MADAM SECRETARY

"Pilot"

Written by

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SECOND DRAFT

1/22/14

TEASER

INT. WHITE HOUSE - OVAL OFFICE - DAY

PRESIDENT CONRAD DALTON meets with SECRETARY OF STATE VICTOR MARSH. Both in their fifties, both charismatic, they could have been college buddies. But they weren't. And aren't buddies now. They are politicians. They respect each other but the tension is palpable.

PRESIDENT DALTON
I read your speech on President Rouhani's visit. The word tepid comes to mind.

MARSH
He's coming to see you, not me.

PRESIDENT DALTON
This is the first time an Iranian leader has set foot in the White House since the Shah. If the Secretary of State has nothing much to say, the world will notice.

MARSH
Just because they stopped saying out loud that they want to wipe Israel off the face of the map doesn't mean their goal has changed. I think the visit is premature.

PRESIDENT DALTON
We're not going to marry them, Victor. We're not even going to trust them. We're establishing diplomatic relations. I need you to sell it and this won't. I'm asking for a united front.

MARSH
So you're convinced their motives are pure.

PRESIDENT DALTON
Of course not. I ran the CIA for twelve years. I don't think anyone's motives are pure. I think their motives are political and that's how negotiations begin.

MARSH
Fine. I'll have the team take an enthusiasm pass.

The President's assistant, KATE WILKIE (30 going on 60) enters the room.

KATE
Excuse me, Mr. President, it's the First Lady for the third time, her words not mine, saying it's taco night and your children are hungry.

PRESIDENT DALTON
Thanks.
(to Marsh)
This is serious. If you'll excuse me, taco night is sacred.

INT. WHITE HOUSE CORRIDOR - CONTINUOUS

They exit the Oval Office and walk through the corridors of BUSY PEOPLE who pretend not to notice them.

MARSH
I have a plane to catch myself.

PRESIDENT DALTON
Getting out of town for the weekend?

MARSH
Martha's Vineyard.

PRESIDENT DALTON
I know this goes without saying but we have no White House business off the coast of Massachusetts.

MARSH
Have you been inside the State Department plane? I take that rat trap as little as possible. Finally invested in a GS5.
(off his look)
Can I help it if I married well?

PRESIDENT DALTON
Have a good time.

They shake hands. Marsh leaves.

EXT. UNIVERSITY OF VIRGINIA QUAD - LATE DAY

ELIZABETH FAULKNER MCGILL moves through the students and teachers with fixity of purpose, messenger bag over her shoulder, checking her watch. 45, striking in every way, full of passion for everything she does, including getting to her destination. A male student, JAKE, approaches.

JAKE
Dr. McGill, can I talk to you about my thesis?

ELIZABETH
Sure, during office hours.

JAKE
Your office hours don't really work for me.

ELIZABETH
I'm sorry to hear that.

JAKE
The thing is, I don't really want to write about the Cold War.

ELIZABETH
You're aware the class is called Postwar Politics and The Cold War.

JAKE
To be honest, I feel like it's been done.

ELIZABETH
That's why they call it history.

JAKE
My theory is that we're living through a new cold war.

ELIZABETH
Compare and contrast to the original and convince me.

JAKE
Great. Also, I'll need an extension. My parents are coming to town and they're very needy.

ELIZABETH
My husband bought tickets to the opera this weekend without asking me.

(MORE)

ELIZABETH (CONT'D)
Normally, I like the opera but it's been a tough week so sitting in a dimly lit room with people singing at me in Italian is just going to make me fall asleep.

Jake is just staring at her.

ELIZABETH (CONT'D)
Oh, I thought we were telling each other our problems. No extension. Enjoy your parents.

Elizabeth walks off leaving Jake to ponder.

EXT. ANOTHER PART OF THE QUAD - CONTINUOUS

A handsome professor about her age holds forth before a gaggle of COEDS. As Elizabeth approaches, we can hear what he's saying:

HENRY
What Aquinas was trying to say in Summa Theologica was that existence and essence are separate things. That's the concept behind Catholic transubstantiation. Now, Luther was a Tomasist by way of definition, though he parted with him in significant ways...

He stops talking as the girls become aware of Elizabeth's presence. HENRY MCGILL, Elizabeth's husband, turns.

ELIZABETH
Honey, their eyes are glazing over. They're just listening because you're cute.

One of the coeds, GILLIAN, speaks up:

GILLIAN
No way. I hated religion before I took his class. Now I'm totally caught up. He's brilliant.

ELIZABETH
Mind if I steal his brilliance for a moment?

She links arms with Henry and they walk away.

HENRY
How am I ever going to develop a cult following?

ELIZABETH
You'll figure it out. Did you remember I'm going into D.C. tonight and you have to cook?

HENRY
Right, the spy reunion.

ELIZABETH
Yes. I'm the only one who can talk about work so I get to be the center of attention.

HENRY
You're always the center of attention with me.

ELIZABETH
Explain that to your cult following.

HENRY
Tell George I'm ready to take his money in poker any time.

ELIZABETH
He's so sensitive about the poker thing.

HENRY
That's why it's so much fun to say it.

She laughs and they walk on across the quad.

INT. GULF STREAM PRIVATE JET - DAY

Victor Marsh sits aboard his private jet with his young ambitious speechwriter, ROGER, 30. Roger is working on his laptop. Marsh reads some papers.

MARSH
How's the pro-Iranian pass going, Roger? Brimming with enthusiasm yet?

ROGER
I'm not sure how far you want me to take it.

MARSH
Take it all the way. I serve at the pleasure. By the time you get done with it, they'll elect me president over there.

ROGER
Yes, sir.

MARSH
Have a draft done by the time we land. We can take the weekend to polish it.

ROGER
That's a pretty quick turn around.

The PILOT steps out from the cockpit with the manifest.

PILOT
To give you an update, gentlemen. We'll be climbing to an altitude of 41,000 feet. Weather is clear, bit of a tail wind. Flying time, five hours and forty-two minutes.

MARSH
Thank you.

The pilot leaves. Roger looks at Marsh.

ROGER
Five hours to Martha's Vineyard?

MARSH
Change in plan. We're heading a little farther south.
(off Roger's look)
You'll like it. It's warm.

ROGER
Yes, sir.

Roger knows better than to question. But this is odd. Victor goes back to reading.

INT. D.C. RESTAURANT - NIGHT

Elizabeth eats dinner with her old friends from the CIA days. ISABELLE (45), JULIET (38) and GEORGE (50). They are all still in The Company. Isabelle was Elizabeth's equal. Juliet was the up and comer. George was once a cowboy of covert ops in the Middle East.

ISABELLE
George is the only one on the Middle East desk right now.

GEORGE
Libya. Lebanon. Staring at screens of abandoned factories and oil wells, listening to chatter about the World Cup. They could have at least pastured me in some place interesting.

ISABELLE
He loves the desk job.

ELIZABETH
They didn't pasture you. They weren't willing to risk your life in the field.

GEORGE
You bought their story? There was no evidence my cover was blown.

JULIET
He never looks back.

GEORGE
Easy for you to say. You've both got Africa. Do you know how volatile that place is going to be? It's the disco of global hotspots.

ELIZABETH
Maybe you should put a call in to our former boss.

GEORGE
I did.

ELIZABETH
You called POTUS about your desk assignment?

GEORGE
(shrugs)
I gave it a shot.

JULIET
He didn't call back.

ELIZABETH
Imagine that.
(then)
So which part of Africa?

Isabelle smiles. She can't say. Changing the subject:

ISABELLE
So how is the bucolic life going?

ELIZABETH
It's great. We're teachers. We're parents. We're horse owners. Everyday we get up, that's all we have to be.

