in a room that was really a closet and hot as a sauna.

JAMIE

More deprivation?

ISAIAH

*(conspiratorially)*

All part of the process... all part of the process.

JAMIE

What else did they ask you about?

ISAIAH

The expected stuff. What I do at the bank. Deals I'm working on. How I see my strengths and weaknesses. My summer internships, my courses at Princeton. Where I'd like to be in five years. Plus the occasional head-scratcher, like where is the world headed. It got pretty repetitive as the day went on. But I was done about 5:30, so six hours overall.

JAMIE

That doesn't sound like a disaster.

ISAIAH

It was, take my word for it. You know when things are going well and when they're not. There were too many awkward pauses. The vibe just wasn't there. No chemistry. Plus, and this is the big reveal – I haven't been invited back.

JAMIE

Oh. So sorry, man.

ISAIAH

They said I'd hear from them sometime after eight so I've been staring at the goddamned phone all night. Testing it every now and then. I even called Verizon to see if the network was down. Before Neha went out I was having her call me every 15 minutes to make sure my phone worked. You want to call me? Yeah, go ahead. Call me.

*Jamie pulls out his phone and taps in Isaiah's number. Isaiah's phone rings. He stares at the display and screams as he disconnects the call.*

FUUUUUUUUUUUCCCCCKKKKKK!

JAMIE

Come on, man.

ISAIAH

*(despairing)*

I had two other choices. Two other perfectly good firms to choose – great options – and I just picked the wrong one.

JAMIE

You could not have known that.

ISAIAH

Doesn't matter. The gods have spoken.

JAMIE

Have you talked to your parents?

ISAIAH

Hell no. I'm not even sure what I'd tell them. I gotta come up with something. You?

JAMIE

No reason. They don't know anything about this stuff. I mean my Mom loved it when I told her I'd landed the job at the bank. My Dad too. They're both totally supportive. A hundred percent. A hundred-fifty percent, even though I know my Dad wants me to take over his company someday. But they don't have any idea what I actually do, let alone have any advice.

ISAIAH

Consider yourself lucky. My father loves sharing stories about how he beat down some billionaire in a negotiation or that he got invited to sit on some board or who he and my mother ran into at the Met Ball. I used to get a kick out of it, but now I feel like every story comes with a little jab. Plus they're both goddamned advice machines. Always sending me articles to read or podcasts to listen to. Look at my inbox here.

*Isaiah holds his phone in front of Jamie's face.*

JAMIE

6,000 unread messages?

ISAIAH

All from them.

JAMIE

Shit. Maybe they just care.

ISAIAH

I'm sure they do. But it grinds me down.

*Beat*

Maybe Carlisle has all the brothers they want or need. I mean, everybody's got quotas these days. Can't overload anywhere or else you'll be screwing someone else. Or maybe they only had me in as a courtesy to my father. I'm sure he's done business with them.

JAMIE

Nobody's having you in just as a courtesy.

*Beat*

I know it's late but if they said you'd hear from them you'll hear from them.

ISAIAH

Easy for you to say. You still on track at Yama?

JAMIE

How did you know I was at Yama?

ISAIAH

It was all over Insta.

JAMIE

What? Get the fuck out.

ISAIAH

Neha told me. And look, let me tell you right now – I'm jealous.

JAMIE

Yeah, well at least you had a choice to make.

ISAIAH

What?

JAMIE

Neha didn't tell you they were the only ones who wanted to see me? This was my one shot. I went there right after breakfast and left at 11PM. 14 hours - and it was non-stop.

ISAIAH

Are you kidding me? What the fuck did you do there?



JAMIE

Not what you'd expect. Pretty much the opposite of what you described.

ISAIAH

Great. More proof I made the wrong choice.

JAMIE

I only mean there was no tests, at least not the number-crunching kind.

ISAIAH

None at all?

JAMIE

Nope. And we barely talked about the bank and what I do there or the economy or sourcing deals or the outlook on interest rates or pretty much anything I prepared for.

ISAIAH

Then what did you talk about? The Yankees?

JAMIE

They came up. But I must have met with 50 people, sometimes one on one, sometimes two together, and almost every conversation was different. School, parents, summer camp, music, hobbies, ex-husbands and wives – theirs, I mean – and what it was like to work at Yama. Some of it was contentious, especially with this one dude. At times it got really personal. A couple of people shared really traumatic stories about their childhoods. Stuff I wouldn't confess to a priest – not that I'd tell a priest anything.

ISAIAH

That's cringe. It's bad enough when you know the person. But when it's a stranger...

JAMIE

Yeah. I caught myself once with my mouth just hanging open. Every meeting was intense, like I was under the microscope no matter what we talked about. Everyone is very direct. There's no bullshit. They call it Rabid Truth. My headhunter warned me this morning before I went in.

ISAIAH

Rabbit Truth? What the fuck is that?

JAMIE

Not rabbit, RABID. Like a mad dog. Rabid Truth. It's the mantra for the whole firm. No secrets. Everything is open and on the table. They insist it drives their success,

ISAIAH

You share anything dark?

JAMIE

I suppose. I didn't feel like I had a choice.

ISAIAH

Like what.

JAMIE

Like nothing you'll ever hear.

ISAIAH

They try to sell you on the place at all?

JAMIE

One partner who grew up in some rat-hole Boston suburb said he now has front-row season tickets to the Red Sox, Patriots and Celtics.

ISAIAH

*(angry)*

Fucking Celtics.

JAMIE

As if that's supposed to impress me.

ISAIAH

It didn't?

JAMIE

No, of course it did.

ISAIAH

They feed you?

JAMIE

Like you wouldn't believe. They've got their own team of private chefs.

ISAIAH

What about the bathrooms?

JAMIE

Some truly dope toilets. The seats are voice controlled so you don't touch anything. Which was cool since I dropped a major deuce after this insane lunch.

ISAIAH

What? That's nuts.

JAMIE

Why?

ISAIAH

What if a Managing Partner walks in and the place smells like a horse farm?

JAMIE

Can't happen. All sorts of climate-controlled breezes and vapors blowing by and sucking it up. It's like taking a crap in outer space.

ISAIAH

Unreal. How did you leave it?

JAMIE

I'm scheduled for one more meeting tomorrow.

ISAIAH

That's clutch. But that's all you know?

JAMIE

It's a one-on-one with Florian Holt.

*Isaiah is clearly stunned. He sits up straight.*

ISAIAH

You fucking with me?

JAMIE

No.

ISAIAH

Your only meeting is with Florian Holt? He's the fucking founder.

JAMIE

That's what they told me.

ISAIAH

*Goddamn!* You're IN, you motherfucker. You know that, right?

JAMIE

*(incredulous)*

No. How should I know that?

ISAIAH

Didn't you call your headhunter when you left?

JAMIE

It was too late.

ISAIAH

It's common knowledge, dude. Holt meets everyone before they make an offer. The final interview. But he only wants to make sure you're not a dolt or a total prick. Though it might be better if you were a total prick. But getting to him means you've run the gauntlet. You're a survivor. I can't believe I'm telling *you* this. Be happy, you idiot. You're getting an offer from the best firm in the world. You are set for life. I fucking hate you.

