

MADAM SECRETARY

"Pilot"

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SECOND DRAFT

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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