

# FARRAGUT NORTH

By Beau Willimon

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## CHARACTERS

STEPHEN – twenty-six, Press Secretary for Presidential Candidate Governor Welsh

PAUL – late forties-early fifties, Campaign Manager for Governor Welsh

MOLLY – nineteen, an intern on the Welsh Campaign

BEN – early twenties, Deputy Press Secretary for the Welsh Campaign

TOM – late forties-early fifties, Campaign Manager for the rival Sorrell Campaign

IDA – early thirties, a traveling political reporter for the *New York Times*.

FRANK – a reporter for the *L.A. Times*.

A WAITER

Note: FRANK and WAITER may be played by the same actor.

## SCENARIO

ACT I, Scene 1 – January. The bar of the Hotel Fort Des Moines, Des Moines, Iowa.

ACT I, Scene 2 – Later that evening at a small, dingy restaurant in East Des Moines.

ACT I, Scene 3 – Early the next morning in Stephen’s hotel room.

ACT I, Scene 4 – Later that morning, the Des Moines airport.

ACT II, Scene 1 – Later that afternoon at a campaign event in Cedar Rapids, Iowa

ACT II, Scene 2 – A few hours later, Molly’s office at the Headquarters in Des Moines.

ACT II, Scene 3 – Later than evening, Paul’s room at the Hotel Fort Des Moines

ACT II, Scene 4 – An hour later at the same dingy restaurant as Act I.

ACT II, Scene 5 – Late that night, Stephen’s room at the Hotel Fort Des Moines.

## THE STAGING

Different locales may be indicated with minimal set pieces, or simply the creative use of furniture and lighting. Transitions should be swift. The dialogue should be spoken swiftly as well, except in moments where the pace of the naturally slows or pauses.

**NOTE:** A backslash ( / ) indicates where the following line is meant to begin overlapping the current one.

# ACT I

## SCENE 1

*January. Early evening. The bar of the Hotel Fort Des Moines. The décor is opulent – oak table, leather upholstered chairs, etc. PAUL, IDA, BEN and STEPHEN sit at a table, drinking. PAUL has a roll-away suitcase beside him.*

STEPHEN

I played you. Like a fucking fiddle.

IDA

Now Stevie...

STEPHEN

It's true.

IDA

You didn't / *play* me.

STEPHEN

Like a well-tuned fiddle.

IDA

*(to PAUL)* It was the first race I ever covered.

STEPHEN

She was gullible.

IDA

*(flicking him off)* You see this?

STEPHEN

Puddy in my / fuckin –

IDA

*(to STEPHEN)* You didn't play me, you *convinced* me. You *persuaded* me. There's a difference. I knew exactly / what I was doing.

PAUL

*(to STEPHEN)* Come on, come on. Back to the story.

STEPHEN

Right. So this was what – ninety-six?

BEN

Ninety-eight.

STEPHEN

Ninety-eight. Thank you Ben.

BEN

We studied Cabrisi vs. Goldman in one of our Poli. Sci. classes.

STEPHEN

No shit?

BEN

Yeah. We spent three weeks on that race. I even wrote a paper on it.

STEPHEN

You see – I'm already a footnote in history.

BEN

Well it's not like the paper was published or anything. I mean the only person who read it was the –

STEPHEN

(*cutting him off*) So right, this was ninety-eight.

PAUL

You were...jesus....you were twenty. I keep forgetting that.

STEPHEN

Yeah – just turned twenty. My third – no – my fourth campaign. First one as paid staff though.

PAUL

Twenty fucking years old.

IDA

We couldn't even buy him drinks.

STEPHEN

I managed to sneak my fair share.

IDA

You managed to sneak *more* than your fair share.

PAUL

So the race...

STEPHEN

The race. Tight, tight fucking race. Ten days out our internals show the suburbs are slipping. Point and a half, two points slide a day. Now this slides out of the margin and we're fucked. Papers will show Cabrisi with the momentum. On top of it all, press is pounding the shit out of us. Hit after hit after hit. Including you Ida. You were the worst of 'em.

IDA

Come on now. I was just being a responsible journalist.

STEPHEN

You were being a bitch.

IDA

I was being a little bit of a bitch. Not as bad as Gordon, or Judy, at the Post. Judy was the *real* bitch.

STEPHEN

You were better than Judy, that's true.

PAUL

So...

STEPHEN

So yeah. I'm thinking – okay, it's over. Chalk this one up and move on. Can't win them all. *Then* - Then a fucking miracle drops in our lap.

IDA

Cabrisi's people should have just locked him up in a padded room. He had it in the bag.

STEPHEN

The fucking bag. It was his to lose.

BEN

You're talking about that comment right – that thing Cabrisi called –

STEPHEN

Who's telling this story Ben?

BEN

I'm sorry, I –

PAUL

So the miracle.

STEPHEN

Like manna from the heavens. Cabrisi's at this fundraiser out in Flatbush, raising cash from all the conservative Jews that hate Goldman. Starts ripping on Goldman, joking around, playing the crowd. At one point he calls Goldman a *putzhead*. Gets a laugh, moves on. Nobody thinks twice about it. Might as well never have happened.

IDA

But there's this AP reporter there.

STEPHEN

Total lightweight.

IDA

Josh Carlin, local beat guy. They sent him 'cause no one else wanted to go.

STEPHEN

He's a big shot now. Covering the West Bank or some shit like that...

PAUL

Keep going; I wanna get to the good part.

STEPHEN

Well Josh, right, he throws this blurb on the wire. Little thing. Headline was something like “Cabrisi gives remarks at Flatbush Fundraiser.” Nobody pays any attention. But our oppo guys, they read this blurb and they rush over to my office. “Look! Look! Carbrisi called Goldman a putzhead Cabrisi called Goldman a putzhead.” And I’m like “So what? Who cares? So he called him a putzhead – he’s called us a lot worse.” And they’re like – no, this is big. Apparently putzhead is Yiddish for dickhead. Meaning Cabrisi publicly called Goldman a *dickhead* in Yiddish.

PAUL

(*laughing*) I love it.

STEPHEN

Beautiful, right?

PAUL

You have your silver bullet.

STEPHEN

Exactly. So now I gotta figure out how to spin this. Problem is *we* can’t send out a release. The press has been handing us our ass for the past two weeks, so they’ll look at it as some desperate attack. So what I *do* / is –

IDA

This was brilliant, I have to admit.

STEPHEN

What I do is I call up the president of the Democratic Jewish League – big supporter – threw us lots of money – and read this AP story to him. Name was Mencken, Harvey Mencken. I say Harvey – we’ve got a great opportunity to fuck Cabrisi here. I want you to send out a release quoting this putzhead comment and accusing Cabrisi of anti-Semitism. He jumps at it. I dictate the whole release to him over the phone, it’s out in fifteen minutes. Then I have Harvey organize a press conference with prominent Jewish leaders all denouncing Cabrisi as an anti-Semite, which he does.

PAUL

Gorgeous.

STEPHEN

That’s what I thought, but it doesn’t stick. I make a few calls but the reporters aren’t really jumping at this thing, and I don’t want to seem aggressive or it would look like I orchestrated it all.

IDA

Which you did.

STEPHEN

But that's not what I want them to think. So I'm like – fuck – how do I get this out there?  
What's the one place where – if I can get this to land – the one place that will force everyone else  
to jump on board?

PAUL  
The *Times*.

STEPHEN  
Bingo. So I give *Ida* a call.

IDA  
And he used this sweet little innocent voice, like all of this was news to him.

STEPHEN  
She didn't want to print it. Thought the story "unworthy" of the *Times*.

PAUL  
So of course you worked your magic.

IDA  
He made me a wager.

STEPHEN  
What I say is – "Ida, off the record, let's be straight here. You've been fucking us over for the  
past two weeks and giving Cabrisi a total pass. You owe us. And if you write this story and I  
guarantee you – I fucking *guarantee* you that your editors will put it on the front page."

IDA  
To which I said "Bullshit"

STEPHEN  
So I say "Look – if your editors don't put this story on the front page not only will I buy you  
dinner at any restaurant of your choice in the city, but I will quit my job and never work in  
politics again. If it *does* make it on the front page you've got your first front page byline and you  
don't even have to buy me dinner."

PAUL  
(to IDA) So you wrote the story.

IDA  
I did.

STEPHEN  
And not only did it make it on the front page of the *Times*, it got two columns *above* the fucking  
fold.

IDA  
"Cabrisi Accused of Anti-Semitism" By Ida Horowicz.

STEPHEN

It was like an avalanche. Cabrisi's on the defensive, first denying the remark, then admitting to it, then refusing to apologize, then *forced* to apologize. Within one news cycle the story was being covered by every TV, radio station and newspaper in New York State. Overnight Cabrisi drops ten points. His message gets drowned out. Four days later we win by twelve. Total blowout.

PAUL

Beautiful.

STEPHEN

It was more than beautiful. It was perfection.

PAUL

(to BEN) You should keep an eye on Stevie, you'll learn everything you need to know.

STEPHEN

Ben's twice as smart as I'll ever be. Probably end up stealing my job.

BEN

Yeah, right.

STEPHEN

I'm getting old, I'll have to pass the torch eventually.

IDA

A wizened twenty-six. You'll need a wheelchair before too long.

PAUL

I still can't believe Goldman hired a fucking twenty-year old for his press secretary.

STEPHEN

*Deputy* press secretary.

PAUL

Still.

STEPHEN

So anyway...that was that.

IDA

And look where he is now.

PAUL

Doing *my* dirty work.

IDA

God help us.

BEN

Does anyone else need a refill?

IDA  
I'm good.

STEPHEN  
Come on Ida, have another.

IDA  
Tempting, but no.

BEN  
Paul?

PAUL  
(*looking at his watch*) I'd love another, but I gotta get going in a few. Fucking security at the airport and everything. Speaking of which, I should call a cab.

IDA  
You want me to drive you?

PAUL  
You have a car?

IDA  
A rental. Yeah. A Suburban no less.

PAUL  
Well then hell— sure — I'll take a lift. (*to BEN*) And I'll take another Jack and Coke actually. (*looking at his watch*) Still got a few minutes.

BEN  
Steve?

STEVE  
I'll take a —

PAUL  
No more for Stevie. (*to STEPHEN*) You've got that press conference.

STEPHEN  
(*to BEN*) I'm fine.

BEN  
One jack and coke then.

*BEN exits.*

PAUL  
He's a good kid. Got a lot to learn, but a good kid. Smart.

STEPHEN

Yeah – he'll be good one day. Definitely worth keeping an eye on.

IDA

So Paul....

PAUL:

Yes Ida?

IDA

Paul, Paul, Paul....

PAUL

Here it comes (*to STEPHEN*) When she gets that shit-eating grin on her face I know she wants something. (*to IDA*) Hit me.

IDA

You're going to the airport.

PAUL

Yes?

IDA

You're getting on a plane.

PAUL

Mm hmm.

IDA

Where is that plane going?

PAUL

(*to STEPHEN*) You see?

IDA

Tell me.

PAUL

Three guesses.

IDA

You're not going back to headquarters.

PAUL

Correct.

IDA

You're not going to New Hampshire.

PAUL

(*to STEPHEN*) Look at these deductive skills we got goin on here.

IDA  
What if I said South Carolina?

PAUL  
That's your guess?

IDA  
You're going to South Carolina.

PAUL  
I will neither confirm nor deny that statement.

IDA  
I knew it.

STEPHEN  
She's good.

IDA  
Now tell me why.

PAUL  
That I cannot do.

IDA  
Pretty please?

PAUL  
No.

IDA  
A hint.

PAUL  
Not a chance.

IDA  
Nothing?

PAUL  
Nada.

IDA  
I hate you.

PAUL  
You love me.

IDA  
I love Stevie. You I hate.

STEPHEN

You only love me because I give you all the scoops.

IDA

Good a reason as any.

STEPHEN

And because I got Paul to agree to your profile.

PAUL

Which wasn't easy, by the way.

IDA

You don't relish spending every living moment together?

PAUL

Maybe if you weren't constantly trying to bait me.

IDA

Wouldn't be a very good profile then, would it?

PAUL

Probably won't be anyway.

STEPHEN

She'll make it nice, won't you Ida?

IDA

No promises, my dear.

PAUL

It better be good. I've given you great stuff.

IDA

Heavy drinking, chewing tobacco, lewd comments...yeah – I'd say so.

PAUL

You drink more than I do.

IDA

But the profile's not about me. And I don't chew tobacco.

PAUL

"Paul Zara has Flaws" – there's your headline.

IDA

I was thinking along those lines – yes.

PAUL

You should do a profile on Stevie here. He's more interesting than I am.

IDA  
But he doesn't have any flaws.

STEPHEN  
Flattery won't get you shit.

IDA  
Sexual favors?

STEPHEN  
You're engaged.

IDA  
If it meant a good story my fiancé would understand.

PAUL  
So it's gonna be one of those marriages, huh?

IDA  
You think I'd let any husband of *mine* wear the pants?

STEPHEN  
Let me see that rock again.

*IDA shows him a ring.*

STEPHEN  
Unbelievable.

IDA  
Nice, huh?

PAUL  
At you least you're marrying rich.

IDA  
Is there any other way?

STEPHEN  
Let's go to pawn shop and hock this thing. We'll get tickets to Vegas and get hitched at some tacky 24 hour chapel with blinking neon signs.

IDA  
In your dreams.

STEPHEN  
You're breaking my heart.

IDA  
You two are breaking my heart by not telling me what this South Carolina thing is about.

PAUL  
Poor baby.

IDA  
(to STEPHEN) How's Helen by the way?

PAUL  
Kaput.

IDA  
What?

PAUL  
Bye-bye Helen.

IDA  
Really?!

STEPHEN  
Not kaput necessarily, just...

PAUL  
It's over.

IDA  
No!

PAUL  
Done. Finis.

STEPHEN  
It's really not a big deal.

IDA  
It's over between you guys?

STEPHEN  
Kind of – for now – yes.

IDA  
When?!

STEPHEN  
Week or two ago.

PAUL  
Stevie's a free man.

IDA  
I'm so sorry.

STEPHEN

Really, it's not a big deal. We're just...just taking a break, you know?

PAUL

Sure you are.

IDA

A little sensitivity is in order here Paul.