JAMIE

You're telling me the founder of the most envied investment firm there is, is simply the welcome wagon? That's crazy and you know it. The place is a black box. Do you actually know anybody there?

ISAIAH

No, but/

JAMIE

/Then come on! This guy didn't get where he is by rubber stamping *anything*. I'm sure it's going to be a bear.

ISAIAH

Look, of course you want to be impressive when you meet the man. I heard he's originally Danish, so he's got to be decent. I mean, don't come across as a wimp. You need to give him Peak Jamie. But otherwise I'm telling you you're in... Of course, you could not show up, or maybe piss on the lobby rug or punch him in the face, but short of that there's nothing you can do to screw this up.

JAMIE

You know, they don't even have a website.

ISAIAH

Big surprise. If you don't know who they are or how to get hold of them, they don't want anything to do with you.

JAMIE

Really? Who doesn't have a website? Pedophiles have websites.

ISAIAH

Of course they do.

JAMIE

They sent me a non-disclosure right after I left. (*Jamie turns his phone screen toward Isaiah.*)

ISAIAH

Didn't you already sign one with them?

JAMIE

I did. It was eight pages. But this one is 25 pages and just for meeting with Holt. It says that I can't tell anyone I ever even saw him.

ISAIAH

So you already violated it.

JAMIE

I haven't signed it yet.

JAMIE

*(reading from his phone)*

I can't say what he looks like or describe his office or say what he eats or drinks. If I do, not only will they take me to court, I have to pay *their* legal bills for the privilege of being ruined.

ISAIAH

Who the hell cares? Once you're in there you're part of the cult and you'll never tell anyone anyway. You won't want to.

*(beat)*

Though you better let me know if he's a total freak. Like if he hasn't shaved since high school or eats with his feet.

JAMIE

You said you know all about Yama.

ISAIAH

Not everything.

*The door opens and Neha enters with Landon. It sounds as if they are sharing an intimate laugh. Jamie and Isaiah look at them both. They slip out of their coats and take a few steps toward the couch but then Neha hesitates, unsure if she is wanted.*

NEHA

Am I interrupting?

JAMIE

Where were you two?

LANDON

Out to dinner.

NEHA

You said you didn't know when you'd be back.

LANDON

So we went out. We were hungry.

JAMIE

We? Who's we?

*A moment of awkward silence is broken by Isaiah.*

ISAIAH

So how did it go, Landon? You still in the running – or out?

LANDON

Out? Be serious. It was a great day. I bonded with the whole team from the get-go. Two of the Partners I met were in my house at Harvard.

JAMIE

Of course they were.

LANDON

The team took me to lunch after a pretty intense morning and then I was done for the day. I just have to stop by early tomorrow to tie up some loose ends and it's a wrap.

ISAIAH

Which firm?

LANDON

I'll tell you tomorrow.

ISAIAH

What's the matter? Superstitious?

LANDON

Of course not. I just prefer to wait.

NEHA

(to Jamie)

Hey, stranger.

*Jamie extends his arm, inviting Neha to sit beside him, which she does. Landon heads to the refrigerator.*

Looks like you boys have been partying.

JAMIE

Just relaxing. How was dinner with your new friend?

NEHA

It was fine.

JAMIE

Don't think I could take an hour just him and me – let alone two.

NEHA

Shhhh! And don't be like that. We were hungry and got some food. He's really not that bad.

*Jamie is about to say something when Landon waltzes back towards them drinking from a bottle of water.*

ISAIAH

No martinis tonight, Landon?

LANDON

Nope. An early morning tomorrow. And you missed a great time trick-or-treating with Neha's niece and nephew, Jamie. Really nice kids. Adorable.

JAMIE

What?

LANDON

My afternoon was free because I wrapped up so early – I told you that, right?

JAMIE

Yes, you told us – about 30 seconds ago.

LANDON

So I offered to help out.

NEHA

*(to Jamie, softly)*

He invited himself.



JAMIE

*(softly, to Neha)*

You forgot how to say no?

NEHA

Don't make something out of nothing.

*Jamie looks like he is getting riled and is about to speak but Isaiah cuts him off.*

ISAIAH

*(to Neha)*

Well, while you were out trick-or-treating your man here won the lottery.

*Isaiah points to the whiskey and wine to ask Neha what she wants. She indicates the wine and he pours her a plastic cup full.*

JAMIE

Stop talking trash.

*(to Neha)*

He doesn't know what he's saying.

ISAIAH

I never saw anyone who hated good news more than you.

NEHA

What do you mean?

ISAIAH

Tell her.

*Jamie hesitates.*

ISAIAH

I will if you don't.

JAMIE

So today went well enough and they invited me back tomorrow.

ISAIAH

To be anointed.

LANDON

That sounds auspicious. Where?

JAMIE

Neha didn't tell you?

NEHA

No, I didn't.

JAMIE

Yama.

LANDON

*(impressed and willfully disbelieving)*

Really?

ISAIAH

And he's meeting with Florian Holt tomorrow to seal the deal.

LANDON

Are you serious?

JAMIE

Serious as a heart attack, Landon.

LANDON

Then what the hell are you doing here getting wasted?

JAMIE

I had a pretty fierce day today. What should I be doing?

LANDON

Oh I don't know. Prepping for the meeting? Getting an IV drip of black coffee?

JAMIE

Why?

LANDON

Because everyone I know who has met Florian Holt says he's a son of a bitch who guards his castle like an army of Orcs. Few leave alive.

*Jamie straightens up, taking Landon more seriously*

JAMIE

You know people who have met with him? Face to face?

LANDON

Yes and yes. My best friend from Harvard-Westlake said it was the worst hour of his life.

ISAIAH

Have you been in Harvard since kindergarten?

JAMIE

What happened?

LANDON

Holt grilled him like a croque monsieur. Humiliated him. Holt is Israeli, you know. Former Mossad.

ISAIAH

Israeli? I heard he was Danish.

LANDON

About as Danish as you.

ISAIAH

How long has your friend been there?

LANDON

He never was there. Didn't get an offer.

JAMIE

But I was told that if you make it to see Holt it's essentially a done deal.

LANDON

Who laid that bullshit on you?

*Jamie glances at Isaiah with bewilderment but says nothing.*

ISAIAH

Just for the record, I have heard otherwise, also from well-connected people.

JAMIE

Well, too late now. I'm as prepared as I'm gonna get.

LANDON

I've got 20 pages of notes to review before lights out. Shouldn't take more than an hour, hour and a half.

ISAIAH

I thought your meeting tomorrow was a lay up.

LANDON

It is, but it doesn't mean I go in ignorant and hung over.

ISAIAH

*(to Jamie)*

He's just trying to spook you. Don't waste any brain cells on him.

LANDON

If you've any left to waste.

JAMIE

*(his tone not quite convincing)*

I feel good after today.

LANDON

Hey, I don't give a crap whether you listen to me or not. You'll have to live with your regrets.

*Isaiah's phone buzzes. He reads a text and then leans back clutching the phone.*

JAMIE

*(to Isaiah)*

Was that?

ISAIAH

Yes. They want me back tomorrow.

JAMIE

I told you.

ISAIAH

*(reading more of the text)*

I have to meet some partners who were up at a polo match in Greenwich and couldn't make it in today.

