

HOUSE OF CARDS

"Chapter 1"

Written by

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EXT. UNDERWOOD RESIDENCE - NIGHT

SLOWLY PULL IN on the front door of a fashionable DC townhouse.

Off-screen, we hear the SOUND OF SCREECHING TIRES followed by a LOUD COLLISION. A CAR ALARM blares.

After a moment, the door to the townhouse opens and A MAN emerges, curious to see what the commotion is outside.

As the Man comes into the light we see he's dressed in a crisp TUXEDO with the collar unfastened, no tie. This is FRANCIS UNDERWOOD - Richard III, Iago and Hannibal Lecter all rolled into one. He has intelligent eyes, mischievous lips and a deep baritone dripping with Southern charm.

Francis glances down the street. He see a CAR backing up then PEELING AWAY from the parked car that it just hit. It disappears around the block.

As Francis heads purposefully toward the scene of the accident, we begin to hear a DOG WHIMPERING IN PAIN. Francis looks down at the ground. Francis' security detail guy STEVE (40s) appears beside him.

FRANCIS

Did you get a good look?

STEVE

Blue Toyota Camry. First two letters of the plate.

Francis and Steve gaze down at the suffering animal.

FRANCIS

The Warton's dog.

STEVE

Looks like a broken back.

FRANCIS

It's not gonna make it.

(to Steve)

Go next door and see if they're home.

Steve heads towards the neighbors' townhouse.

Francis kneels down beside the dog. It's in awful shape. He tenderly strokes the dog's head.

FRANCIS (CONT'D)

Shhhh. It's okay...

Francis looks up at us. The sound of CAR ALARM FADES.

FRANCIS (CONT'D)

(to the camera)

There are two kinds of pain. Good pain - the sort of pain that motivates, that makes you strong. Then there's bad pain - useless pain, the sort of pain that's only suffering. I welcome the former. I have no patience for the latter.

With cool-headed deliberateness, Francis calmly places a hand around the dog's neck and begins to put it out of its misery.

FRANCIS (CONT'D)

(to the camera)

Moments like this require someone like me. Someone who will act. Who will do what no one else has the courage to do. The unpleasant thing. The necessary thing.

The Dog's muffled whimpers cease. Francis looks down.

FRANCIS (CONT'D)

(to the dog)

There. No more pain.

He lets go. The sound of the CAR ALARM RISES again.

Francis stands as Steve approaches. The shook-up neighbors, JACK and BARBARA WARTON, follow several yards behind.

FRANCIS (CONT'D)

(aside, to Steve)

We need to leave in ten minutes.

STEVE

Car's ready.

Francis turns his attention to the couple. He gently approaches them with endless sympathy in his eyes.

FRANCIS

It was a hit and run.

JACK

(to his wife)

He must've jumped over the gate again...

Barbara wells up. Francis lays a hand on her shoulder.

FRANCIS

I'm so sorry. I'll have Steve file a report. We'll track them down.

INT. UNDERWOOD RESIDENCE - BATHROOM - A FEW MINUTES LATER

Francis stands at his sink, methodically washing his hands.

INT. UNDERWOOD RESIDENCE - BEDROOM - MOMENTS LATER

CLOSE ON FRANCIS' HANDS zipping up the back of a woman's elegant evening gown.

We PULL BACK to see that the gown belongs to Francis' wife - CLAIRE UNDERWOOD. She's the epitome of elegance and poise.

FRANCIS

(taking her in)
Stunning.

CLAIRE

(straightening his tie)
You too.

Francis looks composed, dignified. If we hadn't known, we never would have guessed what he was up to just moments before. He offers his arm to Claire.

FRANCIS

Ready?

INT. GRAND BALLROOM - SECONDS UNTIL MIDNIGHT

A loud, raucous count-down. DC's Democratic Party elite are watching the Times Square ball drop on massive monitors.

Three! Two! One! Noisemakers. Applause. People kiss and hug. The sound fades as one face in the crowd, Francis, turns to the camera.

We PAN to the stage to reveal a beaming GARRETT WALKER (late 40s), the apotheosis of leadership. He's flanked by his family - wife PATRICIA and two teenage sons. They lead the crowd in "Auld Lang Syne."

FRANCIS (V.O.)

President-Elect Garrett Walker. I might not like him, I might not believe in him, but it doesn't matter...

The camera finds Francis in the adoring crowd.

FRANCIS

(staring up at Walker)

*Anyone who can get 70 million
Americans to vote for him deserves
my respect.*

(to the camera)

*I helped get him elected. After
twenty-five years in Congress I can
tell which way the wind is blowing.*

We CUT TO to Walker's soon-to-be V.P. JIM MATTHEWS (early 60s) and his large gaggle of a family.

FRANCIS (V.O.)

*Jim Matthews - his Vice President.
Former Governor of Pennsylvania.
He did his duty delivering the
Keystone State. Now they'll put
him pasture. He has four years of
obscurity and impotence ahead of
him.*

CUT TO Walker's recently appointed Chief of Staff LINDA VASQUEZ. She's in the back of the ballroom, being prepped with make-up for a TV stand-up interview.

FRANCIS (V.O.)

*Linda Vasquez - Walker's Chief of
Staff. I like her even less than
Walker, but she's the gate keeper
to the White House. If you don't
want to be left standing out in the
cold, you can't ignore the person
holding the keys.*

The lights from the TV cam flip on, bathing her face in a bright glow. She instantly flashes a toothy smile.

We CUT BACK TO Francis standing in the crowd, his arm around Claire's waist. She's singing along with the crowd.

FRANCIS

*As for me - I'm the House Majority
Whip. In other words - I get things
done. When it comes to legislation
I make the magic happen. I
transform the impossible into the
probable.*

We ZOOM IN SLOWLY on Francis.

FRANCIS (CONT'D)

*But it's time to move up a rung.
I've paid my dues. I've backed the
right man. And now that he's won
I'll get my just reward. Give and
take, give and take, and so the
world spins.*

TIGHT on Francis' face, filling the frame.

FRANCIS (CONT'D)

Welcome to Washington.

TITLE AND CREDITS

Iconic shots of D.C. - the Capitol, the Washington Monument, Lincoln Memorial, Reflecting Pool, etc. But we see them from odd angles, cast in dark shadows or beneath moody skies. The feeling should be ominous.

We shift to interiors - dark hallways and restaurant booths where slow-motion, silhouetted figures conspire with one another.

Interlaced with all of this are recurring shots of dextrous hands expertly shuffling a deck of cards and dealing them out. The FINAL IMAGE should be of the dealer unveiling his hand to the camera: not four, but FIVE one-eyed jacks.

INT. FRANCIS'S CAR - NIGHT

Francis and Claire ride in the back the SUV. Steve drives.

CLAIRE

(she runs her hand through
his hair)

You should get a hair cut.

FRANCIS

You think?

CLAIRE

Just a little trim maybe. What
suit are you going to wear?

FRANCIS

For the meeting, or for the -

CLAIRE

For the announcement.

FRANCIS

My navy blue one, with the pin stripes.

CLAIRE

Good. You look handsome in that suit.

She leans into him, slips her hand between his thighs. She starts to kiss his neck.

FRANCIS

(in a whisper)

We're only five minutes from the house.

CLARIE

You're going to make me wait?

FRANCIS

(with a sly smile)

Patience is a virtue.

CLAIRE

I'm not feeling very virtuous tonight.

He smiles, leans in and kisses her.

INT. WASHINGTON HERALD - NEWSROOM - MORNING

A bustling bull-pen of writers, editors and assistants. Mounted TVs blare with 24 hour news channels. The steady clacking of keyboards wafts from a sea of cubicles.

ZOE BARNES (mid 20s) - a strong and hungry young reporter - weaves through the cubicles toward a corner office.

Inside LUCAS GOODWIN (mid to late 30s) - the Deputy Editor - is talking to BOB HAMMERSCHMIDT (early 50s) - the paper's grizzled Editor-in-Chief.

Zoe waits by the open door and listens in.

HAMMERSCHMIDT

...Only a nine vote majority in the House. Every bill that hits the floor will be a cock-fight.

LUCAS

Yeah it'll be ugly.

HAMMERSCHMIDT

Any guess what's on the legislative agenda?

LUCAS

No idea. All my regular sources won't say a word.

HAMMERSCHMIDT

Keep digging.

Hammerschmidt gives him a slap on the back and exits, brushing past Zoe, whom he barely notices.

ZOE

Morning Mr. Hammerschmidt.

He tries to place a name to the face.

ZOE (CONT'D)

Zoe Barnes.

HAMMERSHMITD

Metro.

ZOE

That's right.

HAMMERSCHMIDT

Keep up the good work.

He's gone. Zoe leans against the doorway a tad provocatively.

ZOE

Did it take him over a year to remember your name?

LUCAS

What can I do for you Zoe?

ZOE

I'm sick of the City Council.