GEORGE
Sounds deadly.

ELIZABETH
It's not for everyone. By the way, Henry wants to get the poker game going again.

GEORGE
No. He cheats.

ELIZABETH
He does not.

GEORGE
It's the only way a religion teacher could beat a CIA operative at a card game.

ELIZABETH
Then you should be able to catch him at it.

GEORGE
I'd keep trying but it's too expensive.

She laughs.

ELIZABETH
Well, you all have to come for a weekend. It's been too long. You won't recognize the kids.

JULIET
Ever miss it?

ELIZABETH
The Company? No. I miss the people but not the life.

GEORGE
I don't know how you could walk away. You were the best analyst we had.
(off Juliet and Isabelle)
One of, anyway.

ISABELLE
No, you got it right.

ELIZABETH
I signed up to keep the world safe for democracy. I bought the idea that we were in the business of eliminating terrorism. The next thing I knew we were engaged in systematic torture. What good does it do to catch the enemy if you just become the enemy?

George's CELL PHONE VIBRATES. While he's looking at it, both Juliet and Isabelle's CELL PHONES GO OFF. They check their screens.

ELIZABETH (CONT'D)
This can't be good.

Reading from a text:

GEORGE
Victor Marsh's plane just went down over the Atlantic.

They look at each other.

INT. MCGILL HOME - MORNING

Elizabeth is making breakfast. Seated at the table and staring at their phones are her two kids, CAROLINE (15) and ADAM (13). Caroline is a conventional popular girl and Adam is a budding anarchist. Henry enters the kitchen. Observes his surroundings.

HENRY
I thought we said no gadgets at the table.

ELIZABETH
We did. And then the kids never came to the table. Besides, it's Saturday.

HENRY
So it's No Rules Saturday?

She nods. He flicks on the small TV in the kitchen. The kids OBJECT.

HENRY (CONT'D)
Oh, wait. My screen is competing with your screens?

They continue to grumble as the news appears on the screen. But then the headline grabs their attention. It's a report on the death of Victor Marsh.

NEWS ANCHOR
There's no evidence of a terrorist attack upon the Secretary of State's plane at this time. According to the flight manifest, he and Roger Vance, one of his speech writers, were headed to Caracas, Venezuela. The White House has confirmed that he was not on State Department business and that the plane was a private Gulfstream Five belonging to Marsh and his family.

CAROLINE
Mom, do you think it was terrorism?

ELIZABETH
No. I think people shouldn't fly in small planes.

HENRY
Still. Why was he going to Venezuela? Is that a resort destination?

ADAM
Exactly. When will you guys acknowledge the obvious conspiracy around us at all times?

ELIZABETH
(to Henry)
You had to wind up the anarchist?

HENRY
Sorry.

They turn their attention back to the news, images of plane debris floating in the Atlantic.

INT. HORSE STALL - MCGILL HOME - DAY

Elizabeth, in full barn gear, is mucking out a horse stall. Which amounts to raking shit. But the way she throws herself into it, we can see that she somehow enjoys it. She is approached by Adam, who is carrying a cell phone.

ADAM
I thought you were going to do something relaxing today.

ELIZABETH
This relaxes me.

ADAM
Other moms have their nails done.

ELIZABETH
So I'm told.

Adam waves the phone at her.

ADAM
Your phone. It wouldn't stop ringing so I answered it.

ELIZABETH
Who is it?

ADAM
Some lady says it's the President's office.

ELIZABETH
President of the PTA?

ADAM
The United States.

Elizabeth stares at him.

ELIZABETH
That's a prank. Hang it up.

ADAM
Just take it. She sounds serious.

Elizabeth takes the phone from him. Now Caroline is running toward them.

CAROLINE
Mom, there are like a thousand black cars outside. What's going on?

Elizabeth absorbs this, then speaks to the phone:

ELIZABETH
Hello?

INT. MCGILL HOME - LIVING ROOM - DAY

Elizabeth, looking a mess (and maybe smelling like one, too) in her barn gear sits across from President Dalton and his ENTOURAGE of Secret Service Agents.

PRESIDENT DALTON
In addition to the personal loss, it's a bad time to be without diplomatic representation. So I can't waste any time on this. I want you to step in.

ELIZABETH
Step into what?

PRESIDENT DALTON
Secretary of State.

Elizabeth is gobsmacked. For a moment she can't respond.

ELIZABETH
You're joking.

He just stares at her.

ELIZABETH (CONT'D)
No, I don't mean you're joking. You just can't be serious. Of course you're serious. But why?

PRESIDENT DALTON
I recruited you for the CIA. I trained you as an analyst. Our current situation requires someone with a deep working knowledge of the Middle East. We've been in the trenches, Bess. I know how you think, how you work. I trust you.

Elizabeth stares at him. He realizes she needs more. He signals to the entourage to leave the room. They do.

PRESIDENT DALTON (CONT'D)
I wanted to nominate you when I was first elected. I was talked out of my choice by well meaning advisers. Marsh and I never got along. He was a decent man but he was always running for office. I couldn't trust his point of view. I think it's dangerous to have a politician in that role. And I know you, Bess. You have no such ambitions. You quit a profession you love for ethical reasons. That makes you the least political person I know. You don't just think outside the box. You don't even know there is a box.

She smiles. It's true.

PRESIDENT DALTON (CONT'D)
I believe I can effect real change in the world. I need you to help me do that. I know you won't let me down.

The President stands.

PRESIDENT DALTON (CONT'D)
I realize you'll need some time to discuss this with your family.

ELIZABETH
Yes.

PRESIDENT DALTON
I'll give you the rest of the day.

He starts out, followed by his entourage. As he goes:

PRESIDENT DALTON (CONT'D)
But I won't take no for an answer.

Elizabeth is left alone in the room, realizing her situation. This is going to happen.

FADE OUT.

END OF TEASER

ACT ONE

FADE IN:

TWO MONTHS LATER

INT. DAMASCAS PRISON - DAY

Not a pretty place. We HEAR a lot of yelling--Arabic and English. Syrian PRISON GUARDS are dragging TWO YOUNG AMERICAN MEN, brothers ALEX AND ETHAN COLE (24, 22) toward a cell. They roughly throw the two kids into their tiny and filthy cell and slam the door. Ethan grips the bars and yells after the guard.

ETHAN
You can't do this! We have rights! Call the American embassy!

His older brother, ALEX, is more resigned. A prison guard keeps yelling in Arabic as they walk away.

ETHAN (CONT'D)
I don't understand. What did he say?

ALEX
He said, "Don't be a fool. You're going to die here."

Ethan looks at his brother, terrified.

INT. STATE DEPARTMENT - CONFERENCE ROOM - DAY

A meeting is in progress. Everyone gathered around a large table, Elizabeth at the center. Present are her CHIEF OF STAFF, NADINE TOLLIVER (40's), POLICY ADVISOR, JAY EISENBERG (40's), SPEECH WRITER, MATT MAHONEY (30's), PRESS COORDINATOR, DAISY FINCH, (30's). All of her staff is inherited from Victor Marsh. At the moment NADINE is at the white board, drawing a diagram. It is the layout of a dinner party. At the head of the board: KING OF SWAZILAND STATE DINNER. Seventeen seats at the table. The King is at one end, Elizabeth at the other, in between are all of the King's wives. Nadine narrates:

NADINE
The King sits here. Madam Secretary, you're at the opposite end. Now, I've charted out all fifteen of his wives with their names and ranks.
(MORE)

NADINE (CONT'D)
Basically, it's a seniority system. You look like you have a question.

ELIZABETH
Yes. Why are we doing this?

