

Act oneScene 1

*Lights up on Upstage Center, where a MODEL T car sits. Four MECHANICS work on it, meticulously assembling parts, making ever so small adjustments. They work in tandem with a flow; true craftsmen.*

*As they work, a SLOW RUMBLE begins. The Mechanics begin to speed up, slowly but gradually. As the rumble gets louder, they get faster. They seem pained, exhausted. Over the rumble are loud, violent noises of men breaking down a door. German shouts signaling a police invasion.*

*Lights up on stage left sharply reveal: ADOLF HITLER, 34, crouched in a ball and holding a gun in his mouth. The rumble is loud enough to overtake all other noises. The Mechanics are at a feverish pitch, almost maniacal, as Hitler closes his lips around the gun and squeezes his eyes shut. He shakes. He hesitates. Blackout.*

*Lights up on a BAVARIAN JUDGE.*

BAVARIAN JUDGE:

Defendants rise!

(He reads a decree)

Heinz Pernet, Friedrich Weber, Wilhelm Frick, Adolf Hitler, and Hermann Kriebel. For the attempt to overthrow, by violent putsch, the Weimar Republic of Bavaria, led by the honorable Statkommissar Gustav Ritter Von Kahr, on the evening of November 6th, 1923. The People's Court of Munich finds you guilty-

*Gasps and boos rain down.*

-Guilty of high treason against the Weimar Republic and the People of Bavaria. The Court sentences all with a mandatory prison sentence and a fine of 200 Gold Marks. However. In the case of NSDAP party leader Adolf Hitler, the Court has reached a decision of a diminished term of five years total for Herr Hitler, to be served in Landsberg Am Lech.

*Boos turn into cheers at this verdict. The Judge is relieved:*

*Quick lights out.*

*In the blackness, fades in a graphic of the date: "1925"*

*Lights up onstage. The Model T has been stripped down to a basic unrecognizable frame.*

*At stage left, HENRY FORD, 50's, Owner and Founder of Ford Motor Company and a man whose folksy demeanor almost hides a desire to own the sun, sits in an office with his personal secretary, E.G. LIEBOLD, 50's. Liebold is writing what Henry dictates.*

Scene 2

FORD

And that's the whole concept, innit? Land.

LIEBOLD

Property, /yes.

FORD

What's a man without his land?

LIEBOLD

The measure of a people's greatness-

FORD

The measure of greatness! The- when I was a boy, I put watches together when my father would force me out in the field. See, he thought I should grow up slave to the land.

LIEBOLD

You, of all people-

FORD

When I chose to make tools- to tame the land, he hated me for it-

LIEBOLD

Hated your need for agency.

FORD

And that's. That's what we need to do with this newsletter! Let every good working man know that we speak for them! For their work. All while satisfying your New York book critics you keep being so mindful

about.

LIEBOLD

(looking at papers in front of him)  
"Landlordism" they may object to-

FORD

"Landlordism" stays.

LIEBOLD

It's-I'm not sure if Webster's-

FORD

"Landlordism" stays.

LIEBOLD

Of course.

FORD

That's what it is. Being landlords, not farmers. Not men of the Earth. They aren't tilling the fields and marking the soil. They make others do the farming for them.

LIEBOLD

(quietly)  
They farm the farmers.

FORD

That's a landlord. That's...what did you say?

LIEBOLD

"They farm the farmers."

*Long silence. Ford makes a motion. Liebold writes these words down. As he does:*

QUICK BLACKOUT.

### Scene 3

*Quick Lights up on CS, where EDSEL FORD, mid-30's, President of Ford Motor Company stands in the middle of an engineering office. A long board table with chairs sits. He stares intently on a giant, black, felt cloth spread across one of the walls. On the cloth is a very detailed chalk drawing of an automobile. The image is "X-rayed"; almost every component can be seen and certain parts are color-coded. Edsel walks towards the image, scanning it for something. As*

*he does, CHARLES SORENSEN, mid-40's, Chief Engineer, walks in from the opposite wall.*

CHARLES

(whispering)

Edsel!

