

FARRAGUT NORTH

by

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based on the original stage play
written by Beau Willimon

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FADE IN:

1 EXT. MIDDLE AMERICA 1

We CRUISE ALONG a snow-covered rural landscape -- flat, gray, desolate. In the distance we see a barn with huge red-white-and-blue letters painted on the side. They read "IOWA FOR MORRIS."

Moments later we ROLL PAST another farm with a large billboard staked into the ground beside the road:
"PULLMAN -- AMERICA'S FUTURE BEGINS ON JAN 19."

CUT TO:

2 EXT. SUBURBAN STREET 2

Canvassers -- bundled to the hilt against the cold -- knocking on doors in a suburban neighborhood. Yard signs for both candidates line the street.

3 EXT. CITY INTERSECTION 3

Supporters at an intersection waving handmade signs to cars: "HONK FOR MORRIS." A passing car lays on the horn and the supporters cheer.

CLOSEUP - PULLMAN BUMPER STICKER

on an SUV at a stoplight, right next to a "My Child is an Honor Student" sticker.

4 EXT. HARDWARE STORE 4

A clerk placing a Morris sign in a hardware store window. Two teenagers in the street make snowballs, then throw them at the window and run off.

5 INT. ELEVATOR - CLOSEUP OF PULLMAN BUTTON 5

on the lapel of a businessman getting into an elevator.

WIDER

As he enters, we see a delivery guy already in the elevator -- he's wearing a Morris T-shirt.

CUT TO:

6

BLACK

6

SUPERIMPOSE: FARRAGUT NORTH

VOICE (V.O.)

And now the candidates will make
their closing remarks...

7

INT. RAPID RESPONSE ROOM - CONTINUOUS ACTION

7

A pixilated image of a TV ANCHOR envelops the screen. We
PULL BACK to reveal the image on four adjacent television
sets, each covering a different network.

TV ANCHOR (V.O.)

You'll reach be allotted ninety
seconds. Governor Morris -- we'll
begin with you...

OUTSIDE the FRAME we now hear furious typing on
keyboards, papers shuffling, half a dozen voices speaking
at once.

The CAMERA SWIVELS 180 degrees. We're in a campaign war
room the size of a coffin, jammed to the hilt with twenty-
something staffers manning laptops. At the epicenter is
STEPHEN MYERS, keenly watching the televised debate.

Stephen's thirty years old, a potent mixture of magnetic
charm, fierce intellect and good looks.

He talks faster than the speed of sound. A minute a
page? Not in this sequence. Try 20 seconds.

STEPHEN

I need that release.

STAFFER #1

Two seconds.

STEPHEN

Advance?

ADVANCE GUY

Right here.

STEPHEN

How's our crowd outside?

ADVANCE GUY

'Bout a hundred.

STEPHEN

Pullman's?

(CONTINUED)

ADVANCE GUY

The same.

STEPHEN

Make ours double.

ADVANCE GUY

In fifteen minutes?

STEPHEN

Call HQ -- get the entire staff outside with signs.

ADVANCE GUY

On it.

STAFFER #1

Here's the release.

Staffer #1 hands Stephen a sheet of paper. He looks over it as he talks.

STEPHEN

Did we get those numbers on Ethanol plants?

STAFFER #2

Four hundred jobs for construction, four thousand for operation, fifty to a hundred mil in income --

STEPHEN

Why aren't they in here?

STAFFER #1

I'll put 'em in right now.

STEPHEN

Interviews?

STAFFER #3

CNN, ABC, and the *Des Moines Register*.

STEPHEN

In that order?

STAFFER #3

Yeah.

STEPHEN

I want the *Register* first. Call the other two and push back ten minutes. Ben?

(CONTINUED)

BEN

Ready when you are.

Stephen hands the release to Staffer #1. Rolls down his sleeves and buttons them. Tightens the tie.

STEPHEN

(to Staffer #1)

Cut the paragraph about education.
We'll hit that later this week.

(to Ben)

Let's go.

BEN

Your jacket.

Ben tosses Stephen his jacket as they glide out of the war room into...

Satellite cables snaking everywhere, technicians scurrying back and forth.

Ben's just a couple years out of college. This is his first major campaign, and he looks up to Stephen as if he were a god.

STEPHEN

Whattaya think?

BEN

He hit a home run.

STEPHEN

He hit a triple. Pullman nailed himself on National Security.

BEN

Really? It seemed to me like --

IDA HOROWICZ -- a tough-as-nails reporter for the *New York Times* -- catches up with them. Her looks are as fierce as her reporting.

IDA

Steve...

He doesn't stop walking. She falls into line with them.

STEPHEN

Shouldn't you be in the bullpen?

(CONTINUED)

IDA

You owe me an exclusive.

STEPHEN

I don't owe you shit. Try asking nicely.

IDA

Give me my fucking exclusive.
(sarcastically)
Please.

They reach a SECURITY GUARD.

STEPHEN

We'll talk about it later.

SECURITY GUARD

(to Ida)

No press past this point, ma'am.

IDA

(to Stephen)

Don't stiff me, Stephen. I got three columns to screw you upside down and backwards.

The Security Guard blocks Ida from continuing.

SECURITY GUARD

Ma'am...

IDA

And you -- don't call me 'ma'am.'
I'm not your goddamn mother.

STEPHEN

(as he walks on)

Meet Paul and me at the hotel for drinks. You can have us tonight, the Governor tomorrow. Deal?

IDA

Fine.

STEPHEN

(to Ben)

Make sure she doesn't sneak backstage.

BEN

Alright. Can I come with you guys later? For drinks?

(CONTINUED)

STEPHEN

(sternly)

Ben?

BEN

Okay, okay.

Ben scampers back to escort Ida to the bullpen. As Stephen presses forward, a cute technician girl in a tool belt walks by speaking into a walkie-talkie. Stephen glances at her ass as she passes, then pushes on to...

PAUL ZARA is waiting in the wings of the soundstage. Stephen saddles up next to him. In the b.g. we can see the candidates at podiums.

Paul is pushing fifty with the grizzled look of a hardened campaign veteran. He's Stephen's boss, the only guy between him and Governor Morris.

Arms crossed, they watch their man wrap up his closing remarks.

PAUL

A triple?

STEPHEN

A triple.

PAUL

Fucking National Security.

STEPHEN

We prepped for two hours on it.

PAUL

I know, it's not your fault.
We're just gonna have to mash the
talking points into his skull.

STEPHEN

Your hammer or mine?

TOM DUFFY -- campaign manager of the rival Pullman campaign -- is also watching from the wings. Duffy's smooth, calculated and icy. He walks over to Stephen and Paul.

DUFFY

Kicked our ass tonight.

(CONTINUED)

PAUL

That's the idea.

DUFFY

(to Stephen)

Must've been you that did the prep work. Paul's not that clever.

PAUL

You always had the brains, Tom, but me -- I always had the balls.

DUFFY

(nodding to Stephen)

Looks like you got some brains now too.

Applause erupts from the debate room. The candidates shake hands with the moderator, then with each other.

DUFFY

(to Paul)

Be careful. I just might have to steal him from you.

Duffy walks off to greet Senator Pullman as he makes his way to the wings. Paul and Stephen eye him as he goes.

PAUL

What a prick.

GOVERNOR JIM MORRIS arrives in the wings. He's got the firebrand aura of an insurgent.

GOV. MORRIS

How'd I do?

STEPHEN

You hit a home run, Governor.

GOV. MORRIS

Yeah?

PAUL

Outta the park.

STEPHEN

And now you're gonna kill me.

GOV. MORRIS

Why?

STEPHEN

We've got three standups.

(CONTINUED)

GOV. MORRIS
For fuck's sake.

PAUL
(to Stephen)
I'll see you at the bar.

Paul heads off in one direction, Stephen leads the Governor in another.

GOV. MORRIS
Whatta we got?

As they plunge back into the corridors...

STEPHEN
The *Des Moines Register*. After
that we got CNN...

And as they go out of earshot, we hear...

A CROWD (O.S.)
MOR-RIS! MOR-RIS! MOR-RIS!

CUT TO:

EXT. OUTSIDE THE CONVENTION CENTER - NIGHT

Two hundred supporters are chanting outside the convention center. The Governor makes his way to a van. The cheering of the crowd soaks in. He's heard a crowd like this a million times before, but it's still inspiring.

CUT TO:

INT. HOTEL FORT DES MOINES - THE BAR - NIGHT

Stephen, Paul, Ida, and Ben are having drinks around a table. The mood is festive.

STEPHEN
Us by nine.

IDA
By *nine*?

STEPHEN
O'Grady drops because he tanks in Iowa. Even if Pullman picks up his people we'll take New Hampshire by double digits.
(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

STEPHEN (CONT'D)

We jump out on the 27th with enough momentum to take no less than five of seven on Super Tuesday. By that point it's over.

PAUL

Listen to the kid -- he knows what he's talkin' about.

IDA

(to Stephen)

So I can quote you on all of that?

STEPHEN

If you buy me another drink.

BEN

I'll get the next round. Who's in?

PAUL

Another Diet Coke for me.

STEPHEN

Dewars on the rocks.

IDA

Same here.

Ben heads to the bar.

IDA

Alright, boys, tell me somethin' I don't know.

STEPHEN

You know everything.

IDA

I *don't* know everything. But I *do* know when you're bullshittin' me.

STEPHEN

(suddenly serious)

Alright, I'm gonna let you in on something...

Stephen looks over to Paul. He nods.

PAUL

Go ahead. We can't keep it secret forever.

Stephen leans in. Ida does the same.

(CONTINUED)

11 CONTINUED:

11

STEPHEN

The thing is... Paul has a third nipple.

IDA

(smiling)

Fuck off.

PAUL

You want me to show you?

Stephen and Paul laugh. Ida shakes her head.

CUT TO:

12 SAME SCENE - AN HOUR LATER

12

Ida and Ben have left. It's just Paul and Stephen, elbows on the bar. They're all business now, and speak in hushed tones.

STEPHEN

Lemme leak it to her. Nothing specific. Just enough to whet her appetite.

PAUL

I'd rather wait until I get back from South Carolina.

STEPHEN

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 can she fuck us? This story's golden.

STEPHEN

It's Ida. She'll find a way.

PAUL

(thinks for a sec)

No specifics.

STEPHEN

I know what I'm doing.

PAUL

Yeah, I know you do.

The BARTENDER places two shots in front of them.

(CONTINUED)

BARTENDER

On the house. Go Morris.

PAUL

Go Morris.

As the Bartender leaves, Paul slides his shot in front of Stephen.

STEPHEN

You're gonna make me do both of these?

PAUL

Damn straight I am.

STEPHEN

Alright, but I'm gonna be shit-faced for the morning briefing.

PAUL

Better you than me.

Stephen throws back one of the shots, quickly washing it down with the second.

A girl is stuffing packets under the doors to all the rooms. This is MOLLY STEARNS. She's a nineteen-year-old knock-out with an old soul.

An elevator door pings open. Stephen exits, looking exhausted and a little tipsy. He eyes Molly, not sure if he recognizes her.

STEPHEN

Mindy...?

MOLLY

(looking up)

Molly.

STEPHEN

That's right -- Molly. I'm sorry.

MOLLY

It's okay.

STEPHEN

Haven't I seen you working at national?

(CONTINUED)

MOLLY

(playfully)

I don't know. Maybe it was *Mindy* you saw.

STEPHEN

(smiling)

What're you doin' out in Iowa?

MOLLY

I came out a week ago. Wanted to be where all the action is.

STEPHEN

And they have you delivering schedules?

MOLLY

That's me. Livin' life in the fast lane.

He stares at her. Maybe it's the booze, but he's smitten.

MOLLY

What...?

STEPHEN

(snapping to)

Nuthin'. I just... Can I have a schedule?

Molly grabs a manila envelope from her stack. Hands it to him.

STEPHEN

Thanks.

Stephen starts down the hall, but teeters a bit.

MOLLY

Easy there, cowboy.

He turns and looks at her. She flashes him a smile, then returns to her task. He opens his mouth to say something, but thinks better of it.

Stephen takes off his jacket, loosens his tie. Picks up the phone and dials. We can see that the clock on the night stand reads 1:04 AM.

(CONTINUED)

14 CONTINUED:

14

STEPHEN

This is room 327. I need a wake-up call for five-thirty... Thanks.

He hangs up and plops down on the bed, not even bothering to take off his clothes.

15 INT. IOWA HEADQUARTERS - THE NEXT MORNING

15

A sprawling, adrenalin-pumped labyrinth of organized chaos. Dozens of makeshift work areas. Staffers darting back and forth. Volunteers making calls.

CLOSEUP ON A HAND-MADE SIGN ON THE WALL

Which reads in big red letters: "11." PAN BACK to see another sign posted beneath it which reads "DAYS TO GO." A YOUNG STAFFER rips down the "11" sign and tacks up a new one which reads "10."

16 INT. PAUL'S OFFICE

16

Cramped and messy. The walls are lined with precinct maps, the desk littered with stacks of papers.

Stephen, Paul are in a war room session with RAY HAENKE, the campaign pollster, and DAN McMILLEN -- the Iowa State Director.

RAY

It doesn't add up. You should've gotten a bump from the debate, or at least held steady. But our tracks from last night show your hard ones dropping like flies.

PAUL

Dan?

DAN

I don't get it. We've had these people for months. I can show you the lists since August.

PAUL

(back to Ray)

How long before we're in the margin?

RAY

If things keep sliding at this rate? A week, at most.

(CONTINUED)

PAUL

(to Dan)

I want a field report with targeted precincts. And let's spike your ground troops. We'll fly 'em in from New Hampshire if we have to.

STEPHEN

We should also amp up direct mail and robo-calls.

PAUL

(to Dan)

Can you put together a rough budget for that?

DAN

By the end of the day.

PAUL

(to Stephen)

How're we gonna spin this?

STEPHEN

Play it cool. We always expected a fight to the end and we're ready for it. And hey, once we roll out the Thompson endorsement, that'll trump this story. Even if we dip into the margin and this hits print, I give it two cycles, maybe three, then we're back in the driver's seat.

PAUL

Alright good.

(rubs his eyes)

I'll give the fuckin' Chairman a ring.

Stephen glances at his watch.

STEPHEN

Bus is loadin' up.

PAUL

Get your ass outta here.

Stephen's already making for the door.

STEPHEN

I'll call you from the road.

17

INT. HEADQUARTERS HALL - VOLUNTEER OFFICE

17

On his way outside, Stephen passes by a small office. He sees Molly inside instructing half a dozen volunteers, each holding an arm-load of pamphlets. He stops to take a look.

MOLLY

Some people are just gonna slam the door in your face. Don't let that upset you. It's just part of the --

She notices Stephen peering in.

STEPHEN

Don't mind me.

MOLLY

(back to the volunteers)
It's just part of the job. But anyway, you guys are gonna do great. Everyone ready to go?

The volunteers nod, say "yeah."

MOLLY

Good luck out there.

The volunteers shuffle out. Stephen and Molly are left alone.

STEPHEN

Look at you. Your own office and everything.

MOLLY

This is the volunteer office. I share it with lotsa people. Quick -- what's my name?

STEPHEN

Olga.

MOLLY

Olga? Puke.

STEPHEN

You don't prefer Olga to Molly?

MOLLY

A-ha, he remembers...

(CONTINUED)

STEPHEN

Hey, are you free around ten?