PAUL

It's for the best. *(to STEPHEN)* You wouldn't have time for her once you got to the White House anyway.

IDA

*(to STEPHEN)* So what happened?

STEPHEN

It's not even worth getting into. Really. Let's change the subject. We're having drinks. We're ahead in the polls. These are happy times right?

PAUL

Don't worry about him Ida. This boy is bullet proof.

*BEN returns with PAUL'S drink.*

BEN

Here you go.

PAUL

How much do I owe you?

BEN

I got it.

PAUL

Fuck off. You don't get paid well enough to buy me a drink. How much?

BEN

Really. I got it.

PAUL

*(to STEPHEN)* I'm telling you – he's a good kid. *(raising his glass)* To happy times.

STEPHEN

To happy times.

*They all clink glasses, except for BEN.*

IDA

So changing the subject. Paul – tell me something I don't know.

PAUL

You know everything.

IDA

I don't know why you're going to South Carolina.

PAUL

Besides that, you know everything. And that wasn't changing the subject.

IDA

Tell me what's gonna happen on the 19<sup>th</sup>.

PAUL

Haha.

IDA

What?

PAUL

What do you think Stevie?

STEPHEN

It's ours for the taking.

PAUL

Ben?

BEN

We'll win.

PAUL

What do you think Ida?

IDA

I'm asking *you*.

PAUL

You tell me and I'll tell you.

IDA

If I had to say, I'd say it'll be close, but you'll eke it out.

PAUL

*Eke?* (to STEPHEN) You see, she's trying to get under my skin.

IDA

So what's gonna happen?

PAUL

Us by nine.

IDA

*Nine?* There's no way you'll win by nine.

STEPHEN

At least. Maybe more.

IDA

Sounds pretty optimistic to me.

PAUL

You don't get into this game if you're a pessimist.

IDA

You don't *win* unless you're a realist.

STEPHEN

We'll win by nine. Jordan drops because he tanks in Iowa. Even if Sorrell picks up his people we'll take New Hampshire by double digits. We jump out on the 27th with enough momentum to take no less than five of seven on Super Tuesday, maybe even a clean sweep.

IDA

South Carolina?

STEPHEN

We can take it.

IDA

Doubtful.

STEPHEN

Even if we don't – we take five or six of the seven it's over. Sorrell runs dry on cash, the Party rallies behind us, we got three weeks to hammer Sorrell into the dust before the next big round.

IDA

You got it all planned out.

PAUL

Listen to the boy – he knows what he's talking about.

IDA

(to PAUL) So you're certain you're gonna win here?

PAUL

*Certain?* No. *Confident?* Yes.

IDA

You just said you'll win by nine.

PAUL

And I think we will, but I won't tell you it's a sure thing. Fucking Saint Gabriel can blow his horn on election day and get his four horsemen to rig the ballot boxes for Sorrell and it wouldn't surprise me. Don't get me wrong. Six presidentials I've done and I've never felt this good. But am I gonna sit here and say "Yes – we will definitely win Iowa"? Not a chance. In the last thirty years seventy-two Democrats have run for president. How many have won? Two. That means seventy guys ran who thought they had a chance, and they all lost. Nobody on this planet knows how to win a presidential campaign. Not Welsh, not Jordan, not Sorrell – no one.

IDA

So you're saying there's a good chance you won't win.

PAUL

Don't twist my words. What I'm saying is that I'm not going to *promise* we'll win. But -okay now. If we *do* win, if we *do* take Iowa and then New Hampshire and get this fucking nomination – our internet support will go through the roof. We'll hit two million supporters by July. At two million we'll hit a boiling point. Every motherfucker that's felt beaten and bullied and busted by the powers that be is gonna suddenly realize – hey, we can stick it to the Man here. We can take on big business, oil, drug companies. Two million will become three million, then four, then five. We have the potential to raise *half a billion dollars*. I don't use the word revolution lightly, but that's what this could be. Millions of people standing up and saying "This is *our* goddamn country – We're gonna take it back from those who have stolen it from us." And on *that* note, I'm gonna go take a shit before I get on this plane.

*PAUL swigs down the rest of his drink and exits.*

IDA

He's crazy.

STEPHEN

He's a genius.

IDA

Do you really buy into all that crap? All that take back the country nonsense?

STEPHEN

Buy into it? I believe that everything Paul says is *possible*. If there was ever a time a campaign like ours, that an insurgent with a real message was gonna – yeah. I guess I do. I do buy into it.

IDA

Half a billion dollars?

STEPHEN

Six months ago who would have thought we'd raised fifty by now?

IDA

That's a long ways from five hundred.

STEPHEN

Six months ago Welsh was a nobody. Now we're leading the polls. You know me – I'm not naïve about this stuff. I've worked on more campaigns than most people do by the time their forty. This is the one Ida.

IDA

You really *have* drunk the kool-aid.

STEPHEN

It's good. You should try some.

IDA

What about you Ben?

BEN

Everything Steve just said.

IDA

Haha. You've trained him well.

STEPHEN

I'm not shitting you here Ida. This is it. I've had a good dose of cynicism pumped into me with every campaign I've worked on. But this thing, this has got me starry-eyed again. It's reminded me why I got into politics in the first place – because every day is a chance to make a real difference. It sounds corny, I know, but it's true.

IDA

(to BEN) Get out of this business now or you'll start sounding like Steve

STEPHEN

Don't listen to her. She gets paid to spoil the fun.

IDA

Not paid well.

STEPHEN

Better than I do.

IDA

You get power, prestige and the chance to change history. I get my name printed in eight point on cheap news-stock. I deserve a few extra bucks for my troubles.

*PAUL returns and sits.*

PAUL

No dice. I'm constipated.

STEPHEN

Ouch.

PAUL

Heaved and huffed on the can but zilch – nothing came out. Cept a little squirt. Motherload's still stuck up in there somewhere.

IDA

Thanks Paul. I'll try to erase that image from my mind while I drive you to the airport.

PAUL

Too many carbs. Always happens. I oughtta go on the Atkins.

STEPHEN

You can shit properly and lose weight at the same time.

PAUL

You saying I'm fat? (*he stuffs a wad of chewing tobacco into his mouth*)

STEPHEN

I wouldn't say you're skinny.

PAUL

What do you think Ben? You think I'm fat?

BEN

No. Not at all.

PAUL

Ass-kisser. I *am* getting fat. And it looks even worse cause I'm bloated at the moment.

IDA

Stop it.

PAUL

(*to IDA*) You know – the only reason I chew this stuff is because it's a diarrhetic.

IDA

Well come to think of it, I'm actually gonna hit the john before we head out. Be right back.

*She exits. PAUL hands BEN a few dollars.*

PAUL

Ben, go get yourself a drink. I owe you one.

BEN

That's okay, I'm not really –

PAUL

Go get yourself a drink.

BEN

Seriously, I'm fine.

PAUL

I don't think you're hearing me. I'm saying you should take this money and go get yourself a drink.

BEN

Oh. Right.

*BEN takes the money and exits.*

PAUL

Whatta ya think?

STEPHEN

I leak it to her. Nothing specific, just enough to wet her appetite.

PAUL

She'll hound me on the drive to the airport.

STEPHEN

No she won't. I leak it like you don't know, on the condition she keeps it hush.

PAUL

You really think she will?

STEPHEN

She owes me. I got her this profile with you and she'll owe me double if I give her this leak off the record. I know Ida. She'll keep it quiet.

PAUL

I don't know.

STEPHEN

She just wants to feel like she's in the loop. If I give her this off the record now she'll write a terrific story once we go public. We keep it secret, she'll fuck us.

PAUL

How? There's not way you can turn this into a bad story.

STEPHEN

Ida can always find a way.

PAUL

No specifics.

STEPHEN

I'll keep it vague.

PAUL

Cause if it gets out the whole thing could fold.

STEPHEN

I know what I'm doing.

PAUL

I know you know what you're doing. I just get a little, you know....

STEPHEN

This is the best way to go.

PAUL

Alright Steve. Alright. If you say this is the way to go then this is the way to go.

STEPHEN

I've never let you down, have I?

PAUL

Not yet.

STEPHEN

Come on.

PAUL

I'm teasing. I trust you. So do your thing. Leak it. Make it nice.

STEPHEN

Done.

PAUL

Now as for this press conference tonight...

STEPHEN

Don't worry your little head off. Or big head rather. I've got it completely under control.

PAUL

They're gonna try to nail us on the new poll numbers.

STEPHEN

As long as the Governor keeps to my talking points we should be fine. And this white paper Paul – it's good. Gonna nail Sorrell on Transportation with a hammer *this* fuckin big.

PAUL

I don't know what we'd do without you Stevie.

STEPHEN

How about a raise?

PAUL

You'll get your fucking raise once we make it to the White House.

*IDA returns.*

STEPHEN  
That was quick.

IDA  
I don't have the same problems Paul does.

PAUL  
Watch it – I'll shit in your suburban.

IDA  
That'd make a story.

PAUL  
(*looking at his watch*) We should get going.

IDA  
I'll pull up out front.

PAUL  
Gimme the keys, I'll pick *you* up front. I haven't driven a car in months.

IDA  
No way.

PAUL  
Gimme the goddamned keys. It'll be nice to get behind a wheel for a few miles. And I *loooove* driving in the snow.

*IDA hands him the keys.*

IDA  
It's in the garage across the street. Second floor. Black suburban.

PAUL  
(*taking the keys. To STEPHEN*) You behave yourself.

STEPHEN  
Always.

PAUL  
(*to IDA*) I'll see you out front.

*PAUL exits with his suitcase. During the following conversation, MOLLY enters, carrying a manila envelope. Seeing that STEPHEN is talking to IDA, she hangs off to the side, waiting for them to finish up so as not to interrupt.*

IDA  
He's gonna crash my rental, isn't he?

STEPHEN  
Probably.

IDA  
I should have ordered a second drink.

STEPHEN  
Thompson.

IDA  
What?

STEPHEN  
Marcellus Thompson.

IDA  
Seriously?

STEPHEN  
This is off *off* the record. You can't let Paul have the slightest idea you know or it'll be my ass. The only people who know are the Governor, Paul and me.

IDA  
My lips are sealed.

STEPHEN  
They have a meeting tomorrow at Thompson's house.

IDA  
He's gonna endorse?

STEPHEN  
After Paul's done talking with him, what do you think?

IDA  
That's huge.

STEPHEN  
It's more than huge. We'll lock up half the black vote in South Carolina overnight once this comes out.

IDA  
He's said publicly he's not gonna endorse anyone.

STEPHEN  
That's what they all say until we get them alone in a room.

IDA  
So this is for real?

STEPHEN  
Yup.

IDA  
For *real* real?

STEPHEN  
It's just about in the bag.

IDA  
When are you gonna announce?

STEPHEN  
Nope. That's all you get for now.

IDA  
You'll give me the scoop, right?

STEPHEN  
Maybe. When the time comes. If you're nice.

IDA  
I want that scoop.

STEPHEN  
Sure you do. So you play nice and we'll play nice.

IDA  
Let's talk after the press conference. I'll do my best to keep an open mind if you're trying to push anything, keeping my journalistic standards intact of course.

STEPHEN  
Of course.

IDA  
You're the best Stevie. I'll talk to you later.

*IDA exits. STEPHEN immediately flips open his phone and begins to dial. MOLLY approaches STEPHEN, standing behind him while he makes his phone call.*

STEPHEN  
Paul? It's done...yeah...Easy as pie. (*Laughs*) Okay, you too. Good luck out there..

*He hangs up.*

MOLLY  
Steve?

STEPHEN  
(*startled*) Mary?

MOLLY  
Molly.

STEPHEN  
Right right right – Molly.

MOLLY  
I worked at headquarters.

STEPHEN  
No – I remember.

MOLLY  
Yeah.

STEPHEN  
Scared the shit out of me.

MOLLY  
Sorry...I... -

STEPHEN  
What are you doing in out Iowa?

MOLLY  
I volunteered to come out here a few days ago.

STEPHEN  
That's great.

MOLLY  
Yeah, I was kinda getting sick of headquarters. It's so dead there now. Everybody's out here.

STEPHEN  
What do they have you doing?

MOLLY  
Same stuff. Blogging mostly. Filling gaps where they can use me.

STEPHEN  
Very cool.

*Molly holds out the envelope.*

MOLLY  
Anyway – this is for you. The folks in the press shop said you'd be here.

STEPHEN  
Oh, right. Thanks. I've been waiting for this.

MOLLY  
Anything interesting?

STEPHEN  
(*mock-serious*) Top secret.

MOLLY  
Gotcha.

STEPHEN  
Just some white paper I gotta pass out tonight.

MOLLY  
White paper?

STEPHEN  
Negative shit. Our oppo guys do research – we feed it to the press, hope they bite.

MOLLY  
So like what sort of negative stuff?

STEPHEN  
Read tomorrow's paper and you'll see.

MOLLY  
Which paper?

STEPHEN  
All of them.

MOLLY  
So it's something big?

STEPHEN  
I wish it were something bigger actually. Just some transportation numbers. I'll have to spin this shit pretty heavy if we want it to stick.

MOLLY  
Well that's what your good at, right?

STEPHEN  
I guess.

MOLLY  
Anyway...it was good seeing you. Good luck at the press conference.

*She starts to go.*

STEPHEN  
Hey Molly? Sorry for getting your name wrong.

MOLLY  
Oh – that's okay.

STEPHEN

No it's not. We worked in the same office for what – two, three months. I should know your name.

MOLLY

Six months. I joined the campaign in June.

STEPHEN

Six? Really?

MOLLY

Yup.

STEPHEN

Jesus. I must seem like a total dumbass right now.

MOLLY

Not at all. (*teasing*) You're a big man on campus. I'm just a lowly intern.

STEPHEN

Come on. It's not like that.

MOLLY

Sure it is.

STEPHEN

No – it's just I meet so many people, have to remember so many names. I'm not always very good at remembering them all. But I remember faces. I always remember faces.

MOLLY

Like mine?

STEPHEN

Yeah. Like yours.

MOLLY

Anyway...

STEPHEN

Why don't you sit down and have a drink with me.

MOLLY

Umm...

STEPHEN

One drink.

MOLLY

I should really get back to the office. I just ran out to give this envelope to you.

STEPHEN

I'll buy.

MOLLY

I don't know...

STEPHEN

Since you trekked all the way out here from the office.

