DESIGNATED SURVIVOR

"Pilot"

Written by
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TITLE CARD:

On the night of the State of the Union, a cabinet member is chosen to sit out the speech at an undisclosed location.

This is to insure that continuity of government is maintained in the event of a catastrophic attack that kills everyone above the cabinet member in the presidential line of succession.

They are what's known as "THE DESIGNATED SURVIVOR."

And if tragedy does strike, they are our nation's new president.
CHARACTERS:

**TOM KIRKMAN** (Kiefer Sutherland). The Designated Survivor. A husband and a father, he suddenly finds himself our country's newest President after a catastrophic attack on the Capitol Building during the State of the Union.


**HANNAH WATTS.** Thirties. The FBI agent in charge of the Capitol bombing investigation.

**AARON SHORE.** Thirties. The former White House Deputy Chief of Staff who Kirkman inherits as his own senior advisor.

**HARRIS COCHRANE.** Sixties. A five star general. Chairman of the Joint Chiefs.

**EMILY RHODES.** Forties. Kirkman’s Chief of Staff and longtime friend.

**SETH WHEELER.** Twenties. A White House speechwriter.

**LEO KIRKMAN.** Kirkman’s 15 year-old son.

**PENNY KIRKMAN.** Kirkman’s 9 year-old daughter.
TEASER

BLACK. APPLAUSE. Then a VOICE. Mighty. Inspiring. In COMMAND:

PRESIDENT RICHMOND (V.O.)
There are times when we make history and there are times when history makes us.

FADE IN:

INT. A CONFERENCE ROOM SOMEWHERE - NIGHT

SUPER: TUESDAY, JANUARY 20. 10:15 PM

THE WASHINGTON DC SKYLINE is aglow outside the window, the cast iron dome of the CAPITOL BUILDING in the faraway distance.

PRESIDENT RICHMOND (V.O.)
This is a crucial moment for our nation and America’s colors burn brightest when we rise to meet and exceed the challenges thrusted upon us.

PULL BACK and PAN ACROSS a nondescript office conference room to find -- TOM KIRKMAN eating popcorn while watching PRESIDENT RICHMOND deliver his third State of the Union address on a wall-mounted flat-screen.

Kirkman is 41. A handsome man, dressed in jeans and sneakers, completely unaware of his own charisma.

PRESIDENT RICHMOND (ON TV)
We need to gaze into the future and decide what we want to make of it. That’s why tonight I’m proposing a $500 million bipartisan bill that will champion those who help encourage forward-thinking initiatives for job creation, health care, defense.

KIRKMAN
The question is, “how do we pay for it”?

PRESIDENT RICHMOND (ON TV)
But the question is “how do we pay for it?” How about we start with closing the tax loopholes that reap billions in benefits for corporations...?
Behind Kirkman, his wife JESSICA is on the phone with their daughter, PENNY, 9, precocious. Jessica is in her forties, but you can’t tell. Latina. An EEOC attorney. Smart and strong.

    JESSICA
    No Penny, I’m not doing this again.
    It’s already --
    (checks her watch)
    Oh my God, it’s beyond bedtime. You
    were supposed to be asleep over an
    hour ago.
    (in SPANISH; SUBTITLED)
    No you can’t wait up. Here talk to
    your dad.

Jessica hands the phone to Tom.

    KIRKMAN
    Hello.

    PENNY (V.O.)
    Hi daddy.

    KIRKMAN
    Who is this?

    PENNY (V.O.)
    It’s Penny.

    KIRKMAN
    Penny who?

    PENNY (V.O.)
    Penny Kirkman. Your daughter.

    KIRKMAN
    No that can’t be. My daughter’s
    asleep. I should know. I kissed her
    good night over two hours ago.

    PENNY (V.O.)
    When are you and mommy coming home?

    KIRKMAN
    As soon as the speech is over.

    PENNY (V.O.)
    When is that gonna be?

    KIRKMAN
    Doesn’t matter. You’ll already be
    asleep when we get there, right?
    (MORE)
KIRKMAN (CONT'D)

(beat)
Right?

PENNY (V.O.)
... I’m hungry.

JESSICA
She can’t keep pulling this.

KIRKMAN
Look, how ‘bout... you go to sleep right now and tomorrow you can stay up an extra hour. Deal?

PENNY (V.O.)
Deal.

KIRKMAN
That’s my girl.

PENNY (V.O.)
Good night daddy.

KIRKMAN
(hangs up; off Jessica, annoyed:)
What?

She throws some popcorn in his face.

JESSICA
You shouldn’t make promises you won’t be able to keep.

KIRKMAN
This is Washington, Jess. Those are the only promises you’re allowed to make.

JESSICA
You couldn’t negotiate with a 9 year old? For the life of me, I can’t understand why the press thinks you’re a pushover.

KIRKMAN
I know. It’s a mystery.

JESSICA
You have to learn how to set limits with her, Tom.
KIRKMAN
You catch more flies with honey than vinegar. That’s what my aunt used to say.

JESSICA
You don’t have an aunt.

KIRKMAN
Doesn’t make it less true. Besides setting limits is your job.

JESSICA
(re: SOTU)
What I miss?

KIRKMAN
Speaker Ellis refused to stand up for equal pay.

JESSICA
What year is this again?

PRESIDENT RICHMOND (ON TV)
I believe as strongly as ever we need to instill our moral authority in those regions of the world where our most cherished values are threatened --

Beat. Jessica watches the speech, then looks to her husband.

JESSICA
Look, Tom... I’m sorry about what I said earlier.

KIRKMAN
Don’t worry about it.

JESSICA
No. If this is something you feel you have to do --

KIRKMAN
Jess. Don’t worry about it.

JESSICA
I love you. I just want to make sure this is what you want.

Kirkman nods. Me too. A beat, then he turns back to the TV.

JESSICA (CONT’D)
He’s doing well... regardless.
Yeah, speechwriting staff is earning their money tonight. Here come his greatest hits.

...to ensure that the same American dream shared by our fathers, our mothers, their fathers, their mothers, is forever secure --

The network feed on the TV suddenly DIES. Screen goes DARK.

Kirkman’s eyes narrow. Huh. He picks up the remote. Tries another channel. Their feed is GONE too. He tries another channel. Same. No station is carrying the speech anymore.

This is weird.

Kirkman’s phone buzzes.

Hey Em.

Yeah ours just went dark too.

Jessica gets a notification on her phone. Looking it over, she turns her head back up, bone-white.

Tom...

An ANCHOR appears back on the TV.

Ladies and gentlemen, we’re starting to get reports --

THE DOOR EXPLODES OPEN. A SECRET SERVICE DETAIL BOMBS INSIDE. JAMES RITTER (30’s, African American, military buzz haircut) is the first to speak:

Mr. Secretary, you need to put down the phone.

Why, what’s the matter?

We’ve lost contact with the Capitol. We’re sheltering in place until we know more.
Kirkman -- Jesus -- as IN A FLASH -- there are FOUR SECRET SERVICE AGENTS guarding the conference room door. Two inside. Two outside.

Kirkman’s phone is SNATCHED out of his hand. An agent pulls the battery so it can’t be tracked. Another agent does the same with Jessica’s phone.

SECRET SERVICE AGENT (to Kirkman)
Gonna need your government-issued blackberry.

KIRKMAN Here.

SECRET SERVICE AGENT (to Jessica)
Do you have any other electronics with you?

JESSICA No. What’s happening?

Kirkman gives the agent his government-issued blackberry. The agent quickly disables it.

Meanwhile, Ritter and the other agents are on their own radios and phones, trying to get information/barking orders, everything RUSHED and CLIPPED:

SECRET SERVICE AGENT
Put me through to the “Bee Hive” immediately.

RITTER I want a level four armored motorcade to our position right away.

In the middle of this insanity -- KIRKMAN AND JESSICA taking everything in.

KIRKMAN Would someone tell me what the hell is going on?

That’s when Kirkman sees on the TV -- a SHAKY IMAGE of the CAPITOL BUILDING.

OR WHAT’S LEFT OF IT. DESTROYED. BURNING. A TOMB.

KIRKMAN (CONT’D)
Oh my God...

Kirkman whips around to the window -- stepping over to the glass and gazing out at --

THE WASHINGTON DC SKYLINE -- and the distant Capitol Building COMPLETELY ABLAZE, black smoke billowing into the sky.

OFF KIRKMAN -- taking in this horrific and terrifying image --

END OF TEASER
ACT ONE

FADE IN:

EXT. KIRKMAN HOME - EARLY MORNING

Establish: a modest suburban house in Chevy Chase, Maryland.

SUPER: 15 HOURS EARLIER

INT. KIRKMAN HOME - BEDROOM - MORNING

Jessica is asleep in bed. Alone. Kirkman is at a desk by the window, reading a briefing book.


CU: BRIEFING BOOK -- adorned with the official seal of the US DEPARTMENT OF HOUSING AND URBAN DEVELOPMENT and marked “2016 HOUSING VOUCHER PROGRAM.”

Kirkman goes to the bed. Shuts off the alarm. Kisses his wife on the forehead. She smiles.

JESSICA
Mmm... morning.

KIRKMAN
Morning bed head.

JESSICA
When did you get up?

KIRKMAN
I don’t know. Early. Only thing on the TV were informercials.

JESSICA
Did you buy anything?

KIRKMAN
Well your birthday is around the corner.

JESSICA
Please be a Smart Mop, please be a Smart Mop.

They kiss.

JESSICA (CONT’D)
Hope you got work done at least.
KIRKMAN
Some. The appropriations committee wants to gut the housing voucher program.

JESSICA
I’m sorry.

KIRKMAN
Not as sorry as they’re gonna be after my op-ed for the Post. Let the committee explain to single moms and their kids why they’re getting evicted.

JESSICA
You sure that’s a good idea? Don’t you need some of them on your side?

