

The Flower and the Serpent

by  
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A thesis presented to the Honors College of Middle Tennessee State  
University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for graduation from  
the University Honors College

Spring 2022

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## **Dedication**

For my teachers, both in and outside of the classroom. Thank you.

## Acknowledgments

This project is something I am incredibly proud of, but know would not be possible without the collaboration and encouragement from others.

I would like to thank my Thesis Director, Dr. Pete McCluskey, whose knowledge and advice was invaluable throughout this process.

I would like to thank my family for reading through my screenplay and being too nice to say anything was wrong with it. I appreciate the votes of confidence.

I would also like to thank Amy Csaki for not being afraid to take a red pen to the pages of my screenplay's rough draft and for helping me get to a final draft.

Finally, I would like to extend a very special thank you to my high school junior year English teacher, Mrs. Thielsen; thank you for introducing me to *Macbeth*, I hope you like page thirty-one.



## Abstract

This thesis explores film adaptations of Shakespeare's work, accompanied by an original screenplay of an adaptation of *Macbeth*, titled *The Flower and the Serpent*. The introduction serves to further the viewer's understanding of how source material is used in adaptations and what characteristics make them successful while maintaining a special focus on adaptations of Shakespeare's *Macbeth* alongside personal reflections of my screenwriting process. The screenplay works in tandem with the introduction with elements mentioned in the paper being implemented into the screenplay. The original screenplay brings *Macbeth* into the modern-day United States setting. It finds its footing on the political stage with ambition and intrigue playing a major role. It also features more inclusive characters in an effort to appeal to a younger audience. This thesis aims to expand the reach and admiration of Shakespeare's *Macbeth* by introducing it in a more contemporary environment with characters more reflective of today's society.

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## Adapting Shakespeare

“The book was better!” is not an uncommon phrase in today’s world in which adaptations are becoming increasingly popular. Adaptations have been around for generations, but the last few years have seen them dominate box offices and streaming services. Some of the most popular movies produced in the last 10 years have seen great success in translating the original stories into a new medium. Netflix, one of the leading choices for streaming, has over 400 movies available on the page titled “Movies Based on Books” and has plans to expand that list with more adaptations in the works. The entertainment industry is constantly looking for ways to appeal to audiences and earn a profit, which is where adaptations come into play. With everything from Young Adult novels to Shakespeare, it has been proven that audiences love a good adaptation— when they are done well. Shakespeare’s work has inspired countless adaptations geared toward many different generations. While Young Adult novels have claimed the spotlight for the last few years, Shakespeare has proven his work to be timeless as it continues to inspire adaptations as recently as 2021, such as Joel Cohen’s *Tragedy of Macbeth*, and if one includes mine, *The Flower and the Serpent*, 2022. This introduction will explore adaptations as they move from source material to the big screen with a special focus on *Macbeth* adaptations, the allure of adaptations, what makes them successful in today’s media-driven world, and how William Shakespeare’s work inspires generations of adaptations.

To understand how an adaptation goes from being a novel, poem, or short story to a television and movie screen, it is important to know exactly what qualifies something as an adaptation. In her book *Shakespeare, From Stage to Screen*, Sarah Hatchuel highlights

a system created by Jack Jorgens; the three categories outlined in the book are presentation, interpretation, and adaptation.

In a presentation, the director tries to convey the original material with as little alteration as possible. Presentations are most recognized as stage productions, of which there are plenty when it comes to *Macbeth*. One example is the 1978 “taping” of *Macbeth* starring Ian McKellen and Judi Dench. This is considered a presentation because there was no additional flare; a company rehearsed the play as Shakespeare wrote it, it was taped, and then released to theaters. It was generally well accepted but there was nothing new when it came to *Macbeth*.

Next, interpretation is when the director shapes the play according to a specific view. The most notable example of an interpretation of *Macbeth* comes from the 2008 Folger Theatre Production. Teller of Penn & Teller, the magician duo, worked with Aaron Posner to co-conceive and direct an interpretation that focused more on a supernatural element. Teller has stated, “Our premise is that Macbeth is Shakespeare’s supernatural horror thriller, and should be done as violently and amazingly as a modern supernatural horror movie” (*Shakespeare & Beyond*). This is a perfect example of an interpretation because Teller and Posner tailored the play to the specific supernatural horror thriller view. They included intricate magic tricks and other nuances that the original lacked but contributed to the overall thriller quality.

Lastly, an adaptation occurs when the original play serves as source material for a new but related work of art (Hatchuel 16). *Scotland, PA* is a prime example of an adaptation. There are no kings or kingdoms, just a family-owned fast-food restaurant. The premise of *Macbeth* was brought to Scotland, Pennsylvania in 1975 and while some

names and the plot remained the same, much of the original play was changed to fit the new setting. In a comparable way, my work, *The Flower and the Serpent* keeps the same plot, but character names and settings have been changed to modernize the work and appeal to new audiences. This thesis will focus on adaptations in which the original work serves as a source for something new. It is important to note, though, that studios today have also seen success with presentations like *Hamilton*, which saw the stage production recorded professionally, and interpretations like Byran Fuller's *Hannibal* television show which expands on the original books to add more drama and depth to the story (Levine).

With the focus on adaptations, the hurdle is knowing how to use a story as source material to produce a good adaptation. What material is crucial to the story and what details might not be so important are all things that screenwriters consider when preparing to write an adaptation. Felicity Flesher tells readers to "Think for the screen" in her article for InFocus Film School. She continues with, "Audiences will not be reading text as the film goes. It is a visual medium in a way that prose is not." "Think of it as translating the story from one medium to another. In some cases, there may not be an exact translation. You may need to come up with a solution to get the same message across" (Flesher). There are a few other tips listed in the article that are helpful for both a screenwriter hoping to write an adaptation and for audiences to understand what goes on behind the scenes.

Of course, Flesher's tips are not the industry standard for writing an adaptation; in fact, there is no industry standard, especially when it comes to something as creative as the entertainment industry. In her book titled, *Now a Major Motion Picture: Film Adaptations of Literature and Drama*, Christine Geraghty writes, "The search for a

generalized model for adaptation can quickly disintegrate into a list of do's and don'ts, a set of requirements and prohibitions ... novels can express internal knowledge of a character, but screen adaptations have to imply feelings or motivations from a character's actions" (1-2). There has never been a step-by-step handbook published for writing adaptations, but the creative freedom given to screenwriters is what allows every new adaptation to stand on its own. The beauty of an adaptation is that you can give the same book to three different screenwriters and get three vastly different screenplays. The basic idea, as Flesher writes, is that the source material just needs to be translated to fit the new medium; those moments where the screenwriter fills the holes in the translation is where the magic lies.

If the story has already been written, why does it need an adaptation? This question is an easy decision for studios looking to produce hits because the adaptation usually comes with an already adoring fan base. Nowadays, the film rights for a novel are acquired before the novel is even on shelves. Of course, when Shakespeare wrote, there were no film studios around to be worried about securing film rights; however, this worked in favor of today's movie studios. All of Shakespeare's works were written well before copyright law was established, which places all of his work into the public domain, making it free for studios to use his works as source material. This was huge for studios as Shakespeare's work has been proven to be timeless and provides much material for studios. It is rare today to see a completely original screenplay that is not an adaptation, a sequel, or a continuation of a series. Production studios would rather pour money into a project that has a solid fan base rather than take a chance on something original. Michelle Lovretta, in an interview with Andrew Liptak for *The Verge* said,

“Adaptations can offer decision-makers the security of a presumed built-in audience” (Liptak/Lovretta). Behind the scenes, adaptations are a safe bet for studios that are producing new content and want to ensure there will be an audience.

Profit is always an effective way to encourage studios to adapt literary works, but adaptations are also popular because they are produced for the audiences and fans to enjoy. While there is an argument to be made for books and how they utilize readers’ limitless imagination to create their own worlds, there is something special about seeing a beloved book on the big screen. Of course, in a studio, the limitless imagination becomes more limited with budgets and executives, but the magic is still there. Ashley Strickland writes, “The idea behind movie adaptations, besides franchise-building, is to give readers a new opportunity to walk through their favorite world” (Strickland).

In a way, Shakespeare’s world is one that is visited again and again, garnering high praise and rave reviews with each new adaptation. The most recent adaptation of *Macbeth*, Joel Cohen’s *The Tragedy of Macbeth* received a ninety-three percent on Rotten Tomatoes from critics (Rotten Tomatoes). One film critic from *Empire Magazine* said, the film was “Stark but utterly compelling, this chilling take on Macbeth is a visually stunning tour de force” while another critic from *Time Magazine* said, “I could see *The Tragedy of Macbeth* becoming a favorite Shakespearean film adaptation, for those who rank such things. Watching it, I felt as if I were part of the audience seeing the play for the first time” (Fuge). Providing audiences an opportunity, even if only for two hours, to relive their favorite stories and to visit worlds they had only made up in their heads is an incredible thing to accomplish.

This was one of the most important aspects of my choice to write an adaptation. I chose to adapt *Macbeth* because of how much I enjoyed it when I first read it in my junior year of high school and how much I would love to experience it all over again from a fresh perspective. I have always loved and lived in worlds that I read about and eventually got to watch. As a career, I want nothing more than to be able to build worlds for loyal fans to experience again, and for newcomers to fall in love with for the first time. If my adaptation of *Macbeth* can have the same effect Joel Cohen's had with the TIME Magazine critic with even one person, it would be a success for me.

While rebuilding those worlds for audiences is an accomplishment for the studios, the success of adaptations can be attributed largely to the loyal audience that follows the project from book to screen. There is a lot more that goes into the success of a movie, but good early reviews and excited fans are typically a good start. The real success with adaptations comes from understanding that not every single detail from the source material needs to be included in the final product. In an article titled "The Reason Adaptation is So Difficult and How to Overcome It," Britton Perelman writes,

Adaptations succeed when they retain the integrity and tone that made their source material so beloved. Taking a book or novel and turning it into a movie is no small feat, but if you can find a way to transform the internal to external in a way that gets to the root of what the story's all about, you'll have a screenplay that diehard fans of the book and newcomers alike will love (Perelman).



The takeaway from this excerpt is that screenwriters just need to focus on the integrity and the tone of the original to create something audiences will love. Learning this information was crucial to my success with *The Flower and the Serpent* because I knew I wanted to do something new that could still be appreciated by fans. It was freeing to not be tied to every single detail of *Macbeth* while writing the adaptation, but still working to include elements that make it recognizable. Perelman makes another good point that a successful adaptation not only appeals to fans of the source material but newcomers as well (Perelman). If an adaptation is done well, then someone who has never heard of the novel should understand the movie as much as someone who has read the novel five times.

Most adaptations of *Macbeth* are more accurately categorized as presentations or interpretations, so it is not difficult for viewers who have managed to never hear of the Scottish tragedy to understand the story, as they are hearing the lines straight from Shakespeare's text. However, there is still room for a bit of fun for loyal fans when it comes to true adaptations in the form of allusions. Allusions, more commonly known as 'easter eggs', in the film industry can serve as fun callbacks to the original work for fans of the source material. For example, in Joel Cohen's *The Tragedy of Macbeth*, there is an allusion that calls back to Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night* when the character Ross sings the line, "For the rain it raineth every day" which appears at the end of *Twelfth Night*. *Scotland, PA* also includes a subtle allusion that requires a bit of historical knowledge. Towards the end of the film, the character Pat McBeth wears an oven mitt to cover a burn she got after Mac kills Norm Duncan. The oven mitt is the same tartan, or pattern, as the clan McBeth from Scottish history. In my work, I included a few allusions of my own

that I thought added a nice touch of the original. In *The Flower and the Serpent*, there are character names that are anagrams of locations in the original *Macbeth*, some lines of dialogue that appeared in the original made it into the adaptation, and the title is a play on Lady Macbeth's line "Look like th' innocent flower, but be the serpent under't" (I.v.64-65).

In contrast, it is not hard to make a bad adaptation, and this has been proven time and time again. It is universally understood that screenwriting is no walk in the park, and adaptations are no exception. The idea that adaptations are easier than an original screenplay has little truth to back up the claim. There is source material to go back to if the writer loses their way, but there is also a hopeful audience that can be disappointed if it goes wrong. The fans that contribute to the success of an adaptation are the same ones that are going to be vocal about the disappointment they face when their favorite source material does not live up to their expectations.

Two examples of rather unsuccessful *Macbeth* adaptations are the 1955 *Joe Macbeth* and the 1991 *Men of Respect*. These adaptations, along with being adapted from *Macbeth*, have a bit more in common; they both are centered around mobsters and the mafia, and they both did not see much success. In a movie review for *Men of Respect* for the *LA Times* reporter Michael Wilmington dives into the problem behind a mafia-based *Macbeth* and writes, "A Mafia 'Macbeth' probably could not work well, unless it went stylish and crazy enough to make us temporarily forget the source." Wilmington continues and even mentions *Joe Macbeth* in his review saying that both movies have a fatal flaw: "Shakespeare's play is about the dark usurpation of proper authority; in this mobster milieu, nothing is legitimate" (Wilmington). Any adaptation is not going to be

successful or work well if it requires an audience to forget what inspired it. Of course, as mentioned before, a good adaptation is one that anyone can understand, but if one needs viewers to remove the source from the adaptation to enjoy it, something went wrong.

An unsuccessful adaptation is one that claims to be a true adaptation of a novel or other work but might be more of an interpretation, as mentioned previously. The case for most unsuccessful adaptations is that they take the source material and add too much new material that is foreign to the established fan base, as is the case with *Men of Respect* and *Joe Macbeth*. Naturally, writers are going to add their own style to an adaptation- that is a given, but when they go too far and the story loses its original meaning, the audience is going to react poorly.

A few bad adaptations are not going to ruin a story, which is the case with Shakespeare. The heart of a story is vital to the success of adaptations, and Shakespeare is no stranger to that success. His plays have endured over the years because of the stories being told, how they grab audiences' attention, and the timelessness of the themes he wrote about. In an academic journal exploring Shakespeare and film, Elena Paliță discusses how impactful Shakespeare's stories have been. She mentions that the British Arts & Humanities Research Council compiled a list of Shakespeare adaptations. She writes, "The result was a list of more than 410 films and television variants of the Bard's plays, some of which respect the original text and others rebuild it for a new audience, for a new age" (166). The idea of rebuilding, as Paliță says, is one that I can appreciate as a writer who is rebuilding one of Shakespeare's works for a new age. My work adds to a growing list of adaptations all based on one man's work, and according to Paliță, there is a good reason for that. She argues that Shakespeare plays were popular when it came to

screen productions, but they were also a source for producers, directors, and writers.

Paliță claims that “The endlessness of his creations is again indisputable ... Shakespeare goes beyond any border and more than this he adapts to any cultural environment, because he represents the essence of human nature” (169). Shakespeare is one of the most admired and well-respected writers in history. The generations of work inspired by him alone are a testament to not only how popular his work was, but how well-crafted it had to be in order to be such a force in the entertainment world today.