EDSEL

It's too heavy.

CHARLES

Will you put this away before he gets here?

EDSEL

We're compromising too much, the valves the suspension...

CHARLES

We are not WE are not doing anything-

EDSEL

We're compensating for what he'll think.

CHARLES

Edsel I'm happy to go through it with you tonight but right now you have to/ put it away.

EDSEL

It has to be perfect or he'll never okay it, Charlie!

CHARLES

If he sees it now I promise you the world and its empires couldn't make him okay it. Put it *AWAY*, Edsel.

*Edsel stares at him before rushing to the wall and plucking the tacks out of the cloth. Charles removes his coat and places it on the coat-rack. ED MARTIN, 50's, VICE PRESIDENT OF MANUFACTURING, enters.*

ED MARTIN

Charlie, my boy, this is going to be a rough one so I'll need you to do the talking-

*He notices the cloth just as Edsel is taking it down.*

Jesus, boy!

CHARLES

I talked to him.

ED MARTIN

Are you fixin' to ruin eight months of work before lunch?

CHARLES

I talked to him, he's taking it down.

ED MARTIN

You realize what this company stands to lose if this doesn't go to the line!

EDSEL

Yes I do, Mr. Martin.

*Edsel folds the cloth and puts it in a bottom file cabinet.*

ED MARTIN

Hurry! Your father is scampering around this building; sneaks up on ya like a- like a rattlesnake.

CHARLES

Rattlesnake?

ED MARTIN

Hey no not there!

CHARLES

A silent rattlesnake?

EDSEL

Where then?

ED MARTIN

You know what I mean!

EDSEL

I don't, where?

ED MARTIN

Not you- just, just put it where your old man won't find it.

EDSEL

Like this file cabinet?

ED MARTIN

Edsel, Henry's gonna be four feet away from that

thing all meeting!

EDSEL

It's a file cabinet, when have you seen my father check sales reports. Ever.

*Ed thinks about this, then gives up arguing and walks to the coat-rack to dump his coat and hat. Edsel leaves the cloth in the file cabinet. Charles takes a seat at the table.*

CHARLES

I'm going to read him the annual first, then ease into the breakdowns. Do not speak a word. Do not suggest any new ideas. No "new" anything. If we let him run the show for the first half, we can bring up the notion- not what we have but the NOTION- in feedback.

EDSEL

Bring up a "notion".

CHARLES

Gently, yes.

EDSEL

And once he refuses the notion?

CHARLES

I think January's numbers will sway his mind-

EDSEL

January's numbers were December's numbers, Charlie. December's were November's. Third quarter's were second's and both were the same as all last year. The Model T is dying.

CHARLES

You open with that he'll disown you, never mind kick you out of the company.

EDSEL

My father is a visionary-

CHARLES

Yes, of course. But a visionary sees his vision first. You have to be careful, here. You said yourself it's not perfect.

EDSEL

You're right, it's not. It's heavy and it rides like

a pack mule.

CHARLES

Give it time.

ED MARTIN

Can't let design kill you before you even start making the thing.

EDSEL

I don't think that's the case, Ed.

ED MARTIN

I dunno, sure sounds like it is. Your father at least knew to just make the damn thing before you nit-pick it.

*Edsel turns out to the audience. Squints.*

EDSEL

I still say it's too heavy.

ED MARTIN

What are you lookin-

*Ed and Charles look out the window to see what Edsel sees. They're flabbergasted.*

You-

CHARLES

You already made the prototype?!

EDSEL

And when Father starts his hoopla over my grandiose ideas, I'm going to calmly get up out of my seat, walk him over to the window and allay his fears.

ED MARTIN

Draw the blinds!

EDSEL

No, Ed.

ED MARTIN

Christ, if you don't cover that window he'll throw us out of it.

CHARLES

Not this way, Edsel.

EDSEL

Charlie, you know my father. He's not going to budge with words or figures. He's a man that responds to the product. When we show him a product, one that's ready to be brought to production and shipped out by Spring, I promise you he'll rant and holler but in the end, he knows a good machine. And this IS a good machine. He won't kill it, he couldn't bring himself to.