KIRKMAN
Hey, who do I work for? Them or me?

Jessica smiles. This is why she loves him. A ritual:

JESSICA
Keep fighting the good fight.

KIRKMAN
To the bitter end.

Another kiss. Then through the door:

PENNY (V.O.)
Mom? Dad?

KIRKMAN
(playful; at the door)
Leave us alone!
(back to Jessica; moving away)
I’ll make breakfast.

Jessica sits up in bed.

JESSICA
Oh God, please don’t.

INT. KIRKMAN HOME - KITCHEN - MORNING

Kirkman makes eggs for Penny, sitting at the table.

KIRKMAN
How do you like your eggs, P? Scrambled or scrambled?
PENNY
Umm... scrambled please.

KIRKMAN
Scrambled for the young lady in the blue dress.

Kirkman makes her a plate and sets it down in front of her as LEO KIRKMAN, 15, comes down the stairs, into the kitchen.

KIRKMAN (CONT’D)
Hey Leo, perfect timing. What can I get you?

LEO
(to Penny)
He’s making breakfast?

PENNY
Unfortunately.

KIRKMAN
Hey, I’m slaving here.

LEO
I’ll just grab some toast.

KIRKMAN
Sure. You make that out of bread, right?

Leo rolls his eyes. As he helps himself to some bread from the pantry:

KIRKMAN (CONT’D)
You used to laugh at my jokes.

LEO
I used to be nine.

KIRKMAN
Ahh, the good old days. Look I need you to watch your sister tonight.

LEO
Can’t do it. I’m busy.

KIRKMAN
Yeah. I know. Watching your sister. It’s a big night.

LEO
It is for me too. I promised Caleb I’d help him out with something.
KIRKMAN
With what?

LEO
Doesn’t matter.

KIRKMAN
Doesn’t matter I won’t like it?
Doesn’t matter I wouldn’t understand?

LEO
Both.

KIRKMAN
Then I really wanna know.

LEO
He’s laying down a new dubstep track and he needs me to write some code for him.

KIRKMAN
Okay I understood “him”.

Leo shakes his head. As he leaves:

KIRKMAN (CONT’D)
Scale of one to ten: how much do I embarrass you?

LEO
(exiting)
11.

Kirkman looks to a nearby TV, tuned to coverage of Richmond’s upcoming SOTU. A PUNDIT comments:

PUNDIT ON TV
... please, Richmond’s speech is gonna be just more of the same. The fact is: he can promise all he wants, but this Congress isn’t gonna lift a finger.

PENNY
Daddy?

KIRKMAN
Yeah, honey?

PENNY
Why doesn’t the President like you?
KIRKMAN
(turning to her)
What do you mean, “why doesn’t he like me?”

PENNY
Scott Orloff’s dad says the
President thinks it’ll be a mistake
keeping you on as a secretary.

KIRKMAN
Umm, okay, wow. Wasn’t expecting
that. Well, Scott Orloff’s dad
doesn’t know what he’s talking
about.

PENNY
He works at the White House.

Kirkman has no comeback.

KIRKMAN
Eat your eggs.

She digs in. Kirkman looks at his daughter cross-eyed for a
moment. Does she really know something he doesn’t?

Jessica comes in, dressed for work, already on her phone.

JESSICA
No that’s not the reality. That’s
their spin. Truth is these
companies have been screwing over
their employees for decades and
it’s high time they answer for
their sins.
(beat)
No. Thank you, Evan. Let me know if
you need any more quotes... I
appreciate that.

She hangs up. Then sees the mess that Kirkman has left in the
kitchen, included an aborted and sloppy attempt at making
pancakes.

PENNY
Daddy doesn’t know how to make
pancakes.

JESSICA
You have two PHDs.

KIRKMAN
Even Superman has a weakness.
Jessica shakes her head. Kirkman’s phone buzzes.

    JESSICA
    (to Penny)
    Hurry up, honey. We gotta get going.

Stepping back into the hallway, Kirkman answers his phone:

    KIRKMAN
    Yeah, Emily. Give me good news.

    EMILY (V.O.)
    How about a category 4 shit storm?

INTERCUT:

INT. DEPARTMENT OF HOUSING AND URBAN DEVELOPMENT - SAME

EMILY RHODES walks with purpose down a hallway. 33. Smart, sexy and sophisticated in a no-nonsense but well-fitted business suit.

    EMILY
    I just got off the phone with Gillings at Cabinet Affairs. He slipped me a final copy of Richmond’s address and none, not a single one of our talking points are included.

    KIRKMAN
    You gotta be kidding me. FHA reform?

    EMILY

    KIRKMAN
    Send me the speech and get me a meeting with Reynolds as soon as possible.

    EMILY
    Already done. White House. One hour.

They hang up. END INTERCUT. Off Kirkman, troubled --

EXT. KIRKMAN’S HOUSE - MOMENTS LATER

A Suburban waits in front, engines running. Ritter, the Secret Service agent from the teaser, stands at the door.
Kirkman exits his house. Waves to a NEIGHBOR.

KIRKMAN
Morning, Max.

NEIGHBOR
Morning, Tom. Good luck tonight!

Kirkman gets to his ride.

KIRKMAN
James.

RITTER
Sir.

Kirkman steps into his car. It drives off.

INT. STARBUCKS - MORNING

Kirkman has already ordered and is waiting for his morning cup. A CUSTOMER in a GW t-shirt eyes him.

CUSTOMER
Hey, sorry, don’t want to bother you, but aren’t you --

Kirkman turns around. The customer looks surprised.

CUSTOMER (CONT’D)
Whoa, sorry, my bad. Thought you were someone else.

Kirkman nods. He’s not someone who gets recognized -- even in Washington. A BARISTA hands him his order. He exits.

CUT TO:

EXT. OFFICE BUILDING - DAY

A law firm on K-Street.

INT. JESSICA’S OFFICE - DAY

Jessica is at her desk, meeting with TWO LAWYERS at her firm.

JESSICA
Scratch Pitt from this list. Turns out he moved to Florida after the storm, not before. And lose Lively too. Something shady about her deposition. Other than that... good work.

(MORE)
JESSICA (CONT'D)
Five years ago, over two hundred Americans were discriminated against by their own government when they were issued sub-standard trailers after Hurricane Leni. And today we’re one step closer to getting them justice. You should be proud when you call your parents tonight.

LAWYER #2
I never call my parents.

JESSICA
Why the hell not?

LAWYER #2
(I don’t know) ’Cause I’m a terrible person.

JESSICA
Get me those new names.

As they rise --

LAWYER #1
There’s gonna be some serious push back from people on the hill.

JESSICA
That just means we’re doing our job.

LAWYER #2
You’re not worried about what this class action suit is gonna mean for your husband? When it’s filed, it’s gonna be embarrassing as hell for his department.

JESSICA
Tell you what. You worry about this case. I’ll worry about my husband.

They leave. Jessica returns to work. There’s a knock at the door. She looks up at PAUL COSTIGAN, a handsome co-worker.

COSTIGAN
Hey, got a sec?

JESSICA
Not really.
Costigan enters anyway. Sits down. Jessica continues to work away, ignoring him.

COSTIGAN
I hear you’re almost ready to file.

JESSICA
This time next week.

COSTIGAN
You know the chances are slim to none.

JESSICA
If you came here to talk me out of it, you’re wasting your time.

COSTIGAN
Please. I’ve known you long enough to know there’s no talking you out of anything.

JESSICA
Then why are you here?

COSTIGAN
It’s about your husband.

JESSICA
Look, you don’t have to worry about it. There’s no conflict. He knows about the case and he’s not gonna get in my way.

COSTIGAN
Glad to hear it, although I reserve the right to throw that quote back in your face at a later time, but I’m talking about something else. I’m hearing rumors.

JESSICA
About what?

COSTIGAN
His job.

OFF JESSICA, confused:

EXT. WHITE HOUSE - WEST PORTICO GATE - DAY

Kirkman’s Suburban gets waved inside the main gate.
INT. WHITE HOUSE - WEST PORTICO WAITING ROOM - DAY

A dingy waiting area badly in need of updating. Weathered furniture. Rug has a few miles on it.

Kirkman, wearing a visitors pass, sits in chairs with Emily and another staffer, MIKE ARNOLD, a recent college grad, going over Kirkman’s rather dull daily schedule.

MIKE ARNOLD
11:30 you have a speech celebrating Asian Pacific Heritage Month. 1:15 is senior staff. Your 2:00 was pushed to tomorrow. Then you have a meeting with Fleming at the Census Bureau. Then a hard out at 4.

KIRKMAN
Secret Service?

MIKE ARNOLD
Picking you up at the house promptly at 5.

Kirkman nods. Good.

MIKE ARNOLD (CONT’D)
You also owe the National Association of Home Builders a response. They’ve invited you to their annual convention in Vegas next month. Are you interested?

KIRKMAN
Why? So they can tell me how they wanna pave over the wetlands? Besides, they have one of these things six a times a year. Pass.

Mike makes a note on his tablet.

Emily turns to him, whispering so no passersby can hear.

EMILY
Look just in case this doesn’t go our way... What if we leak your FHS plan to Politico? Before the speech.

KIRKMAN
It’ll backfire.

EMILY
Maybe. But it’ll be out there.
KIRKMAN
For an hour. Tonight’s all about what’s in the State of the Union. Not what’s not. And besides, it’s less about the message and more about who carries it.

EMILY
We can’t just let the White House take an eraser to our entire domestic agenda.

KIRKMAN
It’s the President’s domestic agenda, Emily.

EMILY
It’s your domestic agenda, Mr. Secretary.

KIRKMAN
And I’m gonna make a case for it. Don’t get me wrong, I’m mad as hell Emily, but at the end of the day, I’m not the President.

A young WHITE HOUSE STAFFER arrives.

STAFFER
Secretary Kirkman. Mr. Reynolds will see you now.