MOLLY

It's only five blocks.

STEPHEN

In the snow.

MOLLY

Two inches.

STEPHEN

Without a jacket.

MOLLY

It wasn't very far.

STEPHEN

You're shivering.

MOLLY

No I'm not. And I'm supposed to be back already.

STEPHEN

Fine. I won't be offended in the least that you turned down a drink with me.

MOLLY

No no no – I'd love to have a drink with you. I mean – yeah. I just really oughtta - ... We're totally swamped, you know?

STEPHEN

Totally. So don't let me keep you.

MOLLY

Okay. But um...

STEPHEN

Um what?

MOLLY

I'll probably be done with my stuff around ten if you...I don't know.

STEPHEN

If...?

MOLLY  
Well I'll be done at ten or so, that's all.

STEPHEN  
Why don't you meet me here at eleven. I'll be done with my stuff by then too.

MOLLY  
Here?

STEPHEN  
Right here. Right at this table. At eleven.

MOLLY  
Okay. At eleven.

*She exits. STEPHEN gulps down the rest of his drink. He pulls out the sheaf of papers from the packet and begins to look them over. BEN returns with a drink.*

BEN  
That the stuff for the press conference tonight?

STEPHEN  
Yeah.

BEN  
Would it be helpful if I came? You know – to like pass stuff out or something.

STEPHEN  
No – I need you back at the office finishing up those press releases.

BEN  
I already finished them.

STEPHEN  
All of them?

BEN  
Yeah.

STEPHEN  
Then you should get started on next week's.

BEN  
I've already got drafts of those ready too.

STEPHEN  
You shouldn't work yourself so hard Ben. We've got eight more months of this.

BEN

I just like staying on top of the work. So can I come to the press conference with you? It's just that I'm trying to learn everything I can I thought -

*STEPHEN'S cell begins to ring. STEPHEN puts down the papers and grabs his cell phone.*

STEPHEN

*(not recognizing the number)* Who the fuck is this?

BEN

I thought you could use some help and -

STEPHEN

*(answering the phone)* This is Steve. *(a perturbed look overtakes STEPHEN'S face)* How did you get this number?...Hold on a sec. *(covering the phone. To BEN)* Go get yourself another drink.

BEN

*(holding up his drink)* But I -

STEPHEN

Do it.

*BEN exits with his drink.*

STEPHEN

*(into the phone)* I'm back... What for?... Not unless you tell me... Well if it's that important shouldn't you be calling Paul?... Why?... I really shouldn't until I talk to Paul first... He's my boss. I can't just -... Look, this doesn't sound right to me... I've gotta be at a -... *(STEPHEN looks visibly torn as he listens)*... Yeah, I'm here... *(grabs a pen from his jacket)* Okay where?... *(cradles the phone and writes on a napkin)*... Uh-huh... Yeah, I know where that is... Alright, see you in a few. *(He hangs up. A moment passes as he considers what just occurred. He picks up his phone again and dials)* Hello Paul?... Yeah, it's me. I just got a... *(He changes his mind)*... you know what - it's not important... Yeah, no. Just something stupid I really shouldn't be bothering you with. Have a great flight. I'll talk to you tomorrow... Okay. *(He hangs up. Another moment passes. He stands, yells to BEN)* HEY BEN - GO AHEAD AND MEET ME AT THE PRESS CONFERENCE. I MIGHT BE A FEW MINUTES LATE. *(he grabs the napkin and exits).*

## SCENE 2

*A run-down restaurant in Westt Des Moines. The furniture is shabby - formica tables, cheap metal framed chairs. The place is desolate except for TOM, who sits at a table alone, a briefcase beside him. STEPHEN enters. He approaches TOM'S table.*

STEPHEN

Tom.

TOM

Steve. Thanks for coming. Please...take a load off.

STEPHEN

*(sitting)* I've got a press conference in about twenty minutes.

TOM

I know. You want a drink?

STEPHEN

No thanks.

TOM

Let me buy you a drink.

STEPHEN

A coke.

TOM

*A coke?* Okay, a coke. *(he signals a waiter)* You look tired.

STEPHEN

I am.

TOM

Me too. This whole thing, it's turned into quite a ball-buster, eh?.

STEPHEN

Yeah.

TOM

Totally exhausting. Try to take care of myself though. That's one thing I've learned – gotta find the time to exercise, eat right. Hit the stairmaster every morning. Three squares a day. It's important when you get to be an old man like me. Young guy like you can live off adrenaline for six months straight and be just fine. I was that way when I was your age.

*A WAITER approaches.*

TOM

We'll take a Sapphire and tonic...and a coke.

WAITER

Yes sir.

*The WAITER exits.*

TOM

Course a little gin doesn't hurt. Gets the blood moving. Gotta drink something to keep a warm. Cold as hell in this city, isn't it? And with this snow now....?

STEPHEN  
What's this about Tom?

TOM  
There's a lot of talk about you.

STEPHEN  
What sort of talk?

TOM  
You can stop looking around Steve. There's no one here.

STEPHEN  
I wasn't, I was –

TOM  
Sure you were. I understand why you'd be worried. But give me a little credit. You think I'd pick a place where there was gonna be anybody? I wouldn't put you in that sort of position - *or* myself.

STEPHEN  
Look Tom, like I said – I really don't have much time and –

*The WAITER arrives with the drinks and sets them on the table.*

WAITER  
Are you ready to order?

TOM  
In a bit.

*The WAITER exits.*

STEPHEN  
I've only got a few minutes here Tom, so –

TOM  
Well – it's simple.

STEPHEN  
What is?

TOM  
You're working for the wrong man.

STEPHEN  
I'm sorry?

TOM  
You are working for the wrong man.

STEPHEN *laughs.*

TOM

You're a smart guy Steve. Very smart. But there's a lot of smart guys out there. I've seen 'em rise and fall, and when they fall – they fall hard. Eventually they make a wrong move or get too arrogant or get too paranoid or just plain buckle under all the pressure. You know what I'm talking about. The heels at your back. Guys twice your age jealous of you. Younger guys circling like vultures. You start making enemies you don't even know you had. That's a terrible feeling, isn't? Constantly looking over your shoulder, wondering who you can trust. Always wondering who's gonna screw you next. It's a / terrible, terrible -

STEPHEN

Okay – look – I appreciate the advice, but I really don't –

TOM

Please. You made the trip all the way out here so do me a favor and let me finish.

STEPHEN

Fine.

TOM

You've got something the other guys don't have. You've got a special -...what is it? Charm isn't the right word. It's more than that. You *exude* something. You draw people in. All the reporters love you. Even the ones that hate you love you. You play them all like they're pieces on a chess board. And you make it look effortless. We both know how much work it takes, constantly being on guard, weighing every word so carefully, every move. But from the outside, you make it look easy. People are scared of you because they don't understand how you do it, and they love you for it. There's nothing more valuable in this business – the ability to win people's respect by making them mistake their fear for love. You can guess what I'm gonna say next.

STEPHEN

No – I don't think I can.

TOM

I want you to work for us.

STEPHEN

You gotta be kidding me.

TOM

Not in the least.

STEPHEN

That's the most ridiculous thing I've ever heard.

TOM

You are going to *lose* Iowa.

STEPHEN

Bullshit.

*TOM takes a folder out of his briefcase and slips it across the table to STEPHEN.*

TOM  
Look inside.

*STEPHEN opens the folder. There are a few pieces of paper inside. STEPHEN glances at them.*

STEPHEN  
This can't be real.

TOM  
It's very real.

STEPHEN  
So you're telling me every other poll on the planet is off?

TOM  
Exactly.

STEPHEN  
That's impossible.

TOM  
About 20 percent of what you think is your solid support is actually our people posing as Welsh supporters. Inflates your lead, makes you feel comfortable, makes us look like the underdog. Three days ago we started telling them to switch back over to us when the pollsters call. During the next week the tracks will show us gaining steadily and finally overtaking you a day or two before the caucus. It'll look like we've made a come from behind victory out of nowhere, when in reality we've had the lead all along. We'll have the momentum out of Iowa and take New Hampshire on the 27<sup>th</sup>. Welsh will throw in the towel by Super Tuesday.

STEPHEN  
There's no way you could have organized that many people and kept it a secret.

TOM  
You really think I'd have you drive all the way out here to blow smoke up your ass. What good would it do me to show you these numbers if they weren't real?

STEPHEN  
And you're dumb enough to show them to me?

TOM  
Take them. Have Welsh hit every county in the state. You might pick up a point or two, but you don't have enough time to close the gap. I'm not showing you these numbers to try and intimidate you Steve. I'm showing you these numbers because I want you to work for a winner. You're too good to work for a loser. These numbers are just the tip of the iceberg. A week ago I brought 300 more field staff to pump up the GOTV. We've got over six hundred organizers under the radar that nobody knows about. The day before the caucus we'll robo-call and mass mail the hell out of your supporters with wrong polling locations. On game day I'll send vans out to your strong areas to cause traffic jams so your supporters can't get to their caucuses. And once

everyone gets into the caucus room you'll find that a third of your precinct captains are actually our people. And by the way – we've got Thompson in the bag.

STEPHEN

I know for a fact that Thompson is going with us.

TOM

We promised Thompson Secretary of Labor, so he'll do anything we tell him to do – like sticking a carrot in front of your noses until we tell him to yank it away. Iowa's already over Steve. It's been over for weeks. I'm thinking way down the road now. That's why I want you. We need the best. I'll bring you in straight at the top.

*STEPHEN closes the folder and slides it back across the table.*

STEPHEN

I can't do it.

TOM

I'm not asking for an answer right this moment.

STEPHEN

I've played dirty before. Pulled stuff that keeps me awake at night. But this – this is completely overboard.

TOM

It'll win us the nomination.

STEPHEN

It's illegal.

TOM

Of course it is. None of this is about the democratic process Steve. It's about getting your guy into office. Simple as that.

STEPHEN

This is the sort of shit the Republicans pull.

TOM

You're right, this *is* exactly what the Republicans do, and it's about time we learned from them. They're meaner, tougher and more disciplined than we are. They're dirty and it works. I've been in this business for thirty years and I've seen way too many Democrats bite the dust because they wouldn't get down in the mud with the elephants.

STEPHEN

If I took this to the press you'd be fucked.

TOM

Try it. There's no way to prove anything. Not a single paper trail, not a single email, nothing. It would take reporters months to get something solid and by that time we've already won the nomination. Then you'd just be screwing over the Democratic Party, and I know you don't want that.

STEPHEN

I could never work for someone like you.

TOM

People like me get keys to the White House. You want your set of keys, you better learn to work for people like me.

STEPHEN

How would it look if I jumped ship a week before the caucus and joined you guys? I'd be branded as the most disloyal, opportunistic asshole ever. My credibility would be totally shot. And the media would go ape-shit.

TOM

You had irreconcilable differences with senior staff, that's all you need to say.

STEPHEN

But that's not true.

TOM

It doesn't have to be.

STEPHEN.

No no no – fuck. Look. I shouldn't even be sitting here right now. I shouldn't even be *having* this conversation. I should really – I should go.

TOM

Steve.

*The WAITER approaches.*

WAITER

Are you ready to order?

STEPHEN

I'm leaving.

TOM

(*to the WAITER*) My friend's gotta be somewhere to be in a few minutes, what can you bring out quickly?

WAITER

The uh, the buffalo wings would probably be the fastest.

STEPHEN

I told you, I'm leaving.

TOM

Two minutes Steve.

STEPHEN

I don't –

TOM

Two minutes. *(to the WAITER)* An order of buffalo wings. *(The WAITER exits. To STEPHEN)* Stay. Two more minutes.

STEPHEN

Forget it.

TOM

Don't flush your career down the drain Stephen. You don't give me two minutes and I'll blacklist you so fast that once you lose Iowa you'll never work again.

*A short pause.*

STEPHEN

Two minutes.

TOM

You don't have to tell me straight away. Sleep on it, think it over. But I need to know soon. I want you before the caucus, not after you've lost. At that point it just looks like you're jumping on the bandwagon. Let me know in a couple days. I have a feeling that when you start seeing things turn you'll change your mind about this.

STEPHEN

I don't need to sleep on it. I can tell you right now. No. I couldn't do this to Paul.

TOM

Fuck Paul. Paul's only ever worked for insurgent wackos that never had a chance of winning, just like he is now. I'm giving you a chance to leap right over Paul and be bigger than he ever was.

STEPHEN

Paul's a friend.

TOM

There are no friends in politics. You want a friend, get a dog. The question you gotta ask yourself is whether you want friends, or whether you want to work for the President.

STEPHEN

I won't do it.

TOM

What is it you love about your job?

STEPHEN

This is insane...

TOM

What is it you love about your job? *(beat)* I bet I know. It's not about power. If you wanted power you'd work on Wall Street, or in Hollywood. And it's not about money, cause we both know this line of work doesn't pay. And it's definitely not any idealistic nonsense about making a difference. Otherwise you'd slave away for GreenPeace or PETA or some other piece of crap non-profit. You love your job because you know you're the best at what you do. It makes you feel invincible. But you still have one hurdle to jump. You want that desk with a window two doors down from the Oval Office with reporters poking in and hanging on your every word. You want that moment when you wake up next to your girlfriend at five in the morning, climb out of bed, make yourself a cup of coffee and can think to yourself – I've made it. I'm at the height of my game. And in that moment the burning stone that's been lodged in your gut since you can remember – it will vanish. You'll know - without a shred of doubt in your mind – that you've made it so high there's nowhere higher left to go.

STEPHEN

Fuck you.

TOM

I'm right, aren't I?

STEPHEN

I'm leaving.

TOM

You have my number. And I don't need to tell you – this conversation never happened.

*STEPHEN exits.*

### SCENE 3

*Seven A.M the next morning. A room in the Hotel Fort Des Moines. MOLLY is in bed, asleep. Clothes are scattered about the room. STEPHEN sits at a small table beside the window in his underwear, talking into a cell phone. As he talks, MOLLY wakes up, goes to the bathroom, and begins to get dressed.*

STEPHEN

....Uh-huh.... I guess we'll have to see how good the roads...*(laughs)*...Maybe we can have him build a fucking snowman or shovel the driveway at an orphanage...*(laughs)*...Unh-uh...No...Come on Ida, you know and I know that's a load of bullshit, and so does everyone else, so don't try to bait me – not this early in the morning...*(laughs)*...Did you get the press release on the –...Sure it's a story...Okay well look – I was planning on getting everyone together to go over this stuff right before we -... .Okay, okay, yeah....Noon. See you then. *(he hangs up, to MOLLY)* Sorry.