*Jamie extends his arm to Isaiah and they high five.*

NEHA

At least your phone works.

ISAIAH

Landon, go make some coffee.

*Jamie turns to Neha.*

JAMIE

Hey, you ok? Still pissed I missed the trick-or-treating?

NEHA

No, it was fine.

JAMIE

You sure?

NEHA

Really, I already forgot about it.

JAMIE

Then what is it? Something's on your mind.

NEHA

You really had a good day there?

JAMIE

Yeah, I think so. It was endless and draining and they played more than a few mind games with me, but something clicked since they want me back.

NEHA

You told me that if you quit the bank you have to return the bonus they gave you and even pay back what they paid to move you down from Ithaca.

JAMIE

I wouldn't leave for maybe another six months. But there are no penalties anyway for going to a place like Yama.

NEHA

Why?

JAMIE

To them it's a fact of life. The banks are actually happy when you wind up someplace where you can send business their way down the road.

NEHA

Then can I tell you something else?

JAMIE

Anything.

NEHA

After we got back this afternoon I spent some time online reading about Yama.

JAMIE

Impressive place, huh?

ISAIAH

World-class toilets.

NEHA

That didn't come up in my search, but noted. It's actually hard to find much of anything. They seem sort of clandestine. But I did see that they do a lot in healthcare.

JAMIE

*(excited)*

Actually, I was going to tell YOU that. They have more than 20 investments in life sciences. I knew that would excite you. For one, they are funding a roll-up/

LANDON

*(interjecting)*

/That's where they buy a bunch of companies doing similar or complementary things to create one bigger business that's more competitive and capable than any of the individual companies.

JAMIE

She knows what it is, Landon. We've talked about these things before.

LANDON

Oh, that was for Isaiah.

*Isaiah smacks Landon in the back of the head.*

LANDON

Ow!

JAMIE

They're also building an amazing drug-discovery business. They just acquired a company in Utah that uses machine-learning to quickly predict what new drug compounds will be useful and which will be garbage. The old way of doing it could take months.

NEHA

That's impressive.

JAMIE

Yeah – And they have a teletherapy company that just won a huge contract with the VA for helping vets through a crisis and getting them into real therapy.

NEHA

That sounds genuinely worthwhile, but I read that they have also been buying assisted-living facilities.

JAMIE

Old age homes?

NEHA

Uh, once upon a time. They're really not called that anymore.

LANDON

Wake up, dude. It's not 2019.

*Neha looks at Landon to respond but then shakes her head and moves on.*

JAMIE

Ok, assisted living. I didn't notice that in their portfolio. But what about it?

NEHA

Like I said, they own a bunch of facilities.

JAMIE

So another roll-up. If these places have been around for a while/

NEHA

They have. A few were even bought from religious orders that had run them since the 19th century.

JAMIE

Then they could probably use some new technology. And I'm sure they need repairs and upgrades, especially if religious groups ran any of them. They're usually not big on the amenities. That all sounds good to me. Yama will make sure they run super-efficiently, too. That's their thing.

NEHA

I'm sure.

JAMIE

When they buy a business they dive in from day one, and they make sure that everything is humming in very short order.

NEHA

Well that's the thing. I'm not sure that assisted-living facilities need to hum. Or are even meant to hum.

JAMIE

What could be wrong with humming?



NEHA

All I can say is that the residents have been dying since the places started humming.

JAMIE

What?

NEHA

The residents are dying. I'm serious.

JAMIE

Well...

*(beat)*

... we're talking about old-age homes, right?

ISAIAH

I believe another acceptable term is residential eldercare.

NEHA

Thank you, Isaiah. I like that.

ISAIAH

No problem. I don't want to see Jamie arrested by the Woke Police. But whatever we call them, these joints are God's waiting rooms, no?

JAMIE

Exactly. I mean they are the last stop before... before the last stop.

NEHA

Yes, many of the residents can't function on their own any more.

LANDON

*(motioning toward Jamie and Isaiah)*

Maybe you boys should apply for early admission.

*Jamie lurches toward Landon, who flinches back as Jamie smiles at him.*

NEHA

I read that the death rates in the facilities Yama bought are way up since they took control – far more than any statistical blip. And the same is true for the amount of

antipsychotics the residents are given, which to me means they're just doping these poor people to keep them quiet.

LANDON

My grandmother was in one of these places and she hated it, especially the food. She said she had no idea how many ways you could prepare halibut. Toward the end, she was in a wheelchair and she would park herself by the front door and wait for families coming to tour the facility. She would corner them and swear that the place was a horror show and they should leave immediately unless they wanted to see their relatives dead in a matter of weeks.

NEHA

*(to Landon)*

What happened to her?

LANDON

She was evicted.

ISAIAH

Your grandmother was booted from an old-age home? Why am I not surprised?

JAMIE

*(to Neha)*

You're sure about all this? Where is it coming from?

NEHA

It was in a journal article I found. The data came from a whistleblower who testified at a state government hearing in North Carolina.

ISAIAH

A whistleblower? The last whistleblower I saw swore that the government is keeping alien pilots in a deep freeze in New Mexico.

JAMIE

*(to Neha)*

Can you at least tell me how they are doing this? Guns? Knives? Pillows?

NEHA

You already said it. Efficiency. I think that eldercare and efficiency, which I know you know is just a euphemism for cutting staff and pinching pennies, are not a good mix. It

can lead to some really bad outcomes. People left alone so long they get bed sores or dehydrated because they don't get enough to drink. People also need connection. They need reasons to live.

ISAIAH

(enthusiastically)

You know, outside of religious and political movements, very few ideas have had as much impact on the modern world as the philosophy of efficiency. In the 1880's It acted as an accelerant to the second industrial revolution. There's a lot to be said for it.

NEHA

(icily)

Isaiah.

ISAIAH

(backing down)

Though maybe not in this context.

JAMIE

(to Neha)

Look, I know this looks sketchy, but what do you want me to do about it?

NEHA

I'm not sure.

JAMIE

It sounds as if you'd like me to forget about the job.

NEHA

I'm not saying that.

JAMIE

Then what are you saying?

NEHA

How about, when you go back there tomorrow, you just ask them about it?

JAMIE

You mean just slip it into the conversation? Like, uh, what percentage do you match for 401K contributions? How much paid vacation do you get the first year? Are you pumping Grandma full of Xanax to keep her quiet?

NEHA

That could work.

JAMIE

I'm serious.

NEHA

So am I.

JAMIE

Neha, I'm there to land a job, not to blow the lid off some scandal for The New York Times.

NEHA

And you want to work for a company that is doping and murdering seniors?

ISAIAH

Neha, you don't know that. You read one crazy thing on the web. Maybe it came from a Chinese bot.

JAMIE

Exactly. And I'm supposed to toss away maybe the chance of a lifetime for that?

NEHA

It doesn't sound crazy to me.

JAMIE

Look, I know you mean well – you always do – but I can't. I didn't get any other offers, not even any other interviews. So it's not like I have options here.

NEHA

Are you kidding? Of course you do.

JAMIE

What?

NEHA

Well, for one, how about staying where you are? It's not the fourth circle of hell.