MOLLY

This morning?

STEPHEN

Tonight.

MOLLY

Why?

STEPHEN

Because I'm gonna take you out for a drink.

MOLLY

Well I gotta print out the schedules, then get 'em to the hotel...

STEPHEN

Fuck that. I'll have Ben do the schedules. You know that bar on Duluth? By the gas station?

MOLLY

The one with the crappy jukebox?

STEPHEN

Meet me there at ten.

MOLLY

I'm underage though...

Stephen's taken slightly aback.

STEPHEN

How old are you?

MOLLY

Nineteen.

STEPHEN

You're shittin' me.

MOLLY

Nope. So I might have trouble getting in.

STEPHEN

Well you've made it in before.

MOLLY

How do you know?

(CONTINUED)

STEPHEN

'Cause you just told me it has a
crappy jukebox. Ten o'clock.
Don't be late.

And he glides off. Molly peeks out from her door and
watches him go, lips cocked in a half-smile.

The bus is cruising along the highway. Stephen standing
at the front by the driver, clipboard in hand, speaking
to a traveling press corps of fifty journalists.

STEPHEN

Nine-fifteen we'll be at an
elementary school in Boone, then
another one in Dallas County,
followed by a short press avail.
Today is Pool B's turn. Pool B,
okay? So none of you Pool A folks
try to sneak in. After the
avail -- yummy -- we'll have box
lunches on the bus --

A collective groan from the corps.

STEPHEN

AND a case of Milwaukee's finest
we have on ice in the back.

He points to Ben in the back, holding up a cooler. The
reporters laugh. A few clap.

STEPHEN

After lunch we have an American
Legion Hall in Jasper county
before you e-mail your pretty
little stories back to your ugly
little bosses, a quick dinner at a
Ponderosa we'll be invading for an
hour, and finally, two stops in
Marion. We should get you all
back to Des Moines in time for
'The Daily Show.' Any questions?

No response.

STEPHEN

Alright, then grab your coffees.
We got some wake-up music for you.

18 CONTINUED:

18

He nods to the driver, who presses play on the CD player.
An upbeat rock song starts to play.

CUT TO:

19 EXT. THE INTERSTATE - DAY

19

Music blaring. Bright morning light bathing the flat
expanse of a snow-covered field. In the distance we can
see the bus barreling down an interstate trailing a black
SUV. "Morris for America" is painted on the side of the
bus in glaring red-white-and-blue.

20 INT. THE SUV - DAY

20

The Governor is sitting up front. Stephen's in the back
with the BODY MAN.

STEPHEN

You're gonna be speaking to a room
full of veterans, so when we get
to the Q and A, expect to get a
lot of questions on the war and
National --

GOV. MORRIS

Are there any more of those donuts
back there?

BODY MAN

Right here.

STEPHEN

No disrespect, Governor, but you
gotta forget the donuts right now
and focus on --

GOV. MORRIS

Alright, alright. Tell me what
you want me to say.

21 INT. PAUL'S OFFICE

21

INTERCUT Paul on the phone with the Campaign Chairman --
GUS HANOVER. Hanover is a no-nonsense blue-blood with a
blue-collar temper.

HANOVER

How the fuck do we lose eight
points in less than a week?

(CONTINUED)

PAUL

I've already started to put a plan in place, and this is what we're gonna do. First we're gonna --

HANOVER

I'll tell you what you're gonna do. You're gonna fire Dan McMillen.

PAUL

It's not Dan's fault.

HANOVER

So it's yours then.

PAUL

You wanna fire a State Director ten days out?

HANOVER

If he's not producing, we can.

PAUL

And replace him with who?

HANOVER

I'm putting Mark Abrams on a plane this afternoon.

PAUL

Consultants? Come on, Gus. It'll cost a fortune. We can't afford to waste that kind of --

HANOVER

It's not up for discussion.

PAUL

I'd like to talk to the Governor about this.

HANOVER

I'm the goddamn Chairman. You go over my head and I swear to Jesus I'll --

PAUL

We can't just wave a magic wand. Throw some money at this and hope --

(CONTINUED)

21 CONTINUED:

21

HANOVER

You either fire Dan and work with
Abrams, or you can pack your
fuckin' bags. Understood?

Paul grits his teeth.

HANOVER

Paul?

PAUL

Yeah, I understand.

22 INT. SCHOOL CAFETERIA - AFTERNOON

22

We're in a makeshift filing center, a sea of laptops and
reporters at lunch tables. Ida's typing away. A tap on
her shoulder. She whirls around to see Stephen walking
past, already a couple yards away. He nods for her to
join him.

23 INT. THE SCHOOL KITCHEN - MOMENTS LATER

23

Stephen leans up against the stove. Ida's got her arms
folded, curious to know what this is all about.

STEPHEN

Marcellus Thompson.

IDA

For real?

STEPHEN

This is off, off, *off* the record.

IDA

He's gonna endorse?

STEPHEN

Paul's flying out to finalize it
tomorrow.

IDA

That's huge.

STEPHEN

It's more than huge. We'll lock
up half the black vote in South
Carolina overnight.

IDA

I get the scoop, right?

(CONTINUED)

STEPHEN

How many other reporters do you
see in here?

She takes his face and gives him a big kiss on the cheek.

IDA

You're the best, Stevie.

STEPHEN

Not a word until I give you the go-
ahead.

Ida mimes buttoning her lips.

Dan McMillen makes his way out, carrying a cardboard box.
He's saying goodbyes, folks are patting him on the back.
Stephen and Ben enter through the front door, stamp the
snow off their feet. Dan gets to Stephen and Ben, lowers
his eyes and tries to press past. Stephen stops him.

STEPHEN

(sincerely)

Hey, Dan, I heard what Gus is
doing, and personally I think it's
bullshit.

DAN

Go fuck yourself, Steve.

And he's out the door.

BEN

Why's he pissed at you?

STEPHEN

'Cause I still got a job.

Beat. Stephen's already over it.

STEPHEN

Write up a release. Make it
short. The Governor is grateful
for his contribution to the
campaign, blah blah blah.

He whistles loudly with two fingers.

STEPHEN

BOBBY!

We see a head turn on the other end of the room.

(CONTINUED)

STEPHEN

Let's do this. I gotta be
somewhere.

Contingents from the Press Staff and the Advance Staff
are gathered around a dry erase board, on which is a grid
with days and times. An ADVANCE GUY fills in the grid as
Bobby reads from a clipboard.

BOBBY

Fund-raising calls from 3 to 4:30.
Radio interviews from 5 to 6:15.
And we wrap up at 7:30 with an OTR
at an ISU game.

STEPHEN

Who're they playing?

BOBBY

I don't know.

STEPHEN

Find out. If it's a school from a
Super Tuesday state we're gonna
drop the OTR.

BOBBY

Okay.

STEPHEN

Monday?

BOBBY

DT in the morning. First stop is
Kirksville at 2 p.m., then we --

STEPHEN

(concerned)
Wait -- what're we doin'
Kirksville?

BOBBY

The Education roll-out.

STEPHEN

Do we have to do it there?

BOBBY

Well, we haven't been to Plymouth
County yet. It's the biggest town
in the county.

(CONTINUED)

ADVANCE GUY

A whopping two-thousand people.

BOBBY

Is there a problem with
Kirksville?

Stephen furrows his brow.

STEPHEN

No.

BOBBY

Anyway, we don't have a venue
pinned down, but we figured we'd
do it at one of the high schools.

STEPHEN

There's only one high school in
Kirksville.

Bobby and the Advance Guy look at each other. Why does
Stephen know this?

ADVANCE GUY

Okay, I guess we'll do it at that
one.

Stephen breezes down the hall with a sheet of paper.
It's late, the staff has thinned, a lot of lights are
off.

Stephen pops into Paul's office and finds him talking to
two overweight men in suits. These guys have the slick,
pompous look of corporate Beltway insiders. Stephen
holds up the piece of paper.

STEPHEN

Got a release for you to look
over.

PAUL

Steve, this is Mark Abrams.

They shake.

STEPHEN

Steve Myers.

MARK

Heard a lot of great things about
you.

(CONTINUED)

PAUL

And his associate, Ken Landau.

They shake too.

PAUL

(to Mark and Ken)

Tell you what -- I'll meet you both at the hotel bar couple minutes. Just gotta go over a few things with Steve really quick.

MARK

First round's on us. What's your poison?

PAUL

Diet Coke.

MARK

Diet Coke?

PAUL

I don't drink.

MARK

Gotcha.

(to Stephen)

And you?

STEPHEN

I'm gonna take a rain check.

MARK

You sure? We're buyin'...

STEPHEN

Next time.

MARK

Alright then.

Mark and Ken head for the door.

STEPHEN

(to Mark and Ken)

Really look forward to working together.

Mark snaps his fingers and points, like a complete asshole.

MARK

Ditto that, hombre.

(CONTINUED)

And they're out. Paul shuts the door behind them.

PAUL

Tweedle-dee and tweedle-fuckin'-
dum.

STEPHEN

(mimicking)

'Ditto that, hombre.' Jesus
Christ.

PAUL

Two steps backward...

STEPHEN

I saw Dan on the way in. He told
me to go fuck myself.

PAUL

He said the same to me.

STEPHEN

It was rough?

PAUL

Could've been worse. I'm tellin'
you, half this job is knowing how
to fire people.

STEPHEN

And what's the other half?

PAUL

Not gettin' my own ass fired.

The lot's almost empty at this hour. Stephen and Paul
make for two cars, parked side by side.

STEPHEN

Absolutely not.

PAUL

Don't make me drink with these
fuckin' guys alone.

STEPHEN

I'm meeting somebody.

PAUL

Who?

STEPHEN

No one.

PAUL

A girl.

STEPHEN

Maybe.

They've arrived at their cars, are opening their respective front doors.

PAUL

You deserve to die, you know that?
Strandin' me with those dipshits
while you go bang some reporter.

STEPHEN

She's not a reporter.

PAUL

Somebody on *staff*?

STEPHEN

Have a safe flight tomorrow.

And Steve shuts his door, starts up the car. We see Paul bend down and scoop up some snow. As Steve pulls away, he throws a snowball right at Steve's car, and it lands squarely on the rearview window.

A crappy dive bar filled with locals. Stephen and Molly are leaning against the wall near the pool table, drinks in hand.

STEPHEN

I shit you not. We got the
potential to raise half a billion
dollars.

MOLLY

Half a billion?

STEPHEN

Six months ago Morris was a
nobody. Now we're leading the
polls. Six months ago, we didn't
have two nickels to rub together.
Now we've got fifty mil. Look,
I've worked on more campaigns than
most people do by the time they're
twice my age.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

STEPHEN (CONT'D)

This is the one, Molly. If there was ever a time the stars were gonna align and somebody fresh and new, an insurgent with a real message had a very real shot at --

Molly laughs.

STEPHEN

What?

MOLLY

Where are you from?

STEPHEN

Why?

MOLLY

You sound kinda like a farm boy when you're drunk.

STEPHEN

I'm not drunk.

MOLLY

Maybe you've just spent too much time in Iowa.

STEPHEN

Where are you from?

MOLLY

I asked first.

STEPHEN

It's a secret.

MOLLY

Oh yeah?

Stephen beckons her with his finger, as though he's about to tell her. She leans in. As she does, Stephen turns her face and kisses her.

Stephen and Molly are going at it hard, groping, kissing, just short of ripping each other's clothes off. The door pings open. Stephen grabs Molly by the hand and leads her down the hallway.

30 INT. HOTEL FORT DES MOINES - PAUL'S ROOM - MORNING 30

It's barely dawn, but Paul's already dressed and packed. He's sitting on the edge of the bed, eyeing the TV. A CNN anchor reports that a recent poll shows Governor Morris' lead in Iowa slipping. He picks up the phone on the nightstand.

31 INT. HOTEL FORT DES MOINES - STEPHEN'S ROOM - TIGHT ON MOLLY

Alone in bed, asleep. In the b.g. we can hear Stephen in the bathroom, talking on his cell to a reporter. The phone on the nightstand begins to ring. She stirs awake.

WIDER

Stephen comes into the bedroom in towel. He's just finished shaving and still has some lather on his face.

STEPHEN
(into the cell)
Hold on a sec, Ida.

He puts the cell to his chest, picks up the room phone. Molly watches.

STEPHEN
Hello?

INTERCUT WITH:

INT. PAUL'S ROOM - PAUL

PAUL
You see this thing on CNN?

STEPHEN
No -- I just got outta the shower.

PAUL
Poll came in. We're down three more points.

STEPHEN
I got it covered. Just lemme know when I can launch the Thompson thing.

MOLLY
(to Stephen)
You want me to go?

(CONTINUED)

PAUL

Who's that?

MOLLY gets out of the bed in nothing but panties. Starts to pick up her clothes and put them on. Stephen's struck by her beauty, seeing her sober for the first time.

PAUL

Steve?

STEPHEN

Yeah, sorry. It was the cleaning lady. Hey, Paul, I got Ida on my cell, can we talk in a little bit?

PAUL

My plane leaves in an hour. I'll talk to you after the meeting.

STEPHEN

Sounds good.

He hangs up the room phone. Goes back to the cell.

STEPHEN

(into the cell)

Ida, I gotta talk to Paul for a few minutes, can I call you back?... Okay, great.

And he flips the cell shut.

MOLLY

The cleaning lady?

STEPHEN

What?

MOLLY

You said I was the cleaning lady.

STEPHEN

Oh that -- come on. I was just --

MOLLY

It's alright. I think it's funny.

STEPHEN

It was just easier to --

MOLLY

Yeah, I know. It's fine.

(CONTINUED)

STEPHEN

You don't have to get dressed. If you wanna sleep in...

MOLLY

I should go. You have work to do.

STEPHEN

Stay. The Governor's got downtime this morning. I don't have to be anywhere for a couple hours.

MOLLY

Well, I got volunteers waiting.

STEPHEN

Lemme order us some breakfast.

She's dressed now. Gives him a peck on the cheek.

MOLLY

Last night was nice.

And she makes for the door.

STEPHEN

This was just a hit and run?

MOLLY

What? Did you think...

STEPHEN

No. It's cool.

MOLLY

I mean I figured...

STEPHEN

Yeah. Sure. You're right. I got a ton of calls to make, actually.

MOLLY

But maybe we can... do it again or something. If you want.

STEPHEN

Yeah, maybe.

Molly smiles broadly.

MOLLY

I'll see you at the office.

(CONTINUED)

31 CONTINUED:

31

STEPHEN

Yeah, come find me. If you can
spare the time.

MOLLY

How about you find me.

And she's out the door.

32 INT. HOTEL FORT DES MOINES - HALLWAY

32

Molly's waiting for the elevator. Paul exits his room
with a rollaway case and walks up next to her. She
turns, surprised to see him. It's clear they know each
other.

PAUL

Hey there.

MOLLY

Hey, Paul.

CUT TO:

33 INSIDE THE ELEVATOR

33

This is awkward, but they're both trying to play it cool.

PAUL

How're you likin' things out in
Iowa?

MOLLY

It's great. It's exciting.

PAUL

Good, good.

MOLLY

Thanks for -- you know -- for
setting me up with a position here
and everything.

PAUL

Of course. My pleasure.

CUT TO:

34 INT. THE HOTEL LOBBY

34

The two of them walk toward the entrance door. Paul
stops short at the concierge.

(CONTINUED)

PAUL

See you around.