MOLLY

Do you want me to go?

STEPHEN

No stay – we'll order breakfast or something. I don't have to be anywhere for a couple hours.

MOLLY

You seem busy. I don't wanna intrude or anything.

STEPHEN

No – I really want you to –

*STEPHEN'S phone rings.*

STEPHEN

This is Steve....Uh-huh...No no no, you gotta look at the report too Frank, that's where the real good stuff is.... Name me one transportation bill that Sorrell got to the floor that was halfway meaningful, much less got passed....That one doesn't count...The numbers Frank, that's all I'm saying. Look at the numbers and then look at his record – there's your story....

MOLLY

Hey Steve?

STEPHEN

*(into the phone)* You guys have been begging for more issue shit, so now I'm giving it to you and –

MOLLY

Steve?

STEPHEN

*(covering the phone)* What's up?

MOLLY

I'm gonna go.

STEPHEN

*(into the phone, holding up a finger for MOLLY to wait)* Yeah, but you're missing the point...

*MOLLY heads for the door anyway, starts to open it.*

STEPHEN

*(into the phone)* Hold on a sec Frank *(covering the phone)* You don't have to go.

MOLLY

You have work to do.

STEPHEN

Wait a minute. I wanna talk to you about something.

STEPHEN

*(into the phone)* Frank? Sorry about that...Nobody, just the uh, the cleaning lady. What was I saying? Oh right, I was saying you're missing the fucking point. What this is about is -...*(glances over at MOLLY)*...Hey Frank? Look, I got a meeting with Paul I really got to run to. Can I call you later about this? Yeah, that's good....Okay, talk to you soon.

*He hangs ups.*

STEPHEN  
Sorry about that.

MOLLY  
The cleaning lady?

STEPHEN  
What?

MOLLY  
You told him I was the cleaning lady.

STEPHEN  
Oh, that – come on. I / was just –

MOLLY  
It's fine. I don't care.

STEPHEN  
Look – it was just easier to –

MOLLY  
Really – I don't care.

STEPHEN  
You're not mad?

MOLLY  
Why would I be mad?

STEPHEN  
Okay, I just don't want you / to think –

MOLLY  
You said you wanted to talk to me about something?

STEPHEN  
Yeah – I just wanna...how do I put this? I just want to be clear about everything so there's no confusion, to make sure we understand each other.

MOLLY  
I won't tell anyone about last night.

STEPHEN  
No no, it's not that. I mean, yes, I'd appreciate if we kept this...if you could be discreet, because, I mean, you know how people are...

MOLLY  
Wouldn't look good that you screwed an intern.

STEPHEN

Come on.

MOLLY

Yes. I know how people are.

STEPHEN

They look for every opportunity to –

MOLLY

I get it. Don't worry. My lips are sealed.

STEPHEN

Okay.

MOLLY

So.

STEPHEN

So what I wanted to talk to you about was that... alright, the truth is I have – *had* – I don't know, it's complicated. I *had* this girlfriend back in DC, a pretty serious girlfriend. And things have been rocky lately so we're kind of taking a break, but I'm not really looking to get into anything serious, you know? Or even want to give the hint of that, so –

MOLLY

You told me all of this last night.

STEPHEN

What?

MOLLY

You told me all about this. You're girlfriend. How you guys have been having trouble...

STEPHEN

I told you about that?

MOLLY

Her name is Helen right?

STEPHEN

Yeah.

MOLLY

You told me all about her.

STEPHEN

When did I...

MOLLY

At the bar. You don't remember?

STEPHEN

I think – wait – I think I'm starting to –

MOLLY

You kept telling me how much you love her. How much you miss her.

STEPHEN

I did?

MOLLY

You talked on and on about her.

STEPHEN

Jesus – I must have been a lot drunker than I thought. I barely...shit. Yeah. I guess I did, didn't I? It's all kinda spotty. I must have been really fucking drunk.

MOLLY

I think we were both pretty drunk.

STEPHEN

I must seem like a total jackass right now.

MOLLY

No you don't.

STEPHEN

Cause it's not like I just got totally wasted and this thing happened because...I mean, I wanted to. I really like you. You're smart. You're hot. I really wanted to...but I just...well I wanted to talk to you because I don't want there to be any expectations, because I have – had - this girlfriend and it's –

MOLLY

Stephen – you don't have to say anything.

STEPHEN

I just don't want you to think that I'm some player or something.

MOLLY

Well you *are* kind of a player, but that's okay.

STEPHEN

No I'm not.

MOLLY

The way you asked me to sit down and have a drink with you.

STEPHEN

I told you I was just being polite.

MOLLY

Bullshit.

STEPHEN

I *was*.

MOLLY

You were hitting on me.

STEPHEN

No I wasn't.

MOLLY

It was totally obvious.

STEPHEN

I was *obvious*?

MOLLY

Completely.

STEPHEN

I thought I was being all smooth and subtle.

MOLLY

You were pretty forward about it.

STEPHEN

You were pretty forward yourself, telling me when you got off work.

MOLLY

Well yeah. I've been wanting to get in your pants for a long time.

STEPHEN

Really?

MOLLY

Back in headquarters, when you'd stroll into the office...yeah. I couldn't keep my eyes off you.

STEPHEN

I never knew.

MOLLY

Because you didn't know I existed.

STEPHEN

So when you came with the envelope...

MOLLY

It wasn't supposed to be me that was gonna bring it. Jerry was gonna bring it over, but I told him I'd do it cause I wanted to see you.

STEPHEN

So you totally planned on...

MOLLY

Yup.

STEPHEN

Wearing those hip-hugging jeans and that shirt...

MOLLY

I changed before I came to the hotel.

STEPHEN

I played right into your hands.

MOLLY

Yup.

STEPHEN

Wow.

MOLLY

Pretty slutty of me, huh?

STEPHEN

No – not at all. I mean – I kind of respect it – In a weird sort of way – how you – yeah.

MOLLY

Good.

STEPHEN

So you're cool with this, you know, with where I'm at and –

MOLLY

Stop asking me that. I knew what I was getting into.

STEPHEN

Okay, cool.

MOLLY

We had fun. Let's just leave it at that.

STEPHEN

We *did* have fun, didn't we?

MOLLY

If you remember it.

STEPHEN

Of course I remember.

MOLLY

Well you seemed to have blacked out about the –

STEPHEN

I remember coming back here, okay. That I completely remember.

MOLLY

You passed out right after we had sex.

STEPHEN

No I didn't.

MOLLY

You said "I gotta get up really early baby. Guh-night." Then you rolled over and passed out.

STEPHEN

I *did* have to get up early.

MOLLY

It was cute. I watched you sleep for a little while. You snored.

STEPHEN

Oh shit. Was it loud?

MOLLY

No, it was kind of adorable actually. Like a kitten. You didn't really snore. You purred.

STEPHEN

I *purred*?

*MOLLY purrs. STEPHEN laughs.*

MOLLY

Are you gonna tell her about me?

STEPHEN

Who?

MOLLY

Your girlfriend.

STEPHEN

Um...I don't know. Like I said - it's complicated.

MOLLY

You said last night that you usually tell her when you hook-up with someone.

STEPHEN

That's the deal we have. If one of us – you know – we tell each other.

MOLLY  
Even though you're broken up?

STEPHEN  
Do we have to talk about this?

MOLLY  
Sorry, I –

STEPHEN  
It's fine.

MOLLY  
You can tell her though. I know it's none of my business, and I know I don't have to give you permission, but in case you're wondering – I don't mind if you tell her.

STEPHEN  
Really?

MOLLY  
Really.

STEPHEN  
You're incredibly mature.

MOLLY  
For a teenager.

STEPHEN  
That's not what I meant.

MOLLY  
It *is* what you meant.

STEPHEN  
Come on.

MOLLY  
Did it turn you on?

STEPHEN  
What?

MOLLY  
That I'm so young.

STEPHEN  
No. I mean – you're hot. You're smart –

MOLLY  
It did – didn't it?

STEPHEN

Well sure. Not in some like, pedophile way, but yeah.

MOLLY

When' the last time you bagged a nineteen year old?

STEPHEN

Uh...shit. I don't know. A while I guess. Now you're really making me feel like an old man.

MOLLY

You *are* an old man.

STEPHEN

Twenty-six isn't old.

MOLLY

It's almost twice my age.

STEPHEN

Fuck off.

MOLLY

You were in college when I got my first period.

STEPHEN

Very funny.

MOLLY

When I was born you could already do your multiplication tables.

STEPHEN

Okay enough

MOLLY

I'm just teasing you.

STEPHEN

Did it turn *you* on? That I'm older?

MOLLY

Maybe.

STEPHEN

Landing the older man?

MOLLY

Well you're not the first.

STEPHEN

What do you mean?

MOLLY  
I've been with a lot of older guys.

STEPHEN  
Really?

MOLLY  
I've never dated a guy younger than twenty-five.

STEPHEN  
Bullshit.

MOLLY  
It's true.

STEPHEN  
Even in high-school?

MOLLY  
I had an affair with my English teacher when I was fifteen.

STEPHEN  
When you were *fifteen*?

MOLLY  
Uh-huh. During a year abroad in France.

STEPHEN  
Holy shit.

MOLLY  
It was kinda messed up.

STEPHEN  
Not to mention illegal.

MOLLY  
He was harmless. I'm the one who seduced him.

STEPHEN  
Wow.

MOLLY  
I mean it was pretty obvious he wanted me. I'd go over to his house to help him grade papers all the time. Even used to babysit his kids.

STEPHEN  
He had kids?

MOLLY  
Anyway....

STEPHEN  
You don't feel like...like he took advantage of you or anything? I mean the whole teacher-student thing...?

MOLLY  
It's weird to be somebody's fantasy. But we were *both* playing out a fantasy. And after a while, when it stopped being a fantasy and just started to get plain weird, I ended it.

STEPHEN  
And the others?

MOLLY  
What others?

STEPHEN  
You said you'd been with *lots* of older guys.

MOLLY  
Well I guess not *lots*, but a few. I took a year off between high school and college and moved in with this guy Nick. He was twenty-nine – a chef at this restaurant where I waited tables. He got really needy and protective. Asked me to marry him as soon as I turned eighteen. Freaked me out. I said “Maybe when I graduate from college,” but as soon as I got to school I never spoke to him again. And then my first semester I dated a drummer in this band. Mark. He was thirty-one. His band was terrible but he was a sweetheart. I ended it after a few months because when it came down to it, he really wasn't the sharpest knife in the rack. And when I left school to join the campaign – well, there's been a couple people on the campaign.

STEPHEN  
Who?

MOLLY  
Just hook-ups, nothing serious.

STEPHEN  
Like who?

MOLLY  
I don't know...Matt Spenser on and off for a few weeks.

STEPHEN  
Who else?

MOLLY  
Nobody.

STEPHEN  
You said a couple.

MOLLY  
You're prying.

STEPHEN  
Tell me.

MOLLY  
Why should I?

STEPHEN  
I spilled my guts about my girlfriend.

MOLLY  
When you were wasted.

STEPHEN  
Still.

*MOLLY considers this for a moment.*

MOLLY  
You promise you won't tell a soul?

STEPHEN  
Scout's honor.

MOLLY  
I'm not joking.

STEPHEN  
Yes. I won't tell anyone.

MOLLY  
Well once, a couple months ago I...- Wow. I can't believe I'm telling you this.

STEPHEN  
Come on.

MOLLY  
Paul...

STEPHEN  
Paul who?

MOLLY  
*Paul.*

STEPHEN  
Paul Zara?

MOLLY  
Just once.

STEPHEN  
No way.

MOLLY  
Yeah.

STEPHEN  
Paul fucking *Zara*?

MOLLY  
You see – I shouldn't have told you.

STEPHEN  
No, no. I'm just surprised.

MOLLY  
You can't tell anyone.

STEPHEN  
I won't. No...I'm just –...Wow. How did it happen?

MOLLY  
It's really not that interesting.

STEPHEN  
This was back at headquarters?

MOLLY  
I really don't want to talk about it.

STEPHEN  
Did he proposition you or something?

MOLLY  
Steve...

STEPHEN  
Okay, okay. It's just totally – man. You fucked my boss. Kind of working your way down the line, huh?

MOLLY  
That's a nasty thing to say.

STEPHEN  
I didn't mean it like that.

MOLLY  
How *did* you mean it?

STEPHEN  
I was joking.

MOLLY  
Well it wasn't funny.

STEPHEN  
I'm sorry.

MOLLY  
You should be.

STEPHEN  
I am – really. I apologize.

MOLLY  
You're the only person I've ever told.

STEPHEN  
That's a good thing. You definitely don't want that to get around.

MOLLY  
No shit sherlock. I don't even know why I said anything. I promised Paul I / wouldn't ever....

STEPHEN  
Look – you can tell me anything, okay? Really. I know how to keep a secret.

MOLLY  
I know, I know.

STEPHEN  
And I don't think less of you. Don't think that for a second. In fact, I think you're pretty amazing. Incredible actually. It's like –

*STEPHEN'S phone rings. He answers.*

STEPHEN  
This is Steve....Yeah...Uh-huh....Hey Chris, we're all gonna get together and go over that before the background briefing. I'm right in the middle of something, so let me call you back, okay?...Alright bye.

*He hangs up.*

MOLLY  
I should go.

STEPHEN  
Stay with me? Let me order you breakfast?

MOLLY  
You usually buy the girl a meal *before* you fuck her.

STEPHEN

So let me buy you one now.

MOLLY

That's okay. I need to get to the office anyway.

STEPHEN

Well I'm not gonna beg you to stay.

MOLLY

Begging doesn't suit you.

STEPHEN

*(chuckles)* You know, twenty-four hours ago I was just minding my business, doing my job, getting ready for a press conference. And in you waltz with your little envelope and your hip-hugging jeans and your fake shyness. And now? Here I am –

MOLLY

With a nineteen year old intern lying in your bed.

STEPHEN

With a nineteen year old intern lying in my bed.

*MOLLY stands.*

MOLLY

You have work to do.

