

AFFAIRS OF STATE

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EXT. ESTABLISHING SHOTS OF WASHINGTON, DC - DAY

The rain-soaked city buzzes - bursting at the seams - as an imposing motorcade barrels through the cordoned-off streets. Sirens whirl and onlookers gawk as we're sucked into...

INT. THE BEAST - CONTINUOUS

Silence.

The kind of quiet only eight inches of ballistic glass affords. Where a man sits isolated - in the eye of the storm.

This is HARRY BAKER AXTON, President of the United States.

BEN (O.S.)
Are we going to talk about it?

AXTON
(without looking up)
The General Assembly?

BEN WOLCOTT (49), the Secretary of State, and a contemporary of Axton, shifts uneasily in his seat across from POTUS.

BEN
No.

AXTON
The situation with the Houthi rebels in Yemen?

BEN
No.

AXTON
Then no, we're not going to talk about it. What's next?

Ben opens his briefing book, smiles.

BEN
I didn't want to talk about it anyway.

Axton looks up, a wry smile, before peering through the glass at the crowds, the countless faces - men, women, and children - he represents, but will never touch.

PRE-LAP the murmurs of a large crowd as we...

MATCH CUT TO:

EXT. LONDON STREET - NIGHT

Where dozens of bundled-up Londoners excitedly hold signs that read "Change" and "Ella." They erupt, barely held back by a bike-rack, as ELLA WALKER approaches with purpose.

She's mid-forties, energized by - and quietly terrified at - the looming end to her campaign.

Ella melts into the crowd, embracing some, taking selfies with others; she's at home in the masses until SANDRA - mid-thirties and not messing around - whisks her away.

SANDRA

Paxhouse is gonna go hard on Tom.

Ella gives a stern look. They walk briskly into...

INT. TV STUDIO - BACKSTAGE - CONTINUOUS

This interaction is quick, snappy:

ELLA

Will he also be announcing his transition to Puritanism?

An AUDIO TECH scrambles to mic Ella who barely notices.

ELLA (CONT'D)

Pious, pompous ass.

SANDRA

Oh good, yep, right into the mic.

ELLA

Could be worse. He could ask me why we're seven points down.

SANDRA

Try not to highlight that.

ELLA

I put my life into this, and it won't even be close.

SANDRA

Chin up.

ELLA

Thanks.

SANDRA

No, I mean lift your chin up, so it doesn't look like you have three.

ELLA

Would you ever say that to a man?

SANDRA

No. But I work for a woman.

As applause erupts off screen.

ELLA

Damn right you do.

And Ella enters the white-hot studio, smiling and waving.

INT. TV STUDIO - ON SET - LATER

Ella sits at a preposterously large table, across from her opponent, Prime Minister KEVIN PAXHOUSE (50s, smarmy). A stodgy MODERATOR stationed between the two.

PAXHOUSE

The MP's husband has off-shore bank accounts that have evaded scrutiny for years. Her husband is bankrolling--

We focus on Ella as Paxhouse drones on. We can't make out what he's saying, but for a few phrases.

PAXHOUSE (CONT'D)

...Ella's husband...her husband.
The MP's husband...

Jotting down notes, Ella allows herself a slight grin.

MODERATOR

I want to give the MP a chance to respond before we wrap it up.

Ella holds up her pad of paper for the camera and audience. We see nine tally marks.

ELLA

Nine. That's how many times the Prime Minister just mentioned my husband. And I want to let you in on a secret about why he did it.

The moderator perks up: The staid debate getting interesting.

ELLA (CONT'D)

A clever consultant told him that saying so would force me to clarify - not just the lies the Prime Minister tells with frightening ease - but what he really wants, his winning strategy, is to force me to remind the United Kingdom that I don't have a husband.

(Beat. Audience leans in.)

I have an ex-husband. He's betting that bothers you. But what bothers me is that he didn't spend his time talking about nine ways he's going to stabilize the NHS, or nine ways we can combat the crisis in Yemen, or, hell, nine ways he'll spruce up "Number Ten."

Laughter in the crowd as Paxhouse tries to jump back in, but is cut off by a determined Ella.

ELLA (CONT'D)

Listen, if you're better off today than you were when the Prime Minister took office, sure, dismiss the divorcee. But if you aren't, or if people you care about aren't, then it's time for somebody who isn't stuck in the past. Time for somebody who knows that when something isn't working you make a change. I am that person.

The crowd applauds.

ELLA (CONT'D)

If you don't believe me, just ask my ex-husband.

The crowd goes wild. We hold on Ella taking it all in as the darkened, cheering crowd turns to...

EXT. ESTABLISHING SHOTS - LONDON - NIGHT

We wind our way through London's greatest hits - from Big Ben and Buckingham Palace to the famous ferris wheel and those double-decker buses.

ANCHOR (V.O.)

A snap election seen largely as a lock for the establishment is thrown into turmoil.

ANCHOR 2 (V.O.)
MP Ella Walker stood up forcefully
to the PM. Is it too little too
late? Or will Kevin Paxhouse soon
be our ex-Prime Minister?

ANCHOR 3 (V.O.)
Does this showing put Walker's
likability problem to rest?

INT. HOTEL SUITE - CONTINUOUS

Ella sits watching TV with Sandra and a contingent of
STAFFERS working in controlled chaos.

ANALYST (ON TV)
This was a real rallying cry
for women. We will not be
slut-shamed.

ANALYST 2 (ON TV)
Her ambition reminds me of
Thatcher.

ELLA
Oh, Christ!

SANDRA
They love you.

ELLA
They love a plot twist. A tighter
race. This'll help, but we'll still
lose by five.

LINDSEY (20s) freezes, having clearly heard Ella's pessimism.

ELLA (CONT'D)
Oh, sorry, no, no - keep milling
about busily.
(perfunctorily)
There's purpose in what you're
doing.

Lindsey, having picked up the tea set and papers, walks off.
Sandra looks to her boss.

ELLA (CONT'D)
What?

SANDRA
You should be chuffed right now.
Your plan is working. We're
incredibly close.
(switching gears)
Do you want to talk about it?

ELLA

It?

SANDRA

Him.

EXT. WASHINGTON, D.C./VARIOUS SHOTS - EARLY MORNING

The OPENING TITLES ROLL against a series of moments - Washington waking up:

A rowing team passes Jefferson on the Potomac; food trucks unfurl their hoods by Washington; a cyclist pedals past the steps to Lincoln.

Dawn breaks over D.C. And as the pounding of a ball becomes more prevalent and the unmistakable language of basketball - "Pick right! Shot. Watch left." - takes hold:

MAIN TITLES END ON

President Harry Baker Axton

Dribbling the ball up court. *His* court.

EXT. WHITE HOUSE BASKETBALL COURT - MORNING

ND PLAYER

Take him, POTUS.

A nervous young aide, BILLY, gives the President a wide berth as ANITA, a sharply-dressed woman in her fifties, calls out from the sidelines:

ANITA

He's got no left, kid!

With that, the President rockets by Billy with his right for an easy lay-up. A little too easy.

AXTON

That's game.

A few high-fives and "good games" end what we glean is an early-morning routine in the Axton Administration. The President approaches Anita who, as Chief of Staff, has earned the right to trash her boss' game:

ANITA

I told him you have no left.

Their bond is self-evident and their banter quick as they trek up the South Lawn driveway and we PAN UP to REVEAL: THE WHITE HOUSE, bathed in the glow of a late-November morning.

AXTON
I can go left or right.

Anita thinking a moment. Axton notices.

AXTON (CONT'D)
You're trying to formulate a joke.

ANITA
No, I'm--

AXTON
Something to do with Compromiser-in-Chief, maybe.

ANITA
It's not fun when you help.

AXTON
The letter I read last night--

ANITA
Farmer in Minnesota.

AXTON
No, bike shop manager in Dubuque.
She made a compelling case about
the unintended consequences of the
CFPB's sustainability rule--

ANITA
Which--

AXTON
The one we rolled out last year.
Let's get a working group to dig in
this week. See if we should adjust.

Anita makes a note as they continue to walk.

AXTON (CONT'D)
And let's push Approps on a clean
CR. I want to give the American
people some sense of confidence as
we enter the holidays.

ANITA
I'll have OLA reach out.

AXTON

The twenty-three-year-old press
aide's still afraid to guard me.

ANITA

He's a twenty-three-year-old press
aide. If he wasn't terrified every
time he walked through the
Northwest Gate, I'd fire him for
cause.

AXTON

What's next?

ANITA

You have half hour before the PDB.
And Alexander needs ten minutes
prior to your "siv-itz" to discuss
G7 protocol.

Axton waves to a groundskeeper.

AXTON

Morning, PJ!
(back to Anita)
Alexander *fills* ten minutes. Give
him two. I'll see you in the Oval.

ANITA

Mr. President, the snap election--

AXTON

--Yep.

Which shuts that down, Anita not sure why.

ANITA

Pardoning at six, sir.

AXTON

The indignities of this office
never cease to amaze me.

ANITA

I'm the one who calls you sir. Sir.

An AGENT opens the door as they reach the White House.

AXTON

(back turned; on the move)
Damn right you do.

INT. OVAL OFFICE - MORNING

Axton, now in a sharp suit, sits by the fireplace next to Anita as GENERALS and intimidating men and women in power suits, plus Ben, provide the Presidential Daily Briefing.

HARRY

What's next?

GENERAL

Yemen.

AXTON

Deteriorating.

GENERAL

Quickly, sir. And Russia isn't stepping up to the plate. It's DNI's assessment that President Vitaly is playing both sides.

AXTON

And what does my Secretary of State say?

BEN

The situation is untenable, sir. Sooner rather than later, our hand is going to be forced. Possibly unilaterally. But provoking Russia--

AXTON

Only escalates the tensions.

BEN

And doing so would torpedo the Iran deal. So, we play nice with Vitaly for the time-being and end-run the rebels separately.

AXTON

We'll build a consensus at the G7-plus-one.

GENERAL

The snap election could affect that-

AXTON

I know where Paxhouse stands.

ANITA

And Walker--

AXTON

Walker can only win if the affluent suburbs come in plus eleven, the urban areas hold steady, and the rural west is depressed relative to three years ago. Chances are roughly seven percent.

(slowing down)

Her recent debate performance notwithstanding.

(off their looks)

What? I do my reading assignments.

He closes his briefing book, signaling the end of the meeting. The generals and suits are replaced by a more political-looking crew, including BECCA, the early-thirties press secretary, and an older political strategist, CONNOR.

Axton moves to the Resolute Desk, props himself up casually.

CONNOR

Your UNGA speech played well.

AXTON

It was platitudes without a plan.

ANITA

Someone's in a good mood today.

AXTON

Don't do the thing where you talk about me like I'm not in the room.

ANITA

Mhmm.

AXTON

And don't talk about my mood to other staff when you walk out of here, either. It's unbecoming.

CONNOR

Unbecoming?

AXTON

It's annoying. And I'm the President and it annoys me.

ANITA

(joking)

You know his mood is bad when he reminds you he's the President.

AXTON
What's next?

BECCA
I'm planning to confirm your France travel at the top of tomorrow's briefing, sir. And we're drafting statements in advance of the Paxhouse-Walker election.

On Axton - a beat too long, his attention elsewhere.

INT. OUTER OVAL OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

Connor and Becca close the door to the Oval behind them as they encounter AIDES going about their business.

CONNOR
(to aide)
He's in a bad mood.

BECCA
(to another aide)
Totally off today. Not himself.

INT. OVAL OFFICE - MOMENTS LATER

Axton takes a seat behind his desk. Something's on his mind. As we're thrust back twenty-some years to BEGIN FLASHBACK:

EXT. OXFORD UNIVERSITY - EVENING

The sun sets over the Radcliffe Camera Library, its Palladian dome striking against the orange-red of the advancing night. This is Oxford University...

INT. OXFORD PUB - EVENING

Where President Axton is just Harry (27), a grad student and TA at the turn of the Millennium, drinking with his best friend Ben (27) who's a long way off from Secretary of State.

STEPH (21), winds her way through the raucous bar to Axton who's chatting with Ben. She grabs Axton's arm.

STEPH
I need a favor. My friend over there, pretty girl in green, she needs a bit of saving. Stuck with a complete ass.
(MORE)

STEPH (CONT'D)
You seem moderately normal. Go
pretend to be her boyfriend, and
next round's on me.

Ben gives Axton a nudge. He wants a free drink...

AXTON
(beginning to go)
Over there in green?

STEPH
Can't miss her.

INT. OXFORD PUB - MOMENTS LATER

Axton approaches a woman in a greenish dress. We can't yet see her face, but she's talking to PATRICK (25) who is unusually handsome albeit somewhat boring. Axton eavesdrops.

PATRICK
The trauma will always be there. I
have a hard time talking about it.

Axton winces, readies himself, slides into the conversation.

AXTON
(handing her a drink)
Hey honey, here you go.

Axton puts his arm around her and we REVEAL: It's Ella (22), a driven undergrad decades from running for Prime Minister.