MOLLY

Yeah, I'll see you later.

And she's on her way, happy to get out of there. Paul watches her go. The cordial smile on his face has given way to a flat, joyless expression. He turns to the concierge.

PAUL

I need a cab to the airport.

Paul's dressed in a crisp suit. An AIDE leads him into a lively Baptist service at a black church. As they head up the stairs.

AIDE

Good flight?

PAUL

Yes. Thanks.

AIDE

They're just finishing up.

And the AIDE opens the doors to the church for Paul. The choir is belting out a hymnal as the congregation sings and claps along. In the front row is MARCELLUS THOMPSON -- a stately African-American Senator -- singing louder than anyone else.

Stephen and Ben stand outside a conference room with glass walls, looking in. Inside we can see the Governor talking to a table full of Editorial Staff. A poster-board blowup of the "Des Moines Register" banner logo hangs on the far wall.

STEPHEN

They love 'im.

BEN

How can you tell?

STEPHEN

See how they're all leaning forward, their elbows on the table?

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

STEPHEN (CONT'D)
They're hanging on his every word.
If it was going badly, they'd all
be leaning back, shifting their
asses, looking up at the clock.

BEN
So you think they're gonna --

Stephen's cell rings. He pulls it out. Looks at the
number.

STEPHEN
Who the fuck is this?

He answer the phone.

STEPHEN
This is Stephen...
(looks perturbed)
How did you get this number?

Ben mouths "Who is it?"

STEPHEN
(into the phone)
Hold on a sec.

He holds the phone to his chest, starts heading down the
hall, Ben starts to follow, but Steve waves him off.

CUT TO:

Stephen enters through a door, looks up the stairs, then
down, then puts the phone back to his ear.

STEPHEN
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... I can't just...
Look, this doesn't sound right to
me...
(looks torn)
Yeah, I'm here...

He grabs a pen from his jacket.

STEPHEN
Okay, where?...

(CONTINUED)

37

CONTINUED:

37

He cradles the phone, writes on his hand.

STEPHEN

Uh-huh... Yeah, I know where that is... Alright.

He hangs up. A moment passes as he considers what just occurred. He dials a new number on the phone.

38

EXT. BAPTIST CHURCH - DAY

38

Paul stands to the side and watches as Thompson shakes hands with all the churchgoers exiting the building. The man is clearly adored. Paul's phone rings. He looks at the number and answers.

INTERCUT WITH:

INT. STAIRWELL - STEPHEN

PAUL

What is it?

STEPHEN

How's everything going out there?

PAUL

This isn't a good time, Steve, so unless the Governor's in an ambulance...

STEPHEN

The thing is. I just got the weirdest call...

PAUL

From who?

STEPHEN

(changing his mind)
You know what? It's not important. I shouldn't be bothering you with this.

PAUL

I gotta get back to Thompson.

STEPHEN

Yeah yeah yeah. Good luck. I'll talk to you later.

Paul hangs up. Thompson is shaking the last hand. Beckons for Paul to join him.

(CONTINUED)

THOMPSON

You hungry?

PAUL

Starved.

THOMPSON

How's barbecue sound?

CUT BACK TO:

THE DES MOINES REGISTER OFFICES

Ben is watching the Ed Board meeting alone. A hand falls on his shoulder. He whirls around -- it's Stephen.

STEPHEN

I gotta take off for a little while. You good on your own?

BEN

Where're you going?

STEPHEN

Just make sure the Governor's not late for those radio calls if I'm not back by five.

And Stephen's off.

BEN

Wait. What if I --

STEPHEN

(as he walks)

It's not rocket science, Ben. Just stick to the goddamn schedule.

EXT. DINER PARKING LOT - DAY

Stephen pulls up to a run-down diner in East Des Moines. It's an overcast day, and everything's a shade of dirty-white or charcoal. Stephen eyes the diner for a moment. He appears uneasy.

INT. THE DINER - DAY

A cowbell on the door clangs as Stephen enters and lets the door swing shut behind him. The diner is desolate except for one man at a far table, his back to the door. Stephen makes his way toward him.

(CONTINUED)

STEPHEN

Tom?

The man turns around. It's Tom Duffy.

DUFFY

Stephen. Thanks or making it.
Please, take a load off.

Stephen takes the seat across from him. Duffy signals a waiter.

DUFFY

Lemme buy you a drink. I think
they serve beer here. A beer good
with you?

STEPHEN

Water's fine.

DUFFY

Just water?

STEPHEN

I gotta drive.

A WAITER approaches the table.

WAITER

What can I get ya?

DUFFY

I'll take a Bud, and he'll have a
water.

WAITER

(to Stephen)
Tap okay?

STEPHEN

Sure.

DUFFY

Real ball buster, huh? This race?
Guy like you can live off
adrenaline for six months
straight, but an old man like me?
Gotta take care of myself.
Exercise every morning. Three
squares a --

SALLY

What's this about, Tom?

Tom smiles. Leans in closer.

(CONTINUED)

DUFFY

You're working for the wrong man.

Stephen laughs. Shakes his head.

DUFFY

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.

(beat)

Guy like you is too good to go to waste. Come work for us.

STEPHEN

Are you fuckin' crazy?

DUFFY

You're gonna lose Iowa.

STEPHEN

Bullshit.

Tom slides a manila folder across the table.

DUFFY

Take a look.

Stephen opens the manila folder. Begins to flip through the papers inside.

Thompson has his tie thrown over his shoulder and is digging into some ribs as Paul sits across the picnic table doing the same.

(CONTINUED)

THOMPSON

So you're here to woo me.

PAUL

I thought the governor already did that part. I'm just here to set the wedding date.

THOMPSON

You married?

Paul holds up his ring finger. It's bare.

THOMPSON

Well I am, and just before I walked up to that altar? I got me the worst case of last-minute jitters. Nearly ran right outta the church I was so scared.

Paul chuckles, a bit nervous.

THOMPSON

Now the minister, he can tell I'm about to shit my pants, so he leans over and whispers something in my ear. Calms me right on down. Wedding was a piece a cake after that.

PAUL

What'd he say?

THOMPSON

No, sir. The question ain't what he said. It's what you're gonna say. 'Cause truth be told -- I'm havin' me a case a some last-minute jitters.

Paul tries to hide his dismay.

PAUL

How can I set your mind at ease?

Stephen is holding the papers from the folder.

STEPHEN

So you're telling me every poll on the planet is wrong?

(CONTINUED)

DUFFY

The slide in your numbers? Twenty percent of your top support is actually our people. We've been telling them to pose as Morris supporters when the pollsters call. Inflates your lead, makes you feel comfortable, makes us look like the underdog. Now we're telling them to switch back. Day or two before the 19th we'll jump ahead. It'll look like a come-from-behind victory, when in reality, we've been ahead all along.

STEPHEN

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

DUFFY

That's just the tip of iceberg, Steve. We've got mass mailings and robo-calls going out to your supporters with wrong caucus locations. On game day I'll send vans to your strong areas to cause traffic jams. And for those who actually make it to the caucus? They'll find that a third of your precinct captains are actually working for us. On top of all that... we've got Thompson in the bag.

STEPHEN

I know for a fact we've got Thompson.

DUFFY

Do you?

STEPHEN

Paul met with him today to finalize it.

DUFFY

I know he did. But we promised Thompson Secretary of Labor, so he'll do anything we ask -- like dangle a carrot in front of Paul's face until we tell him to yank it away.

(CONTINUED)

This is a lot for Stephen to swallow. He's not sure whether it's a bluff or could be true.

DUFFY

Iowa's already over. It's been over for weeks. Come work for winner. I'll bring you in straight at the top.

Steve stands.

DUFFY

Don't piss this chance away.

STEPHEN

Go fuck yourself.

And he starts to go.

DUFFY

Sleep on it. You'll feel differently in a day or two.

But Stephen keeps walking. He's already halfway to the door.

Stephen has his car parked at the side of the Des Moines River as a snow storm envelops the Iowa State Capitol. It's getting dark. He's sitting in silence, thinking over what just occurred. The mood is ominous. His cell begins to vibrate on the dashboard. As he starts up the car, the floodlights which illuminate the Capitol at night switch on, bathing the dome in an eerie cloud of swirling snow.

In the b.g., Gov. Morris is shaking hands in the upper tiers as a ball game rages on the court below. Reporters are tailing him and half a dozen photographers are clicking away. Ben is several yards off, typing with thumbs into a BlackBerry when it starts to ring.

INTERCUT WITH Stephen driving on the snowy roads.

BEN

Where are you?

STEPHEN

(avoiding the
question)

How did the radio interviews go?

BEN

Good. I was just sending you an e-mail. Paul's flight's delayed. Said he's been trying to reach you.

STEPHEN

You have any idea when he's getting back?

BEN

I think he's gotta spend the night. No flights are leaving until the morning.

A three-point shot from below. The crowd erupts in cheers.

STEPHEN

It's hard to hear you.

BEN

I said he's probably gotta spend the night...

STEPHEN

Alright, I'll call 'im when I get back to the office.

BEN

The reporters have been asking about the CNN poll.

STEPHEN

(concerned)

What'd you tell 'em?

BEN

I told 'em to talk to you.

STEPHEN

Good boy. We'll talk later.

Stephen hangs up. As he does, the car begins to dovetail on the slippery street. He spins the wheel, straightening the car out just before it goes off the road.

46

INT. IOWA HEADQUARTERS - NIGHT

46

Stephen darts past countdown sign on the wall, which now reads "9 DAYS TO GO," and enters the press shop. He's already talking the minute he gets in the door.

STEPHEN

I want transcripts from today's interviews.

PRESS STAFFER #1

Almost done with 'em.

STEPHEN

And tomorrow's release?

PRESS STAFFER #2

Printing out the hardcopy now.

Rubs his eyes. Looks down and sees a flyer sitting on his keyboard. Holds it up.

STEPHEN

What's this?

PRESS STAFFER #1

Somebody from the field office brought it in. Our supporters are getting these. Tells them when and where to caucus.

STEPHEN

Yeah, so?

Press Staffer #1 comes over to Steve's desk and points to something on the sheet.

PRESS STAFFER #1

The date and location are wrong. It's got our logo, but we're not the ones sending it out.

Stephen looks grim. He thinks for a second.

STEPHEN

Alright. Out.

Everybody looks at him.

STEPHEN

Out. Everybody out of the room. And close the door.

The press staff is puzzled, but they all do as they're told, leaving Steve alone in the room.

(CONTINUED)

46

CONTINUED:

46

Steve types a few strokes on the keyboard to open his e-mail. Then picks up the phone and dials a number.

47

INT. MOTEL ROOM - SIMULTANEOUS ACTION

47

Paul reclines on the bed, disinterestedly watching TV. His cell phone rings. He switches off the TV with the remote and picks up.

INTERCUT WITH Stephen at his desk.

STEPHEN

Hey, it's me.

PAUL

About fuckin' time.

STEPHEN

Sorry, my car got stuck in the snow and that took up the whole afternoon. This blizzard is ridiculous, man.

PAUL

No shit. That's why I'm twiddlin' my thumbs in a Motel Six right now.

STEPHEN

How'd the meeting with Thompson go?

PAUL

Don't even get me started. The prick said he's having second thoughts. Wouldn't commit.

Stephen's face whitens. It seems like everything Duffy told him is coming true.

STEPHEN

So he's not endorsing?

PAUL

He's just playin' hard-to-get. Probably wants us to offer him a Cabinet position. I'll talk to the Governor about it when I get in tomorrow. How's everything on your end? Any surprises today?

Steve pauses for a fraction of a second.

(CONTINUED)

STEPHEN

Other than my car? No. Reporters are on my case about the polls, but we were expecting that.

PAUL

Well hopefully we'll get this Thompson thing taken care of soon so you can have a story to deflect with.

STEPHEN

Yeah, that'd be a huge help.

PAUL

Alright. I'm gonna order a pizza or somethin', get some sleep. Fuckin' 6 A.M. flight tomorrow, if the weather doesn't fuck it up.

STEPHEN

I'll keep my fingers crossed. See you when you get back.

Steve hangs up. Picks up the flyer, folds it in half, and sticks it in his jacket pocket.

Molly is busy making signs on a poster board. Steve appears in the doorway, raps lightly on the door. He looks beat, but Molly brightens when she sees him.

MOLLY

Hey there.

STEPHEN

You're here late.

MOLLY

Yeah, all the volunteers went home and these signs gotta be done by tomorrow, so.

STEPHEN

You almost done?

MOLLY

Almost. I guess I can come in early and finish up...

STEPHEN

You could probably use a drink, huh?

(CONTINUED)

48 CONTINUED:

48

MOLLY

Looks like you could use one more.

49 INT./EXT. PACKAGE STORE/STEVE'S CAR

49

Stephen pays for a bottle of Jameson's at the counter. Molly's with him. The store clerk leers at Molly, who looks underage, but goes through with the transaction anyway. As they exit the store, Stephen pulls out his keys.

MOLLY

Gimme the keys. I wanna drive.

STEPHEN

The roads are bad.

MOLLY

You scared?

Stephen eyes her for a second. Then tosses her the keys.

CUT TO:

50 INT. STEPHEN'S CAR

50

Molly is driving down the empty city streets. Stephen's in the passenger seat, holding the bottle.

MOLLY

So you plan on getting me drunk?

STEPHEN

That's the idea. Then I'm gonna take advantage of you.

MOLLY

Maybe I'm the one taking advantage.

STEPHEN

Oh yeah?

MOLLY

When's the last time you banged a 19-year-old?

STEPHEN

You trying to make me feel old?

MOLLY

You're almost twice my age.

(CONTINUED)

STEPHEN

Not even.

MOLLY

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

STEPHEN

Fuck off.

MOLLY

You were out of college when I got my first period.

STEPHEN

Fine -- I'm old. You win.

MOLLY

It turns you on, doesn't it? Me being so young.

STEPHEN

What about you? Scoring the older man?

MOLLY

You think you're the first?

Stephen looks at her. His curiosity is piqued.

MOLLY

When I was fifteen, I had an affair with my English teacher.

STEPHEN

That's fucked up.

MOLLY

Well it wasn't at the beginning. I mean, I was the one who seduced him. But after a while it got weird, so I ended it. And when I was seventeen, I dated this drummer in a rock band who was thirty-one. His band sucked, but he was a sweetheart. And on the campaign there's been a couple people...

STEPHEN

Like who?

MOLLY

I don't know. Matt Spencer on and off for a couple weeks.

(CONTINUED)

STEPHEN

That douchebag?

MOLLY

It was harmless. We were just having some fun.

STEPHEN

Who else?

MOLLY

That's all.

STEPHEN

You said a *couple* people on the campaign.

Molly shakes her head.

STEPHEN

Tell me.

Molly hesitates, as though she's about to speak, but doesn't.

STEPHEN

Come on.

MOLLY

You promise you won't tell anyone?

STEPHEN

I'm good at keeping secrets.

MOLLY

Because he'd kill me if you knew.

STEPHEN

I *promise*. Tell me who it is.

A brief pause.

MOLLY

Paul.

STEPHEN

Paul who?

MOLLY

Paul.

STEPHEN

Paul Zara?!

(CONTINUED)

MOLLY

Just once. Back at headquarters.

STEPHEN

Jesus Christ.

MOLLY

You better not say a word.

STEPHEN

No, I'm just... wow. You fucked my boss. Sorta workin' your way down the line, huh?