STEPHEN

There's nothing I can do to convince you to stay.

MOLLY

You're starting to beg.

STEPHEN

Call me later?

MOLLY

*(she gives him a kiss)* You call me. If you can remember...

*She starts to go.*

STEPHEN

Wait.

MOLLY

Yes?

STEPHEN

Last night, when I was drunk...Did I say anything about -...*(stopping himself)*

MOLLY  
About what?

STEPHEN  
Besides what I said about Helen. Did I -...?

MOLLY  
Did you....

STEPHEN  
I just talked about Helen right?

MOLLY  
Pretty much.

STEPHEN  
Not about anything else?

MOLLY  
What are you getting at?

STEPHEN  
You know what? Nevermind. It's not important.

*She gives him a puzzled look.*

STEPHEN  
I'll call you.

MOLLY  
(teasing) Alright weirdo. I'll see you later.

*She leaves. STEPHEN grabs his cell phone off the table and dials.*

STEPHEN  
Hello Paul? It's Steve...Good....I know, I'm sorry for interrupting, I just wanted to let you know that I'm gonna meet you at the airport when you get back today, okay?...Yeah, everything's fine, I'm just gonna pick you up if that's alright....Okay, good luck. See you this afternoon.

*He hangs up.*

#### SCENE 4

*The main terminal at the Des Moines Airport. STEPHEN is waiting nervously. PAUL approaches him from behind, pulling his roll-away suitcase.*

PAUL  
Boo!

*STEPHEN whips around, startled.*

STEPHEN

Paul.

*PAUL sets his suitcase aside, pulls a tin of chewing tobacco out of his back pocket and wedges some chew in his cheek.*

PAUL

Been fucking *dying* the last six hours. Rude to spit into a cup when someone's sittin next to you. I need to find another addiction is what I need to do. This snow – we circled so many times I thought they were gonna re-route us to fuckin Omaha. How long you been waiting?

STEPHEN

Couple of hours.

PAUL

Sorry you had to wait.

STEPHEN

Don't worry about it.

PAUL

Nice of you to come out here and pick me up. I coulda gotten a cab you know.

STEPHEN

Well I got a rental this morning, so...

PAUL

I hope not an expensive one.

STEPHEN

On my own dime.

PAUL

You shouldn'tve done that. If you needed a car we could've –

STEPHEN

We need to talk.

PAUL

You're sounding way too serious.

STEPHEN

What'd Thompson say?

PAUL

Cocksucker said he's having second thoughts.

STEPHEN

Fuck.

PAUL

I know. Thought this trip was to seal it, but I get to his house this morning and he starts throwin up smoke right and left, says he wants to see how things pan out in Iowa. I almost rip him a new asshole, but I stop myself. I ask him – why'd you have me fly all the way out here just to tell me you're not sure? He says he needs more info – what our strategy is over the next ten days, all this shit.

STEPHEN

Did you tell him?

PAUL

Course I told him. Talked his ear off for an hour – exactly how we're gonna take Iowa, every single fucking step. And *still* no dice.

STEPHEN

This is bad Paul.

PAUL

What is?

STEPHEN

Thompson's not gonna endorse.

PAUL

He's just playin a little hard to get.

STEPHEN

No Paul – he's definitely not gonna endorse.

PAUL

What are you talking about?

STEPHEN

He's gonna endorse Sorrell three days out. Fuck – I should have called you last night, but I was hoping it wasn't true. I should have –

PAUL

Wo wo wo – slow down.

STEPHEN

I met with Tom Duffy last night.

PAUL

You *what*?

STEPHEN

He called me just after you left for the airport and asked to meet. I asked what it was about and he said it was really important. So I did. I met with him. Shit, I should've called / you. I –

PAUL

Stop. Let me get this straight. You met with Tom Duffy?

STEPHEN

Yes.

PAUL

What'd he want?

STEPHEN

Well first he – look - the gist of it is he wants to hire me. He wants me to jump ship and come work for him. This is bad, Paul. He showed me poll numbers with Sorrell already ahead by four. They've been telling their supporters to pose as Welsh people to the pollsters. We're in really deep fucking trouble.

PAUL

That can't be true. He was playing mind games with you.

STEPHEN

He laid out their whole plan. Robo-calls, traffic jams, fake lit, and fucking Thompson. Promised him Secretary of Labor and told him to lead us on. Everything you told him last night's gonna go straight to Duffy's ear.

PAUL

If this is some sort of practical – I mean – my fucking blood pressure is going through the roof right now.

STEPHEN

I'm sorry Paul. I really should have called / you.

PAUL

This happened last night?

STEPHEN

Just before the press conference.

PAUL

And you didn't fucking *call* me?

STEPHEN

I'm sorry Paul. I – I don't know. I guess I thought – I thought maybe it wasn't true. Maybe / he was –

PAUL

Jesus Steve. I can't believe you didn't –

STEPHEN

I know I know I know. Look – I was scared. I was scared and totally confused and I thought –

PAUL

It doesn't fucking *matter* what you thought. It matters what you did. It matters what you *didn't* do. If all this shit is true I made a fucking ass of myself at Thompson's place. And I gave away

our whole goddamn strategy. Just handed it over. Do you realize what this – do have *any* fucking idea?

STEPHEN

I know Paul. Believe me. But it's like – like I was paralyzed. I didn't know if it was even worth telling you about if – if you came back and said – yeah – Thompson's in the bag, but...fuck Paul. I don't know.

PAUL

I sure as hell hope you were gonna tell me even if I came back and –

STEPHEN

Of course! Yes. I just –

PAUL

Cause I mean, if you were planning on keeping this secret –

STEPHEN

No! Not at all. That's why I'm telling you now.

PAUL

After I tell you Thompson said no.

STEPHEN

Seriously Paul, that's why I'm here now. To tell you. To –

PAUL

A little late now, don't you think? After I –

STEPHEN

You know me Paul. You know I would never – I really should have called last night. I should have and I didn't.

PAUL

You're fucking right you should have. You don't meet secretly with the other guy's campaign manager and *not* fucking tell me about it. You don't get a fucking *call* from the other guy's manager and not tell me.

STEPHEN

This is the *first* time Paul. The first time I've ever really fucked up. And I'm sorry. I am so fucking sorry.

PAUL

It's a pretty big goddamn fuck-up whether it's your first time or not. I mean if we lose here, if we *lose* – then we're *both* out of a job.

STEPHEN

We can figure this out. There has to be a way to figure this out.

PAUL

We *better* figure this the fuck out.

STEPHEN

Paul. Please. You gotta forgive me on this. I feel like absolute shit. I feel terrible. Last night, I was so – you want to know the truth? I was so wound up about this shit that I went out and got wasted. Totally wasted. Drank myself to oblivion. Slept with some girl I shouldn't have. I dealt with this completely the wrong way. So I'm coming clean now. I came out to the airport to tell you this so we can figure it out. I know if we put our heads together and we – Goddamnit! I'm sorry. I am so so so –

PAUL

Steve.

STEPHEN

I am *so* sorry. I feel like I'm – I feel like –

PAUL

Steve. Stop. It's okay.

STEPHEN

No it isn't.

PAUL

It is. It's okay. You're right. We can figure it out. You did the right thing. You told me, which means that we can do something about it.

STEPHEN

I know there's a way.

PAUL

There's always a way. So take a breath and get yourself together. I need you at your best on this.

STEPHEN

I don't want you to think – I mean – I respect the hell out of you and your respect is something I –

PAUL

You and I are still okay, alright? It's been me and you from the beginning on this thing and I got a little upset, but that's just because all of this – it's a bit of a shock to me. You're allowed your one fuck-up. So now let's get past that and get to work. Sound good?

STEPHEN

Yeah.

PAUL

Good. Now. First thing we have to do is get to that fucking event in – where is it?

STEPHEN

Cedar Rapids.

PAUL

Cedar Rapids. We got to get to that event in Cedar Rapids so I can break this all to the Governor. You can fill me in on the drive out there.

STEPHEN  
He's gonna flip.

PAUL  
He'll be fine. I know how to handle him. You just do your job and deal with the press.

STEPHEN  
I can do that.

PAUL  
Of course you can.

STEPHEN  
Thanks Paul. Really. I mean –

PAUL  
Don't thank me. Just win me this fucking state.

## END OF ACT ONE

## ACT II

### SCENE 1

*An event in Cedar Rapids later that day. STEPHEN is standing outside an elementary school gym talking with FRANK, a reporter from the LA Times. BEN is waiting just off to the side. Occasionally we hear the muffled cheers of the event inside the gym.*

STEPHEN  
Of course they're tightening. That's what happens a week out.

FRANK  
And you're not worried?

STEPHEN  
No. We've held the lead for three months. Our base is strong. Ninety-five percent of the people who are going to vote have already made their choice. You're just seeing a few undecided going the other way.

FRANK  
But you're numbers are sliding. This isn't just a few undecideds suddenly –

STEPHEN  
Three points? That's hardly a slide Frank. Like I said, we're a week out. You've covered these things before. The race tightens. That's how it goes.

FRANK

It keeps going like this you'll be within the margin of error by Friday.

STEPHEN

So let it. We started out as the underdog and proved everyone wrong, we'll do it again. You know and I know that half of this shit is the press. You all want a tight race, so you've been slamming us, and now you're getting your tight race.

FRANK

You can't blame this on us.

STEPHEN

I sure as hell can. When's the last time you wrote an article that had anything to do with one of our events?

FRANK

I write about your events.

STEPHEN

A line. Maybe two, on a good day. Then you regurgitate Sorrell's white paper for the next three columns.

FRANK

You're not being fair.

STEPHEN

Don't talk to me about fair Frank. None of this shit is fair. If you all were being fair I'd wake up to a much different stack of papers every morning.

FRANK

What's gotten into you Stevie?

STEPHEN

Nothing's gotten into me.

FRANK

I ask you a few questions – you blow up at me..

STEPHEN

You're missing the event Frank.

FRANK

Is something going on?

STEPHEN

The event – right through those door.

FRANK

Off the record.

STEPHEN

Nothing. Really. Now please, go watch this event. I'd still like my our line or two in tomorrow's paper.

FRANK

There's only so many ways I can cover a stump speech Stevie. It's the same speech every time.

*A massive cheer of the crowd is heard within.*

STEPHEN

You hear that? It's the same speech because it works. This guy is gonna be the next fucking president of the United States and you're standing out here talking to me. Go in there and do your job. You oughtta be listening to him instead of hounding my ass about the tracking polls. Don't you think the people of LA deserve to get a little accurate reportage? Or do they even read the paper?

FRANK

Jesus Stevie.

*FRANK exits into the event. BEN approaches STEPHEN.*

BEN

Steve.

STEPHEN

Why the fuck are you always lurking around? (*beat*) Don't you have press releases to hand out?

BEN

I already did.

STEPHEN

Well go hand out some more.

*BEN holds up a few sheets of paper.*

BEN

I was wondering if you'd take a look at this.

STEPHEN

Can it wait?

BEN

I – well I just –

STEPHEN

Yes or no? We're right in the middle of an event.

BEN

It's a speech.

STEPHEN  
What speech?

BEN  
For the Governor. A new stump speech.

STEPHEN  
I didn't put out an order for a new speech.

BEN  
I know. I just figured...

STEPHEN  
Figured what?

BEN  
I just figured that since the reporters we're getting a little...you know...a little bored with –

*STEPHEN grabs the speech and looks it over.*

STEPHEN  
Who wrote this?

BEN  
I did.

STEPHEN  
You don't change a stump speech a week before the election.

BEN  
Well it's more than a stump speech – it's kind of a new approach. A whole new –

STEPHEN  
We spent months – *I* spent months perfecting the Governor's speech. Every word. Every gesture. Every pause. You don't up and change your message seven days out.

BEN  
I wasn't trying to imply that the Governor's speech isn't good, it's just a matter of how effective it is at this point since all the reporters –

STEPHEN  
Effective? It's put us in the lead for three months straight.

*IDA enters, coming from the event, and approaches STEPHEN as BEN talks.*

BEN  
Look Steve – I'm sorry. I was just hoping you'd look it over and tell me what you think, even if you don't want to use it. I thought maybe you could show it to Paul. I really think there's some good stuff in there and if we just insert a few things into his regular –

STEPHEN

Another time Ben. (*STEPHEN hands the speech back to BEN*) What's up Ida?

IDA

If you two are –

STEPHEN

No – not at all. Talk to me.

BEN

Can I just slip this under your door at the hotel and –

STEPHEN

Go away Ben.

*BEN exits.*

IDA

Wow. Kinda harsh there.

STEPHEN

Kid wrote a –...never mind. It's not important.

IDA

I like Ben. He's a sweetheart.

STEPHEN

He's an ambitious little fucker.

IDA

Just like you.

STEPHEN

Hangs around me like a puppy.

IDA

He looks up to you.

STEPHEN

Whatever.

IDA

So Stevie...off the record...

STEPHEN

No Ida. I can't tell you what happened in South Carolina.

IDA

That's not what I wanted to ask you about.

STEPHEN  
No?

IDA  
Well not right away. There's something else.

STEPHEN  
What?

IDA  
You met with Tom Duffy.

*A pause. STEPHEN doesn't know what to say.*

IDA  
So it's true?

STEPHEN  
Who told you that?

IDA  
A little bird.

STEPHEN  
Who?

IDA  
Did you meet with him?

STEPHEN  
Tell me who Ida.

IDA  
Can't do that.

STEPHEN  
I'm not fucking around here.

IDA  
Neither am I.

STEPHEN  
It's not true.

IDA  
I *know* you met with him. At a little restaurant in West Des Moines, two nights ago, just before the press conference. Duffy ordered buffalo wings.

STEPHEN  
Did Duffy tell you this?

IDA  
Anonymous.

STEPHEN  
You don't have shit.

IDA  
This is a story, Steve.

STEPHEN  
The *Times* won't print anything with one uncorroborated anonymous source.

IDA  
I can't get it printed at the *Times*, but I could always give Matt Drudge a call, or send an email to *Roll Call*.

STEPHEN  
Is that some sort of a threat?

IDA  
All I'm saying is that you've got a choice. You tell me what happened with Duffy and I bury it, or the story shows up in a blurb somewhere. I just wanna be in the loop.

STEPHEN  
You're blackmailing me.