PATRICK Honey? ELLA Honey?

ELLA (CONT'D)
And you are?

AXTON
Very funny, dear. I'm only the love
of your life.
(offering Patrick a shake)
Name's Harry.
(now less confident)
I'm Harry...

PATRICK
Patrick. And you know her how?

AXTON
Longtime boyfriend.

ELLA

Longtime?

AXTON

Longtime.

PATRICK

Oh, I didn't know--

AXTON

No, suppose you didn't.

Ella, at first recoiling, recognizes a charm in Axton's false bravado and goes with it. She kisses him on the cheek.

ELLA

Patrick was just recounting his trip to Rwanda rebuilding schools and helping combat genocide.

Axton's eyes bulge. He doesn't know what to say for a beat...

AXTON

Thank you for your service.

PATRICK

I'm not in the military. I don't believe in violence.

AXTON

Fortunate for both of us. You're a very tall, classically handsome man. Any girl would be lucky--

ELLA

Sweetie, should we go?

AXTON

Please God.

INT. OXFORD PUB - MOMENTS LATER

Ella and Axton make their way to the bar.

ELLA

Kind of a bold move.

AXTON

Slightly less so considering your friend bribed me.

ELLA

What friend?

Steph approaches angrily. Ben's in back at the bar.

STEPH
Who the hell's this?

ELLA
I'm Ella.

AXTON
(to Ella)
Lovely to meet you.

STEPH
Wanker - you got the wrong girl!

AXTON
You said the green dress.

STEPH
(leaving)
It's clearly turquoise!

Axton and Ella alone now. He eyes her. A chagrined smile.

ELLA
She's wrong, you know.

AXTON
I didn't get the wrong girl?

Their eyes meet, his false confidence turning real. Ella thinks a beat. Smiles.

ELLA
This dress is more of a sea foam.

Off these two, a glimmer between them. And we END FLASHBACK:

INT. WHITE HOUSE - OVAL OFFICE - MORNING

Anita enters, finds Axton at his desk where we left him.

ANITA
I've been your chief of staff long enough to know when something's bothering you.

AXTON
Nothing's bothering me.

ANITA
With respect, Mr. President--

AXTON

And if there was something
bothering me, doesn't mean it needs
to be analyzed like a piece of
legislation or a matter of state.
I'm a person. People get bothered.

ANITA

You're the President.

AXTON

And what does it say of your mood
when you're reminding me that I'm
the President?

Whatever mild tension existed now breaking.

ANITA

Lassitude?

AXTON

Lassitude?

ANITA

I've been Googling synonyms for
exhaustion.

AXTON

(thinking a moment)

Torpor.

ANITA

Oh, good one.

AXTON

Speaking of exhaustion, how many
days until my meeting with Sam?

ANITA

410, sir.

They smile a moment. Axtion takes a breath before digging in:

AXTON

Let's stand up a meeting with the
Chiefs on Yemen and set a call with
the Kremlin to follow. And I have
notes on the OMB...

We pull out as Axtion and Anita continue the diligent work of
the presidency even as their words trail off and we PRE-LAP:

NEWS ANCHOR (V.O.)

As we near 9PM...

EXT. LONDON SKYLINE - NIGHTFALL

The sun sets on London. We follow the night quickly - stylistically - ever darker until:

NEWS ANCHOR (V.O.)
...a snap election ordered at the
request...

INT. PUB - NIGHT

Locals toss back beers, eyes on the small TV behind the bar:

NEWS ANCHOR (ON TV)
...of Prime Minister Paxhouse and
ratified by a two-thirds vote in
the House of Commons will conclude.

INT. 10 DOWNING STREET - OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

Where Paxhouse, surrounded by the trappings of the Prime-Ministership, consults his victory speech.

NEWS ANCHOR (ON TV)
Paxhouse aims to strengthen his
hand as the world grapples with
several thorny international
issues, foremost among them: what
to do in Yemen where rebels,
thought to be backed by Russia,
have made a bad situation worse.

INT. HOTEL SUITE - CONTINUOUS

Sandra on the couch. Ella in the background with a document.

NEWS ANCHOR (ON TV)
And MP Ella Walker, recently
thought un-electable, surging here
at the end - looking to upend the
political system and send her own
global message.

We find Ella, focused, frustrated.

ELLA
This concession speech is shit.

SANDRA
Fortunately, you won't need it.

ELLA
An optimist to the end.

An excited AIDE rushes in. This has to be good news.

AIDE
Exit polls.

SANDRA
Yeah, out with it!

AIDE
High-end suburbs are plus...
(fumbling with phone)
...plus eight!

Ella and Sandra deflate; the aide notices - just as Lindsey walks by with more tea. She also notices.

SANDRA
Great, great - keep us posted.

ELLA
(once the room is clear)
Plus eight is not plus eleven.

SANDRA
It's still early.

ELLA
Yeah.

SANDRA
You may be right to take a pass on
the speech though. Just to be
responsible.

INT. OVAL OFFICE - EARLY EVENING

CLOSE ON: An iPad, which Axton peruses, as we catch the headline about the snap election:

"Early returns suggest Paxhouse to remain; too soon to say."

Axton quickly covers the iPad as the door to the Oval opens and an aide escorts BOB inside.

Bob's the Chairman of the National Turkey Federation [nb: this is a real thing] and he looks exactly like you'd expect the Chairman of the National Turkey Federation to look.

AXTON
Mr. Chairman.

BOB
Mr. President, please call me Bob.

As an OFFICIAL PHOTOGRAPHER snaps a picture.

AXTON
All right, should we pardon some turkeys, Bob?

Axton ushers him to the door to the Rose Garden, ready to exit when Bob gets uncomfortable...

BOB
I'm sorry, sir. This is the seventh year we've done this--

AXTON
And my support for the National Turkey Federation remains steadfast.

BOB
I have to confess something.

Axton really doesn't have time for this, but hides it well.

BOB (CONT'D)
We say the pardoned turkeys go off to a farm in Pennsylvania to live out their lives.

AXTON
Yes.

BOB
And they do.

AXTON
Good.

BOB
But the rest of their lives is only about three weeks. You see, we fatten them up so direly that they succumb to obesity within days of their supposed freedom.

AXTON
Well, all turkeys die.

BOB
They literally collapse under their own weight.

(MORE)

BOB (CONT'D)
And since they're technically
pardoned, we don't allow them to be
eaten. Typically, we incinerate
them.

AXTON
OK, Bob, I'll be sure not to
mention that to the children
waiting for us in the Rose Garden.

BOB
Their names this year are Candied
and Yams!

As they exit the Oval...

INT. HOTEL SUITE - NIGHT

Ella at work on her speech.

ELLA
First line: I want to congratulate
Prime Minister Paxhouse on the
impressive race he ran against my
ex-husband.

SANDRA
(laughing)
Okay, that's pretty good.

The aide from before bursts back in with an iPhone.

AIDE
The rural west!

Sandra takes the phone. Ella stands.

SANDRA
(reading)
Down nine.

ELLA
West was supposed to be up.

SANDRA
Holy shit. Down nine.

ELLA
Down nine?

Another AIDE enters.

AIDE 2
Urban exits.

ELLA
Steady?

AIDE 2
Up from three years ago. Four
percent.

ELLA
Urban areas weren't supposed to
move.

SANDRA
If these trends hold, you're the
next Prime Minister of the United
Kingdom.

INT. OVAL OFFICE - EVENING

Axton enters from the Rose Garden to find Ben waiting.
Something very clearly on his mind. News.

BEN
This is going to be awkward.

BEGIN FLASHBACK:

INT. OXFORD DORMS - AXTON'S ROOM - MORNING

A sea foam dress rests on the floor. We find Axton and Ella - together, asleep. Axton slowly stirs, rolls over. His hand inadvertently touches Ella's, waking them both.

AXTON
Hi.

ELLA
Hi.

A prolonged, uneasy beat before Ella spots the clock.

ELLA (CONT'D)
Shit. I have a class!

AXTON
Ah, me too.
(as she hurries from bed)
Whoa, Ella: that's it? I don't even
know your last name.

ELLA
I'm sure that's not necessary.

Axton gets up. He's shirtless and she notices. He approaches.

AXTON
Can I have your number?

ELLA
Not sure that's necessary either.

AXTON
(wry)
Should we hug?

ELLA
Look, I don't know what got into
me. This isn't who I am.

AXTON
Who are you?

Ella puts her hand out for an extremely platonic shake.

ELLA
I'm Ella Walker, and I do not do
one-night stands.

AXTON
(smirking)
In that case, you really better
give me your number.

PRE-LAP the crackling of chalk against slate.

INT. OXFORD CLASSROOM - DAY

A PROFESSOR (70s) turns from the chalk board, pontificating.

PROFESSOR
Moral licensing is the idea wherein
one believes that the good they've
done entitles them to the wrong
they're about to do. Take the
American President, for example.
(off students' murmurs)
No, really. Clinton likely
rationalized his behavior with Ms.
Lewinsky such that he had done so
much good for so many people that
he permitted himself the dalliance.

ATTENTIVE STUDENT
The good outweighed the bad.

PROFESSOR
Correct. Now, here's where it gets interesting. We usually look at moral licensing on an individual, self-centric level. But, where's my American TA. Harry...

Axton, with other TAs (it's a big class), raises his hand.

PROFESSOR (CONT'D)
Yes, you...

AXTON
Harry Axton.

PROFESSOR
Right. American Harry Axton.

REVEAL: Ella, seated in the middle, recognizes him. Stunned.

PROFESSOR (CONT'D)
Last year, your President was mired in scandal. Imagine it, a President discussing his sex life! I don't think we'll ever see a more embarrassing moment at the White House! And yet today...

AXTON
People love him.

PROFESSOR
Exactly! His approval ratings have never been higher! Now, most Americans would say cheating on your wife with an intern is...

AXTON
Not ideal.

The large lecture hall rumbles with a bit of laughter.

PROFESSOR
And yet those same Americans are willing to look past it. Why do you think that is?

ELLA (O.S.)
Because Bill Clinton has a penis.

HARRY

Pretty sure that's what got him
into trouble in the first place.

More laughter, except for from Ella who turns to Axtion. He realizes in this moment exactly who Ella is. He's shocked.

ELLA

Pretty sure that's also what
ensures he'll never truly face the
consequences of his actions.

HARRY

What if he didn't know?

(beat)

Suppose he was single and he didn't
know she... worked there? What if
he just really liked her?

Ella takes a beat. They're talking about something else now.

ELLA

How could he not know?

AXTON

There are lots of people at the
White House. He can't be expected
to know all of them. What if--

ELLA

No "what if's." I'm talking about
the real world, where he won't be
held accountable.

AXTON

He got impeached in the real world.

ELLA

And came out ahead. All because of
his cock.

The classroom goes wild. The professor works to quiet them.

AXTON

I get what you're saying. This
Lewinski girl's life is ruined.

ELLA

Don't do that.

AXTON

Don't do what?

ELLA

Her life doesn't have to be defined
by a blowjob.

The professor, who seems to be enjoying the debate, grimaces.

AXTON

Maybe it doesn't have to be, but 25
years from now, this is what she'll
be known for.

ELLA

I refuse to believe that the world
will be so uninteresting in 25
years that we'll still be talking
about this.

AXTON

As long as we're still talking.

PROFESSOR

All right, all right. I think you
two are in violent agreement.

AXTON

It's all Clinton's fault.

ELLA

It's not all Clinton's fault. He
didn't force himself on her.

AXTON

He didn't have to. He's the
President, and she's an intern.

ELLA

Don't do that either.

The Professor gives a "here-we-go" look.

AXTON

What?

ELLA

Discount her experience entirely.
They're both people. By your
rationale, the President can't have
a relationship with anybody because
he's more powerful than everybody.

AXTON

Presidents have peers.

ELLA

Not in the States.

AXTON

OK, so back to my initial question:
what if somebody in a position of
power just happened to like
somebody who... wasn't? Yet.

Off Ella, considering.

EXT. OXFORD CLASSROOM - LATER

Axton exits with a sea of students, looking for Ella on the outdoor walkway. He spots her. Struggles to catch up.

AXTON

Ella!

(catching up)

Ella Walker! I knew I recognized
that name.

She keeps walking.

AXTON (CONT'D)

You reached out to the professor--

ELLA

The internship.

AXTON

Right! Right. You get it?

ELLA

Interview's tomorrow.

AXTON

You'll get it. You're very
political.

ELLA

What's that supposed to mean?

AXTON

Nothing, it's just... all that talk
and I don't actually know where you
stand on Bill Clinton.

ELLA

I find that cynicism and charm are
mutually exclusive.

AXTON

What if I'm genuinely charmed by
you and you're too cynical to see
it?

(she's ahead of him now)

How 'bout a tour?

(she turns, confused)

Once you get the internship, can I
get a tour of 10 Downing Street?

ELLA

Number 10.

AXTON

Huh?