To conclude, the success and passion behind adaptations have proven that they are going to be around for a while. It is important to distinguish the difference between presentations, interpretations, and true adaptations, all of which fall under the blanket term of being an adaptation. A true adaptation will use the original work as the source material for a new body of work that should be able to be enjoyed without needing prior knowledge of the source material. The main job of a screenwriter making an adaptation is to translate the source material into their own project. They work to keep the overall themes and character motivations the same while breathing new life into the source material. The appeal of making adaptations is two-fold: studios are confident that the new movie will reach an already sizable audience, and it will give devoted fans space to revisit their favorite characters and worlds. Lastly, the success of an adaptation comes from screenwriters being more objective about the story and writing it in a way that both fans of the original and new fans can enjoy just the same. There is the added fun of leaving an easter egg or two behind for the truly dedicated fans to notice in the final adaptation. Overall, adaptations have the power to be some of the best movies that top the box offices— if done well, or they risk facing disappointment from fans if they stray too

far from the original story. Some of the most successful movies in the last few years have been adaptations, demonstrating just how impactful it can be to give audiences an opportunity to fall in love with another world, even just for a few hours.

## Personal Reflection

*The Flower and the Serpent* reimagines Shakespeare's *Macbeth* by elevating the 'good guys' and bringing it into American politics in 2024. The political stage provides a similar tone to the hierarchy in *Macbeth* and allows for the actions to be regarded on the same scale as the original.

The lead character, Matthew, is fueled by ambition and once he is in the Oval Office, he notes there is a sense of power there that he likes. His wife, Ava, does not play as big of a role as Lady Macbeth did, and that is to allow Marlee to become a more complex character. My screenplay does not include a scene comparable to Lady Macbeth washing the imaginary blood off her hands, in fact, Ava's decline happens almost completely off-screen. This choice allows me to take Marlee's character and dive into her reaction to Matthew's betrayal.

Marlee and Matthew are remarkably similar, both stubborn and ambitious beyond belief, but Marlee plays into those qualities and makes them her strengths by doing the right thing. Alternatively, those same qualities lead to Matthew's demise, proving that evil never wins against good. I believe that giving Marlee the platform that Macduff did not allows new viewers to celebrate the victory more because they have followed Marlee's journey all the way to the end.

In early drafts, I went back and forth about killing characters or taking advantage of the political angle and having them resign. In the end, I decided to follow Shakespeare's lead and have three major character deaths. Charlie Donnelly, adapted from King Duncan dies, in the beginning, to allow Matthew to become president. The next death, Brandon is the catalyst for Marlee to move ahead with Matthew's

impeachment. The final death, Ava's, works in a way like Lady Macbeth's; Matthew realizes all he has lost and goes to Marlee ready to fight for what little he has left. All these deaths serve to push the story forward and have impactful consequences for both the characters and the movie overall. In the original, Macbeth is quite famously beheaded by Macduff, but my adaptation sees Matthew live to the end of the movie. The choice to not kill Matthew, but have his bobblehead end up headless, is to highlight just how opposite Marlee is from Matthew. As stated before, they are very similar, but Marlee knows what the right decisions are, and killing Matthew would only pull her down to his level. Marlee is the underdog in this screenplay, she fights back and refuses to let up on Matthew, but she never goes as far as he did. This was one of the most effective choices I made to both modernize the work and give the 'good guys' more of a platform.

I was able to learn a lot about adaptations and screenwriting through this thesis. *The Flower and the Serpent* is the first feature-length screenplay I have written, and I could not be prouder of it. The most important thing I learned is that writing an adaptation is a lot more than just putting the author's words in screenplay format. There were quite a few times that I had to stop and break down the plot for my own screenplay to see where to go next. I had the source material as a sort of blueprint, but, as I have learned, a good adaptation focuses on original content that keeps the integrity and tone of the source material. I am confident that my screenplay is recognizable as an adaptation of *Macbeth* but is also original enough to stand on its own as a feature film.

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## *The Flower and the Serpent* Synopsis and Dramatis Personae

### **Synopsis**

Driven by his wife and unrelenting determination, Matthew Thompson kills President Charlie Donnelly and settles into the office of the President of the United States. Matthew must face the challenges that come with being President, including keeping how he got there a secret. Marlee Bowdoin, a tenacious, young politician keeps a close eye on Matthew. After he attempts to kill her, Marlee sets out to prove what kind of man Matthew really is.

### **Logline**

An ambitious Vice President is pushed by his wife to kill the President, but once the Oval Office is his, he must contend with a determined ex-chief of staff who knows just how he took over the most powerful office in the country.

### **Tagline**

“There’s a snake in the Rose Garden.”

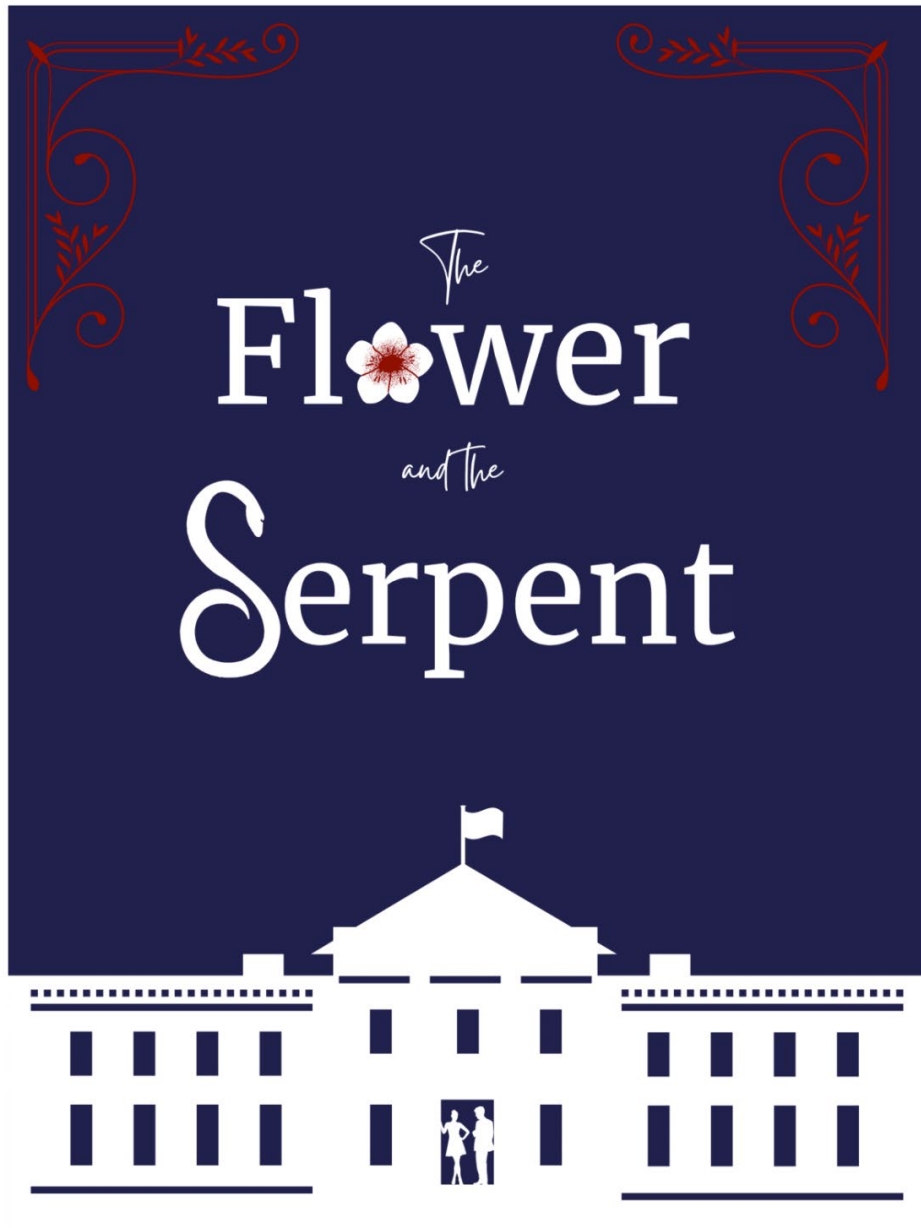
### **Characters**

Matthew C. Benjamin Thompson.....	President of the United States
Marlee Bowdoin.....	Former Chief of Staff to the President
Ava Thompson.....	First Lady
Brandon Armstrong.....	Vice President
Harper Campbell.....	Chief of Staff
Emma Morris.....	Deputy Chief of Staff
Seth Anderson.....	Personal Aide to the President
Charlotte “Charlie” Donnelly.....	Former President of the United States
Aiden Dunnes.....	Speaker of the House of Representatives

THE FLOWER AND THE SERPENT

An original screenplay by

Mackenna O'Sullivan



INT. OFFICE - NIGHT

A banner hangs on the wall that reads "Thompson for President." Handmade posters and signs decorate every wall in the campaign headquarters. Folding tables are set up with computers and stacks of paper.

Three campaign aides, SETH, HARPER, and EMMA, all in their late 20s, sit around one computer. The clock on the wall reads 2:07 am.

SETH

Run them again!

HARPER

These polls have been my life for the last year, Seth. There is no running them again.

SETH

That sounds an awful lot like giving up.

EMMA

It's not giving up. It's reading the numbers and, right now, the numbers aren't looking good for us.

SETH

Is that what you're going to tell him? That "the numbers don't look good?" He's going to want more than that.

HARPER

I have something that I think might sway him.

MATTHEW THOMPSON emerges from his office. He wears a suit, the tie hangs loosely around his neck. He places a briefcase on an empty table and approaches the AIDES.

MATTHEW

What are you guys still doing here? It's late, go home. Better yet, it's Friday, go have fun!

EMMA

Sir, it's two in the morning. All the fun places are closed.

SETH  
(under his breath)  
Besides, why have fun when we can  
sit here and stare at poll results?

Harper swats at Seth under the table.

MATTHEW  
Fair enough. I suppose you kids are  
here for a reason, then? How are we  
looking after the debate the other  
night?

The three aides exchange worried glances between each other.

HARPER  
Would you like the good news or bad  
news first?

MATTHEW  
Bad news. No! Good news. Oh, just  
get the bad news out of the way.

Harper looks to Seth and lets out a breath.

SETH  
What are you looking at me for? You  
heard the man, what's the bad news?

Matthew chuckles.

MATTHEW  
Harper, it's okay. I promise I can  
handle it.

HARPER  
Okay... It looks like you're not  
going to be the nominee. DONNELLY  
has you beat by a substantial  
margin.

Matthew pulls out a chair and sinks into it. He stares at the  
floor for a moment.

MATTHEW  
The good news had better be good.

HARPER  
The good news is that I have it on  
good authority that Donnelly is  
going to ask you to be her VP.

Matthew stays silent. He surveys more of the floor.  
Eventually, his eyes move to the posters on the wall.

Hand-colored signs endorsing Thompson for president cover one wall.

Matthew walks over and takes a long look at the posters.

MATTHEW

What about ARMSTRONG? Is he not a threat?

SETH

He'd be lucky to get a cabinet position. How he made it this far is beyond me. It's his kid you should watch out for.

EMMA

His kid is in high school, Seth. What are you even talking about?

SETH

Sorry, have you not met his daughter? She is a genius! I don't care if she's only seventeen, I'd vote for her in a heartbeat!

HARPER

Guys. Not the time.

Matthew turns to face the group.

HARPER (CONT'D)

Sir, Armstrong is officially dropping out of the race Monday morning. You should call him. I know he was competition, but...

MATTHEW

He's a friend. I know.

EMMA

Excuse me, sir, but I have to ask. If Donnelly calls to offer the vice presidency... Will you accept? I don't want to pressure you, but the convention is only a few days out.

HARPER

Plus, the vice presidency is a big step up from governor. And you'd have a pretty good chance of winning the presidency when Donnelly's term is up.

SETH

If you really want to be president,  
it's a step in the right direction,  
sir.

Matthew takes a look around the room. Folders and sticky notes with messages scribbled on them cover the tables. His eyes stop on the giant banner that reads "Thompson for President."

He finds a blank piece of paper on a nearby table and picks up a marker. The aides watch as he writes something down.

Matthew opens a few drawers in the cabinet along the wall and finds a roll of tape. He picks up the paper he wrote and walks toward the banner.

Matthew steps up onto a chair and tapes the paper up in front of the word "President."

Matthew steps back and admires the banner. He puts a hand on Seth's shoulder.

MATTHEW

You three have done some excellent  
work this last year.

SETH

Thank you, sir.

MATTHEW

We've still got some work ahead of  
us, but you kids need to get home.  
We'll deal with this on Monday.  
Enjoy your weekend.

HARPER

Sir, are you sure? We could-

MATTHEW

Enjoy the weekend. Please. And,  
Harper?

HARPER

Yes, sir?

MATTHEW

Get some sleep.

Harper smiles at Matthew.

Seth, Emma, and Harper gather their things and leave the office.



Matthew stands, grabs his briefcase, and walks toward the door. He takes one last look at the banner that now reads, "Thompson for Vice President."

He hits the light switch and walks out the door.

In the dark, the door swings shut, the impact rattles the office a bit. The paper that reads "Vice" falls off and floats to the floor.

The banner now reads "Thompson for President" again.

INT. KITCHEN - MORNING

Matthew sits at the island in a big, very well-kept kitchen.

He scrolls through the news on his phone and eats a bowl of fruit for breakfast.

AVA THOMPSON, his wife, walks in. She wears a wrinkle-free dress, not a single strand of hair is out of place. She is the very definition of presentable and lady-like.

MATTHEW

You're up early.

AVA

And you're not at the office for once. Have you been outside lately? Are pigs flying?

Ava walks over and kisses Matthew on his forehead. She steals a grape from his bowl.

MATTHEW

Very funny. I gave the team the weekend. Not much for them to do right now.

AVA

Correct me if I'm wrong but the convention is in a few days. I thought you'd have the team working overtime to prepare.

Ava gets a bowl out of the cabinet and makes her own bowl of assorted fruit and a cup of coffee.

MATTHEW

I guess I meant there's not much for them to do since I won't be getting the nomination.

AVA

Matt, I would appreciate it if you would stop dancing around the point and just get to it. Please.

She gives a quick, fake smile and bats her eyelashes.

MATTHEW

Donnelly is getting the nomination at the convention. Harper is pretty sure she'll be asking me to be her Vice President.

AVA

She's pretty sure? Matt, I feel like this is something she should be absolutely certain of. And is that something you even want?

MATTHEW

It's a step toward what I want, I know that much. And Harper hasn't been wrong yet. Either I go to the convention and lose the nomination or Donnelly calls and asks me to be her second. It's a waiting game at this point.

Ava looks off to the side. She nods slowly.

AVA

Hence the weekend off.

Matthew gives a short nod in response.

MATTHEW

Don't need everyone in the office on a Saturday for nothing. Who knows when she'll call.

AVA

*If she'll call.*

MATTHEW

I appreciate that vote of confidence.

AVA

Number one rule of Washington: never trust a politician.

Ava smiles, leans over the island, and messes up Matthew's hair.

AVA (CONT'D)

And I vote for you when it counts.

MATTHEW

I'm sorry, did you just say that you don't trust me?

AVA

I said I don't trust politicians. You're my husband.

MATTHEW

You have a funny way of not answering the question that was asked.

AVA

What can I say, I learn from the best.

Matthew opens his mouth to respond. His phone rings and the caller ID reads "CHARLOTTE DONNELLY."

Ava brings a cup of coffee to her lips.

AVA (CONT'D)

Speak of the devil.

Matthew glares at her playfully.

AVA (CONT'D)

Donnelly. I said, Donnelly.

Matthew raises his eyebrows at her.

AVA (CONT'D)

Just answer the phone.

Matthew laughs as he presses the accept button and brings the phone to his ear.

MATTHEW

Good morning, Charlie. Hell of a performance the other night at the debate.