IDA  
What happened with Duffy?

STEPHEN  
You're supposed to be my friend Ida. You'd stab me in the back like this? You'd ruin my reputation / just so you -

IDA  
Wait wait wait – is that what you thought? That we were friends?

STEPHEN  
I've given you *everything* – every fucking scoop, you're profile with Paul....

IDA  
You're right – you've given me a lot. But let's get real here Steve. The only reason you ever treated me well was because I work for the *Times*. Not because I was your *friend*. You give me what I want, I write you better stories. Don't pretend it's any more than that.

STEPHEN  
So this is the shit you're willing to pull to get your scoop?

IDA  
You'd do the same if you were me.

STEPHEN  
No I wouldn't.

IDA  
Why'd you meet with Duffy?

STEPHEN  
Go fuck yourself.

IDA  
Okay, I'll make it easier on you. Forget Duffy. What happened at Paul and Thompson's meeting?

STEPHEN  
No.

IDA  
Is he gonna endorse?

STEPHEN  
You're not getting a goddamn thing out of me.

IDA  
Don't make things hard on yourself.

STEPHEN  
This conversation's over.

*STEPHEN starts walking away.*

IDA  
Do you really want this story getting out?

STEPHEN  
(*stopping*) Lower your voice.

IDA  
Do you?

STEPHEN  
(*coming back*) Do you realize what a story like this could do to me?

IDA  
Of course I do. That's why I'm giving you a choice here.

STEPHEN  
I could get fired.

IDA  
So it's not a difficult choice, is it?

*A pause.*

STEPHEN  
No.

IDA  
I've got to file by four. You've got till then to make up your mind.

*IDA exits. STEPHEN pulls out his cell phone and dials. On the opposite side of the stage lights come up on TOM sitting at a desk, his phone ringing. TOM looks at the number on his phone and answers.*

TOM  
Steve.

STEPHEN  
You fuckin bastard.

TOM  
Excuse me?

STEPHEN  
You leaked it.

TOM  
Leaked what?

STEPHEN  
Don't bullshit me Tom.

TOM  
Bullshit you? What the –

STEPHEN  
I just spoke with Ida Horowicz.

TOM  
Yeah?

STEPHEN  
Why'd you do it?

TOM  
Do what? What the *hell* are you talking about?

STEPHEN  
You know exactly what I'm talking about.

TOM  
No Steve. I wish I did, but I -

STEPHEN  
You fuckin ambushed me.

TOM  
I have no idea what / your're –

STEPHEN  
Ida's threatening to let the story out.

TOM  
*What* fucking story?

STEPHEN  
That we met! That I fuckin met with you!

TOM  
How did she find out?

STEPHEN  
Don't play dumb here Tom.

TOM  
You think *I* leaked it to her?

STEPHEN  
Who else?

TOM  
This isn't good Steve.

STEPHEN  
You're fucking right it isn't good.

TOM  
I didn't leak it to her.

STEPHEN  
Well I know *I* didn't, so that leaves you.

TOM  
What's she know?

STEPHEN  
She knows whatever you told her.

TOM  
I swear to Jesus I didn't leak it to her Steve. I don't want this story out any more than you do.

STEPHEN  
Too fucking late.

TOM  
What did she tell you?

STEPHEN  
She knows where and when we met. I don't think she knows anything else.

TOM  
She has a source?

STEPHEN  
Of course she has a source.

TOM  
And you have no idea who it could be?

STEPHEN  
Other than you?

TOM  
Well it wasn't me, so it's gotta be some one else.

STEPHEN  
Did you tell anyone? Anyone at all?

TOM  
No. Did you?

STEPHEN  
No.

TOM  
Did you admit to meeting with me?

STEPHEN  
No.

TOM  
Then we stonewall her and she's got nothing.

STEPHEN  
She's gonna take the story to Drudge, or Roll Call – shit like that.

TOM  
You can't stop her?

STEPHEN  
She's trying to blackmail me – wants info about Thompson.

TOM  
Then tell her what she wants to know.

STEPHEN  
I can't do that.

TOM  
You can't let this story get out.

STEPHEN  
I'm not gonna be blackmailed Tom.

TOM  
You don't have much of a choice here.

STEPHEN  
If I tell her about Thompson I gotta tell her he's gonna endorse you guys.

TOM  
Then tell her. I can handle it from my side if I start getting calls.

STEPHEN  
No fuckin way. I told her we had Thompson in the bag. It'll make us look like fools.

TOM  
You're gonna look like fools anyway when he endorses us.

STEPHEN  
I can't do it Tom. I can't let her blackmail me. I give in once, she'll do it again.

TOM  
You're on a sinking ship Steve. Tell her what she wants to know and jump. Come over to our side. We can control this thing. *(Pause. No answer from STEPHEN)* Steve?

STEPHEN  
I'm here.

TOM  
Tell her about Thompson. Tell her you're coming over to us. *(Pause)* You there Steve?

STEPHEN  
I gotta go.

TOM  
Steve? Listen to me --

STEPHEN  
I really -...

TOM  
Do the right thing here Steve.

STEPHEN  
I never should have met with you.

TOM  
Get it together kid. You and I can *control* this.

STEPHEN  
I'm fucked Tom.

TOM  
No you're not.

*STEPHEN hangs up.*

TOM  
Steve? *(He looks at his phone and sees that the call has ended)* Damn it.

## SCENE 2

*A small office at Welsh's Iowa campaign headquarters. MOLLY is sitting at a desk, typing away at a laptop. STEPHEN enters the room abruptly, slamming the door behind him. Startled, MOLLY turns around in her chair.*

STEPHEN  
Your phone's been off.

MOLLY  
No it hasn't. I / just don't –

STEPHEN  
I've been trying to call you for five hours.

MOLLY  
I don't get a good signal in this office.

STEPHEN  
Did you talk to Ida Horowicz?

MOLLY  
Ida? No.

STEPHEN  
Don't lie to me.

MOLLY  
I'm not! Why would I talk to Ida?

STEPHEN  
Did you talk to anyone else?

MOLLY  
Who? What are you talking about?

STEPHEN  
Last night, when I was drunk, what did I tell you?

MOLLY  
You told me about your girlfriend.

STEPHEN  
What else?

MOLLY  
Nothing.

STEPHEN  
I don't believe you.

MOLLY  
You talked about Helen. That's it.

STEPHEN  
I didn't tell you about a meeting?

MOLLY  
No. You didn't tell me anything about a meeting.

STEPHEN  
I didn't mention Tom Duffy?

MOLLY  
Tom Duffy?

STEPHEN  
If you're fucking lying to me...

MOLLY  
Steve. *What* is going on?

STEPHEN  
I'm getting screwed is what's going on.

MOLLY  
What happened?

STEPHEN  
(*to himself*) Who the fuck could it have been?

MOLLY  
Could *what* have been?

STEPHEN

Some one told Ida and I can't figure out who.

MOLLY

Told Ida *what*?

STEPHEN

Nothing.

MOLLY

You can trust me.

STEPHEN

You have no idea how fucked I am.

MOLLY

Will you *please* tell me what's going on?

STEPHEN

If I can just figure this out. I need to *think*.

MOLLY

I won't tell anyone Steve. And maybe I can help.

*A beat.*

STEPHEN

Tom Duffy called me yesterday, right after we talked at the hotel. I met with him. He offered me job on Sorrell's campaign. I turned him down. But somehow Ida found out about the meeting. Duffy might have leaked it, but I don't think he did. And if you didn't, then I / don't know –

MOLLY

Even if you *had* told me I'd / never –

STEPHEN

I know, I know.

MOLLY

I don't do stuff like that.

STEPHEN

Of course you don't. I'm sorry if I – if it seemed like I didn't trust you, but...fuck...*someone* told Ida.

MOLLY

Where did you meet with him?

STEPHEN

Little restaurant in West Des Moines.

MOLLY  
Was there anyone else there?

STEPHEN  
Just us.

MOLLY  
And you didn't tell anyone?

STEPHEN  
No.

MOLLY  
Then it has to be Duffy, right?

STEPHEN  
Yeah, but I...shit. I really don't think it's him. I just.... If this thing gets out – this thing, it's like – if I had known. If I had any clue that –

MOLLY  
You only *met* with him right?

STEPHEN  
That's enough, believe me.

MOLLY  
I don't see what the big deal is.

STEPHEN  
It looks like backroom politicking – which is what it *was* I guess. Welsh's Press Secretary meets with Sorrell Campaign Manager? Press'll eat it up. And we can't afford it. Not with – not with all that's gonna happen in the next week. I mean – Molly – this race – it's – we might not win this thing. Not even *might* not win. We're *definitely* not gonna win. Not Iowa at least. We're gonna have to scramble for every fucking vote in New Hampshire after we tank here, and we might / not be able to –

MOLLY  
Hold on a sec. We're not gonna win Iowa?

STEPHEN  
No.

MOLLY  
I don't understand.

STEPHEN  
It's all a myth. We lost this state weeks ago. Everything you read, everything you hear, everything you see – it's all a myth. It's over. Iowa is fucking over already.

MOLLY  
We're ahead in the polls.

STEPHEN

No. We're behind. The polls – they don't mean shit. And there's Thompson, and fake lit and – fuck – a load of shit. Sorrell's gonna take the state.

MOLLY

We *can't* lose.

STEPHEN

Wake the fuck up Molly! I'm telling you this state is over and I *know*. You think you have any idea what's going on while you're sitting behind this fucking computer all day? Do you think you even have a shred of a clue?

MOLLY

Don't talk to me like that.

STEPHEN

I'm sorry. You're right. I shouldn't / have -

*STEPHEN'S phone rings. He looks at the number.*

STEPHEN

Ida. (*STEPHEN looks at his watch*) It's filing time.

MOLLY

Are you gonna answer it?

*The phones continues to ring.*

STEPHEN

No. I'm not gonna answer it.

*The phone stops ringing.*

STEPHEN

Well. That's that.

MOLLY

What's gonna happen?

STEPHEN

I don't know.

MOLLY

I'm sure you can – I mean – there's got to be a way to handle it, right?

STEPHEN

Maybe. I gotta talk to Paul. I gotta let Paul know what's gonna happen. Maybe if we – I don't know...

*STEPHEN opens the door.*

MOLLY  
Steve?

STEPHEN  
Yeah?

MOLLY  
I would never betray you like that.

STEPHEN  
(*not accusingly, but reflectively*) I barely know you.

MOLLY  
You just have to trust me.

STEPHEN  
I'm not good at that.

MOLLY  
I know.

STEPHEN  
I want to trust you, but...

MOLLY  
But what?

STEPHEN  
It's just hard. I got where I am today by never trusting anyone. Always assume everyone's out to get you and you can *prepare* for it. You can *anticipate* it. You can defend yourself. But I slipped, and now look...

MOLLY  
I'm not a reporter Stephen. I'm on your side.

STEPHEN  
Why are you being so nice to me?

MOLLY  
I don't know. Because I like you.

STEPHEN  
But why? What have I done, other than get drunk and take you back to my hotel room?

MOLLY  
You took me seriously.

STEPHEN  
You call a one-night-stand taking you seriously?

MOLLY  
I don't mean last night. I'm talking about this morning.

STEPHEN  
All I did was ask you to stay for breakfast.

MOLLY  
What you did was actually get off your phone and listen to me.

STEPHEN  
You shouldn't like me Molly. I'm not a good person.

MOLLY  
Well neither am I. So there.

*A brief pause while Stephen takes her in.*

STEPHEN  
Keep your cell phone on.

*STEPHEN exits.*

### SCENE 3

*A room in the Hotel Fort Des Moines. Paul is lying on the bed, talking on his cell phone.*

PAUL  
Absolutely – there's no question about it ....

*A knock. PAUL goes to the door, opens it and waves STEPHEN in, shutting the door behind him as he enters.*

PAUL  
But we've got to think broader strokes here, rethink everything....uh-huh....Yeah, I know how to handle it....Look, Stevie just got here. Can I call you back in a few minutes?...Okay, bye. (*He hangs up*). The Governor. We had a good long talk on the way back. He's up to speed with everything.

STEPHEN  
How'd he take it?

PAUL  
Better than I thought he would. Where've you been? I couldn't find you after the event.

STEPHEN  
I left early. Drove straight back here. Wanted to start laying out a media plan for the next ten days.

PAUL

What do you have in mind?

STEPHEN

Well assuming the worst, that we're gonna lose Iowa, I figure we need to downplay the state. We gear up the notion that we're running a national campaign. We stop stumping here altogether. Lower expectations. Start doing events in Super Tuesday states. Even suggest that we may lose here, but that we're looking at the bigger picture. That way when Sorrell wins it's not as big of a blow. The media are prepared for it. And we've already started to shift the focus to Feb. 3<sup>rd</sup> even if we come up short in New Hampshire.

PAUL

So you think we pull out of Iowa with just a week to go?

STEPHEN

I don't see any other choice.

PAUL

It's risky.

STEPHEN

But it'll lessen the blow. And if we come out of Iowa as the underdog, that might actually work for us. The Governor's a much better underdog than he is a front-runner. The press'll soften its coverage and start to slam Sorrell.

PAUL

You really think so?

STEPHEN

Once Sorrell's the front runner? Yeah. I do.

*PAUL goes over to the table and picks up some papers.*

PAUL

You see this?

*He hands the papers to STEPHEN.*

STEPHEN

What is it?

PAUL

Speech Ben wrote.

STEPHEN

He tried to give me a copy at the event, but I didn't have time to look over it.

PAUL

I wanna use it. It's just what we need right now. The tone, the message. It's perfect for the position we're in. I think Iowans will really connect with it.

STEPHEN

Paul – I gotta tell you something.

PAUL

What's up?

STEPHEN

Ida knows I met with Duffy.

*PAUL takes the speech out of STEPHEN'S hands and places it back on the table.*

STEPHEN

I'm sorry Paul. I don't know how she found out. Tried to blackmail me. Said she was gonna let the story out if I didn't tell her what happened at your meeting with Thompson.

PAUL

Did you tell her?

STEPHEN

Of course not. You know I wouldn't do that Paul.

PAUL

So it's gonna hit the papers.