NADINE
The chart?

ELIZABETH
The dinner. Why are we entertaining the King of Swaziland?

JAY
It was on Victor's agenda. It was important to him.

DAISY
The press loves stuff like this. The guy is flamboyant. Exotic.

ELIZABETH
Polygamist.

MATT
We're not using that word.

ELIZABETH
Really? What are we calling it?

MATT
It falls under cultural diversity.

ELIZABETH
I see. Is it important for all the wives to come? Couldn't we have cut it off at three? How much is this costing?

NADINE
You want me to get you the numbers on that?

ELIZABETH
Yes. And updated information on the AIDS epidemic in that country.

At this moment BLAKE CALIBRESE, Elizabeth's young, Kennedy handsome assistant, appears.

BLAKE
Madam Secretary, it's the Czech Ambassador. He says it's urgent.

JAY
What could be urgent over there?

ELIZABETH
Guess we'll find out. Let's resume after lunch.

The staff stand and begin to disperse. Elizabeth follows Blake out.

INT. OUTER OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

As Elizabeth heads toward her office with Blake.

ELIZABETH
On a scale of one to ten, how much does Nadine hate me?

BLAKE
I think that one goes to eleven.

ELIZABETH
Do they all hate me that much?

BLAKE
No. It's a mixture.

ELIZABETH
Why don't you hate me?

BLAKE
Because you hired me. And you're awesome. I might have inadvertently reversed those.

ELIZABETH
I should have brought my own staff.

BLAKE
Probably.

ELIZABETH
But their boss had just died and they were all in shock. I couldn't clean house like that.

BLAKE
Jay's nervous about advising you because you don't appear to care about polling and trending which was all Victor Marsh cared about.
(MORE)

BLAKE (CONT'D)
Daisy is cranky because she's tired of handling press and she'd rather be speech writing which means she wants Matt's job. Matt likes his job but he wouldn't mind sharing another kind of job with Daisy.

ELIZABETH
Okay, up to speed.

INT. ELIZABETH'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

Now she is in her office, heading to the phone.

BLAKE
Meeting with the Chief of Staff and the Secretary of Defense in five. Russell Jackson and Gordon Fletcher respectively.

ELIZABETH
I know their names, Blake.

BLAKE
Sorry. I did a stint in the Palin camp right out of college. Still haven't recovered.

ELIZABETH
Work on that.

She picks up the phone.

ELIZABETH (CONT'D)
Hello, Pavel. How are you?

Blake leaves and her expression changes as she hears what the ambassador is telling her.

INT. WHITE HOUSE - CHIEF OF STAFF'S OFFICE - DAY

Elizabeth meets with RUSSELL JACKSON, the president's CHIEF OF STAFF. He's intimidating and it's not bluster. He is that smart and he doesn't suffer fools or mince words. Also present, GORDON FLETCHER, SECRETARY OF DEFENSE. More of a stonewaller.

JACKSON
Rouhani's visit remains the priority. State needs to stay on top of the Israeli reaction.

ELIZABETH
We're in daily contact. I'm more concerned about the Iranian Revolutionary Guard reaction.

FLETCHER
They're letting the visit happen so they must be on board.

ELIZABETH
Or they aren't concerned about a public relations mission.

FLETCHER
Rouhani's communication with us will legitimize him in the eyes of the world and the Revolutionary Guard will recede. This visit is all part of his move to take the power back and centralize it where it belongs.

ELIZABETH
The IRGC couldn't care less about the eyes of the world. It's a shadow government with its own separate economy. It's a mistake to underestimate them.

JACKSON
I believe the Defense Department is on top of this. The Secretary is not in the habit of underestimating people.

Gordon smiles at Elizabeth. She chooses her words carefully.

ELIZABETH
We aren't going to war with Iran. This is a diplomatic mission. There are different rules of engagement.

FLETCHER
You want to invite the head of the Revolutionary Guard to this shindig?

ELIZABETH
No. I want to pump up intel on the ground to make sure they aren't completely at odds with Rouhani's intentions.

JACKSON
The CIA is at your disposal. Use the house of spies any way you see fit.

ELIZABETH
Thank you.

JACKSON
I think we're done here.

Jackson and Fletcher stand.

ELIZABETH
I have another item.

They sit back down.

ELIZABETH (CONT'D)
Two American kids arrested and imprisoned in Syria for attempting to join Jabhat Al-Nusra. Alex and Ethan Cole, brothers from Hartford, Connecticut. Intel on them is that they are self-proclaimed journalists. They have an activist website called One Free World, the basic premise of which is war bad, peace good.

FLETCHER
So they're joining a jihadist group to drive home that point?

ELIZABETH
Al-Nusra is not a jihadist group. They have jihadist elements but their immediate goal is to overthrow the Syrian government which, I think we all agree, is not a paradigm of virtue.

FLETCHER
I stand corrected. The kids are peace loving freedom fighters.

ELIZABETH
There's no reason to think they had any interest in Al-Nusra except as amateur journalists. Mainly, they were using Instagram and Facebook to demonstrate poverty and poor treatment of women.
(MORE)

ELIZABETH (CONT'D)
Which doesn't make them geniuses but also doesn't make them jihadists.

JACKSON
Where does this come from?

ELIZABETH
The Czech Ambassador. That's how we communicate with Syria these days. Not sure how it leaked but probably from some operatives we have working inside the prison system.

JACKSON
Any idea what the Syrians think they're up to?

ELIZABETH
Assad is opposed to Rouhani's visit. He sees it as a threat to his authority. The Syrians want to prove they still have teeth, even if their old allies are wavering.

JACKSON
So they grab two hapless kids and threaten to execute them? That's an extreme reaction.

ELIZABETH
It puts them on a world stage. Any voice is better than no voice.

FLETCHER
They're always detaining some Westerner who has no business being there. What's the urgency?

ELIZABETH
The kids are scheduled for execution in ten days.

The men process this information.

JACKSON
Has it hit the news cycle?

ELIZABETH
No. We're just learning about it.

JACKSON
What do you recommend?

ELIZABETH
I know some people on the ground. I'd like to try some back channels.

FLETCHER
It's too risky. We're already plagued on this side with Americans trying to sign up with al-Nusra.

ELIZABETH
There were three unclassified cases months ago. That's hardly a plague.

JACKSON
Nevertheless. We need to take focus off of that issue.

ELIZABETH
Allowing two young tourists to be executed in Syria? That doesn't help our image in terms of lecturing Rouhani or anyone on human rights.

Jackson considers it.

JACKSON
What do you mean back channels?

ELIZABETH
Not an official operation. It's safer and faster to work directly with people I know.

JACKSON
Trouble is, I don't know the people you know. Keep it within the Company and proceed carefully.

Elizabeth process. Not her first choice but it is action.

ELIZABETH
All right. I'll meet with the parents first and stress the importance of non-communication.

JACKSON
Good. Now, I think we're done?

ELIZABETH
Yes.

She gets up to leave. Jackson walks her to the door and speaks to her privately.

JACKSON
We got you the name of a stylist, right?

ELIZABETH
A stylist?

JACKSON
You're going to find it useful. It's a tough transition.

ELIZABETH
It's really not necessary.

JACKSON
It's coming from the top.

ELIZABETH
Conrad...the President wants me to have a stylist?

JACKSON
As Chief of Staff, when I speak I'm generally speaking for the President. Image is a big part of the job. Don't take it personally.

Elizabeth shoulders this, then:

ELIZABETH
Since we're somewhat on the subject of speaking to the President, I'd like to brief him on the Syrian kidnapping.

JACKSON
No. It's premature.

ELIZABETH
I haven't had any one on one time with him since I took office.