LUCAS

I know you are. You tell me everyday.

ZOE

Move me online.

LUCAS

You want to schlep for the twitter feed? Be my guest.

ZOE

No. My own blog. Five hundred words. First person. Subjective.

LUCAS

Not gonna happen.

ZOE

Give me some freedom. I'll go underground. Win over staff members on the Hill. Give them an outlet to vent anonymously.

LUCAS

A glorified gossip column.

ZOE

A forum for the underpaid and overworked. We'll lift the veil. Tap into what's really going in.

LUCAS

This is the *Washington Herald* Zoe, it's not TMZ.

ZOE

You know how many people watch TMZ?

LUCAS

I couldn't care less.

ZOE

Which is why print journalism is dying.

LUCAS

If it's gonna die, it'll die with dignity. At least at this paper.

ZOE

You're stuck in the 20th century Lucas. You lack imagination.

LUCAS

Maybe so, but right now I'm not interested in imagination, I'm interested in copy.

ZOE

You're telling me to get back to work.

LUCAS

I am.

ZOE

But what you're really telling me
is to fuck off.

LUCAS

I'm telling you both.

Zoe is brimming with frustration but she's too cool of a
cucumber to let it show. She turns on her heels and departs
as quickly as she came.

INT. RUSSO'S OFFICE - MORNING

CHRISTINA MALONE (late 20s) - sexy and headstrong - ushers a
humorless looking LOBBYIST into Rep. Peter Russo's office.
Christina is Russo's Executive Assistant. Russo is smart and
amiable, but a bit of rascal.

CHRISTINA

Mr. Chapman, from Horizon Trust...

RUSSO

Henry. Great to see you. Thanks
Christina.

She leaves, closing the door behind her. The two men sit.

RUSSO (CONT'D)

How long are you in town for?
Staying for the Inauguration? I
can hook you up if you -

CHAPMAN

I'm not interested in parties. I'm
interested in the zoning laws you
promised to get changed in your
district. We've got 12 million
sitting in escrow for an empty lot
we can't build on.

RUSSO

Yes, I know. And believe me, I'm
on it. But you gotta understand,
that's a local municipal issue. I
can't just pick up the phone and -

CHAPMAN

You can't? That's not what you led
us to believe when you begged for
fifty grand in donations.

RUSSO
 (realizes what he's up
 against)
 Right. Well...

The phone rings. Russo looks sympathetically to Chapman.

RUSSO (CONT'D)
 One sec.
 (picks up the phone)
 Christina I told you - no calls.
 Not while I'm meeting with Mr.
 Chapman.
 (pause)
 The President-Elect?

Chapman's eyes widen.

RUSSO (CONT'D)
 Put him through Christina.
 (short beat)
 Mr. President-Elect...Thank you, we
 were pleased to win by double
 digits...Absolutely, anything you
 need...

CUT TO Christina at her desk outside the office. She's
 whispering into a receiver.

CHRISTINA
 I need you to put that long, wet,
 talented tongue of yours between my
 thighs and make me squeal like
 Monica Lewinsky.

CUT BACK TO Russo on his phone. Laughs boisterously.

RUSSO
 Me too, me too...Okay, thanks again
 Mr. President-Elect.

And he hangs up. Chapman is impressed.

RUSSO (CONT'D)
 I'm sorry - what were we
 discussing?

INT. BLAIR HOUSE - OFFICE - DAY

As the Aide lets Francis into the office, we see that it's
 Vasquez, not Walker, who is behind the desk. Francis
 registers a whiff of surprise.

VASQUEZ
 Thanks for coming Frank.
 (gestures at a chair)
 Please...

FRANCIS
 (as he sits)
 Will the President-Elect be joining
 us?

VASQUEZ
 No. He told me to apologize on his
 behalf. I'll brief him though.

Francis has no other choice but to roll with the punches. He
 hands Vasquez a manila folder.

FRANCIS
 This is a memo I drafted on the
 Middle East policy we've been
 developing. I think we need a more
 direct way to frame our approach.
 We'll steal from Reagan - trickle-
 down diplomacy. If we tackle -

VASQUEZ
 Frank - I'm going to stop you right
 there.
 (half beat)
 We're not nominating you for
 Secretary of State.

A huge blow. Francis stares at Vasquez in stunned silence.

VASQUEZ (CONT'D)
 I'm sorry, I know he made you a
 promise, but circumstances have
 changed.

FRANCIS
 The nature of promises, Linda, is
 that they remain immune to changing
 circumstances.

VASQUEZ
 Garrett has thought long and hard
 about this, and he's decided we
 need you to stay in Congress.

FRANCIS
 I built the campaign's foreign
 policy platform from the ground up.
 (MORE)

FRANCIS (CONT'D)

I briefed him, I prepped him for debates. And the deal we agreed upon was -

VASQUEZ

I'm sorry Frank. If it had been up to me I would've handled this differently. I wouldn't have waited this long to tell you.

FRANCIS

So you knew this was what you were going to do.

VASQUEZ

It's been an evolving discussion.

FRANCIS

(slowly)
An evolving discussion...

VASQUEZ

Frank...

FRANCIS

I got fourteen conservative Democrats in key states to endorse him. I was personally responsible for raising over six million dollars in contributions to the campaign, seven million for House races to keep hold of our majority in -

VASQUEZ

You're right. We wouldn't have won without your help. But now we have to lead, and that means making tough choices.

(half beat, now she has
the initiative)

Our first order of business is Education Reform. A complete federal overhaul. We want you in the House, doing what you do best - counting votes and delivering legislation.

FRANCIS

I've paid my dues Linda. I deserve this.

VASQUEZ

There are lots of deserving people
Frank. We can't nominate them all.

FRANCIS

I'd like to speak with Walker
personally.

VASQUEZ

The decision is made.

The two stare each other down like gunslingers.

VASQUEZ (CONT'D)

We need you Frank. Desperately.
Just not in the cabinet. I'm asking
for your help here. Are you going
to stand beside us?

It takes every ounce of will to swallow his pride.

FRANCIS

Yes. I will.

VASQUEZ

I'm very glad to hear that.

FRANCIS

May I ask - if not me, then who?

VASQUEZ

(hesitates, then...)
Michael Kern.

He says the following with a smile, but underneath the table
we can see Francis cracking his knuckles with rage.

FRANCIS

Michael Kern...That's an excellent
choice.

INT. CLEAN WATER FOR AMERICA (CWA) OFFICES - DAY

TO ESTABLISH: A large polished steel sign above a reception
desk that reads:

CLEAN WATER FOR AMERICA

We TRACK an older woman (50s) - EVELYN - carrying a folder
past side offices to CLAIRE'S OFFICE. She knocks on the
door, which is slightly ajar.

CLAIRE (O.S.)

Come in.

INT. CWA OFFICES - CLAIRE'S OFFICE - DAY

Claire is behind her desk. Evelyn sits across from her.

EVELYN

Maybe we should do this in steps.
A couple people at first - see how
that goes, then if we decide --

CLAIRE

This isn't about operational
efficiency, Evelyn. This is about
freeing up money. It's a new year.
It's time to clean house a little.
Spring cleaning, right?

EVELYN

It's not spring - it's January.

Claire just stares at her. That was a stupid thing to say.

EVELYN (CONT'D)

I just want to make sure we don't
cripple our ability to function
properly in the process.

CLAIRE

I hear you, but if I thought that
was going to be an issue, I
wouldn't be asking for this list in
the first place.

EVELYN

(shifts in her chair)
Okay...

Claire feels the needs to address Evelyn's discomfort. She
leans forward, sympathetically.

CLAIRE

We went over this before the
holidays.

EVELYN

I know...

CLAIRE

You didn't mention anything then.

EVELYN

I know...

CLAIRE

We want CWA to maximize it's potential, don't we?

EVELYN

Of course.

CLAIRE

So can we agree it's time to reorganize? To raise the bar?

EVELYN

Yes.

CLAIRE

Good. Put a proposal together.

Evelyn stands and exits, closing the door behind her. Claire glances at her watch. Picks up her phone. Dials. Waits. No answer. Leaves a message.

CLAIRE (CONT'D)

(into the phone)

It's me. I feel like an idiot leaving messages like this. Call me back.

She hangs up. We linger on her for a moment. An expression of frustration and concern.

INT. WASHINGTON HERALD - NEWSROOM - NIGHT

JANINE SKORSKY (late 30s) - hard-edged and ruthless - is punching away at her computer. Zoe leans over her cubicle partition, lingers for a moment.

JANINE

(not looking up)

What is it Zoe?

ZOE

I know you're going to have your hands full at the White House, with the new administration and everything, so if you need somebody to do research, punch out background -

JANINE

I think I'll be fine.

ZOE

But if things get hectic, if you need any help or -

JANINE

So you can blog about rubbing shoulders with the big boys?

ZOE

Lucas told you.