STEPHEN

Probably. Yeah. I figure she'll take it to *Drudge* or *Roll Call*,. Whoever she takes it to, they'll have to call me for a comment, so I wanted to ask your advice here. I wanna know what you'd like me to say. I could just deny the whole thing, but if they call Duffy and he admits to it, that could look worse. If I say no comment they won't let up. Or, I could admit to it, and try to spin in it a way that makes Duffy look bad. But I wanted to ask your advice first.

PAUL

I leaked it to Ida.

*Pause.*

PAUL

At the event.

STEPHEN

I don't understand.

PAUL

We made a deal. She lets me read an advance copy of her profile, I give her a juicy little piece of gossip.

STEPHEN

Paul – this story's gonna hit the papers tomorrow morning.

PAUL

I know.

STEPHEN

But why? Why on earth would you do that to me? Why would you do that to the campaign.

PAUL

The campaign will survive.

STEPHEN

But what about me?

PAUL

Makes it easier to let you go.

STEPHEN

What?

PAUL

To let you *go* Steve. To replace you.

STEPHEN

You're joking, right?

PAUL

No. I'm not.

STEPHEN

Don't do this Paul.

PAUL

It's already done. The Governor knows. He agrees it's the right thing to do. I'm sorry Steve. Please don't take this personally.

STEPHEN

How the fuck am I not supposed to take this personally?

PAUL

Because it's politics.

STEPHEN

Paul –

PAUL

Why'd you meet with Duffy?

STEPHEN

I told you – I was confused. I wasn't thinking. I –

PAUL

Bullshit. You knew exactly what you were doing.

STEPHEN

It was a stupid mistake – okay? A very very stupid mistake.

PAUL

No Stephen. You didn't make a mistake. You made a choice. Yesterday – remember when you called me on the way to the airport? Remember that? “Hi Paul, this is Steve. I just got a -...” What? What did you just get? A call from Duffy? No. That's not what you told me. You stopped yourself. You made up some bullshit to cover yourself. You *chose* Stephen. You *chose* not to tell me. Why did you make that choice?

STEPHEN

I don't know...

PAUL

Sure you do. Because you were curious. Because you were flattered. Because it made you feel special to think Duffy wanted to speak to you instead of me. Because you thought to yourself: maybe I can get something out of this. Because it made you feel *big*.

STEPHEN

That's not true Paul. I don't know why I did what I did. But if you think it's because – because I wanted to prove something to myself, or because it somehow / made me feel -

*As he talks PAUL takes out his wallet and pulls out a folded up dollar bill.*

PAUL

*(holding up the dollar bill)* You know what this is? *(As he unfolds the bill)* First campaign I ran tiny little race in Kentucky – state senate seat. Workin for redneck nobody named McGuthrie. Had no money, no staff, no fuckin office. Worked out of Sam's garage. Everyone thought we didn't stand a chance. But sure enough, we start to turn things around. Our numbers go up. Donations start trickling in. We hire a few people. Rent an office. Next thing you know Sam looks like he's got a real chance. Incumbent is running scared. So what happens? State Republican Party doesn't want to lose this seat. They pour 50 grand into the other's guys coffers. Doesn't seem like a lot to us now, but in a small race like that, twenty years ago? It was a fortune. There's no way we can compete. Our party decides to abandon Sam. Didn't want to spend the money for a seat they thought they were gonna lose anyway. And about this time, a guy running a congressional campaign a few districts over gives me a call. Says, “I really like what you were able to do for poor ole' Sam. But let's face it, he's a goner, so why don't you come work for me?” What do I do? Well Stephen – this is where you and I are different. I told Sam about the call. And Sam says to me, “Paul, you think this other's guy's got a shot at winning, and he can pay you more than anything I can afford, so if it's what you feel you need to do, then I won't get in your way.” So I say, “Sam – you took a chance and hired me when I was even more of nobody than you are, and I'd be damned if I'm gonna jump ship just because the shit hit the fan.” We froze all the staff's salaries and poured every dime we had into winning the race. By election day I was literally down to one dollar in my pocket. This dollar. *(he crumples up the dollar and tosses it to STEPHEN)*. We lost the race, but three years later, when Sam decided to run for Governor – who do you think he called? We *won* that race. And twenty years later I'm where I am now. *(beat)* There's only one thing I value in this world Steve, and that's loyalty. Without it you're nothing and you have no one. And in politics it's the only currency that you can count on. That's why I'm letting you go. Not because you're not good enough. Hell, you're the best. But I value trust over skill. And I don't trust you anymore.

STEPHEN

What am I supposed to do?

PAUL

If I were you? I'd get a good night sleep. You're gonna get pounded by calls from the press in the morning..

STEPHEN

Who the fuck's gonna replace me?

PAUL

Ben.

STEPHEN

*Ben?*

PAUL

He's a smart kid. Not as good as you, but smart. And I trust him.

STEPHEN

He's a baby.

PAUL

So are you.

STEPHEN

I built the press shop. From the ground up. No one knows the reporters better than I do. No one can run this thing like me. You can't just hand it over to Ben overnight.

PAUL

Sure I can.

STEPHEN

I've worked my ass off for you Paul. I've fucking – I lost my girlfriend because of this campaign. I gave up a good job with Senator Callahan to do this. I –

PAUL

Wait wait wait. Am I supposed to feel *sorry* for you? Because you left Callahan? Because you got dumped by your *girlfriend*? You made your own bed Stephen. You *made* those choices. If your girlfriend left you it's because you wanted this job more than you wanted her. And even *her* you tried to spin, with that whole "open relationship" bullshit. Did you really think you could have your cake and eat it too? And do you expect to be *rewarded* because you fucked up your personal life to come work for me?

*There's a knock on the door.*

PAUL

IT'S OPEN.

*BEN enters, holding a few sheets of paper. He's surprised to see STEPHEN.*

BEN

Steve. I didn't know you'd –

PAUL  
Whattya got Ben?

BEN  
That release you asked me to –... The release you wanted to look over.

*STEPHEN grabs the release out of BEN'S hands and looks at it.*

STEPHEN  
Irreconcilable differences? *(to BEN)* Is that the best you could come up with?

PAUL  
I told him to write that. And I suggest you say the same when the press calls you about it.

STEPHEN  
You can go fuck yourself if you think that's what I'm gonna say.

PAUL  
You can make this a soft landing, or make it hard on all of us. If I were you, I'd think down the road here. No sense making an ass of yourself. There will be other campaigns.

STEPHEN  
This was the one Paul. *(turning on BEN)* You little cunt. You've been waiting for this moment, haven't you? Writing your little speeches, schmoozing with the big boys.

BEN  
No Steve. It's not like that.

STEPHEN  
You must be loving this.

PAUL  
Get out Steve.

STEPHEN  
*(to BEN)* I will take *so* much pleasure in watching you getting eaten alive.

PAUL  
Leave Stephen.

*STEPHEN hands BEN the crumpled up dollar bill.*

STEPHEN  
Ask Paul to tell you the story his buddy the redneck. It's a real tear-jerker.

*He begins to go. Stops and turns.*

STEPHEN  
And Paul – just so you know. Molly told me everything. I know you fucked her. *(to BEN)*

PAUL  
Get the hell out of my room.

*STEPHEN exits, slamming the door behind him.*

#### SCENE 4

*Later that evening. The same run-down restaurant where STEPHEN and DUFFY met in Act I. STEPHEN is sitting at a table, nervously looking over a menu. DUFFY enters.*

STEPHEN  
Tom. Thanks for meeting with me.

TOM  
I've only got a few minutes.

STEPHEN  
I know. I'll keep it short. You want anything? A drink?

TOM  
No. I'm fine.

STEPHEN  
I'm gonna order a drink if you don't mind.

TOM  
Course not.

*STEPHEN signals a waiter.*

TOM  
So what's this about?

STEPHEN  
I wanna come work for you.

TOM  
I see.

STEPHEN  
Is the offer still open?

TOM  
A reporter at *Roll Call* phoned me this afternoon.

STEPHEN  
I know who leaked it.

TOM  
Who?

STEPHEN  
Paul.

TOM  
You told Paul?

STEPHEN  
Yeah. I told him we met. He leaked it.

TOM  
Why?

STEPHEN  
He fired me Tom.

TOM  
He *fired* you?

STEPHEN  
A few hours ago.

TOM  
I'm sorry to hear that.

STEPHEN  
Don't be. He's a -...He's not who I thought he was.

*The WAITER approaches.*

WAITER  
Anything to drink?

STEPHEN  
I'll take a Dewers on the rocks.

TOM  
Just water for me.

*The WAITER exits.*

TOM  
You shouldn't have told him we met.

STEPHEN  
I felt I had to.

TOM

I've worked with Paul. He gets paranoid.

STEPHEN

Obviously.

TOM

So he fired you and now you wanna come work for me.

STEPHEN

It's not like that. I was seriously thinking about working for you before any of this shit went down.

TOM

No you weren't.

STEPHEN

I was. Believe me. What you said yesterday. It really-...it affected me. You're right. I wanna work for a winner.

TOM

You're saying that if Paul hadn't fired you we'd still be sitting here right now?

STEPHEN

Yes.

TOM

You're lying to me.

STEPHEN

I'm not. I swear to God. I'll work my ass off for you Tom.

TOM

I'm sure you would.

STEPHEN

And I can give you everything on Welsh. *Everything*. I can lay out his whole strategy for you.

TOM

I already know his strategy. Paul gave it all to Thompson.

STEPHEN

I can give you the details. I can give you numbers. I can give you everything Thompson didn't.

TOM

You'd do that to Welsh? To Paul?

STEPHEN

They *dropped* me Tom. They dropped my ass like I was yesterday's news. Yeah. I would.

TOM

Revenge makes people unpredictable Steve. I can't have someone who's unpredictable. Who's unstable.

STEPHEN

(*calmly*) I'm not unstable.

TOM

It's not just that / Steve.

STEPHEN

I'm in control here. I'm on top / of things. I'm -

TOM

Steve. Listen to me. This story in *Roll Call*, it's not good.

STEPHEN

It'll blow over. I can make that happen.

TOM

I don't know if you can.

STEPHEN

That's what I do. I make things blow over. I'm a pro at it. I can handle this story.

TOM

If it had been a clean break – if you'd left Welsh before this story broke, that'd be one thing. *That* we could control. But the way it'd look now – Paul fires you and *then* you come work for us. Looks like we're picking up the scraps. Puts Welsh in the drivers seat. I can't have that.

STEPHEN

You gotta hire me Tom.

TOM

I wish I could.

STEPHEN

The Party needs me this cycle.

TOM

Then go work for the DNC.

STEPHEN

The *candidate* needs me.

TOM

I think we'll be alright.

STEPHEN

You practically begged me to work for you yesterday.

TOM  
Things have changed.

STEPHEN  
I'll work for next to nothing.

TOM  
It's not a matter of money.

STEPHEN  
Don't make me get on my knees here.

TOM  
Steve – it's not gonna happen. I'm sorry. Go take a nice long vacation. You could use some time off. And maybe this thing is really a blessing in disguise.

STEPHEN  
*A blessing?*

TOM  
You're a smart guy Steve. Everything I said yesterday is true. But maybe politics isn't for you.

STEPHEN  
Politics is my fucking life.

TOM  
That's what I'm getting at. It *shouldn't* be your life. Guy smart as you doesn't belong in a business like this. It's nasty, it's petty, it makes you jaded and cynical. Who needs a life like that? You're twenty-six. There's so many other things you could do besides this horseshit. Think about it. You make it to the White House. You do your four or eight years, if you last that long, and then what? You're pushing forty and so looped into this game that you can't get out. You open some consulting firm in Farragut North with all the other political has-beens that made it to the top and don't know what else to do with themselves afterwards. You make a lot of money, but what's your life? Schlepping from race to race, never quite getting back the excitement you had when you first started out, when all of it was still ahead of you. Do yourself a favor. Get out now while you still can. Go into entertainment, or business, or open a fucking restaurant in Costa Rica – anything. Do what will make you happy. You stay in this business long enough you'll turn into one of those stone-hearted hacks that's so chained to the game you can't break free.

STEPHEN  
Like you?

TOM  
Yeah. Like me.

STEPHEN  
I don't want to get out.

TOM  
Then I don't know what to tell you kid.

STEPHEN

You played me, didn't you?

TOM

Played you? No. I tried to hire you.

STEPHEN

You knew I'd tell Paul.

TOM

I didn't *know*. I thought you *might*, but I didn't *know*.

STEPHEN

You knew if I told him he'd fire me.

TOM

Thing you gotta know about Paul – he's big on loyalty.

STEPHEN

You never wanted me to work for you to begin with.

TOM

Put yourself in my shoes Steve. Your opponent has the best media mind in the country working on his team. What do you try to do? You either try to hire him yourself, or work it so if you can't have him, the other team can't either. This was a win-win situation for me. You work for us – great. Paul doesn't have you. Then again, if Paul fires you and I don't take you – fine – Paul still doesn't have you. Either way I win. The moment I got you to sit down in that chair yesterday, I knew I'd won.

STEPHEN

This is my fucking life you're toying with.

TOM

It's not *easy* for me to do this sort of thing Steve. Don't think I take any pleasure in it. I'm sorry for you. I really am. Take care of yourself.

*TOM stands and leaves. The WAITER approaches with the drinks and sets them down on the table.*

WAITER

Is your friend...

TOM

He left.

WAITER

Then it's just you?

TOM

Yeah.

WAITER  
Are you ready to order?

*STEPHEN gulps down his drink.*

TOM  
I'm not eating.

WAITER  
Oh.

*The WAITER starts to go. Stops and returns.*

WAITER  
I'm sorry to bother you, but you're that guy, right? From the Welsh campaign? I've seen you on TV. Stephen Michaels, right?

STEPHEN  
Myers.

WAITER  
Right! Myers! Stephen Myers. I've seen you on TV a bunch of times. I gotta say, I'm a big Welsh supporter. Gonna caucus for him next week.

STEPHEN  
Good for you.

WAITER  
All these other guys, you can see right through them, but Welsh, he's the real thing. I saw him speak when he came out here to East Des Moines a couple months ago.

STEPHEN  
Yeah?

WAITER  
Man – he really blew me away. That speech. Wow. That's really cool that you work for him. I'd give anything to work on a campaign like that.

STEPHEN  
It's not as exciting as it looks.