JAMIE

It may actually be the fourth circle of hell, so will you at least try to see this in a different way? Just imagine it's a few years from now. You're out of med school and working someplace. Someplace good, like Mt. Sinai. And you're ok there, doing the kind of work you want to do and making a nice living to boot. But then you unexpectedly get a call from the Mayo Clinic and before you turn around they make you an offer.

NEHA

Just how is that the same thing?

JAMIE

Because Yama Capital is the Mayo Clinic of private equity.

ISAIAH

Maybe more the Mass General, but same thing.

NEHA

Are they killing people at Mass General?

JAMIE

I don't know. Maybe. Not intentionally, I mean. Which could be what's going on here. But no matter – you understand what I mean.

NEHA

Not really, Jamie, I don't. And it surprises me that you're so blase about this. I really thought this would bother you like it does me. I know it would have once. But I see your mind's made up, so go work for them. Be complicit!

*Neha jumps up, grabs her coat and heads for the door.*

JAMIE

Hey, come on.

*(He shouts as she leaves and slams the door behind her)*

Neha!!

*Stage fades to dark.*

## 5

*Early Sunday afternoon. Jamie, back in his Zegna (jacket and tie), is seated at the end of a mid-sized oval conference table that runs parallel with the stage. He is anxious – strumming his fingers, looking around the room. He reaches down to adjust his ergonomic chair, which drops down with a thud, leaving him like a child who needs a booster seat. He fumbles to raise it up but can't, so he quickly swaps the seat with the next one over.*

*Several electric guitars rest on display stands on a long credenza behind the table. Modernist paintings are hung around the room. They might be famous and priceless or merely decorative – Jamie doesn't know. Before taking his seat again Jamie takes a close look at the guitars. He gently runs his hand along the neck of one and then returns to his chair.*

*A moment later, Florian Holt enters and closes the door behind him. Holt is thin, on either side of 50, with a runner's wiry build. He is dressed casually and comfortably but expensively. (There is perhaps something feminine in his movement.) His tone is detached, even if his words are warm and welcoming and he might have the slightest trace of a foreign accent, though from where is impossible to say. He glances at the iPad he carried into the room and then rests it on the table.*

*Jamie stands out of respect. He extends his hand and they shake.*

JAMIE

Mr. Holt... It's an honor.

FLORIAN

It's all mine. Sit, sit. And please call me Florian.

*Jamie slips back down into his chair while Holt takes the chairman's seat at the end. He stares in silence at Jamie, prompting an awkward moment, at least for Jamie.*

JAMIE

Thank you so much for the opportunity.

FLORIAN

I'm sure you've earned it. But I'm told that it's 12 times harder to get a job here now than to get into Stanford, so I'll guess you were not counting on hearing from us.

JAMIE

Definitely not. And I didn't get into Stanford.

FLORIAN

No one does

*Beat*

Jamie..... It's Jamie, right? Not James or Jim or something else?

JAMIE

That's right, just Jamie.

FLORIAN

Any reason for that? Some cute story about how your baby sister mangled your real name?

JAMIE

No, nothing cute. Jamie is my real name. My father is James, so my parents called me Jamie to avoid any confusion.

FLORIAN

Yes, your father. The builder.

JAMIE

That's him.

FLORIAN

An immigrant and a success story.

JAMIE

He was... and is. He came here at 25, worked construction for eight years and then started his own company. Gets bigger every year. He's a real entrepreneur.

FLORIAN

And you worked for him?

JAMIE

Yes. Most summers since I was 14. I still do some weekends and I still love it. The bank says they don't want us working Saturdays, so I have more time now than I've had in a while..

FLORIAN

You must be quite adept with your hands.

JAMIE

Not like him. He can build anything and fix everything. I'm just ok. I can do framing, drywall, some plumbing and electrical. Small jobs.

FLORIAN

That's far from small. I'd be surprised if anyone here could do more than screw in a light bulb.

JAMIE

Not the crew you want around you after the Zombie apocalypse.

FLORIAN

That's for sure. They wouldn't last an hour. But you're an immigrant as well.

JAMIE

Uh, technically. I was just one when we arrived.

FLORIAN

No matter. Immigrants get it done, as they say. Some of the greatest contributors to Yama's success migrated here. Many from the most god-awful places.

*(Without warning, Holt's head snaps back, seemingly in pain.)*

Ah!

JAMIE

Are you ok?

FLORIAN

*(Florian does not respond but rather seems to be adjusting something in his right ear)*

Excuse me.

*(He removes something half the size of a pea from his ear and looks at it in his palm)*



I'm almost deaf in this ear. This is an amazing new device. Disposable. I print a new one each morning. It is made by one of our portfolio companies. But it's early-stage. Not even a beta, but it can be brilliant at times. Just not often enough.

JAMIE

It's a hearing aid?

FLORIAN

Well, in the sense that a Model T and a Lamborghini are both cars, yes. We think of it as a neural decoder. Aside from amplifying sound or muffling background noise, the developers layered in speech processing, so it quickly samples anyone's voice and then mimics them shockingly well, even if they are mumbling or have their back to you. But most impressive, it incorporates an AI model to voice what people will say before they actually do.

JAMIE

Jesus. Wouldn't you have to train it on each person? People don't all think alike.

FLORIAN

(laughing)

You'd be shocked how alike most people are. You know, Apple once had a tagline for their advertisements: Think Different. But almost no one does, assuming they think at all. Still, individual training improves it. Take yourself for instance.

JAMIE

You want to train it on me?

FLORIAN

No need. It had a long training session with you already.

JAMIE

Wait, what? When? How?

FLORIAN

Why yesterday, of course. You were here all day and into the evening and the device was listening – absorbing, processing, analyzing and predicting. It's not accurate enough to go to market yet, but hopefully soon. It also still suffers some basic mechanical problems. Just now it started echoing as if we were in a cave and the volume exploded to 11, if you know what I mean.

JAMIE  
(laughs)  
I do.

FLORIAN  
*(takes his iPad, taps the screen a few times and reinserts the device in his ear)*  
I thought you might.

JAMIE  
Can I ask how you lost your hearing?

FLORIAN  
Of course, and please don't feel sorry for me. The damage was self-inflicted. When I was your age, before all this, I had a band. We covered a lot of Zeppelin, Stones, Black Sabbath. Anything loud. I played lead guitar but quite stupidly never bothered with ear plugs.

JAMIE  
I played in a band in college.

FLORIAN  
Yes. Drums. You're very good.

JAMIE  
*(suspicious)*  
How'd you know? It's not on my resume.

FLORIAN  
Oh, we dig far deeper than a resume before we let anyone through the door – let alone up here.

JAMIE  
I see that.

*Beat*

Do you still play?

FLORIAN  
Every day.

JAMIE

Seriously? How do you find the time? I've played exactly once since I started at Morgan.

FLORIAN

When you love something you make the time. I still remember when I first heard my parents play Rubber Soul. I was 10 and my body just started shaking. It changed everything. Two days later I had my first guitar.

JAMIE

Wow. I had the same thing. I mean, not with the Beatles, but I remember the first time I heard Nevermind. That was it for me. I stopped doing my homework just so I could listen and play along with a pair of pencils every moment I had. A couple of weeks later my parents got me a second-hand set of drums.