Ava waves her hands at Matthew. He furrows his eyebrows at her and shakes his head.

AVA

(whispers)

Put it on speaker.

He pulls the phone away from his ear and presses a button.

CHARLIE (O.S)  
(on the phone)  
Thank you, Matt. You were worthy  
competition up there. I hope it's  
not too early, but I wanted to run  
something by you.

MATTHEW  
Not too early at all. What's on  
your mind?

CHARLIE (O.S)  
You've probably heard that  
Armstrong is dropping out on  
Monday. With the convention coming  
up soon, I'll need a vice  
president.

MATTHEW  
So, you're looking for Armstrong's  
number? Maybe his email?

They both laugh. Matthew uses his fork to push the fruit  
around his bowl. His hand shakes ever so slightly.

CHARLIE (O.S)  
No, no. I was calling to ask you to  
be my vice president.

Matthew drops the fork. Ava sets her coffee down. She locks  
eyes with Matthew and raises her eyebrows.

MATTHEW  
Ma'am...

Matthew keeps his eyes on Ava.

CHARLIE (O.S)  
You've run an incredible campaign,  
Matt. I'd love for you to serve  
this country with me. I think we  
could be a great team. What do you  
say? You ready to win this thing?

Ava takes in a breath and holds it. She still looks into  
Matthew's eyes. They stare at each other for a moment.

Ava gives him a small smile and shrugs her shoulders.

Matthew releases a breath. He lowers his head and closes his  
eyes. He nods slowly.

MATTHEW  
I'd be honored, ma'am.

CHARLIE (O.S)  
 Alright then, it's settled.  
 Donnelly and Thompson. Has quite a  
 ring to it, don't you think?

Matthew winces so subtly it almost goes unnoticed. Ava, ever the attentive wife, squints her eyes at him and tilts her head.

MATTHEW  
 I couldn't agree more. I'll see you  
 Monday, Charlie.

CHARLIE (O.S)  
 See you Monday, Matt.

The call ends. Matthew drops his head onto the counter.

AVA  
 This is good, right? Where did the  
 whole 'step in the right direction'  
 attitude go?

MATTHEW  
 I know, I know. I just... I wish...

He exhales.

AVA  
 You wish you had been the one  
 making the call to Donnelly. Asking  
*her* to be your vice president.

Ava walks over to Matthew's side. He picks his head up to look at her.

AVA (CONT'D)  
 You've wanted to be president for  
 as long as I've known you. Of  
 course you can be disappointed in  
 having to settle for VP.

MATTHEW  
 I know it's the right decision, but  
 it doesn't feel great right now.

AVA  
 What are you going to do about it?

MATTHEW  
 Huh? What... What do you mean?

AVA

I mean, so, you're vice president.  
What are you going to do with the  
vice presidency to ensure that you  
become president?

MATTHEW

Ava...

AVA

Hear me out. You and Donnelly  
finish this campaign out, you win  
in November, and take office in  
January, right?

MATTHEW

I'm pretty well-versed in the  
electoral cycle, Ave.

Ava rolls her eyes and sits on the stool next to Matthew.  
They face each other. Ava holds Matthew's hands.

AVA

Then it's safe to assume you're  
also pretty well-versed in the 25th  
Amendment?

Matthew narrows his eyes at the counter and furrows his  
eyebrows as he files through each amendment in his head. His  
eyes widen and he drops Ava's hands.

MATTHEW

I don't know that I like what  
you're suggesting.

AVA

And, what would that be?

Matthew gets up from his seat and walks across the kitchen.  
He sets his bowl in the sink.

He looks out the window into the backyard. Ava walks up next  
to him.

MATTHEW

In the case of removal of the  
President from office or of his  
death or resignation, the Vice  
President shall become President.

AVA

I'm sure all of your professors  
would be proud that you've got your  
amendments memorized.

Matthew turns to face Ava.

MATTHEW

Ava, do you know what you just implied? Death or resignation. Unless Donnelly has some heart condition no one knows about or a scandal that hasn't been uncovered, I can't imagine she wouldn't serve her full term.

AVA

We could...

MATTHEW

I mean, God, Ava, what do you want me to do? Kill her? Make her resign? I know I'm not thrilled about being vice president, but there's no way this is happening.

Ava throws her hands up and steps away from Matthew.

AVA

Okay. Okay. I'm sorry.

She turns to leave. She stops for a beat and then faces Matthew again.

AVA (CONT'D)

Actually, I'm not sorry. You can sit here and wallow about being second best or you could do something about it, Matthew. If being president is really what you want, then you'd better find a way to get it, because it's not going to get handed to you.

INT. TOWN HALL - NIGHT

GRAPHIC: 2 MONTHS LATER

Crowds of PEOPLE sit around a carpeted round stage lit up with bright lights.

Cameras focus on a podium in the center of the stage. Signs and banners that read "Donnelly and Thompson 2024" are scattered throughout the venue.

ATTENDEES hold signs and wear buttons that read the same.

Charlie Donnelly wears a dark blue suit. She walks around with a microphone.

Two lines of PEOPLE stand behind a microphone. They all hold cards with questions written on them.

INT. CITY HALL - AFTERNOON

Rows of chairs filled with PEOPLE take up the open floor of a small-town city hall.

Matthew Thompson stands behind a podium on the small stage. A banner hangs behind him and reads "Vote Donnelly/Thompson on Election Day! November 5th, 2024."

Ava stands just off stage in a purple dress that reaches her knees, a small black belt sits across her waist. She smiles at Matthew while he recites his speech.

EXT. STREET - NIGHT

Crowds of PEOPLE gather along a metal fence. They are bundled up in winter coats and mittens. They wear buttons and hold signs for Donnelly and Thompson.

Cameras flash sporadically as a car pulls up.

Both Charlie and Matthew step out of the fancy car and greet the PEOPLE. They shake hands and pose for pictures.

Their wives, GRACE and Ava, step out after them. Ava joins Matthew at his side and Grace steps up to meet Charlie.

Ava smiles for the cameras but glances toward Charlie often. She watches her every move.

The two couples approach the door to a restaurant, Matthew reaches the door and holds it open for Charlie, Grace, and Ava. They walk through and into the restaurant.

INT. RESTAURANT - NIGHT

The group sits at a table near the back of the restaurant, away from all the crowds and cameras.

GRACE

I'm so glad we were all able to sit down for a meal before election day! The schedule has been so packed, I wasn't sure it would happen.



MATTHEW

It's nice to take a breather, even  
just for the night. We all could  
use it.

AVA

But it's back to work in the  
morning. The election is not going  
to win itself!

Ava smiles before she sips from the glass of water on the  
table. Everyone gives an uneasy smile.

Charlie nods and sends a confused look towards Grace.

Ava's leg bounces a little under the table. Matthew reaches  
next to him and places a hand on her leg, he steadies her.

A WAITER in a suit approaches and fills the empty glasses  
with wine.

CHARLIE

You're right about that.  
(beat)  
I'd like to propose a toast!

Charlie raises her glass of wine, the others follow.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)

Matthew, I know the vice presidency  
might not have been your original  
goal, but you have been a gracious  
and, at times, formidable running  
mate. Grace and I are lucky to have  
you on the team.

The group clink glasses together and sip on their drinks.

MATTHEW

Thank you, Charlie. Ava and I are  
grateful for the opportunity to  
serve. We're in the home stretch  
now.

Charlie and Matthew exchange smiles. Charlie places her hand  
on top of Grace's and places a kiss on her cheek.

Matthew turns to Ava and sees her looking at Charlie,  
something dark in her eyes.

INT. CONFERENCE ROOM - NIGHT

Tables cluttered with papers, post-its, and cups of coffee crowd the room. Whiteboards with various states and checkmarks sit near the front of the room. The clock on the wall reads "3:04 am 11/06/2024."

Emma and Harper are sitting at one of the tables, refreshing a computer. Seth sits across from them, head on the table.

Charlie and Matthew stride in.

MATTHEW

Any news? Reports say Texas should be final any minute now.

SETH

(muffled)

Texas. The Lone Star State. 38 electoral votes.

MATTHEW

I can always count on you, Seth. But any chance we know who those 38 votes went to?

Emma hits the refresh button on the laptop again. Harper leans in closer. She takes in a sharp breath then looks at Emma.

Emma widens her eyes at the screen, then nods at Harper.

Harper walks towards the whiteboard and picks up a marker. Next to Texas, she writes 38 along with a checkmark.

CHARLIE

I guess that answers that. Which means...

HARPER

Wisconsin. It all comes down to Wisconsin.

SETH

(muffled)

Wisconsin. America's Dairyland. Ten elector-

EMMA

Electoral votes. We know.

Matthew laughs and pats Seth on the shoulder as he goes to sit down.

Charlie stands still, she looks over the whiteboards.

CHARLIE

We should've added that third stop  
in Madison. Could've done a meet  
and greet or something.

MATTHEW

Charlie. We've done it all. It's  
time to sit back and see if that  
was enough.

Harper and Emma remain in front of the computer, hunched  
toward the screen.

EMMA

Wisconsin should be coming within  
the next twenty minutes.

MATTHEW

Twenty minutes until we make  
history.

Charlie forces a smile and smoothes out her dress. Her hands  
shake a bit.

Seth jumps to his feet. The chair rolls backward into the  
wall.

SETH

Oh. Sorry about that. But twenty  
minutes is like two hours when you  
haven't slept since July. I'm  
making another coffee run. Anyone  
want anything?

The group in the conference room brushes him off  
dismissively.

SETH (CONT'D)

Suit yourselves.  
(to himself)  
Ha. Cause they're wearing suits.

Grace and Ava pass Seth and walk in. They each take a seat  
next to their spouses.

INT. CONFERENCE ROOM - NIGHT

The clock on the wall reads "3:37 am 11/06/2024." Emma  
sketches on a post-it peels it off, crumples it, and throws  
it at Seth.

Harper hits refresh on the webpage another time. She sits up straighter. Matthew and Charlie take notice.

CHARLIE  
Wisconsin.

HARPER  
It's in.

Harper takes a deep breath before walking up to the whiteboard. She takes a marker, finds Wisconsin, writes 10 next to it. She hesitates a second.

Everyone in the room holds their breath. Harper draws a checkmark. A collective sigh releases throughout the room.

GRACE  
You did it. YOU GUYS DID IT!

Grace hugs Charlie and gives her a kiss.

GRACE (CONT'D)  
You're going to be the next  
President of the United States!

Charlie widens her eyes, her mouth falls open. Tears form in her eyes. She walks over and gives Matthew a handshake.

Matthew smiles, shakes her hand, and pulls her into a hug.

Ava stands, a smile on her face. She pulls Matthew toward her. She looks into his eyes.

AVA  
Did you hear that?

She gives Matthew a hug and rests her chin on his shoulder, her mouth level with his ear.

AVA (CONT'D)  
(whispers)  
You're going to be the next  
President of the United States.

Matthew's smile drops.

He lets go of Ava, she still smiles. She raises her eyebrows at Matthew before walking up to Charlie and Grace.

Emma, Harper, and Seth pick up the papers that cover the table.

Matthew looks down to where Ava was sitting next to him. A small yellow post-it lays on the table, a red pen next to it.

The number "25" is written across it and circled. Matthew stares at it.

A stack of papers falls on top as Seth tries to organize the files.

INT. KITCHEN - MORNING

GRAPHIC: JANUARY 12TH, 2025

Ava stands in the kitchen in front of a blender that whirrs to life. She wears workout clothes and has headphones in. She is a little out of breath and sweaty.

Matthew walks into the kitchen in a suit, the jacket hangs from his arm. He sets it on the back of the stool at the island.

MATTHEW

Have a good run?

Ava still stands toward the blender as it blends. Matthew walks up behind her and takes a headphone out of her ear. She jumps a bit in surprise.

MATTHEW (CONT'D)

Sorry.

He chuckles.

MATTHEW (CONT'D)

I asked if you had a good run?

AVA

It was good. How are you? Only about a week until the inauguration.

MATTHEW

I swear you think about this more than I do.

AVA

Maybe I want it more than you do.

Matthew takes a step back. He raises his eyebrows.

MATTHEW

Sorry? You want it more than me?

AVA

All I'm saying is you've been playing all buddy-buddy with Charlie. I thought you wanted to be President.

MATTHEW

Yeah, I do. Playing "buddy-buddy" is how I get there. It got me Vice President, didn't it?

The blender stops. Ava removes it from the base and pours the smoothie into a glass.

AVA

A Vice President with no plan to actually be President.

MATTHEW

I'm going to put in the work and be the best VP I can be so in four years I can be *elected* President.

Ava huffs and places the blender in the sink.

MATTHEW (CONT'D)

I'm not going to apologize for not wanting to commit a crime in order to serve in the most powerful position in the country. There's another way to get there.

AVA

I know. I've been thinking about it since November. What have you been doing?

MATTHEW

Ava, if you think I haven't been thinking about becoming President since I picked up the phone and settled for Vice President months ago, you're out of your mind.

Ava turns to face Matthew. She studies his face for a moment.

AVA

Do you remember what you told me on our first date?

MATTHEW

(confused)  
Our first date? Ava-

AVA

We were nineteen. You drove me home. We sat outside my apartment talking for hours.

She steps closer to him, her eyes find his, and she grabs his hands.

AVA (CONT'D)

I told you I wanted to be a teacher. You told me-

Matthew lets out a breath and gives a small nod, knowingly. He looks to the floor.

MATTHEW

I was going to be President of the United States.

Ava nods.

AVA

Right. Not that you *wanted* to be President. You were *going* to be. You were certain.

Ava brings her hand to Matthew's chin and lifts his head to look into his eyes.

AVA (CONT'D)

Where did that man go?

MATTHEW

Ava...

AVA

If you still want this, Matt, the way I know you do. We are going to get it. Just say the word.

Matthew holds her gaze. Ava raises her eyebrows. One hand supports his chin, the other holds his hand.

MATTHEW

I want it.

Ava drops his hands and brings her hands to his cheeks. She kisses him, a smile on her face when she pulls away. A sort of darkness fills Matthew's eyes.

MATTHEW (CONT'D)

I am going to be President of the United States.

INT. BALLROOM - NIGHT

The ballroom is elaborately designed with classy decorations. PEOPLE in ballgowns and tuxedos mingle throughout the room. WAITERS walk around with various trays of appetizers and drinks.

Charlie and Grace stand near a small stage and mingle with a group of ATTENDEES.

Matthew stands near an entryway in an expensive tuxedo. Ava walks up behind Matthew. He jumps slightly. She rests her chin on his shoulder.

AVA

It's a beautiful night. Big turn out, lot of people, moving parts.

Ava's eyes scan over the room. She slides a hand into Matthew's jacket pocket.

She grabs a small bottle, pulls it out from the pocket, and holds it in her hand, steady. It is filled with a clear liquid.

AVA (CONT'D)

Haven't got the courage, yet? You know the party is going to end at some point.

MATTHEW

I know. I know. I-

MARLEE BOWDOIN, a younger woman and Charlie's Chief of Staff, approaches Matthew and Ava. She wears a dark blue floor-length dress, her hair in an elaborate braid.

Ava quickly shoves the bottle back in Matthew's pocket. She steps out and stands next to Matthew.

MARLEE

Matthew! Congratulations! You must be excited to get to work!

Marlee extends her hand to Matthew. He takes it and shakes her hand.

MATTHEW

You have no idea.

Matthew holds Marlee's hand still. His eyes drift over her shoulder to Charlie across the room.