MOLLY

That's a nasty thing to say.

STEPHEN

I'm sorry, I'm just surprised is all.

MOLLY

You think I'm a slut or something.

STEPHEN

No, I'm... I'm kind of impressed to be honest.

He turns and smiles at her.

MOLLY

Still wanna take advantage of me?

Holding up the package.

STEPHEN

Let's see where this bottle takes us.

Stephen's holding the bottle of Jamesons in one hand, a full tumbler in the other, pacing back and forth. Molly's sitting on the edge of the bed with her drink. Steve's very drunk, and his farm boy accent is in full affect.

STEPHEN

I mean, I got in this fuckin' business because I actually gave a damn, you know? Since I was a little kid. Even though my folks -- my Pop really -- they thought it was a waste of time.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

STEPHEN (CONT'D)

Thought politics wasn't any better than sellin' used cars. But not me. Because I thought: Hey, you get all these people -- you get 'em to pull a lever next to a name, get 'em to care about something, about the some-body who stands for that same some-thing that you do, and it's like... it's like magic. Your guy gets elected, he gets the power to, to -
- fuck --

He laughs bitterly.

STEPHEN

I don't even know what I'm saying.

And he gulps down the rest of drink. Starts pouring another.

MOLLY

Maybe you should lay off the --

STEPHEN

(ignoring her)

I mean, that's why you got in this, right? Dropped outta school and everything? Because you gave a shit.

MOLLY

I didn't drop out. I just took a semester off. But yeah, I guess I joined the campaign because --

STEPHEN

Well, I fuckin' dropped outta school. Bet you didn't know that. I never finished college. Dropped out to work on a Senate race. Never went back. Never got my fuckin' diploma.

MOLLY

You seem to be doing alright without it.

STEPHEN

I'm telling you though, Molly. That thing I had. The thing that made me drop out, get deep in all this shit to begin with? I don't know.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

51 CONTINUED:

51

STEPHEN (CONT'D)
You work on enough races and Jesus
-- the shit people'll pull. You
have no idea how fuckin' dirty it
gets.

MOLLY

Like how?

Stephen just shakes his head. Takes a big sip from his
tumbler.

STEPHEN

You need a refill?

CUT TO:

52 STEPHEN'S ROOM - MORNING

52

Stephen's passed out on his bed, still in his clothes.
Molly's nowhere to be seen. The alarm is screeching.
Steve groggily opens his eyes, looks at the clock-radio.
It's 8:04. He bolts up. Shuts off the alarm. Rubs his
eyes. The guy looks awful.

He stands up, starts for the bathroom. Eyes the flyer on
the dresser from the night before. Picks it up and looks
at it for a sec. Finds his phone on the nightstand and
dials. His voice is hoarse.

STEPHEN

(into the phone)

Hey, Ben, it's me. I overslept.
Do me a favor -- find out what
time Paul's plane gets in.

OFF which --

53 EXT. DES MOINES AIRPORT - DAY

53

The sky is overcast, but it's no longer snowing. A plane
taxi up to the gate. Its engines roar with one last
thrust as it eases to a stop.

54 INT. AIRPORT - BAGGAGE AREA

54

Stephen waits nervously, watching passengers exit out of
the terminal. He's freshly showered and clothed, but
still looks pretty hung over. Paul emerges from the line
of the people trickling into the baggage area. Steve
spots him and approaches. Paul looks surprised.

(CONTINUED)

PAUL

What're you doin' here?

STEPHEN

We need to talk.

PAUL

(alarmed)

Okay...

STEPHEN

I met with Tom Duffy.

PAUL

You what?

STEPHEN

He called me yesterday and asked that I meet him. I wasn't going to, but he said it was important so I --

PAUL

(incredulous)

Stop. You met with Duffy and you didn't tell me?

STEPHEN

I was going to, but you were with Thompson and I figured --

PAUL

What did he want?

STEPHEN

He said he wanted to hire me. Which I said no to right away. Then he told me all this shit. About robo-calls and traffic jams... and Thompson. He's not endorsing us, Paul. They already snagged him.

PAUL

And you didn't fuckin' call me?

STEPHEN

Like I said --

PAUL

No wait -- you *did* call me. At the motel. And you didn't say a goddamn thing about this.

(CONTINUED)

STEPHEN

Paul --

PAUL

And that shit about your car
getting stuck? That was a fuckin'
lie wasn't it?

Paul's voice is getting loud. People are starting to
look in their direction.

STEPHEN

I panicked, okay? I didn't know
what to do. I know. I fucked up.
But this is the first time, Paul.
The first time I've ever really
fucked up bad. And I'm sorry. I
can't even tell you how sorry I
am.

Paul takes him in. His apology seems sincere. He's not
ready to accept it yet, but he's willing to take things
down a notch.

PAUL

You got a car here?

STEPHEN

In the lot.

Paul starts walking. Steve follows.

PAUL

You tell me everything.

OFF which --

Stephen stands motionless. Paul paces back and forth.

STEPHEN

... promised him Secretary of
Labor. He's been leading us on.

PAUL

(resigned)

I gave that fucker our whole
goddamn strategy for Iowa. Just
handed it over. And if what
you're saying is true, he's gonna
hand it right on over to Duffy.

(CONTINUED)

STEPHEN

We can figure something out.
There's gotta be away.

PAUL

There better be, otherwise you and
me? We're out of a job.

A beat. The two men sit in silence for a moment,
digesting this prospect.

PAUL

Nobody knows about the meeting you
had with him, right?

STEPHEN

Nobody.

PAUL

Alright look -- you don't breathe
a word of this to anyone.
Especially Abrams and Landau.

STEPHEN

Of course not.

PAUL

'Cause they'll go straight to the
Chairman and all hell will break
loose. So you just do your job as
if nothing happened, deal with the
press. Let me think this over,
then we'll talk. Decide what our
next step is, okay?

STEPHEN

Yeah.

PAUL

And, Steve, you and me are good,
alright? You fucked up, but it's
been me and you from the
beginning, so let's just let this
whole thing drop and --

STEPHEN

I mean, I respect the hell out of
you and I'd never -- I mean, the
last thing I'd ever want you to
think is that --

PAUL

I know. I know that.

Stephen looks at his watch.

(CONTINUED)

55 CONTINUED:

55

STEPHEN

The Governor's got an event in
Plymouth County. I should
probably get there...

PAUL

Alright.

Paul opens the door for him.

PAUL

Find me when you get back.

STEPHEN

Thanks, Paul. Really. For --

PAUL

You don't have to thank me. Just
help me win this fucking state.

Stephen exits and Paul shuts the door behind him.

56 EXT. RURAL ROAD - DAY

56

Steve's car is stuck behind an eighteen wheeler on a long
stretch of desolate road in Northwest Iowa. He waits for
an oncoming car to pass, then yanks the car into the
oncoming lane and zips past the truck.

57 INT. STEPHEN'S CAR - DAY

57

Steve's got the music blaring as he approaches the
outskirts of a tiny farm town. Through the windshield we
can see a sign that reads: "Welcome to Kirksville, Pop.
2,016." Below that is a large map of the USA, all fifty
states shown, and a big star indicated where Kirksville's
location is.

58 INT. MORRIS HEADQUARTERS - CONFERENCE ROOM - DAY

58

Abrams and Landau are at the dry erase board marked up
with a Venn diagram of sorts. As they talk strategy,
Paul only half-listens, his eyes glazed over. His
thoughts are elsewhere.

ABRAMS

As you know, we've got two major
media markets -- Des Moines and
the Quad Cities. We target those
with a blitz of ad-buys starting
Friday prime-time, Saturday
morning cartoons, et cetera.

(CONTINUED)

LANDAU

Filling the gaps we launch a steady stream of rush-hour radio buys with the top three A.M. stations and the top five F.M. stations, and we make sure we hit the farm reports over the weekend.

ABRAMS

We put the budget at ten to fifteen mil. That shouldn't be a problem, should it?

Paul does not respond.

ABRAMS

Paul...?

PAUL

(snapping to)
Yeah, sorry.

ABRAMS

Then to fifteen mil. You okay with that?

PAUL

Aren't we supposed to be talking about field ops?

Abrams and Landau share a glance. Abrams nods to Landau.

LANDAU

Well given the time constraints we're dealing with, it's our opinion that the most advantageous way --

ABRAMS

And efficient.

LANDAU

Most advantageous and efficient way to maximize the...

Paul's eyes glaze over again. This is torture for him, but he knows he has to suck it up and listen.

Stephen is peering in through the door to a gymnasium packed with almost everyone in town. At the far end is Governor Morris, delivering his standard stump speech.

(CONTINUED)

Stephen turns and slowly starts walking up the hallway. We see him stop at a locker. He pauses for a moment, then bends over to try the combination. It works. He opens the locker and peers inside. The shelf full of books. The back of the door is plastered with photos of a girl -- presumably a cheerleader -- and her friends. As well as the photo of some hunky movie star. He gently shuts the locker.

CUT TO:

Stephen stands in front of a trophy case.

THROUGH HIS POV

we SCAN ALONG the various trophies. Each has a group photo of the triumphant team behind it. Some are rather old, and are covered in their fair share of dust.

We STOP AT one and TIGHTEN. It's a basketball trophy from over a decade ago. We TIGHTEN MORE ON the photo behind it. Among the dozen or so teammates we see Stephen, a fresh and eager 18-year-old. Everyone else is smiling except for Stephen, whose intense expression indicates a boy full of pride and ambition.

CLOSEUP OF STEPHEN'S FACE (THE PRESENT ONE)

It clearly pains him to look at this photo, but he can't take his eyes off it. We sense a vulnerability in him that we haven't seen before.

VOICE (O.S.)

I thought you were dead.

Stephen whirls around to see Ida coming down the hall toward him. He goes to meet her so she doesn't get near the display case. Instantly he switches from nostalgic wistfulness to sharp-witted charm.

STEPHEN

If I was gonna die, I'd send out a press release first.

Ida smiles.

IDA

Where you been hiding the past couple days?

(CONTINUED)

STEPHEN

Would you believe me if I said
I've been having a torrid affair
with one of the interns?

IDA

No, because your ego's too big.
You'd aim higher.

STEPHEN

But you've always turned me down.

IDA

Because *my* ego's too big.

STEPHEN

How could you aim higher than me?

IDA

Well you'd head straight to the
top of the list if you told me how
Paul's meeting with Thompson went.

STEPHEN

To get you in bed? It'd almost be
worth it.

IDA

Almost? You have no idea.

STEPHEN

I'll tell you when I can tell you.
But I can't yet.

IDA

You promised me the story. Don't
forget that.

STEPHEN

Would I lie? Come on, let's get
back to the event.

As they walk back down the hall --

IDA

That CNN poll doesn't look good.

STEPHEN

We always expected a slide. It's
all part of being the front-
runner. In fact, I would've been
surprised if our numbers hadn't
started to...

61

EXT. KIRKSVILLE HIGH SCHOOL - DAY

61

The governor is making his way along a rope line, shaking hands, kissing babies. Stephen's just two steps behind him, talking to another reporter.

STEPHEN

... slide a bit. There's only so high you can fly before the other hawks start pecking away at you. So what we're seeing now is --

MAN (O.S.)

STEVE!

We switch to --

STEPHEN'S POV

as he looks around to see who yelled out his name in the sea of faces.

WOMAN (O.S.)

OVER HERE!

And he zones in on two faces. A middle-aged couple are making their way to him. They're dressed plainly, heavy coats and faded jeans, like many of the farmers attending the rally. This is GEORGE and FRAN MYERS, Stephen's parents. Steve wants to flee, but it's too late. They're standing eye-to-eye now.

ANOTHER ANGLE

FRAN

(hugging Steve)

It's good to see you, son.

STEPHEN

You too, Ma. Wasn't sure if I'd run into you all. I know the Governor's not exactly your cup of tea...

FRAN

We came because we thought you might be here.

GEORGE

How long you been in the state?

STEPHEN

Couple weeks now.

(CONTINUED)

GEORGE
(furrows his brow)
I see.

STEPHEN
Yeah, I'm sorry I haven't called.
It's just been -- you know -- so
crazy and everything.

FRAN
Well you have time to come over
for some lunch?

STEPHEN
I wish I did, but we got two more
events today, and I gotta head
right back to the office after,
so...

FRAN
Well if today's no good, we can
drive into Des Moines sometime
this week, go out to a restaurant
or somethin'.

GEORGE
Our treat.

STEPHEN
That sounds great, but this next
week -- it's gonna be insane, and
I'd hate to have you drive all
that way if I'm gonna be -- I
mean, you know -- if I'm gonna be
tied up...

This clearly hurts his mother to the core, but she bites
her lip and nods. We can see George's eyes filling with
anger.

GEORGE
Well we don't wanna be a nuisance
to ya.

STEPHEN
No, no, no -- it's not that at
all...

FRAN
Why don't you just call us if your
schedule frees up, okay? Even to
just talk on the phone.

(CONTINUED)

STEPHEN

Alright, Ma. I'll do that. I'll call you.

GEORGE

(all politeness gone)
We've heard that before.

Fran gives George a reproaching glance. Stephen decides to ignore the comment. He gives his mom a kiss on the cheek.

STEPHEN

I better get back to the governor.

He holds his hand out to his dad.

STEPHEN

Pop?

They shake hands coldly. Then Stephen spins around and starts making his way back to the Governor.

The Governor is ducking into the back seat. Stephen gets some last-minute briefing in. He's agitated.

STEPHEN

You keep to Education today, alright? That's the message, and we don't wanna dilute it.

GOV. MORRIS

But these folks wanna talk ethanol.

STEPHEN

I know, but we have to stay focused. You can talk about ethanol, just don't dwell on it.

GOV. MORRIS

Is it okay I'm wearing boxers? Or should I be wearing briefs?

STEPHEN

(curt and annoyed)
Can we be serious about this?

GOV. MORRIS

What's up your ass?

(CONTINUED)

62

CONTINUED:

62

STEPHEN

Nothing. I'm sorry. I'll see you
in the next town.

He shuts the Governor's door.

63

INT. THE BUS - A LITTLE LATER

63

Stephen is sitting up front, staring out the window as they exit the town. He looks grim. Ben settles into the seat next to him. He's holding several sheets of paper.

BEN

Hey, man.

STEPHEN

(without turning)
Piece of shit, isn't it?

BEN

What is?

STEPHEN

This town.

BEN

Seems like all the rest we've been
to.

STEPHEN

Exactly.

Ben isn't sure what Steve's talking about. Decides not to pry. Lets a moment pass.

BEN

Steve?

STEPHEN

Yeah?

Ben tries to hand him the sheets of paper.

BEN

I was wondering if you'd take a
look at this. Maybe show it to
Paul when you get the chance.
It's uh... it's this thing I
wrote -- a new speech for the
Governor -- and I thought --

Steve continues to stare out the window.

(CONTINUED)

STEPHEN

Not now, Ben.

BEN

But I just --

STEPHEN

I said not now.

Ben is disappointed. But there's no sense in pushing the issue. He folds the papers and places them in his lap. We switch to --

STEVE'S POV

as he sees the large "Welcome to Kirksville" sign, with the map of all fifty states and the star marking Kirksville's location.

CUT BACK TO:

HIS FACE

We see the glimmer of an idea.

INT. HOTEL FORT DES MOINES - BAR - NIGHT

Paul and Ray are sitting at the far end of the bar. Stephen enters and approaches, looking weary.