FLORIAN

Have you ever met him?

JAMIE

Who? Dave Grohl? No way. I mean, I've seen Foo Fighters about 40 times but if you mean met him and told him what he means to me? I wish.

FLORIAN

It could still happen. You could *make* it happen.

JAMIE

I don't see how.

FLORIAN

Last week I spent a day with Jimmy Page.

JAMIE

(enthused)

Really? You know him? Is he a friend of yours?

FLORIAN

A friend? Hardly.

JAMIE

Then how'd you swing it?

FLORIAN

\$5 million.

JAMIE

*(embarrassed he needed to ask)*

Oh....

FLORIAN

I know. Self-indulgent. It's a vice.

JAMIE

It must have been pretty awesome.

FLORIAN

Frankly it was tough to keep him focused. He seemed to think I was just a fan who wanted to hear stories about hotel rooms he'd wrecked and groupies he'd fucked.

JAMIE

But you played too?

FLORIAN

He eventually got the point... though it took some medication.

*(pointing to the guitars on display)*

That's his Gibson Les Paul there. The white one. They have to leave me their instrument. Part of the deal.

JAMIE

They? Who else?

FLORIAN

Oh, a few you'd know. Clapton, Keith Richards. The red one there was Eddie Van Halen's.

JAMIE

It's like a museum.

FLORIAN

We've had a handful of good drummers at Yama over the years. On the staff, I mean.

JAMIE

What happened to them?

FLORIAN

Don't worry. They didn't all die mysteriously.

JAMIE

Haha... Did any of them?

FLORIAN

No, they all retired. It's hard to keep people here after they make more money than they ever dreamed of.

JAMIE

You're still here.

FLORIAN

Yes, but what should I do? Design a rocket and fly to Mars? We've built something unique, which is why I still interview everyone before we make an offer, even after 27 years. Some people say I should give it up – that I'm a drag on the process. But I can't. Everyone else figures out if you can read a balance sheet or calculate cash flows or run a sensitivity analysis. And we already have machines here that do all that better than any of us ever could. But are you the right person for what we've created here? Can you lift us to the next level? Are you hungry? Do you think different?

*It takes a moment for Jamie to realize that the questions are not rhetorical.*

JAMIE

Uh, I believe so, yes.

FLORIAN

It takes decades to build something great. But it can all tumble down in an instant, as fast as Vesuvius buried Pompeii. Hiring the wrong person can trigger a disaster. It's not just expensive, it's like introducing a toxin into a healthy body. A cancer. But you wouldn't be here unless everyone else thought we should bring you on board. And as you learned yesterday, we live by a code of Rabid Truth that lets us build genuine consensus. So if the consensus felt you didn't belong, you wouldn't be here now.

JAMIE

But you still have the final say.

FLORIAN

I do. But it has been a while since I exercised my veto. If I nix you I'm telling everyone else they're wrong... or they've been hoodwinked. I take the wisdom of the crowd, especially our crowd, very seriously.

JAMIE

Is it possible they only pass along people they know you'll like?

FLORIAN

That's exactly what they do. But it's because they feel the same way. That's what a good corporate culture is – an extension of the founder's deepest intuitions... his own personal culture. We hire people at Yama with a certain approach to life, to work, to right and wrong. It started with the first group I brought aboard and it's been self-replicating since then. Everyone knows at a gut level what will work here and what won't. I mean, we have plenty of disagreements, even the occasional screaming match, but rarely about anything fundamental. And if we do, that person knows they need to move on.

JAMIE

For good? That sounds harsh.

FLORIAN

Not at all. It's liberating for everyone concerned.

JAMIE

I saw a TV show like that. Only the person didn't leave. He was grilled over a fire pit and eaten by everyone else.

FLORIAN

Hmmm. Sounds like a bonding exercise some consultant dreamed up.

JAMIE

What if someone won't leave?

FLORIAN

I don't know. That's never happened.

JAMIE

So if I'm here now you think I'm a good fit.

FLORIAN

Everyone else so far thinks so. That's why people say that if you reach this stage at Yama you'd have to punch me in the face not to get an offer.

JAMIE

I've heard that.

FLORIAN

Are you planning to punch me in the face?

JAMIE

Not so far.

FLORIAN

But you're not ruling it out.

JAMIE

Can we ever rule it out?

FLORIAN

(intrigued)

I suppose not. You'll make a good negotiator. Nothing's off the table.

*(Florian stands and moves about, striking a more dominant pose.)*

You should know that we don't put people through a dry run or hire them on probation. You get the keys to the kingdom when you sit down at your desk on your first day. So I need to see for myself that you're one of us and not a charlatan or a psychopath... an agent of destruction.

JAMIE

So we just talk until you're convinced one way or the other?

FLORIAN

For the most part. But you also need to pass a test.

JAMIE

A test? After yesterday I thought you don't believe in tests here.

FLORIAN

Oh not at all. In fact, the chance of being hired after not testing well is zero.

JAMIE

So it's pass/fail?

FLORIAN

From your perspective.

JAMIE

What does it cover?

FLORIAN

It's not helpful to describe it. I found out early on that knowing too much generally skews the results

JAMIE

So it's a secret test?

FLORIAN

It's not a secret. I just told you.

JAMIE

Sounds more like a game than a test.

FLORIAN

All tests are games, Jamie. Some just have more serious consequences than others.

JAMIE

Then when does it start?

FLORIAN

It has already started.

JAMIE

Really? Uh, how am I doing?

FLORIAN

You're still here.



JAMIE

And if I don't make the grade? A trap door opens and I drop into a tank of piranhas?

FLORIAN

Don't be silly. That's only for our underperforming CEOs.

*(Beat)*

But now that you ask, I think we're done here.

JAMIE

*(disappointed)*

What? Just like that?

FLORIAN

I'm afraid so.

*Jamie sits stunned.*

JAMIE

I thought things were going well.

FLORIAN

They were.

JAMIE

So what happened? Was it what I said about punching you? I was only/

FLORIAN

*(laughing)*

Not at all. I was glad you felt comfortable enough to say that. Enjoying the Rabid Truth.

JAMIE

My headhunter says no one ever gives honest feedback, but I'd really like to know what I did.

FLORIAN

I think you're missing the point. You passed, Jamie. Welcome aboard. I'd like you to join us.

JAMIE

I passed?

FLORIAN

I don't see any reason dragging out interviews once I've made up my mind. The way this works, though, is you have to make your decision by 8 o'clock tonight. So go home, think about it, and let us know.

JAMIE

You're making me an offer?

FLORIAN

I am. Just shoot my assistant an email by 8. And not a minute later.

JAMIE

I don't need to think about it.

FLORIAN

No?

JAMIE

No. I accept.

FLORIAN

Ok, then. We like decisiveness here as much as the truth. You can get our paperless paperwork started downstairs. You made the right choice, by the way. And I'm looking forward to playing together as well. So find time to practice.

JAMIE

*(excited)*

Absolutely. This is really too much.

FLORIAN

We need people who are hungry and with something to prove.

JAMIE

You think I have something to prove?

FLORIAN

I know you do.

*Jamie shakes Florian's hand. He strides toward the door but then pulls up short and turns toward Holt.*

Can I... can I ask you about something?