INT. WHITE HOUSE - WEST WING HALLWAY - MOMENTS LATER

Kirkman and Emily are escorted up to the office of the White House CHIEF OF STAFF.

As they approach it, the door opens and a pack of WHITE HOUSE SPEECHWRITERS flood out.

Among them of note, a young man we’ll meet in more detail later: SETH WHEELER, who can’t help but get one last word in at CHARLIE REYNOLDS, the prickly White House Chief of Staff.

SETH
I’m telling you: we still need to take a look at the AB-33 section.

To his assistant:

CHIEF OF STAFF REYNOLDS
Chris, can you please hand me something heavy to hit Mr. Wheeler with please?
SETH
The message is muddled. I wrote it and I don’t even know what it says.

CHIEF OF STAFF REYNOLDS
Ahh, the mark of any successful political speech.

Seth walks off, frustrated. Reynolds invites Kirkman inside.

CHIEF OF STAFF REYNOLDS (CONT’D)
Mr. Secretary, welcome. Please.

Kirkman lets Emily disappear inside the office first. Then as he follows, his phone buzzes. He checks the display. It’s Jessica. He can’t answer now. He shuts the phone off.

INT. WHITE HOUSE – CHIEF OF STAFF’S OFFICE – LATER
Reynolds, backed by pitbull deputy AARON SHORE, 40s, square off against “good cop” Kirkman and “bad cop” Emily.

AARON
You’re wrong. This has nothing to do with the program’s importance --

EMILY
Of course it does.

AARON
No one’s debating it’s value, Emily.

EMILY
Please. That’s exactly what you’re doing, Aaron. If you valued the Secretary’s initiative at all, the President wouldn’t be ignoring it tonight. He’d be celebrating it.

CHIEF OF STAFF REYNOLDS
Unfortunately we have a lot to cover in the speech and yes, we had to kill some darlings.

EMILY
Overkill is more like it.

KIRKMAN
Emily.
(to Charlie; diplomatic)
Charlie, there’s not a single mention of any of my programs in the speech tonight.
(MORE)
Nothing about affordable housing or first time home ownership. Issues that actually build communities.

CHIEF OF STAFF REYNOLDS
I’m sorry, Mr. Secretary, but this is the way it’s gonna be. The speech is locked. Now I invited you over as a courtesy --

EMILY
Does the President value the Secretary’s opinion or not, Charlie? Cause right now it’s hard to tell.

Reynolds shuts Emily up with a look. Then turns back to Kirkman, softer but still firm, which only makes it more condescending.

CHIEF OF STAFF REYNOLDS
Don’t take this personally, Tom.

KIRKMAN
It’s kind of hard not to, Charlie.

Reynolds looks to Aaron and Emily.

CHIEF OF STAFF REYNOLDS
Give us a moment.

Aaron walks out. Emily looks to Kirkman for the approval to go. He nods. She leaves.

KIRKMAN
Look Charlie, I don’t want to sound paranoid, but first I get benched tonight --

CHIEF OF STAFF REYNOLDS
Being appointed the “Designated Survivor” is hardly being “benched”, Tom. You were chosen to sit out in case, God forbid, anything happens.

KIRKMAN
Yeah. That’s the exact definition of “benched” -- and then you draw a line through all my talking points. You tell me: what am I supposed to think about all of this?

Reynolds rises. Sits at the edge of the desk.
CHIEF OF STAFF REYNOLDS
Tom... we were going to wait until after the State of the Union to tell you, but the President’s looking to make a change.
(beat)
He’d like to offer you an ambassadorship to the international civil aviation organization.

Kirkman can’t believe his ears.

KIRKMAN
You can’t be serious, Charlie.

CHIEF OF STAFF REYNOLDS
I’m afraid I am.

KIRKMAN
Was Chairman of the International House of Pancakes unavailable?

CHIEF OF STAFF REYNOLDS
Mr. Secretary --

KIRKMAN
Is the Civil Aviation Committee --

CHIEF OF STAFF REYNOLDS
Organization.

KIRKMAN
-- even a thing?

CHIEF OF STAFF REYNOLDS
Of course. It’s in Montreal. It’s under the UN. It affords you the rank of Ambassador and all the trimmings that go with it.

KIRKMAN
So that’s it? Montreal? I’ve served the President above and beyond his entire term. I still have a lot to say --

CHIEF OF STAFF REYNOLDS
I know. But now it’s about the second term. And I serve at the pleasure of the President.
(beat)
And so do you.

Off Kirkman, shut down:
EXT. KIRKMAN HOME - NIGHT

JESSICA (V.O.)
Ese hijo de puta de suficiencia.

INT. KIRKMAN HOME - BEDROOM - SAME

Kirkman is getting dressed/gathering papers with Jessica.

KIRKMAN
English please.

JESSICA
I said I can’t believe that turd was right. He wants to get rid of you. Just like that.

KIRKMAN
Reynolds actually tried to sell it as a promotion.

JESSICA
What did you tell him?

KIRKMAN
What could I tell him?

JESSICA
Go to hell comes to mind.

KIRKMAN
Jess --

JESSICA
You can’t just take this lying down.

KIRKMAN
There’s no other way to take it. Richmond’s made up his mind.

JESSICA
The White House never respected you. That’s the problem.

KIRKMAN
No. The problem is I didn’t want to play Richmond’s game all the time.

JESSICA
It’s called politics and maybe if you did --
KIRKMAN
What? I wouldn’t be out of a job?
Yeah... but I wouldn’t be me, Jess.

JESSICA
It took three years, but it finally feels like we’ve settled into Washington. I love my job. Penny loves her school. Even Leo’s making friends. We can’t uproot that.

KIRKMAN
What choice do we have?

JESSICA
So your mind’s made up? You’re gonna step down?

Kirkman pauses. He doesn’t want to, but he’s stuck.

KIRKMAN
I told him I’d give him an answer tomorrow. 
(beat)
I promise I’ll make it work.

Jessica says nothing. From downstairs, the doorbell rings.

JESSICA
It’s the sitter.

She walks out, disappointed. Off Kirkman, alone, we PRELAP:

RITTER (V.O.)
Mr. Secretary, you need to put down the phone.

INT. A CONFERENCE ROOM SOMEWHERE - LATER THAT NIGHT

We’re back at the moment where Ritter and the Secret Service have just rushed inside the room immediately after the attack on the Capitol Building.

KIRKMAN
Why, what’s the matter?

RITTER
We’ve lost contact with the Capitol. We’re sheltering in place until we know more.

As agents take the batteries out of the Kirkmans’ phones -- we FAVOR RITTER -- picking up on a conversation he’s having over his comm -- one that we didn’t take notice of earlier:
RIPTTER (CONT’D)
Control, I need an update. Do you have eyes on the President?
(beat; reacting; dropping his guard for the first time)
Jesus Christ. Are you sure?

KIRKMAN (O.S.)
Would someone tell me what the hell is going on?

RIPTTER
Is the White House secure?
(beat)
Well make certain.

JESSICA (O.S.)
(re: the TV)
Tom.

Kirkman looks to the TV and is instantly GUTSTRUCK by the terrifying image of the decimated Capitol Building.

KIRKMAN
Oh my God...

He whip over to the window -- as Ritter gets additional intel over his mic. Turns to the detail.

RIPTTER
We’re moving now. Let’s go.

Kirkman and Jessica are instantly ushered out of the room. The SCREAM OF ZIPPING CARS AND HOWLING SIRENS as we SMASH TO:

EXT. WASHINGTON DC STREET - NIGHT

Motorcycles THUNDER up gravel and SCREECH to a stop at every intersection, blocking traffic for two miles.

DC POLICE SCREAM at bystanders to get out of the way of a MOTORCADE ROARING INTO VIEW, flashing red and blue lights. Kirkman and Jessica ride with Ritter in a middle car.

INT. SUBURBAN - SAME

Kirkman holds Jessica’s hand. Ritter and two more agents inside are getting the latest intel on the Capitol explosion.

RIPTTER
Yes, sir. I understand. Anything else from our men inside?
KIRKMAN
James. Talk to me. What do you know?

RITTER
(to Kirkman)
The Capitol has been attacked. There’s still no word from the President or his detail --

ANOTHER SECRET SERVICE AGENT
(getting information over his phone)
Oh my God. Please don’t tell me that.

JESSICA
What?
The agent turns to Ritter, somber.

ANOTHER SECRET SERVICE AGENT
It’s confirmed... Eagle is gone.
The whole car reacts to this with total dread and sorrow.

Ritter is the first to snap out of it -- getting new orders over his earpiece.

RITTER
Yes, sir. I’ll let him know.
(to Kirkman)
Mr. Secretary, we’re enacting continuity of government. A DC appellate judge will meet us at the White House.

A beat as Ritter contemplates what he’s about to say:

RITTER (CONT’D)
You’re now the President of the United States.

Kirkman is speechless.

END OF ACT ONE
ACT TWO

FADE IN:

INT. GEORGETOWN BAR/RESTAURANT - NIGHT

A TV PLAYS ABOVE THE BAR. Tuned to the State of the Union.

NOTE: this opening scene takes place moments before the Capitol attack:

PRESIDENT RICHMOND
That’s why tonight I’m proposing a $500 million bipartisan bill that will champion those who help encourage forward-thinking initiatives for job creation, health care, defense.

At a table: HANNAH WATTS, 30s, is on a first date and it couldn’t be going worse, having just spilled her date’s entire glass of Merlot over his lap.

HANNAH
Oh my God, I’m so sorry.

Her handsome DATE assures her:

DATE
It’s fine. Don’t worry about it.

HANNAH
No, it’s not. It’s all sorts of terrible. I’m really sorry. Take my word for it. I’m usually very impressive.

DATE
I have no doubt.