JANINE

No offense, Zoe, but I don't have time to ween you off your training wheels.

Wham - a slap in the face. Zoe eats it.

ZOE

Okay. Just thought I'd ask.

She walks off, humiliated, fuming.

INT. UNDERWOOD RESIDENCE - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

TIGHT on Claire sitting alone, stock still, face grim.

We hear the front door open. In the background we see Francis enter the room. He looks weary, spent.

He comes into the foreground, sits down across from her. Shame in his eyes. Disappointment in hers.

FRANCIS

Claire --

CLAIRE

You didn't call me.

FRANCIS

I was --

CLAIRE

(harder this time)

You didn't call me, Francis.

Before Francis can defend himself she's on her feet, all the pent-up energy from waiting bursting forth. She's furious.

CLAIRE (CONT'D)

When you didn't call me right after I wondered. When I called and you didn't call back I knew.

(MORE)

CLAIRE (CONT'D)

You don't not call me. Not when it's this big.

FRANCIS

You're right.

CLAIRE

When have we ever avoided each other?

FRANCIS

I wanted to figure out a solution first.

CLAIRE

Did you?

FRANCIS

No.

A long beat.

CLAIRE

So they lied to your face.

FRANCIS

For months.

CLAIRE

And you didn't see it coming?

FRANCIS

It was always a possibility. My mistake wasn't in failing to consider this scenario; it was in miscalculating the risk. I thought it was almost impossible.

CLAIRE

You're usually good at sussing out liars.

FRANCIS

I am. But this time...
(shakes his head)
Hubris. Ambition.

CLAIRE

Those aren't bad things.

FRANCIS

They are when they blind you.

CLAIRE
Aren't you angry?

FRANCIS
Of course I am.

CLAIRE
Then where's your anger?

FRANCIS
You want to me lash out at Walker?
At Vasquez? You want me to go to
the press and make mess of
something I can't change?

CLAIRE
I want more than what I'm seeing.

FRANCIS
How kind of you.

CLAIRE
I'm not doling out sympathy.

FRANCIS
I didn't ask for it.

CLAIRE
You're better than this, Francis.

FRANCIS
(genuinely)
I'm sorry, Claire.

CLAIRE
No. That I won't accept.

FRANCIS
What?

CLAIRE
Apologies.

Claire looks hard at him. A typical wife might smother him with sympathy, but not Claire. She knows that's the worst thing she could do for a man like Francis.

CLAIRE (CONT'D)
My husband doesn't apologize, even
to me.

Claire walks out of the room toward the stairs. We follow her.

As she ascend the stairs we hear a CRASH in the living room, something SHATTERING. She pauses without turning, just a fraction of a moment, then continues up the stairs.

BACK ON Francis in the living room. Rage in his eyes. We see an overturned coffee table. Shards from a broken vase on the floor. He rights the table. Bends down, picks up the larger shards and places them on top.

He walks over to the side window. There's a pack of cigarettes and a lighter neatly placed on the sill. He raises the window. Opens the pack. It's nearly full. He pulls out one of the cigarettes. Perches himself on the sill.

He turns to us, cooled down by now.

FRANCIS

(to the camera)

My wife and I don't smoke. Once a week maybe. Together at this window. It's our time to escape. To be ourselves.

Lights the cigarette. Takes a long drag.

FRANCIS (CONT'D)

(looks out the window)

But I'm alone now.

(back to us)

She's left me this way. To myself. To my thoughts. It's not a punishment; it's a challenge.

He looks back out the window. Takes another drag.

INT. UNDERWOOD RESIDENCE - BEDROOM - DAWN

Claire is in bed as morning light seeps in through the window. The bed is empty beside her. Her eyes are open. She stares at the ceiling. The alarm beeps. She reaches over, turns it off.

INT. UNDERWOOD RESIDENCE - STAIRS - MORNING

Claire descends the stairs in her bathrobe, freshly showered. When she gets to the bottom of the stairs she sees Francis sitting beside the window just as he was when she left him the night before. He doesn't turn to her. She pauses for a moment, taking in the tableau, then walks to the kitchen without a word.

INT. UNDERWOOD RESIDENCE - KITCHEN - MORNING

TIGHT on two cups in an espresso machine filling with steaming coffee.

INT. UNDERWOOD RESIDENCE - LIVING ROOM - MORNING

CLOSE ON Francis, taking a cigarette out of the pack. It's nearly empty now. He lights it. Inhales. Claire enters with the espressos. Sits down beside him, places one of the cups at his side. A moment. He turns to her.

FRANCIS
Did you sleep?

CLAIRE
No.

Claire waits for more. Francis takes a drag.

FRANCIS
I know what I have to do.

CLAIRE
Of course you do.

FRANCIS
We'll have a lot of nights like this.

CLAIRE
That doesn't worry me.

FRANCIS
I'm not sure how yet.

CLAIRE
But you will.

Francis hands her the cigarette. Picks up the espresso and downs it with one gulp.

FRANCIS
I should get to work.

CLAIRE
I laid a suit out for you upstairs.
The navy blue one.

He gives her a kiss on the forehead. Heads for the stairs. We FOLLOW HIM as he ascends. He turns to us.

FRANCIS

(to the camera)

*I love that woman. I love her more
than sharks love the smell of
blood.*

INT. UNDERWOOD'S OFFICE - KAUFBERGER'S OFFICE - DAY

TIGHT on screen. MICHAEL KERN (50s) - clean-cut and handsome - is speaking at a lectern, flanked by Walker and Vasquez. The ticker-tape reads: KERN NOMINATED FOR SEC. OF STATE.

CUT TO DOUG STAMPER (early 40s) - Francis's well-connected, amoral and loyal Chief-of-Staff - with NANCY KAUFBERGER (50s) - Francis's Exec. Assistant. They're watching the news on a flat screen in Nancy's Office.

NANCY

He's had work done. A chin tuck.
Probably botox. He definitely dyes
his hair.

(after a beat)

Maybe the GOP won't confirm him.

STAMPER

Oh no, they'll confirm him. Walker
is riding high. It's not worth the
political capital. They'll save
the big guns for legislative
battles.

NANCY

Hey Doug...

He looks up to see Francis striding in from the main door. Stamper grabs a folder. The boss is here. It's work time. Stamper and Nancy head out to intercept him.

STAMPER

(opening the folder)

At 9:30 you're sitting down with -

FRANCIS

(in stride)

Cancel everything. Stamper, you're
with me.

Stamper tosses a glance to Nancy. She's on it. Francis makes for his office. Stamper follows.

INT. FRANCIS'S (INNER) OFFICE - DAY

Francis and Stamper behind closed doors. Stamper is trying to process it all.

STAMPER

How do we get there...?

FRANCIS

We'll seize opportunities. We'll make opportunities. React. Respond. This is a time for broad strokes.

STAMPER

I just don't understand how're we're going to -

FRANCIS

For now we keep focused on what's right in front of us.

STAMPER

Kern.

FRANCIS

Yes. And the Education Bill.

STAMPER

Who's drafting it?

FRANCIS

Vasquez hasn't told me yet. But I'm guessing it'll be Harry Blythe.

STAMPER

He'll need to be handled.

FRANCIS

Which is exactly why she wants me here instead of the State Department.

STAMPER

I can start digging on Kern.

FRANCIS

Get me names first. Let's have somebody to give them once Kern is gone. And we should have a front man for that. In case we need to distance ourselves.

STAMPER

Who do you want?

FRANCIS

A lost child. Somebody we can save from himself.

STAMPER

I'll keep my ear to the ground.

FRANCIS

Okay, I'm going to get a bite to eat. I haven't eaten in two days.

INT. CAPITOL MESS HALL - LATER

Francis waits at the checkout. Junk food heaped on his tray.

We hear some commotion. Entering the mess hall is Michael Kern followed by a couple of AIDES. People are congratulating him. He's smiling like a pig in shit.

Francis makes eye contact with Kern. Smiles. Gives him a big thumbs up. Kern nods with appreciation. Gets intercepted by another well-wisher.

Francis picks up his tray and turns to us, the smile on his face instantly gone.

FRANCIS

(to the camera)

A wink, a nod, a little warmth and grace - and with that one wraps oneself in a cloak of civility. Kern's not the sharpest knife in the rack, but he's not dull either. He knows I was up for the nomination. He knows I must be jealous. But he doesn't need to know the danger he's in. Let him bask in the limelight for now. I'll sharpen my blade in the dark. He'll still be smiling when I slit his throat.

INT. EPISCOPAL CHURCH - MORNING

The service is chock full of DC's political heavyweights, including Francis and Claire seated near the back. A MINISTER is in the midst of delivering a sermon.

MINISTER

(reads from scripture)

"And whosoever shall exalt himself shall be abased; and he that shall humble himself shall be exalted."

Matthew 23:12.

(looks up)

I'd like to speak today on the subject of Humility. A lot of you just won re-election. If you hadn't, you wouldn't be sitting here.