JACKSON
Welcome to Washington.

ELIZABETH
It's a volatile situation and I don't want him to be caught off guard if it does hit the press.

JACKSON
It’s not going to hit the press. Because I’m telling you to make sure it doesn’t. Understood?

ELIZABETH
I’ll do my best.

JACKSON
I know you have a friendship with the President. But you’re in a system now and trying to take advantage of that would be ill advised.

ELIZABETH
How would I take advantage of that?

JACKSON
By going around me.

Elizabeth doesn’t know how to respond. Jackson smiles and waits for her to leave. Finally she does.

FADE OUT.

END OF ACT ONE

ACT TWO

INT. DAMASCUS PRISON - NIGHT

Ethan and Alex Cole lie on bare ragged pallets on the floor, not sleeping. From down the corridor we hear the sound of a MAN SCREAMING in terror, followed by LOUD VOICES berating him. Ethan gets up, walks toward the bars. He looks to Alex.

ALEX
Get away from the bars.

But he doesn't. He stands there until he sees a naked MALE PRISONER with a black hood over his head being dragged down the hallway by three GUARDS. It's a terrifying sight. A guard hits the prison bars with a baton, making Ethan jump back.

ETHAN
What are they doing? Are they going to kill that guy?

ALEX
Sit down. Don't draw attention.

But Ethan can't sit down. He's frantic.

ETHAN
Somebody will miss us, right? Somebody's called the embassy by now. It's gotta be in the news. They'll come for us.

Alex just looks at him.

ALEX
I'm sorry. I'm so sorry.

ETHAN
What do you mean?

ALEX
I just wanted to be where the action was. I wanted something to write about. I had no idea this could happen. And I dragged you into it.

ETHAN
But we're going to get out of here, right?

Alex fixes a dead stare on the ground. Shakes his head. Ethan begins to cry.

INT. CONFERENCE ROOM - DAY

Elizabeth sits with the PARENTS of the kidnapped kids, JANE and STEWART COLE. Forties, middle class, educated professionals. They are distraught about their sons. Elizabeth listens to their story.

JANE
Alex is the ambitious one. He has this idea that he's going to change the world with his blog. He says it's the future of journalism. No corporations calling the shots, no advertisers influencing content.

STEWART
He majored in Middle Eastern studies. He speaks Farsi and Arabic. He's a brilliant kid. I can't believe he's stupid enough to pull a stunt like this.

ELIZABETH
I assume you tried to discourage them from making this trip.

JANE
We didn't know about it. We were sending Ethan to Europe for graduation. He wanted Alex to go with him. We knew they were going as far as Turkey. We had no idea they'd cross into Syria.

STEWART
Ethan's not political at all, poor guy. He wants to play music and pick up girls. Alex talked him into this.

JANE
It doesn't matter whose fault it is.

ELIZABETH
Do you think there's any possibility that they were trying to join the Syrian Opposition movement?

STEWART
Absolutely not. Neither one of them knows how to mow a lawn, let alone handle a weapon. They're idealists.

JANE
It should be easy enough to explain. Tensions are easing in that part of the world, right?

ELIZABETH
Not with Syria. We have to go through a third party. If the State Department takes this on we'll have to do it completely under cover.

STEWART
If?

ELIZABETH
It has to go up the chain of command. So far I've been given the green light to pursue a negotiation through back channels. But if anything gets out in the press, it will jeopardize our efforts.

STEWART
You'd hang them out to dry?

ELIZABETH
We don't want to do that. But you'll have to work with us. We need to take down their blog, their Facebook pages, and we have to request that you have no communication through social media yourselves.

JANE
How do we take their pages down? We don't know their passwords.

ELIZABETH
We can handle that.

STEWART
You're asking us to go underground.

ELIZABETH
Yes.

STEWART
It feels oppressive.

ELIZABETH
Mr. Cole, free speech has landed us where we find ourselves right now. It's a constitutional right. Not a global one. As your sons are finding out the hard way.
(beat, regrouping)
I have two teenagers. Smart, self-confident and articulate, as we've raised them to be. My son is a self-described anarchist. I can see him doing something like this. And if it were my son where Alex and Ethan are right now? This is how I would handle it.

On the Coles, realizing they have to trust her.

INT. MCGILL HOME - NIGHT

The family is eating dinner.

ADAM
The kids are all either preppy nerds who already have their rooms at Harvard and Yale picked out or these athletes who are too dumb to breathe.

HENRY
That's pretty dumb.

ELIZABETH
Not to mention a bad situation for an athlete.

ADAM
Fortunately, the teachers are completely unimaginative rule followers who are totally threatened by original thought.

ELIZABETH
Let's play a game called 'find one positive thing to say about your new school.'

ADAM
There are three hot girls.

HENRY
See? That's three things. I'm feeling better already.

ELIZABETH
I seem to recall you hated your former school, too.

ADAM
Yeah but for totally different reasons.

HENRY
Such is the lonely journey of the anarchist.

ADAM
I'm not complaining.

ELIZABETH
And yet it sounds a lot like complaining.

She looks to Caroline who is picking at her food.

ELIZABETH (CONT'D)
How about you?

Caroline just shrugs.

ELIZABETH (CONT'D)
Come on.

CAROLINE
Do you want to hear details about me missing my boyfriend?

ADAM
I vote no.

ELIZABETH
What about your classes? You were excited about French literature.

CAROLINE
It's fine. Can I be excused?

HENRY
Yes.

Caroline gets up and leaves. Elizabeth looks at Henry.

HENRY (CONT'D)
I'm sorry. Did you want more of that?

ELIZABETH
I should go talk to her.

HENRY
Give her some space.

Elizabeth considers it. Then gets up and leaves.

HENRY (CONT'D)
Or not.

INT. CAROLINE'S ROOM - NIGHT

Caroline is lying on bed. A KNOCK and Elizabeth enters.

ELIZABETH
Hey. Do you want to talk about it?

CAROLINE
I know you expect me to be a strong and independent woman. It makes me feel like an idiot, whining to the Secretary of State about my boyfriend.

Elizabeth sits on the bed.

ELIZABETH
I'm your mother first. And being a strong woman doesn't mean giving up your emotions. You're in love. Gabe's a great guy. Why wouldn't you be sad?

CAROLINE
He just broke up with me on Facebook.

ELIZABETH
What? That little twit.

CAROLINE
I'm kidding.

ELIZABETH
Don't do that.

Caroline starts laughing. Elizabeth laughs, too. Enjoying the mother daughter bonding. Then:

CAROLINE
Now leave. I need to listen to sad music and cry.

Elizabeth absorbs the mood swing and leaves.

INT. HENRY AND ELIZABETH'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Henry is in bed reading. Elizabeth enters wearing pajamas, towel drying her hair.

ELIZABETH
Did we do the right thing?

HENRY
We absolutely did the right thing. What are we talking about?

ELIZABETH
This. The job. The move.

HENRY
Yes. The kids will adjust. It's only been two months.

ELIZABETH
Are you sure I didn't push us into this?

HENRY
No. Adam was thrilled to get even closer to the dark halls of conspiracy. Caroline hated living on a horse farm.

ELIZABETH
But now she misses her boyfriend.

HENRY
And if we were back home she'd be dramatically upset about something else because she's fifteen.

ELIZABETH
See? You called it home. The place we used to live.

HENRY
It will take a while for it to stop feeling like home.

ELIZABETH
You really like it at Georgetown?

HENRY
I love Georgetown. Being a religion professor at a Jesuit University? It's like being a Beatle.

ELIZABETH
So we're okay?

HENRY
We're fine.

She takes a beat, sits on the bed next to him.