HANNAH
See, I’m just starting to put myself out there again and --
(beat; realizing)
Know what? You don’t wanna hear this. No one wants to hear this. I don’t want to hear this. You probably just want me to shut up now so you can watch the State of the Union.
DATE
If I wanted to watch the State of the Union, would I have asked you out on the night of the State of the Union?

Hannah smiles. Likes this one.

DATE (CONT’D)
Look, why don’t I run to the bathroom, clean myself off, and when I come back, we can start fresh. Deal?

HANNAH
Sounds good.

The date gets up. Goes to the bathroom. Waiting, Hannah picks up her phone. Places a call.

HANNAH (CONT’D)
Hey, just checking in...Fine, I guess. No, it’s not him. It’s me. I just think it’s too soon...well, that will never happen because I’m allergic to cats -- so there...Okay, I’ll call you after.

Hannah hangs up, eyes going to the TV screen above the bar where the SOTU has been replaced by an ANCHORMAN starting to report rumors of an attack. People are gathering around the bar now. There’s a BUZZ. Hannah knows something’s up.

Which is just when her phone rings. The display reads: DIRECTOR JACOBS. She answers.

HANNAH (CONT’D)
This is Agent Watts.

Her tone: it’s almost like she’s a different person. Whereas her personal life is a mess, when she’s working, she’s fully in COMMAND.

ANGLE: HANNAH’S DATE -- MOMENTS LATER

Returning from the bathroom -- only to find that Hannah is now GONE -- the table EMPTY.

EXT. WASHINGTON DC STREET - PRESENT

The motorcade zooms past, approaching the White House.
INT. SUBURBAN - SAME

Into his comm:

RITTER
Liberty’s approaching now.

Kirkman, in the back, still in a fog over everything that’s going on:

KIRKMAN
Who’s “Liberty”?

RITTER
You are sir.

Kirkman nods. Yeah. Right.

EXT. WHITE HOUSE - WEST PORTICO GATE - PRESENT

Kirkman’s motorcade thunders through the gate and up to the White House. Kirkman and Jessica are quickly RUSHED inside.

INT. WHITE HOUSE - WEST WING HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

And as soon as Kirkman steps inside --

EVERYTHING SLOWS: we stay completely with Kirkman -- in his POV -- as we move inside the White House. This morning he was just a visitor, on his way out, and now...

Following the Secret Service agents through the halls, there’s NO SOUND -- as Kirkman takes in the scene:

HORRIFIED WHITE HOUSE STAFFERS all peering up at TVs, taking in fresh footage of the Capitol Building BURNING.

Some are sobbing. Some are still too stunned to do much of anything. Others embrace each other. Trying to find comfort in this moment. A nation has been attacked and everyone is going to be looking for strength. Looking to --

Kirkman, gripping Jessica’s hand, being led into:

INT. WHITE HOUSE - ROOSEVELT ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Where a handful of WHITE HOUSE STAFFERS are waiting, including Deputy Chief of Staff Aaron Shore.

Kirkman is walked up to an awaiting DC APPELLATE JUDGE Jessica is handed a bible.
Kirkman peers down at the bible. Holy shit, is this really happening...!?!?

It takes him a moment to realize, yes, it is. He’s about to be sworn in as President of the United States in jeans and Nike’s.

DC APPELLATE JUDGE (CONT’D)
Repeat after me. I Thomas Adam Kirkman do solemnly swear --

KIRKMAN
I Thomas Adam Kirkman do solemnly swear --

DC APPELLATE JUDGE
That I will faithfully execute the Office of President of the United States --

KIRKMAN
That I will faithfully execute the Office of President of the United States --

And off Kirkman becoming our country’s newest President --

INT. WHITE HOUSE - HALLWAY - LATER

Now-President Kirkman moves swiftly up to the SITUATION ROOM, backed by various White House staffers including Aaron Shore.

However, when they reach the sit room’s secure door it quickly dawns on them that none of them has the security access to open it. After trading looks:

AARON
Dammit.

With no other option, Aaron knocks. A MARINE GUARD opens the door up from the inside. Kirkman steels himself and enters:

CHAOS. Inside: DEPUTY SECRETARIES (DEFENSE, TRANSPORTATION, TREASURY, INTERIOR, ETC) are now Acting Secretaries and along with the ACTING FBI DIRECTOR, ACTING HOMELAND SECURITY DIRECTOR, NSA OFFICIALS and various GENERALS, including the DEPUTY CHAIRMAN OF THE JOINT CHIEFS, HARRIS COCHRANE, 60’s, Full-Bird, decorated, intractable in his beliefs --
They’re all SCRAMBLING, on phones, at computers. Lots of cross-talk. Everyone is FRAYED. Everyone is SCARED. Everyone wants to do the right thing but they need a LEADER.

ACTING TRANSPORTATION SECRETARY
(on a phone)
No, I’m the one telling you that we have to ground all aircrafts immediately --

ACTING TREASURY SECRETARY
(on a phone)
Don’t give me crap about authorization. The market cannot open tomorrow, do you understand?!?

ACTING FBI DIRECTOR
(to a NSA OFFICIAL)
I want any and all intercepts right now: Social media, e-mail, phone calls, any connection to the bombing I need to know --

ACTING TREASURY SECRETARY
(on a phone)
Don’t give me crap about authorization. The market cannot open tomorrow, do you understand?!?

ACTING HEALTH AND HUMAN RESOURCES SECRETARY
(on a phone)
All hospitals need to be on full alert in case there’s another attack.

ACTING HOMELAND SECURITY DIRECTOR
(to a staffer)
We’re shutting down both the Mexican and Canadian boarders. I also want intel on any and all people trying to leave the United States illegally --

WHITE HOUSE STAFFER
(on a phone)
Look, if you’re on this call, your boss is dead and you are Acting Secretary.

And under all of this: Kirkman, in the back, like the substitute who can’t get an unruly class to quiet down.

KIRKMAN
Excuse me, excuse me --

But no one is listening -- not respecting Kirkman yet. Turning to Shore, standing beside him:

KIRKMAN (CONT’D)
This is out of control.

Agreeing, Shore slams his hand on the desk.

AARON
Hey!

All heads turn to Kirkman.

AARON (CONT’D)
I need everyone quiet right now.

The room settles. Kirkman gives Aaron a nod. Thanks. Then addresses the room -- now his to command.
But with all the faces staring back at him, it takes him a second to settle himself.

KIRKMAN
Let’s all, umm, take a moment. To fallen friends, heroes all.

A beat as everyone takes a moment to reflect on the night’s tremendous losses. As he finally takes a seat:

KIRKMAN (CONT’D)
Why don’t we, uhh, go around the room?

Everyone looks at each other. He serious? Taking over:

AARON
Where’s the CIA director?

NSA OFFICIAL
We’re still working to set up a secure comm.

AARON
The hell with secure comms. We gotta get him patched in now. Cell phone, land line, Skype, whatever we got. Who has the networks?

A WHITE HOUSE STAFFER raises a hand.

AARON (CONT’D)
Tell them we’ll be live from the Oval in sixty minutes and no one talks to any press from any office or agency under threat of me skull-fucking them. No rumors, no leaks, no panic. There will be no “Pet Goat” moments tonight, understand?

WHITE HOUSE STAFFER
Yessir.

KIRKMAN
Do we have any idea what happened?

ACTING FBI DIRECTOR
It’s still too early to determine --

AARON
Well we’re gonna need something, Chris. Whole world’s watching us right now.
COCHRANE

Exactly. We need to alert every one of our embassies to convey to every host country that the U.S. is on a war footing and now is not the time to test us.

Suddenly, everyone is back on phones, rapid-fire, overlapping conversations overwhelming the room, Cochrane soon over-stepping his authority.

COCHRANE (CONT’D)
I want all U.S. forces worldwide on Defcon 3.

The ACTING DEFENSE SECRETARY takes issue:

ACTING DEFENSE SECRETARY
You can’t make that call.

COCHRANE
The Chairman of the Joint Chiefs is gone --

A NAVY ADMIRAL joins in:

NAVY ADMIRAL
Which doesn’t give you any authority --

COCHRANE
We’re under attack -- what other authority do you need, Peter!?!?

Tempers FLARING, tensions SPIKING, Kirkman tries to gain control --

KIRKMAN
General Cochrane -- Admiral -- I want the Air Force flying

COCHRANE (CONT’D)
Gentlemen -- in 15 minutes --

An AIR FORCE MAJOR retorts:

AIR FORCE MAJOR
Who are you to give me orders?

COCHRANE
Who are you to question them?

KIRKMAN
We got too much confusion

COCHRANE (CONT’D)
I’m not gonna sit on my hands here! and hope for the best.
As the room descends back into chaos, we stay on Kirkman, taking in the disorder -- with all the power, yet at the same time, powerless.

Under this, the in-over-his-head ACTING TRANSPORTATION SECRETARY, looks up from a call, alarmed.

ACTING TRANSPORTATION SECRETARY
Jesus -- we got an oil tanker coming into the Port of Baltimore. I ordered a stop on all boats, but it’s not responding to hold its position and stay away from the dock.

Everyone in the room immediately goes to worst case scenario.

MARINE GENERAL
Oh my Lord.

AARON
What’s the ship?

ACTING TRANSPORTATION SECRETARY
(reading off a tablet) It’s the Tarcoon out of Georgia.

Almost instantly a photograph and corresponding intel on the Tarcoon oil tanker appears on one of the monitors.

ACTING TRANSPORTATION SECRETARY
(CONT’D) It’s carrying roughly 550,000 gallons of liquefied natural gas.

ACTING DEFENSE SECRETARY
If it’s detonated on the perimeter of the city --

KIRKMAN
It’s like a nuclear bomb. (beat) Where’s the tanker now?

ACTING TRANSPORTATION SECRETARY
Mid-way through the Chesapeake Bay.

COCHRANE
Which puts it far enough from land that the collateral damage is minimal.

AARON
If we did what? Blow it up?
COCHRANE
Absolutely. You heard Brady. They’re ignoring direct orders to hold their position.