FLORIAN  
Of course.

JAMIE  
It's about the test. I've always been a decent test-taker. But this was different, right?

FLORIAN  
Correct. Very different. I call it my airport test.

JAMIE  
Airport test?

FLORIAN  
Let's say we're traveling together – just the two of us. We're visiting investors in Saudi, for instance, to raise a new fund. We have good meetings and we get to the airport in Jeddah to fly home, but we're grounded for the afternoon because a sandstorm has closed the airport.

JAMIE  
OK.

FLORIAN  
The test is a simple one. Could I stand sitting with you in an airport lounge for four hours? Or would I be praying for you to disappear after 10 minutes?

JAMIE  
Wow. I have to say I'm shocked.

FLORIAN  
At what?

JAMIE  
That you fly commercial.

FLORIAN

I don't. This is a thought experiment.

JAMIE

And what if I felt that way about you after 10 minutes?

FLORIAN

I will let you know when Yama becomes a democracy, but until then....

JAMIE

Understood.

FLORIAN

But you're an interesting young man, Jamie. That trip to Saudi may happen sooner than you think.

JAMIE

Just say the word.... But... uh, there is one other thing... Listen, my girlfriend/

FLORIAN

Ms. Malhotra? Training to become Dr. Malhotra?

JAMIE

I guess I shouldn't be surprised you know about her, too?

FLORIAN

No, you shouldn't be.

JAMIE

Well, yes, and she's on her way to becoming a geriatrician, more specifically.

FLORIAN

Really? I don't think we had that detail.

JAMIE

A crack in the matrix?

FLORIAN

Soon to be repaired.

.

JAMIE

She wanted me to ask you about one of Yama's healthcare investments.

FLORIAN

*(very enthused)*

She probably wants to know about pharmaceuticals. I love talking about this. One of our firms is deep into clinical trials with the first truly efficacious drug for Alzheimer's. The real-world evidence is overwhelmingly positive and the FDA will likely let us end trials early so we can start saving lives. We've already secured patents in every market that matters. I don't think I need to tell you what a monster this is going to be. \$10 billion in sales minimum in year one, but it could be twice that. This could end up as one of the biggest public offerings in history if we stay focused.

JAMIE

That's phenomenal. But it's actually not pharmaceuticals that interest Neha.

FLORIAN

That's a beautiful name.

JAMIE

I think so too. But since she wants to specialize in geriatrics, she has an interest in old folks' homes.

FLORIAN

You mean assisted living?

JAMIE

Yes. Assisted living, senior living, nursing homes, eldercare... the whole thing.

FLORIAN

Sure. What does she want to know? We own a dozen facilities already and we're about to acquire 10 more. It has been a good space for us. It's not pharmaceuticals, though not much is. Still, the risk is almost nil. I mean, the population shift is irrefutable. People live longer and longer and this isn't Japan, so we take better care of our cars than our parents. Eventually their families can't deal with them or *they* can't take their families. But they have to go somewhere.

JAMIE

Can't leave them up in the attic banging on the floor when they're hungry.

FLORIAN

That is frowned upon. Plus it's a fragmented industry and we're helping rationalize it while revolutionizing it, at least the places we own. If Neha would like to visit one of them I'm happy to make arrangements.

JAMIE

I think she'd like that, but she's focused on another angle.

FLORIAN

Tell me.

JAMIE

Uh.. let's see how to put this.

FLORIAN

Don't hold back. The only way to fit in here is to speak your mind. I hope you learned that when you spent the day with us yesterday.

JAMIE

I did . And after I told Neha that I was interviewing here she went and read what she could find about Yama. And as you'd imagine, given her interests and background – her parents are both doctors up on Michigan's northern peninsula/

FLORIAN

/and immigrants. They both came here as part of a program to serve rural American communities.

JAMIE

Yes, I was going to mention that, but no need, I guess.

FLORIAN

You can tell her that if she stays the course with geriatrics, a lot of doors will open for her.

JAMIE

You mean...

FLORIAN

Pharma, for one. The companies are always looking for insights from smart practitioners. And also Wall Street, if she comes to appreciate our perspective on the world.

JAMIE

I'm pretty sure she sees herself in a clinic full time, very hands on, treating patients.

FLORIAN

It could still be a good side hustle, as they say. Geriatricians pull down barely 200K – and that's after 10 years. You're already topping that, no?

JAMIE

*(slightly uncomfortably)*

Yeah, I am.

FLORIAN

And you'll double that in your first year here. Of course, if Ms. Malhotra and you stay together, her earnings will be a rounding error alongside yours. She'll have little to worry about.

JAMIE

I doubt she plans to rely on me or anyone else for her living. She takes care of herself.

FLORIAN

Nonetheless, it's a shame what has happened to doctors. I understand some of them can barely afford to live in the towns or cities where they practice. They're the new teachers.

JAMIE

What about the old teachers?

FLORIAN

Wonderful point.

*(Holt takes out his phone and dictates into it)*

Investigate teacher and physician real-estate play. Where can we zone for group housing?

*(to Jamie)*

Sorry. I think we strayed from your question.

JAMIE

We did – but not a problem. And please don't take this the wrong way, but... in the spirit of Rabid Truth, Neha read a study that, uh, implies that residents in Yama's facilities are dying at an accelerated rate since Yama took control.

FLORIAN

*(after letting it sink in for a moment)*

You mean we're killing them.

JAMIE

That's how she reads the data.

FLORIAN

I see.

JAMIE

That and consumption of sedatives is up...

*(mumbling)*

... way up.

FLORIAN

*(laughing, but in a forced way)*

Why would I take any of this the wrong way? I mean, we've been accused of more shenanigans over the years than I can count: tax evasion, money laundering, fraud, human trafficking – that's a great one, like we're pirates – and 50 flavors of market manipulation – none ever formally charged, let alone proven. And probably a hundred Congressmen have called us traitors over our investments in China. But it all comes with the territory when you're a winner. Our competitors are consumed with jealousy and the regulators don't have a clue what we're doing. Still, murder is a new one.

JAMIE

Please, I'm not/ suggesting...

FLORIAN

No, but you're probably wondering. You clearly respect your girlfriend. You've been together since freshman year.

JAMIE

Uhhhh... Right again.



FLORIAN

She must be very bright and talented.

JAMIE

She is.

FLORIAN

And I'm sure she didn't raise this lightly.

JAMIE

That's true.

FLORIAN

Plus this isn't something you can check out on LinkedIn. So even if it seems ludicrous, you'd still like to know if you're joining a criminal enterprise. Like that law firm in the Tom Cruise movie. You surely don't want to go bankrupt defending a RICO charge. And here you are with someone who should know, right? I mean, if not me, then who?

JAMIE

Thank you for indulging me.

FLORIAN

Of course I'm familiar with the study Ms. Malhotra came across. Finding problems at businesses we're looking to buy, and especially ones we already own, is critical to our success and we monitor just about every information source on the planet. So I'll admit that the study, which helped some assistant professor at East Pitchfork State get tenure, was not totally wrong. Deaths have crept up since we took over.

JAMIE

What? It's true? Neha's right?

FLORIAN

At a statistical level, yes, but this is not a simple story. There's a lot of nuance.

