

NUMBERS GAME

Written By

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1. BLACK SCREEN.

--in the middle of a conversation.

TOM: (O.S.)
We had a horrible quarter.

JACK: (O.S.)
How horrible is horrible?

FADE IN

2. INT. COMMUNITY COLLEGE CAFETERIA - NIGHT

TOM CONWAY, JACK RITTER, and CHARLIE SILHOL sit in the cafeteria, all wearing suits, no jackets, shirt sleeves rolled up, loosened ties. Exhausted. Together, they make up the senior staff of the Kevin Sampson for President campaign. TOM serves as Campaign Manager, JACK is the Communications Director, and CHARLIE is the campaign's Political Director.

TOM:
Less than two million.

CHARLIE:
Are you *fucking* kidding me?

JACK:
There are congressional candidates raising more.

TOM:
It's over.

CHARLIE:
Wait a minute, it's not over, over.
Is it?

TOM:
We've taken two loans from the party already. And none of us have been paid in what, two months? By the time the numbers are released tomorrow afternoon, the media will be nailing our coffins shut. Our polling numbers have been anemic for the past seven weeks, too.
(a beat)
I'm going to recommend that we suspend the campaign.

JACK:
Are you sure there's nothing more
that we can do-

TOM:
Guys, I'm running on three hours of
sleep right now. I was up all
night last night crunching numbers
and running through scenarios. I'm
telling you, we're done.

A beat. Reality sinks in.

CHARLIE:
Damn it.

TOM:
At the end of the day, it's still
Kevin's decision, but he's gonna
look like Don Quixote if he
continues. The press is gonna have
a fucking field day tomorrow.

CHARLIE:
Kevin was the right guy-

TOM:
I know. This situation is never
easy.

JACK:
And it gets harder the more you
find yourself here.

TOM:
Exactly. And I hate to say it, but
this is what happens when your
polling numbers dip, and your
biggest bundlers take their money
elsewhere. Take solace in the fact
that it's early. We're all gonna
find jobs with the others in the
race.

CHARLIE puts his head in his hands and rubs his temples.

CHARLIE:
So what needs to happen in the here
and now?

TOM:
Now, I go tell Kevin.

JACK:
He doesn't know?

TOM:
He knows the totals. What he
doesn't know is that we can't come
back from this. There's no path to
victory.

JACK:
Do you want me in that meeting?

TOM:
We'll need you to draft a statement
soon, but let me have him
one-on-one first.

TOM goes to leave, stopping at the door before exiting.

TOM: (CONT'D)
I'm sorry guys.

JACK:
Don't do that. Don't take
responsibility for something that
was obviously a team failure.

TOM exits.

TOM: (O.S.)
How you feelin'?

KEVIN: (O.S.)
A little nervous.

CUT TO:

3. INT. CAMPAIGN BUS - NIGHT

TOM is talking to KEVIN SAMPSON privately, in a back room of
the campaign's bus.

TOM:
Nervous about the campaign, or this
conversation specifically?

KEVIN:
Both.
(a beat)
We can't overcome this can we?

TOM:
No.

KEVIN:
No way whatsoever?

TOM:
No way, whatsoever.

KEVIN:
Can we ask the National Committee--

TOM:
We owe the National Committee
several million at this point,
Jesus, Kevin.
(a beat)
I admire your desire to win, but
we're the Titanic. I told you at
the start of this thing that we
could have a few bad weeks, maybe a
bad month. We've had a horrendous
six months. When you're running
for President, you cannot have a
quarter like the one we just had.

KEVIN:
What about our polling numbers?

TOM:
They aren't much better. We've
been in the basement of this race
for almost two months.

KEVIN:
What about making a policy
announcement?

TOM:
That would give you a bump in
polling, but it would probably be
superficial. With a 24 hour news
cycle, we'll be lucky if we get a
three or four point bump, and even
then, it'll only last for a week.

KEVIN:
Tom, why does it feel like you're
against me on this?

TOM:
I am your Campaign Manager and
Political Consultant. I'm telling
you, in politics, money is
everything-

KEVIN:

I know that Tom! I'm the candidate. I'm not a fucking idiot!

TOM:

I know you're not an idiot, but the price tag on the White House is in the Billions these days. Billions with a B! You can debate all you want about how there's too much money in politics, but the bottom line is that you've got to make a certain amount of money each quarter to be able to sustain a campaign-

KEVIN:

So we had a shitty quarter-

TOM:

No, our totals dipped in the second quarter. We needed to *rebound* in the third quarter. And we haven't.

KEVIN:

This is because of Scott Brennan, isn't it?

TOM:

(matter-of-fact)

He gave his pile of money to our opponent. Certainly didn't help.