Charlie sips on her almost empty drink. She scans the crowd and smiles when she makes eye contact with Matthew.

Ava looks at Matthew still shaking Marlee's hand. Marlee is unsure of what to do.

AVA

You must be excited as well! Chief of Staff, that's no walk in the park.

Matthew snaps back to the conversation and drops Marlee's hand.

MATTHEW

Yes! Chief of Staff! It's a big role! And you're so young!

MARLEE

Yes, well, I know I can handle it. I've been working with Charlie for as long as I can remember. I was the one that suggested she ask you to be VP.

Ava tenses, her polite smiles drops for just a moment. She regains her composure.

AVA

So, we have you to thank then.

MARLEE

Oh, Matthew did the work, I just relayed that to Charlie. Er-President Donnelly. I have got to get used to saying that. Anyway. I just wanted to extend my congratulations. Enjoy the night!

Matthew keeps his eyes on Marlee as she turns and walks through the room.

AVA

That little-

MATTHEW

Ava.

AVA

What? She's the one that-

MATTHEW

Got us here tonight. She's the reason that we're in this room.  
(MORE)

MATTHEW (CONT'D)

She's the one that got us this  
close to the oval.

Ava sighs and relaxes a bit. She smoothes her dress out and  
pushes a stray hair behind her ear.

AVA

I suppose you have a point, but  
this is as far as she's getting us.  
It's on you now.

MATTHEW

I know.

Matthew kisses Ava's forehead. He stands up straighter and  
searches the room. His eyes land on a WAITER who carries a an  
empty tray, but approaches a bar.

Matthew makes his way towards the bar. His hand slips into  
his pocket. He steps up to the bar as the WAITER walks away  
with a full tray of champagne glasses.

BARTENDER

Good evening, sir. What can I get  
for you?

MATTHEW

Two glasses of champagne, please.

The bartender silently fills two glasses and places them on  
the bar. He eyes Matthew curiously.

BARTENDER

There you are. Enjoy and, um,  
congratulations, Mr. Vice  
President.

MATTHEW

Thank you.

Matthew nods and turns to face the room. Everyone is occupied  
and caught up in conversation. He finds an abandoned table  
near the edge of the room.

With his back to the party, Matthew grabs the bottle from his  
pocket and empties the clear liquid into one of the glasses.

He turns and walks toward Charlie.

Charlie gives a small laugh to the COUPLE standing in front  
of her. She notices Matthew as he walks up, and dismisses the  
couple politely.

CHARLIE

Matthew! How are you enjoying the party?

MATTHEW

It's more than I could have ever dreamed of!

Matthew extends a glass to Charlie. She takes it with a smile.

MATTHEW (CONT'D)

Cheers, Madam President.

Matthew raises his glass and tips it against Charlie's. They both sip from their glasses.

CHARLIE

Are you ready for these next four years?

MATTHEW

Yes, ma'am. I'm ready.

Matthew looks past Charlie, he scans the crowd. His eyes land on Ava, who is in conversation with a CONGRESSWOMEN.

Grace walks up next to Charlie.

GRACE

I feel like I haven't seen you all night, how are you enjoying the party, Matthew?

Matthew continues to stare at Ava who glances in his direction. Ava politely ends her conversation with the Congresswoman and walks toward Matthew.

GRACE (CONT'D)

Matthew? You alright?

Matthew snaps his attention back to Grace and Charlie.

MATTHEW

Uh, yeah. Yes. Yes, ma'am. You two enjoy your evening. And, uh, congratulations again.

Matthew turns just in time to grab Ava by the arm and lead her away. Ava looks at Matthew confused.

AVA

What was that about? Did something go wrong?

MATTHEW

No, it all went fine. I just- I  
need to get some air.

Matthew leads Ava to a set of doors that lead to a courtyard.

EXT. COURTYARD - CONTINUOUS

Small groups of PEOPLE mingle throughout the courtyard.  
WAITERS are spread out with trays of appetizers and drinks.

Matthew paces in small circles in front of Ava.

AVA

(whispers)

Hey, hey. Stop. Matthew.

Matthew keeps pacing. He chews on his fingernail. Ava grabs  
his arm.

AVA (CONT'D)

Hey. You might as well be walking  
around with a sign that says "I did  
something wrong" on your back. Quit  
pacing and look at me.

Matthew stand still. Ava takes his hands and holds them at  
his sides.

AVA (CONT'D)

Stand up straight.

Matthew complies.

AVA (CONT'D)

Good. Now what happened.

MATTHEW

I got two drinks from the bar,  
poured-

Matthew looks around. Everyone is caught up in their own  
conversations. No one is within ear shot of Matthew and Ava.

MATTHEW (CONT'D)

(whisper)

Poured the bottle into her glass,  
and brought it to her.

AVA

Okay. Good. You threw the bottle  
away, right?

Matthew widens his eyes, his breath catches.

AVA (CONT'D)  
Matthew. You got rid of the bottle,  
correct?

Matthew shakes his head. Ava closes her eyes, drops her head,  
and sighs.

She reaches in Matthew's pocket and pulls the bottle out. She  
takes Matthew's pocket square out of his chest pocket and  
wipes the bottle down. She wraps the bottle in the pocket  
square and puts it in her purse.

Ava looks over Matthew's shoulder and sees a WAITER with a  
tray of drinks.

AVA (CONT'D)  
Excuse me, sir!

Ava waves the waiter over. He turns and approaches the  
couple.

WAITER  
Good evening. Champagne?

AVA  
None for us, thank you. But could  
you send some over to the  
President? Just tell her  
congratulations.

WAITER  
Of course, who should I say sent  
it?

AVA  
Just a guest. Thank you.

The waiter nods and walks into the main ballroom.

MATTHEW  
What was that?

AVA  
You don't want to be the only one  
handing her a drink tonight. Now,  
where can we find Charlie's secret  
service detail?

INT. BALLROOM - CONTINUOUS

Ava walks back into the ballroom and Matthew follows closely. Ava scans the crowd and spots ETHAN, a younger, muscular man. He is in his late twenties and wears a well-fitted suit. A small wire runs from an ear piece underneath his jacket.

Ava saunters towards him. Her hand disappears into her purse before she reaches him.

Ethan notices Ava and smiles widely at her.

ETHAN

Well, if it isn't the Second Lady of the United States!

AVA

You're one to talk! Secret service for the President. The oval is a big step up from the campaign trail! I bet your parents are proud.

Ethan smiles proudly and points at a table where an older couple sits. Ava follows his direction.

AVA (CONT'D)

Oh! You brought them here! They look like they're enjoying themselves.

ETHAN

I hope so. I feel bad that I have to work and can't really be with them, but it's an important job.

AVA

That it is. Speaking of which, I'll let you get back to it, just wanted to say hello.

Ava pulls Ethan into a hug. She pulls away and her hand glides down his arm. She slides the bottle into his pocket and keeps the pocket square in her hand.

AVA (CONT'D)

Keep making them proud. We'll see you around, Ethan.

Ethan lets out a small laugh and smiles big at Ava.

ETHAN

I'll do my best! Have a good night, you two!

Ava smiles in response and loops her arm through Matthew's. They walk toward the exit.

Over their shoulder, Charlie and Grace stand near the front of the room talking to Marlee. Ethan stands not too far from the group, he gives his parents a thumbs up. Two other secret service agents are only a few feet from Charlie.

Charlie sways just a little, it's almost unnoticeable. Grace and Marlee laugh at a remark. Charlie smiles uneasily. She coughs a little.

SECRET SERVICE AGENT 1

Ma'am, everything okay?

CHARLIE

Oh, yes. It's just been a long day.  
Going to have to call it a night  
soon.

Charlie smiles at the agent.

INT. OVAL OFFICE - MIDNIGHT

There are bouquets of flowers placed throughout the room. Among the flowers is one snake plant with a small tag that reads "Congrats! -The Thompsons", which sits among various colorful arrangements.

Charlie, still dressed in her outfit from the ball, has taken her hair out of the updo. It flows down her back and over her shoulders. She looks a little pale and unsteady. She sits behind the desk, and faces the windows.

A droning buzz sounds from the phone that dangles off the desk.

Marlee enters from a side door connected to her office. Charlie sits with her back to Marlee.

MARLEE

Good evening, Madam President. How  
are you adjusting to the new  
office? I've got to say, you got  
way more flowers than I did.

Marlee chuckles as she toys with a leaf on the snake plant.

MARLEE (CONT'D)

At least it's a short walk from my  
office to yours. You must be  
exhausted from today.

Charlie sits very still. Marlee notices the phone hanging from the desk.

MARLEE (CONT'D)  
Madam President, are you alright?

Marlee rushes over to Charlie and spins the chair toward her. Charlie remains still and almost limp. There is vomit down the front of her outfit.

MARLEE (CONT'D)  
Charlie! HELP! I NEED HELP!

Marlee feels for a pulse on Charlie.

MARLEE (CONT'D)  
SOMEONE CALL AN AMBULANCE, PLEASE.  
WE NEED A DOCTOR!

Two SECRET SERVICE AGENTS rush in and check on Charlie.

MARLEE (CONT'D)  
There is a pulse, but barely. She's  
burning up. She needs help!

SECRET SERVICE AGENT 1  
We've got it from here ma'am.

MARLEE  
Where are you taking her? What  
hospital?

SECRET SERVICE AGENT 1  
Walter Reed, ma'am. That's  
protocol.

The two secret service agents carefully pick Charlie up and exit the Oval Office.

Marlee stands up, brushes herself off, and composes herself. She places the phone back onto the receiver. She surveys the room, and exits.

INT. HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

Marlee steps in the hallway and finds SECRET SERVICE AGENT 2. The Agent is on high alert and a little jumpy. Marlee is calm and stoic.

MARLEE  
You. I need to know everything the  
President ate, drank, or touched  
tonight.  
(MORE)



MARLEE (CONT'D)

Get other agents on it with you.  
And I need someone to check every  
flower in that office. And I mean  
every single petal.

SECRET SERVICE AGENT 2

Yes ma'am.

MARLEE

I need the guests list from the  
ball and all the agents that were  
working tonight. Understand?

SECRET SERVICE AGENT 2

Yes, ma'am. I'm on it.

The secret service agent retreats down the hallway.

MARLEE

WAIT! Get Thompson's detail to  
bring him to Walter Reed.

(pauses)

And find a judge.

SECRET SERVICE AGENT 2

Ma'am-

MARLEE

I know.

The agent nods then continues down the hallway.

Marlee adjusts her posture and lifts her chin. She pulls her  
phone out of her pocket, dials, and holds it up to her ear.

MARLEE (CONT'D)

I need a car.

INT. WAITING ROOM - MORNING

The sun rises through the windows in a private waiting room.  
Most of the chairs are empty.

Marlee sits with perfect posture and stares out the window.

Grace sits next to Marlee, tears in her eyes, her hair a  
mess.

Ava stands near the window, arms crossed, and an emotionless  
face.

Matthew leans on the windowsill near Ava. His eyes are red and his hair a bit messy, like he ran his hands through it one too many times.

All four turn their attention to the television mounted in the corner.

A newscaster, TAYLOR, late thirties, sits behind a desk, a few papers spread out in front of her.

TAYLOR

An update for you on the developing story regarding President Donnelly being rushed to the hospital late last night. Reports say she was found in the Oval Office just after midnight, non-responsive. Just hours after being sworn in as president, President Donnelly is being treated at Walter Reed National Military Medical Center. Vice President Thompson has stepped up as Acting President which will remain effective until President Donnelly, hopefully, recovers. The cause has not yet been revealed, but-

GRACE

Turn it off.

Grace shifts away from the television. She closes her eyes as a tear falls down her cheek.

Neither Ava nor Matthew moves.

Marlee stands, walks over, and yanks the plug from the wall.

MARLEE

I am going to get some coffee.

Marlee walks toward the door to the hallway.

AVA

None for me, thank you.

Marlee keeps walking, she does not turn around.

MARLEE

I didn't offer any.

She walks through the door and lets it slam. Grace winces at the impact.

AVA  
Well, isn't she lovely.

MATTHEW  
Ava. She's upset. Leave her be.

Grace stares at a spot on the floor. She takes, small, concentrated breaths.

GRACE  
I think we're all a little on edge.  
It's best we practice kindness.

Matthew swallows and shifts his attention to his shoes.

They all sit in silence until Marlee returns. She sulks in with a small cup of coffee and takes a seat.

A doctor follows Marlee in with two secret service agents and a woman in a suit. Matthew's eyes snap up to see CHIEF JUSTICE THIELSEN enter. Ava and Matthew stand up straighter.

MATTHEW  
Chief Justice Thielsen.

Marlee glances at the entrance. She gets up from her chair and spins to face the group at the door. Grace remains in her seat, frozen, eyes on the floor.

The doctor steps forward.

DR. FITZGERALD  
Madam First Lady...

Marlee kneels in front of Grace, and gets her attention. Grace looks up at the doctor. Marlee continues to kneel in front of her, and holds her hand.

DR. FITZGERALD (CONT'D)  
I am sorry to say that your wife  
has passed.

Marlee stands, still holding Grace's hand.

MARLEE  
How? What happened? I mean she- she  
was fine all night. At the ball,  
she-

GRACE  
Marlee...

Marlee looks at Grace and squeezes her hand. Tears fall freely down Grace's cheeks.

Marlee looks back to Dr. Fitzgerald. Anger clouds her eyes.

MARLEE

What. Happened.

DR. FITZGERALD

Her blood pressure was incredibly low when she was brought in. It continued to fall despite our efforts. The President experienced organ failure throughout her body.

Marlee lets out a shaky breath and holds back tears. She gives a small nod and stares out the window.

Chief Justice Thielsen steps forward, a bible in her hand.

CHIEF JUSTICE THIELSEN

I am terribly sorry for your loss, Madam First Lady. Unfortunately, we do have to swear in Vice President Thompson. If you would like to step out, you may.

Marlee whips her head around.

MARLEE

Wait! Wait- she just died! This has to happen right this second? Her wife just found out and you want to do this now? Really?

AVA

(over-eager)

Marlee. The 25th Amendment states-

Matthew shoots Ava an incredulous look. Marlee notices.

MARLEE

(sharply)

I know the 25th Amendment. I just-

GRACE

It's okay.

Grace stands, very unsteady, with the help of Marlee.

MARLEE

Grace...

GRACE

Marlee. Let them do what they need to.

Thielsen nods and hands the bible to Ava. She takes it with a small smile and holds it flat in her hands.

Matthew steps up beside her. He tries to set his left hand on top of the bible, but he knocks it out of Ava's hands.

AVA

Oh! I'm sorry.

Matthew shakes his head, trying to make himself more awake. Ava bends down, picks up the bible, and Matthew gently places his left hand on top.

MATTHEW

Our apologies, it's been a rough night.

Chief Justice Thielsen nods sympathetically.

Marlee grips Grace's hand tighter.

CHIEF JUSTICE THIELSEN

Vice President Thompson, please raise your right hand and repeat after me. I, Matthew C. Benjamin Thompson, do solemnly swear,

MATTHEW

I, Matthew C. Benjamin Thompson, do solemnly swear,

CHIEF JUSTICE THIELSEN

That I will faithfully execute,

MATTHEW

That I will faithfully execute,

CHIEF JUSTICE THIELSEN

The office of President of the United States,

MATTHEW

The office of President of the United States,

CHIEF JUSTICE THIELSEN

And will, to the best of my ability,

MATTHEW

And will, to the best of my ability,

CHIEF JUSTICE THIELSEN  
Preserve, protect, and defend,

MATTHEW  
Preserve, protect, and defend,

CHIEF JUSTICE THIELSEN  
The Constitution of the United  
States.