JAMIE

You'll have to share that because Neha is going to grill me.

FLORIAN

No doubt.... So here's an opening salvo: The residents at every facility we own are far better off today than before we took over.

JAMIE

Especially the ones who are still alive.

FLORIAN

*(clearly miffed)*

Love the humor.

*Beat*

I hope you know, Jamie, that there are a lot of black hats in private equity and that we are not one of them.

JAMIE

I do.

FLORIAN

We never buy a company, pile on a mountain of debt, pay ourselves an obscene dividend, and then let the business collapse, which is how most civilians see private equity. Not that the firms who do that are led by bad people. Some of them went to the best MBA programs in America. And if they can find idiots to lend them money in those circumstances, then good for them. But that's not us. We buy good companies, sometimes in need of TLC, and we repair and strengthen and expand them before reaping our reward when we sell them.

JAMIE

I know, and that's what excites me about working here.

FLORIAN

Good. So it won't surprise you to learn that the assisted-living chain we bought had problems that needed fixing, and not just peeling paint and clogged pipes.

JAMIE

Like what?

FLORIAN

By far the worst was a steady stream of residents sneaking off. Some did it intentionally, like a jailbreak/

JAMIE

*(imitating a movie tough guy/prisoner)*

We're bustin' outta here, warden!

FLORIAN

Sad but true. Others were lost in their own private fog and left because they thought they had a date with an old boyfriend or they had to go make the donuts at 4AM.

JAMIE

That's frightening.

FLORIAN

Damn right. And it's bad for everyone. For the facility and for the local police, but especially for the resident and for his or her family. So what did we do?

JAMIE

Hired some extra security people?

FLORIAN

What? No. This isn't 1950. We installed state-of-the-art wander management.

JAMIE

What management?

FLORIAN

*Wander* management. Sensors are placed on every chair and bed in every resident's room – cameras too.

JAMIE

That's invasive, no?

FLORIAN

They only detect if someone gets up when they're not supposed to – and more important if they don't climb back into bed when they should. We don't watch them go to the bathroom. But there are no more middle-of-the-night excursions, which is far better than finding one of them in their bathrobe trying to hitch a ride on the interstate.

JAMIE

True.

FLORIAN

Everyone's life is improved with what we've done. And that's just one example.

JAMIE

But Neha says it's even simpler stuff, like getting people up and out of bed to avoid infections or making sure they have enough to drink. Or just keeping them company, someone to talk to. I know Yama likes tech solutions. And don't get me wrong. I love technology. But maybe Yama could also have hired some additional people? Were people let go when Yama took over?

FLORIAN

I don't have the numbers in front of me, but probably. Companies we buy are almost always bloated with unnecessary staff.

JAMIE

Maybe some of them should have been kept around.

FLORIAN

But that doesn't raise productivity or get the facility ready for the next owner. Plus we have investors. Pension funds, endowments, sovereign wealth funds, labor unions, all give us their money so we can grow it and make their members' lives better. We're not the Sisters of Mercy.

JAMIE

I get that. But if nothing else, more people dying sounds like horrible PR, which has to affect whether families want to move their relatives in at all.

FLORIAN

You'd be surprised.

JAMIE

You mean...?

FLORIAN

Every decision has trade-offs. You just spent four years getting a degree in economics. What is economics but the study of tradeoffs, for god's sake? Let me put this another way. you care about the environment. You attend climate rallies, you're very conscious of your own carbon footprint.

JAMIE

Don't tell me Yama has been going through my garbage.

FLORIAN

Haha. No. We don't need to. But I share that green passion and I'm sure you know what aerosols are, even if most people think only about their grandmother's hairspray. But industrial aerosols released into the air were a real environmental problem in the middle of the 20th century. A big source of air pollution. They were choking us to death. But aerosols in the atmosphere also reflect sunlight and increase cloud formation. The result? They stop or reverse global warming. Yes, the air is dirtier; certainly causing more deaths than otherwise. Nonetheless, the world decided that reducing aerosols was a better path for everyone, even though the rise in greenhouse gasses is now killing who knows how many people.

JAMIE

Even if that's all true, and I'll take your word that it is, the people who made that decision didn't know the unintended consequences. I'm sure Yama understands precisely the consequences of its actions, probably down to four decimal places.

FLORIAN

Oh, many more than that.

JAMIE

Then it should be clear that you can't only make improvements that can be depreciated.

FLORIAN

Sure we can.

JAMIE

But people who keep old folks company can't be that expensive. Kids in my high school volunteered to do that. I mean, It's got to be infinitely less than a day with Jimmy Page.

*Florian stands back, deciding what to make of Jamie.*

FLORIAN

That's got nothing to do with this.

JAMIE

You know what, I/

FLORIAN  
STOP!

JAMIE  
What?

*Florian grabs his ear again, as if in pain.*

It's acting up again? The hearing aid?

FLORIAN  
No, it's working fine, but it says the next words out of your mouth are going to be, "I quit".

JAMIE  
Wow. You might want to move up the release date on that thing. It works.

*Jamie gets up to leave.*

FLORIAN  
Jamie, please sit down. You're on the brink of making the biggest mistake of your life. You could do great things here. Yama is the brass ring and the golden ticket rolled into one. You just won it and now you're handing it back?

JAMIE  
Crazy, huh? Especially given the loans I have to pay back for Cornell. But I wouldn't last here – even your neural decoder knows that – so why get started? You said you like people who think different but that's just not true, is it?

FLORIAN  
Not *that* different.

JAMIE  
Look, this is your place and you should run it the way you want. It's just that the closer I look the less I see myself here. I'm one of those people who'd get into an argument and be forced to leave. I'm pretty sure that if I've got something to prove, as you say, this isn't the place to do it. Plus all the digging you do into people is pretty creepy.

FLORIAN  
And this is not just because you'll have trouble explaining the job to your girlfriend?

JAMIE

That's part of it. I won't deny it. I mean, she feels very strongly about this. I wouldn't have raised it if not for her. But I'm very glad I did.

FLORIAN

Well maybe you'd like to know a bit more about why she brought it up in the first place.

JAMIE

What do you mean?

FLORIAN

I mean that our research uncovered a few things about Ms. Malhotra and her family that maybe you don't know but should. Things that could explain her vehemence on this particular subject.

JAMIE

You think you know her as well as I do?

FLORIAN

Maybe better.

*Florian picks his iPad off the conference table and starts swiping across the screen.*

JAMIE

Hey, really, I am *not* interested.

*(Holt approaches Jamie with the tablet. Jamie steps backward but stops when he bumps into a chair. Regardless, Holt keeps coming.)*

I'm serious.

*Holt pulls up just a foot or so away from Jamie, flips the tablet around to face him and moves it just inches from his face. Jamie slaps the iPad to the floor with his left hand and punches Holt square in the jaw with his right – not a knockout blow, but enough to send Holt reeling.*

*Stage goes black.*

## 6

*Later Sunday afternoon. In the apartment. Halloween decorations remain up. Neha is on the couch by herself, reading.*

*The door opens and Landon enters. He is not his usual bubbly self, but we can't tell what's up, if anything. He looks relieved that Neha is alone.*

LANDON

Anyone else here?