STEPHEN

Sorry, I just got back.

PAUL

Take a seat.

Stephen does. They talk in hushed tones. The mood is conspiratorial.

PAUL

Ray?

RAY

I was just telling Paul that if the internals Duffy showed you are accurate, then it's pretty much impossible for us to lose the gap between now and game day. My tracks show --

The Bartender approaches. Ray abruptly stops talking.

(CONTINUED)

BARTENDER
(to Stephen)
Anything I can get you?

STEPHEN
I'm good.

BARTENDER
Alright then.

The Bartender walks away. Ray waits until he's at the other end of the bar before he starts up again.

RAY
My tracks show the slide accelerating, and we'd have to pick two or three points a day just to keep things even. I don't see that happening.

PAUL
(to Stephen)
We've exhausted all our oppo?

STEPHEN
Pretty much. I mean we've got small stuff, but nothing that would knock him down ten points.

PAUL
Abrams and Landau wanna throw half our budget into ad-buys, and I'm not in a position with Gus to fight them on it. That takes the legs off of our ground game.

STEPHEN
Well, I put some thought into this on the ride back, and I think I've got a solution...

PAUL
Shoot.

STEPHEN
We pull out of Iowa all together. Close up shop. Concede the state. That way we lower expectations, prime the media for a loss.

PAUL
I think I see where you're goin'...

(CONTINUED)

STEPHEN

We say we're running a fifty-state race, and we're not gonna neglect the other forty-nine just because Iowa's caucus comes first. Pour all our money into New Hampshire and Super Tuesday states. We lose Iowa, but we got a fighting chance in the next two rounds. And it's the last thing Duffy will be expecting.

PAUL

(to Ray)

What do you think?

RAY

We're still polling ahead by close to double digits in New Hampshire and over half of the Super Tuesday states. We'll take a hit in those numbers when we lose Iowa, but we might be able to sustain a lead.

PAUL

I'd have to go over Gus' head for this. Straight to the Governor.

STEPHEN

I think it's the only chance we got.

PAUL

Alright. I'll bring it up with the Governor tomorrow. May lose my fuckin' job, but hey...

(raises his Diet

Coke)

You only live once, right?

He clinks glasses with Ray. Despite his weariness, Stephen looks excited for the first time all day. The game is on.

Steve is sound asleep in bed. There's a ferocious pounding on his door. He sits up, groggy.

STEPHEN

Alright! I'm coming!

He doesn't bother to get dressed. Heads to the door and looks through the eyehole. We see --

(CONTINUED)

HIS POV

-- a bubble-faced version of a very distraught Ben.
Steve opens the door.

BACK TO SCENE

STEPHEN

What the fuck, Ben?

Ben waves a small stack of papers.

BEN

The press clips just came in.
It's Thompson. He's endorsing
Pullman today.

STEPHEN

(wearily)

Alright, round everybody up. I'll
meet you at the office.

INT. HEADQUARTERS - THE PRESS SHOP - A HALF-HOUR LATER

Everybody is dressed casually. THROUGH the window we can
see that dawn is only beginning to arrive.

Stephen is pumping out orders to a bleary-eyed staff.
They're taking notes as he talks.

STEPHEN

Janey, I want you to contact David
Wilkins, he's our press guy in
South Carolina. Get a prioritized
list of every radio station, local
TV news, dailies, weeklies, the
whole works. Alex, you get a call
list together for all the major
African-American organizations --
national, Florida and South
Carolina. Peter, you get in touch
with scheduling and make sure we
can get two hours minimum this
morning for the Governor to get on
the phone. And we'll need a half-
hour for a press avail. Ben, you
work with Peter and get that avail
set up, let all the reporters
know. Try to shoot for before
noon. As for the release --

Paul peeks his head through the press shop.

(CONTINUED)

PAUL

I just heard.

STEPHEN

(to the press staff)

I'll be back in a minute. Get to work.

It's just Stephen and Paul. Both are bleary-eyed and run ragged.

STEPHEN

It'll make South Carolina tough, but we still have six other Super Tuesday states. We pull out of Iowa now and start focusing on --

PAUL

You don't fuckin' get it, man. I was supposed to pull through on this Thompson thing. How am I supposed to bring up this 50-state bullshit with the Governor? You think he's gonna give two goddamns about my advice? I'll be lucky if I last the fuckin' day.

STEPHEN

So you're just gonna throw in the towel?

Paul stops and glares at Steve.

STEPHEN

Paul -- the Governor'll listen to you. I mean we were a fuckin' long shot when we started. Nobody thought we had a chance in hell. But you made us front-runners. Yeah -- some shit is startin' to hit the fan, but Jesus Christ, man. This race can still be ours.

Paul rubs his eyes. Lets this moment sink in. He's seen this before -- the unraveling -- and he knows it isn't pretty.

PAUL

A vodka tonic would be good right about now.

(CONTINUED)

STEPHEN

How 'bout a coffee instead. I'll grab us a couple at that place down the street. None of that cheap Sanka crap here at the office.

Paul digs into his pocket, takes out a few bills.

PAUL

Yeah, a coffee sounds good.

Stephen waves off the money.

STEPHEN

It's on me.

PAUL

Fuck off. You don't get paid well enough to buy me coffee.

STEPHEN

Neither do you.

Both men chuckle.

PAUL

That's for fuckin' sure.

He places his hand on Stephen's shoulder.

PAUL

Come on. I'll walk on over there with you.

The office is abuzz with activity as the team works on damage control. We can see broad daylight through the window now. Stephen's changing into the backup suit he keeps at the office.

STEPHEN

Janey, you got those lists for me yet?

JANEY

Just e-mailed them.

STEPHEN

I want a hard copy too.

(CONTINUED)

ALEX

Scheduling says we can squeeze in another hour this afternoon to finish up the calls.

STEPHEN

Great. And, Ben?

BEN

Yo.

STEPHEN

You make sure that release goes out the minute this avail is over.

BEN

Wanna look it over?

STEPHEN

You make the changes I asked?

BEN

Yeah, and I shortened the whole thing by a couple paragraphs.

STEPHEN

Then I'm sure it's fine.

BEN

Cool.

STEPHEN

Hold down the fort while I'm gone.

BEN

Will do.

STEPHEN

Alright, everybody, I'll be back in an hour or two. Good work today. Keep at it.

He grabs his jacket and tie and darts out the door.

Paul sits at his desk, staring at the phone. He looks tired. Takes a sip of his coffee. Wearily picks up the phone and dials. After a moment.

PAUL

(into the phone)

This is Paul Zara. Is Gus available? It's important.

(CONTINUED)

INTERCUT WITH:

INT. KITCHEN - GUS HANOVER

in his luxurious kitchen, wearing a T-shirt and boxers.
His WIFE hands him the phone.

HANOVER'S WIFE

Paul Zara.

Gus takes the phone.

HANOVER

What the fuck?

PAUL

I'm sorry to call so early, I just
wanted to --

HANOVER

I'm talking about Thompson. First
the poll numbers, then this thing.
I'm starting to lose my fuckin'
patience, Paul.

PAUL

Gus -- hear me out. I got
somethin' I need to run past you.
And then we can both talk to the
Governor about it.

INT. HOTEL FORT DES MOINES - CONFERENCE ROOM - DAY

A hastily put together press avail has been arranged.
Reporters and photographers are milling about. Stephen,
is at the microphone.

STEPHEN

The Governor'll be out in a few
moments. He'll begin with a
statement, then we'll move onto
questions.

As Stephen tries to make his way through the room,
reporters are trying to get his attention.

REPORTER #1

Hey, Steve...

STEPHEN

I'll talk to you after the avail.

(CONTINUED)

REPORTER #2

Steve, I just wanna ask you
about --

STEPHEN

After the avail, okay?

Then Ida comes up to him.

IDA

You fucked me over.

STEPHEN

Let's talk about this outside.

CUT TO:

INT. HOTEL FORT DES MOINES - UPSTAIRS LOBBY

Ida's livid. Stephen's trying to prevent a scene.

IDA

I told my editor I'd get a scoop
about Thompson going with you
guys, then he chews me out when
the Pullman endorsement hits the
wires. You made me look like an
amateur.

STEPHEN

Okay, look --

IDA

Did you know about this?

STEPHEN

Paul's meeting didn't go as well
as we thought it would.

IDA

So you *did* know.

STEPHEN

My hands were tied. Paul didn't
want me to tell a soul. How can I
make it up to you?

Ida's suddenly very cool-headed.

IDA

You can tell me about your meeting
with Tom Duffy.

Stephen's completely taken aback, but doesn't betray it.

(CONTINUED)

STEPHEN

Who told you that?

IDA

A little bird.

STEPHEN

I'm not fucking around here.

IDA

Neither am I.

STEPHEN

You don't have shit.

IDA

This is a story, Steve.

STEPHEN

One anonymous source?
Uncorroborated? The *Times* will
never print it.

IDA

I can't get it printed in the
Times, but there's always Matt
Drudge, or *Roll Call*.

STEPHEN

Is that some sort of 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 laughs. But he's not amused.

IDA

Tell me 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? Let's get real here.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

IDA (CONT'D)

The only reason you ever gave half a shit about me was because I work for the *Times*. Not because I was your friend. You give me what I want, I write better stories. Don't pretend it's anything more than that.

STEPHEN

You're not gettin' shit from me.

He starts to walk away. She calls out to him.

IDA

Do you really want this story getting out?

Stephen stops.

STEPHEN

Lower your goddamn voice.

(returning)

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.

STEPHEN

I could get fired.

IDA

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

Stephen's stymied. He doesn't know what to say.

IDA

I've got to file by four. Make up your mind by then.

And she's off, back into the press avail. Steve watches her go, then whips out his cell phone and starts darting down the stairs.

From the rear of the hall, Duffy is watching his candidate share the stage with Marcellus Thompson. Pullman and Thompson have their arms around each other and are waving to a cheering crowd. Duffy's cell phone rings, he looks at the number, then ducks out into the lobby.

(CONTINUED)

INTERCUT WITH:

EXT. STREET - STEPHEN

briskly walking down a Des Moines city street. It's bitter cold, but he hasn't bothered to put on a jacket.

DUFFY

Steve.

STEPHEN

You fuckin' bastard.

DUFFY

Excuse me?

STEPHEN

You leaked it.

DUFFY

Leaked what?

STEPHEN

Don't bullshit me, Tom.

DUFFY

Bullshit you? What the --

STEPHEN

I just spoke with Ida Horowicz. She knows we met. You fuckin' ambushed me.

DUFFY

You think I leaked it to her?

STEPHEN

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

DUFFY

It wasn't me. I promise you that.

STEPHEN

Then who else?

DUFFY

Did you tell anyone we met?

STEPHEN

No, did you?

DUFFY

Nobody.

(CONTINUED)

STEPHEN

She's threatening to take it to
Drudge or *Roll Call*.

DUFFY

This isn't good, Steve.

STEPHEN

No shit.

DUFFY

Unless you come over to us. You
do that and we can handle this.

STEPHEN

(can't believe it)
Jesus Christ...

DUFFY

You're gonna lose this race. That
should be pretty clear by now.
Come over to our side and we'll
handle this.

STEPHEN

I'm fucked.

DUFFY

No you're not. You come over to --

STEPHEN

I never should have met with you.

DUFFY

Steve, listen to me --

But Stephen has hung up.

DUFFY

Steve...?

There's no response. He flips his phone shut, then
coolly makes his way back into the event room.

Steve bursts into the office. There's two VOLUNTEERS
stuffing envelopes.

STEPHEN

(urgently)
Where's Molly?

(CONTINUED)

VOLUNTEER #1

She left a little while ago.

VOLUNTEER #2

I think she's out canvassing.

STEPHEN

Where? What neighborhood?

VOLUNTEER #2

I don't know.

(to Volunteer #1)

Do you know?

VOLUNTEER #1

Unh-uh. I don't have a clue.

STEPHEN

(venomously)

Well, can you find me someone who
does have a fuckin' clue?

The two Volunteers stare back at Steve, aghast.

Ben is running the show while Stephen's gone.

BEN

Janey, we need to get that hard
copy to the Governor. His car's
leaving in fifteen minutes.

JANEY

I'll have somebody run it over
now.

ALEX

(to Ben)

I've got the Charleston Gazette on
the phone. They're on conference
with David Wilkins.

Paul peeks his head into the room.

PAUL

Hey, Ben, can I speak to you for a
second?

BEN

(to Paul)

Yeah, sure.

(to Alex)

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

74 CONTINUED:

74

BEN (CONT'D)
Tell 'em I'll be on in a couple
minutes.

And Ben follows Paul out of the room.

75 INT. STEVE'S CAR - DAY

75

Steve is gunning it down suburban streets, looking left and right out the windows as he does. Making a hard turn, he almost slams into another car, but narrowly misses. This doesn't faze him. He keeps on gunning it. Suddenly sees what he's looking for and screeches to a halt.

76 EXT. SUBURBAN STREET - DAY

76

Molly is talking to an old lady on her stoop, pamphlets in hand. Steve strides over to her. Grabs her by the arm.

STEPHEN
(to the old lady)
I'm sorry, ma'am, she's needed
back at the office.

And he starts leading Molly away.

MOLLY
Steve, I was --

STEPHEN
Let's go.

MOLLY
What's goin' on?

STEPHEN
Get in the car.

MOLLY
Tell me what this is --

STEPHEN
I said get in the goddamn car.

77 INT. STEPHEN'S CAR - MOMENTS LATER

77

Steve's driving, just as recklessly as before. Molly is gripping the handle above her door for dear life.

STEPHEN
Did you talk to Ida Horowicz?

(CONTINUED)

MOLLY

Ida Horowicz? The reporter?

STEPHEN

Don't play dumb here.

MOLLY

I don't know what you're talking about.

STEPHEN

The other night, when I was drunk, what happened?

MOLLY

You don't remember?

STEPHEN

Tell me.

MOLLY

You were rambling on and on, bumping into things. And then you passed out. I tried to get you undressed, under the covers, but --

STEPHEN

Did I mention anything about a meeting to you?

MOLLY

No, you just kept ranting...

STEPHEN

About what?

MOLLY

All sorts of stuff. How dirty politics is. How it made people cynical. You weren't making much sense...

STEPHEN

And I didn't say anything about a meeting with Tom Duffy? I didn't bring that up and maybe you mentioned it to somebody?

MOLLY

No, Steve.

STEPHEN

Well fuck! Who could it be?

(CONTINUED)

MOLLY

Will you please tell me what's going on?

STEPHEN

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

CUT TO:

Stephen and Molly are parked in a strip mall.

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. Morris' Press Secretary meets with the Pullman's Campaign Manager? The reporters will have a heyday. We go off message. My staff starts doubting me. Morale takes a nose dive. And we can't afford that now -- not with all that's happening. I mean, Molly -- this race -- we're not gonna win Iowa. We'll be lucky if we don't tank in New Hampshire too.

MOLLY

(dejected)

You really think we're gonna lose?

STEPHEN

Iowa? Yeah. Everything Duffy said seems to be on target.

MOLLY

Not just Iowa. I mean the nomination.

STEPHEN

I don't know. It doesn't look good.

(CONTINUED)

His cell phone rings. He looks at the number.

MOLLY

Who is it?

STEPHEN

Ida.

(glances at his
watch)

It's filing time.

He lets it ring.