KEVIN rubs his forehead.

TOM: (CONT'D)

(consoling)

I know how much you wanted this. And if you call me up in four or eight years, and you ask for my help again, I will be behind you 100 percent.

(a beat)

But tonight, this election cycle. It's just not your time.

KEVIN:

Jack and Charlie know?

TOM:

Yes.

KEVIN:

Where do we go from here?

TOM:

Jack will draft a statement. The standard stuff, you know. You're suspending the campaign, you'll be back. You fought the good fight. Claim the victory in the defeat. The whole nine yards.

KEVIN:

And fade into obscurity-

TOM:

No. Go back to being the Governor of Arkansas. Focus on leaving office with a balanced state budget, and all the wonderful things that the American people like to see, so that four years from now, eight, really, if we're lucky, you run again.

KEVIN:

With you at the helm of the campaign?

TOM:

If you'll have me, yes.

KEVIN:

(A beat)

Where do you think I went wrong in all of this?

TOM:

I don't think you went wrong anywhere. I don't think any of us went wrong. I think that it's become damn near impossible to poll people.

KEVIN:

Do you think I'll ever have an honest shot?

TOM:

Give it time. This run gave you name recognition. You've established yourself as a principled, even-keeled guy. Who

(MORE)

TOM: (CONT'D)

knows, the pulse of the country
could be completely different four
years from now.

KEVIN:

This sucks.

TOM:

I know. And I'm sorry.

KEVIN:

For what?

TOM:

Any number of things. Most
notably, not hiring the right
pollsters.

KEVIN:

It's not your fault. I'd pick you
to run my campaign any day of the
week, and twice on Sunday.

KEVIN stands and goes to leave. He extends his hand to TOM,
who reciprocates as they shake hands.

KEVIN: (CONT'D)

Thank you. For everything. Tell
Jack I need to see him.

A knocking sound...

CUT TO:

4. INT. HOTEL HALLWAY - LATER

SUPER: "Six Hours Later"

TOM stands outside of JACK'S hotel room, knocking on his
door.

JACK answers it. He's wearing pajamas and has a glass of
scotch in his hand. He's not drunk (yet), but he looks like
shit. KEVIN'S campaign suspension speech happened hours
ago. It's now officially all over.

JACK:

Hey.

TOM:

You been drinking alone?

JACK:

Yup.

TOM:

Let me join you. That way, it's
not alcoholism.

TOM enters the room and JACK shuts the door.

CUT TO:

5. INT. JACK'S HOTEL ROOM - CONTINUOUS

TOM picks up the bottle from which JACK is drinking.

TOM:

How old is this?

JACK:

60 years.

TOM:

And you aren't saving it?

JACK:

I was.

(a beat)

Didn't feel right saving it for
something that isn't gonna happen.

TOM:

Jack, it's too soon to know that.
You'll be working for someone
else's campaign in another week or
two.

TOM pours himself a glass.

JACK:

I'm not going to anyone else.

TOM:

What?

JACK:

I'm not going to carry on this
charade anymore. This fantasy of
thinking that one day I'll be
working in the White House.

TOM:

Jack, c'mon man, you can't say
that. What about Danvers?-

JACK:
Too extreme.

TOM:
Ashbie?-

JACK:
Too moderate.

TOM:
David Lynch-

JACK:
Will be out of the race in two
weeks, you watch.

TOM:
You know something I don't?

JACK:
He fucked an intern.

TOM:
He fucked an *intern*?-

JACK:
Yeah.

TOM:
How'd you find that out?

JACK:
I've got a friend on the inside.
Although, it doesn't take a rocket
scientist. He's barely made an
impact, yet he's hemorrhaging
money. He's gotta be paying her
off.

TOM:
Holy shit.

JACK:
Yeah. It's gonna hit the fan and
go everywhere.

TOM:
(A beat)
So what's next then?

JACK:

I'll do what everyone does. Open my own firm. Run with the big dogs. Make my money on Congressional, Senate races. I may throw in some state house races, and a Governor's race here and there.

TOM:

So you're serious about this? You're gonna abandon the White House completely. You're never gonna work on another national campaign?

JACK:

I don't think so, no.

TOM:

Can I ask why?

JACK:

Tom, in my fifteen years of experience working on campaigns and government staff, I've learned I'm only good at messaging when I can control the message.

TOM:

And that's exactly what you'd be doing for the President-

JACK:

You and I both know that's bullshit. In the Brady Press Room, you're constantly defending a man whom the press believes is entirely indefensible. I'm at my best when I can craft a positive message-

TOM:

So you're really good at rhetoric, what do you want, a medal?!-

JACK:

I'm not just good at it, I'm the best there is-

TOM:

Says the man who sits here drinking
a 60 year old bottle of scotch
after his candidate just suspended
his campaign-

JACK:

Jesus, Tom, we both know that it
wasn't messaging that killed him!
You can't expect our campaign to
survive after our largest bundler
pulls the rug out from under us.