ELIZABETH
We used to have sex more.

HENRY
We had sex this weekend.

ELIZABETH
We used to have week night sex.

HENRY
Stop overthinking things.

ELIZABETH
Is it that I have too much masculine energy? Some men are turned off by women in positions of power.

HENRY
I totally love women in power positions.
(off her look)
I'm completely attracted to your masculine energy.
(another look)
Tell me what to say.

Before she can her cell phone BUZZES. It's a text message. As she reads it:

HENRY (CONT'D)
What is it?

ELIZABETH
A text. It's encoded.

HENRY
From the White House?

ELIZABETH
I think it's from George.

HENRY
Saying what?

ELIZABETH
He's in the back yard.

HENRY
Why?

ELIZABETH
I have no idea.

EXT. MCGILL HOME - NIGHT

George is nervous and pacing in the backyard. Elizabeth comes out.

ELIZABETH
Come inside.

GEORGE
I can't. Your place is probably bugged.

ELIZABETH
I'm pretty sure it's not. How did you get around my security?

GEORGE
I'm really good at what I do.

ELIZABETH
Used to do.

GEORGE
Indulge me. I'm taking my life in my hands as it is. You're the only person I can trust.

ELIZABETH
You look terrible. Have you slept?

GEORGE
Listen to me. Victor Marsh's plane crash was not an accident. I have reason to believe someone inside had it arranged.

ELIZABETH
Inside what?

GEORGE
The Company. He was in bed with the Iranian Revolutionary Guard. He was brokering a deal with them to sabotage the peace talks.

ELIZABETH
Why would he do that?

GEORGE
Money. Personal agenda. The guy was dirty.

ELIZABETH
What's the evidence?

GEORGE
I decoded some personal correspondence and uncovered a bank account in Venezuela. He was on the way to meet with them. Do you know what happens when that gets out? That someone inside the White House was in bed with the IRGC?

She's quiet. He seems very crazy.

GEORGE (CONT'D)
You think I'm nuts.

ELIZABETH
It's a lot to process. That's all.

The back door opens and Henry comes out.

HENRY
Hey, buddy. Everything okay?

GEORGE
Hank. Where did you come from?

HENRY
The bedroom. I live here. Want to come in for a drink?

George is completely flustered now.

GEORGE
I'm sorry. I shouldn't have come. This didn't happen. Understood?

HENRY
What didn't happen?

GEORGE
Be careful, Bess.

He abruptly leaves, disappearing into the shadows. Elizabeth looks to Henry. Is their friend losing it? Or onto something?

FADE OUT.

END OF ACT TWO

ACT THREE

INT. STATE DEPARTMENT OFFICE - OUTER OFFICE - DAY

Blake sits at his desk, working at his computer. Elizabeth's door is closed. He is approached by Matt and Daisy.

MATT
Hey. Who's in there with her?

BLAKE
I'm not at liberty to say.

DAISY
I got a tip from security. It's the Director of the CIA.

BLAKE
Cannot confirm or deny.

DAISY
Just so you know? There's a tradition of sharing information in the outer office.

BLAKE
In that case, I heard you guys tongued in the supply closet during the Christmas party and it's been a little awkward ever since because you're both with other people.

Daisy and Matt avoid looking at each other.

DAISY
There's a limit to sharing.

MATT
(cutting to the chase)
Is she going to fire us? Because I need to get my resume in order.

Before Blake can answer, ROXANNE MAJIDI enters. A beautiful Iranian American woman about their age, well put together.

ROXANNE
Blake? I'm Roxanne Majidi. I have an appointment with the Secretary.

BLAKE
The Secretary is busy. Let's all grab a seat and check our Twitter accounts.

They sit and check Twitter.

INT. STATE DEPARTMENT - ELIZABETH'S OFFICE - DAY

Elizabeth sits with the CIA Director, ANDREW SWAIN. He's laying out a map of Damascus and the surrounding area. Also on her desk are photos of Alex and Ethan Cole.

SWAIN
(indicating map)
We've located the coordinates of the prison, twenty miles outside of Damascus in a rural area. Mostly abandoned warehouses and farms but our team on the ground made a positive i.d. They're working with people inside.

ELIZABETH
How big is the team?

SWAIN
Four guys, special ops. Standing by and ready to go. Prison's low security and the guards are all on the take. One helo, in and out under cover of darkness, clean and simple. Barring unanticipated complications.

ELIZABETH
Yeah, barring those.

SWAIN
It's always a risk but we've pulled off missions much harder than this and the AP never budged from Obamacare.

ELIZABETH
And there's no reason to think these kids are somehow CIA.

SWAIN
Absolutely not. We haven't flagged them anywhere. FBI says they haven't either.

Elizabeth weighs this information, then:

ELIZABETH
All right. This is the official go ahead. Alert me two hours out.

SWAIN
Yes, ma'am.

Swain gathers his things to leave. As he does:

ELIZABETH
How's George doing with the desk job?

SWAIN
He's a good analyst. A little high strung. I think he'll settle in.

ELIZABETH
Good.

SWAIN
Why, has he said anything to you?

ELIZABETH
No. About what?

SWAIN
Right after Marsh's plane went down, he came into my office babbling about a conspiracy.

ELIZABETH
What conspiracy?

SWAIN
It wasn't an accident. He was putting the pieces together. He wanted to create an op to get to the bottom of it. I told him to take some time off. That just upset him more. Accused me of firing him.

ELIZABETH
Are you firing him?

SWAIN
No. I told you. He's doing good work. He just needs to take a breath.

ELIZABETH
He's not really a breather.

SWAIN
Is he putting you up to this?

ELIZABETH
Of course not. He's a friend and I'm worried about the transition from field work to desk work. It's hard on anyone. That's all.

Swain stares at her, suspicious.

ELIZABETH (CONT'D)
I have a lot going on. I don't have time to run interference. Don't be paranoid.

Swain nods.

SWAIN
Right.

He starts out.

ELIZABETH
Andrew, if there's any reason at all to pull the plug on this op, do it. We can't afford a Black Hawk Down moment.

SWAIN
Understood.

Swain leaves. Elizabeth is deep in thought. A KNOCK and Blake enters with Roxanne.

BLAKE
Madam Secretary, this is Roxanne Majidi. The latest addition to our staff.

ELIZABETH
I see. In what capacity?

ROXANNE
Mr. Jackson sent me. I'm to be your personal appearance specialist.

ELIZABETH
By which you mean...

ROXANNE
Your stylist.

ELIZABETH
I'm sure you're very good. I don't need a stylist.

ROXANNE
Everyone can use a little help.

ELIZABETH
We'll find a way to keep you busy until I can arrange a transfer.

ROXANNE
Madam Secretary, I just do what I'm told. But I've been sent by the Chief of Staff. He was pretty insistent.

ELIZABETH
Yes, he has a forceful personality.

ROXANNE
The way he conveyed it to me, you don't have a choice in the matter.

ELIZABETH
See, here's the problem. I've never met a situation where I don't have a choice in the matter.

A KNOCK and Daisy and Matthew enter.

DAISY
Madam Secretary, we need to review your statement about the King of Swaziland visit.

Blake takes the cue and ushers Roxanne out.

MATTHEW
I have a rough first draft. I'm still working on the adjectives. Right now you're happy and excited.

ELIZABETH
You need to work on the adjectives.

DAISY
I have to get something to the press by tomorrow.

ELIZABETH
Can I be resigned and conflicted?

DAISY
You can never be either of those things.

MATTHEW
You could be eager and optimistic.

DAISY
No, she can't be eager. That's too Jimmy Carter.

ELIZABETH
What if I'm cautiously optimistic?