AARON
We don’t know what they’re doing. Their comms could be malfunctioning.

KIRKMAN
Do we have any eyes on the crew?

ACTING TRANSPORTATION SECRETARY
No, not yet.

NAVY ADMIRAL
It’s almost 11. It’s dark. They could be asleep.

COCHRANE
How far away is the Coast Guard?

ANOTHER MILITARY STAFFER
(on phone)
8 minutes out.

KIRKMAN
How close to land is the tanker?

ACTING TRANSPORTATION SECRETARY
It’ll pass Deale, Maryland in about two minutes.

COCHRANE
We need to put Apaches on their bow right now.

ACTING DEFENSE SECRETARY
And if you’re wrong --

COCHRANE
Look at the ship’s registry. Three stops back it was in the Sudan. We need to act on what we know. Not what we don’t.

ACTING DEFENSE SECRETARY
Mr. President --

COCHRANE
(cutting him off)
Mr. President.

(MORE)
COCHRANE (CONT'D)
You need to authorize the Apaches
to fire on that vessel before it’s
too late.

Kirkman pauses. Everything’s on him now. And there’s no time
to think. He has to act.

KIRKMAN
Where’s the ship now?

ACTING TRANSPORTATION SECRETARY
Will pass Deale in fifty seconds.

KIRKMAN
Apaches?

AIR FORCE MAJOR
En route. Thirty seconds.

Kirkman looks to Aaron, whose face betrays nothing. This
one’s gonna be on him. His first decision as Commander in
Chief. And if he’s wrong...

KIRKMAN
How big’s the crew?

NAVY ADMIRAL
200. 250.

KIRKMAN
Do I just give the order or...?

AARON
Yes, sir. It’ll be on your command.

ACTING TRANSPORTATION SECRETARY
The Tarcoon’s about to pass Deale.

AIR FORCE MAJOR
Apaches are locked on.

PUSH IN on Kirkman and his first act as President --

KIRKMAN
Fire.

The Air Force Major is about to relay that order to the
Apaches when --

A RADIO COMMUNICATION CRACKLES over speakers. The Captain of
the Tarcoon talking:
TARCOON CAPTAIN (V.O.)
Port of Baltimore Dock Master, this
is the Tarcoon, apologies for the
silence. Looks like a radio
malfunction. We’re holding
position. Over.

DOCK MASTER (V.O.)
Confirm hold position Tarcoon.
Over.

The transmission ends. Everyone breathes a sigh of relief.
Kirkman is GREEN. He just almost killed 250 innocent people.

INT. WHITE HOUSE - HALLWAY - MOMENTS LATER

Kirkman is making his way down the corridor, away from the
situation room, when he’s suddenly overwhelmed with nausea.
Quickly ducks into:

INT. WHITE HOUSE - BATHROOM - CONTINUOUS

Where he swings open a stall, flings up the toilet seat and
hurls in the bowl.

A beat as he gathers himself. Spits. Then as he’s staring
down the bottom of the bowl, a VOICE from the next stall, a
little tipsy:

VOICE (O.S.)
It’s all right. Let it all out.
We’re all feeling the same way
tonight.

KIRKMAN
Sorry. Thought I was alone.

IN THE NEXT STALL:

The young man we recognize from outside Reynolds’s office
earlier that day -- SETH WHEELER. Up until the attack, the
speechwriter was in a celebratory mood, off the clock,
throwing back drinks with his colleagues. And now...

SETH
Yeah well, nothing is what it seems
anymore. I swear to God, I don’t
know how the hell we’re gonna get
through this.

KIRKMAN
Same way we always do.
SETH
Ha. Right. Do you know who’s in charge now? I mean, I’m asking. ‘Cause I can’t even remember his name.

KIRKMAN
(beat)
Kirkman.

SETH
Yeah. Kirkman. The lowest rung on the ladder. The guy whose biggest domestic policy so far has been where to order take-out.

Kirkman sits back. Continues to let Seth mouth off.

SETH (CONT’D)
You know that President Richmond fired him this morning? And now he’s the President. He’s the guy the country is gonna be looking to in our darkest hour.

KIRKMAN
Maybe he’ll surprise you.

SETH
You mean, maybe he’ll realize that he’s in his over his head? That he has no business running the country? That he should step aside and maybe let one of the generals take over? Or the CIA Director? Someone who knows what the hell they’re doing. Who has some experience. Fat chance that’ll happen. No one ever gives up power here. And know what? I don’t even want surprises. I want stability. I want strength. I want to wake up tomorrow with the knowledge that there’s going to be a tomorrow. Kirkman’s a follower. We need a leader. Cause I tell you man, I got a half a mind to make a run to Canada, know what I’m sayin’?

With that, Seth flushes the toilet, rises and steps out of the stall --

-- finding himself face-to-face with Kirkman.
SETH (CONT’D)

Oh.

KIRKMAN

Canada.

SETH

Mr. President --

Kirkman holds up a hand.

KIRKMAN

Save it.

Seth couldn’t feel more embarrassed.

KIRKMAN (CONT’D)

You really believe everything you just said?

SETH

Mr. President, let me explain --

KIRKMAN

(cutting him off)

What’s your name?

SETH

Seth Wheeler.

Kirkman stares at Seth’s face, placing him.

KIRKMAN

I saw you this morning coming out of Charlie’s office. You’re a speechwriter. You were arguing with him about the President’s address.

SETH

The AB-33 section.

KIRKMAN

Housing reform.

Seth nods. That was Kirkman’s section.

KIRKMAN (CONT’D)

And you think I should step aside?

Seth looks at Kirkman. He wants an honest answer.

SETH

I do.
Kirkman considers Seth -- then:

KIRKMAN
Maybe I should.
(beat)
But right now I’m what you got. And you have --
(checks his watch)
Fifty three minutes to write me a speech telling the country why that’s a good thing.

Kirkman goes to the door. Once he leaves -- Seth makes a quick dash into the same stall he was just in -- door shutting behind him. A disgusting retching sound is audible, as we GO TO:

EXT. CAPITOL HILL - NIGHT

Total panic and confusion. Where the historic United States Capitol building once stood proudly is now a pile of still-burning rubble and ash. EMERGENCY SERVICE CREWS work to dig through the wreckage looking for survivors. NEWS CREWS jockey for position. DISTRAUGHT FAMILY MEMBERS implore DC POLICE keeping a perimeter for any info:

CRYING WOMAN
Please, my husband was inside --

TERRIFIED MAN
Just tell me if he’s all right --

DC COP
-- we still don’t know -- yes, we’re doing everything we can --

ANGLE: A CAR

Parked on the perimeter.

INT. CAR - SAME

Hannah sits inside. She stares out the window. At the rubble. Her eyes tell us that she’s overwhelmed. But this isn’t the time and she knows it.

She looks into the visor. Locks eyes with her reflection. Steels herself. And when she steps out --

EXT. CAPITOL HILL - CONTINUOUS

-- she’s in total fucking charge -- crossing up to the crime scene, flashing her badge, overlooking the chaos, taking in the entire scene, mind at work.
VOICE (O.S.)
Hannah!

Hannah turns. She’s being waved over to a makeshift command station lorded over by FBI TECHS and AGENTS, hard at work gathering forensic evidence. There she joins up with two more agents, JOHN LAWRENCE and MARK NOLAN.

LAWRENCE
It’s a Goddamn mess. We can’t even secure the scene.

HANNAH
Any survivors?

LAWRENCE
Not yet, but EMS is still digging through the rubble.

HANNAH
Anyone claiming responsibility?

Nolan shakes his head.

HANNAH (CONT’D)
Alright... John, first thing: we need to make sure there isn’t a second device. I want thermo UAVs and air sniffers looking for anything biological or radiological in the area. I want the license plates of every car parked in the next three blocks scanned. If any of them are stolen or owned by anyone on a watch list, tear that car apart. Mark: bomb disposal techs, CSI, we got debris everywhere and every piece matters. We need to treat this like a plane exploded in mid-air. We catalog what we find and where we found it.

NOLAN
(nodding)
Who do we report to?

HANNAH
Me.

The agents nod. Go to work. Off Hannah, in charge:
EXT. WHITE HOUSE - WEST PORTICO GATE - NIGHT

A Secret Service Suburban pulls inside, stopping at the portico entrance where Jessica is waiting. The Suburban doors open up. A FEMALE AGENT takes Penny out by the hand. Brings her to her mom’s warm embrace.

INT. WHITE HOUSE - GUEST ROOM - LATER

Jessica tucks Penny into bed.

JESSICA
Here you go, sweetie. Snug as a bug in a rug.

PENNY
Mommy... why are we here?

Jessica doesn’t know how to answer. Kisses her forehead.

JESSICA
Just get some rest. Everything’s going to be okay. We’ll talk in the morning.

Penny nods. Turns over. Jessica steps away from the bed.

EXT. WHITE HOUSE - ROSE GARDEN - NIGHT

Kirkman paces alone, cigarette in hand, exhaling smoke into the crisp January air. Jessica soon joins him, concerned.

JESSICA
It’s freezing out here.

KIRKMAN
I don’t mind it.

JESSICA
(re: the cigarette)
Haven’t had one of those in awhile.

KIRKMAN
Figured tonight was as good a time as any to start back up. How’s Penny?

JESSICA
Scared. Confused.

Kirkman nods.

KIRKMAN
How are you?
JESSICA
Scared. Confused.
(beat)
Is this really happening?

KIRKMAN
If it isn’t can one of us wake up already?

Kirkman takes another drag.

KIRKMAN (CONT’D)
I almost blew up a ship today,
Jess. 250 people on board. They
would’ve been gone in an instant if
they hadn’t...

He turns to her.

KIRKMAN (CONT’D)
What the hell am I doing here? I’m
so not the person for this.

He sits down on a bench. Jessica joins him.