MATTHEW  
The Constitution of the United  
States.

CHIEF JUSTICE THIELSEN  
So help you God?

MATTHEW  
So help me God.

Grace lets out a sob and rushes out of the room.

CHIEF JUSTICE THIELSEN  
I'm sorry about the circumstances,  
but congratulations, Mr. President.

MATTHEW  
Thank you, Ma'am.

They shake hands. Chief Justice Thielson leaves the room.

Marlee looks at Matthew and Ava, about to say something, then  
leaves the room without a word.

Matthew relaxes a bit when Ava wraps him in a hug.

AVA  
Matthew. We did it. You did it.

Matthew nods and smiles.

AVA (CONT'D)  
President of the United States. Now  
that has a nice ring to it.

INT. OFFICE - DAY

Marlee paces behind her desk and files through a stack of  
papers in her hand. There are stacks of unpacked boxes  
throughout the room.

Marlee's hair is in a messy braid, day-old mascara gives her  
eyes a dark look.

Secret Service Agent 1 enters cautiously but with purpose. He knocks gently. Marlee's head snaps up to the door.

SECRET SERVICE AGENT 1  
Sorry to spook you, but I have an  
update for you.

The Agent pulls a small evidence bag from his pocket. The small bottle from the inaugural ball is inside.

MARLEE  
Is that...?

Secret Service Agent 1 nods.

MARLEE (CONT'D)  
Well, who brought it? And who gave  
it to Donnelly?

The Agent looks out into the hallway.

SECRET SERVICE AGENT 1  
Bring him in!

Secret Service Agent 2 walks in with Ethan. Ethan's hands are cuffed behind his back.

Marlee drops her shoulders, the papers in her hand fall to the floor. Her face falls into a frown.

MARLEE  
Ethan? What-

ETHAN  
Marlee, please. You have to know  
this wasn't me.

Marlee regains her composure and looks to Agent 1. He holds up the bag of evidence, then sets it on the desk.

SECRET SERVICE AGENT 1  
We found the bottle in the pocket  
of his jacket from the inaugural  
ball. There were very few drops  
left, but a lab was able to  
identify the contents: a highly  
concentrated poison whose symptoms  
were apparent in Former President  
Donnelly.

Marlee winces then studies the bag. Her fingers reach for it, but she pulls away at the last second.

Ethan strains against the handcuffs, tears in his eyes.

ETHAN  
I don't know how it got there!  
Please, Marlee, look at me. I  
wouldn't lie to you. Please.

Marlee winces in response. She turns away and closes her eyes tight.

MARLEE  
Get him out of here.

ETHAN  
Wha- No, WAIT! I- I didn't do this.

Agent 2 leads Ethan out of the room. Ethan struggles against him.

Agent 1 picks up the evidence bag. Marlee catches his hand before he pulls it away. Marlee's face turns red, her whole body goes stiff.

MARLEE  
I don't know what you do with him  
now, but if I see him again-

SECRET SERVICE AGENT 1  
He'll be taken care of.

Agent 1 gives Marlee a short nod. She lets go of his hand and he walks out.

Marlee exhales forcefully, then picks up the papers she dropped.

Harper knocks on the door frame, a small box in her hand. Marlee looks up at her and eyes the box suspiciously.

HARPER  
Hi, I'm not sure where you want me  
to put this for now...

MARLEE  
Is that my paperwork from-

HARPER  
My paperwork. This is the office of  
the Chief of Staff, right?

Marlee furrows her eyebrows and cocks her head.

MARLEE  
Yeah, but-

The door to the Oval Office opens. Matthew steps in.



MATTHEW

Harper! Do you have- Oh, Marlee.  
What are you still doing here?

MARLEE

This is my office. Where else would  
I be?

Matthew looks at Harper who looks just as confused.

MATTHEW

It seems you didn't hear the news.  
Harper is *my* Chief of Staff. So,  
this is her office, and...

Suddenly, realization washes over Marlee.

MARLEE

You don't need me.

Marlee scoffs.

MARLEE (CONT'D)

Just as soon as it started, it's  
over.

MATTHEW

Marlee, you're a valuable asset in  
Washington. I'm sure someone will  
need you on their team.

MARLEE

Just not the President anymore,  
huh?

MATTHEW

It's tragic what happened to  
Charlie, I won't argue. But this  
country needs to keep going.  
Harper's been with me since the  
early days of the campaign, you  
understand.

Marlee throws her papers into an open box on the desk.

MARLEE

Yeah, well, the campaign is over,  
*Mr. President*. You won.

She takes the box off the desk and storms out of the office.

MATTHEW

Don't mind her. We have work to do.  
Were you able to reach Armstrong's  
office?

HARPER

Yes, sir. He's on the way now.

Matthew nods and exits.

INT. OVAL OFFICE - AFTERNOON

Matthew sits behind the desk. Various small stacks of paper  
sit in front of him. Ava, in her best outfit, glides into the  
room effortlessly. Seth follows her, frantic.

SETH

Ma'am, wait. I'm not sure you can  
just-

AVA

Good afternoon, Mr. President.

SETH

I'm sorry, sir. I'm still getting  
used to my position here. Plus, she  
walks so fast!

MATTHEW

It's alright, Seth. Thank you,  
though.

Seth nods, turns, and pauses.

MATTHEW (CONT'D)

Yes. You can go.

SETH

Thank you, sir.

Seth exits.

Ava wanders around the room and admires it.

AVA

Certainly an upgrade. How are you  
liking it?

MATTHEW

It's everything I've wanted.

AVA

And you deserve it. So, does that mean you're done feeling sorry for how we got here?

MATTHEW

I'm done thinking about it. I'm focusing on this.

He gestures around the room.

MATTHEW (CONT'D)

I mean, not everyone gets to sit behind this desk.

Ava takes a seat on the couch.

AVA

Have you heard anything about Ethan? I know Marlee was working with Secret Service, but did she get anything?

MATTHEW

They took Ethan out of here not too long ago. The agents showed Marlee the bottle they found in his pocket.

AVA

Good to hear. It's a shame about Ethan, he was a good kid. Although, not noticing someone slipping something in his pocket, makes you think -- would he have been all that good of an agent?

MATTHEW

It was a means to an end. He would've done his best.

AVA

Oh, I know. The whole situation with him, though, it's just so-

Matthew stands quickly.

MATTHEW

Sad. I would've never expected it from him. Like you said, he was a good kid.

Ava furrows her brow. She turns toward Matthew.

BRANDON ARMSTRONG stands in the doorframe. He wears a tailored suit, his hair styled perfectly.

MATTHEW (CONT'D)

Brandon! Thank you for coming by.  
Ava, here, was just stepping out.

Ava stands and extends her hand to Brandon. He takes her hand and shakes it gently.

AVA

Always good to see you, Brandon.

She smiles.

BRANDON

You too... ma'am?

AVA

First Lady is fine!

Brandon chuckles, unsure. Matthew holds his breath.

AVA (CONT'D)

Oh, please! I was just joking. Just  
Ava is fine!

He nods and smiles politely.

Ava walks over to Matthew, kisses his cheek, and leaves. The door closes behind her.

Matthew gestures toward the couches.

MATTHEW

Please, take a seat. I've got some  
things I want to discuss with you.

INT. MARLEE'S LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

The living room is dimly lit and a bit too messy. Bobbleheads of past presidents fill shelves upon shelves. A bowl of popcorn sits on the coffee table accompanied by piles of papers, pens, highlighters, and folders. A laptop is open on top of the clutter.

Marlee lays on her couch with her hair in a messy bun, sweatpants and baggy sweatshirt on. Her arm drapes over the side of the couch, a half-empty wine glass rests between her fingers, almost falling out of her hand.

On her laptop, a podcast titled "Something Wicked in Washington" plays over the speaker. TIM, the host, drones on. Marlee stares at the ceiling and listens.

TIM (O.S.)

And then, less than 24 hours into the presidency, she dies! I mean, what? You want me to believe this wasn't some sort of inside job? This is Washington, or should I say Wicked-ton? In all my years covering the shady politicians in D.C., I have never, and I mean never, seen anything this suspicious. We finally get a women in the highest office in America and she dies? Did poor Matthew not feel like Vice President was enough? Was it AIDEN DUNNES, the speaker of the house? We know she never liked Donnelly, but could murder be on the table?

Marlee shoots up and spills some of her wine on the floor. It doesn't phase her.

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

There are a lot of powerful people in Washington, so I suppose, listeners, it's a question of who, not if. Donnelly was murdered, and if you believe it was that starry-eyed agent, Ethan, then you haven't been in Washington all that long. I'm surprised he even landed a job with the Secret Service. Over the next few weeks, I'll be doing a deep dive into who I think killed the president, but I'll tell you right now I've got a bad feeling about a few of these guys, and I'm keeping an eye on Aiden, but I really think-

Marlee slams the laptop shut. She sits on the edge of the couch and rubs her eyes.

MARLEE

God, it wasn't her. Why don't you and your 62 monthly listeners find something better to do, Tim?

A knock comes from her front door. Marlee's head turns to the door. She surveys the room, or really, the mess in the room.

Another knock sounds on the door. Marlee stands, attempts to fix her hair, and walks to the door.

She glances through the peephole then turns her back to the door, her eyes wide and frantic as they dart across the room.

Marlee cringes at the state of her living room, turns, and opens the door a bit.

Brandon Armstrong stands in the hallway with two Secret Service agents behind him.

MARLEE (CONT'D)

Brandon, hey! What can I do for you?

Marlee notices the agents behind him.

MARLEE (CONT'D)

Is everything alright?

BRANDON

Oh, don't mind them! I apologize that it's so late, but I've got a rather urgent matter I wanted to bring to you.

MARLEE

Please, not too late at all! Come in!

Marlee steps back and opens the door wider. Brandon steps forward and when the Agents move to follow, he motions for them to wait.

BRANDON

I'll be alright in there.

Brandon steps into Marlee's apartment and surveys the mess.

MARLEE

Sorry about the mess, I'm kind of between jobs right now.

BRANDON

Quite a collection you have there.

Brandon gestures to the shelves of presidential bobbleheads.

MARLEE

Thank you. It's a bit childish, but kind of reminds me why I'm still in Washington.

(MORE)

MARLEE (CONT'D)

I guess, in a way, all of them made changes and that's what I want to do. Anyway -- you had something important!

BRANDON

Right! Now, I know you're between jobs at the moment...

Marlee clears off a spot on the couch and motions for him to sit. Brandon steps over the spilled wine and gingerly sits on the couch.

BRANDON (CONT'D)

I had a meeting with President Thompson earlier and-

Marlee rolls her eyes.

BRANDON (CONT'D)

He asked me to step in as Vice President.

Marlee sits up straighter, like she's trying to impress.

MARLEE

Sir, congratulations! That's... Well, congratulations.

BRANDON

We've got a few steps before it's official, but thank you. The situation with Charlie was devastating, but I'm glad they figured the whole Ethan thing out.

Marlee opens her mouth, but Brandon doesn't notice.

BRANDON (CONT'D)

And I know that it's still fresh, but I agree with Thompson that we need to move forward. For the country. You played a big role getting Charlie to the Oval. I've seen your work ethic, how you don't give up even when all the odds are stacked against you. Anyway, I'm here to ask you to be my Chief of Staff.

Brandon exhales harshly. Marlee sits, stunned.

MARLEE

I- uh. That was a lot.

BRANDON

I'm sorry. I don't want to overwhelm you, just, like I said. Moving forward and all that.

MARLEE

Right.

Marlee focuses on the floor and considers.

MARLEE (CONT'D)

I'll do it.

BRANDON

Really?

MARLEE

I'd love to. Plus, it'll give me something to do. I can't hear another episode of "Something Wicked in Washington."

BRANDON

Oh! With Tim? I swear he doesn't do an ounce of research, he just sits in front of a microphone and rambles.

Marlee laughs.

INT. MARLEE'S OFFICE - AFTERNOON

Light streams in through large windows into a decently-sized office. Marlee moves around, unpacks boxes, and organizes her belongings. Her back faces the door.

Ava, in a red dress and her hair in a tight, low bun, enters holding a snake plant, similar to the one from the Oval Office when Donnelly died. Ava knocks, holding the plant in her other hand.

AVA

Hi there! I'm Ava, just wanted to welcome the new VP Chief of Staff to-

Marlee spins around to face Ava, she closes a folder and places it behind her. The color in Ava's face drains. She quickly recovers with a polite smile on her face.

AVA (CONT'D)

Marlee. What a surprise! I had no idea Brandon reached out to you!



Ava places the plant down on an empty surface. Marlee eyes the plant, her brow furrows.

AVA (CONT'D)

You must be excited to get to work with this administration. I mean, it's the same administration as before, just without...

MARLEE

Charlie. You can say her name.

Marlee holds her head high and stands defensively. Ava notices.

AVA

(cautious)

Right, of course. I am terribly sorry for her family. And you. I know she was a mentor of sorts for you. She would have done wonders for this country.

MARLEE

I know. It's why I worked to get her elected. It's why she won.

AVA

And it was well-deserved.

Ava's hands shake a bit as she walks further into the room.

AVA (CONT'D)

It really is a shame about that Ethan kid, who would've thought?

Marlee watches Ava's every move. Ava catches Marlee's eyes and holds eye contact with her.

MARLEE

Didn't I see you speaking to him the night of the ball? Were you two close friends? I don't recall him mentioning you.

Ava waves her hands to dismiss the question.

AVA

Oh, that was nothing. We knew him from the campaign trail. Just saying hello!

MARLEE  
(skeptical)  
Right... But what about...

Ava takes a sharp breath but remains collected.

MARLEE (CONT'D)  
You know what, I'm probably just  
overthinking things. Forget I said  
anything.

Marlee studies Ava's face, Ava returns the stare.

MARLEE (CONT'D)  
I actually have a lot left to  
unpack...

Ava's eyes drift to a box near the side of Marlee's desk. The  
word "Charlie" covers the side in handwritten marker.

MARLEE (CONT'D)  
And some work to get done, so.

Ava's eyes snap back to Marlee, a bright smile on her face.

AVA  
(overly-cheery)  
Oh, of course! I will leave you to  
it!

MARLEE  
Just one more thing. Ethan? He's  
not a kid, and he's not stupid.  
I'll figure out why he did it. Or  
helped someone do it.

AVA  
Well, for Charlie's sake, I hope  
that's true.

Ava quickly turns and walks down the hallway. Marlee watches  
Ava's calculated steps turn into a quick run.

She stares down the hallway until Ava disappears around the  
corner.

Marlee opens the folder, a photo of Ava, Matthew, and Ethan  
is paper-clipped to the top. Marlee studies the photo, then  
peers down the empty hallway.

INT. HALLWAY - AFTERNOON

Ava comes around a corner and looks a bit disheveled as she races down the carpeted hallway. She keeps looking from side to side, almost paranoid. She comes up to a door, pauses, then turns the handle.

EXT. BALCONY - CONTINUOUS

Matthew sits on a bench in front of a small table. A few manila folders cover the surface. He glances up toward the door when he hears it open. He notices Ava and looks back at his work.

MATTHEW

There you are! I feel like I haven't seen you in a while. Did you finally pick the right shade for those curtains?

AVA

Matt.