MATTHEW
That's for more serious world events.

DAISY
You can be forward thinking.

MATTHEW
I'll do the writing.

ELIZABETH
Can we add something of substance to it? A reference to world health issues or developing economies?

DAISY
I just don't feel that now is a good time for substance.

ELIZABETH
What if I'm grateful for the opportunity to expose the world to a variety of cultural differences as we move toward a more global thinking society?

Matthew considers it.

MATTHEW
That's really good.

ELIZABETH
Should I write it down for you?

MATTHEW
No, I'm the writer.

ELIZABETH
As long as our roles are clear.

Daisy hands her papers.

DAISY
Nadine wants you to go over the seating charts again. She has spelled all the wives' names phonetically.

ELIZABETH
Great, thanks.

Daisy and Jay leave. Elizabeth sits down and stares at the overwhelming chart full of intimidating Swazi names. A lot of work for a dinner party.

EXT. STATE DEPARTMENT - NIGHT - 8 P.M.

It's dark when Elizabeth finally leaves work. She walks up to the waiting sedan, followed by her SECURITY DETAIL. One of them opens the door for her.

ELIZABETH
Thanks, Anthony.

As she's getting the car she's approached by Nadine and Jay, harried and serious.

NADINE
Madam Secretary. We have a problem.

INT. STATE DEPARTMENT - ELIZABETH'S OFFICE - NIGHT

Elizabeth turns on lights as they enter her office.

NADINE
It concerns Operation Stupid Kids.

ELIZABETH
Is that really what we're calling it?

JAY
That's what we were calling it. Before it went bust. Now we're calling it Operation Never Happened. The intel on the prison location was bad and when the special forces made their way inside the structure, they found goats.

ELIZABETH
Is this a code name for something?

JAY
No, ma'am. Actual goats.

NADINE
It was disinformation.

ELIZABETH
Obviously. I was supposed to be alerted two hours out. How did this just happen?

JAY
Apparently they saw a window. They felt they had to move.

ELIZABETH
And Andrew couldn't be here to share the details?

JAY
He's busy cleaning up the mess on the ground.

ELIZABETH
Which is nothing compared to the mess he has to clean up with me.

JAY
The good news is that there were no casualties and no goats were harmed.

ELIZABETH
There's a silver lining.

NADINE
Meanwhile, we're dealing with this.

Nadine puts a laptop down on Elizabeth's desk and uploads a video, plays it. Jay stands by.

ANGLE - SCREEN

Alex and Ethan sitting at a table in a bare room, unkempt, exhausted, defeated. Alex speaks into the camera:

ALEX
We are American spies who have been captured and rightfully imprisoned in Damascus. Our objective was to overthrow the government.
(MORE)

ALEX (CONT'D)
We intended to commit acts of terrorism against the Syrian people.

ELIZABETH
Where did this come from?

NADINE
An encoded email sent directly to our office.

JAY
It arrived right after the operation. So the game is on.

ELIZABETH
What do they want?

NADINE
They haven't specifically stated.

ELIZABETH
We aren't going to give them the chance. I'm taking this to the President.

Elizabeth takes the computer and walks out.

INT. WEST WING - OVAL OFFICE - DAY

Elizabeth sits with Dalton and Russell Jackson. They are looking at the video.

PRESIDENT DALTON
When did this come in?

ELIZABETH
About an hour ago. Unfortunately, it comes on the heels of an unsuccessful attempt to liberate the prisoners.

JACKSON
How unsuccessful?

ELIZABETH
We were given disinformation on the location. Nothing disastrous but now they have some leverage. This is obviously their next move.

PRESIDENT DALTON
What if we don't respond?

ELIZABETH
They'll release the video. This thing goes viral? Suddenly it's on the first hour of the Today Show with compare and contrast profiles of the Boston bombers and Matt Lauer's talking to child psychologists about ten signs that your kid is a budding terrorist.

JACKSON
Not the worst outcome I could imagine.

ELIZABETH
I agree, that's the best case scenario. Worst case, no one buys the phony confession and the world has to stop while we negotiate their release. That's why we have to act now. Under the radar while we still have some latitude.

PRESIDENT DALTON
Your failed attempt wasn't under the radar?

Elizabeth chooses her words carefully.

ELIZABETH
It was an official op. I want to take more covert action. I know people who can get it done.

Dalton is interested but Jackson intervenes.

JACKSON
How do we know these kids aren't spies? In which case, we just leave them over there. That's policy.

ELIZABETH
Langley says they're not.

JACKSON
Apparently, their information is not always state of the art. Sir, we can't afford to get involved in this. Not on the eve of the most important peace talks in recent memory.

ELIZABETH
We're already involved.

JACKSON
Keep it at bay. Let the Syrians know we're going to disavow the kids, deny the validity of the video. By the time it gets out, if it does, Rouhani's visit is over, the world is focused on peace in the Middle East, the Syrians look like fringe lunatics, the kids are trouble makers who shouldn't have been there in the first place.

ELIZABETH
And if the kids are executed?

JACKSON
Same story, sadder outcome.

ELIZABETH
Sir, let me get in front of this. I know how to handle it.

On Dalton. Elizabeth has been outranked.

PRESIDENT DALTON
Sorry, Bess. You gave it a shot. Now I have to go with Russell.

There's nothing for her to say.

INT. MCGILL HOME - BEDROOM - NIGHT

Elizabeth and Henry are lying in bed. Her head is on his chest. She's deep in thought.

HENRY
There. Week night sex. Do you feel better?

ELIZABETH
Uh-huh.

HENRY
There's a ringing endorsement.

ELIZABETH
I was just thinking.

HENRY
Then I suppose my work is not done.

He starts to kiss her. She stops him.

ELIZABETH
My job is to advise the President. How am I supposed to do that if I can't get any time alone with the President?

HENRY
Send him an email.

ELIZABETH
It doesn't work like that. There's all this protocol. A whole chain of command. I can't just email him.

HENRY
How many times did you email him?

ELIZABETH
Fifteen. And every time I got a reply from Russell Jackson's office.

HENRY
What about texts?

ELIZABETH
He does answer texts. He refers me to Russell Jackson.

HENRY
You're still new at the job. I'm sure you'll work it out.

ELIZABETH
I don't have time to work it out.

She realizes she's said too much.

HENRY
What's going on?

ELIZABETH
You know I can't tell you.

HENRY
Okay, let me take the Socratic approach. Why did you take this job?

ELIZABETH
Because who wouldn't take this job?

HENRY
You wouldn't. Without a good reason.

Elizabeth thinks.

ELIZABETH
I didn't want to let my friend down.

HENRY
And do you feel like you're letting him down now?

ELIZABETH
Yes.

HENRY
How?

ELIZABETH
By not insisting that he do the right thing.

HENRY
And what is the right thing?

ELIZABETH
You know, there's a reason they killed Socrates.

HENRY
Whatever it is, you can't let yourself be paralyzed. You have to find a way to take action. As Thomas Aquinas said, "If the highest aim of a captain were to preserve his ship, he would keep it in port forever."

ELIZABETH
Easy for him to say. I have to work inside the chain of command.

HENRY
Yeah. Because the thirteenth century Catholic Church was not known for a chain of command. He was risking his life every time he opened his mouth. Vision without courage isn't much use to anyone.

Elizabeth hears this. A beat. Stares at the ceiling, gears grinding. Finding her courage.

HENRY (CONT'D)
Aquinas also said, "Sorrow can be alleviated by a good sleep, a bath and a glass of wine."

Elizabeth throws off the covers and jumps out of bed.

HENRY (CONT'D)
Which one of those worked?

But she is gone.