ELLA

We call it Number 10 here. Not Ten
Downing Street. Not Downing Street.
Just Number 10.

AXTON

That's a fun British fact.

(off her eye roll)

You really don't think we should
talk?

ELLA

There's nothing to discuss. We
bonked. Turns out you're my TA. It
was a mistake.

AXTON

Or fate.

ELLA

Fuck fate.

AXTON

How refreshingly unromantic.

ELLA

Are you suggesting there's some
baseline of romance I'm expected to
live up to?

For the first time, Axton's caught off guard. She notices.

ELLA (CONT'D)

Relax. I'm messing with you.

AXTON

Wait, bonk?

ELLA
Yeah, like fuck.

AXTON
As in fate?

ELLA
Fate removes choice, so yes, fuck
fate. Now, I'm choosing to leave.

INT. OXFORD DORM - AXTON'S COMMON AREA - NIGHT

Axton sits at his small dorm desk. Ben approaches.

BEN
Are we going to talk about it?

AXTON
What's there to talk about?

BEN
She's your student.

AXTON
She's not. I'm an unpaid TA.

BEN
You grade her papers.

AXTON
She's amazing.

Ben's now behind the desk, too - they both eye the phone.

BEN
Are you gonna call her?

END FLASHBACK and...

MATCH CUT TO:

INT. OVAL OFFICE - EVENING

Where we find President Axton and Secretary Wolcott. They're in the same position, huddled together looking hesitantly at a phone. Only this time, they're at the RESOLUTE DESK.

Axton can't wrap his head around this moment, he lingers...

BEN
Sir.
(still nothing)
Harry.

Which prods Axton to pick up the phone as we INTERCUT with:

INT. HOTEL SUITE - SIMULTANEOUS

Where Ella - seated with Sandra - takes a deep breath. She looks at the phone. A beat. She picks up.

AXTON
Madam Prime Minister-elect.

ELLA
Mr. President.

AXTON
Congratulate.

Axton has a paper with "Talking Points" before him.

ELLA
(light-hearted)
Is that an order?

The first bulleted point reads: "Congratulate." We hang on this awkward beat for a moment before he recovers.

AXTON
Congratulations - excuse me - on
your momentous victory tonight.

ELLA
Thank you, sir. It's been a surreal evening, but I look forward to the work ahead, and I particularly look forward to the continued alliance between our two nations.

A beat, clearly Axton's turn to speak. We find the talking points page again. He's at the second bullet, which reads: "Discuss Special Relationship." He's completely thrown.

ELLA (CONT'D)
Well, it's been a long day. A remarkable day.

AXTON
I pardoned a turkey today.

ELLA

Maybe not quite so much for you--

AXTON

Funny thing... the birds die just a few weeks after the pardoning. They literally collapse under their own weight before being incinerated.

ELLA

Well. That is a funny thing if I've ever heard one.

This is brutal.

AXTON

I look forward to meeting you at the G7-plus-one in France.

ELLA

It will be good to see you, too - and to work toward an international consensus on Yemen.

She's going there...

AXTON

Right. Well, Prime Minister Paxhouse and I were largely on the same page with respect to--

ELLA

(putting him in his place)
As you know, Mr. President, we've begun a new chapter tonight.

AXTON

Right.

ELLA

Thank you for your call, Mr. President.

INT. OVAL OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

AXTON

Madame Prime Minister.

Axton hangs up, head in his hands.

AXTON (CONT'D)

One day, a very, very long time
from now, we'll laugh about what
just happened.

BEN

Sir, if it's all the same to you,
I'm going to laugh about that the
moment I walk out of your office.

INT. HOTEL SUITE - CONTINUOUS

Sandra eagerly awaits what Ella has to say.

ELLA

All things considered, I'd say he's
handling things... fine.

SANDRA

How'd he react about Yemen?

ELLA

He spoke primarily of obese birds.

An aide pops her head in.

AIDE

Ma'am. The President of Russia is
on the line.

SANDRA

This is going to get complicated.

Off Ella... complicated's an understatement.

EXT. DC ESTABLISHING SHOTS - MORNING

Over...

NEWS REPORT (V.O.)

The world wakes up to a new
political order this morning...

NEWS REPORT 2

Upstart candidate Ella Walker has
pulled off the impossible...

NEWS REPORT 3

Though Paxhouse is threatening to
fight the results in court.

INT. WHITE HOUSE - BASEMENT CROSS HALL - MORNING

We track along the famous red carpeting and arched, marble ceiling of the Basement Cross Hall where Presidents make the trek from their elevator toward the West Wing.

TV PUNDIT (V.O.)

The UK has a new leader, and President Axton has a new player to contend with.

We find a television and zero-in on a pundit roundtable.

TV PUNDIT 2 (ON TV)

All while he struggles to develop a plan to deal with the crisis in Yemen and unpack Russia's role in the devastation.

TV PUNDIT 3 (ON TV)

The Iran Deal he's hyped for months may hang in the balance.

TV PUNDIT 4 (ON TV)

It has nothing to do with hype. The Iran Deal represents the most sweeping, systematic reforms that country's seen in generations.

TV PUNDIT 2 (ON TV)

Hype or not, the President's tied his legacy to the deal.

TV PUNDIT 3 (ON TV)

And if he doesn't play the next few months very carefully, he can kiss both goodbye.

INT. PALM ROOM/EXT. COLONNADE - CONTINUOUS

Where a door swings open, Axton bursts through, and Anita falls into step.

AXTON

Hello.

ANITA

Morning, sir.

They walk briskly through the bright and airy Palm Room, then down the Colonnade famous for countless presidential strolls.

ANITA (CONT'D)
PDB at nine; senior advisors is
nine-thirty; and your sit-room
briefing's at ten. Then, depending
on what we learn, speech prep--

AXTON
I'd like a look at the readout of
my call last night before it goes
to press.

ANITA
The Walker congratulations? It'll
be pro-forma.

AXTON
All the same. I'd like to see it.

ANITA
Okay.

AXTON
Matter of fact, just send whomever
wrote it to the Oval.

INT. OVAL OFFICE - MORNING

The door to the Oval creaks open. Anita peeks her head in.

ANITA
I have Billy for you.

AXTON
The basketball kid?

ANITA
Turns out, he also writes pro-forma
press releases.

She opens the door farther - revealing a wide-eyed Billy
who's clearly never been in the Oval Office before.

EXT. OUTER OVAL OFFICE - MOMENTS LATER

Anita closes the door to the Oval behind her and looks to the
President's secretary, TORI, seated just outside the door.

ANITA
Tori, do you have a copy of
yesterday's PDB?

Tori nods, reaches into her desk. Off Anita, considering...

INT. OVAL OFFICE - MOMENTS LATER

Billy stands in front of the Resolute Desk as Axton looks over a paper.

AXTON
It's nice work. Just a few nits.

Billy can barely speak. Beads of sweat dot his forehead.

AXTON (CONT'D)
For instance, here you've written
"deepening our special
relationship." That's hitting my
ear wrong.

BILLY
Oh, I'm so sorry, sir. I was told
it's the diplomatic term of art...

AXTON
This comma. Do we think it's
necessary?

BILLY
Well, I just thought it was a nice
pause within the sentence, but--

Axton scribbles on the page. Crossing out entire sentences.

AXTON
(handing over the paper)
I think we can be a little more
concise. Brevity is important.
(as Billy heads out)
And Billy.

He turns, nervous as hell.

AXTON (CONT'D)
How many people were listening in
on the call last night?

Billy squints, thinking, as we...

MATCH CUT TO:

INT. WHITE HOUSE PRESS BRIEFING ROOM - LATER

CLOSE ON: Anita watching intently from the back of the room
where Becca stands at the podium before dozens of reporters.

BECCA

Before I take your questions, I have a readout of the President's congratulatory call to Prime Minister-Elect Ella Walker of the United Kingdom.

She shuffles papers, looks down, begins reading.

BECCA (CONT'D)

"President Axton last night called Prime Minister-Elect Ella Walker to offer his congratulations following the outcome of the general election in the United Kingdom."

An awkward beat. Becca turns the paper over. Nope, that's it. Anita exits out the back.

BECCA (CONT'D)

AP, kick us off.

AP REPORTER

Thanks, Becca. Did the President and Prime Minister-elect discuss Russia's role in the war in Yemen?

INT. PRIVATE STUDY OFF THE OVAL - CONTINUOUS

REVEAL: Axton and Ben having lunch, watching the briefing.

BECCA (ON TV)

You know, I'll have to let the readout speak for itself.

The door to the study swings open and Anita enters, our attention drawn away from the television.

ANITA

With all due respect, what the hell is going on?

AXTON

In which hemisphere?

ANITA

This one. I read your PDB from yesterday.

Axton knows what's coming. Ben doesn't.

ANITA (CONT'D)
Those numbers you cited about Ella
Walker's election weren't in there.
That coupled with your edited
readout and botched congratulations
call lead me to ask again--

AXTON ANITA (CONT'D)
"Botched" is a strong-- What the hell is going on?

They look at each other. Ben nods to Axton, then:

AXTON BEN
Shut the door. Close the door.

INT. WHITE HOUSE PRESS BRIEFING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Where Becca continues sparring with the press corps.

REPORTER 2
Becca, Prime Minister Paxhouse is
disputing the results of the
election. Does that put the
President in a difficult position?

PULL OUT to REVEAL:

INT. BRITISH OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

Ella marks up a draft speech as Sandra assiduously checks her phone. The American press briefing plays in the background. Ella reacts to the reporter's question.

ELLA
(eyes remain on paper)
No, it puts *me* in a difficult
situation.

SANDRA
Paxhouse is all bluster. It's hard
for a man like that to admit he
lost to you. Besides, he's getting
exactly no traction. The U.K. is
swept up in Ella-fever.

ELLA
Thank you.

Sandra gives a quizzical "what for?" look.

ELLA (CONT'D)

For being my cheerleader when I
needed one. For believing that this
was possible when I didn't.

(off Sandra's grin)

You didn't believe it either!

SANDRA

Of course I didn't. May not have
gone to Oxford, but I'm not dead
from the neck up.

ELLA

(smiling)

Sod off!

SANDRA

I'm not lying about the Ella-fever.
That's real. More people learn
about you, more they love you.

(concerned)

But it's like you said. The press
will look for a plot twist.

ELLA

There's nothing to find.

SANDRA

So your college sweetheart becomes
the American President... and you
keep it a secret for seven years?

ELLA

Essentially.

SANDRA

But you told me.

ELLA

As my campaign manager, telling you
was the responsible decision.
Telling anyone else would have been
the irresponsible decision. You're
the only one who knows.

SANDRA

What about at Oxford?

ELLA

He was my TA. Not something I
wanted to advertise.

SANDRA

So nobody?

ELLA

Well, Ben, of course.

SANDRA

Ben?

ELLA

The Secretary of State.

SANDRA

Naturally.

INT. WHITE HOUSE PRESS BRIEFING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Back with Becca adeptly handling the press.

BECCA

Again, I won't speculate on the internal politics of an ally, except to say the next Prime Minister will continue to enjoy a Special Relationship with the United States.

REPORTER 2

A follow up?

(off Becca's nod)

Ms. Walker seems less than comfortable with the options floated by this White House and outgoing Prime Minister Paxhouse with respect to Russia vis-a-vis Yemen. How do you move past that?

BECCA

The Brits once literally set the White House on fire. If we got past that, I think we'll be fine.

ANITA (PRE-LAP)

We're screwed!

INT. PRIVATE STUDY OFF THE OVAL - MOMENTS LATER

Where we find Axton, Ben, and a now in-the-loop Anita.

AXTON

It's not ideal.

ANITA

(to Axton)

How could you not flag this for me?

BEN
She only had a seven--

ANITA
Percent chance. So POTUS mentioned.
Do I need to mention probability
forecasting is nonsense?

BEN
We can contain this.

ANITA
Who else knows?

AXTON
No one outside of this room.

ANITA
Except, of course, for the woman
preparing to move into Ten Downing
Street.

AXTON
Number Ten.

ANITA
What?

AXTON
They call it Number Ten. The Brits,
I mean.

ANITA
Who knows on her end?

AXTON
Unclear. We haven't been in touch
in twenty-some years.

BEN
Except for last night's call.

ANITA
(sarcastic)
Which went great.

AXTON
I know you're frustrated.

ANITA
Mr. President, were you in love?

AXTON
Excuse me?

ANITA

The situation is dire enough as it is, but I need to know how--

AXTON

We weren't.

ANITA

Sir, if this got out--

AXTON

I know.

ANITA

It would entirely derail the legacy plan we've put into place. Her election would be re-litigated. And it would overwhelm the Vice President's campaign.

BEN

We've kept the Vice President isolated. She has total cover.

ANITA

Every foreign policy decision you make would be tainted by the appearance of impropriety. The global credibility you've built drop by drop over the last seven years would be poured away in buckets.

AXTON

I agree with everything you just said. But I think Ben's right. We can contain this.