MATTHEW

Oh, what about the portraits to hang? I know you said there were a few options.

AVA

Matthew.

Matthew finally gives Ava his attention and notices her bloodshot eyes. He drops his pen.

AVA (CONT'D)

I just met Brandon's new Chief of Staff.

Matthew looks at her expectantly.

AVA (CONT'D)

Marlee Bowdoin. That's who he picked.

Matthew scoffs in disbelief.

MATTHEW

Of everyone in Washington.

He shakes his head.

AVA  
I think she suspects something,  
Matt.

MATTHEW  
Whoah, whoah! You think? What  
happened to that effortless  
confidence?

AVA  
She was asking me about how we knew  
Ethan and what we talked to him  
about that night.

MATTHEW  
Okay? So, she has questions. She's  
the only one. The rest of the world  
believes it was Ethan. Just... calm  
down.

AVA  
I'm not sure you're understanding  
me, Matt.

MATTHEW  
Oh, I understand, I promise.

Matthew stands and walks toward Ava.

MATTHEW (CONT'D)  
What you need to understand is  
this.

Matthew grabs Ava's hand and pulls her to the balcony  
railing. The view overlooks the lawn, the Washington Monument  
a prominent feature on the horizon.

MATTHEW (CONT'D)  
This is ours. This house is ours.  
This country is ours.

Ava closes her eyes. Matthew stares out over the horizon.

MATTHEW (CONT'D)  
I fought for it. It's mine. If  
Marlee thinks she can take it from  
me, I'd like to see her try.

Matthew turns toward Ava, her eyes still closed.

MATTHEW (CONT'D)  
Look at me. Hey, open your eyes.

Ava slowly opens her eyes, she looks into Matthew's.

MATTHEW (CONT'D)  
You are the First Lady of the  
United States.

Ava nods weakly.

MATTHEW (CONT'D)  
And who am I?

AVA  
President of the United States.

Matthew puts an arm around Ava and admires the view again.

MATTHEW  
That's right. Everything is going  
to be fine. Marlee isn't going to  
get anywhere with her little  
suspicions. That's all they are and  
she's got no one convinced.

Ava's hands shake as she places them on the railing. She lets  
out a shaky breath.

AVA  
What happened to you?

Matthew furrows his brow at Ava.

AVA (CONT'D)  
I mean, before you nearly took my  
head off when I even mentioned the  
25th Amendment. Now? You're the one  
calming me down.

Matthew returns his gaze to the horizon, the sun sets behind  
the Washington Monument. He lets out a breath.

MATTHEW  
You're right. But sitting behind  
that desk in the Oval Office?  
There's a power there, it's unlike  
anything I've felt before, it's -

AVA  
Addicting?

Matthew keeps his eyes on the horizon.

AVA (CONT'D)  
I don't think either of us thought  
about what happens after. About  
what you'll have to do to keep it.

A tear slips down Ava's cheek. She lowers her head.

AVA (CONT'D)

I can keep a smile on my face, and  
I can pick out curtains and  
paintings, and wear pretty dresses,  
but... You have to do the work now.

Ava's eyes search Matthew's face. His stare focuses on the Monument.

Ava kisses his cheek and retreats inside.

INT. WEST WING - MORNING

Various AIDES sit at their desks and work. Emma, in her office, files through papers and marks up a page with red pen. Marlee strides past the aides toward Emma's office, folder in hand.

Marlee knocks on the door frame and Emma's head snaps up.

EMMA

Marlee! Come on in, what can I do  
for you?

MARLEE

I just need some clarification I'm  
hoping you might have.

EMMA

I can try, but Harper might be more  
help.

MARLEE

What do you know about the First  
Lady and Ethan, the former secret  
service agent?

EMMA

Nothing? They chatted a few times  
on the campaign trail and, I think,  
the night of the ball?

Marlee walks further into the room, she examines the shelves.

MARLEE

But, otherwise? It's  
been...professional? You would say?

EMMA

Uh, yeah, you could say that.

MARLEE

But, would you say that? You've been with the First Lady since the beginning, wouldn't you know?

Emma drops her pen onto the desk and watches Marlee cautiously.

EMMA

Yes. I would say that the relationship between the First Lady and Ethan has been strictly professional.

MARLEE

Got it. What about the President and Former President Donnelly?

EMMA

Listen, I'm really not the one you should be talking to. Like I said, Harper is-

The phone on Emma's desk rings. She picks it up and holds it to her ear.

EMMA (CONT'D)

(on the phone)

I'm on my way.

(to Marlee)

Sorry, I have a senior staff meeting. Is there anything else you need?

Marlee looks down at the folder in her hand, then back up at Emma.

MARLEE

No. That's all.

Marlee leaves the room. Emma gathers some papers and exits her office.

INT. BRANDON'S OFFICE - AFTERNOON

Brandon sits behind his desk and holds his phone to his ear. Marlee knocks on the slightly open door, the folder still in her hand. Brandon waves his hand as a gesture for Marlee to come in.

BRANDON

(on the phone)

I appreciate that, Cyndi.

(MORE)

BRANDON (CONT'D)

I've got my chief of staff here,  
though, so I'm going to have to let  
you go. Thank you, again. Bye.

Brandon hangs up the phone and turns his attention to Marlee.  
She has a small smile on her face.

MARLEE

Cyndi? That's...

BRANDON

Another parent from QUINN's school,  
She needed- you know what, it's  
nothing. What do you have?

He nods toward the folder in her hand.

MARLEE

Something I want to run by you.

She drops the folder on Brandon's desk. He opens it, the  
picture of Ethan, Ava, and Matthew falls onto the desk.  
Brandon picks it up and inspects it.

He flips through the pages and skims them quickly.

BRANDON

What's all this for? Are you  
looking more into Ethan? I thought  
he was dealt with?

MARLEE

Not Ethan.

Brandon looks over the last few pages, then up at Marlee.

BRANDON

Not Ethan? Then who? The First  
Lady? The President?

Brandon looks up at Marlee, a playful smile on his face.

Marlee stares right at Brandon, she doesn't move a muscle.

Brandon raises his eyebrows, his eyes widen.

BRANDON (CONT'D)

Why are you looking into the  
President?

MARLEE

I have a bad feeling about him.

Brandon laughs a little.



BRANDON

Marlee, half this town has a bad feeling about the other half of this town. It's politics.

MARLEE

This isn't *just* politics. I think-

BRANDON

Stop.

Brandon holds up a hand.

BRANDON (CONT'D)

I'm going to give you the opportunity to choose your next words carefully.

Marlee juts her chin out, she stands straighter, confident.

MARLEE

I think the President had something to do with Charlie's death.

Brandon drops the folder and stands up from his chair.

MARLEE (CONT'D)

It's more than a bad feeling and I promise I wouldn't come to you if I wasn't sure. If I didn't know what I know.

Brandon lets out a breath and stares into Marlee's eyes. She doesn't blink, her posture is rigid.

BRANDON

Talk to me.

INT. OVAL OFFICE - AFTERNOON

Harper and Emma sit next to each other on a couch. Harper's notebook and folder sit on her lap. Matthew leans against the front of his desk. He stares at the floor.

HARPER

I'm sure she's just got questions. Charlie died suddenly and she was close with her. She's probably just looking for closure.

EMMA

Right. And it's not like you or the First Lady did anything. They already got Ethan on it.

HARPER

Exactly. She'll drop it when she realizes we have a country to run.

Matthew lifts his eyes to the ceiling and takes a deep breath.

Harper flips a page in her folder.

HARPER (CONT'D)

Speaking of which, There's the event in Houston next week. I told them you and the First Lady will make an appearance. Air Force One will leave Washington at 7:40 Thursday morning, you'll be back here early Friday morning.

Harper scribbles a note in her notebook, then looks at Matthew.

Matthew stands with his back to the women, he looks out the window.

HARPER (CONT'D)

Sir?

MATTHEW

I'm not going.

HARPER

Mr. President-

Harper frantically flips through her notes. Matthew spins to look at Harper, a smile on his face.

MATTHEW

I think Armstrong should go. It'll be good for him, don't you think?

Harper looks at Emma, her eyes wide in confusion.

EMMA

Sure, Mr. President. We can inform him of the change to his schedule.

Harper scribbles more in her notebook.

MATTHEW

I can handle that. Just tell him to come by the ov- my office, tomorrow afternoon.

HARPER

Of course, sir. Is there anything else?

Matthew walks around and sits behind his desk.

MATTHEW

That's all. Can you send Seth in on your way out, please?

Both women nod, gather their things, and exit the office.

Seth pushes the door open a bit as he knocks gently.

SETH

You wanted to see me, sir?

MATTHEW

I need a meeting with LIEUTENANT COLONEL GRANT tomorrow afternoon. I'll be meeting with Armstrong tomorrow as well, but I need to see Grant first, understood?

SETH

Yes, sir. I'm on it.

MATTHEW

Thank you. That's it.

Seth nods, spins around, and exits. Matthew leans back in his chair, a content smile on his face.

In the window behind Matthew, the sun sets and then rises again.

INT. OVAL OFFICE - THE NEXT MORNING

Matthew pushes the door open and strides in confidently. He approaches the desk while Seth walks in behind him.

SETH

Good morning, Mr. President. I have Lt. Colonel Grant here to see you.

Matthew rounds the desk to stand behind it, looks to Seth, and gives him a smile.

MATTHEW

Thank you, send him in.

Seth nods and steps in, the door opens wider as Lt. Colonel Grant walks in. He is a tall man, in his mid-forties, and wears an Air Force Dress uniform.

LT. COLONEL GRANT

Mr. President.

MATTHEW

Lt. Colonel Grant, thank you for stopping by.

Matthew drops a stack of papers on his desk and walks toward the door. He shakes Lt. Colonel Grant's hand.

MATTHEW (CONT'D)

Please, have a seat.

Matthew pushes the door shut.

INT. WEST WING CORRIDOR - MORNING

Marlee and Brandon walk side by side down a long hallway.

MARLEE

I guess I just don't understand why we can't bring it up.

BRANDON

It's not that I want to sweep this under the rug, but if we bring this to him? If we accuse a sitting president of-

Brandon glances behind him, no one is close enough to hear him.

BRANDON (CONT'D)

Murder? And he *didn't* do it? I'd not only be out of a job, I'd be out of this town.

MARLEE

But if he did it, you're letting a murderer sit in the Oval Office.

BRANDON

Marlee, not here. We're not discussing this here.

MARLEE

I know you believe me, and maybe  
you're afraid of what that means,  
but I will not sit here and let  
that man run this country.

Brandon straightens his tie as they approach the Oval Office.

BRANDON

Can we shelve those feelings for a  
few minutes?

Marlee huffs and then forces a smile on her face.

Brandon gives her a short nod. He walks up to Seth's desk.

BRANDON (CONT'D)

Morning, could you let the  
president know that we're here to  
see him, please?

SETH

Of course, sir.

Seth rounds his desk, knocks and enters the Oval Office.

Marlee leans forward toward Brandon.

MARLEE

Do you think he was in on it, too?

Brandon shoots Marlee a look.

BRANDON

I said, not here.

Marlee throws her hands up in front of her, she turns to  
examine Seth's desk. She lifts a post-it up and a long strand  
of accordion style post-its follow.

The door to the Oval Office opens and Lt. Colonel Grant walks  
out. He nods his head at Brandon.

Marlee quickly drops the post-it notes and pushes them back  
into place on the desk. She turns in time to see Seth hold  
the door open for them. Brandon and Marlee walk into the Oval  
Office.

INT. OVAL OFFICE- CONTINUOUS

Brandon and Marlee stand next to each other in front of the  
desk. Matthew sits in his chair behind the desk, papers cover  
his work space.

MATTHEW

I do appreciate the both of you being so flexible with this. It's been a rocky start to this administration, and I think that getting out there and meeting with the people is a step in the right direction.

Brandon nods with a smile.

MARLEE

Then, why aren't you going?

Brandon whips his head toward Marlee and widens his eyes. He looks back at Matthew.

BRANDON

I apologize for her shortness. We had a bit of a long night getting... situated in the new offices.

Matthew dismisses his comment with a wave of his hand.

MATTHEW

It's alright. I won't be going because I have some important work to do here with my staff. Plus, I thought it would be a good look for the administration if you and Brandon went out there. It shows that we're moving forward. That I trust Brandon.

MARLEE

It has nothing to do with the fact that the First Lady ran off to her parents' house?

The polite smile on Matthew's face falls, but he quickly recovers. Marlee keeps eye contact with him.

MATTHEW

The First Lady is at her parents' house, that is true, but she didn't *run off*. She was a bit overwhelmed by the sudden change in responsibility and I thought it best she had time to adjust away from all this.

BRANDON

I am grateful for the opportunity to speak to the folks in Houston, Mr. President. Marlee and I are happy to take the trip.

Matthew keeps his eyes locked on Marlee's for another moment. He turns to Brandon.

MATTHEW

Thank you, Brandon. I'm sure you two will get a lot out of the trip.

Matthew raises his eyebrows and gasps.

MATTHEW (CONT'D)

You know what, I just had an excellent idea. Why don't you take Quinn? I'm sure your daughter would love the experience!

BRANDON

Sir, all due respect, she's only seventeen. We have some time before she needs to dive head first into the world of politics.

MATTHEW

Nonsense. It's never too early to get started! Have her join you in Houston, it'll be a great learning experience for her! I'll even call her out of school myself!

Brandon and Matthew share a laugh.

BRANDON

Well, Mr. President, I will see if she's up for it. I'm sure she'll love the invitation.

MATTHEW

I hope so.

(beat)

That's all I had for you two. Thank you.

Brandon and Marlee turn to leave the office and walk a few feet.

MATTHEW (CONT'D)

Uh, Marlee, could I have a quick word before you go?

Marlee looks at Brandon. He shakes his head at her almost unnoticeable, a warning more than anything.

MARLEE

Of course, Mr. President.

Marlee puts a smile on her face before she turns to face Matthew.

MATTHEW

You may step out, Brandon.

Brandon nods and steps out, the door closes behind him.

Matthew and Marlee stand on opposite ends of the room. Her stance is rigid and tense. Matthew relaxes and leans back in his chair.

MATTHEW (CONT'D)

Take a look around.

Marlee's gaze does not move. She's focuses on Matthew and they hold eye contact.

Matthew stands and approaches Marlee.

MATTHEW (CONT'D)

This, Ms. Bowdoin, is the Oval Office. Now, I know you are- we are all having a rough time. This was not the most conventional start to a presidential term. I have made exceptions for you, chalked it up to your grief getting the best of you. That ends now. Say what you will about my ability to lead, but when you are in this office, you will show respect. If not for me, then for the position I hold.

He gets closer to Marlee, his lips inches from her ear.

MATTHEW (CONT'D)

(whispers)

I don't know what game you're playing, but actions have consequences. Have I made myself clear?

He pulls back and looks right into her eyes.

Marlee swallows and holds her head higher.



MARLEE

Is that a threat, Mr. President?

A smirk creeps onto Matthew's face.

MATTHEW

I would never.

Now, Marlee leans in close to Matthew's ear.

MARLEE

(whispers)

You don't scare me, Mr. President.

She stands up straight, holds her head high. There is no trace of a smile on Matthew's face, his jaw clenches.

MATTHEW

You can go, Ms. Bowdoin.

Marlee walks out without another word.

Matthew returns to his desk, stands for a moment, then sweeps all of his papers onto the floor in a fluid motion.