A smattering of chuckles among the congregation. CLOSE on Francis as the minister continues.

MINISTER (O.S.) (CONT'D)

Of course you should be enjoy your success, and be grateful for it. But never let your gratitude sour into pride. You'll have many challenges ahead over the next couple of years. And a person's character is not determined by how he or she enjoys victory, but rather how he or she endures defeat...

EXT. EPISCOPAL CHURCH - LATER

We're following Francis and Claire as everyone files out.

FEMALE VOICE (O.S.)

Claire...

They're approached by another power couple: the longtime Senator CHARLES HOLBURN and his socialite wife FELICITY, both immaculately groomed, styled and outfitted.

CLAIRE

Hello Felicity.

Holburn gravitates toward Claire, Holburn toward Francis.

HOLBURN

Frank.

FRANCIS

(shaking his head)

Morning Charles.

We track Claire and Felicity, a few paces ahead of the men.

FELICITY
 (to Claire,
 sympathetically)
 How are you?

CLAIRE
 Terrific.

FELCITY
 I'm sorry about the...you know.
 (nods back toward Francis)

CLAIRE
 Oh, you mean the...

FELCITY
 Just awful. Charles and I were so
 upset when we heard.

CLAIRE
 (smiling)
 It's nothing. Really. Between you
 and me, I think Francis is
 relieved. He feels much more at
 home in Congress.

We JUMP OVER to Francis and Holburn.

HOLBURN
 I would've bet a million dollars
 Walker was going to choose you.

FRANCIS
 (laughs it off)
 Good thing you have a million
 dollars to spare.

HOLBURN
 But Kern - come on. That's a real
 insult, isn't it? He's got half
 the experience you do, and less
 than half the brain.

FRANCIS
 He must've had his reasons.

HOLBURN
 This is bad for business. We
 needed a strong-man in the State
 Department, not a straw man.

FRANCIS
 We'll make do.

HOLBURN

You're a bigger man than me. I'd
be pissed as hell.

Francis and Claire catch each other's eyes. They appreciate the sympathy of the Holburns, but they abhor sympathy as a concept. It feels humiliating.

INT. RUSSO'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

A cluttered high-rise apartment. Russo and his secretary Christina are having wild, wall-pounding sex.

As soon as Russo climaxes with a primal yawp, he rolls over and pours himself a drink from the night stand. Takes a sip. He hands her the glass. Grabs the bottle for himself. Takes a swig. Regards the bottle.

RUSSO

This is nice, where'd you get it?

CHRISTINA

The Speaker's holiday party. I
snuck into the V.I.P. room and
stole it.

RUSSO

'92. Wow. Twenty years old.

CHRISTINA

Seems about right for you.

RUSSO

Funny.

CHRISTINA

(starts to dress)

I'm almost thirty. That's ancient
in your book.

RUSSO

I don't discriminate when it comes
to age.

CHRISTINA

When's the last time you hired a
forty year old assistant?

RUSSO

That doesn't mean I haven't, or
that I wouldn't.

CHRISTINA
As long as they're good in bed.

RUSSO
Oh come on.

CHRISTINA
You do have a reputation, Peter.

RUSSO
For being a good lover?

CHRISTINA
For fucking the help.

RUSSO
Where's this coming from?

CHRISTINA
You're not just gonna get your
kicks, then toss me aside for some
slut straight out of college?

RUSSO
I can't. You'd sue me for sexual
harassment.

CHRISTINA
I'm serious.

RUSSO
So we're having that conversation
now?

CHRISTINA
It's been six months. This isn't
just a little office fling anymore.

RUSSO
You want me to say the three magic
words, don't you? One of which
starts with an L. Okay, I'll say
them.

Christina turns to him longingly. He takes her hand.

RUSSO (CONT'D)
Lick my balls.

She slaps him playfully. He wrestles her to the bed.
They're both laughing. Now he's sincere.

RUSSO (CONT'D)

I love you. I do. I love you
Christina.

She smiles, rolls on top, kisses him.

CHRISTINA

I love you too.

A beat.

RUSSO

So will you lick my balls now?

She pushes him down for round two.

INT. KENNEDY CENTER - LOBBY - NIGHT

A full lobby. OPERA-GOERS dressed to the hilt. A decidedly middle-aged crowd. Gray haired men, matronly women.

We ZERO in on Francis and Claire. People seem to be parting subtly around them - a wide berth. Francis got snubbed for the nomination and everyone knows it.

And OLDER MAN and his wife pass by. The Older Man gives Francis a little double-pat on the shoulder - a consolation. As Francis turns the Older Man and his wife have already moved on. The Older Man gives Francis a slight piteous nod.

From Francis' POV we see the Older Man whisper into his wife's ear. She looks back at Francis and Claire. Francis' gaze shifts to small GROUPING of couples, all stealing glances his way and speaking in hushed tones to one another. The gossip is palpable.

FRANCIS

I need some air.

Claire picks up immediately on his discomfort.

CLAIRE

I'll see you at the seats.

She disappears through the doors to the auditorium as we follow Francis toward the door.

EXT. KENNEDY CENTER - NIGHT.

Francis stands outside, scrolling through his blackberry, more to look like he's busy than because he is.

A cab pulls up. Zoe emerges. She's in a strapless black dress that hugs every curve. It isn't very fancy, but it sure gets the job done.

It's cold. She's not dressed for the weather. Her headlights are FULLY ON. She turns to her date, BRIAN, early 30s - a typical Capitol Hill climber. He's getting out of the cab behind her.

ZOE

Gimme your jacket.

He pulls off his jacket and hands it to her. She drapes it over the front of her dress and starts hurrying to main doors. She's not going to be late for this.

As she climbs the steps Francis notices her - more out of instinct than interest. He glances at her ass ever so briefly as she passes. And it's an exceptional ass. We can tell from the form-fitting fabric that she's wearing a thong.

Once Zoe has passed, Francis turns to his attention back to the blackberry.

INT. KENNEDY CENTER - OPERA - NIGHT.

Francis slips into the booth and takes his seat next to Claire. She doesn't even look at him, but she reaches out and takes his hand.

The SOUND of an orchestra tuning. The LIGHTS begin to fade. PUSH INTO Francis' face as the first subtle strands of MUSIC begin to play and we CUT TO:

INT. UNDERWOOD RESIDENCE - BASEMENT - NIGHT.

Still TIGHT on Francis' face, the MUSIC carrying us into the scene, we PULL BACK to reveal that he's wearing a headset with a microphone. It's dim. Blue light flickers in his eyes.

As we PULL BACK MORE we see that he's slumped in a chair, still in his tuxedo (*sans* tie) with an Xbox controller in his hands. His thumbs and fingers deftly fly back and forth, but the rest of his body is totally motionless - the calm and focus of a true gamer.

A silhouette enters the frame. It's Claire. She places her hand gently on Francis's shoulder. He pulls the headset off. The MUSIC cuts out abruptly. From the headphones, we HEAR the distant, tinny SOUND of other online gamers.

Things like a 12 year-old kid taunting: "Imma cap your ass muthafucka" and some redneck retorting: "Suck it dickless" The lowest of low culture, if you can even call it culture.

FRANCIS

Going to bed?

CLAIRE

Are you coming?

FRANCIS

I'll be there in a bit.

CLAIRE

Don't stay up all night.

Claire leans down and kisses him on the forehead. Leaves. Francis puts his headset back on. The online TAUNTS and EXCLAMATIONS resume, full-force.

CUT TO the flat-screen TV. It's Grand Theft Auto - a complete bloodbath. Francis' avatar starts blowing people away. Death. Carnage. Glorious vulgarity.

INT. CAB - NIGHT.

The cab pulls up in front of Zoe's apartment. Zoe and Brian are in the back seat. Zoe's got Brian's jacket draped over her. She hands it to Brian.

ZOE

Thanks so much. I'll call you.

She gives him a platonic peck on the cheek. Opens the door.

BRIAN

Wait...

She turns back.

BRIAN (CONT'D)

I thought you had a good time.

ZOE

I did. I've never been to the opera before. I loved it.

BRIAN

So...can I come up?

She just looks at him patiently.

BRIAN (CONT'D)
I guess that's a no.

ZOE
You're really sweet, Brian. I'm
sorry if I gave you the wrong idea.

He looks dejected. She's not going to let this turn into a conversation.

ZOE (CONT'D)
Thanks again for inviting me. It
was wonderful.
(squeezes his hand)
Have a good night.

And she's out of the cab. She throws one last glance back at Brian, a pity glance. Then she's off. Quick, clean, relatively painless.

INT. ZOE'S APARTMENT - NIGHT.

The sound of keys, the bolt unlocking. The door opens and Zoe enters. Tosses her purse on the bed (just a mattress on the floor, no bed frame) and slips off her heels.