MOLLY

You're not gonna answer?

He thinks for second.

STEPHEN

No. I'm not gonna let her
blackmail me.

The phone stops ringing.

MOLLY

So now what?

Steve bites his lip. He knows what he's got to do.

STEPHEN

I'll drop you back at the office.

And he starts up the engine.

Paul is sitting in front of a full tumbler of whiskey, staring at it. It's barely cocktail hour, and there's only a few other people in the bar. In the b.g., we can see Stephen walking through the lobby on his way to the elevator, but he glances to the side and sees Paul. Comes into the bar and takes a seat next to him.

STEPHEN

Your phone's been off. I've been
looking all over for you.

PAUL

I've been here.

Stephen eyes the drink Paul's been staring at. Paul keeps gazing down at the tumbler. He won't turn to face Stephen.

(CONTINUED)

STEPHEN

You haven't been...

PAUL

No... I haven't.

He slides the drink in front of Steve.

STEPHEN

I don't want it.

PAUL

You might.

Steve's concerned, but chalks Paul's melancholia up to the rough day the both of them have had.

STEPHEN

Things didn't go well with the Governor?

PAUL

They went fine.

STEPHEN

So the 50 state plan is on.

PAUL

Not exactly.

He pulls a couple folded sheets of paper out of his jacket, hands them to Steve.

PAUL

You see this?

STEPHEN

What is it?

PAUL

Speech Ben wrote.

STEPHEN

I think he tried to show it to me yesterday. I didn't have time to go over it.

PAUL

It's good. Has just the right message. Perfect for the position we're in right now.

Paul's acting weird. Steve knows it's risky bringing up bad news when Paul's in a mood like this, but he knows he doesn't have a choice.

(CONTINUED)

STEPHEN

Look, Paul -- Ida knows about my meeting with Duffy. I'm not sure how she found out, but she knows, and it's gonna hit the wires tomorrow morning. So I wanted to ask your advice. I could just deny the whole thing, but if Duffy admits to it, that could look worse. If I say no comment, they won't let up. Or, I could own up to it, and try to spin it a way that makes Duffy look bad. What do you think I should do?

Paul turns to Steve.

PAUL

I leaked it to her.

STEPHEN

(floored)

What...?

PAUL

It was me. I leaked it to Ida.

STEPHEN

Why would you do that?

PAUL

Because it makes it easier to let you go.

STEPHEN

Hold on. You're not fucking serious...

PAUL

You backed me into a corner, Steve. I can't trust you anymore.

STEPHEN

Yeah -- I made a stupid mistake. But then I --

PAUL

You didn't make a mistake. You made a *choice*. The other day, when you phoned me in South Carolina, you said 'I just got the weirdest call...' I asked who, and did you tell me? No. You didn't.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

PAUL (CONT'D)

You said 'Never mind, it's not important.' Why? Why didn't you tell me?

STEPHEN

I don't know.

PAUL

You know exactly why. Because it made you feel important. Because it made you feel big, that Duffy would want to speak to you. You thought to yourself -- hey, maybe there's something in this for me.

STEPHEN

Look, Paul --

PAUL

I'm sorry. It's over.

STEPHEN

You can't do this.

PAUL

It's already done. I spoke to Gus about it, and he spoke to the Governor. They agree it's the right thing to do.

STEPHEN

I built the press shop from nothing. When we didn't have a dime. When it was only me and you and a couple of interns.

PAUL

I know.

STEPHEN

Then how can you fire me? What about yesterday -- when you said we were good. That it's been me and you from the beginning?

PAUL

Please don't make this harder than it has to be.

STEPHEN

Who the fuck is gonna replace me?

PAUL

Ben. Until we find somebody else.

(CONTINUED)

STEPHEN

Ben?! He's a fuckin' baby.

PAUL

But I trust him.

Now Stephen has really lost it. The other patrons are starting to take notice.

STEPHEN

So I'm your fall-guy. Fire me so it's not your own ass out on the street.

PAUL

I'm not gonna let your carelessness jeopardize this campaign.

STEPHEN

Carelessness? Is that what you were thinking about when you bent Molly over and fucked her in your office?

Paul doesn't respond. It's pointless to go on.

STEPHEN

On top of being a washed up drunk, you gotta be fuckin' lethargic too.

And Steve's off. Paul digs into his pocket, places a few bills on the counter.

PAUL

(to the Bartender)

You can take this away. I'm not gonna have it.

INT. STEVE'S CAR - DUSK

Steve is driving over the Des Moines River bridge on his way to East Des Moines. He's got his cell phone to his ear.

STEPHEN

Hey, Tom? It's Steve.

INT. DINER - NIGHT

We're at the same run-down diner where Stephen and Duffy had their first meeting. Stephen and Duffy are sitting across from one another.

(CONTINUED)

STEPHEN

Thanks for making it. Must be a busy day for you with the whole --

DUFFY

What's this about, Steve?

STEPHEN

I know who leaked the story. It was Paul.

DUFFY

You told Paul?

STEPHEN

The fucker fired me. He's using me as a scapegoat.

DUFFY

I'm sorry to hear that.

STEPHEN

Anyway, I put a lot of thought into it, and I've decided I wanna come work for you.

DAN

Because now you're unemployed.

STEPHEN

No -- I was gonna resign, after I talked to you. Paul just beat me to it.

DUFFY

I don't think that's the case.

STEPHEN

What's the difference? As long as I'm on your team.

DUFFY

Because now you're damaged goods. If you had come to me *before* Paul fired you, that'd be one thing. But now, it just looks like we're picking up the scraps. Puts Morris in the driver's seat. I can't have that.

STEPHEN

But I'll give you everything. Our strategy over the next seven days...

(CONTINUED)

DUFFY

I already got that from Thompson.

STEPHEN

It's different now. We changed it.

DAN

You'd really do that to the Governor? To Paul?

STEPHEN

They dropped me like I was yesterday's news.

DUFFY

Revenge makes people unpredictable, Steve. I can't have somebody like that on my staff.

STEPHEN

This isn't about revenge. It's about working for a winner. Like you said.

DUFFY

I'm sorry, I can't help you.

STEPHEN

You practically begged me to work for you...

DUFFY

Things have changed.

STEPHEN

But you need me.

DUFFY

I think we'll be fine.

The WAITER arrives.

WAITER

What can get y'all.

DUFFY

Nothing for me, I'm leaving.

WAITER

(to Stephen)
You, sir?

(CONTINUED)

STEPHEN

Give us a minute.

WAITER

Alrighty.

The Waiter leaves.

DUFFY

I've gotta get back.

STEPHEN

You fuckin' played me, didn't you?

DUFFY

Put yourself in my shoes, Steve. Your opponent has the best media mind in the country working on his team. You either try to hire him for 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 with me the other day, I knew I'd won.

STEPHEN

This is my fucking life you're toying with.

DUFFY

It's just politics Steve. Maybe this is all a blessing in disguise. You can take some time off. Get away from it for a little while. Maybe you'll find it's not the life for you. I mean, do you really wanna turn into one of those stone-hearted hacks heading to your consulting firm at Farragut North every morning? Trudging from race-to-race, never getting back the excitement you had when you first started out?

STEPHEN

Like you?

(CONTINUED)

DUFFY

Yeah, like me.

He gets up.

DUFFY

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.

And Duffy leaves. Once he's gone, the Waiter approaches Steve.

WAITER

You wanna order? Or you need to head out with your friend?

STEPHEN

You got a full bar?

WAITER

Sure do.

STEPHEN

I'll take a Dewars on the rocks.

The Waiter pauses a second. Stephen looks up at him.

WAITER

You're that guy, right? Stephen Prior.

STEPHEN

Myers.

WAITER

That's right. Stephen Myers. I've seen you on TV and stuff. I'm a big Morris supporter. Saw him speak about a month ago. He's really got somethin'. The real thing. Not like that other guy. I'm gonna caucus for him next week.

STEPHEN

Good for you.

WAITER

That's so cool you work for him. Tell you what. That Dewars is on the house.

(CONTINUED)

81 CONTINUED:

81

And the Waiter scurries away to fetch the drink.

82 EXT. DES MOINES RIVER

82

Stephen stumbles high along the banks of the river. It's freezing, but he's too drunk to care. In the b.g. we can see the Iowa Capitol building, bathed in floodlights. He slips on a patch of ice and falls, hitting the ground hard, then sliding halfway down the bank. As he fumbles to climb back up, we can see his head is bleeding.

He touches his head. Feels the blood. Clumsily bends down and picks up some snow, packs it, and presses it to the cut on his brow.

83 INT. STEPHEN'S ROOM

83

Stephen is shirtless in the bathroom, looking at his cut in the mirror. It's not terribly bad, and although the bleeding has stopped, it's still painful. He has his dress shirt in the sink, turns the water on. Scrubs furiously to get the blood stains out, but it's not doing much good. There's a knock. He goes to the door. Looks through the peephole, then opens it. It's Molly. She sees the cut.

MOLLY

What happened to you?

STEPHEN

Nothing.

He goes back to the bathroom, resumes scrubbing his shirt. Molly looks on from the bathroom door.

MOLLY

You're drunk.

STEPHEN

You think?

MOLLY

How could you tell Paul?

STEPHEN

Tell 'im what?

MOLLY

That you knew. What I told you.
About me and him. I trusted you,
Steve.

(CONTINUED)

STEPHEN

Big mistake.

MOLLY

It wasn't just a mistake. It was --

STEPHEN

I mean trusting me. *That* was the big mistake.

MOLLY

He threatened to fire me.

STEPHEN

That seems about right.

MOLLY

Why are you being such a prick?

He stops scrubbing, turns to her.

STEPHEN

I don't need this, okay?

MOLLY

Oh I'm sorry, am I upsetting you? Jesus, Steve. You can fuck up your own life if you want to, but you didn't have to fuck up mine.

STEPHEN

(sarcastically)

You mean your *internship*? God forbid you lose that.

(then viciously)

Try losing your fucking *job*. Try getting screwed out of everything you worked half your life for.

MOLLY

Okay, let's throw a big pity-party for Steve, because the *whole* world is out to destroy him...

STEPHEN

Get out.

A pause. She stares at him.

STEPHEN

I said get out.

Stephen resumes scrubbing the shirt. Molly shakes her head.

(CONTINUED)

83 CONTINUED:

83

MOLLY

I can't believe I was so fucking stupid.

STEPHEN

You still standing there?

Molly laughs bitterly. Stephen ignores her. She leaves the room, slamming the door as she goes.

84 INT. HOTEL FORT DES MOINES - LOBBY - MORNING

84

The elevator opens. Steve, now with a small bandage on his brow, makes his way out of the hotel, luggage in tow. A small crowd of reporters are waiting for him, trying to get his attention, pelting him with questions about being fired.

But Stephen just keeps walking. He sees Ida, standing on the fringes of the crowd. She almost looks sorry for him.

The reporters follow Steve out to his cab, but he doesn't say a word as he drops his luggage in the trunk and climbs in the car.

85 INT. DES MOINES AIRPORT - CHECK-IN - DAY

85

Stephen is standing in line to check his bags. He's miserable, and eager to get on the flight and get the hell out of Iowa.

VOICE (O.S.)

Steve...

Steve turns around, expecting a reporter, but it's Ben. He's surprised to see him.

BEN

Can I talk to you? Just for a second?

STEPHEN

You got a lot a fuckin' nerve, you know that?

BEN

Please. I'm sorry about the whole thing with --

STEPHEN

Yeah, I bet you are.

(CONTINUED)

BEN

Please. I just wanna talk to you for one second if that's alright.

STEPHEN

Shouldn't you be back at the office, doing my job?

BEN

That's what I wanted to talk to you about. Because I need your help. I need you to tell me how to do it.

STEPHEN

You got to be kidding me.

BEN

Steve, I'm begging you. I didn't ask to be thrown into this position, and if it were up to me, you'd still be running things. I wish you were. All I'm asking is a few minutes before you get on your plane, so I can ask you some questions. Please.

STEPHEN

(menacingly)

Get the fuck outta my face.

Dejected, Ben turns and walks away.

From afar we can see Steve sitting in a chair, staring at his feet.

P.A. (V.O.)

Last call for Stephen Myers. This is a final boarding call, Stephen Myers. Please make your way to the gate or the flight will leave without you.

Steve doesn't budge.

A cab pulls up to the curbside. Stephen gets out with his luggage.

88 INT. BUS - DAY

88

Stephen sits in a rather empty Greyhound making its way along a rural highway. Across the aisle from him is an OLD FARMER, chewing on some tobacco. Steve watches as the old farmer spits his tobacco juice into a cup.

The man looks up and offers a slight nod to Stephen. Steve nods back, then turns to stare out the window.

89 EXT. BUS STOP - AFTERNOON

89

The bus pulls to a halt in the center of a small town. We see Stephen exit the bus with his luggage. He braces himself against the cold as he starts to walk down the street leading out of town.

90 EXT./INT. MYERS' FARM/TOOL SHED - DUSK

90

George Myers, hands covered in grease, is trying to fix a broken piece of farm equipment. He hears his wife from far off.

FRAN (O.S.)

GEORGE...?

GEORGE

JUST A MINUTE.

FRAN (O.S.)

GEORGE, COME OUT HERE NOW.

GEORGE

(to himself)

Christ.

He wipes his hands with a rag and steps out of the shed. Sees Stephen standing with Fran on the porch.

91 INT. MYERS' RESIDENCE - KITCHEN - NIGHT

91

Stephen is sitting across from his father at the kitchen table as Fran prepares a meal. The whole house is sparsely furnished, and cheaply, but still has a warm feel to it.

Stephen's a different person in front of his parents -- sheepish, carrying the burden of shame.

FRAN

So what's that bandage doin' on your head, son?

(CONTINUED)

STEPHEN

Took a fall on the ice last night.

FRAN

You want me to take a look at it?
Think I got some iodine in the
pantry...

STEPHEN

No, it's fine. Just a little cut.

GEORGE

Saw on the news they let you go.

STEPHEN

Yeah. They did.

GEORGE

How'd all that go down?

FRAN

Don't pester him about it, George.

GEORGE

Just askin' the boy a question.

STEPHEN

It's alright, Ma. I don't mind.

GEORGE

(back to Stephen)
So. You got any idea what you're
gonna do now?

STEPHEN

I was kind of hoping I might stay
here for a day or two.

Fran turns to them, ecstatic. George is less enthused.

FRAN

That'd be wonderful, son!

Steve makes his way up the stairs with his luggage,
pauses in front of a door at the end of the hall. Then
opens it and turns on the light.

It's his old room, just as it was when he left for
college. On the wall is a big American flag and numerous
maps of the United States. On each map is a year and the
names of candidates: Carter/Regan, Reagan/Mondale,
Bush/Dukakis...

(CONTINUED)

etc., and all the states are colored in to represent who won the electoral votes for each. Steve drops his luggage and runs his hand along the maps.

There are also several clippings taped to the wall. Yellowed with age. They're articles about a 17-year-old prodigy who managed a race for a state senator. The boy pictured in the articles is Stephen.

A knock. Stephen turns around to see his father standing in the door.

GEORGE

What do you say to grabbin' a drink?

It's a small town pub, mostly populated by local farmers and townspeople. Steve and George are sitting at the bar with a couple empty pints in front of them. LUCY, a 60-year-old woman whose looks have seen better days, but whose sass has never been sharper, sets two fresh pints on the bar.