NEHA

Isaiah's taking a nap and Jamie hasn't come back yet.

LANDON

How did their interviews go?

NEHA

Isaiah told me he got the offer he wanted. He was over the moon but exhausted. I haven't heard from Jamie. Maybe they're putting him through another marathon or he could still be mad from last night. How about you? Did you get your offer too?

LANDON

I don't get it but I didn't get it.

*Isaiah emerges from his bedroom.*

ISAIAH

What's that?

LANDON

They told me I built the most sophisticated buy-out model they'd ever seen anyone do in 30 minutes. And they said no one, even their longest-serving employee, who's now 90 and has been there since 1954, knows more about the firm's history than me. They've never seen anything like it. Like me.

NEHA

So what happened?



ISAIAH

You said it was a lock.

LANDON

I thought it was.

ISAIAH

Did they announce a hiring freeze or something?

LANDON

No, but the HR woman said my future bosses/

ISAIAH

Your Harvard bros?

LANDON

Yeah. She said both of them told her they'd kill themselves if they were stuck in an airport with me for 15 minutes.

*(beat)*

Then they changed their minds and said they would kill me instead.

NEHA

Jesus.

ISAIAH

Trick or treat, baby!

*(beat, then with feigned compassion)*

I mean, that's tough man. Real tough.

*The door opens and Jamie enters. Neha ignores him.*

ISAIAH

There he is!

JAMIE

(to Isaiah)

So?

*Isaiah smiles and nods*

ISAIAH

I just called them to formally accept.

JAMIE

Good for you, man. You deserve it. Just shoot me some Knicks tix when you're in the owner's box.

*Jamie looks at Landon.*

And?

LANDON

Hard to fathom, but no.

JAMIE

*(sounding genuinely disappointed for Landon)*

Wow. I'm sorry to hear that, Landon. I know how much you wanted it.

*(Landon is silent, unsure if Jamie is sincere or mocking him.)*

I'm sure other doors will open. My mother always says that things happen for a reason.

*Isaiah and Neha look at each other, wondering what's up with Jamie and this mellow, magnanimous state he has fallen into.*

ISAIAH

I see you're going to make me ask what happened, so what happened?

JAMIE

What happened?

ISAIAH

Yes, what happened?

JAMIE

It was something else. I was with Florian for about 15 minutes.

ISAIAH

You're on a first-name basis?

JAMIE

He insisted.

ISAIAH

That's positive.

JAMIE

We talked about this and that. Some about music, which made for an easy conversation.

ISAIAH

Sounds good.

JAMIE

Then a few minutes later, right out of the blue, he says he's heard enough, which shocked me because I thought we were cruising. So I'm just crushed, thinking I must have overstepped the Rabid Truth.

*Neha turns toward Jamie and starts to smile.*

ISAIAH

You overstepped the *Rabid Truth*? What the hell did you say?

JAMIE

It doesn't matter, it didn't seem like much in the moment.

LANDON

I told you he was a monster.

JAMIE

So I start to apologize. You know, no offense intended, blah blah blah, when he interrupts me to say, "Welcome aboard!" It didn't even compute at first since I thought he'd just sent me packing. But then he says I have until this evening to accept the offer and I tell him I don't need until this evening, I'll take it.

ISAIAH

What a ride! That's fabulous, man. Congrats!

LANDON

Yes, congratulations. I'm glad you didn't take any of my advice. It was obviously shit.

NEHA

*(insincerely)*

Yes, of course. Congratulations.

JAMIE

Isaiah, remember you told me the only way I could fuck this up would be to punch Holt in the face?

ISAIAH

*(laughing)*

The job was yours the moment you walked into his office, dude. Just like I said.

JAMIE

Right, but a few minutes later I punched him in the face.

NEHA

*(screaming)*

What?

ISAIAH

Quit fucking with us, man. What are you talking about?

JAMIE

I'm not kidding.

ISAIAH

No no, come on. You are kidding, right?

*(beat)*

Right?

*When Jamie doesn't say anything, Neha runs over to him and guides him to the couch and sits beside him.*

ISAIAH

Man, you are one limit-testing motherfucker. Are the police on their way over?

JAMIE

No.

NEHA

Jamie, you've got to tell us what happened.

*Jamie takes a deep breath*

JAMIE

After he made the offer and I accepted it, I figured what the hell, I'll ask about the nursing homes.

NEHA

You did? I'm so proud of you.

JAMIE

Yeah, well things headed downhill from there.

ISAIAH

You think?

JAMIE

The good vibes we'd built up just evaporated. He tried to dance around it, but he admitted what Neha said about the places they'd bought was true, and that ultimately he didn't care. His attitude really got to me. It was so damn calculating. So I told him I wasn't taking the job. He got a bit aggressive, said some nasty things and I cold-cocked him.

LANDON

You knocked him out?

JAMIE

No, he knows some insane jiu-jitsu and when he bounced back he slammed me down like a sack of potatoes. By the way, I think he's Brazilian.

*Jamie lifts the hair from his forehead to show a few stitches.*

NEHA

My god!

JAMIE

He actually liked that we fought. He said it showed he was right – that I think different.

ISAIAH

You certainly *act* different. Not sure you're thinking at all.

JAMIE

He brought in some doctor he keeps at hand 24/7 to stitch me up. He was still trying to get me to take the job when I left.

NEHA

Get out!

ISAIAH

Did you?

JAMIE

Of course not.

LANDON

What are you going to do?

ISAIAH

Hang on until the spring, then try for someplace else?

JAMIE

Ha! No way. I'm going in there tomorrow, but only to give my notice.

ISAIAH

Quit?

JAMIE

Yeah, quit. That's not the place for me.

ISAIAH

What are you going to do?

JAMIE

I called my Dad on the way back here and asked him if he still wanted me to join him. He said he's been praying for it.

NEHA

That's amazing, Jamie.

JAMIE  
(to Neha)  
You're ok with that?

*Neha hugs him, gently kisses his injured scalp and then his lips.*

JAMIE  
I'm not gonna be living here.

ISAIAH  
That sucks, bro.

JAMIE  
You'll find another banker just like you found me.

LANDON  
I know someone.

ISAIAH  
Oh my god.

JAMIE  
(to Neha)  
A lot fewer fancy restaurants.

NEHA  
Who has time for that?

JAMIE  
And good-bye to the summer house on Martha's Vineyard.

NEHA  
(happily waving)  
Bye-bye!

*Jamie and Neha embrace and Jamie then bounces up and over to the idle drum set. He sits down, flips it on, slips on the head set and starts wailing away with a big smile on his face. Music wells up behind him and Neha, Isaiah and Landon start dancing.*

*When it feels the curtain is about to come down, there's a pounding on the door.*

*Isaiah goes to the door as the others stop dancing. Jamie doesn't notice and keeps on playing.*

*Isaiah opens the door and Florian Holt steps inside. He's about to speak when he sees Jamie intensely and merrily banging away on the drums. Holt takes a close look at him, recognizes that recruiting him is a lost cause, turns and leaves. While Neha and Isaiah look at each other in astonishment, Landon runs out of the apartment after Holt.*

LANDON

*(from off stage)*

Mr. Holt! Florian?

*End of Play*