

IDA / Stephen

— his frustration and anger seething — but he keeps his cool. His next line is delivered with confidence and dignity.)

BEN. Alright. ~~We'll talk later when you're a little less busy.~~
(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. Look in a mirror darlin'.

STEPHEN. Hangs around me like a puppy.

IDA. He looks up to you. You're his idol.

STEPHEN. (Laughs bitterly.) 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. I'm listening.

IDA. You met with Tom Duffy. (A pause. Stephen doesn't know what to say.) 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 East Des Moines, last night, 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 ...

STEPHEN. You're gonna play gutter ball with me?

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. I'm not gonna let you strong-arm 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, your 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 story?

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

STEPHEN. No, I wouldn't.

IDA. Go fuck yourself.

STEPHEN. Ask me a million times, I'm still not gonna —

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 as Stephen takes this in.) 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