

Lex Tierney sits across from Joshua Breedlove, his expression one of genuine concern mixed with simmering frustration. The usual energy of the Empyrean Forge facility feels muted today. Lex straightens his blazer and leans forward, his voice softer than usual but no less resolute.

Lex Tierney: Mr. Breedlove... Joshua... first, let me just say, on behalf of everyone at "The Bottom Line," we are *devastated* by what happened at Redemption. Devastated.

He shakes his head slowly, as if processing a personal tragedy.

Lex Tierney: You go into that event as the standard-bearer, as you've *always* been, and you come out having to vacate the World Championship because of a shoulder injury. It's... it's a *travesty*, frankly.

Lex's jaw tightens, a flash of anger crossing his face.

Lex Tierney: And I'm not going to sugarcoat this—I've already seen the vultures circling online. The critics, the haters, the people who could *never* accomplish what you've accomplished... they're acting like this is some kind of cosmic justice. It's disgusting.

He takes a breath, composing himself, then looks directly at Breedlove with empathy.

Lex Tierney: So before we get into anything else, I just want to give you the floor. How are *you* feeling, Mr. Breedlove? Physically, mentally... how is the Empire's leader processing all of this?

Joshua Breedlove, dressed in casual clothes with his arm in a sling, takes a big sigh.

Breedlove: I'll be real with you, Lex. I'm not taking it well. I'm not really processing all of it. I'm bummed out. This SUCKS. I feel disconnected. Haters are gonna hate, and yeah man... I just... I guess I'm not doing well.

Lex's expression shifts to one of deep empathy. He sets his pen down, giving Breedlove his full attention.

Lex Tierney: And you know what? That's... that's *allowed*, Mr. Breedlove. You're allowed to not be okay right now. Anyone who says otherwise has never had something they've *bled* for ripped away from them through no fault of their own.

He pauses, letting that sit for a moment before leaning in slightly.

Lex Tierney: But I want to remind you of something, because I think it's important—especially right now when you're in the thick of it. While you're sitting here, arm in a sling, feeling disconnected... do you know what the *rest* of the wrestling world just said about you?

Lex holds up a finger for each accolade.

Lex Tierney: Wrestler of the Year. For the *second consecutive year*. Feud of the Year—your *third*. And Villain of the Year for the *fourth time*. Fourth, Joshua.

He shakes his head in disbelief.

Lex Tierney: The haters can chirp all they want, but the record doesn't lie. You didn't just have a great year—you had a *historically* great year. Doesn't that... doesn't that count for *something* right now?

Breedlove shifts in his chair, a little uncomfortably.

Breedlove: I mean, to me Lex? Right now? It counts for a little, but not as much as it could count for if I were able to be out there and shove it in everyone's face.

He frowns.

Breedlove: Superlatives are awesome, but for me... Villain of the Year? An inevitability. Wrestler of the Year? Definitely. Feud of the Year? Everything I do is compelling, so also kinda unsurprising. I WANT to be out there. I WANT to be the World Champion. I WANT to look down the barrel at Thunderwolf, who is apparently also on the shelf, and let him know that his haggard old decrepit ass isn't good enough to share space with me... but instead, I'm waiting for surgery. Or waiting to find out if I need surgery. I'm trying NOT to be mad at Nate Robideau, my business partner here at the Forge, because he's the one that injured this shoulder initially and put me out for nearly a year.

He sighs again.

Lex's face darkens at the mention of Nate Robideau. He picks his pen back up, tapping it against his knee—a nervous habit that betrays his own frustration on Breedlove's behalf.

Lex Tierney: And *that's* the part that just... it eats at me, Mr. Breedlove. It really does. Because you're right—you *should* be out there. You should be standing tall, three-time Wrestler of the Year in the making, reminding everyone why you're the standard. Instead, you're sitting here dealing with the consequences of someone else's actions.

He hesitates, choosing his next words carefully.

Lex Tierney: And look, I'm not going to tell you how to feel about Nate. That's... that's complicated. Business partners, colleagues, and yet... *he's* the reason you missed nearly a year, and now this shoulder is compromised again. That's a lot to carry, especially when you're trying to keep this whole operation running.

Lex leans back, shifting his tone slightly—still sympathetic, but trying to offer a lifeline.

Lex Tierney: But here's what I *will* say, and I hope this lands the right way... while you've been dealing with all of this, your *system* is still working. Izzy and Mike just captured the tag team championships. The Forge is still collecting gold, still proving the model works.

He gestures gently.

Lex Tierney: Does that help at all? Knowing that what you built is sustaining itself?