Both men go for their wallets at the same time.

STEPHEN

I got this round.

GEORGE

Bullshit, you're on my turf, boy.

LUCY

Ain't either of you buyin'. This round's on me.

GEORGE

Thanks, Lucy.

LUCY

Thank your son and that cute face a his.

GEORGE

Tryin' to make me jealous?

LUCY

Well, unlike you -- he ain't wearin' a weddin' ring.

GEORGE

And unlike my wife, you ain't wearin' a bra.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

And he winks at her. Lucy slaps him on the hand.

LUCY

You rascal!

Stephen looks at his father admiringly, and with a bit of surprise. We see this is where Steve got his charm and sense of mischief from.

CUT TO:

AT THE BAR - LATER

Steve and his dad have put back a few. They're both a bit drunk at this point.

GEORGE

You can't blame the man any.

STEPHEN

I sure as hell can.

GEORGE

I'd've done the same thing, you went over my head like that.

STEPHEN

This was the one, Pop. I don't know if I'll get a chance like this one again!

GEORGE laughs.

STEPHEN

What?

GEORGE

You can start talkin' that way when you get to be my age. Stop bein' a pussy and feelin' sorry for yourself.

Stephen decides to take a stab.

STEPHEN

I doubt you'd shed many tears if I never got back in.

A grave look washes over George's face. He weighs his words carefully.

(CONTINUED)

GEORGE

Now look -- I never was much for politics, and I ain't ever made no bones about it. But you chose your path, son, and I respect that. What I won't respect is a man who goes belly up just cuz he got some cowshit on his shoe.

STEPHEN

It's not that simple.

GEORGE

Ain't it?

STEPHEN

No.

GEORGE

Well, I've never had a boss in my life. Only person I ever had to answer to was myself. Somethin' goes wrong on the farm, I look in the mirror, not to the weather, or the barley prices, or whatever the hell else there is to lay blame on. You can bitch an' moan all you want, but that don't change a thing. And you can work for any boss you want, but at the end of the day, you gotta answer to yourself. So if it's sympathy you're after, you ain't gettin' it from me.

Stephen swigs the last of his beer. This isn't what he wants to hear.

STEPHEN

We should head back.

GEORGE

Go ahead and be pissed at me. I'm just sayin' it like I see it.

STEPHEN

I'm not pissed.

GEORGE

You're actin' like you are.

(takes a swig)

But that ain't nothin' new.

95 INT. GEORGE'S PICKUP TRUCK - LATER

95

George drives and Steve looks straight ahead as the two drive in silence. Steve steals a glance at George.

He's filled with simultaneous revulsion and respect for the man.

96 INT. STEPHEN'S ROOM - NIGHT

96

It's dark and Stephen's in bed, eyes open and staring at the ceiling. He closes them, but they're open again a moment later. There won't be any sleep tonight. Only a flood of memories and calculations.

97 INT. IOWA HEADQUARTERS - PRESS SHOP - DAY

97

Ben is working at his desk. He looks overwhelmed.

JANEY

(to Ben)

Did you have a chance to look over that release I wrote?

BEN

Looking at it now.

Bobby pops his head in the door.

BOBBY

Hey, Ben -- we gonna run down tomorrow's events?

BEN

Gimme a half hour.

BOBBY

I got my whole advance team in a holding pattern. We really need to --

BEN

Thirty fuckin' minutes, okay?!

BOBBY

Alright... Jesus.

Ben's cell phone rings. He looks at the number. Is surprised to see it. Darts into the hallway with the phone. Answers it.

BEN

Steve?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

INTERCUT WITH:

INT. LIVING ROOM - STEVE

in his parents' living room. He's sitting on an ancient couch, his laptop on his knees. His mother brings him some coffee while he's on the phone.

STEPHEN

Okay, I'll help you out.

BEN

Really?

STEPHEN

You got a few minutes?

BEN

Lemme get out of the office. I'll call you back in ten.

CUT TO:

INT. McDONALD'S - DAY

Ben is sitting in a booth, a note pad in front of him. Steve is pacing back and forth in the living room. As he talks, he pauses at the window, looks out to see his dad shoveling the driveway.

STEPHEN

So there wasn't any talk of pulling out of Iowa?

BEN

No -- Abrams and Landau are planning a big media blitz. Blowing half our budget on ad-buys. We're throwing all our eggs in one basket.

STEPHEN

(sighing)

Alright, I guess we're gonna have to work around that. You still doing the national security roll-out?

BEN

Tomorrow.

(CONTINUED)

STEPHEN

I need you to send me the release,
and also tomorrow's schedule.

BEN

I'll e-mail 'em as soon as I get
back to the office.

STEPHEN

I don't really get a signal out
here. Can you fax them?

BEN

Sure, what's the number?

STEPHEN

I'm in Kirksville visiting my
parents. Send it to the post
office here. They got a fax
machine.

BEN

Is that safe?

STEPHEN

They won't even know what they're
lookin' at.

George's pickup truck rattles to a halt in front of the
Post Office. Stephen hops out of the driver's side and
darts inside.

It's a small-town post office, only one CLERK. Stephen
heads to the counter.

STEPHEN

Good morning.

CLERK

Mornin'.

STEPHEN

Name is Stephen Myers. Should
have a fax waitin' for me.

CLERK

You George Myers' son?

STEPHEN

That's right.

CLERK

Last time I saw you, hell -- that must've been over ten years ago. I'm John Mahoney's pop. Played on the ball team with ya.

STEPHEN

Yeah, I remember John. What's he up to these days?

CLERK

Runnin' the electrical workers union out there in Des Moines. Been at it for a few years now.

STEPHEN

That's great.

CLERK

How 'bout you? What're you doin' back in town? Visitin' your folks?

STEPHEN

Yessir.

CLERK

Thought you were workin' for uh -- for one of the campaigns. Least that's what your pop told me the last time I saw him.

Steve smiles. He's surprised his dad would relay this information to anyone.

STEPHEN

No -- not these days.

CLERK

Well, you tell your pop I say hey the next time you see him.

STEPHEN

Will do.

CLERK

Anyhow, I think I got your fax right here.

The Clerk shuffles through some papers, finds the fax, and hands it to Steve. Steve looks over it for a couple moments.

(CONTINUED)

100 CONTINUED:

100

STEPHEN

Great. You got a cover sheet? I need you to fax these to somebody else.

The Clerk hands Steve a cover sheet.

CLERK

Here ya go.

101 INT. MYERS' HOME - STEPHEN'S ROOM - AFTERNOON

101

Stephen's packing his bags in his room. His cell rings. He answers.

INTERCUT WITH:

INT. OFFICE - TOM DUFFY

at his office, looking at several sheets of paper.

STEPHEN

Hey, there, Tom.

DUFFY

What's with this stuff you faxed me?

STEPHEN

It's the release on Morris' national security roll-out, and his schedule for the next two days.

DUFFY

I hope you didn't send this thinking there's a chance I might still hire you, because I --

STEPHEN

No, Tom. This is purely me getting even. And I'm much more valuable *not* on your staff.

DUFFY

How's that?

STEPHEN

'Cause I got my former deputy spoon-feeding me all this shit. Told him I'd help do his job from the sidelines, so I can get you anything you need.

(CONTINUED)

DUFFY

We're gonna win anyway,
regardless.

STEPHEN

I know. I just wanna do what I
can to help you blow them out of
the water.

DUFFY

How do I know that this isn't all
a bunch of bullshit?

STEPHEN

Why would it be?

DUFFY

You're tryin' to con a con-artist,
Steve. You could be screwing me
here.

STEPHEN

See for yourself. Three P.M.
today they're launching that roll-
out.

DUFFY

If you're lying about this...

STEPHEN

My grudge is with Paul, not with
you. But take or leave it. I'm
just trying to help.

And Stephen hangs up.

CLOSE ON DUFFY

at his desk. He picks the papers back up, looks at them
warily.

Stephen has his bags with him and is saying good-bye to
his folks.

FRAN

You sure you can't stay longer?

STEPHEN

Naw, I gotta get back to Des
Moines. Wrap up some loose ends.

(CONTINUED)

FRAN

When will we see you again?

STEPHEN

Soon.

Fran nods, a bit disappointed.

STEPHEN

I'm not just sayin' that. I mean it.

And he does. His mother smiles. They give each other a big hug. George looks at his watch.

GEORGE

We should get goin'.

STEPHEN

Yeah.

He picks up his bags and he and his father walk out. Fran follows them out and watches from the porch as they climb into the truck. She waves as George pulls a U-turn and heads down the driveway.

The truck is parked by the side of the road, next to the bus stop, nothing but snowy fields in sight. They're listening to country music on the radio as they wait for the bus. After a moment or two, George turns the music down.

GEORGE

I didn't mean to get on your case last night. Prolly had a beer too many and I --

STEPHEN

It's okay, Pop. You don't need to say anything.

A pause.

GEORGE

Well. Me and your mama, the both of us. We're uh --

He nods, looking at Steve intently, vulnerable even, and not able to finish the sentence. But Stephen knows what he means.

(CONTINUED)

103 CONTINUED:

103

STEPHEN

Yeah, I know.

GEORGE

Good.

And George turns the radio back up.

CUT TO:

104 EXT. GEORGE'S TRUCK

104

Stephen's climbing onto a bus as his dad looks on from the truck. He waves goodbye. George waves back.

We feel like these two men have come to terms with each other -- not a perfect amends, but an amends nonetheless.

105 INT. HEADQUARTERS - PAUL'S OFFICE - DUSK

105

Paul is holding a meeting with Abrams, Landau, Bobby and Ben.

ABRAMS

It's like they had the fuckin' release in their hands. Every single point, right on down the line, they nail us on. It's all over the wires before we even get a chance to roll it out.

LANDAU

Somebody must've leaked something.

ABRAMS

The schedule too, cuz there was a shitload of protesters at the event.

PAUL

(to Ben)
You know anything about this?

BEN

No.

PAUL

Somebody didn't see the release who shouldn't have?

BEN

No one.

(CONTINUED)

ABRAMS

(to Ben)

Well, you sure as hell better get a grip on your press shop, because this'll cost us a whole damn media cycle.

Ben looks like a deer caught in headlights. Everybody's glaring at him.

PAUL

(to Abrams and
Landau)

Will you all give us a sec?

The two men head out of the room.

PAUL

I didn't make a mistake, did I?
Putting you in a position you're
not ready for?

BEN

No...

PAUL

Because we don't have time to find
a replacement...

BEN

Seriously, Paul. I can handle it.

Paul pats him on the shoulder.

PAUL

Alright. Get back to work.

Ben exits. Paul shuts the door behind him. Sits wearily down at his desk. A moment passes. Then he pounds the tabletop twice with his fist in utter rage. Even for a hardened veteran like him, the pressure is starting to take its toll.

Stephen opens the door to his room. Everything about this place is crappy compared to the opulence of the Hotel Fort Des Moines.

He sets his bags down. Turns on the TV. The screen only shows snow. He plays with the rabbit-ears until he gets a halfway decent image. The evening news is on with a report about the nomination race being neck and neck. His cell phone rings.

107 INT. POOL HALL - CLOSE ON A POSTER - NIGHT

107

of Paul Newman and Jackie Gleason in *The Hustler*. We PAN to see Stephen at a table, smacking a shot into the corner pocket. As he sizes up his next shot, Ben bursts INTO the FRAME.

BEN

(furious)

You fucked me.

STEPHEN

(cool and collected)

Keep your voice down.

BEN

That stuff I sent you. Did you fuckin' leak it to Pullman's people?

STEPHEN

Yes.

BEN

Jesus Christ, Steve! I ask you for help and you shit on me like this? I mean --

STEPHEN

Listen --

BEN

I got my ass chewed out! I can't believe you --

STEPHEN

Shut the fuck up for a second and listen to me.

Ben submits. Steve still has that power over him.

STEPHEN

I passed the stuff on to Duffy, but I only did it so he would trust me. And it had to be accurate information or he wouldn't. I knew if I told you what I was doing, you wouldn't send it to me in the first place. So I had to lie a little, okay?

BEN

They fuckin' screwed us, man.

(CONTINUED)

STEPHEN

Small time. It'll pass over by tomorrow. Now you and me, we're gonna nail them to the wall. And you're gonna look like a fuckin' superstar.

BEN

Will you tell me what the fuck all this is about?

STEPHEN

First lemme ask you. Has my Amex card been canceled yet?

BEN

For the discretionary fund?

STEPHEN

Yeah.

BEN

I doubt anyone's got around to it.

STEPHEN

Perfect.

Stephen's talking to the CLERK.

STEPHEN

Just a basic four-door. Nothing fancy.

CLERK

Alrighty.

The Clerk types on his computer.

STEPHEN

And what about vans? How many do you got?

CLERK

Vans?

STEPHEN

Yeah -- how many?

The Clerk gives him a quizzical look, then types into the computer again.

(CONTINUED)

CLERK

Twelve.

STEPHEN

Great. I'll take those too.

CLERK

All twelve?

STEPHEN

Is there a problem with that?

Stephen places an Amex card on the counter. The Clerk is truly puzzled now.

STEPHEN

And you all have outlets in Davenport and Cedar Rapids, too, right?

CLERK

Yessir.

STEPHEN

Why don't you get all the vans they have too.

CLERK

You have people to pick these up? Cuz I'll need all their drivers licenses...

STEPHEN

No you won't. These vans aren't goin' anywhere.

Steve is parked across from the Morris Headquarters, watching the front door in the dark. After a few moments he sees Molly come out and start walking down the street. He starts his engine.

CUT TO:

Stephen pulls the car up alongside Molly. Rolls down the window.

STEPHEN

You need a ride?

(CONTINUED)

She's shocked to see Steve. Then the memory of the last time she saw him kicks in and she keeps walking, briskly now, trying to get some distance. He cruises at pace with her.

STEPHEN

Molly...

MOLLY

Fuck off.

STEPHEN

I want to apologize.

She keeps walking.

STEPHEN

Can we talk?

MOLLY

No.

STEPHEN

Please? Just for a couple minutes?

She ignores him. Continues to walk. Stephen brings the car to a halt. Jumps out and goes up to her.

STEPHEN

You have every right to walk away. But before you do, I just want you to know how sorry I am. And that if I could go back in time and take back everything I said, I would.

MOLLY

Do you have any idea how much of an asshole you are? I have *never* been treated the way you treated me.

STEPHEN

You wanna punch me in the face?

She hesitates.

STEPHEN

(smiling)

You do, don't you? Go for it.

(taps his chin)

Right here. As hard as you want.

(CONTINUED)

110 CONTINUED:

110

But instead she slugs him hard in the stomach. It's quite a wallop. He bends over with a groan. Then looks up.

111 INT. STEPHEN'S MOTEL ROOM - LATE AT NIGHT

111

It's dark. Stephen's in bed, asleep. Molly is quietly getting dressed. Stephen opens his eyes.

STEPHEN

You leavin'?

MOLLY

Go back to sleep.

He sits up.

STEPHEN

Lemme drive you.

MARK

No, I'll have the front desk get me a cab.

STEPHEN

You sure?

MOLLY

Yeah.

She puts on her jacket. Heads toward the door. Stephen's awake now.

STEPHEN

Can I see you tomorrow?

MOLLY

I don't think so.

STEPHEN

Well I'll be in town for a few days if you wanna --

MOLLY

This was the last time.

STEPHEN

So never again?

MOLLY

No.