ANITA

On our side. Maybe. But not her's. She wasn't even an MP when you won.

AXTON

So?

ANITA

So your ex-boyfriend becomes President of the United States, you mention it to some people.

AXTON

Not Ella.

ANITA
How do you know?

AXTON
I know.

ANITA
You're willing to bet your
presidency on that?

A beat. Axton exhales.

AXTON
We've got some time to get our
heads around this.

As attention turns back to the TV playing the press briefing,
which is wrapping up. Connor hands her a piece of paper.

BECCA (ON TV)
Right, meant to mention this at the
top. I can confirm the President's
travel next month to Paris, France
for the G7-plus-one where he will
meet with world leaders, including
his first face-to-face with Prime
Minister-Elect Walker.

Back on Axton, Ben, and Anita - watching.

BEN
Time flies.

BEGIN FLASHBACK on the...

I/E. OXFORD UNIVERSITY BOOKSTORE - DAY

JINGLING of Christmas bells, which ring as Ella enters the
bookstore. She notices Axton at the counter, purchasing
something. Scrambling to look busy, she finds a book as...

AXTON
Ella, hey.

ELLA
Hi.
(an awkward beat)
Listen, I got your message. It's
been--I'm not trying to avoid you.

AXTON
It's okay if you are.

He smirks. She allows a slight smile.

ELLA
Just a crazy week.

AXTON
Oh. Right. The interview. How'd--

ELLA
I made it to the next round.

AXTON
That's great. Congratulations.

ELLA
It's not a done deal. Final
interview's in six weeks.

AXTON
I'm sure they'll find you equally
prompt and productive then.
(a beat; Axton redirects)
OK, I'll let you get back to
your... light porn.

REVEAL: Ella's accidentally grabbed an erotic romance novel.
He begins to go. We're on her a beat before...

EXT. OXFORD UNIVERSITY - MOMENTS LATER

Axton striding through campus. This time Ella follows.

ELLA
Why'd you say that?

AXTON
No judgment here. Erotica is a
foundation of literature--

ELLA
"Prompt and productive." Why'd you
use those words?

AXTON
(lighting a cigarette)
Oh.

ELLA
You smoke?

AXTON
You care that I smoke?

ELLA

No.

(frustration building)

I care that you went through my files. I care that you read the professor's recommendation letter. That's completely over the line!

AXTON

I didn't *read* it.

He gives a look. His eyes a bit bulgy. Ella goes ashen.

ELLA

Bloody hell!

AXTON

It was before I knew who you were.

ELLA

So I'm the girl who slept with the guy who wrote her a letter of recommendation?

AXTON

No, you're the girl who *does not* do one-night stands.

ELLA

You don't know anything about me.

AXTON

I'd like to.

ELLA

You're my teacher.

AXTON

I'm an unpaid TA.

ELLA

Do you grade papers?

Axton hesitates. Ella's got him.

AXTON

Because the professor's like a hundred years old!

ELLA

(re: a book he's holding)
What's that?

AXTON

Less titillating than what you're
used to...

ELLA

"The History of Number 10"?

AXTON

Talking to someone you like is hard
enough. I wanted to have something
to talk about.

ELLA

Harry, this isn't happening.

AXTON

Why?

ELLA

Don't you remember? I have a
longtime boyfriend.

AXTON

The colorblind guy? Word is he
can't even get a call back.

ELLA

He said it's okay if I'm avoiding
him.

Their eyes meet.

AXTON

Okay, now I'm actually confused
because I just said that to you.

ELLA

Sorry, yeah, I could see how that
could confuse my sentiment.

AXTON

Which is... that we're...

ELLA

Not happening.

She begins to go. He calls after her:

AXTON

Fine. We'll just be friends.

Off Ella, not convinced.

END FLASHBACK and PRE-LAP the rumble of...

EXT. SOMEWHERE OVER THE ATLANTIC OCEAN - DAY

Air Force One streaks through the sky.

INT. AIR FORCE ONE - SERIES OF SHOTS - MOMENTS LATER

We track through the famous interior of Air Force One, now adorned with Christmas decorations. Garland sweeps along the side hallway of the plane, passing the Secret Service cabin, computer area, and staff quarters until we reach the conference room - door closed - protected by a USSS Agent.

INT. AIR FORCE ONE CONFERENCE ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Ben and Anita sit at a large table. Two holiday wreaths flank the flat screen TV behind them, which displays a map of the plane's progress across the Atlantic. They hold phones, connected by wires to the table. They're speaking with:

INT. ROYAL AIR FORCE AIRBUS VOYAGER - CONTINUOUS

Sandra, also in private quarters on a flight. Begin INTERCUT:

BEN

The President simply wanted to ensure that we are on the same page with our most important ally.

SANDRA

I come bearing the same message from the Prime Minister.

ANITA

Being on the same page is important...

A taut beat before Ben jumps in.

BEN

To do that, President Axton asked us to build relationships with our counterparts based in mutual respect, trust... and transparency.

SANDRA

Personal relationships are key.

ANITA
For better or worse.

Another beat. Sandra's still not biting.

BEN
The Special Relationship is based
on our shared history.

SANDRA
Shared histories can be
complicated.

WIDEN to REVEAL Axton seated at the other end of the table,
listening on his own phone. He mouths "she knows" to Ben and
Anita, who heed his advice.

ANITA
We know.

SANDRA
So do I.

Anita and Ben nod back to Axton. It's clear which special
relationship they're discussing.

ANITA
How many other people know-- I mean
really understand the nature of the
shared history, of the special
relationship?

This is the key question. A long beat ensues.

SANDRA
Just the Prime Minister.

Anita rolls her eyes "no way," Ben exhales, and Axton nods -
knows it's true. Ella didn't tell anyone.

SANDRA (CONT'D)
And on your side?

BEN
The special relationship is
understood by the President, his
Chief of Staff, and myself.

ANITA
No wider understanding exists.

SANDRA

Well, then I think we understand
that the right people understand
the importance of limiting
understanding of the special
relationship.

BEN

Our understanding--

AXTON

(un-muting/hanging up)
I can't bear this any longer. We'll
see you in Paris, Ms. Whetstone.

INT. ROYAL AIR FORCE AIRBUS VOYAGER - CONTINUOUS

Sandra's momentarily taken aback to have heard from the President of the United States. Then, she looks to the corner of the room where Ella's been listening in, more composed.

ELLA

He was listening in.

Sandra looks to the phone Ella is still holding.

ELLA (CONT'D)

Right.

EXT. ESTABLISHING SHOTS OF PARIS - NIGHT

A little kid struggles to skate on the temporary ice rink set before the glittering Eiffel Tower. The Champs-Elysees glows warm with the Christmas spirit.

AMERICAN NEWS REPORT (V.O.)

Sparks are expected to fly in the City of Lights this week as eight of the most important global leaders meet at the G7-plus-one.

EXT. CHARLES DE GAULLE AIRPORT - NIGHT

Air Force One touches down, the heat of the rubber generating smoke on the tarmac.

BRITISH NEWS REPORT (V.O.)

The plus-one refers to Russia who was officially kicked out of the group a decade ago.

QUICK SHOTS of official planes touching down in rapid succession: Canada, Germany, Japan, Italy, ending on the Russian President's wide-body, white plane with its red Cyrillic lettering, infamous and imposing to the West.

BRITISH NEWS REPORT (ON TV)
 But President Anatoly Vitaly was invited to discuss Yemen, the international community hoping to find a way forward.

A grey plane barrels down the runway, slowing gradually. "ROYAL AIR FORCE" is printed along the plane's body.

AMERICAN NEWS REPORT (V.O.)
 Any successful resolution hinges on President Axton and Prime Minister Walker. They've not spoken since election night.

INT. ROYAL AIR FORCE AIRBUS VOYAGER - MOMENTS LATER

BRITISH NEWS REPORT (V.O.)
 All eyes on our new PM as she faces the first test of her premiership.

An ATTENDANT uses both hands to rotate the plane's door lever toward OPEN. And as we hear the unlocking, we...

MATCH CUT TO:

INT. G7 CONVENTION HALL - HALLWAY - MORNING

A freight elevator opens. USSS Agents spill out before we find Axton, flanked by Ben and Anita, on the move.

BRITISH NEWS REPORT (V.O.)
 A slew of diplomatic issues and international pitfalls, beginning with...

Axton has disappeared again, swallowed by a phalanx of aides and Secret Service agents as we PRE-LAP:

AXTON (O.S.)
 Is it one kiss or two?

INT. G7 CONVENTION HALL - BACKSTAGE - MORNING

Axton standing with Ben, Anita, and ALEXANDER (40), the persnickety, perfectly-dressed Chief of Protocol.

ALEXANDER

There are basically two schools of thought: firm handshake, double kiss on the cheek. Or firm handshake, no kiss. Never one kiss.

AXTON

And in this instance?

ALEXANDER

To foster an environment suitable for successful diplomacy, I'm of the mind that an embrace always bests a handshake. But it is your first time meeting Prime Minister Walker, so I could go either way.

AXTON

(to Ben and Anita)

This wasn't worked out on a staff level?

ANITA

It was the next item on our call before...

Fair point. Axtон heads to the stage door. Alexander follows.

AXTON

I'll wing it.

ALEXANDER

(worry building)

Those are my least favorite words! Sir, Mr. President, sir: There are too many variables. Building bridges between leaders is the first step to building bridges between governments! And if you know anything about structural engineering, building bridges takes planning, foresight--

AXTON

Alexander. I've got this.

INT. G7 CONVENTION HALL - FAMILY PHOTO STAGE - MOMENTS LATER

Axtон enters from off-stage. The pack of reporters perk up. Camera shutters flutter. A commotion befitting the American President rumbles through the room as he meets...

AXTON
Remy.

REMY THOMAS, the very tactile French President (think Gad Elmaleh). They shake hands. Remy kisses Axton on the cheek.

REMY
Bienvenue.

AXTON
Merci.

Axton makes his way down the line of six other leaders, but we don't see those greetings. We're focused on Ella at the end, standing poised. Axton comes to her.

They're face to face. First time in 22 years. They share a look for a split second, and Axton's about to lean in when Ella holds her right hand out firmly.

ELLA
Mr. President.

Axton smiles, takes her hand. They shake.

AXTON
Madam Prime Minister. It's a pleasure to mee--

ELLA
The pleasure's mine. Lovely to see you again.

That throws Axton a bit, but he recovers quickly. Smiles.

INT. G7 CONVENTION HALL - FAMILY PHOTO STAGE - MOMENTS LATER

The leaders, each in front of their flags, pose together for a family photo. The French President, playing host, is in the middle next to Axton. Ella is on one far end and PRESIDENT VITALY (formidable, clever, 68) on the opposite far end. As the photos wrap, leaders disperse. Axton approaches Ella [nb: "pull-aside" is a diplomatic term for an impromptu meeting].

AXTON
Madam Prime Minister--

ELLA
Ella.

AXTON
Ella. I'd love a brief pull-aside with you if--

Remy butts in. Puts his arm around Axton.

REMY

Harry, we have to discuss the new Ambassador; he's a disaster--

As multiple leaders approach Ella, congratulating her.

REMY (CONT'D)

You'd do well to recall him. Tres vite! And don't get me started on--

Axton turns towards Ella, who's been enveloped by the leaders. We pull away as Ella and Axton are tugged in opposite directions.

INT. G7 CONVENTION HALL - MEETING ROOM - LATER

A presentation wrapped. Axton, Ella, and the other leaders close their briefing books, remove their translation devices.

AXTON

Ella, would now work?

EDITH WEBER (50s), the German Chancellor, approaches Axton. Edith's bubbly, but dead serious when it comes to her work.

EDITH

(smiling throughout)

Harry, my friend, climate-based migration is becoming a thing, and your UNGA speech left me a little, how should I say... pissed-the-hell-off.

Harry looks briefly to Ella - and we're with her now - cornered by the Japanese Prime Minister, TARO ISHIBA, who speaks through a TRANSLATOR.

TRANSLATOR

Former Prime Minister Paxhouse's posturing on automobiles hurt both our countries, and it is my hope--

We pull away. Ella and Axton mired in the affairs of state.

INT. G7 CONVENTION HALL - MEETING ROOM - LATER

Leaders and their aides continue to shuffle to and fro. Axton's with Ben, handing him a document.

AXTON

Taro's proposal. Proximate targets,
nothing remotely forward-looking--

He notices Ben's attention drawn to something behind him.
Axton turns to find:

ELLA

Mr. President, you wanted a pull-
aside?

AXTON

I did.

They head off together. Ella nods to Ben.

ELLA

Lovely to see you again, Ben.

Ben looks around, puzzled, worried someone could have heard -
but no one's around... save for Sandra.

SANDRA

Here we go.

As we PRE-LAP a swift ZIPPERING.

INT. TENT - MOMENTS LATER

Axton finishes zipping a large white tent door from the
inside. Ella sits across from him.