JESSICA
You wanna quit?

KIRKMAN
More than anything.
(beat)
I’m sorry. I know that’s not what
I’m supposed to say, but I just
can’t help feel --

JESSICA
I think you should quit.

He turns to her, surprised.

KIRKMAN
What?

JESSICA
Look what happened tonight, Tom.
How many people -- we haven’t even
processed. And now everyone in the
world is looking to us -- to you --
to get us through this. It’s not
that I don’t think you can do
it...I just don’t want that
responsibility.
Kirkman knows exactly where she’s coming from. Just then, Ritter comes rushing out with two Secret Service agents.

RITTER
Mr. President.

Kirkman rises.

KIRKMAN
What is it?

RITTER
You said Leo was over at a friend’s house tonight.

KIRKMAN
That’s right. Caleb West.

RITTER
I just spoke to our agents at his residence. Leo’s not there. Never was. Neither is the other boy.

JESSICA
(worried)
What?

KIRKMAN
Where is he then?

RITTER
We don’t know.

Off Kirkman and Jessica, imagining the worst --

END OF ACT TWO
ACT THREE

FADE IN:

EXT. WHITE HOUSE - NIGHT

PAN ACROSS a line of NEWS REPORTERS doing stand-ups in front of the wrought iron fence that guards the perimeter:

NEWS REPORTER #1
-- everyone is at a complete loss for words --

NEWS REPORTER #2
-- the most devastating attack on our country since 9/11 --

NEWS REPORTER #3
-- staffers at the White House are asking the same questions as the rest of the country: Who did this and will it happen again?

ANGLE -- EMILY RHODES

Kirkman’s COS -- arguing with a WHITE HOUSE SECURITY GUARD at a booth at the northwest corner of the White House complex.

EMILY
Look, check again. My name is Emily Rhodes. I’m Secretary Kirkman’s Chief of Staff. He was the Designated Survivor tonight.

SECURITY GUARD
I already told you. You’re not on the cleared list. Nothing can be done.

EMILY
I was just in there this morning.

SECURITY GUARD
Yeah well, a lot’s happened since then if you haven’t noticed. Now back away from the gate.

Emily, no choice, backs up, finding Mike Arnold and some other members of Kirkman’s cabinet staff, waiting nearby.

EMILY
They won’t let me in.
MIKE ARNOLD
(phone out)
I still can’t reach anyone inside.

EMILY
Keep trying. Someone’s gotta pick up.

Mike dials again. Off Emily, frustrated:

INT. WHITE HOUSE - ROOSEVELT ROOM - NIGHT

A black leather briefcase with a small antenna protruding out of it is set down onto a table in front of Kirkman by the head of the WHITE HOUSE MILITARY TEAM: MAJOR SCOTT CAMERON.

Cochrane and a few Acting Secretaries (from the sit room) are also present, on phones, giving/receiving orders and updates.

MAJOR CAMERON
Mr. President, this is the nuclear football. It will be with you whenever you leave the White House.

From out of the leather "jacket", Cameron pulls out a titanium shelled inner case. Kirkman looks on as Cameron opens up the package containing our nation’s retaliatory options: a book listing classified site locations, a manila folder containing procedures for the Emergency Alert System, and a three-by-five inch card with authentication codes.

MAJOR CAMERON (CONT’D)
Here are the launch codes, the verification codes, a listing of every classified location where nuclear weapons can be launched from. If a strike is imminent, you can give the green light from this phone. There are no dead zones. It works anywhere on earth as well as beneath it. You will never be unable to give a launch order.

Kirkman is overwhelmed by the briefing. A beat, then he takes off his jacket and prepares to roll up his sleeve. Cameron and the rest of the Military Team look on, confused.

MAJOR CAMERON (CONT’D)
Sir?

KIRKMAN
Don’t you need my thumbprints now? Or eye scan...?
The Military Team members stifle laughs.

MAJOR CAMERON
No, sir. It’s not like the movies.
It doesn’t work that way.

Kirkman, sheepish, puts back on his jacket.

KIRKMAN
Of course.

MAJOR CAMERON
Anything else, sir?

KIRKMAN
No. Thank you.

Cameron and the Military Team file out. Kirkman turns to the rest of the room.

KIRKMAN (CONT’D)
Okay. Updates. Jill?

ACTING SECRETARY OF STATE
(into a phone)
Yes, thank you.
(hanging up)
The UN is in emergency session. I have a three page phone list with every one of our enemies calling to deny responsibility for the attack. Russia, Iran, even North Korea.

COCHRANE
In the meantime, we’ve fueled the 1st Air Support Operations Group, the 5th Combat Communications Group and the 54th Fighter Group. Every US military base, home and aboard, are on full alert, and the USS Eisenhower and its strike group is currently hard charging towards the Fifth Fleet stationed in the Persian Gulf.

KIRKMAN
Wait, wait, I understand putting our bases on alert, but why are we “hard charging” a US aircraft carrier anywhere?

COCHRANE
Mr. President, in the event of an attack --
KIRKMAN
Against who? You heard Jill.
Everyone’s denying involvement.

COCHRANE
Of course they are. All warfare is based on deception and there are still plenty we haven’t heard from.

Kirkman pauses.

KIRKMAN
I just don’t think I feel comfortable yet showing this much force.

COCHRANE
Well, with all due respect sir, do you mind telling me when you do plan on being comfortable?

Cochrane’s eyes penetrate Kirkman as he says this. He doesn’t answer. But thankfully the arrival of one of the Secret Service agents from Ritter’s team gives him an exit.

SECRET SERVICE AGENT
Mr. President.

KIRKMAN
(backing away from the Deputy’s disapproving glare)
Did you find Leo yet?

SECRET SERVICE AGENT
Yes, sir. Agent Ritter is picking him up now.

ELECTRONIC MUSIC PULSATES.

CUT TO:

INT. UNDERGROUND CLUB - NIGHT

A BLAST OF SOUND AND LIGHT. We’re at a RAVE in the basement of a DC nightclub. LOOKING AROUND...the club is half-empty and those who are there are too strung out to know/care about what happened in their city tonight. In a shadowy corner --

A SMALL PLASTIC BAG WITH A HANDFUL OF COLORFUL PILLS INSIDE (MOLLY) IS PASSED TO AN UNDERAGE CLUB GOER BY --

LEO -- in exchange for a $100 bill. Leo quickly pockets the cash.
LEO
Pleasure doin’ business with you.

CALEB, his friend, joins him.

CALEB
Hey, I just sold three more. How you lookin’?

LEO
I still got two more bags left.

CALEB
Save ’em. We gotta bounce anyway.

LEO
Screw that. I came here to make money.

CALEB
Don’t you have to get home?

LEO
Not if I call and say I’m crashin’ at your place tonight.

Caleb smirks.

CALEB
Man, you just park yourself right on that edge.

LEO
How else are you gonna know when to stop?

Just then -- all the lights TURN ON. It’s blinding. DC POLICE BUST INSIDE -- ON THE HUNT. People SCREAM. SCATTER.

CALEB
Shit, it’s a raid!

Leo takes off -- but quickly runs into a wall of people. Seeing the cops advance, he quickly doubles back, fighting his way into:

INT. BATHROOM – CONTINUOUS

Where he immediately throws open a stall and drops his remaining Molly bags into the toilet. Flushes as --

The bathroom door explodes open -- police thundering inside, storming right up to him. Leo spins, terrified.
LEO
Whoa, hold up, I didn’t do anything!

VOICE (O.S.)
Leo.

Leo’s eyes narrow, recognizing the voice.

LEO
James?

James Ritter steps forward.

RITTER
I’m here to take you home.

INT. WHITE HOUSE - COMMUNICATIONS OFFICE - NIGHT

START ON: A NEWS REPORT -- featuring a file photo of Kirkman.

NEWS REPORT
Thomas Adam Kirkman was born November 14, 1972 in Port Washington, New York. Raised by his single mother Dena, a political activist, Kirkman graduated cum laude from Cornell University --

ANGLE -- THE WHITE HOUSE SPEECHWRITERS, Seth among them.

SPEECHWRITER #1
Great. Not even a real Ivy.

ANGLE -- ANOTHER NEWS REPORT on Kirkman.

ANOTHER NEWS REPORT
Kirkman is largely unknown. Before being appointed Secretary of Housing and Urban Development, Kirkman worked in both the nonprofit and private sectors and in academia as an educator --

SPEECHWRITER #2
Tell me it was at least poli-sci.

ANOTHER NEWS REPORT
-- teaching architecture and design at an inner city New York school.

SPEECHWRITER #3
This is insane. I mean, this isn’t really happening, is it?
It’s happening all right.

But he can’t really be the President, can he? Guy has never even be elected to anything.

He was next in the line of succession.

By complete happenstance. No one could have ever foreseen --

(looking up the computer)
Why the hell do you think we have a Designated Survivor in the first place, Alan? Because this was foreseen.

What do you got so far?

(reading off a draft on his computer)
“Tonight, our way of life, our very freedom came under attack in a deliberate terrorist act.”

We don’t know it’s terrorism.

What the hell do you think it was?

What I’m sayin’ is we don’t know if it was a terror group or a foreign government or --

Fine. Just “under attack... This act of cowardice was meant to cripple our nation but as before, America will show the world that we will not bow down to fear. That we will fight back. That we will persevere.” And then I get into the continuity of government explanation.
SPEECHWRITER #3
Sounds good.

SETH
That’s the problem. It can’t sound good. It has to sound great. Kirkman has to nail this. And as a speechwriter I have to know how to deliver and I can’t deliver cause I don’t know who he is. It took me almost two years to learn how to write for President Richmond. I met Kirkman twenty minutes ago. A writer and the people they write for-- they have to know each other. They have to find their rhythm together or it just doesn’t work.

VOICE (O.S.)
So what do you wanna know?

Seth turns around. Kirkman is standing in the doorway.