Goes to the fridge. It's pretty empty - just yogurt, some old take-out containers, an empty Britta. She grabs a yogurt. Fishes a power bar out of a drawer. Heads over to her computer - a laptop amidst of a sea of papers and notes. Her desk is just a plywood board perched on cinder blocks.

She dips the power bar directly into the yogurt (no spoon) as the computer screen jumps to life. Her fingers fly over the keyboard. New window. Email. Password. Inbox. Mostly work stuff. But there's a new message at the very top:

FROM: Photogangsta@WashingtonHerald.com SUBJECT: Frank Underwood ASS-WHIPPED.

She clicks on the message. A photo fills the screen: Francis checking out Zoe's ass when she passed him on the steps of the Kennedy Center.

There's text beneath the photo: *If you want em to take you seriously, maybe wear more than G-string?*

Command N. New window. Keys punched at lightning speed. Google Search. "Frank Underwood." Wikipedia comes up. Click. The words "House Majority Whip" stick out. Zoe considers this for a moment. Clicks back to the other screen. Looks at the photo. Hits reply. Types quickly:

He looks pretty serious to me.

Send. Boom. Done.

INT. UNDERWOOD'S (INNER) OFFICE - MORNING

Underwood is working at his desk. Stamper knocks and peeks his head in the door.

STAMPER

She's here.

FRANCIS

Show her in.

Stamper disappears. Francis turns to the camera.

FRANCIS (CONT'D)

Quite rare for a President's Chief-of-Staff to climb up the Hill. A gesture of respect, no doubt - which I appreciate, even if it comes at a cost. Let's see if I was right about Harold Blythe.

He cranes his head to see her approaching down the hall.

FRANCIS (CONT'D)

Here she comes - my lesser but necessary half.

Vasquez enters carrying a folder. Francis stands.

FRANCIS (CONT'D)

Good morning Linda. I appreciate you making the trip over.

VASQUEZ

Of course. My pleasure.

FRANCIS

I assume we're discussing Education?

VASQUEZ

First things first...

She places the folder on his desk and opens it.

VASQUEZ (CONT'D)

The seating chart for the Inauguration.

(MORE)

VASQUEZ (CONT'D)

(points)

Do these work for you and Claire?

FRANCIS

Wow.

VASQUEZ

Which comes with a complimentary set of tickets to the Red and White Ball.

FRANCIS

Claire will be over the moon.

VASQUEZ

Good, I'm glad.

(closes the folder)

So - Education. We have Harry Blythe drafting the legislation.

Francis tosses us a quick glance. His guess was correct.

VASQUEZ (CONT'D)

You can imagine the bind that puts us in.

FRANCIS

The bill's going to be too be two steps to the left of Karl Marx.

VASQUEZ

Education's been his baby for twenty years. We have to let him take the lead.

FRANCIS

It'll be hard to drum up much confidence.

VASQUEZ

Which is why I'm here.

FRANCIS

You want me to advise him. Bring him toward the middle.

VASQUEZ

(relieved he gets it)

We need to this bill to pass smoothly.

FRANCIS

Consider it done, Linda.

VASQUEZ

I know it's a lot to put on your plate...

FRANCIS

You've got 100 days before the honeymoon is over. Anything you want to put on my plate, feel free.

INT. UNDERWOOD'S (OUTER) OFFICE - FRONT DOOR - DAY

Francis opens the door for Vasquez. As she's leaving --

VASQUEZ

Keep me posted?

FRANCIS

Let me talk to Blythe. I'll check in with you later this week.

VASQUEZ

Terrific.

Vasquez leaves. Francis watches her go. He speaks to us --

FRANCIS

She's wary. I can see it in her eyes.

(and now to the camera)

Walker's political capital rises or falls with the success of this Bill. And I need to be at the center of it.

He closes the door, walks back toward his inner office.

FRANCIS (CONT'D)

Vasquez might not trust me as far as she can throw me. But she doesn't have to. If I prove myself indispensable, she can't afford to throw me very far.

He pops his head into Nancy Kaufberger's office.

FRANCIS (CONT'D)

Nancy, set up a call with Harold Blythe.

Continues toward his office.

FRANCIS (CONT'D)
(calls out)
Doug?

Stamper pops out from his.

FRANCIS (CONT'D)
You have a list for me?

STAMPER
Just finished.

FRANCIS
My office.

INT. FRANCIS'S OFFICE - AFTERNOON

Francis and Stamper are having a brainstorming session.

STAMPER
Ferguson?

FRANCIS
Too old.

STAMPER
Willis?

FRANCIS
Too stupid.

STAMPER
Boyd?

FRANCIS
Queer.

STAMPER
Really?

Francis gives him a look.

STAMPER (CONT'D)
He's married with two kids.

FRANCIS
Come on.

STAMPER
What about Catherine Durant?

A beat. Francis leans back in his chair.

FRANCIS
Interesting. Catherine Durant.

INT. CWA OFFICE - CLAIRE'S OFFICE - DAY

Claire at her desk. Evelyn sits across from her. Claire peruses a document.

CLAIRE
Can we do any better?

EVELYN
Not without totally crippling our day to day. And we might have to pull out of some of our impact studies.

CLAIRE
(hands back the document)
Okay, we'll go with this.

EVELYN
We're losing some very good people. Folks who have been with us from the beginning...

CLAIRE
This is a charity, but not for our employees. I can't keep people on just because they've been with us a long time.

EVELYN
Do you mind if I ask what we're going to use the money for?

CLAIRE
An organization I want to bring in - World Water Initiative. They've done nice work overseas - Big projects. Very little budget.

EVELYN
Do we need to bring in a new organization? If you want to expand overseas can't we just -

CLAIRE
Evelyn - you're the office manager.

EVELYN
I know.

CLAIRE

And you're an excellent one. But I need you trust that I know what I'm doing here.

EVELYN

I do. I think.

CLAIRE

You have friends - I understand. People you've spent years working with. It's hard to see them go.

Evelyn nods.

CLAIRE (CONT'D)

Should I bring somebody else in handle this?

EVELYN

No. I'm good. I can do it.

Evelyn offers a resigned smile.

EXT. UNDERWOOD RESIDENCE - FRONT DOOR

TIGHT on a finger pushing the door bell. A moment later the door opens, revealing Francis. We CUT TO Zoe standing opposite, Steve right beside her.

STEVE

Sir, I'm sorry to bother you. This woman said you were expecting her.

FRANCIS

Who are you?

ZOE

My name is Zoe Barnes. I'm a reporter at the *Washington Herald*.

FRANCIS

It's almost ten at night. This is my home. I don't -

ZOE

We're part of a mutual appreciation club.

She holds out her phone. We can't see what's on it, but Francis can. He smiles.

FRANCIS
You're a fan of the opera.

ZOE
More for the people watching than
the music. Same as you.

Francis is impressed by her brassiness.

FRANCIS
(opens the door wider)
Come in, Ms. Barnes.

INT. UNDERWOOD RESIDENCE - LIVING ROOM - A FEW MINUTES LATER

Francis pours drinks from the liquor cabinet. Hands one to
Zoe, then sits across from her. Zoe takes a sip.

ZOE
It's strong.

FRANCIS
You like it weak?

ZOE
No - the stronger the better.

She unwraps her scarf, revealing some impressive cleavage
Francis takes a quick glance, then finds her eyes again.

ZOE (CONT'D)
There's no harm in looking.

FRANCIS
That's a cheap ploy, Ms. Barnes.

ZOE
Cheap but effective.

FRANCIS
If your goal is to distract me -
which you haven't.

ZOE
I don't want you distracted. I
want you focused.

FRANCIS
You certainly have my undivided
attention.

ZOE

Good, then I'll get straight to the point...

FRANCIS

(amused)

Foreplay is over?

ZOE

I read somewhere that JFK never lasted more than three minutes.

FRANCIS

The point being?

ZOE

That time is precious. Powerful people don't have the luxury of foreplay.

He smiles, eyes narrowing.

FRANCIS

Why are you here Ms. Barnes?

ZOE

Because I need somebody I can trust, and someone who trusts me.

FRANCIS

You're in the wrong zip code for that.

ZOE

Maybe trust isn't the right word. An arrangement perhaps.

FRANCIS

As in...

ZOE

You confide in me, to the extent that you're comfortable...

FRANCIS

And in return...

ZOE

I protect your identity and print what you tell me. I serve you. I communicate what you can't publicly say yourself.

FRANCIS

What makes you think I don't already have such an arrangement with one of your colleagues?

ZOE

Because if you did, you wouldn't have let me in the door.

Francis smiles. He's enjoying the repartee.

FRANCIS

I've had a very long, very successful career avoiding this sort of intrigue with the press. I don't see any particular advantage in starting now.

ZOE

Is there any disadvantage?

FRANCIS

Sloppiness, for one.

ZOE

I promise you absolute discretion.

FRANCIS

So we are talking about trust.

ZOE

Use whatever word you like. I don't care.