*Suddenly, the door bursts open, prompting everyone to stiffen up anticipating Henry. Instead, NORVAL HAWKINS, chief sales manager, enters the office.*

ED MARTIN

Jesus, Norval-

CHARLES

Norval you sunuvabitch-

NORVAL

Gentlemen, you told me to come early.

CHARLES

Pre-conference.

NORVAL

Subject being?

CHARLES

Don't talk today unless I give you the look that means "talk".

NORVAL

So my usual instructions at a meeting, then.

EDSEL

I assure you, Norval, you're doing a stellar job, as always. We're going to address the real issues with the T today.

NORVAL

The problem isn't the car. It's that we're not selling the car properly.

ED MARTIN

We're not selling the car *period*.

NORVAL

Well if you beefed up the marketing budget, I could



carry out one of many ideas I've not been able to.

CHARLES

I appreciate the marketing department's ideas, Norval but this is not the meeting to introduce them.

*As soon as he says this, Henry strides in.*

HENRY

Introduce what?

*Everyone clams up and stands up. The boss is in the room.*

CHARLES/ED/NORVAL

Henry!

CHARLES

Nothing at all

ED MARTIN

Specs for just. Just specs.

HENRY

Speak up, Norval? You have a new idea or somethin'?

EDSEL

The numbers-

HENRY

You're not Norval.

*A Pause. Normal sees Charlie giving him a look that means "talk".*

NORVAL

(improvising)

I was...I was saying to Charlie that we've never done a sophisticated campaign to sell to the, uh, the...females?

*The room is silent. Henry just stares at him. Because, you see, the woman is on the cusp of the future, preparing a man as a boy. She keeps the hearth, she...*

HENRY

She knows what to buy at the drugstore.

NORVAL

Yes. Yes! She knows what to buy at the drugstore! She-  
and that is my point! Why does she have to relay the  
list to her husband? Why doesn't she go out and run  
the errands herself?

HENRY

(to the others)  
Well I don't see what's so bad about that?

CHARLES

It's certainly worth thought.

HENRY

(approaching Norval)  
Mighty good idea, Norval!  
  
*Henry slaps him on the back.*

CHARLES

Can we begin the meeting, Henry?

HENRY

(his arm finding Norval's neck and wrapping  
around it)  
Sure we can, what do you think, Norval?

NORVAL

Ha, ye-

*Henry all of a sudden is wrestling Norval,  
playfully, but forceful enough that Norval is  
not sure how to respond.*

CHARLES

Henry.

HENRY

Should we start the meeting, Norval?

NORVAL

(struggling to keep his balance)  
I- ah-

*Henry has now pinned Norval down on the ground.  
He's got him in a submissive hold, but is almost  
pretending Norval is fighting back.*

HENRY

Smart guy, *SMART* guy Norval! Heh not so smart now  
hah?

NORVAL

Ha, nope nope, no.

CHARLES

Henry, please.

HENRY

Norval's gotta say uncle first.

NORVAL

(immediately)

Uncle.

*Henry pauses briefly.*

HENRY

Aw, that's no fun, Norval.

*He loses interest and releases Norval. Takes a seat at the head of the table.*

Alright, what do you wanna bore me with today?

*Norval gets himself together, meekly finds a seat.*

CHARLES

Sales before Christmas were below expectation.

HENRY

Ah that's too bad. Dealers aren't happy I imagine?

CHARLES

They're managing.

HENRY

What's the market share?

CHARLES

This previous year began strong, it's important to /remember how harsh the-

HENRY

Not what I asked.

CHARLES

-winter was-

HENRY

Charlie. What's our market share?

*Pause. Charles fishes through papers.*

EDSEL

Twenty-three percent.

CHARLES

Yes, well, that's a number we can work with.

ED MARTIN

Absolutely that's a number to work with.

CHARLES

It's important we just keep the workers on their quotas.

ED MARTIN

Those are the numbers we have to pay attention to, output.

CHARLES

Exactly.

ED MARTIN

What we can control.

