

~~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.)~~

# Tom/Stephen

Scene 2

*A rundown restaurant in East Des Moines. The furniture is shabby and 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, huh?

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.*) We'll take a Sapphire and tonic ... and a Coke.

~~WAITER. I'm sorry, we don't have Sapphire.~~

~~TOM. Tanqueray?~~

~~WAITER. No, I'm an ...~~

~~TOM. Whatever you've got is fine.~~

~~WAITER. Yes, sir. (The waiter exits.)~~

TOM. 'Course a little gin doesn't hurt. Gets the blood moving. Gotta drink something to keep 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?

STEPHEN. Look, Tom, you said on the phone that this was important.

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.*) That's funny.

TOM. You're a smart guy, Steve. Very smart. But there's a lot of smart guys out there. 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 it? Constantly looking over your shoulder, wondering who you can trust. Always wondering / who is going to screw you next.

STEPHEN. Okay — look — I appreciate the advice, but I really don't —

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. We both know how much work it takes, constantly being on guard, weighing every word so carefully, every move. But 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.

STEPHEN. If you're trying to poach me — you're wasting your time.

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. Twenty percent of what you think is your solid support is actually our people posing as Morris 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 before the caucus. It'll look like we've made a come-from-behind victory, when in reality we've had the lead all along. We'll have the momentum out of Iowa and take New Hampshire on the twenty-seventh. Morris 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. Our field director talks to fifty organizers. Each of those organizers talk to a dozen precinct captains. The precinct captains call twenty, thirty supporters they trust. Do the math, Steve. That's what — fifteen thousand voters. Over ten percent of the vote.

STEPHEN. You're lying.

TOM. 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 Morris 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.

STEPHEN. I *am* working for a winner.

TOM. Wrong. These numbers are just the tip of the iceberg. A week ago I brought three hundred more field staff to pump up the GOTV. The day before the caucus we'll robocall 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've played dirty before. Done stuff that keeps me awake at night. But this ...

TOM. It'll win us the nomination.

STEPHEN. It's illegal.

TOM. Of course it is.

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. 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.~~