FRANCIS

Words matter very much, Ms. Barnes. You should care more, given your profession.

ZOE

Then yes, your trust. Because if I were to betray it I stand far less of a chance surviving the consequences.

FRANCIS

Metro is killing you, huh?

She looks at him, impressed he knows this.

FRANCIS (CONT'D)

Don't be flattered that I'm familiar with your work. I read everything.

ZOE
I don't doubt it. And yes, Metro
is killing me.

FRANCIS
(considers for a moment)
How exactly can I help you?

ZOE
The Administration's legislative
agenda.

FRANCIS
I see.

ZOE
You must know.

FRANCIS
I may.

ZOE
Immigration is too controversial.
Tax-reform isn't sexy enough. I'm
thinking Education.

FRANCIS
You very well might think that.
I couldn't possibly comment.

ZOE
All I need is a nod or a wink.

FRANCIS
It's late Ms. Barnes, and it's been
a long day.

ZOE
Can we speak again?

FRANCIS
A prudent man never makes a rash
decision unless forced by
necessity. And my only necessity
at the moment is a pillow beneath
my head. I hope you'll understand
if I'd prefer to sleep on all of
this.

INT. UNDERWOOD RESIDENCE - FOYER - MOMENTS LATER

Francis helps Zoe put her coat on. Steve is in the foyer
with them. Zoe hands Francis a card.

ZOE
 My cell phone's on the back.
 Personal, not work.

Francis pockets the card without looking at it.

FRANCIS
 (to Steve)
 Did you put Ms. Barnes in the
 visitors leger?

STEVE
 Not yet.

FRANCIS
 Don't.
 (to Zoe)
 Needless to say...

ZOE
 Needless. I get it.

Francis smiles. She smiles back. His desire to make her visit "disappear" is a good sign. He opens the door for her. Claire is coming up the steps.

CLAIRE
 Oh...hello...

FRANCIS
 Claire, this is Ms. Zoe Barnes,
 from the *Washington Herald*.

ZOE
 Very nice to meet you Mrs.
 Underwood.

They shake hands. Claire offers a polite smile.

FRANCIS
 (to Zoe)
 Drive safe. There's lots of ice on
 the road.

ZOE
 I will. Goodnight. And thank you.

Francis and Claire watch Zoe walk off.

CLAIRE
 A reporter?

FRANCIS
 A hungry reporter.

CLAIRE
Aren't they all?

EXT. MICHIGAN AVENUE - LATE AT NIGHT

A BMW slows to a halt by the curb with a POLICE CAR slowing to a stop behind it, lights flashing.

CUT TO: A POLICE OFFICER ambles up to the stopped BMW and aims a flashlight at the driver. It's Russo. He looks wasted.

POLICE OFFICER
License and registration.

RUSSO
The glove compartment sweetheart.

We see that there's a CALL-GIRL in the passenger seat. She gets the registration out of the glove compartment while Russo pulls out his license and hands it to the cop.

RUSSO (CONT'D)
Here you go.

POLICE OFFICER
This isn't your license. It's a Starbucks card.

RUSSO
Oh...sorry about that.

POLICE OFFICER
Sir - have you been drinking?

RUSSO
No, I don't drink coffee at this hour.

POLICE OFFICER
(not amused)
I'm going to need you to step out of the car.

RUSSO
If I was speeding just write me a ticket and I'll -

POLICE OFFICER
Sir, out of the car. Right now.

RUSSO

Alright listen, I don't want to sound like a prick, but I'm a member of Congress...

POLICE OFFICER

I don't care if you're the King of China.

RUSSO

China doesn't have a King. It's a communist oligwock - ola - communist oligarchy. Man, that's hard to say.

The cop opens the door.

POLICE OFFICER

Let's go. Out.
(to the Call-Girl)
You too.

INT. UNDERWOOD RESIDENCE - BEDROOM - LATER

The phone rings. Francis groggily answers it.

FRANCIS

Hello...?

Listens for a second. Sits up, suddenly alert.

FRANCIS (CONT'D)

Good - let's think this through for a second...

INT. DINER - 4 AM

The door swings open, jangling a bell. In walks D.C. Police Commissioner BARNEY HULL - a square-jawed career law enforcer. He glances around, doesn't see who he's looking for. Takes a seat in one of the booths.

A figure slowly spins around on one of the stools at the counters and faces Hull. It's Stamper.

STAMPER

Mind if I join you?

Hull looks at him, perplexed. Stamper gets off the booth and slides into the booth across from Hull.

STAMPER (CONT'D)

Doug Stamper - the Congressman's
Chief-of-Staff.

HULL

I thought I was meeting someone
else...

STAMPER

No. You're meeting me.

HULL

What the fuck is going on? It's
the four in the goddamn morning and
I've got a City Council meeting
in...

(glances at his watch)

Less than five hours.

STAMPER

(leans in close)

You've been Police Commissioner for
what - almost a decade now?

HULL

We here to talk about my resume?

STAMPER

Mayor of D.C. would look good on
that resume, wouldn't it?

Hull sits up straighter. He's listening now.

STAMPER (CONT'D)

We know you've been angling to run
for some time. Experience is your
strong suit. Endorsements and fund-
raising aren't. But we can help
with that.

INT. POLICE STATION - HOLDING CELL - MORNING

Russo is sitting on a bench, head in hands. We hear
footsteps. He looks up. A COP enters, unlocks the door,
opens it.

COP

You're free to go.

Russo stands. He's puzzled, but he's not about to ask
questions. He exits the holding cell.

INT. CHRISTINA'S CAR - LATE MORNING

Christina is driving, Russo's riding shotgun.

RUSSO

It was just a few drinks.

CHRISTINA

It was enough to get pulled over.

RUSSO

But I was in control. I wasn't
drunk drunk.

CHRISTINA

Were you alone?

RUSSO

Yes.

CHRISTINA

Say it to my face.

RUSSO

Watch the road.

CHRISTINA

Say it to my face!

RUSSO

Yes - I was alone!

CHRISTINA

You can't keep doing this Peter.
It's gonna catch up with you.

INT. UNDERWOOD RESIDENCE - KITCHEN - MORNING

Claire picks up two fresh cups of coffee from the espresso machine. Meanwhile Francis finishes slicing an apple, places half the slices on one plate, half on another. They meet at the kitchen table - Claire with the coffee, Francis with the apple. Sit down. Their morning routine.

CLAIRE

Do you think we can arrange two
more at our table for the Red and
White Ball?

FRANCIS

For whom?

CLAIRE
The Holburns.

FRANCIS
Why on earth would we want them
there?

CLAIRE
I'm going to need her money for the
CWA at some point.

FRANCIS
The expansion?

CLAIRE
The staff cuts will only get us
halfway there. We'll need to fund
new projects.

FRANCIS
I'll talk to Vasquez.

A beat.

CLAIRE
(checking in)
How're we doing?

FRANCIS
Good.

CLAIRE
Just good?

FRANCIS
Progress. Irons in the fire.

CLAIRE
(smiles)
I like irons. But I love fire.

He downs his espresso. Stands. Gives her a peck on the
forehead. And he's out the door.

INT. BLYTHE'S OFFICE - DAY

Francis holds up a document as HAROLD BLYTHE looks on.

FRANCIS
(holding up the document)
This is the only hard copy?

BLYTHE

Yes.

Francis goes over to the shredder, starts feeding in pages.

BLYTHE (CONT'D)

What are you...

Francis has put too many pages in. The shredder jams. He yanks out the half devoured sheets and tosses them in the waste basket with the rest of the 600 page document.

FRANCIS

The bill is garbage, Harry, and you know it. You've wasted your time and mine. I'm not happy.

BLYTHE

I'm sorry Frank...

FRANCIS

I don't want apologies, I want a passable bill. Tax increases? The ban on vouchers? A Federal Oversight Commission? How am I supposed to work with that? You have to help me help you.

BLYTHE

I'll rewrite it.

FRANCIS

By the inauguration.

BLYTHE

If you want something from scratch that's going to be -

FRANCIS

You have less than a week.

BLYTHE

That was years worth of work.

FRANCIS

Then get me a short-form draft. Get me something I can put your name on. We can flesh out the long-form later.

Francis points to the waste basket.

FRANCIS (CONT'D)
That version is dead. Erase every
copy on every computer.

Blythe nods.

FRANCIS (CONT'D)
(as he goes)
Call me if you need anything.

And Francis is out the door. We follow him. He turns to us.

FRANCIS (CONT'D)
(to the camera)
*Busy work for poor old Blythe.
Eventually I'll have to re-write
the bill myself. Not because I
care what's in it. I only care
about where it gets me. And if it
gets me rubbing shoulders with
Walker again, it's served its
purpose. But to do that I need a
bill I can pass. Ideology is for
standing still on a soapbox. I
never stand still. I want
momentum.*

INT. HOTEL ROOM - NIGHT

TIGHT on the door. A knock. A moment later the door opens,
revealing the CALL-GIRL we saw with Russo the night before.
She's wearing a long overcoat and heels. CUT TO to Stamper.