INT. WHITE HOUSE - HALLWAY - NIGHT
Shore is finishing up a conversation with some staffers when:

COCHRANE (O.S.)
Aaron.

Shore turns. Sees Cochrane down the hall.

COCHRANE (CONT’D)
A word.

INT. WHITE HOUSE - EMPTY WEST WING OFFICE - MOMENTS LATER
The Deputy closes the door behind Aaron.

COCHRANE
Something needs to be done, Aaron.

AARON
I think we’re doing everything that’s expected of us, Harris.

COCHRANE
That’s not what I’m talking about.
AARON
Then what are we talking about?
Because if it’s what I think it is, this conversation is gonna be treading dangerously close to conspiracy to commit treason.

COCHRANE
You call it treason. I call it my civil responsibility.

AARON
He hasn’t given us any reason yet --

COCHRANE
He is the reason, Aaron. You know it just as well as I do.

Aaron does.

COCHRANE (CONT’D)
America is on her back right now. We’ve been hit harder than we have ever been before. And if we are going to get through this we need to act. Quickly and definitively. Tom Kirkman will not get us through this.

AARON
And let me guess... you can?

COCHRANE
We’re in a state of war. Who would you have rather have leading us?

Off Aaron, hard to argue against his logic:

EXT. WASHINGTON DC STREET - NIGHT

A suburban zooms past, bubble lights spinning.

INT. SUBURBAN - SAME

Leo sits in the back, sulking. To Ritter beside him:

LEO
How’d you find me?

RITTER
You’re not exactly a criminal mastermind.
LEO
You gonna tell my dad?

RITTER
What? That I found his teenage son dealing molly in the basement of some underground club surrounded by the same kind of strung-out junkie he’s gonna be one day if he doesn’t straighten the hell up right quick?

(beat)
No. I think your dad’s got enough to deal with right now.

LEO
Does another ribbon need cutting somewhere?

RITTER
What the hell do you think your father does?

LEO
I don’t know.

RITTER
(turning back to him)
That’s right. You don’t know.

Leo really doesn’t. Ritter shows him his phone. On the display: STREAMING NEWS FOOTAGE OF THE CAPITOL ATTACK.

LEO
Oh my God.

A beat as Leo takes it all in. Then catches the street outside the window.

LEO (CONT’D)
I thought you were taking me home.

RITTER
I am.

Leo’s eyes narrow, confused. That’s when he sees the car is approaching -- THE WHITE HOUSE.

Off Leo -- oh my God:

EXT. CAPITOL HILL - NIGHT

FBI AGENTS in white HazMat suits comb through blackened-pieces of rubble, gathering evidence, bagging bits of charred metal, marking the scene with red-flags, Hannah among them.
Coming across a piece of old cobblestone, she pauses, eyes narrowing. She bends down. Picks up the piece. Examines it. Something about it troubles her. She calls out to Nolan.

HANNAH

Mark.  
(no answer)  
Mark!


HANNAH (CONT’D)  
Agent Nolan, did you hear --

She pauses when she sees what has him so haunted: body remains among the rubble, bloodied. A hand. Leg. They’re standing on a graveyard.

NOLAN  
I joined the FBI after 9/11. I wanted to do everything I could to make sure something like that never happened here again.

Hannah lets Nolan gather himself before showing him the cobblestone piece she found, back to business:

HANNAH  
See this? It’s cobblestone.

NOLAN  
Yeah. So?

HANNAH  
So the Capitol Building’s made out of cast iron and marble. This shouldn’t be here.

Nolan is still at a loss.

HANNAH (CONT’D)  
Remember the embassy bombing in Darfur in ‘09? Bomber built his device inside a silo of cobblestone. Kept the explosion targeted to go straight up through the basement and out -- to maximize damage.

She hands Nolan the evidence bag.
HANNAH (CONT’D)
I don’t care what else we’re looking at. I want this tested immediately. Where it’s from. Who sells it. What’s on it.

Nolan nods. Off Hannah, theory forming:

INT. WHITE HOUSE - ROOSEVELT ROOM - NIGHT

Kirkman, on the phone.

KIRKMAN
Yes, thank you for your prayers Madam Prime Minister... You too.

Kirkman hangs up. Turns to Seth, sitting on the couch, laptop out. Jessica sits beside him.

KIRKMAN (CONT’D)
Where were we?

SETH
The Presidential voice.

KIRKMAN
Right. I don’t have it.

SETH
Not exactly no.

KIRKMAN (to Jessica)
You gonna defend my honor here?

JESSICA
I will -- once he says something I disagree with.

KIRKMAN (sitting across from him)
So tell me. What do you think the Presidential voice is?

SETH (reading from his computer)
“All of us here know there is work to be done. We have a responsibility to light the way for every American.”

KIRKMAN
That sounds good.
SETH
I imagine it would -- to you. You said it two years ago at the Congress for the New Urbanism in Atlanta. Tonight you’re speaking to the world.
(point-blank)
The country doesn’t need a friend right now. You can’t be relaxed or disarming. That won’t work anymore. You need to be stronger than you’ve ever been before. All of us -- we need that right now.

It’s clear that Seth is also talking about himself -- and the moment gets away from him for a second. Jessica puts a hand on his shoulder, comforting him.

JESSICA
It’s okay. We’re all feeling it.

SETH
(composing himself)
Thank you ma’am.

JESSICA
Please. Jessica.

SETH
(correcting her)
No. Ma’am. You’re the First Lady now.

Jessica pauses -- as if realizing for the first time that tonight’s monumental change also applies to her.

The phone on the desk rings. Kirkman rises. Answers.

KIRKMAN
Yes...On my way.

Kirkman hangs up. Bee-lines to the door.

JESSICA
What is it, Tom?

KIRKMAN
(exiting)
Iran.

INT. WHITE HOUSE - HALLWAY - MOMENTS LATER

Kirkman heads up the corridor to the situation room. Puts his hand on the door scanner. Door unseals.
INT. WHITE HOUSE - SITUATION ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Everyone is still seated when Kirkman enters.

KIRKMAN

Aaron.

Aaron quickly realizes his mistake and rises -- getting the room to follow.

AARON

Gentlemen.

KIRKMAN

Be seated.

(everyone does)

General Pierce.

The Acting Secretary of Defense refers to a monitor image.

ACTING DEFENSE SECRETARY
Sat imagery shows 10 Iranian Navy destroyers leaving Bandar Beheshti port and taking up positions along the Strait of Hormuz.

AARON
(explaining to Kirkman)
Strait of Hormuz is where 30 percent of the world’s oil passes through --

KIRKMAN
I know what it is.

ACTING DEFENSE SECRETARY
Mr. President, it does appear that this is a purposeful provocation by the Iranians to take advantage of the night’s events and choke off the Western World’s main source of oil.

Driving this home:

COCHRANE
Just as we’re on our knees the Iranians are gonna step on our throat.

Off Kirkman:

END OF ACT THREE
FADE IN:

INT. WHITE HOUSE - WEST PORTICO ENTRANCE - NIGHT

Emily has been finally allowed entry and is granted a visitors pass, slipping it around her neck when she spots Aaron making his way up the hallway ahead of her.

EMILY
Aaron!

Aaron sees her. Keeps going. She catches up, following him into:

INT. WHITE HOUSE - HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

EMILY
I finally got past the gate. What’s going on?

AARON
I can’t talk right. I have to get back to the situation room.

EMILY
Is Tom going to be in there?

AARON
It is his meeting.

EMILY
Then I’m coming with you.

AARON
Sorry Emily, but in there it’s top secret code clearance or above.

EMILY
I’ve been with Secretary Kirkman’s staff for three years.

AARON
Well, it’s President Kirkman now and you’re not authorized.

EMILY
If you’re choosing this moment for a pissing contest, Aaron --

AARON
That’s my point, Emily. It’s not a contest. Now excuse me.
With that, Aaron pushes through a set of doors. Emily is about to follow when she’s blocked by a MARINE GUARD.

Emily throws up her hands and backs off. You’ve won this round Aaron...

INT. WHITE HOUSE - SITUATION ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Aaron rejoins the room -- where a debate rages on.

COCHRANE
How many more ways can I say it? In the morning, our economy is going to go off a cliff and the Iranians are just seizing the moment.

KIRKMAN
So what would you have me do? Declare war? I just got shown the football forty minutes ago. I think I’ve waited long enough to try it out.

COCHRANE
Understand this: the Iranians are banking on two things right now: our inability to pick ourselves up off the ground and with all due respect --

KIRKMAN
Because you’ve shown me so much so far?

COCHRANE
-- your inability to show any strength whatsoever, so yes, Mr. President, I want to fly a stealth bomber over Tehran. I want to drop shells in the supreme leader’s backyard. The world thinks it can test us right now and a full, swift show of force is the only thing that’s going to remind them that our flag is still flying strong tonight.

KIRKMAN
Yes, but there’s more than one way to show force.

COCHRANE
This isn’t some consumer group or an urban development caucus. (MORE)
What you need to understand is that the Iranians respect only one course of action and that’s action.

KIRKMAN
And what you need to understand is that in between lunches with the urban development caucuses and photo ops with consumer groups, I’m in those cabinet meetings where this very issue has come up. The Iranians have been threatening to close the Strait of Hormuz for 35 years. They didn’t just decide tonight to do it.

Kirkman rises -- commanding:

KIRKMAN (CONT’D)
General, you can scramble the bombers, but no one engages until I give the order.

ACTING DEFENSE SECRETARY
Yes, sir.

KIRKMAN
(to Aaron)
When’s the Iranian ambassador arriving?

AARON
Fifteen minutes.

KIRKMAN
(to Cochrane)
We try it my way. If it doesn’t work, we try yours.
(to Aaron)
Have the agents bring him to my office.

AARON
You mean the Roosevelt Room?

KIRKMAN
No. My office.

