

MCCALLAN

Not gonna happen, Sir. But good news -- West Nile Virus in Texas has been contained.

SHERMAN

Any new cases?

MCCALLAN

Not after the aerial spraying. We took out those mosquitoes. Shock and awe -- boom.

Sherman gives a nod, peels off, crossing paths with **DR. ALAN FISCHER** (39, a short, neurotic psychiatrist, a gentle soul).

SHERMAN

Dr. Fischer, how's the nation's mental health?

FISCHER

I'd have to say grim, Sir. Levels of stress, depression, anxiety, all on the rise.

SHERMAN

And how much of that is you personally?

FISCHER

(smiles)

I could account for a lot of it.

START

Sherman ducks into the OFFICE KITCHEN, tees up a cup of coffee at the machine. As it brews, he takes off his jacket, rolls up his shirt sleeve to his muscular bicep, where we see a NICOTINE PATCH. He rips it off and replaces it with a fresh one as his CHIEF OF STAFF, **LYDIA FERRARI** (40, tough, savvy, sexy, fiercely loyal) enters.

SHERMAN

These damn things don't work. Can I issue a Surgeon General's Warning that quitting smoking makes you a miserable sonofabitch?

FERRARI

Need more data. You were kind of a miserable sonofabitch before you quit.

It's said with affection and he gives a knowing smile -- these two are clearly longtime friends.

SHERMAN

Are you saying that as my friend or my Chief of Staff?

FERRARI

Yes. You get the script from the White House for the press conference?

SHERMAN

I didn't get a chance to look at it.

She knows him too well --

FERRARI

You threw it out.

SHERMAN

Yeah.

FERRARI

(not pleased)

After firing your speechwriter.

SHERMAN

I didn't fire him. I just told him to write up something useful.

FERRARI

And when he asked "like what?" -- you said "like the lunch specials in the cafeteria."

SHERMAN

I can never read that little sandwich board.

He grabs his coffee, heads for his office, Ferrari following.

FERRARI

You have a unique two-prong approach to key politicians. You ignore most and piss off the rest. Including the guy whose idea it was to hire you in the first place.

SHERMAN

You're not happy about my comment to the press yesterday.

FERRARI

I'm not happy about the timing.

SHERMAN

It's a fact. Seventy thousand senior citizens die every year from infections they got in the hospital. It's unacceptable.

FERRARI

And the Vice President was glad you chose to share that fact the same day he was in Florida plugging his health care victories for seniors.

SHERMAN

We're doctors not spin-doctors. People deserve the facts.

FERRARI

That may be, but public health is the Vice President's "issue" and he's got clout. He hired the President's Chief of Staff, he controls that little mutt, and he controls the agenda.

SHERMAN

Not our agenda. That was the deal.

END

He heads past his Assistant's desk, trailed by Ferrari into...

INT. SHERMAN'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

An American flag and a U.S. Commission Corps flag adorn the stately suite. Sherman approaches his immaculate DESK, discovers a SOFTBALL on it. Mystified, he looks to Ferrari:

SHERMAN

Do you know why this is here?

FERRARI

'Cause I put it there.

Sherman goes to pick it up, can't.

SHERMAN

It's --

FERRARI

Superglue.

SHERMAN

How do I get it off?

FERRARI

You don't. From now on, I want you to look at this ball before you make every decision. It is to remind you occasionally to play ball. Because I'm here to tell you, this whole game is won by people who play ball. And that means making nice with the White House, and their friends.