STAMPER
Come on in.

The Call-Girl takes a look around the room, impressed. She
unzips her overcoat. Let's it fall to the ground. She's
only wearing panties underneath.

Stamper pulls an enormous wad out of his jacket pocket.
Tosses it to her. She starts to flip through the wad.

STAMPER (CONT'D)
Ten thousand dollars. What will
that get me?

She eyes him, a little frightened.

CALL-GIRL
I mean I'm kinky, but I don't know
if I'm the girl you're looking for.

STAMPER

Oh you're definitely the girl I'm looking for.

CALL-GIRL

(stands)

This doesn't feel right...

STAMPER

All I want for that money is your silence.

CALL-GIRL

My silence...?

STAMPER

The guy you were with last night, the one who was arrested. Do you know who he was?

CALL-GIRL

You mean the Congressman?

STAMPER

There was no Congressman. There was no arrest. None of it exists. All that exists is the money you're holding. You understand?

CALL-GIRL

Yeah.

STAMPER

Good.

Stamper pulls out some more money from his jacket. Folds it.

STAMPER (CONT'D)

Open your mouth.

She does, he gently slides the bills between her teeth.

STAMPER (CONT'D)

Here's four hundred more. This last bit is for me.

He takes off his jacket and starts to unbutton his shirt.

INT. FRANCIS'S (INNER) OFFICE - LATE MORNING

Francis sits across from CATHERINE DURANT (early 50s), another conservative Democrat from the South.

DURANT
Secretary of State?

FRANCIS
That's right.

DURANT
(puzzled)
Walker just nominated Kern.

FRANCIS
It's a long road to confirmation.

DURANT
Kern is a boy scout.

FRANCIS
No one's a boy scout. Not even boy
scouts.

Durant is intrigued by Francis's tone. She presses.

DURANT
What do you have?

FRANCIS
Absolutely nothing.

DURANT
So what are we talking about here?

FRANCIS
I'm just asking a simple question -
does the job interest you?

DURANT
Wouldn't you want it for yourself?

FRANCIS
I turned it down.

DURANT
Really? I heard that Walker passed
you over.

FRANCIS
I've let that story ride so he
could save face. I haven't spent
twenty years in Congress to toss it
aside for a four-year cabinet post.

DURANT
So why do you want Kern gone?

FRANCIS

I want him gone because he's a pretty face with an empty skull. The Foreign Relations Committee needs a Secretary I can work with. Somebody brilliant. Somebody tough. Somebody who isn't afraid to stand up to Walker when he's wrong. We need you Catherine.

DURANT

(slight beat)

Let's assume I'm interested...

FRANCIS

I don't want to assume - I want to know.

INT. RAYBURN BLDG PARKING GARAGE - NIGHT

A Black SUV rounds a corner on the bottom floor of the garage, pulls into an empty spot. We can see that Steve is driving. The back door opens. Stamper gets out. He heads toward a set of dumpsters in the far corner. Looks around. Sees no one. Opens the lid to one of the dumpsters.

INT. NEWSROOM - DAY

ZOE is seated at her desk, looking miserable - trapped, underappreciated, creativity stifled. She's got her land line phone to one ear and is taking notes she clearly doesn't give a rat's ass about.

ZOE

Uh-huh...uh-huh...

Her cell phone vibrates. She glances at it. "Unknown Number."

ZOE (CONT'D)

(into the land line)

Hold on.

She answers the cell phone.

ZOE (CONT'D)

Zoe Barnes.

After a beat she stiffens, suddenly alert.

ZOE (CONT'D)
 Yes, anywhere you want.
 (listens)
 On my way.

She ends the call.

ZOE (CONT'D)
 (into the land line)
 I'll call you back.

She hastily grabs her purse and coat, heads for the elevator.

INT. NATIONAL GALLERY - DAY

Francis and Zoe sit side by side on a bench in front of a Thomas Eakins painting. It depicts two rowers in a skull.

FRANCIS
 Do the math, Ms. Barnes.

ZOE
 He needs a bill...

FRANCIS
 Sponsored by?

ZOE
 Somebody with legitimacy...

Zoe thinks for a moment, then shakes her head.

ZOE (CONT'D)
 But the person with the most
 experience...

FRANCIS
 (finishing her thought)
 Harold Blythe.

ZOE
 ...is an old school tax and spend
 Democrat. Walker ran as a
 moderate. He's almost Republican.

FRANCIS
 Exactly, which is why he needs me.

ZOE
 To steer the bill to the center.

FRANCIS

You were right about why Walker kept me in Congress.

ZOE

Do you think Blythe would talk to me?

FRANCIS

Be smarter than that. He can't speak to the press about this.

ZOE

Maybe somebody in his office, if I butter them up. All I need is a few crumbs.

Francis flips open a brief case. Pulls out a bulky manila envelop and places it in Zoe's lap.

FRANCIS

How about a five-course dinner?

She peeks inside the envelope.

ZOE

Is this what I think it is?

Francis points to the painting.

FRANCIS

I just love this painting, don't you?

Zoe looks up. TIGHT on the two rowers in the painting. Then BACK TO the pair on the bench. Francis turns to Zoe.

FRANCIS (CONT'D)

We're in the same boat now, Zoe. Take care not to tip it over. If you do, I can only save one of us from drowning.

INT. ZOE'S APARTMENT - AFTERNOON

Zoe in her cramped, hopelessly messy apartment. She's flipping through Blythe's original draft. Making notes. Utterly focused. She has something no one else on the planet has. Her cell phone rings. She presses ignore without even looking at the number. A moment later it rings again. She presses ignore. Nothing is going to distract her.

INT. BLAIR HOUSE - VASQUEZ'S OFFICE - DAY

Francis and Vasquez across a desk from one another.

VASQUEZ
We need a passable bill.

FRANCIS
And you'll have one.

VASQUEZ
Before the inauguration.

FRANCIS
I didn't choose Harold Blythe. You did. And that's fine. I had to send him back to the starting gates, but I can work with him. You don't have to micro-manage this, Linda.

VASQUEZ
The President-Elect is concerned.

FRANCIS
He shouldn't be. And you shouldn't either. You're asking me to work a miracle. I understand that. And I'm telling you - I'll work the miracle.

VASQUEZ
Alright, Frank...

FRANCIS
I have a favor to ask, though. Can you fit two more guests at our table? For the Red and White Ball?

VASQUEZ
Of course. I can make that happen.

INT. FRANCIS'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

Francis shuts the door as Russo takes a seat.

FRANCIS
Drink?

RUSSO
Sure...what do you got?

FRANCIS
Whiskey. Bush Mills.

RUSSO
If you're offering.

As Francis pours him a drink.

FRANCIS
How are things in the city of
brotherly love?

RUSSO
We're getting by.

FRANCIS
Good, good.

Francis hands him the drink.

FRANCIS (CONT'D)
So it seems you've been a
bit...irresponsible.

RUSSO
What...?

FRANCIS
Don't play dumb with me Peter.
Save it for the House Ethics
Committee.

Russo freezes - a deer caught in headlights.

FRANCIS (CONT'D)
Drink up, you could use some
courage right now.

RUSSO
You're not having any?

FRANCIS
It's a bit early in the day for me.

Russo sets his drink down.

RUSSO
Is this about last night?

Francis simply stares at him. A stare which says "yes."

RUSSO (CONT'D)
How do you know about that?

FRANCIS

Because it's my job to know.

RUSSO

Look - they let me off. There's no charges. It's all taken care of.

FRANCIS

Honestly Peter, do you really think these things take care of themselves?

Russo suddenly realizes Francis was behind his release.

RUSSO

It was just that once, Frank. I swear to God.

FRANCIS

Then you must hold God in very low esteem, because we both know that's a lie. Drunk driving, prostitutes, cocaine - you've got quite a long list of hobbies. I'm surprised you can find the time to represent your constituents. What I should really have done is hang you out to dry. But then you'd be of no use to me, would you?

RUSSO

What is it that you want?

FRANCIS

Your absolute, unquestioning loyalty.

RUSSO

(after a beat)

Anything. You name it, Frank.

FRANCIS

Not now - but soon. There will be no shortage of things you'll be able to do for me.

INT. WASHINGTON HERALD - NEWSROOM - AFTERNOON

Zoe makes a B-line for Lucas's office. As she barges in...

LUCAS

Where have you been? I've been calling you.

(MORE)

LUCAS (CONT'D)
 Everybody's working double-time on
 the Inauguration and you decide to
 just up and disapp --

She plops a large ream of paper on his desk. He picks it up,
 starts to flip through.

LUCAS (CONT'D)
 Where did you get this?

ZOE
 Wrong question. The right question
 is how quickly can we get it up on
 the site?