WE PULL OUT TO:

INT. U.S. CONTROLLED PREP ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Where the tent sits awkwardly in the middle of the room. An
AGENT clicks on a stereo that plays POP MUSIC [nb: this is
really how the United States Government helps combat spying].

INT. TENT - CONTINUOUS

The music can be heard, but less clearly.

AXTON

(re: music)

It muffles any listening devices.
And the tent ensures no cameras...

ELLA

Thank you for the basic training in op-sec, but I have bilat prep I could be tending to so why don't we-

AXTON

Yes, no, of course. I just think we need to talk...

(Ella's not budging)

About us. Our past.

ELLA

Mr. President, I was just elected Prime Minister, not prom queen.

AXTON

Which is exactly why we need to get a handle on a few things, especially our history.

ELLA

Mr. President--

AXTON

Ella, first of all, call me Harry. Second, this is no longer just a personal matter.

ELLA

Harry. You want to talk? Let's talk about tomorrow's principal's meeting.

AXTON

Ella, seriously, we--

ELLA

I don't think I've ever been more serious in my life.

AXTON

Fine. Let's talk about tomorrow. I'm going to need you to leave some space for Vitaly to--

ELLA

Continue flouting basic international norms of behavior?

AXTON

No. Space to preserve flexibility.

ELLA

There's an inspired foreign policy doctrine if I've ever heard one.

AXTON

We need to maintain a range of ideas that includes Vitaly, so he can find his way to a position we can work with.

ELLA

(unzipping the tent)
I'd like a little space myself.

INT. U.S. CONTROLLED PREP ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Ella steps out of the tent. The music's louder now. Axton follows her, notices the agent (MARK).

AXTON

Mark.
(as Mark begins to go)
And Mark...

Mark clicks the stereo OFF. Ella and Axton alone again, this time in silence.

ELLA

If there's nothing more to discuss, my team's waiting.

AXTON

It's a mistake not to talk about it.
(that hangs a moment)
Always is.

Ella considers, notices another corner of the prep room.

ELLA

The other leaders know about this?

And we REVEAL: Life-size cardboard cutouts of all the Prime Ministers and Presidents we've seen at the G7.

AXTON

No, and I'd like to keep it that way - though I imagine they have equally bizarre prep strategies.

ELLA

Your secret's safe with me.
(then)
Tell me about them.

Axton approaches the cutout of the German Chancellor.

AXTON

Edith's laser-focused on migration right now. She's been good on the issue, but Germany's on the front lines of a crisis that could spill--

ELLA

No, tell me about *them*. I know their positions. I've studied their backgrounds. Tell me about what makes them tick.

Axton isn't quite sure where to begin.

ELLA (CONT'D)

What they're afraid of. What they think is funny. Politics is personal.

AXTON

Okay. You know how everybody calls her "Steady Eddie"?

ELLA

For her longevity on the world's stage and dedication to democracy.

AXTON

Sure, sure - all of that. But she can drink like a fish without the slightest wobble.

ELLA

Really?

AXTON

Once saw her put back five pints of Guinness and then convince President O'Malley to agree to increased tariffs on Irish pharma products flowing into Germany. It was masterful.

ELLA

And our host for the weekend?

We focus on a photo of Remy Thomas.

AXTON

Hands-on in diplomacy and
interpersonal interactions.

ELLA

I noticed that.

AXTON

It's almost cliche.

ELLA

Your neighbor to the North?

We note the CANADIAN PRIME MINISTER'S cardboard cutout.

AXTON

How such a polite citizenry elected
such an immense prick, I will never
understand.

ELLA

Not cliche though.

AXTON

No, and he's a reliable partner.
Just a miserable person.

Moving to the ITALIAN PRESIDENT'S cutout.

AXTON (CONT'D)

Oh, and Lorenzo, my God, great guy -
but, by all means, avoid him at the
dinner tomorrow night. His stories
are endless.

ELLA

And with the translation...

AXTON

Doubly-so!

They smile - for the first time in a while - together. Until
they reach the next cutout: Prime Minister Ella Walker.

AXTON (CONT'D)

Ella Walker.

She rolls her eyes.

AXTON (CONT'D)

Afraid of spiders. A planner.

Accomplice to boat theft.

(she allows a smirk)

(MORE)

AXTON (CONT'D)
Never really understood what makes
her tick.

ELLA
That's quite enough, Harry.

AXTON
She's--

ELLA
Ready to move on to Anatoly.

Axton takes a breath, his momentum cut short, as they move to Vitaly's cutout. Ella's not ready to re-live their past.

AXTON
Certainly as deluded as you'd
expect from a strongman who's been
in power twenty-some years--

ELLA
Twenty-two.

AXTON
Right... 22. Tends to respond to
carrots.

ELLA
When was the last time you tried a
stick?

INT. G7 CONVENTION HALL - TRANSLATION ROOM - DAY

A group of TRANSLATORS sit in a darkened room, watching something we do not see. They speak simultaneously. Different languages. We don't have any idea what they're saying, but we hear FRENCH, ENGLISH, ITALIAN, JAPANESE, and RUSSIAN.

INT. CONVENTION HALL - MEETING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

The eight leaders sit around a circular conference table, the G7 logo emblazoned in the center. Each has an earpiece that they hold to their ears when necessary. Aides, including Ben and Sandra, sit back-bench at attention along the walls.

AXTON
We all come to this table with
different perspectives--

VITALY
(in Russian)
And varying levels of experience.

A shot at Ella. She lets it go.

VITALY (CONT'D)

(in broken English)

Welcome, Ms. Walker. It's important
you are here, despite controversy
over your election in your home
country.

ELLA

Thank you, Mr. President. I suppose
we can't all win with 97.5 percent
of the vote.

The room is taken aback - the implication clear.

AXTON

But I think we can agree that
Yemen's civil war has to end.

ELLA

Of course. But we need to be
intellectually honest as we frame
the conversation. Yemen isn't
fighting a civil war so much as a
dozen foreign countries are
fighting proxy wars on Yemeni soil.

WEBER

(in German)

Russia is at the top of that list,
Anatoly. Your security forces'
arming of the insurgency is--

VITALY

(in Russian)

Edith, I don't understand. I've
seen no evidence of that. Merely
rumors.

ELLA

There's a saying: It's difficult to
get a man to understand something
when his salary depends on his not
understanding it.

VITALY

(in broken English)

Truth is, I've been so tied up
helping the Americans with Iran...
maybe Russia pulls back on this
front and focus on finding what you
say is illegal action in Yemen?

AXTON

Anatoly, I appreciate the insinuation, and it should be noted that your cooperation has been crucial in our continued progress with respect to Iran.

ELLA

It should also be noted that doing the right thing in one part of the world does not give you license to do the wrong thing in another.

Remy puts his hand on Ella's arm.

REMY

(in English)

Ella, I fear you're demanding purity at the expense of progress.

VITALY

(in Russian)

And I fear you're a little confused, Ms. Walker.

ELLA

You men, so fearful.

Edith smirks.

VITALY

(in Russian)

I know a saying, too: Intelligence is the ability to hold conflicting thoughts and still function.

AXTON

Okay, let's focus on--

ELLA

Does it ever occur to you all that there is no other room?

(a beat)

Maybe it's the clarity that comes with being new, maybe cynicism hasn't yet set in -- but it strikes me there is no other room. No one else to make these decisions. We're it. Think about that. I mean, Jesus, we're the ones who are supposed to know better. And, right now, we're failing the people of Yemen.

(she eyes each leader)

(MORE)

ELLA (CONT'D)
History is staring us in the face,
and I won't blink.

We land on Vitaly as Ella removes her ear piece, covers the small mic in front of her, and says something in Russian.

ELLA (CONT'D)
(in Russian)
And, Anatoly: I don't get confused.

Vitaly stares back, blinks, then offers an inscrutable smile.

EXT. FRENCH MANOR - NIGHT

MOTORCADES pull down the driveway. Heavily armed MEN and WOMEN scope the surroundings and talk into radios.

INT. FRENCH MANOR - NIGHT

A sophisticated party where world leaders and French high society meet and mingle. Ella and Sandra enter together.

SANDRA
Russia's Foreign Minister already
reached out at the staff level.
That's a good sign, ma'am.

ELLA
Time will tell.

SANDRA
I know I should play it cool, but
you bent the world's leaders to
your will today. And I'm bursting.

Sandra grabs two glasses of champagne. Hands one to Ella, swigs the other. Axton approaches. Sandra peels off. He's clearly frustrated. He looks at Ella's glass.

ELLA
I told you I was going to try the
stick approach.

AXTON
That was a sledgehammer in there!

ELLA
You really want to do this here?

AXTON
Do you honestly feel good about
this afternoon?

ELLA

You mean when I stood up to a foreign foe or when the leader of the free world sat back and played middleman instead of statesman?

AXTON

Ella, I'm trying to give you the benefit of the doubt, but you seem more intent on making a point than making a deal.

ELLA

I've found that the latter flows from the former.

AXTON

All your experience on the world's stage teach you that?

ELLA

Right out of Vitaly's playbook. Nice, Harry. What else has the dictator taught you?

AXTON

My point is I've been in this fight longer than you, and you have to learn to pick your battles.

ELLA

Good advice.

She leaves - this battle's not worth it - but turns back.

ELLA (CONT'D)

You're right by the way. It is a stage, and sometimes you have to put on a show.

We're on Ella, determined but shaken. The Italian President approaches with a translator.

ELLA (CONT'D)

(sotto)

Oh, Christ.

(smiling, louder)

Lorenzo!

INT. FRENCH MANOR - NIGHT

Axton standing with the Canadian Prime Minister, JOSHUA.

AXTON

Remy's team did a nice job.

JOSHUA

Of all the G7's I've been to, this
is certainly one of them.

AXTON

Right... Well, I trust the United
States can continue to count on
Canada's support as we develop--

JOSHUA

(walking away)
Always, always.

Axton rolls his eyes, spots Ella cornered in conversation with Lorenzo. He takes a drink, eyes her, thinking about the way they left it. He's about to approach when:

REMY

Beautiful woman.

Remy sidles up next to Axton, touches the back of his neck.

REMY (CONT'D)

I don't mean that in a French way.
I just can't help noticing her.
(uncomfortably close)
And you are a handsome man.

AXTON

Thank you, Remy.

REMY

It could be... a match made in G7!
(beat)
Could you imagine?!

Remy is amused with himself. Axton tries to move away, can't.

REMY (CONT'D)

Poor woman. Stuck in a conversation
she clearly wants no part of.

AXTON

(sarcastic)
I can't imagine.

REMY

Why doesn't she just make up an
excuse to leave?

AXTON
You know, I should go intervene.

REMY
(as Axton leaves)
Smart.

INT. FRENCH MANOR - MOMENTS LATER

Axton reaches Ella, Lorenzo, and the translator. He eavesdrops a second and then slides in, handing her a drink.

AXTON
Here's your drink... Madam Prime Minister.

She looks him up and down. Takes the drink.

ELLA
Thank you. Should we continue our conversation?

AXTON
(having fun with her)
Which conversation was that?

ELLA
...Rwanda.

INT. FRENCH MANOR - MOMENTS LATER

Ella and Axton walking away from Lorenzo and the translator.

ELLA
I feel really bad.

AXTON
For comparing me to a brutal dictator?

ELLA
For invoking a genocide to get out of a conversation.

AXTON
You're right. That's worse.

ELLA
Why'd you come over?

He looks back at Remy.

AXTON
Sometimes our interests align.

Axton's hand rests on the small of her back, a momentary reminder of their past. Holds a beat. Then he takes it away deliberately. Too easy to fall back into whatever that was.

ELLA
Didn't feel like it 10 minutes ago.

AXTON
I'm sorry about what I said.

ELLA
Saving me from Lorenzo fully makes up for it.

AXTON
I warned you about him yesterday.
Not that I expected you to listen.

ELLA
I listened... How do you think I got Edith to accuse Vitaly first?

They spot Edith Weber in the corner. Ella raises her whiskey glass to Edith who returns the gesture.

AXTON
All very clever. Unfortunately, the Foreign Minister is already making noise. And not in a good way.

ELLA
I learned to block out the noise a long time ago.

They find a table, sit.

AXTON
Time will tell.

On Ella, suddenly doubtful of her strategy, when: A MIME makes his way past them "pulling" himself along a "rope."

ELLA
Thank God this is closed press.

AXTON
Remy hosted the G20 three years ago. Opted for a cabaret show on the final night. Turkish President stormed out.

(MORE)

AXTON (CONT'D)
(noticing)
Anita!

Anita turns, approaches.

AXTON (CONT'D)
Ella, this is my chief of staff--

ELLA
Anita Jacobs, of course. I'm very impressed by your work. Especially given who you have to deal with every day.

ANITA
We all have our burdens to bear.

ELLA
I could never stand the smoking.

Anita's taken aback by the forthrightness.

AXTON
I quit.

ANITA
His worst habit now is asking "what's next?" every ten minutes.

ELLA
That is a bad habit.

ANITA
Pleasure to meet you, Madam Prime Minister.