With that, Kirkman steps out of the situation room.

INT. WHITE HOUSE - HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

And once the door closes -- Kirkman lets out a big sigh. Holy shit. This is all on him now.
EXT. WHITE HOUSE - RESIDENCE - ESTABLISHING - NIGHT

CUT TO:

INT. WHITE HOUSE - RESIDENCE HALLWAY - NIGHT

Kirkman is heading back to one of the guest bedrooms when he hears voices coming out of the room that Penny is staying in. He stops at the door. Peeks inside.

Sees Penny is awake, upset. Leo is at her bedside, consoling her.

    LEO
    I know you’re scared ladybug, but everything is going to be okay.

    PENNY
    But why are we staying here?

    LEO
    Because this is gonna be our new home.

    PENNY
    Why?

    LEO
    Because some bad people did something bad tonight and it’s dad’s job to make sure we’re all safe.

    PENNY
    ...Are you scared?

    LEO
    Yeah.

    PENNY
    Is dad?

    LEO
    Are you kidding? Dad’s not scared of anything.

Kirkman takes that in -- and slowly backs away from the door and heads down the hallway -- where Aaron awaits him.

    KIRKMAN
    Is he here?

    AARON
    Yes, sir. He just arrived.
INT. WHITE HOUSE - OVAL OFFICE - OUTER OFFICE - NIGHT

IRANIAN AMBASSADOR MOHAMMED FAYAD waits in the outer office to the Oval. Rises when Kirkman crosses up with Aaron.

AMBASSADOR FAYAD
Mr. President.

KIRKMAN
Mr. Ambassador. Please.

Kirkman leads Fayad into:

INT. WHITE HOUSE - OVAL OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

START ON: PHOTOGRAPHS ON THE RESOLUTE DESK -- PRESIDENT RICHMOND AND HIS FAMILY. PAN UP: Kirkman enters. This is our first time inside the Oval. Kirkman’s too busy to take it in. If he did, he’d probably lose it.

AMBASSADOR FAYAD
Mr. President, let me begin by extending to you and the American people my country’s most sincere sympathies on this horrific tragedy. If there is anything our people can do in response to this tremendous act of cowardice, we will do so without question.

KIRKMAN
I appreciate that, Mr. Ambassador. You can start by removing your destroyers from the Strait of Hormuz.

AMBASSADOR FAYAD
Mr. President, excuse me, but you have been misinformed.

KIRKMAN
Is that a fact?

AMBASSADOR FAYAD
Yes. We have moved no such destroyers into the Strait of Hormuz.

Aaron hands Kirkman a folder. He opens it up. Pulls out satellite photos. Hands them to Fayad.

KIRKMAN
My defense department has war gamed this out.

(MORE)
They’re just waiting for my greenlight -- which I’m more than happy to give unless these destroyers are back in Bandar Beheshti in the next three hours.

AMBASSADOR FAYAD
Mr. President --

KIRKMAN
Mr. Ambassador, you may not know much about me, but what you should know is that I’m as straight a shooter as you’re likely to meet in Washington, so believe me when I tell you I don’t want my first act as Commander in Chief to be an attack on Iran, but it’s not always up to us how history plays out. Now I believe your country wasn’t preying on our emotions tonight, but nevertheless you’ll feel the full effects of them unless you comply with my demands. Dry dock the destroyers immediately. Or the lead story on the news tomorrow isn’t gonna be the attack on our Capitol. But the attack on yours.

(beat)
So let’s not get off on the wrong foot here tonight.

Fayad is appropriately intimidated -- while Aaron is impressed. He’s never seen this side of Kirkman before.

AMBASSADOR FAYAD
I’ll relay your wishes to my government.

KIRKMAN
Three hours, Mr. Ambassador.

Fayad nods. Kirkman extends a hand. They shake.

KIRKMAN (CONT’D)
I look forward to working with you.

AMBASSADOR FAYAD
Me as well, Mr. President.

Fayad exits the Oval.

AARON
That was incredible.
KIRKMAN
Make sure you tell Cochrane all about it.

AARON
I’m sorry?

KIRKMAN
You heard me. I know I don’t have his trust yet -- or yours -- and that’s something I’ll have to earn in time, but as the President, I demand your respect. If you can’t give it to me, there’s the door.

Aaron, put in his place, nods.

AARON
Anything else?

KIRKMAN
Are the networks ready?

AARON
They’re setting up in East Room.

KIRKMAN
No. In here.

AARON
Yes, Mr. President.

Aaron leaves. Kirkman is now alone. He takes a moment to consider the office. It’s awe-inspiring. A beat.

SETH (O.S.)
Mr. President.

Kirkman turns. Sees Seth in the doorway, file folder in hand. He waves him inside.

Seth hands him the folder. Removes the speech. Reads. Seth waits for his reaction.

KIRKMAN
This is good.
(beat)
This is really good.
(looking up)
Nicely done.

SETH
Thank you, sir.
KIRKMAN
We’re gonna get through this you know.

SETH
I do.

Kirkman turns away, reading over the speech. Seth leaves him. But then stops. Turns back.

SETH (CONT’D)
One thing, sir.
(beat)
You are a democrat, right?

Seth smiles, hopeful. But when Kirkman answers --

KIRKMAN
Independent.

-- Seth’s smile instantly disappears. Off which -- PRELAP:

ANCHOR ON TV
We’re hearing now that President Kirkman’s address to the nation will take place inside the Oval Office...

INT. WHITE HOUSE - OVAL OFFICE - NIGHT

Cameras are being set-up. Lights are adjusted. Seth makes sure the speech is loaded correctly onto the teleprompter. Kirkman stands in the corner with Jessica, adjusting his tie.

KIRKMAN
Listen...I’ve been thinking.

JESSICA
I know what you’re going to say.

KIRKMAN
You do?

JESSICA
Yes. And don’t worry about it. Your tie doesn’t clash.

He smirks.

KIRKMAN
I want to do this, Jess. I have to do this.
JESSICA
I know you do.

She finishes up with his tie. Their ritual:

JESSICA (CONT’D)
Keep fighting the good fight.

KIRKMAN
To the bitter end.

They kiss. He moves away -- to the desk. He considers the chair. His now. A beat, then he sits down -- our first look at him before the desk.

A STAFFER goes to remove Richmond’s photo. He stops him.

KIRKMAN (CONT’D)
No. Leave it for now.

The staffer backs away. A PA gives Kirkman the countdown.

PA
Mr. President, you’re live in five, four, three, two --

The red light on the camera across from him turns on. Kirkman now has the world’s attention. We PUSH IN --

KIRKMAN
Good evening my fellow Americans. Tonight, our way of life came under attack. This act of cowardice was meant to cripple our nation but as before, America will show the world that we will not bow down to fear. That will we fight back. That we will persevere.

EXT. CAPITOL HILL - INTERCUTTING

Hannah and her evidence gathering team pour through rubble, excavating bodies which are zipped into black bags.

KIRKMAN (V.O.)
The victims were husbands and wives, fathers and mothers, daughters and sons. Their lives were devoted to service. They went to work today like any other day. Striving to making our country safer and our world brighter. Rest assured they have not died in vain.
Nolan soon crosses up to Hannah. Hands her a computer print-out. The lab results she was waiting on. As she reads them over, her eyes WIDEN.

Whatever is on it SHOCKS her to the core. Off this mystery:

**INT. WHITE HOUSE - COMMUNICATIONS OFFICE - INTERCUTTING**

Emily and the rest of Kirkman’s cabinet staff watch the speech from outside the oval on TV’s, annoyed they are being kept out of the inner circle, but nonetheless proud to see their boss rising to the occasion.

KIRKMAN (ON TV)
While we do not know yet who was responsible for these mass murders, take comfort that we are taking every precaution to protect our citizens at home and around the world.

**INT. WHITE HOUSE - RESIDENCE - INTERCUTTING**

Leo, also watching the speech, can’t help but be taken back by the sight of his father as the country’s new President.

KIRKMAN (ON TV)
None of us will ever forget this day. Where we were. What we were doing. How we were feeling. We are all united in that way and it is in that union we will find strength.

**INT. SITUATION ROOM - INTERCUTTING**

As Cochrane and the rest of the national security team take in new satellite images of the Iranian Navy moving their ships out of the Strait of Hormuz --

KIRKMAN (V.O.)
Immediately following the attack, continuity of government was initiated. As next in the Presidential line of succession, I was sworn in as your new President.

**INT. WHITE HOUSE - OVAL OFFICE - INTERCUTTING**

As Kirkman makes his plea to the American people.

KIRKMAN
You don’t know me. You didn’t vote for me. But I’m asking you to trust me.
EXT. WHITE HOUSE - NIGHT

MOURNERS lay flowers and light candles in front.

   KIRKMAN (V.O.)
   Our government will continue
   without interruption. America is
   open for business tomorrow. And to
   those who would seek to take
   advantage of what happened --

CUT TO:

SEVERAL TV SCREENS

As Kirkman’s address is broadcasted in several languages
around the world.

   KIRKMAN (ON TV)
   This is an opportunity to you as
   well. To show the world you stand
   with peace. With justice. I ask
   every nation in the world to help
   us find those who are responsible
   for this atrocity.

INT. SITUATION ROOM - NIGHT

With Cochrane, watching.

   ACTING SECRETARY OF STATE
   He’s not bad.

   COCHRANE
   For now.

INT. WHITE HOUSE - OVAL OFFICE - NIGHT

As Jessica looks on, proud -- Kikrman puts his speech down,
looks at camera and speaks from the heart.

   KIRKMAN
   I’m Tom Kirkman. I’m from New York.
   My kids names are Penny and Leo. I
   like the Knicks, but not the
   Rangers and I will make it my
   mission to remind you and the world
   why America is the greatest nation
   on Earth. Thank you. God bless you.
   God bless these United States.

The red light atop the camera clicks off.

END OF PILOT