STEPHEN

But we have fun together.

(CONTINUED)

111 CONTINUED:

111

Molly smiles, and there's something almost sad in it.
She seems ten years older than the first time we saw her.

MOLLY

You call this fun?

She opens the door.

STEPHEN

Never's a big word, Molly.

MOLLY

Take care of yourself, Steve.

And she's out the door.

112 INT. RETIREMENT HOME - DAY

112

In the b.g., Gov. Morris is giving a speech to a small gathering of senior citizens. Paul is at the rear, eyes glued to his candidate. Ida sidles up to Paul. They both watch the Governor.

IDA

Seems like ages since we got a drink.

PAUL

Well I've been a little busy...

IDA

Excuses, excuses.

PAUL

Maybe tonight or something, at the hotel.

IDA

Wouldn't be quite the same without Steve, though, would it?

Paul turns and looks at her.

IDA

You having any regrets?

PAUL

Are you?

IDA

I was just doing my job.

PAUL

So was I.

(CONTINUED)

IDA

Or maybe you were just saving your job.

PAUL

(getting irritated)

What is this?

IDA

Just making conversation.

Paul turns his gaze back toward the Governor.

PAUL

You're missing the speech.

Paul is making his way down the hall with Abrams and Landau.

ABRAMS

The blitz is in full effect.
Every TV and radio station in the state.

LANDAU

And it's strange -- not a single ad from Pullman.

PAUL

Not one?

As Abrams speaks, they pass by Molly talking to some volunteers. Molly's and Paul's eyes meet. In Paul's eyes we see shame; in hers we see stifled embarrassment.

ABRAMS

We thought we'd have to battle them for the slots, but he's not running a thing. Honestly, I don't understand it. I mean, it's not like they're short on money...

They're past Molly now, but Paul pauses for a moment and turns back, as if he's gonna say something to her. Decides not to.

ABRAMS

Paul?

He falls back into stride with them.

(CONTINUED)

113 CONTINUED:

113

PAUL
Yeah, sorry. Go on.

114 EXT. IOWA STATE CAPITOL - DAY

114

It's cold. Steve is waiting on the steps, back to the wind. He has a manila envelope tucked under his arm. Duffy comes up the steps to meet him. As he nears...

STEPHEN
Told you it would work. That was beautiful, how you creamed their ass on the wires.

DUFFY
Thanks for the tip-off.

STEPHEN
My pleasure.

DUFFY
You got somethin' else for me?

Stephen hands the envelope to Duffy.

STEPHEN
Lists of every supporter we have in New Hampshire and the Super Tuesday states. Paul's pulling out of Iowa altogether.

DUFFY
No shit?

STEPHEN
The plan is to run a fifty state campaign. They're gonna blitz the fuck out of New Hampshire with ad-buys, hope to kick start a comeback. The same for Super Tuesday. Figure they'll get a jump on you while you're pouring all your beans into Iowa. Meantime the Governor'll be up in Manchester.

Stephen flips up his collar.

STEPHEN
If I were you? I'd hit those lists with as much direct mail and robo-calls as you can. Clog up the airwaves in New Hampshire, South Carolina and Florida.

(CONTINUED)

114 CONTINUED:

114

He starts down the stairs.

STEPHEN

Maybe even get your guy up in New Hampshire.

DUFFY

Two days before the Caucus?

STEPHEN

(over his shoulder)
That's where the Governor'll be.

115 INT. ELECTRICAL WORKERS UNION LOCAL 2725

115

Ben is standing before a secretary. The office is tacky as hell -- fake wood paneling, garish wall-to-wall carpeting. Cheap paintings. And a big "Electrical Workers Union - Local 2725" sign above the secretary's desk.

BEN

Hi. My name is Ben Walker. I was wondering if John Mahoney was in?

CUT TO:

116 INT. JOHN'S OFFICE

116

Ben is sitting across from John, who's smoking his umpteenth Winston of the day.

JOHN

What can I do for ya?

BEN

Stephen Myers sent me. Said he's a friend of yours?

JOHN

Stevie Myers? Shit. I went to high school with that fucker. We played basketball together.

BEN

Well Steve was wonderin' if you could do us a favor.

117 INT. PULLMAN HEADQUARTERS

117

Duffy is holding a war room session.

(CONTINUED)

DUFFY
(to the Field
Director)
I want you to direct mail and robo-
call every name on these lists.

He hands him the stack of papers Steve relayed. The
Field Director flips through the stack.

DUFFY
(to the Advance
Director)
Howard -- we're gonna nix the
Senator's current schedule. I
want events set up in Manchester,
Portsmouth and a few podunk towns
in the hills. Let's get the
Senator on a plane by tomorrow.

ADVANCE DIRECTOR
Two days out?

DUFFY
Morris is pulling out of Iowa.
We're gonna head him off at the
pass.

(to the Comm.
Director)
Susan, you get me ad-buys in
Boston tri-state area, Florida's
and South Carolina's major media
markets.

SUSAN
Could be up to twenty mil...

DAN
Fine.

FIELD DIRECTOR
(referring to the
stack)
Must be two hundred thousand names
here. It'll take a week just to
vet them all.

DUFFY
We don't have time. Just do it.

FIELD DIRECTOR
Fine, but budget-wise, the direct
mail alone will put us back --

(CONTINUED)

117 CONTINUED:

117

DUFFY

Listen, people -- I don't want any
bitching about how much money all
this is gonna cost. I want Morris
in the grave before February.

118 INT. STEPHEN'S MOTEL ROOM - CLOSE ON STEVE'S HAND - NIGHT18
opening the door, revealing Ida.

STEPHEN

Come on in.

She does.

IDA

Livin' in style, huh?

Stephen goes to the pizza box.

STEPHEN

Want any?

IDA

No thanks.

STEPHEN

Suit yourself.

He helps himself to another slice.

IDA

I thought you left...

STEPHEN

So did I.

IDA

And are you gonna tell me why I'm
here? Or did I drive out to this
shithole for no reason.

STEPHEN

Well seeing as we're *friends*, Ida,
I've decided to give you a story.

IDA

(not amused)
I'm listening.

(CONTINUED)

STEPHEN

Duffy is pulling out of Iowa. Figures they've got Iowa won already, so there's no need to stick around.

IDA

How do you know this?

STEPHEN

That's what my meeting with Duffy was about. He was trying to hire me away, and told me this was their plan. A 50-State Strategy.

IDA

Can you confirm that somehow?

STEPHEN

You want confirmation? I'd bet my left nut that Pullman'll be in Manchester within 24 hours.

IDA

Okay. Maybe I'll look into it.

STEPHEN

You do that.

IDA

I'd thank you for the tip, but I think we're beyond that.

STEPHEN

Just get the story above the fold. That'll be thanks enough.

Ben is sitting at Steve's former desk. He's on the phone, and he's got the *New York Times* website on his computer screen.

INTERCUT WITH Stephen at a 7-Eleven, staring at the print copy of the paper.

As they talk, we see the top headline "PULLMAN PULLS OUT OF IOWA, POURS MONEY INTO NEW HAMPSHIRE" with Ida's byline.

STEPHEN

You see this shit?

(CONTINUED)

BEN

It's beautiful.

STEPHEN

And the press conference?

BEN

In an hour. I've never seen the Governor so amped. He's chompin' at the bit to do this thing.

STEPHEN

Don't let 'im get off the talking points.

BEN

Come on, man. Gimme more credit than that.

STEPHEN

Oh, so you're a pro now?

BEN

Rookie of the year, motherfucker.

STEPHEN

You know that if this pans out, you got ten more months of this shit.

BEN

Bring it on.

Stephen laughs.

STEPHEN

Alright, go kick some ass.

John Mahoney, in electrician gear, is at the front desk with a couple other electricians.

FRONT DESK GIRL

Can I help you?

JOHN

Yeah, we're here to check the meters.

FRONT DESK GIRL

Ummm...okay. Lemme just make sure that --

(CONTINUED)

120 CONTINUED:

120

JOHN

It's alright, honey, we know where they are.

And before she can stop them, they're striding into the main office.

121 INT. MANCHESTER TOWN HALL - DAY

121

Senator Pullman is talking before a crowd of a few hundred.

PULLMAN

It's a good day to be in New Hampshire...

The crowd cheers. Duffy is in the back of the hall on the phone, looking distraught. He's staring at a copy of the *Times*.

INTERCUT WITH:

INT. IOWA HEADQUARTERS - WAR ROOM STAFF

On a speaker phone.

DUFFY

Somebody tell me what this shit is about.

The War Room staff look at one another. No one answers.

DUFFY

Is anyone fucking there?

FIELD DIRECTOR

I've got some more bad news, Tom. We did the direct mail, but it's all getting returned. Those lists you gave me? All those people are either dead or don't exist. That's two million bucks down the drain.

Duffy closes his eyes. It's starting to dawn on him what's happening.

DUFFY

(resigned)
What else?

(CONTINUED)

ADVANCE GUY

Our GOTV operation is paralyzed.
Every van in the state has already
been rented out. We're not gonna
be able to get folks to the
caucus.

DUFFY

Susan?

SUSAN

Well, we got a full media blitz
going in Boston, South Carolina,
Florida, like you asked. No snags
in terms of getting the air time.
But the problem is we don't have
money left for Iowa, and the
Morris folks are running heavy TV
and radio in-state.

DUFFY

Lemme guess. Morris is still in
Iowa, isn't he?

SUSAN

Yes. About to hold a press
conference actually.

Just then the lights black out in the room. The War Room
staff looks around, confused. Start chattering amongst
themselves.

DUFFY

Hello...?

But the phone line's dead.

SUSAN

I'll call him.

She dials Duffy up on her cell.

DUFFY

(answering)
What the hell just happened.

SUSAN

I think the power went out.

DUFFY

FUCK!

And as soon as he yells it, the entire crowd at the town
hall turns to look at Duffy.

122 INT. HOTEL FORT DES MOINES - CONFERENCE ROOM 122

Ben watches to the side as Governor Morris speaks to a room full of reporters.

GOV. MORRIS

My opponent may take this state for granted, but not me. I'll be campaigning here until the very last minute before the caucus rooms open, because that's what the people of Iowa deserve...

123 INT. MORRIS HEADQUARTERS - CLOSEUP OF THE COUNTDOWN SIGN - DAY 123

It reads "1 DAYS TO GO." A couple hands tear down the "1" and replace it with a "0" so it now reads "0 DAYS TO GO."

124 INT. MORRIS HEADQUARTERS - DAY 124

Paul is standing on a chair, speaking to the entire Iowa staff, a couple hundred people cramped into the main office room.

PAUL

Ray here tells me that we've got a fighting chance. The latest tracks show us in a dead heat.

The staff cheers. Paul waits for it to die down.

PAUL

Now I know it's been a rocky road the past week or so. But you all fought like dogs, did your jobs and kept this ship from goin' under. I know the Governor appreciates it. And I know I sure as hell do, so whatever happens tonight, I want you all to take pride in the work you've done. Next stop -- New Hampshire!

121 THE CROWD 121

cheers again. Someone starts chanting "Mor-ris! Mor-ris! Mor-ris!" until everyone is joining in. As Paul steps down from the chair, he's mobbed by a crowd of well-wishers. Paul's scanning the crowd, looking for someone. Turns to a nearby volunteer.

(CONTINUED)

PAUL

You work with Molly Kearns, right?

VOLUNTEER

Yeah.

PAUL

You seen here around?

VOLUNTEER

No, I haven't seen here around all day. I don't know where she is --

Ben works his way up to him, interrupts.

BEN

Hey, Paul?

Paul turns on a dime, letting the Molly issue go. Slaps Ben on the shoulder.

PAUL

My man Ben. You really pulled through.

BEN

Can I talk to you for a second?

125 EXT. STEPHEN'S MOTEL ROOM - NIGHT

125

Stephen zips up his roll-away suitcase. Puts on his jacket. Heads for the door. As he opens it, he turns back. The CAMERA SWIVELS to reveal Molly is in her underwear beneath the sheets.

STEPHEN

The room's reserved through tomorrow morning if you wanna spend the night.

MOLLY

Thanks.

STEPHEN

Well... I guess I'll see you around.

MOLLY

Or not.

STEPHEN

Or not.

(CONTINUED)

A brief pause as they take each other in. Stephen flashes her a smile. It's disarmingly ambiguous, both kind and malicious. Then Stephen abruptly exits, toting his bag.

Molly waits for a moment, then picks her phone on the nightstand and dials. A moment later.

MOLLY

Hey, Mom, it's me...

As Molly talks, she gets up from the bed, goes to look at herself in the mirror. She does so with a cool curiosity and confidence well beyond a girl of nineteen. This woman is longer a child.

MOLLY

I'm okay. I just wanted to call and say hi... Yeah, we'll see, but if we win...

She pauses and smiles to herself. It's a sly smile, a knowing smile.

MOLLY

... well, I'll probably take next semester off too. I'm learning more out here than I ever could in college, and you know what, Mom? I'm good at this. I'm good at what I do...

Stephen is signing his credit card slip at the front desk, as the Clerk watches.

STEPHEN

You mind calling me a cab?

CLERK

Isn't that your ride out there?

STEPHEN

Out where?

CLERK

(pointing)
There's a man been outside a while. Said he's here to pick you up.

Stephen turns and sees Paul leaning against a car in the drive-up area. Stephen picks up his bags and warily heads outside. The two men face off for a moment.

PAUL

Ben told me you were here.

Stephen doesn't respond.

PAUL

He also told me what you did. To help us out.

STEPHEN

Yeah... well, I guess no secret is safe.

Paul nods.

PAUL

Anyhow. I came here to say that I uh... I think I might've been too hard on you.

STEPHEN

Seriously, Paul, don't waste your breath.

PAUL

Would it be a waste of breath to ask you back?

Stephen considers this for a brief moment.

STEPHEN

Yeah, it would.

PAUL

There's nothing I can do to convince you?

STEPHEN

I don't think so.

PAUL

You headin' back to D.C.?

STEPHEN

For a while. Then we'll see.

PAUL

Well, can I at least drive you to the airport?

Stephen lifts his bags. Paul opens the trunk.

127

INT. PAUL'S CAR

127

The two men are driving in silence through downtown Des Moines. The streets are eerily empty, with everyone at the caucuses. Stephen stares straight ahead. Paul taps on the clock above the radio. It reads 8:45 P.M.

PAUL

Results should be comin' in.

He turns on the radio. Tunes it to an AM news station.

RADIO NEWS ANNOUNCER (V.O.)

... with 19 percent of precincts
reporting in Boone, Marshall and
Jasper counties, early exit polls
show that --

And Steve turns off the radio. Paul looks over at him, puzzled.

PAUL

Don't you wanna know who won?

STEPHEN

I already know.

PAUL

Is that right?

STEPHEN

Yeah.

PAUL

Who won then?

The briefest of pauses.

STEPHEN

I did.

There's something resolute and cold in the way Steve says it, almost terrifying. Paul's thrown off and doesn't know how to respond.

We PULL BACK to see the two men squarely THROUGH the windshield, both looking straight ahead as they drive in silence. Stephen turns and stares out the passenger window and...

We --

CUT TO:

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

CLOSEUP OF HIS FACE

We hear nothing but the soft whirr of the engine.
Stephen's half-looking at the streets of Des Moines, half-
looking at his own reflection. He closes his eyes. And
a fraction of a second later...

BLACK.

THE END

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