LUCAS
 This is page one. I have to run it
 past Bob.

ZOE
 Then let's run it past Bob.

INT. WASHINGTON HERALD - HAMMERSCHMIDT'S OFFICE - AFTERNOON
 Hammerschmidt, Zoe and Lucas - serious shit going down.

HAMMERSCHMIDT
 (to Lucas)
 Get legal on this - make sure we're
 not breaking any laws. And I want
 a litigation assessment.
 (to Zoe)
 You won't tell me your source?

ZOE
 I can't do that.

HAMMERSCHMIDT
 Fine. But if legal -

ZOE
 I understand. How long do you
 think that will take? We should
 get this online right away.

HAMMERSCHMIDT
 I'm not just going to scan a 600
 page document and put it up before
 we've gone through every --

ZOE
 I did that already.

HAMMERSCHMIDT
You read the whole thing?

ZOE
Cover to cover. I've got excerpts.
Analysis. Three thousand words
ready for editing.

Hammerschmidt glances at Lucas. They're impressed.

HAMMERSCHMIDT
(to Lucas)
You start going over that. And
let's get the online staff pitching
in, working on graphs, charts, the
whole nine yards.
(opens door, calls out)
Janine!
(to Zoe)
What's the angle, five words or
less?

ZOE
Far left of center.

HAMMERSCHMIDT
How far?

ZOE
Very.

HAMMERSCHMIDT
Enough to put Walker on his heels?

ZOE
Forget his heels. This will put
him on his ass.

Janine enters. She doesn't see Zoe in the corner.

HAMMERSCHMIDT
(to Janine)
We've got a draft of the
administration's Education Bill.
You're going to work with Zoe, do
background copy.

JANINE
(incredulous)
Zoe Barnes?

HAMMERSCHMIDT
That's right. Whatever she needs.

Hammerschmidt nods in Zoe's direction. Janine sees Zoe for the first time.

JANINE
 (as if it's disgusting)
 Share a byline with her?

HAMMERSCHMIDT
 No sharing. The byline is Zoe's.

JANINE
 But she's Metro. I'm your chief political correspondent...

HAMMERSCHMIDT
 Then you should've brought in the story yourself.
 (to Lucas)
 Zoe gets the byline. Janine gets assisted credit.

JANINE
 Assisted? Come on. You can't -

HAMMERSCHMIDT
 Go. We've got 18 hours before tomorrow's print deadline.

Janine glares at Zoe.

ZOE
 (to Janine, triumphant)
 I'll see you at my desk.

Zoe walks out. Janine reluctantly follows.

EXT. THE MALL - MORNING

A WIDE PAN of massive crowds gathered for the Inauguration Ceremony on a crystal clear, January morning.

FRANCIS (V.O.)
Power is like real estate. It's all about location, location, location.

CUT TO the rostrum on the Capitol steps. Walker has his hand raised as CHIEF JUSTICE conducts the oath of office.

FRANCIS (V.O.)
The closer you are to the source, the higher your property value.

We ZOOM IN on Francis and Claire sitting in the first row behind the lectern.

FRANCIS (V.O.)
*A hundred years from now, when
 people watch this footage, who will
 they see smiling just at the edge
 of the frame?*

Francis gives a little wave to the camera.

CHIEF JUSTICE
 So help you God.

WALKER
 So help me God.

EXT. THE ROSTRUM - TEN MINUTES LATER

TIGHT on Walker in the midst of his Inaugural Address.

WALKER
 ...Today is not simply about the
 next four years. It's about the
 next four decades. You've placed
 your faith in me, and I, in turn,
 choose to place that faith in our
 children. Our children are the key
 to this nation's future, and that's
 why the first order of business for
 this administration will be a
 comprehensive Education Reform Bill
 to properly fix, finance and
 strengthen our nation's schools.

Huge cheers from the audience. QUICK CUT TO Francis,
 clapping vigorously, staring right at us.

INT. RED AND WHITE BALL - NIGHT

A huge reception hall decorated to the hilt. The mood is
 festive. Francis and Claire are seated next to Charles and
 Felicity Holburn at the Vice-President's table.

FELICITY
 (leaning into Claire)
 It was so nice of you to make this
 possible. When you called and -

CLAIRE
 Not another word.

SHIFT TO Secretary of State nominee Michael Kern.

KERN

... "Your dog must be a genius," the guy says. "Nah," says the other guy, "He's pretty stupid. Every time he's got a good hand he sniffs his ass."

Everyone at the table laughs at the punch line, Kern most of all. Francis forces a laugh. Claire leans into Francis.

CLAIRE

Go do your thing.

He squeezes her hand. Gets up.

CUT TO Blythe standing awkwardly alone eating a crab cake at the hors d'oeuvres table. Francis approaches.

FRANCIS

Maestro, I've been looking all over for you.

Blythe fumbles with the crab cake, accidentally spilling it on his lapel.

BLYTHE

Shit.

In an instant Francis has grabbed a napkin and begins dabbing the stain.

BLYTHE (CONT'D)

Oh thanks...

FRANCIS

Truly outstanding work on the new draft. You're going to make history with that bill Harry.

BLYTHE

Thanks for all your help Frank. Couldn't have done it without you.

Out of the corner of his eye, Francis spots Catherine Durant near the dance floor.

FRANCIS

Catherine!
(to Blythe)
Excuse me Harry.

And Francis glides over to Catherine.

FRANCIS (CONT'D)
Don't you look stunning.

DURANT
We Southern girls clean up well
when you get us out of the trailer
park and into some Vera Wang.

FRANCIS
And we Southern boys may be slow
with our words, but we're fast on
our feet.

He half bows, takes her hand and kisses it.

FRANCIS (CONT'D)
May I have the honor?

DURANT
You most certainly may.

He leads her onto the dance floor and they waltz beautifully.

EXT. PENNSYLVANIA AVENUE - EARLY MORNING

The streets are empty. Sanitation workers sweep up the
ticker tape from the previous day's celebration. Police
crews load barricades into flatbed trucks.

EXT. FREDDY'S BBQ JOINT - EARLY MORNING

It's a bitterly cold, bright sunny day. Francis arrives at
the restaurant with a newspaper tucked under his arm. FREDDY
- the husky African American proprietor - sees him
approaching and opens the door for him.

FREDDY
Mornin' Frank.

FRANCIS
Morning Freddy. How are you?

FREDDY
Can't kick. Come on in.

FRANCIS
Actually, would you mind setting up
a table for me outside?

FREDDY
Outside? It's freezing.

FRANCIS

I'll be fine. A little cold never hurt anyone.

Freddy nods and heads inside. Francis turns to the camera.

FRANCIS (CONT'D)

My one guilty pleasure is a good rack of ribs. Even at 7:30 in the morning. I have the whole place to myself. Freddy opens up just for me...

CUT TO:

Francis at a table, breath condensing in the cold air.

FRANCIS (CONT'D)

Where I grew up in South Carolina nobody had two pennies to rub together. A rack of ribs was a luxury, like Christmas in July. I've had a weakness for them ever since.

Freddy comes outside with a steaming plate of ribs. Places them before Francis. Before digging in, Francis glances at the newspaper he brought with him.

Zoe's breaking story, detailing the contents of the leaked Education Bill, occupies a huge swath of the front page. The headline reads:

EDUCATION BILL FAR LEFT OF CENTER

We PAN DOWN to see Zoe's byline in bold above the article.

QUICK MONTAGE

-- Blythe in his office staring at the article on his computer. Complete horror.

-- Vasquez in the back of an SUV scrolling through her blackberry in even more horror.

-- Zoe, Lucas and Hammerschmidt gathered around a computer where a TECH GUY is monitoring a graph.

TECH GUY

The web traffic is crazy.

-- Janine watching Zoe, Hammer and Lucas from a distance, eyes narrowed - jealous.

-- A COP CAR with its lights flashing beside a dented BLUE TOYOTA CAMRY - the same car that hit the dog in the opening scene. Two COPS cuffing the mangy 20 year-old CULPRIT.

EXT. FREDDY'S BBQ JOINT - MORNING

Francis' plate is empty. He wipes his hands and dabs his mouth with a napkin. Freddy starts to clear Francis's plate.

FREDDY
You want seconds?

FRANCIS
I better not.

Freddy starts off. Scarcely a moment later...

FRANCIS (CONT'D)
Actually, yes. I'm feeling hungry today.

Freddy goes inside. Francis stares right at us, piercingly.

FRANCIS (CONT'D)
(to the camera)
There are two kinds of pain, but only one kind of pleasure - total, unstoppable, undeniable victory.
(leans toward us)
The minister was wrong about defeat. I wasn't put on this planet to endure. I was put on this planet to win.

He closes his eyes again and leans back. Basks in the sun and exhales a long, deep breath into the cold air.

The serenity is shattered by sudden, thumping ROCK MUSIC.

Black out.

THE END