Anita goes. Axton ensures no one is listening, then:

AXTON
Why'd you assume she knew?

ELLA
The look you gave her as she approached. Your lips tensed and your eyes bulged a bit.
(he does the look)
Like that!

They both laugh, Axton momentarily moved by the specificity. Ella touches his knee. Didn't mean anything by it.

AXTON
No way.

ELLA

What?

AXTON

I call bullshit. You would never take a risk like that on such a flimsy premise. You listened in on the call.

ELLA

So did you.

Axton sits back, smiles. Ella, realizes her mistake.

ELLA (CONT'D)

Sandra briefed me--

AXTON

Too late.

INT. FRENCH MANOR - LATER

Axton and Ella still sitting together as Remy, standing in the front of the room, wraps up a toast.

REMY

(in English)

So, let's raise our glasses. To our community of nations, to forging new partnerships, and learning from the past as we look to the future.

Axton and Ella, glasses raised, cheers.

AXTON

Speaking of the future, my team wanted me to ask you--

ELLA

Oh, Harry. Please start over.

AXTON

Excuse me?

ELLA

"My team wanted me to ask you." You're the President of the United States--

AXTON

People keep reminding me of that.

ELLA

So, if you have something to ask
me, ask me.

AXTON

Now you've made it awkward.

ELLA

I've made it awkward?

AXTON

The more we talk about it, the more
awkward it becomes.

ELLA

If our countries heard this
conversation, they'd impeach you
and dismiss me.

AXTON

Who could blame them?

ELLA

Are you trying to invite me to a
State Dinner?

AXTON

Yes. No.

(off Ella's confusion)

I mean yes, but not a State Dinner,
which is reserved for Heads of
State, which in your country's case
would be...

ELLA

The Queen.

AXTON

Yes. Lovely woman. But I mean an
Official Dinner. They're just as
good, but different in... Why is
this so hard? I'm diplomatically
obligated to ask.

ELLA

And I'm diplomatically obligated to
say yes.

EXT. ESTABLISHING SHOTS OF WASHINGTON, DC - MORNING

Washington, DC in winter. A light snow blankets the National
Mall. Over:

NEWS REPORT (V.O.)
Two weeks after the 46th annual
summit concluded, new trade
partnerships have been set...

EXT. ESTABLISHING SHOTS LONDON - AFTERNOON

Bundled-up Londoners brace against a stiff wind as:

BRITISH NEWS REPORT (V.O.)
The question of Yemen looms. And
Russian President Vitaly's next
move is anybody's guess.

INT. WHITE HOUSE - SITUATION ROOM - LATE MORNING

Axton enters quickly. Everyone around the formidable wooden table rises. He motions for them to sit, just as he does, quickly. The NATIONAL SECURITY ADVISOR pipes up:

NATIONAL SECURITY ADVISOR
Russia's reversing course.
Squeezing the insurgents.

AXTON
How so?

NATIONAL SECURITY ADVISOR
They've cut off the flow of arms
and, it appears, funds.

AXTON
According to whom?

NATIONAL SECURITY ADVISOR
Assets on the ground alerted us,
and our partners in Oman and Saudi
Arabia are reporting the same.

BEN
I'll be damned.

AXTON
Vitaly's reaction in Paris would
not have portended this. Keep
tracking it. Could be a head fake.
Either way, gives us a moment to
exhale for the holiday.
(rising)
Enjoy New Year's.

INT. WHITE HOUSE - TREATY ROOM - EARLY EVENING

Axton seated behind a desk - larger than the Resolute - in the Treaty Room. This office, a bit more functional than the Oval, serves as the President's after-dark workspace. Clocks with times from notable cities around the world - Beijing, Sydney, Tehran, Cairo, London - line one wall.

Axton looks up from his briefing book as Ben enters.

AXTON

Word from the Foreign Minister?

BEN

Not much to report. They're playing it close to the vest.

AXTON

We lose leverage if Iran sees that Russia is shaky.

BEN

This is looser than I'd like.

AXTON

Foreign policy's messy. Let's pick it up tomorrow.

BEN

Need anything else?

AXTON

No, please, go enjoy the night with your family.

(as Ben heads out)

Give Victoria and the boys my best.

BEN

Mr. President, I know what you're thinking about doing... and I think it'd be best if you didn't.

AXTON

Are you speaking as my oldest friend or as my Secretary of State?

BEN

Have a good evening, Harry.

Which answers that. As he closes the door, Axton consults the series of clocks - notices it's nearing midnight in...

INT. 10 DOWNING STREET - PRIVATE OFFICE - LATE NIGHT

Where we find Ella, ensconced - reading documents in a darkened, wood-paneled private room. Probably the first moment of quiet she's had in a year. She's wearing an old, faded "Oxford" sweatshirt.

She comes across press clippings in her bulky nightly memo, including the "family photo" with Axton. Ella crosses to a window through which we can make out crowds gathering below, ready to celebrate. An ASSISTANT enters.

ASSISTANT
Ma'am, the American President--

INT. WHITE HOUSE - TREATY ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Axton on the phone at his desk. INTERCUT with Ella:

AXTON
I had an interesting briefing
today.

ELLA
As did I. Though I imagine I was
less surprised by it than you.

AXTON
What you did was risky.

ELLA
Why are you calling me...
(consulting a clock)
Half hour before New Year's?

BEGIN FLASHBACK

EXT. OXFORD UNIVERSITY - NIGHT

Axton, in a tuxedo, walks past kids running with sparkler fireworks. He crosses under a "Happy New Year" sign into...

INT. OXFORD DORMS - LOBBY - CONTINUOUS

Where Axton stops in front of a mirror. He undoes his bow tie and considers his reflection before:

AXTON
Stupid.

PRE-LAP a knock.

INT. OXFORD DORMS - ELLA'S DORM DOOR - NIGHT

Ella skeptically eyes Axton who stands at her door. His bow tie is re-tied. She notices he's holding roses

ELLA
I'm allergic.

She shuts the door in his face. A beat. He knocks. She opens. Axton flings the roses down the hall without missing a beat or breaking eye contact. Problem solved.

ELLA (CONT'D)
What are you doing here?

AXTON
Had a hunch you might be alone.

ELLA
Rather rude hunch, isn't it?

AXTON
No, not because I think you are a loser or in any way unpopular, I just thought I'd... check. I worked on that "hunch" line on the way--

ELLA
What's with the dinner jacket?

AXTON
(smiles, regaining poise)
We call them tuxedos. I was at a gala. Left early. Kind of romantic when you think about--

ELLA
Thought you wanted to be friends.

AXTON
That's right.

ELLA
Do you usually bring your friends roses?

EXT. OXFORD WALKWAY - NIGHT

We find Axton and Ella walking together. No one's around.

ELLA
Is this really necessary?

AXTON
Friends don't let friends stay in
on New Year's Eve. Plus if what
they say about Y2K is legitimate...

ELLA
Could be our last night.

Axton gives her a look, veers off the path.

EXT. OXFORD - MOMENTS LATER

They come upon a small riverbank. A little boat is tied up on shore. Axton eyes it, smiles at Ella.

ELLA
No way. Harry, no.

EXT. SMALL RIVER - MOMENTS LATER

Ella and Axton cruising a darkened River Cherwell.

ELLA
It was Clinton's fault, by the way.

AXTON
Then why'd you jump down my throat--

ELLA
Didn't like the way you framed it,
removing all agency from the woman.

AXTON
I wonder if maybe we should talk
about something other than
infidelity and power dynamics in
the workplace.

ELLA
I think it's best to immediately
discuss the most uncomfortable
things imaginable. That way, you
know right away if you can stand a
person or not. Anybody can chat
about the weather or sports or
university. But why waste weeks on
that stuff only to learn you don't
actually respect a person when you
get to the things that matter?

(MORE)

ELLA (CONT'D)
(off Axton pondering)
What?

AXTON
Just trying to figure out which
fraught topic we can cover next.

ELLA
Teachers fraternizing with
undergrads?

AXTON
You know I'm a TA. And that's not
what this is. I like you, Ella.

ELLA
Tell me about your family.

AXTON
Can we start with something
simpler? Systemic racism, maybe?

ELLA
I bet it's actually pretty simple
if you say it out loud and limit
yourself to 20 words.

Axton's perplexed.

ELLA (CONT'D)
Try it. I swear.

AXTON
My dad left. But he waited just
long enough to be sure I knew
exactly what was going on.

ELLA
19 words, nice. How old were you?

AXTON
Eleven. Spent the next 11 years
trying to cheer up my mom.

Ella puts her hand on his knee.

ELLA
And now you're on your third fancy
post-graduate degree in hopes of
what? Delaying re-entry into the
real world?

AXTON
I don't know.

ELLA

I can't imagine not knowing. I could never not know what's next.

AXTON

I have plans. Big plans... I just don't know what they are yet.

ELLA

I know my plan.

AXTON

The internship.

ELLA

That's phase one.

AXTON

You have phases?

ELLA

Internship upon graduation. Engaged by 27. Kids at 30. MP by 40. And, hopefully a cabinet position in my fifties.

AXTON

That's 21 words.

ELLA

Nix the "hopefully."

Ella turns toward the evening night. Axton looks to see if anyone is nearby. Then: he begins to put his arm around her.

AXTON

You must be cold.

ELLA

Oh, Harry. Please start over.

AXTON

What?

ELLA

(mocking)

"You must be cold."

(she moves her hand from
his knee to his thigh)

If you want to put your arm around
me, put your arm around me.

AXTON

Well, now you've made it awkward.

As we pull away into the darkness, they bicker lightly. It's familiar to us. But their voices fade as we fall into...

ELLA
I've made it awkward?

AXTON
The more we talk about it...

...BLACK and **END FLASHBACK.**

INT. WHITE HOUSE - OVAL OFFICE - DAY

Axton's staring out the window. Ben - standing with Anita, Becca, and Connor - snaps him from his trance.

BEN
She's going to want to reset the relationship on her terms.

CONNOR
Which plays into our hands. Give her assurances on intel-sharing and-

AXTON
(moving from window)
Won't be that easy. Prime Ministers have a long history of debasing themselves for American Presidents: from Eden, Eisenhower and the Suez Crisis to Blair, Bush, and Iraq. Ella won't make the same mistakes.

BECCA
But Yemen isn't Iraq and the Iran deal is an obvious good--

BEN
She's under enormous pressure. Paxhouse won't go away.

AXTON
No roses, right?

ANITA
Sir?

AXTON
The flowers for the Official Dinner? What are they?

Folks tilt their heads. Did he really just ask that?

INT. OUTER OVAL OFFICE - MOMENTS LATER

Becca and Connor exit the Oval.

CONNOR

He's off again.

BECCA

I guess priorities change in the
last year of a presidency.

CONNOR

(mocking, miffed)

"Flowers?"

BEGIN MONTAGE - VARIOUS

NEWS REPORT (O.S.)

Preparations are underway for the
Official Visit of Prime Minister
Ella Walker to the White House.

- Axton with Alexander trying on a tux and reviewing menus, fabrics, and flowers. Axton's not sure about the tux.
- Ella working with Sandra on a speech.
- Axton in the Treaty Room at night, eyes the "London" clock.
- Ella in her private office opening a large package. A note reads: "In case you want to talk" before we REVEAL: The cutout of the chatty Italian President.
- Axton getting more opinions on the tux from staffers. Billy gives a thumbs up.
- Ella trying on a dress. We don't see it. She's not paying a moment's attention to the outfit or her stylists. Instead, she's focused on the briefing book she brought along.

END MONTAGE

EXT. SOUTHEAST WASHINGTON, D.C. - MORNING

We track along with an Amtrak train hurtling to Union Station, the rails seemingly headed into the Washington Monument in the distance - which pierces the morning sky.

NEWS REPORT (O.S.)

Walker's set to meet with President Axton. We expect a pool spray at the top of their bilateral meeting.

INT. WHITE HOUSE - OVAL OFFICE - MORNING

Where Axton and Ella sit in front of the fireplace. The British and American press fan out: boom mics loom; cameras click; and reporters rest recorders on the empty couches.

AXTON

So if I could conclude by again welcoming the Prime Minister. I look forward to leveraging our relationship to have a positive impact around the world. Thank you.

BECCA

(ushering press out)
Thank you, pool. Thank you!

The journalists are slow to move, yelling questions.

REPORTER

Could you have imagined this moment when you were both back at Oxford?

AXTON

Thank you, pool. We'll have more--

REPORTER

Did you know each other?

The room quiets.

AXTON

(lighthearted)

I can assure you Ella would have been far too busy and popular to hang around with the likes of me.

ELLA

Actually, that's not quite right. I knew you from a lecture hall class. You were one of the TAs.

Axton is stunned, but hides it well. The press are intrigued.

REPORTER

Which class?

HARRY

(joking)

Politics 101.

ELLA

But to your question, no, I
couldn't have imagined this moment
back then.

INT. WHITE HOUSE - OVAL OFFICE - MOMENTS LATER

The press are gone. Axton and Ella are alone.