TOM:

Alright, I'll give you that. But
what I can't understand is how this
presidential is any different than
any of the other three you've
worked. Each time, you jumped ship
and joined another team-

JACK:

They all eventually lost, Tom!-

TOM:

Cry me a fuckin' river Jack, that's
the price of doing business in this
line of work!-

JACK:

Well it's really fucking old now!
(Jack regains his composure)
It's old, and none of the other
losers in the race can win.
America's lost their fucking mind,
and the pulse of this country now
beats to the rhythm of extremism.
There is no longer a candidate in
the field that I feel politically
aligned with.
(a beat)
And I'm not willing to sell my soul
for a white-house-dot-gov e-mail
address.

TOM finishes his drink, sets it on the table, and takes a
deep breath.

TOM:

It's not just about the e-mail
address and the business card,

(MORE)

TOM: (CONT'D)

Jack. It's about writing history instead of watching it.

JACK:

But we never write the history Tom. Not when it comes to the presidency. The media writes the history, and at the end of the day, the best presidencies are paved with the same materials used on the road to hell.

TOM finally puts his hands up in defeat.

TOM:

Well, it sounds like you already made your decision.

JACK:

I have.

TOM:

And you're sure?

JACK:

Yes.

TOM:

And there's nothing that I can do to change your mind?

JACK:

No. And I appreciate your effort, but I just don't think that I can work two doors down from the leader of the free world, and believe that that person is a douchebag.

TOM:

(sighs)

Well, if that's your reason, it's the right one. This is a shitty business to be in sometimes. You actually remind me of a guy I met once.

JACK:

Oh yeah?

TOM:
 (nodding)
 When I was fresh out of college, I has a great job working for U.S. Senator Dan Sullivan. Part of the job was attending Senior Citizen resource fairs. Local State Reps and State Senators would host them, you know?

JACK nods.

TOM: (CONT'D)
 I'm at one of these expos, and this guy comes up to me, probably in his mid-60s, and we're talking, and right before he leaves, he says to me, "you know what the definition of politics is, right?"

JACK:
 Oh, here we go-

TOM:
 I know, right? There are about a thousand responses to that question.

JACK:
 What was his?

TOM:
 The guy says "poli is Greek for many, and ticks are blood sucking insects."

JACK:
 Wasn't a fan of government, was he?

TOM:
 Probably not.

TOM holds up his glass, which is now empty.

TOM: (CONT'D)
 Mind topping me off?

JACK nods, taking the glass, and refills TOM'S drink before handing it back to him.

JACK:
 Can I ask you something?

TOM:

Sure.

JACK:

Why didn't you warn me that it would get like this?

TOM:

Like what exactly?

JACK:

Why didn't you warn me that I'd become jaded enough to give up on working for the president?

TOM:

Because it's important to dream, Jack.

JACK:

Thanks Yoda, what the fuck does that mean?

They briefly laugh.

TOM:

Let me tell you a story.

TOM takes a sip of his drink before setting it down beside him.

TOM: (CONT'D)

Fifteen years ago, I was working a presidential. It was a primary, and it was tight, but we had the edge.

JACK:

You were up?

TOM:

No, down by three points.

JACK:

Best place to be.

TOM:

Exactly. And we're coming down to Super Tuesday, and my dad has a heart attack.

JACK:

Shit.

TOM:
I spent Super Tuesday, as well as
the rest of the week, in a hospital
room, visiting him.

JACK:
Did your dad get better?

TOM:
Oh yeah, he's fine now.
(a beat)
My point is that it wasn't until
that moment that I realized that my
job was consuming my life.
(a beat)
Jack, it's important to have
dreams, but the reason why I don't
blame you for pursuing consulting
is because it's important to
recognize when your dream is
holding you back from living your
life.

TOM stands up, takes a piece of the hotel stationary, and
writes down an address before ripping the page off and
handing it to JACK.

JACK:
(reading the page)
What's this?

TOM:
It's an office building off of K
Street. I purchased some space for
a firm of my own.

JACK:
You need a partner?

TOM:
You're the first one that came to
mind.

JACK:
It'll take me a day or two to get
my things packed up, and make
travel arrangements.

TOM:
(nodding)
Want to meet next week? Maybe
Wednesday, and check it out?

JACK:

Sounds good. See you then.

TOM heads to the door, and leaves the room.

FADE TO BLACK.

ROLL CREDITS.

THE END.