Breedlove: Oh, fuck yeah it does. Izzy and Mike are flag bearers, especially after the Collins Twins failed. Failed at Redemption, and now they're... who the hell knows where they are. My system **DOES** work. The Forge **DOES** work. Madison Seton just defended the Premier Championship. She's got the second most important title in this company. She was a **ROOKIE** not that long ago.

He half smiles.

Breedlove: I'm so proud of them.

Lex's face lights up, feeding off the shift in Breedlove's energy. He points his pen at him, nodding emphatically.

Lex Tierney: *There* it is. That's the Joshua Breedlove I know. And you *should* be proud—what you just described is extraordinary.

He sits up straighter, animated now.

Lex Tierney: Madison Seton. A *rookie*, like you said, holding the second most prestigious title in SHOOT Project. Izzy Sia and Mike de los Huesos—tag team champions, proving that the Forge isn't just about singles excellence, it's about *dominance* across the board. Meanwhile, the Collins Twins...

Lex waves his hand dismissively.

Lex Tierney: ...wherever they are, they're not *here*, and that tells you everything you need to know. The system weeds out the ones who can't cut it and elevates the ones who can. That's not luck—that's *design*. Your design.

His expression shifts, becoming a bit more serious as he broaches the next topic.

Lex Tierney: But I do have to ask, Mr. Breedlove... because it's the elephant in the room. You vacated the World Championship, and now Corey Lazarus is wearing it. *Corey Lazarus*.

He says the name like it leaves a bad taste in his mouth.

Lex Tierney: How does it sit with you, knowing *he's* the one carrying the title you never actually lost?

Breedlove bristles.

Breedlove: Ohhhh I hate it, Lex. And I caught his little shot at Zenith, too. There's nothing I can really say about it, unfortunately. It's not like I can talk shit and show up next week to get my revenge, nah. Corey Lazarus earned that title and he won it under crazy circumstances, given everything that happened to HIM at Redemption.

He leans back, another prolonged pause with a sigh.

Breedlove: So while I hate it and while I think he's kinda just generally garbage that's holding something that belongs to me until I return... he did earn it, and he is going to be expected to carry that burden with him as THE champion here in the SHOOT Project.

Lex nods slowly, his expression a mixture of respect and barely contained disdain—respect for Breedlove's measured response, disdain for the situation itself.

Lex Tierney: And *that* right there is why you're a three-time Feud of the Year winner and a back-to-back Wrestler of the Year. Because even when you're sitting here, injured, watching someone else parade around with *your* championship... you're still being honest. You're still being *fair*.

He shakes his head, almost in disbelief.

Lex Tierney: Most people in your position would be screaming conspiracy, throwing chairs, burning bridges. But you're sitting here saying, "He earned it." That's... that's class, Mr. Breedlove. Even if Lazarus doesn't deserve it.

Lex leans forward, his curiosity getting the better of him.

Lex Tierney: Now, you mentioned he took a shot at you at Zenith. I saw it too—couldn't believe my ears, honestly. The man didn't even have the championship yet and he's already running his mouth about the guy who *built* the standard he's now expected to uphold.

He tilts his head, probing gently.

Lex Tierney: What was going through your head when you heard that? And more importantly... does Corey Lazarus understand what's waiting for him when you *do* come back?

Breedlove: It's just jealousy, man. Lazarus doesn't have the juice to hang with me, so he takes an easy shot while I'm out and can't do anything about it.

He chuckles.

Breedlove: It's coward shit. He has NO IDEA what's coming his way when I get this sorted out.

Lex grins, a glint of satisfaction in his eyes.

Lex Tierney: "Coward shit." I love it. And you know what? You're absolutely right. It's easy to talk when the man you're talking about can't answer the bell. Real easy.

He taps his pen against his notepad, nodding.

Lex Tierney: But here's the thing about Corey Lazarus—he's got a shelf life, and I think deep down, *he* knows it. He's holding that title like a lottery winner holds a giant check. Excited, sure, but completely unprepared for what comes next. Meanwhile, you're sitting here, already planning his downfall. That's the difference.

Lex pauses, glancing down at his notes before looking back up with a slightly different expression—curious, maybe even a little cautious.

Lex Tierney: Now, speaking of things changing while you've been dealing with all this... I have to bring up a name that I'm sure you've noticed. Jamie Johnson.

He lets the name hang in the air for a moment.

Lex Tierney: New look. New attitude. Came back and made a *statement*. Now, I know there's... history there. Complicated history, if I'm being generous.

Lex raises an eyebrow.

Lex Tierney: What's your read on whatever *this* version of Jamie Johnson is supposed to be?