EXT. AIR FIELD - MORNING

A large airplane with the words "United States of America" across the side sits stationary on the tarmac. The door to the plane is open and the stairs extend to the ground.

One car pulls up and come to a stop near the stairs of the plane. Brandon steps out of the first one in a nice suit.

A second car pulls up and Marlee steps out, she wears a fancy pant suit, her hair flows down her back. She puts on a pair of sunglasses.

Marlee walks over to Brandon, together they walk toward the plane.

MARLEE

Quinn's not coming?

BRANDON

I tried. She had a big exam and didn't want to miss soccer practice.

MARLEE

What I wouldn't give to play a game of soccer right now.

Brandon furrows his brow and tilts his head with a small laugh.

BRANDON

I didn't know you played?

MARLEE

I don't, but it seems like more fun than jetting off to Houston on a whim because Thompson doesn't want us around the White House.

Brandon sighs. He moves aside and allows Marlee to climb the steps before him.

BRANDON

I think you've been listening to too much Wicked in Washington. Marlee, not everything needs to be a conspiracy.

MARLEE

You didn't disagree with me when I told you what Thompson did.

BRANDON

What he *allegedly* did. And, even if he did it, he's not sending us away because he doesn't want us around. The Houston event has been planned since Charlie got elected.

At the top of the stairs, Marlee stiffens at the mention of Charlie's name.

INT. AIR FORCE 2 - CONTINUOUS

Lt. Colonel Grant stands just inside and welcomes Brandon and Marlee. Grant nods toward Marlee, she gives a polite smile and continues into the plane.

Brandon reaches to shake Grant's hand.

LT. COLONEL GRANT

Welcome on board, sir. I'm your pilot, Lt. Colonel Grant. My co-pilot, Lt. Colonel O'Neal is already in the cockpit.

Brandon shakes his hand. His brow furrows, but he shakes it off.

BRANDON

Uh... Thank you.

Brandon walks further into the plane and finds a seat across from Marlee. She has a folder open in her lap, red pen in hand.

MARLEE

I don't know who thought this bill was a good idea. I've already gone through two red pens.

She chuckles to herself and shakes her head.

Brandon is in a bit of a daze, he stares at the tabletop, then looks in the direction of the cockpit. Marlee looks up and watches as he gazes at a closed door.

MARLEE (CONT'D)

Uh, everything okay...?

Brandon snaps back, he looks at Marlee.

BRANDON

No, well, yes, I'm just...

He drops his head and his eyes dart around the tabletop. Marlee watches him carefully. His head snaps back up, he locks eyes with Marlee.

BRANDON (CONT'D)

That's it!

Brandon snaps his fingers.

BRANDON (CONT'D)

He was at the White House!

Marlee's eyes widen, her eyebrows arch in confusion.

BRANDON (CONT'D)

Sorry, the pilot. He said his name was Lt. Colonel Grant. I thought he looked familiar. He was leaving the Oval when we got there the other day.

Marlee stands quickly.

MARLEE

Nope. I'm not going. I'm not staying on this plane.

Brandon reaches over the table and pulls Marlee's arm.

BRANDON

You're not going anywhere. It was probably nothing. There's different pilots for Air Force 1 and 2, Thompson was probably just letting Grant know that he would be flying us.

Marlee exhales but cautiously sits back down. Brandon cracks a smile, a small chuckle escapes.

BRANDON (CONT'D)

We'll be fine, Marlee.

Marlee huffs as she picks her folder up. She goes back in with her red pen and marks up the pages.

INT. WHITE HOUSE BEDROOM - NIGHT

Matthew walks into his room and loosens his tie. From his pocket, he pulls out his cell phone and calls Ava. He slowly moves to the bed and sits on the edge while the phone rings.

INT. AVA'S BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

Ava is asleep in her bed. Her phone vibrates on the nightstand and lights up with the name "Matthew" across the screen. It vibrates for a moment then Ava reaches over and brings it to her ear, she doesn't open her eyes.

AVA

Hello?

MATTHEW (O.S.)

Hey, Ave. It's me. Just wanted to check in. How are you?

AVA

What time is it?

INT. WHITE HOUSE BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

The clock on Matthew's bedside table reads "1:37 am."

MATTHEW

I'm sorry, I just got out of the office. How are you, though?

INT. AVA'S BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

Ava is on her side. The phone, on speaker, rests in front of her.

AVA

I can't come back, Matt. I feel sick to my stomach every time I walk down those halls.

MATTHEW (O.S.)

Ava...

AVA

No. I don't know how you can sit behind that desk. In that office. But, if I come back? I would ruin it.

INT. WHITE HOUSE BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

Matthew runs his hands through his hair.

MATTHEW

That's not true, Ava. I'd be better with you here.

AVA (O.S.)

Marlee would take one look at me and know something was up.

MATTHEW

But, what if Marlee was gone? Would you come back then?

INT. AVA'S BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

Ava rolls over and stares up at the ceiling.

AVA

Marlee's not gonna leave, Matt. You've met the girl, she's more stubborn than me.

MATTHEW (O.S.)

Marlee won't be an issue after tomorrow morning.

Ava's eye widen and her breath catches.

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

Ava? You there?

AVA  
Matt. What did you do?

MATTHEW (O.S.)  
I said that Marlee won't be an  
issue anymore. I want you to come  
back. Come *home*.

A tear slides down Ava's face. She covers her mouth with her hand, and suppresses a cry. Ava swallows, she takes a deep breath.

AVA  
I can't.

INT. WHITE HOUSE BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

On the edge of his bed, Matthew's posture is perfect as a tear rolls down his face.

MATTHEW  
Ava...

The line goes dead.

MATTHEW (CONT'D)  
Ava.

Matthew falls backwards onto the bed. He holds his phone close to his chest.

INT. WHITE HOUSE BEDROOM - MORNING

Matthew sleeps sideways, he wears his suit, and his hand still clutches his phone.

The clock on the bedside table reads "5:44 am." The phone next to the clock rings, a red light flashes.

Matthew rolls over and groans into a pillow. The phone continues to ring and flash.

Finally, Matthew reaches over and presses the speaker button on the phone.

MATTHEW  
(muffled)  
Hello?

HARPER (O.S.)  
Sir?

Matthew turns his head at Harper's voice. He pulls himself up right.

MATTHEW  
Harper? Where's Seth?

HARPER (O.S.)  
Mr. President, this isn't a wake up call.

Matthew sits on the edge of the bed. He brings the phone to his ear. He waits a moment.

MATTHEW  
I'm on my way down.

He hangs up the phone. He walks toward the door and pulls his tie off. He finds a tie on the way out and throws it around his neck.

INT. EMMA'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

A television hangs in the corner and displays aerial footage of a field covered with wreckage on a news channel. The scrolling text at the bottom reads "Air Force 2 Crashes in Field." Harper, Emma, and other aides watch intently.

Matthew ties his tie as he walks in and peers up at the television.

The aides in the room stand at attention, their eyes on Matthew now.

MATTHEW  
What happened?

HARPER  
They don't know. Just said that it went down. They don't have any more information.

Matthew looks at Emma and Harper.

MATTHEW  
You two, my office, now.

Matthew walks out as Emma and Harper follow. The three of them walk briskly down the hall.

INT. WEST WING CORRIDOR - CONTINUOUS

Seth sits at his desk outside the Oval Office. His head rests in his hands, his eyes closed, asleep.

Matthew approaches and knocks on the desk. Seth jolts awake, his head falls and hits the desk.

SETH

Ugh.

He rubs his head and looks up to see Matthew, Harper, and Emma walk into the Oval Office.

SETH (CONT'D)

Whoah, wait, who died?

He pushes his chair back, walks around his desk, and enters the oval office.

INT. OVAL OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

Matthew leans on the front of his desk, he crosses his arms in front of him. Seth joins Harper and Emma and stands in front of Matthew.

Matthew looks right at Harper.

MATTHEW

What do you know?

HARPER

The plane went down around 5:00am.

SETH

Wait, what plane?

HARPER

They're not sure what caused it.

SETH

What plane?!

Emma swats at Seth. His raises his eyebrows.

Matthew nods.

MATTHEW

Who's hurt?

Harper opens her mouth, then closes it.



MATTHEW (CONT'D)

Harper, who is hurt?

HARPER

Uh, Brandon Armstrong, Lt. Colonels Grant and O'Neal, most of Armstrong's staff.

MATTHEW

How badly are they injured?

HARPER

Mr. President... They...

Harper takes a shaky breath.

EMMA

They died, sir.

Seth gasps. Matthew clenches his jaw and stares past the staff.

MATTHEW

Armstrong's daughter, Quinn. Is she alright?

EMMA

She didn't go, sir.

Matthew drops his head. He runs his hands through his already disheveled hair.

MATTHEW

She didn't go? I told Brandon to invite her...

EMMA

She was in school yesterday, something about a big exam. The secret service agents assigned to the Armstrong's are going to tell her when she wakes up.

SETH

Thank God for that exam, can you imagine if she was with them?

Emma eyes Matthew suspiciously. He catches her stare.

MATTHEW

Right, right. It would have been devastating.

Matthew nods to himself. His head snaps to look at Harper. Her eyes are bloodshot and there are bags under her eyes.

MATTHEW (CONT'D)

Marlee. What happened to her?

HARPER

She was transported to a local hospital and is being flown into Walter Reed.

MATTHEW

She survived?

HARPER

Yes, sir. She was injured, but found alive.

Matthew exhales harshly.

MATTHEW

Okay. Now, what?

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - DAY

A steady, rhythmic beep sounds from a machine next to a hospital bed. Marlee lays still, her right arm rests across her stomach. There is an IV in her left arm and a monitor on her finger. There are scratches on her face, her eye is black.

A NURSE walks in and checks over Marlee. She enters information on a computer. Marlee stirs. Slowly, her eyes open, she squints at the light.

The nurse turns and sees Marlee move, she rushes over.

NURSE

Hey, there. You're alright.

Marlee tries to lift her right arm, cries out, and drops it.

NURSE (CONT'D)

You're alright. You're at Walter Reed. Your collarbone is broken, so try not to move your arm too much, okay?

Marlee nods weakly.

The nurse pulls a tray over with a plastic pitcher and a small cup with a straw. She pours a small amount of water and brings it to Marlee's lips.

Marlee sips slowly. She swallows and cringes at the pain.

The nurse sets the cup down. A knock sounds at the door. Harper walks in cautiously.

HARPER

I just came to check on Ms. Bowdoin.

NURSE

She just woke up. Go easy on her.

Harper nods and the nurse exits. Marlee uses her left arm to push herself more upright. She winces as she leans forward. Harper rushes over to help, but Marlee shoos her away.

MARLEE

Tell me what happened.

HARPER

Well, there was an accident, and-

MARLEE

The plane crashed. That's the last thing I remember.

HARPER

First responders pulled you out of the wreckage and you were taken to a local hospital. You arrived here a few hours ago. Diagnosis is a broken collarbone, two broken ribs, and a concussion, miraculously.

Marlee takes a few deep breaths.

MARLEE

What happened to everyone else? Is Armstrong here?

Harper takes in a breath.

HARPER

Armstrong didn't make it. You and four advisors survived. That's all.

MARLEE

Brandon's gone?

HARPER

I'm so sorry, Marlee.

Tears well up in Marlee's eyes. She purses her lips and breathes in through her nose.

HARPER (CONT'D)  
Is there anything I can do for you?  
Someone I can call?

MARLEE  
Get out.

Harper gasps.

HARPER  
Sorry...I-

MARLEE  
You want to know what you can do  
for me? You can get the hell out  
and tell Thompson that I'm done  
playing his game.

Harper swallows, opens her mouth to speak, then turns and  
walks out.

MARLEE (CONT'D)  
This ends now.

INT. OVAL OFFICE - AFTERNOON

Matthew sits behind his desk. He leans back in his chair with  
bloodshot eyes and messy hair.

Harper paces near the desk, Emma sits next to Seth on one of  
the couches.

SETH  
I don't get it. What does she mean  
"his game?"

HARPER  
That's what she told me. I'm just  
the messenger.

EMMA  
You think she's under the  
impression you had something to do  
with the plane crash?

Matthew throws his head back and rests it on the back of the  
chair.

SETH  
You can't make a plane crash.

Seth narrows his eyes with a tilt of his head. He looks at  
Harper

SETH (CONT'D)  
He can't, right?

MATTHEW  
(eager)  
Exactly! How would I?

HARPER  
It was an accident that's being investigated. Marlee was probably just out of it.

EMMA  
Right, and what's she gonna do? Impeach the president for sending her to Houston?

Matthew sits up in his chair. His eyes find Emma, she looks at Seth.

EMMA (CONT'D)  
How was he supposed to know the plane was gonna crash?

SETH  
Please, Marlee wouldn't dare talk to the Speaker of the House, even if it means *she* could become president. At least not after what happened.

Seth relaxes into the couch.

EMMA  
Now's really not the time for that, Seth.

Matthew jumps out of his seat. He walks to the other couch and sits across from Seth and Emma.

MATTHEW  
What happened?

SETH  
You mean with Marlee and AIDEN DUNNES?

Matthew leans in closer to Seth, his eyes wide.

MATTHEW  
Why won't she talk to her?

SETH  
Uhh...

He looks at Emma, then back at Matthew.

SETH (CONT'D)

They had a pretty bad break-up  
right before the convention.  
Neither one has spoken to the other  
in almost a year.

Harper narrows her eyes at Seth.

HARPER

How did you know about that?

Seth shrugs.

SETH

What? I listen when people talk. If  
they're talking loudly and near me,  
you can't expect me *not* to listen.

Harper shakes her head at Seth and waves him off. She turns  
to Matthew.

HARPER

Gossip aside, Marlee doesn't have  
anything on you. So, legally, she  
won't be able to hurt you. Now,  
that being said, I have known her  
for a few years. When she gets mad,  
she gets *mad*.

Matthew sits back on the couch and crosses his arms. Harper  
starts to pace again.

HARPER (CONT'D)

I'm not telling you to be afraid of  
her because she'd have to get  
through Secret Service and she  
loves her job too much to risk  
doing anything stupid. With  
Armstrong gone, she'll push for a  
new VP, I'm not sure who, but she's  
gonna want to be involved.

EMMA

Like you said, he has nothing to  
worry about, though. Plus, if Seth  
is right, Marlee won't be able to  
do much without going to Aiden.

SETH

She won't. Marlee is stubborn and  
she swore she would never speak to  
Aiden again.

Matthew takes a deep breath.

                  SETH (CONT'D)  
You're gonna be fine, Mr.  
President.

EXT. FRONT STOOP - NIGHT

A set of steps leads up to a large blue door. The blinds block the view into the windows on either side of the door.

A small car pulls into a parking spot in front of the apartment. Marlee gets out, her right arm is in an elaborate sling.

She circles around the car, opens the passenger seat, and struggles to pull a cardboard box out.

She holds the box with her left hand against her hip and kicks the car door shut.

She walks up the few steps to the door. She tries to reach for the knocker with her right hand, but is unsuccessful. She looks around for a moment, then kicks the door to knock.

After a moment, the door opens. AIDEN DUNNES, a younger woman, appears. She wears sweatpants and an oversized Yale sweatshirt. Her hair is up in a messy bun.

                  AIDEN  
Mar...

Marlee manages a small smile, but her eyes are soft and sad.

                  MARLEE  
Hi, Aiden.

The two women stare at each other for a moment. Aiden looks down at the box on Marlee's hip.