AXTON

How many reporters do you think are
descending on Oxford as we speak,
searching for anybody who claims to
have known both of us?

ELLA

Harry--

AXTON

Hundred? Two hundred?

ELLA

The real risk is saying anything
that's easily disproved. I'm sure
you've been doing this long enough
to know that's politics 101.

(a beat)

Look, Iran is important to me, too,
Harry.

AXTON

You have a funny way of showing it.

ELLA

Working toward a better deal and
standing up to Vitaly aren't
mutually exclusive.

AXTON

I need you to support reinstating
practical cooperation between NATO
and Russia.

ELLA

I won't do that.

AXTON

Ella--

ELLA

Not until they cease all
intervention in Yemen.

AXTON

You saw the same intel I did.
They've scaled back. I just need--

ELLA

Space. You've mentioned.

AXTON

We have a real opportunity in Iran.
I'm talking about immense good--

ELLA

You're talking about kicking the
can down the road.

AXTON

How can you say that?

ELLA

Inspection notice requirements.
Delayed funds. Reactor sunset
clauses.

AXTON

Compromises.

ELLA

Designed to put off the most
difficult decisions.

AXTON

If I wanted to put off the most
difficult decisions, I wouldn't
have tackled immigration in my
first four months in office!

ELLA

Tackle is a strong word. Two-hand-
touch maybe.

Axton, frustrated, takes a beat.

AXTON

Is that what you think of me? Of my
Presidency?

ELLA

I think... you've been a very
effective President.

Axton knows exactly what that means.

AXTON
 (sharp)
 Thirty million newly insured
 Americans might agree with you.

ELLA
 Eighteen million under-insured
 Americans might not.

She may have just overstepped. Axton exhales. Sits back.

AXTON
 You're playing with fire.

BEGIN FLASHBACK

EXT. SMALL RIVER - LATER

Their boat rounds a bend, emerging from the darkness, nearer campus now. Ella grabs something under her seat.

ELLA
 Give me your lighter.
 (off his hesitation)
 Come on, I'm already an accomplice
 to theft. Don't hold me back now.

AXTON
 (sees what she's holding)
 That's a flare. Not a firework.

ELLA
 Same difference.

AXTON
 You want people to notice to us?

ELLA
 It's New Year's and a firework--

ELLA (CONT'D) AXTON
 --won't draw attention. Flare.

AXTON (CONT'D)
 I legitimately think you shouldn't.

Ella moves in much closer, touching his chest, whispers.

ELLA
 And I legitimately think you should
 quit smoking.

As her lips linger near his ear, she pulls back, having swiped the lighter from his jacket pocket. She smiles, prepares to ignite the flare. Does so.

Sending it... sideways into a telephone poll by the riverbank. They both laugh forehead to forehead.

ELLA (CONT'D)
Should we go somewhere?

AXTON
Here's fine.

ELLA
Harry, if this is going to happen... Nobody can see us. Ever.

Harry looks around. Nobody's remotely in sight.

AXTON
Like I said, here's fine--

She kisses him. Then again, more passionately. Their hands gliding up and down each other's bodies. Axton removes her jacket. Kisses her neck. Ella runs her hands through his hair, loving it until...

ELLA
Oh my god!

She pulls him back by the hair to see what she sees. A transformer on the telephone poll is smoking. Intensely.

EXT. RIVERBANK - MOMENTS LATER

Having ditched the boat, Axton and Ella dash into a field. Ella stops to remove her heels. It begins to rain. Axton grabs her hand, they run. Fast. Laughing.

INT. OXFORD DORM - ELLA'S ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Axton and Ella reach her door. They kiss immediately. Just as a flurry of students barrel down the hall.

DRUNK STUDENT
The power's out at Magdalen!

ANOTHER DRUNK STUDENT
Y2K is real!

The students continue on. One particularly drunk student dry heaves in the corner as his friends laugh and snap pictures.

INT. OXFORD DORM - ELLA'S ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Axton and Ella tumble into his room to get out of the chaos. They continue kissing before backing away from each other as if to come up for air. Ella grabs Axton's undone bow tie.

ELLA

The undone bow tie is my favorite look in the world.

He pulls her in. They kiss. She pulls off his bow tie. He begins to undress her. Ella starts to undo his belt buckle.

Ella pulls him towards her. He removes her bra as they fall into bed together where they begin to make love.

INT. OXFORD DORM - ELLA'S ROOM - THE NEXT MORNING

Ella rolls over, wakes to find... an empty bed. Axton's gone. She's hurt, but she'll choose to be furious instead.

EXT. OXFORD UNIVERSITY WALKWAY - LATER

Ella walks toward a bridge. She's cold, shivering. She's pissed, and so are we. But just as she crests the Magdalen Bridge over the River Cherwell and we hate Axton for leaving her, we spot him - running to catch up.

AXTON

I went to look for your coat...

As he begins to explain, she softens - but hides that she was saddened in the first place.

AXTON (CONT'D)

But that boat is long gone, so I grabbed this.

She smiles, her momentary disappointment in him now evaporated as she accepts his gift. It's the "Oxford" sweatshirt we saw before - only brand-new.

We PAN down to the river below to find a BRITISH ROWER braving the cold, who crosses out of sight below the bridge as we END FLASHBACK and...

MATCH CUT TO:

EXT. POTOMAC RIVER - DAY

An AMERICAN ROWER exits from below the THEODORE ROOSEVELT BRIDGE along the Potomac River as the sun sets over DC.

INT. WHITE HOUSE - TREATY ROOM - NIGHT

From behind, we find Axton at his desk - on the phone.

AXTON
How's the Blair House?

And begin INTERCUT:

INT. BLAIR HOUSE - ELLA'S BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

ELLA
Surprisingly cozy.

AXTON
I slept there my first week.

ELLA
Residence wasn't ready?

AXTON
No, the President wasn't ready.

ELLA
That's either very endearing or very embarrassing.

AXTON
Lemme know if you decide before I start my memoir. I just wasn't comfortable sleeping where Lincoln did. You know what I mean at all?

Ella turns. REVEAL: A bust of Churchill staring at her.

ELLA
I do.

AXTON
Do you want to come over?

ELLA
You know I can't.

INT. WHITE HOUSE - OVAL OFFICE - NIGHT

CLOSE ON: Axton pours drinks. He approaches Ella seated on the couch, taking in the quiet of the Oval Office at night.

AXTON
How'd it feel?

A beat.

AXTON (CONT'D)
Lying to that reporter?
(off Ella's look)
Come on, you always saw yourself here. Visiting the White House as Prime Minister.

ELLA
I didn't.

AXTON
Sure, you did.

ELLA
I mean I didn't lie. The reporter asked if I could have imagined the moment. The moment included the person who was on the other side of that fireplace.

She nods to the two chairs they were seated in during the pool spray, flanking the fireplace.

ELLA (CONT'D)
And that, *Mr. President*, is something I never imagined.

AXTON
Parsed like a true politician.

ELLA
Cynic.

AXTON
People find me charming.

They both smile a beat. But Axton seems off, taken by a memory he's not ready to re-live. Ella notices, redirects.

ELLA
(re: Oval Office)
Takes on a different dynamic at night.

AXTON

Like all the history is still here,
sitting with us. Ghosts of
Presidents past.

ELLA

Skeletons, too.

(then)

You know how much worse it would be
for me, right?

AXTON

Because I have a penis?

ELLA

I still can't believe I said that.

AXTON

I still can't believe nobody from
that class remembers you said it.

(then)

The thing you're kindly not saying
is that you're at the dawn of your
career. I'm at the end of mine.

ELLA

There's life after the White House,
Harry.

HARRY

You know outgoing Presidents get
one final flight on Air Force One?
It's called a "Special Airlift
Mission." SAM for short. Been
looking forward to landing on a
private island and getting away
from all of this. Greatest honor of
my life, don't get me wrong, but--

ELLA

You want to be even more secluded?

AXTON

I want some clarity. Seven years
behind ballistic glass can distort
your perspective. I can see people
out on Pennsylvania Avenue, peering
through the wrought-iron gates or
on the sidewalks as I drive by.
Struggling to see me. And I wonder
if they realize, I'm trying to see
them, too.

This strikes a chord with Ella.

EXT. WHITE HOUSE - ROSE GARDEN - NIGHT

Ella and Axton, a few drinks later, stroll through the Rose Garden, the illuminated Oval Office behind them.

ELLA

Why didn't you find someone?

AXTON

My best guess is nobody compared. I
threw myself into work. Made plans.
What about you? Why the divorce?
Why no kids at 30?

ELLA

It just never felt right.

AXTON

That simple?

ELLA

(moving closer)

Whether something feels right or
not is the least simple thing in
the world.

BEGIN FLASHBACK

EXT. OXFORD DORMS - ESTABLISHING SHOTS - NIGHT

ELLA (O.S.)

This feels wrong.

INT. OXFORD DORMS - ELLA'S ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Axton sits across from Ella who reluctantly indulges his mock interview. He slips into a British accent for a moment.

AXTON

Pretend it's not me.

ELLA

Harry, that's hard to do
considering we've had sex...

AXTON

Ms. Walker, my name is Montgomery,
Richard Montgomery, and I'm
wondering why we should hire you
for this internship--

ELLA

Are you doing a British accent?

AXTON

I'm asking the questions.

ELLA (CONT'D)

Because it was quite bad.

AXTON

Why should we choose you over the
other candidates?

ELLA

That's a preposterous question. I
don't know the other candidates--

Axton scribbles on a piece of paper.

AXTON

Critiquing the questioner. Smart.

ELLA

Some men can handle that sort of
thing.

A flirtatious look between them. Axton jots something down.

ELLA (CONT'D)

What are you doing?

AXTON

Marking the time when the
interviewee came on to the
interviewer.

She kisses him. He kisses her back sweetly, the way you kiss
someone you've spent every day of the last six weeks with.

AXTON (CONT'D)

Okay, lightning round!

(Ella rolls her eyes)

Biggest fear.

ELLA

Spiders.

AXTON

Favorite food.

ELLA

Indian?

AXTON

Is that a question, Ms. Walker?

ELLA
Indian!

AXTON
How honest are you?

ELLA
I am brutally, harshly honest.

AXTON
First quote that comes to mind: go!

ELLA
"It's rare for a man and woman to
fall equally in love." Eleanor
Roosevelt.

That stymies the moment for a beat, but Axton moves past it.

AXTON
If you were a superhero--

ELLA
Harry, my interview is tomorrow!

AXTON
You don't think superpowers will
come up?

ELLA
Ask me something real.

AXTON
Where do you see yourself in 20
years?

Off Ella, considering, as we END FLASHBACK and...

EXT. WHITE HOUSE - MORNING

A regal shot of the White House as we PAN from the front gates across Pennsylvania Avenue to the Blair House.

INT. BLAIR HOUSE - BEDROOM - MORNING

Ella with breakfast and a briefing book, sits across from her bed, which is unmade only on one side. Sandra enters.

SANDRA
Morning, ma'am. How was last night?

ELLA

He showed me the Oval Office at night. It was... affecting.

SANDRA

Question: Have you turned on the TV or otherwise come across news yet?

(off Ella's concern)

I truly hate this part of the job. I should warn you it's not great, but it's not...

Ella reacts to a news report on her laptop.

ELLA

Shit. Shit!

SANDRA (CONT'D)

...that bad.

Grainy footage of Ella's late night crossing to the Oval.

BRITISH NEWS REPORT (ON SCREEN)

Walker made a late night jaunt to the West Wing last night, presumably to discuss Yemen.

PAXHOUSE (ON SCREEN)

Walk of shame if you ask me.

ELLA

Oh my God, he knows.

SANDRA

He doesn't. He just sounds that way because he speaks fluent misogyny. He's making it about caving on your campaign promise. We need to get to the tent though. Bit more... news.

INT. BLAIR HOUSE - TENT - MOMENTS LATER

Where Ella and Sandra receive a closed-circuit briefing.

ELLA

The insurgents re-entered Yemen?

BRIEFER

They're circling Sana'a. Operating theory is Russia provided cover.

We focus on a map of Yemen and...

MATCH CUT TO:

INT. WHITE HOUSE - SITUATION ROOM - SIMULTANEOUS

Axton reviewing the same map, looking at the same intel.

BEN

Vitaly's testing Paxhouse's theory
of last night's... visit.

AXTON

Doesn't track. If Vitaly thought
the Prime Minister was coming to
our side, he wouldn't test her now.

BEN

Maybe it's not her he's testing.

PRE-LAP: a violinist playing classical music.

BEGIN MONTAGE - VARIOUS

- White House florists inspect bouquets. No roses.
- Chefs prepare dishes in the industrial basement kitchen.
- Men in tuxedos and women in formal gowns make their way through metal detectors.
- A violinist plays in the East Room as tables are set.

INT. WHITE HOUSE RESIDENCE - PRIVATE QUARTERS - EVENING

Axton, in a perfectly-tailored tux, talks with Ben.