WAITER  
Still – to be right in there, right in the action. Making a real fucking difference. You guys gotta win, you know. That dude we got in White House – I voted for him last time around – but this mess he got us into? Shit. My brother Hank – enlists a couple years back. Gets orders to go fight. Ain't overseas but a week the phone rings. Tell my Mama Hank's been injured. Few weeks later they fly him home. Turns out a landmine ripped his hummer to Jesus. All these little bits of shrapnel tear through his brain. He's alive, right, but not *really* alive, you know what I'm sayin'? Can't do nothin' for himself. Momma has to quit her job to take care of him all day. I

gotta start working double shifts to make up for what she's not earning. And the hospital bills man – through the roof. Army picks up some of the slack, but not all of it. Was takin' classes at the community college down the street here, gonna get my associates, you know? But gotta hold off on that for now...

STEPHEN  
I'm sorry.

WAITER  
Don't be sorry man. What's done is done. Just get that fool out of office. Let me get you another Dewars. On the house.

*The WAITER exits.*

## SCENE 5

*STEPHEN'S room at the Hotel Fort Des Moines, later that night. STEPHEN is sitting on the bed, staring at nothing. He's got a gash on his head, and dried blood on his face. A knock. STEPHEN answers the door. He wobbles slightly as he walks.*

MOLLY  
Oh my god, what happened to you?

STEPHEN  
Nothing.

MOLLY  
You're bleeding.

STEPHEN  
I crashed my car.

MOLLY  
Jesus. Are you okay?

STEPHEN  
Where have you been?

MOLLY  
Let me see.

STEPHEN  
I'm *fine*.

*MOLLY takes a closer look at the gash.*

MOLLY  
You need to see a doctor.

STEPHEN

I'm not gonna see a doctor.

MOLLY

You need stitches.

STEPHEN

I've been calling you.

MOLLY

Are you hearing me? You need --

STEPHEN

I don't need stitches.

MOLLY

*(reaching toward his forehead)* At least let me clean it out.

STEPHEN

Leave it the fuck alone, okay?

MOLLY

I'm just trying to help.

STEPHEN

I don't want any help.

MOLLY

What happened Steve? How'd you crash your car?

STEPHEN

Telephone pole.

MOLLY

You crashed into a telephone pole?

STEPHEN

Some kind of pole. I don't know. It was dark. And the snow. I don't know how I crashed it.

MOLLY

And they didn't take you to the hospital?

STEPHEN

Who?

MOLLY

The police?

STEPHEN

There were no fuckin police. I got out of the car and walked.

MOLLY  
You just left the car there?

STEPHEN  
Yeah. It had a pole in its engine.

MOLLY  
I really think we should go to the hospital.

STEPHEN  
I'm not going anywhere.

MOLLY  
You're drunk.

STEPHEN  
Yes. I'm very very very drunk.

MOLLY  
I'm calling an ambulance.

*She heads over to the phone on the nightstand. STEPHEN knocks the phone off the nightstand.*

STEPHEN  
No you're not.

MOLLY  
Alright look. You need to calm down and let me --

STEPHEN  
Tell me where you've been.

MOLLY  
I came as soon as I listened to your messages.

STEPHEN  
I've been trying to reach you all night.

MOLLY  
I was at dinner.

STEPHEN  
With who?

MOLLY  
No one.

STEPHEN  
Who?

MOLLY  
No one I said.

STEPHEN  
I don't believe you.

MOLLY  
Paul. I was having dinner with Paul.

*STEPHEN laughs.*

STEPHEN  
That's just fucking fantastic.

MOLLY  
You shouldn't have told him Steve.

STEPHEN  
The cocksucker deserved it.

MOLLY  
You promised.

STEPHEN  
Did you fuck him? After dinner?

MOLLY  
Come on.

STEPHEN  
Did you?

MOLLY  
No!

STEPHEN  
Did you want to?

MOLLY  
I'm leaving.

*She starts to go.*

STEPHEN  
Molly...

MOLLY  
I don't want to be around you when you're like this.

STEPHEN  
Alright, alright. I'm sorry.

MOLLY  
You're being an asshole.

STEPHEN  
Please Molly. Don't go.

MOLLY  
Why'd you have to tell him?

STEPHEN  
I was angry.

MOLLY  
But I trusted you.

STEPHEN  
You shouldn't have.

MOLLY  
He fired me Steve.

STEPHEN  
That fucking prick.

MOLLY  
You got me fired.

STEPHEN  
Well I got fired too. So I guess that makes two of us.

MOLLY  
Are you hearing me? I got fired because of *you*.

STEPHEN  
Alright. Here's the plan. You go to Paul and you tell 'im that if he doesn't give your job back you're gonna call every newspaper in the country and say that –

MOLLY  
Are you crazy?

STEPHEN  
It'll work. Believe me.

MOLLY  
No. I'm not gonna do that.

STEPHEN  
You gotta hit this fucker back.

MOLLY  
No I don't.

STEPHEN  
Why are you protecting him?

MOLLY  
I'm not. I'm protecting myself.

STEPHEN  
If you want your job back this is what you gotta do.

MOLLY  
I *don't* want my job back.

STEPHEN  
But you can't let him get away with this.

MOLLY  
Listen to yourself.

STEPHEN  
What?

MOLLY  
You don't care about me getting my job back. You just want to use me to get back at Paul.

STEPHEN  
That's not true.

MOLLY  
You're just like him...

STEPHEN  
Who? Paul?

MOLLY  
This isn't some *game* Stephen. This is *me* – a real person. And *you* –

STEPHEN  
What? What about me?

MOLLY  
Nevermind. This is pointless...

STEPHEN  
I'll tell you about me. Do you want to hear?

MOLLY  
Look...

STEPHEN

You wanna feel sorry for yourself?

MOLLY

No. I -

STEPHEN

You didn't lose a job. You lost an *internship*. A fucking *internship*. I'm the one who lost the job, okay? I'm the one who -

MOLLY

Please...

STEPHEN

Guess what I've been doing for the last five hours...

MOLLY

Stop it...

STEPHEN

I met with Duffy again. I practically begged him to hire me. No. I *did* beg him. But he said no. Then I listened to some waiter tell me how his brother's brain got chopped into mince-meat over in Iraq. That's what I was doing while you were having dinner with Paul. Listen to this guy's sob story for an hour while he forced drinks down my throat. How his brother went over there and came back a fucking vegetable.

MOLLY

And what did you do?

STEPHEN

I told you. I got drunk. I crashed my car...

MOLLY

What did you say to him?

STEPHEN

Nothing. I listened.

MOLLY

Did you care? Did you give a fuck?

STEPHEN

I don't know...

MOLLY

How can you not *know*?

STEPHEN

Lay the fuck off, okay?

MOLLY

You were *probably* thinking what a good story this waiter's brother would make if you got him up on the stage with Welsh. All the great articles that flashed before your eyes. You probably didn't even hear a word the guy said.

STEPHEN

It *would* have made a great fucking story. Yes. If I could get that guy on stage with Welsh it'd be fucking golden. But you know what? I don't *work* for Welsh anymore, so it doesn't matter how good this guy's story was. His story doesn't mean shit. Because it'll never see the light of day. I mean honestly - what was I supposed to do? Hold his fucking hand? Tell him everything is gonna be okay?

MOLLY

Instead of getting wasted? Yeah, maybe so.

STEPHEN

Whose fucking horse did you ride in on?

MOLLY

You know what? Getting fired is probably the best thing that'll ever happen to you.

STEPHEN

I'm getting pretty fuckin tired of people saying what's good for me.

MOLLY

You 're like a – a fucking robot. A machine.

STEPHEN

Why are you attacking me?

MOLLY

I'm *not* attacking you. I'm trying to help.

STEPHEN

By making me feel like shit?

MOLLY

No...

STEPHEN

'Cause it's working.

MOLLY

Look –

STEPHEN

You want me to say I'm a monster? That I have no soul? That I –

MOLLY

All I'm saying is –

STEPHEN

Fine. I'm a monster. I'm a fucking horror show. A fucking loser and a fucking idiot and a fucking –

MOLLY

Stop it Steve.

STEPHEN

Why? Why should I stop? I've come this far in ruining my life. Why stop now?

MOLLY

You haven't ruined your life...

STEPHEN

What do I have to fall back on? My girlfriend who dumped me because I've never home? Some bullshit consulting job in DC? I'd suffocate. I've been working in politics since I was fifteen years old. Eleven years. Without it I don't –

MOLLY

Sit down.

STEPHEN

I don't wanna sit –

MOLLY

SIT THE FUCK DOWN.

*Stephen is taken aback by her forcefulness. He stops.*

MOLLY

*(quieter now)* Come on. Sit right here.

*STEPHEN sits on the edge of the bed. MOLLY grabs a pillow and pulls the casing off.*

STEPHEN

What are you doing?

MOLLY

Be quiet.

*She starts to dab at the cut on STEPHEN'S forehead. He winces and pulls back.*

STEPHEN

Oww.

MOLLY

Stay still and let me do this.

*She continues to clean the wound as STEPHEN grimaces. A moment passes.*

STEPHEN  
Why did you sleep with Paul?

MOLLY  
I don't wanna talk about it.

STEPHEN  
Please?

MOLLY  
Because I was an idiot. Because it made me feel special and I fell for it.

STEPHEN  
How did it happen?

MOLLY  
Enough talking, okay?

STEPHEN  
I need to know.

MOLLY  
He kept telling me how smart I was. How *mature* I was. How talented. And it felt good to hear that. To get that kind of attention. To feel like more than just an intern. Half of me knew he was lying, but the other half wanted to believe him. So I decided to let myself. To believe him. So one night, we were in his office and he shut the door and he...anyway...

STEPHEN  
What? He came onto you?

MOLLY  
Yeah.

STEPHEN  
And you let him.

MOLLY  
Yes.

STEPHEN  
Was it the same with me?

MOLLY  
Was what?

STEPHEN  
Did you think I was lying to you? The things I said?

MOLLY  
I didn't care. (*She finishes cleaning the wound*) There. That's a little better.

STEPHEN  
I wasn't lying to you.

MOLLY  
It doesn't matter now anyway.

STEPHEN  
But I wasn't.

MOLLY  
Fine.

STEPHEN  
It's important to me that you know that.

MOLLY  
Well now I know. Let's get you to a doctor.

STEPHEN  
Can we just stay here?

MOLLY  
You really need stitches.

STEPHEN  
What's wrong with me?

MOLLY  
Nothing's wrong with you. Come on. Let's get outta here.

STEPHEN  
There has to be something wrong with me. Otherwise this wouldn't have happened. I wouldn't be sitting here right now with this cut on my head – I'd have my job still. I'd be –

MOLLY  
Will you forget about your job for a second?

STEPHEN  
What am I gonna do Molly?

MOLLY  
I don't know. You can figure that out tomorrow...

STEPHEN  
I'm nothing without this job.

MOLLY  
There are other things in the world besides politics.

STEPHEN  
Not to me.

MOLLY

Well that's what's wrong with you then.

STEPHEN

But I don't...I don't know anything else.

STEPHEN

I don't even know where to begin. I don't...I mean – you're right. That guy in the restaurant. I should have... Jesus. All I thought about was how I could use this guy...how I...*Goddammit!*

MOLLY

It's okay. Really. You're gonna be fine.

STEPHEN

*(suddenly cold)* You know what? Fuck this.

MOLLY

Steve.

STEPHEN

No. Fuck all of this. This is bullshit is what it is. This is...I don't deserve this. This right now? This isn't who I am...Feeling sorry for myself. Acting like a goddamn pussy.

MOLLY

Grow up Stephen!

STEPHEN

*Grow up?* And how the fuck old are you are?

MOLLY

It has nothing to do with –

STEPHEN

The fact that you're a teenager? That you're fucking *nineteen*? Yeah. I think it does. What fucking right do you have telling me to grow up?

MOLLY

Jesus Christ...

STEPHEN

You don't know who I am. You don't have a fucking clue. But you wanna know who *you* are? Because I can tell you...

MOLLY

Is that right?

STEPHEN

You're that cute little girl, the one with a couple more brain cells than all the others, prancing around, sniffing out the big dogs like a bitch in heat. Because it makes you feel good that

somebody with actual power will take ten minutes out of their schedule to bend you over in a closet.

MOLLY  
Goodbye Steve.

*She makes for the door. STEPHEN blocks her.*

STEPHEN  
Do you know how many girls like you I've fucked?

MOLLY  
Get out of the way.

STEPHEN  
That's what it is, isn't it?

MOLLY  
Let me go.

STEPHEN  
Now I'm not a big dog anymore, so it's right back to Paul.

MOLLY  
No.

STEPHEN  
You dropped him 'cause you saw me and said to yourself, hey, I maybe I can get the younger, better looking guy to fuck me. But now that I'm not shit anymore, it's back to the drawing board, right?

MOLLY  
Sleeping with Paul made me feel like trash. Which is exactly how you're making me feel like right now.

STEPHEN  
I *almost* feel sorry for you.

*MOLLY tries to push past him to get to the door. He grabs her and presses her against the wall.*

MOLLY  
I wanna go.

STEPHEN  
I'm not gonna let you walk out on me.

MOLLY  
Steve...

STEPHEN

You can't fuck me over the way Paul and Duffy did. I won't let you. I won't –

MOLLY

Please...

STEPHEN

Shut up and listen to me.

MOLLY

If you don't let go I'm gonna –

STEPHEN

SHUT UP!

MOLLY

*(beginning to struggle)* LET GO OF ME!

STEPHEN

STOP YELLING!

MOLLY

LET ME GO!!! LET ME OUT OF THIS ROOM!!!

STEPHEN

STOP YELLING AND LISTEN TO ME.

*He presses her against the wall and covers her mouth. We can hear her screams muffled from under his hand. As he speaks, he breaks into tears.*

STEPHEN

STOP IT. STOP IT MOLLY. LISTEN TO ME. JUST FUCKING LISTEN TO ME. THAT'S ALL I ASK. I just want you to listen to me. I just want you to – Shhhhhhh. Shhhhhhhhh. Shhhhhhh. Just listen to me please. Just listen to what I have to say. Please? Listen? .

*His grip on MOLLY loosens, he slides to the floor. MOLLY opens the door and leaves. A pause. STEPHEN'S cell phone rings on the nightstand, startling him. He stares at the phone as it rings, but does not budge from where he is. As the phone continues to ring, the lights fade to black.*

END OF PLAY