Breedlove thinks on that for what feels like a long time.

Breedlove: My curiosity is piqued. Awhile back, Jamie and I had a discussion about his future. It was after all the stuff happened with him and HEXXX. He took the red envelope where so many other took the black envelope. Totally his call, respected his choice, he needed to get his head right.

He cocks an eyebrow.

Breedlove: I'm just not sure his head is right yet. He's... cold. Different. His eyes are like, this is gonna sound weird when I say it, his eyes are like a mix of the Real Deal's eyes and Adrian Corazon's eyes. I'm interested, but I'm also a little concerned.

Lex's eyebrows rise noticeably at the mention of Adrian Corazon. He lets out a low whistle, sitting back in his chair.

Lex Tierney: Real Deal *and* Adrian Corazon? That's... Mr. Breedlove, that's not a small observation. That's a *warning sign* wrapped in a family tree.

He folds his arms, processing the weight of that comparison.

Lex Tierney: Real Deal's eyes—okay, I get that. The man's a legend, a killer in his own right, built to compete at the highest level. That makes sense for Jamie. But Corazon? We're talking about one of the most dangerous, most *unhinged* villains this company has ever seen. A man who didn't just want to win—he wanted to *break* people.

Lex leans forward, genuinely intrigued but also slightly unsettled.

Lex Tierney: So when you say you're "concerned"... is this concern for Jamie himself? Like, you're worried about the kid's wellbeing? Or is this concern about what a Jamie Johnson with *that* look in his eyes might do to the landscape around here—including, potentially, the Forge?

He pauses, then adds carefully.

Lex Tierney: Because if Jamie Johnson came back with Adrian Corazon living behind his eyes... that's not someone who took time off to "get his head right." That's someone who came back with a *different* head entirely.

Breedlove: I don't really know how to answer that. I guess it's just... overall concern.

He furrows his brow, clearly not sure what to say.

Breedlove: I really hope I'm wrong, or he could be a problem for everyone.

Lex nods slowly, his usual bravado tempered by the weight of what Breedlove just said. There's a rare moment of genuine gravity in his expression.

Lex Tierney: You know, Mr. Breedlove, in all the time I've been covering you, I don't think I've ever heard you sound *uncertain* about a read on someone. You're usually three steps ahead, seeing the chess board while everyone else is fumbling with checkers. So the fact that Jamie Johnson has *you* unsure...

He trails off, letting the implication speak for itself.

Lex Tierney: ...that tells me everyone else should be paying very close attention. Because if Joshua Breedlove is concerned, there's something to be concerned *about*.

Lex takes a breath, glancing down at his notes before setting them aside entirely. He looks at Breedlove with something approaching warmth.

Lex Tierney: Look, I know this hasn't been the easiest conversation. You're dealing with the injury, the title situation, Lazarus running his mouth, Jamie coming back as... *whatever* he is now. It's a lot.

He gestures around the room.

Lex Tierney: But before we wrap up, I want to ask you something more hopeful. What's the timeline looking like? When can the SHOOT Project faithful—and more importantly, when can Corey Lazarus—expect Joshua Breedlove back in that ring, reclaiming what's his?

Breedlove shifts again, wincing from a zip of pain in his shoulder.

Breedlove: I don't have a clear answer on that. I'm talking to a couple of different doctors and sports medicine people to see what the best course is. If I have surgery, I could be gone for half the year... if I don't, I could be back by Reckoning Day. It's... I really don't know.

Lex's face falls slightly. The uncertainty clearly bothers him—not just as an interviewer, but as someone who genuinely seems invested in Breedlove's success. He watches Breedlove wince and shakes his head slowly.

Lex Tierney: Half the year. That's... that's a *long* time for this company to be without its standard-bearer. And I'm not just saying that as a fan of yours, Mr. Breedlove—I'm saying that as someone who watches the product. SHOOT Project *needs* Joshua Breedlove.

He pauses, his tone softening.

Lex Tierney: But look... whether it's Reckoning Day or six months from now, the one thing I know for certain is that when you *do* come back, it's going to matter. It's going to be an *event*. Because that's who you are. You don't just show up—you make history every time you step through that curtain.

Lex leans forward one last time, his voice sincere.

Lex Tierney: So take the time. Talk to the doctors. Make the right call for *you*—not for Lazarus, not for the haters, not even for the Forge. Because the Joshua Breedlove who comes back healthy and whole? That's the one who takes back everything that belongs to him.

He extends his hand carefully, mindful of the sling.

Lex Tierney: Thank you for your time, Mr. Breedlove. "The Bottom Line" will be here, waiting and watching, until the king reclaims his throne.