CHARLES

And so with that in mind, we can reorganize the Highland Park location even further. A gradual decrease of staff on the assembly for re-orders, and an uptick-

HENRY

(to Edsel)

Are you Charles?

EDSEL

No, sir.

HENRY

Then why do you open your mouth when I ask Charles a question about my company?

*Edsel looks down.*

Answer my question.

EDSEL

You know we need a new product.

CHARLES

That's not necessarily true.

HENRY

Oh there you go startin' up on this again.

*Henry gets up.*

That's what this is all about isn't it? You want YOUR car.

EDSEL

I want your legacy to survive.

HENRY

And it will! The Model T is a basic tool for the common man. That won't ever change-

EDSEL

The common man is making more money, Father.

HENRY

Yes, partly thanks to me, you think?

EDSEL

You've done wonders, yes.

HENRY

I've given the everyday man mobility!

EDSEL

Yes.

HENRY

Opportunity!

EDSEL

Exactly.

HENRY

And he's certainly better off than he was twenty years ago!

EDSEL

Precisely why he wants to buy a high-end car.

HENRY

This is that little shit with the yachts talking.

EDSEL

No, it isn't-

HENRY

Karval? That bastard wines and dines you on a boat,

you think you're in with Wall Street.

*Edsel gets up to go to the window.*

CHARLES

I'd stay seated, /Edsel-

EDSEL

Just come with me /over here-

CHARLES

I'd-I'd really not-let's stay here at the table and /hash it out-

EDSEL

I just want you to come here and see what's possibl-

*As soon as Edsel makes a healthy distance- Ed runs in front of Henry's view and spreads his arm wide.*

ED MARTIN

You never pinned me old man!

*Ed tackles Henry to the floor. Norval and Charles are incredulous. Edsel is furious. Henry is having the time of his life.*

EDSEL

Confound it! Ed!

*Henry twists and pins poor old Ed Martin until he howls.*

Just knock it off and come here so I can-

HENRY

(while finishing up with Ed)

I already saw your dang prototype.

*Edsel looks at him. He turns to look out the window. He is completely still. Charles looks too.*

CHARLES

Where did it go?

HENRY

I took it out for a test spin. Rides alright but needed a better shock absorber. Also, too heavy.

EDSEL

Where. Where did you-?

HENRY

Left it to the boys at the furnace. That's the other side of the factory. You might still catch 'em. Better hurry though.

EDSEL

I. How could-

HENRY

Because it's MINE, boy. That's why. You made a beautiful thing...with my materials. My labor. In my factory.

*Edsel wants to say something, but decides to run out and save the prototype. Exits out the doorway.*

CHARLES

Bit harsh, Henry, don't you think?

HENRY

Harsh is a twenty-three percent market share.

CHARLES

We have options.

HENRY

Well here's an option. Dump our advertising.

*Norval straightens up.*

NORVAL

How much?

HENRY

All of it.

CHARLES

/Henry-

HENRY

What do we need marketing for? My son's absolutely right, there's no mystery to the Model T. We know what it is, we know what it does.

NORVAL

But Mr. Ford, how will you keep customers coming into the dealerships?

HENRY

Is that what I run here? A dealership?

NORVAL

Well. No.

HENRY

I run a factory. A factory that sells to dealerships. My obligation is to build the product. Theirs is to sell it. We double our production and give the dealerships what they ordered. Customer buys it or not, is on them, as far as I'm concerned.

*Ed, Charles look at each other. Not sure what to say.*

NORVAL

It's. Been an honor to work for you, sir.

HENRY

Now stop that, do I look like I'm canning you, Norval? I like your lady-ad idea. I think heading our event committee would be a fine place to apply it.

CHARLES

We don't have an event committee.

HENRY

Well there you are, you get to create it, Norv. Grow the Ford brand from the inside!

*Norval is a ghost.*

CHARLES

Why don't we stop there for now, gentlemen? Meeting adjourned. Henry I need you to stay just for an account inquiry.

*Ed follows a distraught Norval out the door.*

**(END OF EXCERPT)**