INT. CHURCH SANCTUARY - NIGHT

She sits in a pew staring at the candles. It seems she's found someone to talk to. Until we hear FOOTSTEPS on concrete and a MAN appears in the shadows next to her. She looks over at him. ANTON VLADOVICH. A Russian colleague.

ANTON
Well. It has been a long time.

ELIZABETH
Thanks for coming out.

ANTON
What can I say? I've missed you.

He sits next to her.

ANTON (CONT'D)
What's it been, six years?

ELIZABETH
Yes. Chechnya.

ANTON
Such a paltry little rebellion by today's standards.

ELIZABETH
What's your title these days?

ANTON
Still Cultural Attaché. They wanted to move me to science. But it's too much like a real job.

She nods. It's not what she wants to talk about.

ELIZABETH
I need to broker a deal on the ground. In Syria.

ANTON
What kind of deal?

ELIZABETH
Two American kids imprisoned for espionage.

ANTON
I'm sorry. I really am a cultural attache now. For the last couple of years. No double dipping in the spy pool.

ELIZABETH
You must still know people.

ANTON
Bess, I'm telling you, I'm fully legit now. State department. I can get you caviar and vodka. I like it here. I can't risk going back to Russia. It's a pig sty. My kids are on the fast track for Ivy Leagues.

ELIZABETH
Let me ask you something, Anton. Who got your cousin and his family out of Chechnya and into this country during the revolution?

ANTON
You did, of course.

ELIZABETH
Using field officers on the ground who risked their lives to make it happen. I took responsibility for that.

ANTON
I haven't forgotten.

ELIZABETH
These kids are going to die. Just as your cousin and his family were going to.

ANTON
So you're cashing in your chips?

ELIZABETH
No. I'm appealing to your humanity.

On Anton. Thinking.

ELIZABETH (CONT'D)
And if that doesn't work, I'm reminding you that the Secretary of State can remove any diplomat on U.S. soil for any reason.

Anton considers it.

ANTON
I am feeling very humane.

She smiles.

FADE OUT.

END OF ACT THREE

ACT FOUR

INT. WHITE HOUSE - OVAL OFFICE - PAST MIDNIGHT

Dalton pours a finger of Scotch into a glass. Hands it to Elizabeth. Then one for himself. He's in casual clothes. It's clear she got him out of bed.

PRESIDENT DALTON
Let's call it a night cap. That way I don't have to yell at you for breaking protocol and waking me up.

Elizabeth gathers her nerve.

ELIZABETH
I made an unofficial move on the situation in Syria.

PRESIDENT DALTON
Why would you do that?

ELIZABETH
To save the lives of two innocent kids who aren't that much older than mine. And that's just the first reason.

PRESIDENT DALTON
You tried before.

ELIZABETH
I tried with someone else's idea. I'm not going to make that mistake again.
(then)
Let me ask you something. Why did you give me this job?

PRESIDENT DALTON
I told you why.

ELIZABETH
You claimed you didn't want a politician in this post. This is me not being a politician. I didn't uproot my life and my family to come here and sit in endless staff meetings and plan dinner parties for potentates. I came to do the job that you said only I could do. So for God's sake, Conrad, let me do it.

He looks at her. A beat.

PRESIDENT DALTON
I'm waiting.

ELIZABETH
You said I think outside the box. Well, from where I sit, you're in a dangerous box of appeasement and I'm showing you the way out of it. You said you knew I wouldn't let you down. And I won't. I can't let you make this mistake.

Dalton takes her words to heart.

PRESIDENT DALTON
Step it out for me.

ELIZABETH
If we do nothing, the Syrians will execute those kids. Just to prove a point. When it hits the press that you knew about it and did nothing? That's a genie I can't put back in the bottle. My job is to advise you in matters of foreign policy and I am advising you. This is a risk you can't afford not to take. I know the right people and we have to do it my way. Trust me.

Dalton considers it.

PRESIDENT DALTON
You'd better be right about this. Or yours could be the shortest term in State Department history.

ELIZABETH
Elihu B. Washburne under President Grant. Eleven days. I looked it up.
(off his look)
But I take your point.

Dalton nods. Handing her the reigns.

EXT. GEORGETOWN STREET - DAY

Elizabeth walks with Anton. He's on the phone with someone speaking in Russian. He stops to translate to her.

ANTON
It’s going to be two million U.S. dollars.

ELIZABETH
It’s going to be half that.

He translates. Then:

ANTON
One and a half. Close of business.

ELIZABETH
I can get that to work. First installment with confirmation that the kids are released. Second installment after they’ve landed.

He translates. Then:

ANTON
In the air.

ELIZABETH
Fine. In the air.

ANTON
It needs to be U.S. dollars in a third party account.

ELIZABETH
No. It’s going to be that amount in the form of medical supplies and food. Assad gets the photo op and we’ll circulate it in the press. Him distributing relief to the suffering masses. Great PR across the board.

ANTON
I don’t think it’s enough.

ELIZABETH
Okay, then throw in this. We won’t sanction them into the stone age. This is the way the tide is turning and they don’t want to be isolated on the wrong side of it. No one misses Syria if it completely self-destructs.

Anton stares at her, then translates into the phone. Elizabeth paces with baited breath. Finally he slow smiles.

ANTON
I think they are taking it.

ELIZABETH
No press until the kids are on U.S. soil. That's a deal breaker.

He translates, then turns off his phone.

ANTON
Congratulations. You have bought yourself two stupid American kids.

ELIZABETH
I'll believe it when they're in the air. Stay on it.

ANTON
Yes, ma'am. Madam Secretary.

She smiles. Anton peels off.

INT. ELIZABETH'S OFFICE - DAY

The staff is assembled again except for Jay. Going over the chart for the King of Swaziland dinner.

NADINE
I've made out this chart for you with all of the names spelled phonetically. It's alright to call them by their first names. But be advised that they probably won't have much to say. Most of them don't speak English. Unless you happen to speak Swazi.

ELIZABETH
French, German, Arabic and Farsi.

NADINE
So you'll just smile at them a lot.

Jay enters the room, flustered.

JAY
I just got off the phone with a New York Times reporter. Who just got off the phone with Alex and Ethan Cole's parents.

ELIZABETH
The Times got them to make a statement?

JAY
No. The Times got them to give a two hour interview.

ELIZABETH
What did you say?

JAY
I said no comment and then I called Stewart Cole and said a lot of things at an elevated volume.

ELIZABETH
When are they going to run it?

JAY
Tomorrow.

ELIZABETH
Buried in the back?

JAY
Depends on how big of a news day it is.

Elizabeth thinks for a beat, then:

ELIZABETH
Is the personal image consultant in the building?

JAY
Who?

ELIZABETH
The stylist. Roxanne Majidi.

NADINE
She has an office down the hall.

ELIZABETH
I need to see her right away. And let security know I'll be taking a walk after work.

Elizabeth leaves the room and on her staff, wondering--

EXT. STATE DEPARTMENT - DAY

Elizabeth comes out of the building with her SECURITY DETAIL. She looks completely different. Head to toe makeover including a sassy hair cut. She looked good before. She looks amazing now. As she begins to walk down the D.C. street, people start to recognize her. Some call out. Everyone stops to take her picture. A young female TOURIST steps forward to say hello. Security stops her.

ELIZABETH
No, don't. It's fine. Want to take a picture with me?

TOURIST
Yes ma'am. If you don't mind.

ELIZABETH
Of course. How about the whole family?

A YOUNG HUSBAND and SMALL CHILD join them. They pose and a DIPLOMATIC SECURITY AGENT takes the photo. The tourists thank her and she walks on with her detail. Cameras are coming out of the woodwork. Just as she planned.