                  AIDEN  
Did you need something?

Marlee stares at Aiden for another moment, then snaps back, her eyes jump to the box.

                  MARLEE  
Uh, yeah, actually. Do you have a  
minute to talk?

INT. AIDEN'S LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Aiden's living room is tidy, alphabetized books sit on the shelves. On the coffee table, a glass of water and a small bowl of popcorn sit off to the side.

The box Marlee brought is open in the middle. The women sit next to each other on the couch and go through the pages in the box.

AIDEN

You have quite a bit here. How did you get all this information?

MARLEE

I've been looking into this for a while.

AIDEN

You thought President Thompson killed Charlie and you just...? Kept it to yourself?

Aiden pulls more pages out of the box and flips through them.

MARLEE

I didn't think it was him right away. They arrested Ethan and I thought that was it, but you should've seen him when the secret service had him in my office. I mean, he was a wreck. He had a whole life, a real future. I didn't get why he would throw that away. So, I-

AIDEN

Took matters into your own hands?

Aiden looks into Marlee's eyes. Marlee opens her mouth, then closes it.

MARLEE

Yeah.

Aiden keeps her eyes on Marlee.

AIDEN

I'd be disappointed if you didn't.

Aiden focuses on the paper in her hand. Marlee watches her read as a smile forms on her face.



AIDEN (CONT'D)

Okay, so, I can take all this with me tomorrow morning, but-

MARLEE

No! You can't!

Marlee reaches for the papers in Aiden's hand. She winces at the sudden movement. Aiden turns away and holds the papers out of reach of Marlee.

AIDEN

Mar, I'll need this information.

MARLEE

Sorry, these are just the only copies. I don't want them getting destroyed.

Aiden brings the papers back in front of her. She takes another look at the stack in the box.

AIDEN

I can make copies. You can take these home, and I can bring the copies into my office.

Marlee pulls back and her posture relaxes.

MARLEE

Okay. Okay, I can do that.

Aiden gets up from the couch and grabs the box as she stands. She walks behind the couch, and leans over toward Marlee.

AIDEN

You did the right thing, Mar.

MARLEE

This job's all I have left. I'm gonna do what I can to save it.

Aiden walks past a clock on the wall and into the next room. The clock display changes from 8:15 pm to 9:00 pm.

INT. AIDEN'S LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Aiden walks back into the living room with the box. Marlee sleeps in an upright position.

Aiden drops the box on the table and Marlee wakes with a jump. She winces and her left hand shoots up to her collarbone. Aiden drops and kneels down in front of her.

AIDEN

Oh, I'm so sorry! I didn't mean for that to happen. Are you okay?

Marlee gently runs her fingers over her collarbone, she squeezes her eyes shut.

MARLEE

I'm okay. It's alright.

Aiden kneels still and puts her hands on Marlee's knee. Aiden raises her eyebrows and looks into Marlee's eyes.

MARLEE (CONT'D)

Really, I'll be okay.

Aiden watches her face another moment, nods, then stands.

AIDEN

I can carry this out for you.

Marlee's eyes land on her knee where Aiden's hands were. She shakes her head and stands.

MARLEE

Right, thank you.

EXT. FRONT STOOP - NIGHT

Marlee stands next to her car while Aiden places the box on the passenger seat. Aiden closes the door and crosses her arms. Marlee looks down at the ground.

AIDEN

I'll do what I can with this, but-

MARLEE

No promises.

Aiden cracks a small smile and nods.

MARLEE (CONT'D)

You're not the only who can finish the other's sentences.

Aiden's smile turns soft, almost sympathetic.

AIDEN

No, I guess not.

Marlee smiles. The two women stare into each other's eyes. After a few moments, Aiden clears her throat and Marlee looks down at her car.

AIDEN (CONT'D)  
I should let you get home. You need  
to get some sleep.

MARLEE  
Right, yeah. Okay.

Marlee stands frozen next to her car. She watches Aiden walk  
up her steps. Aiden turns the doorknob and Marlee circles  
around to the driver's side door.

Aiden turns around to face Marlee. Marlee opens her car door.

AIDEN  
Wait!

Marlee stops in her tracks, her eyes find Aiden's.

AIDEN (CONT'D)  
You were wrong before. This job's  
not all you have left. I know you  
don't believe it, but you still  
have me...  
(beat)  
... And I'm really glad you're  
okay.

Marlee's mouth falls open a bit. She stands frozen.

AIDEN (CONT'D)  
Good night, Mar.

Aiden walks into the apartment, the door shuts with a click.

INT. HARPER'S OFFICE - MORNING

Harper walks into her office in a knee-length black skirt and  
pulls her hair out of it's high pony-tail. She drops into her  
seat behind her desk and kicks her heels off. As soon as she  
rests her head on her desk, the door swings open.

HARPER  
No, please, come in.

EMMA  
Sorry, I saw you just got back from  
Armstrong's visitation, and this  
can't wait.

Harper keeps her head on her desk and groans. She sits up and  
takes a deep breath.

HARPER  
What is it?

Emma sets a thick stack of paper on Harper's desk.

HARPER (CONT'D)  
Did you print the dictionary? Emma,  
what is this?

Emma hands over another, smaller, set of pages to Harper.

Harper reads. Her eyes widen and she looks up at Emma, then  
back down at the paper.

HARPER (CONT'D)  
Well, I'll be damned. Mar went to  
Aiden.

INT. OVAL OFFICE - LATER

Matthew sits hunched over the desk, the phone pressed to his  
ear.

MATTHEW  
No, I know she's upset. I just need  
to talk to her. Please, let me talk  
to my wife. No. Gwen, don't hang  
up, please.

Matthew slams the phone down on the receiver.

MATTHEW (CONT'D)  
Unbelievable.

Harper walks in with the set of pages in her hand.

HARPER  
Everything alright with the First  
Lady?

MATTHEW  
I wouldn't know. Her mother won't  
let me speak to her. She acts like  
we're some sixteen-year-old kids  
and I'm not the President of the  
United States. How are you going to  
hang up on the President of the  
United States?!

HARPER  
Sorry to hear that, sir.

Harper swallows and examines the papers in her hands.

HARPER (CONT'D)  
I, unfortunately, have some  
information that you're not going  
to like.

Harper slides the small stack in front of Matthew. The  
heading reads "Articles of Impeachment Against Matthew C.  
Benjamin Thompson."

The color drains from Matthew's face. He holds his breath and  
clenches his jaw.

MATTHEW  
If this is about the plane crash,  
it's still an ongoing  
investigation. They can't do-

HARPER  
It's about the death of Former  
President Charlie Donnelly.

MATTHEW  
What?! That's insane. They've  
already got Ethan for that. He had  
the vial in his pocket! I mean this  
is, this is outrageous!

HARPER  
Sir, I didn't think there was any  
truth to it, either.

MATTHEW  
Didn't? What? So, now you're on  
their side?

HARPER  
I'm not on anyone's *side*, sir. I  
was given a pretty large stack of  
papers with the *facts* and I won't  
lie, it doesn't look good.

Matthew scoffs and tosses the copy of the articles of  
impeachment onto the floor. He turns and looks out the  
window.

MATTHEW  
If this is the game Bowdoin wants  
to play, then bring it on.

Harper narrows her gaze at Matthew. She walks over and picks  
up the tossed papers.

HARPER

The game that Mar said she was done playing?

Matthew pivots away from the window and focuses on Harper.

HARPER (CONT'D)

Sir, if this is true...

Harper holds up the articles.

HARPER (CONT'D)

I would watch out for her.

Matthew laughs. He throws his hands up in frustration.

MATTHEW

Why does no one here understand that I am the *President of the United States*. Your little 'Mar' can't touch me here. Not in this office. Not in this building. It's mine. I won't lose it without a fight.

Harper stands very tense and holds the papers in her hand. She watches Matthew take heavy deep breaths.

MATTHEW (CONT'D)

SETH!

Seth enters the room meekly, he stands a bit hunched over, afraid.

MATTHEW (CONT'D)

I need you to call Gwen or Anthony Roberts, Ava's parents, and get them to put Ava on the line.

Matthew takes a seat at his desk.

MATTHEW (CONT'D)

Transfer the call in here when you get her.

Seth looks over at Harper who still stands frozen, papers in her hand. Matthew follows Seth's eyes.

MATTHEW (CONT'D)

For Christ's sake, do I have to remind everyone here who I am? Don't look at her, Seth. I gave you an order.

SETH

Yes, sir.

Harper clenches her jaw, swallows, and clutches the papers tighter.

Matthew waits expectantly in front of the phone. He stares for a few moments. He looks up at the door, a scowl on his face.

Seth pushes the door open.

MATTHEW

I said transfer the call. What are you doing?

SETH

Uhm, sir. They...uh, they would...

MATTHEW

SPIT IT OUT, KID!

Seth and Harper both wince at the sharp tone.

SETH

They would not put the First Lady on the phone, sir.

MATTHEW

And, why not?

SETH

They informed me that she has passed away.

Matthew's face grows more tense, his jaw tight.

MATTHEW

Say that again.

SETH

The First Lady is dead.

Matthew takes short, sharp breaths. His jaw clenches.

MATTHEW

(quietly)  
Everyone out.

Harper and Seth waste no time. They each turn and exit the Oval Office.

Matthew stands, clenches his fist. He takes heavy breaths.

Suddenly, he turns behind him and grabs a velvet curtain. He rips it down with a yell. He falls to the floor. He takes a long breath in through his nose.

His whole body shakes with sobs as he cries on the floor.

INT. AIDEN'S OFFICE - MORNING

Aiden sits behind her desk and files through a stack of papers. Marlee sits on her desk to the side with papers in her hand, her arm still in a sling, but the cuts and bruises have faded.

The door opens slowly and Matthew walks in. There are bags under his bloodshot eyes. His hair sticks out and his tie is crooked.

Aiden puts her papers down and stands.

AIDEN  
Mr. President.

Marlee turns to see Matthew, but does not stand.

MARLEE  
Here to turn yourself in?

MATTHEW  
I'm here to speak to you, Ms.  
Bowdoin.

Aiden glances at Marlee then looks back at Matthew. She steps around her desk.

AIDEN  
I'll give you two the room.

Matthew nods and steps out of the door way. Aiden shuts it on her way out.

Matthew approaches Aiden's desk. He picks up her name plate, "Aiden Dunnes" covers the front of the gold and wood.

Marlee, with her good hand, snatches it out of Matthew's hand. She hops off the desk and stands in front of it, a foot from Matthew.

MARLEE  
Don't touch that. Don't touch  
anything.



MATTHEW

Marlee, I don't know what you think I did-

MARLEE

Murdered Charlie Donnelly, Brandon Armstrong, two Lt. Colonels, and more than half of the vice president's staff. You attempted to kill Quinn Armstrong, an innocent seventeen-year-old girl. Oh, yeah, and you nearly killed me. I am done playing nice. I am done beating around the bush. You are a guilty man and I am going to see you brought to justice.

Matthew swallows but keeps his eyes on Marlee.

MATTHEW

I gave up everything for this office. Everything. I have nothing left. You of all people should understand that. I will not let you take this from me. If you want me out of this office, you'll have to take me out yourself.

MARLEE

Someone once told me that actions have consequences. It must be hard to face those consequences when they're your own actions. You put yourself in this mess. You pushed everyone, everything, aside for your fifteen minutes of fame. Was it worth it? Was it worth all this? Sure, your name is in the history books, but for all the wrong reasons. What about all the little girls out there that watched Charlie get inaugurated, only for her to be killed because she was in your way. Who tells them that they didn't get to see a capable, worthy, respectable, female leader because some man thought that the forty-six guys before her weren't enough? Who got to tell Quinn that her dad had to die because someone who claimed to be his friend didn't want him to know the truth about what he is.

(MORE)

MARLEE (CONT'D)

That he wasn't good enough to *earn*  
his place in history, so he stole  
it instead.

Matthew stands firm, his posture rigid.

MARLEE (CONT'D)

You want to stain your reputation?  
Throw your life away? Fine by me.  
But that office? The one meant for  
Charlie? You do not get to sit  
behind that desk. You do not get to  
go down in history as one of the  
greats. You want me to remove you  
from office myself?

Marlee takes a step forward, only inches from Matthew now.

MARLEE (CONT'D)

(whispers)  
Watch me.

GRAPHIC: 6 MONTHS LATER

INT. MARLEE'S OFFICE - MORNING

Marlee works to unpack a couple boxes in her office. She  
pulls binders out of one box and organizes them on a shelf  
She slides one into place, then adds another one to the  
shelf. She moves the empty box out of the way.

Above a row of filing cabinets sits Marlee's presidential  
bobble head collection. Charlie Donnelly's figure sits next  
to Matthew Thompson's figure near the end of the shelf.

A knock sounds from the door, QUINN ARMSTRONG, 18 years old,  
pushes the door open.

QUINN

Hey, are you ready to go?

MARLEE

Just give me another minute. I've  
got one more thing to hang up.

Marlee opens the last box and pulls a frame out.

QUINN

Isn't it a little late in the game  
to still be unpacking your office?

Marlee laughs as she adjusts the frame on the wall.

MARLEE

I just wanted to make sure this one was going to stick. Didn't want to get cozy just to move again.

QUINN

Fair enough.

Quinn smiles softly.

She walks over to the bobble head collection and inspects it closely.

Marlee tilts the frame a little to the side, she puts her hands up and steps back. The frame holds a newspaper front page that reads "President Thompson Impeached, Removed from Office, Convicted of Murder; Speaker of the House Aiden Dunnes Sworn in as President."

Marlee tilts her head all the way to the right.

MARLEE

Does it look crooked to you?

Quinn spins to see the frame on the wall. She tilts her head a little to the side.

QUINN

The frame? Or Thompson?

Marlee smiles proudly at Quinn and shakes her head. They both laugh.

Marlee steps forward, straightens the frame and takes a big step backwards to inspect it.

She steps back and bumps into the filing cabinets, some of the bobble heads above shake. The Matthew bobble head tips over and falls off the shelf.

Marlee turns to see it hit the ground. The head rolls across the floor. Marlee picks up the body of the bobble head, looks it over, and places it back on the shelf.

Quinn reaches down and picks up the head, she hands it to Marlee.

Marlee goes to set the head back on the body, but pulls it back. She takes a look at the cartoon depiction of Matthew's face. She considers it for a second, then drops the head in the trash can near the door.

MARLEE

You ready to go?

QUINN  
Yes, ma'am!

They both leave the room, Marlee swings the door shut. The impact rattles the shelf. Charlie's smiling bobble head bounces back and forth next to the headless Matthew bobble head.

FADE TO BLACK.

CREDITS SEQUENCE

POST-CREDIT SCENE

GRAPHIC: JANUARY 2042

EXT. CEMETERY - MORNING

Rows of tombstones cover the field, a flag sticks out of the ground beside each stone.

A woman, in her mid-thirties, stands in front of a flag and stone. The woman stands with her back to the black car, her face hidden.

She reaches forward and places her hand on top of the stone.

Marlee, in her mid-fifties now, stands a few feet away from the woman. Marlee waits outside of the black car with flags on the hood. She looks at her watch and opens the car door.

MARLEE  
Madam President? I'm sorry, but  
it's time to go.

The woman steps away from the stone to reveal the name "Brandon Taylor Armstrong" etched into it.

Quinn, now in her mid-thirties, smiles at Marlee and slides into the car.

Marlee pushes the door shut, the Seal of the President of the United States covers the center of the door.

END