INT. MCGILL HOME - KITCHEN - MORNING

Elizabeth enters the room to find the family is at the breakfast table, flipping through the morning news. Every channel has a news report on Elizabeth's new look.

TALKING HEAD
Secretary of State Elizabeth Faulkner McGill is sporting a new look today.

Next channel:

TALKING HEAD (CONT'D)
It looks like a top to bottom makeover, starting with a short haircut and highlights...

Next channel:

TALKING HEAD (CONT'D)
Her office issued no statement about why the Secretary felt the need to modernize her look...

Next channel:

TALKING HEAD (CONT'D)
The response to Secretary McGill's look has been positive, most people saying she looks younger and, quote, more relevant.

ELIZABETH
More relevant? How can hair be relevant?

ADAM
It's hard to believe with everything going on in the world, this is the news. No offense Mom but bangs aren't a world event.

ELIZABETH
I guess they are now.

CAROLINE
What happened to the whole woman of substance lecture? Don't focus on the superficial stuff.

ELIZABETH
I felt like a change. I can't believe it's this big of a deal.

HENRY
It's the most you've been in the news since the confirmation hearing.

Elizabeth's gets a text on her cell. She looks at the screen:

KIDS ARE IN THE AIR.

She smiles, puts the phone down.

ELIZABETH
Come on, electronics off. Let's try to stick to some rules.

She turns off the TV.

CAROLINE
Promise there won't be tats or twerking.

ELIZABETH
Deal.

She starts to make breakfast. Her eyes meet Henry's across the room. He smiles. He knows she's up to something. She smiles back and shrugs.

INT. STATE DEPARTMENT - OUTER OFFICE - DAY

Elizabeth walks in. Blake is at his desk.

ELIZABETH
Good morning.

Blake issues a head nod toward her open office, indicating someone is in there.

INT. STATE DEPARTMENT - ELIZABETH'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

She walks in to find Russell Jackson pacing. She closes the door.

ELIZABETH
I didn't realize we had an appointment.

JACKSON
You want to tell me how those kids got released?

ELIZABETH
I guess the Syrians saw the error of their ways.

JACKSON
So that would be a no.

ELIZABETH
I got the President to sign off.

JACKSON
And how could you do that without my knowledge?

ELIZABETH
Oh, I don't know. By blatantly circumnavigating your authority?

He's surprised by her candor.

JACKSON
You had better learn how to work with me instead of around me.

ELIZABETH
My first choice as well. I used your stylist, didn't I?

Beat as he regards her.

JACKSON
I think you'll find I make a much better ally than opponent.

ELIZABETH
Same here.

Stare down. Noble warriors.

JACKSON
I'm going to chalk this one up to rookie enthusiasm. But going forward? I won't be so forgiving.

He walks out. On Elizabeth, realizing she has her work cut out.

INT. JFK AIRPORT - NIGHT

Jane and Stewart Cole stand in front of an airline gate, pacing excitedly, peering through the crowd as passengers disembark from a flight. A group of RELATIVES AND FRIENDS gather behind them with balloons and signs: "Welcome home, Ethan and Alex." Finally the kids come into view. They race toward their parents and embrace them. Tears of joy and relief. The crowd moves in to join the celebration. In a moment of gratitude, Alex drops to his knees and kisses the ground. Ethan follows. The CLICKING OF CAMERAS as the PRESS capture this image.

FREEZE FRAME on the shot.

DISSOLVE OVER:

INT. STATE DEPARTMENT - BANQUET ROOM - NIGHT

The PHOTO IMAGE of Elizabeth with KING NUNGUNDE of Swaziland. She's stunning in an evening gown and he is dressed like royalty, a uniform bedecked with medals.

WIDE TO REVEAL

Real time. Elizabeth sits at a banquet table with the King (note: this character is fictional) and his fifteen wives. Members of her staff are present at another table.

There's a PRESS TABLE as well. Both parties are aware of their presence.

NUNGUNDE
It is an honor to visit your beautiful country. And its most beautiful Secretary of State.

ELIZABETH
We are happy to have your highness and his family.

NUNGUNDE
What about your family, Madam Secretary? Do you have children?

ELIZABETH
I have a son and a daughter.

NUNGUNDE
A nice small family.

ELIZABETH
Well, I just have the one husband. So.

A beat as everyone stares. Nungunde actually laughs at this. His wives laugh along with him.

NUNGUNDE
I am honored to have twenty-seven children.

ELIZABETH
That sounds like a lot of work.

NUNGUNDE
I am blessed to have wonderful partners.

ELIZABETH
Your Highness, if I could take a moment to discuss a matter of international importance.

NUNGUNDE
Of course.

ELIZABETH
I know you're aware that the AIDS epidemic in your country has continued to grow despite its decline in other developing nations.
(MORE)

ELIZABETH (CONT'D)
Early in your reign you took steps to address it but lately it hasn't been on the forefront of your political agenda. Certainly a man of your education and obvious love of family understands how important this issue is. We'd like to work with you to put it back at the top of your list.

The King feels on the spot--not happy to be called out on this matter but knows the press is watching and listening.

NUNGUNDE
It would be an honor to do so, Madam Secretary.

ELIZABETH
I'm sure you can enlist the aid of your wives--Sibhale, Majaha, Lindelwa, Nomcebo, Nolwazi, Siviwe, Temily, Dzeltwe, Andiswa, Bongeka, Faniswa, Cokisa, Khuzani, Onele and Nosisi.

She has nailed all the names. The King is impressed. Not to mention the wives.

ELIZABETH (CONT'D)
A woman's perspective is an important thing. You have no shortage of that.

The King nods. The press takes notes. Across the room, Nadine watches with the rest of the staff. Elizabeth's eyes connect with hers. A slight smile and nod. Nadine is starting to get it.

EXT. HALLWAY - NIGHT

Elizabeth comes out with the King and poses once more for press photos. They shake hands and part. She heads down the hallway with her staff following close behind.

DAISY
That moment is already trending, Madam Secretary. Twitter is blowing up. People love it.

ELIZABETH
Not everyone's going to love it so, Matt, prepare a statement for tomorrow. We might have to call a press conference.

MATT
Already working on it.

NADINE
Do you want it to become an issue or do you want it to go away?

ELIZABETH
Let it become an issue. We've spent enough time on my hair.

DAISY
World health, education, War on Women, how do you want to frame it?

ELIZABETH
All of the above.

INT. STATE DEPARTMENT - OUTER OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

Elizabeth and the staff file in.

JAY
At this rate the kids from Syria are never going to make the news cycle.

ELIZABETH
Keep it that way.

The others feather off, leaving her alone with Nadine. Moment of truth between two strong women.

NADINE
Nice work, Madam Secretary.

ELIZABETH
Thank you.

A smile between them. A future alliance is born. As Elizabeth heads to her office, she's surprised to see Henry standing there. She goes in and closes the door.

INT. ELIZABETH'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

As she approaches him:

ELIZABETH
How long have you been here? If you wanted to come to the dinner I could have wrangled an invitation. I know some people in the State Department.

His serious expression throws her.

ELIZABETH (CONT'D)
What's wrong?

There's no other way to say it:

HENRY
George is dead.

Elizabeth registers shock.

ELIZABETH
What? How?

HENRY
Single car collision. Into a telephone pole. No witnesses.

ELIZABETH
Oh, my God.

Henry hugs her. She is too stunned to cry. She pulls back, paces away from Henry, flustered, gears grinding.

ELIZABETH (CONT'D)
That wasn't an accident.

A beat as Henry stares at her.

HENRY
I know.

On the two of them--

FADE OUT.

END OF ACT FOUR