BEN

Harry.

(Axton groans)

I haven't said anything yet!

AXTON

But you called me Harry, so I know
whatever you're about to say is
friend advice, and I much prefer
your Secretary of State advice.

BEN

Then consider it both. The
consensus we built in the Middle
East hinges on Iran, which hinges
on Vitaly, which hinges on your ex-
girlfriend not screwing it up!

AXTON

Don't talk about the Prime Minister
like that.

BEN

(humbled)

All I'm trying to say is, for a guy
who's going to be an airport one
day and a hundred high schools, and
a battleship... *that* guy shouldn't
be intimidated.

AXTON

I've never thought about it like
that. I'm a battleship. I'm. A.
Battleship! Doesn't change the fact
that I don't want to get into a
disagreement with our foremost ally
in front of 300 strangers.

Ella enters forcefully, trailed by Sandra and Anita.

ELLA

You don't need to worry about that.
There's nothing to discuss. My
position hasn't, and won't, change.
I will not ease up on Russia and
neither should the most powerful
country on Earth.

It's a big moment - and the whole room stops dead in their
tracks as we PAN down and notice right along with them - the
dress we didn't see in the montage. Ella looks unbelievable.

AXTON

You--

ELLA

Don't you dare undermine the geo-
political stand I just took by
commenting on my dress. I know how
good I look.

AXTON

I'm--

ELLA

A battleship. Let's go.

Sandra can barely contain her pride as they walk past.

INT. WHITE HOUSE - EAST ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

A FORMAL MAN enters from the Cross Hall, announces:

FORMAL MAN

The President of the United States
accompanied by the Prime Minister
of the United Kingdom.

Axton and Ella enter as the room erupts.

INT. WHITE HOUSE - EAST ROOM - LATER

We follow them. Ella watching Axton. Axton watching Ella.

INT. WHITE HOUSE - EAST ROOM - LATER

Axton rises to deliver a toast. Ella is seated at his side.

AXTON

As America entered its gravest test
since the Civil War, and the
globe's future was more uncertain
than ever, Winston Churchill came
to visit the White House. A few
days turned into nearly a month.
And with the help of a not-
insignificant amount of scotch,
right upstairs, a President and a
Prime Minister forged a bond that
broke the back of the Nazi's and
won the war. After Churchill
departed, FDR took to his suddenly
too-quiet office and penned his new
friend a letter. "It's fun to be in
the same decade as you," he wrote.
Eight decades later, I raise my
glass to the new Prime Minister.

He looks to her like there's no one else in the room.

AXTON (CONT'D)

Though our paths may cross only for
one year, I can already tell: It's
fun to be in the same decade as
you.

As the guests CLINK champagne, we find Ella, quietly moved.

INT. WHITE HOUSE - FOYER - LATER

Two glasses are set down. Ella and Axton sit on the red-carpeted marble steps. They both sip their drinks.

ELLA

Do most of your State Dinners end like this, drinking on the steps?

AXTON

No, this has a very Official Dinner vibe. But we could drink upstairs.

ELLA

I'm not sure that's a good idea.

She kisses him on the cheek. They hold a beat. Maybe. Nope.

AXTON

Do you want me to walk you across the street?

ELLA

Why don't we FaceTime Kevin Paxhouse while we're at it?

Axton smiles. So does she. She gets up to go.

AXTON

Is that really it? The optics?

She thinks a beat. Doesn't answer.

INT. WHITE HOUSE - RESIDENCE - MOMENTS LATER

Axton paces impatiently. Enters his bedroom. We hold at the door as he disappears. He returns - passing us with purpose.

INT. BLAIR HOUSE - DOOR TO BEDROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Axton knocks. He catches his reflection in an ornate mirror. He quickly undoes his bow tie. Ella opens the door. He's debonair in this moment.

AXTON

Did you know the White House has tunnels?

From the side, she pulls him in.

INT. BLAIR HOUSE - ELLA'S BEDROOM - MOMENTS LATER

They're close.

ELLA

If you think this will have any effect on my decision with respect--

AXTON

I don't.

ELLA

Because I signed off on new sanctions against Russia no less than ten minutes ago.

AXTON

I understand.

Chemistry says they have to kiss this instant.

ELLA

Does the Secret Service know you're here?

AXTON

Of course. Six of them trailed me through the tunnel, and we crossed two underground checkpoints to get here. Kind of romantic if you think about it.

ELLA

And they know why you're here?

AXTON

I mentioned a tariff emergency.

ELLA

A tariff emergency?

AXTON

It wasn't my finest work. But they don't know.

ELLA

You're not giving appropriate credit to the men and women you entrust with your life. And if you are, you should rethink who you let carry a gun around you.

AXTON

We're going to talk ourselves out
of another moment, aren't we?

EXT. ROOF OF THE BLAIR HOUSE - LATER

Ella and Axton sit atop the roof of the Blair House,
overlooking the White House gleaming against the backdrop of
Washington after midnight.

ELLA

It's endearing.

(beat)

I decided it's endearing that you
slept here your first week in
office.

AXTON

My team didn't believe me.

ELLA

That you slept--

AXTON

That your ex-boyfriend became
President of the United States, and
you really didn't tell anybody.

ELLA

It's not what I wanted for my claim
to fame. That wasn't my plan.

AXTON

I know.

A beat. Axton takes a sip of his drink. Ella breaks in:

ELLA

It was odd watching you get
inaugurated, but also not as weird
as you'd think. There was this
duality. The idea of you - this
global figure - and then there was
the 27-year-old guy I knew who was
just trying to figure out his life.

AXTON

We're different things to different
people.

ELLA

That's right.

AXTON

Question I've always had is what
are we to each other?

Ella breaks the simmering tension.

ELLA

A secret.

AXTON

Sometimes I wonder if running for
office was my way of sending out a
flare. Hoping it'd bring you back
to me, that we'd cross paths in
public life.

ELLA

(after a long beat)

Maybe it's enough, you know, same
decade and all. Maybe merely
existing at the same time as
someone you love can be enough.

AXTON

No. It's not enough.

They're close again. Eyes locked.

ELLA

I wasn't honest with you at Oxford.

Ella looks toward the Washington Monument. She's on the verge
of saying something important, then - disappointed - exhales:

ELLA (CONT'D)

I'm not actually allergic to roses.

AXTON

Please, for the love of God,
pretend you are for the rest of
your life. I drove my staff crazy
about that.

Ella looks ready to cry. Or laugh. She laughs. Then:

ELLA

I think about the way it ended
every day. But if we stayed
together, we wouldn't have this.

(re: the White House)

We wouldn't be here.

AXTON

Maybe we'd be someplace else. Maybe we'd have two kids. A normal life with normal people who aren't around to take a bullet for you, but just to be there.

ELLA

On the other hand, you wouldn't be a future battleship.

AXTON

Legacy's a strange thing to think about without a family.

A quiet beat. Ella starts to laugh to herself a bit.

ELLA

It's funny. We got the two jobs on Earth that make it impossible for us to be together.

AXTON

I guess you were right all along.

ELLA

About what?

AXTON

Fate.

As we PRE-LAP the thunder of...

EXT. JOINT BASE ANDREWS - DAY

The Prime Minister's Royal Air Force plane barrels by us. A series of shots track the plane that takes Ella from Axton. Soaring through the air. Touching down in London at SUNSET.

EXT. WASHINGTON MONUMENT - SUNRISE

The sun crests the tip of the Washington Monument as frenzied news reports - as if from the heavens - bleed together.

AMERICAN NEWS REPORT (V.O.)
Details are sparse, but here's what we know...

BRITISH NEWS REPORT (V.O.)
A cover up at the highest
levels of government.

AMERICAN NEWS REPORT (V.O.)
To hide their sexual
relationship at Oxford.

AMERICAN NEWS REPORT (ON TV) (CONT'D)
The bombshell report, which is
reportedly backed up by scandalous
pictures, comes on the heels of the
Prime Minister's first official
visit. Neither the White House nor
Downing Street has commented.

INT. 10 DOWNING STREET - OFFICE - DAY

Sandra and Ella, shell-shocked, watch in disbelief.

BRITISH NEWS REPORT (ON TV)
Kevin Paxhouse has already called
for Ms. Walker's resignation, her
duty to country clearly conflicted.

PAXHOUSE (ON TV)
She's proven she'll bend over
backwards for the American
President.

SANDRA
If we're going to survive this, I
need to know everything.

ELLA
You do know everything.

SANDRA
I didn't know there were pictures.

ELLA
Neither did I!

SANDRA
And I don't know what happened that
night after the President--

ELLA
Nothing happened. You don't think I
know that would create an actual
conflict of interest?

SANDRA
I do. And we didn't spend months,
alone, working our asses off to get
elected for this to take us down.

INT. PRIVATE STUDY OFF THE OVAL - MORNING

AMERICAN PUNDIT (ON TV)
You have to ask: Did President
Axton get Ella elected?

Axton mutes the television. Picks up the phone. INTERCUT:

INT. 10 DOWNING STREET - OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

ELLA
The whole trip was a risk that
wasn't worth it.

AXTON
The moment we let our past effect
state decisions, like a routine
official visit, then everything
they're saying about us is true.

ELLA
They're not saying the same things
about us, Harry.

AXTON
Come on, Ella. You don't think this
is destabilizing for me, too?

ELLA
Destabilizing, yes; defining, no!
Jesus, Harry, you've always been so
careless about this. I cannot
believe two meaningless months
decades ago are going to cost me
everything.

AXTON
If it makes you feel better to
revise history, that's fine, but--

ELLA
Must be easy to talk about history
when you'll be remembered as the
47th President of the United
States, and I'll go down as the
Prime Minister who fucked him!
This. Wasn't. Worth. It.

They hang up. Each suspended momentarily in their own quiet
isolation - even as the world around them swirls with...

INT. 10 DOWNING STREET - SANDRA'S OFFICE - MOMENTS LATER

YELLING. Sandra on the phone, grapples with Ben and Anita who are on a speakerphone as we intercut with...

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

BEN

We deny. Now! Every second we sit on our hands--

ANITA

We can't say a thing before we know exactly what the pictures are.

BEN

There's no way they have anything.

SANDRA

Sounds like they do. London Live's holding the photos for prime time.

BEN

Shiny press scandal to distract from the policy failings of Ella's G7 stunt, maybe?

SANDRA

Excuse me?! If anybody leaked it, it was your side--

An infuriated Ben responds, goes back and forth with Sandra, but we're focused on Anita. After a beat, she breaks in.

ANITA

They would never have done it, Ben.

BEN

How do you know?

ANITA

I know.

BEN

Then, who did?

BEGIN FLASHBACK

INT. OXFORD DORMS - ELLA'S ROOM - AFTERNOON

Axton's watching TV on the couch. Ella's leaning on him. We're on her a beat. She mutes the TV, sits up.

ELLA

You know how I like to talk about
the uncomfortable thing right away?

AXTON

I am aware of that quirk of yours.

ELLA

Sometimes it's harder than others.

AXTON

I bet it's pretty simple if you say
it out loud and limit yourself...

AXTON (CONT'D)

To twenty words.

ELLA

I got the internship.

AXTON

What? That's incredible!

He kisses her, then clocks that something is really wrong.

AXTON (CONT'D)

OK, you've succeeded in making me
uncomfortable, but I have no idea
why.

ELLA

I'm sorry.

AXTON

For what?

ELLA

For making you uncomfortable.
For... I don't know.

AXTON

Ella, what's going on? Talk to me.

ELLA

The whole thing just reminds me...
this is about to be over.

AXTON

What's over?

ELLA

Us.

AXTON

That's not true.

ELLA

Your program ends in a month. I start the month after that.

AXTON

I'll move to London.

ELLA

And do what?

AXTON

I don't know.

ELLA

That's the wrong answer.

AXTON

I want to be with you. How is that the wrong answer?

ELLA

It just is. I'm the easy way out for you, Harry. The path of least resistance.

AXTON

Ella, you are a lot of things. Easy isn't one of them.

ELLA

You're jumping from degree to degree... to me.

AXTON

Only you could think I'm an idiot for seeking more education.

ELLA

I don't think you're an idiot. I think you're... very good at getting an education.

AXTON

I know you're what's next for me.

ELLA

Maybe that's true, but it doesn't mean the reverse is also true. I'm 22 years old and I need to figure some things out on my own.

AXTON

Bullshit, Ella. You're the most frustratingly figured-out person on earth. You have your entire life--

ELLA

And it's your job to what? Disrupt my plan? Sweep me off my feet?

AXTON

That's your problem. You look at everything as "either or," like being happy inherently comes at a cost. Like my wanting to be with you is a threat to your plan. If you'd get out of your head for one second, you'd see that's not the case. You can do both.

(calming down)

I just want to be a part of what you want.

ELLA

I want some space.

Axton, reaching a breaking point, collects himself a beat.

AXTON

Do you love me?

ELLA

I don't know.

AXTON

That's not how love works. You know.

ELLA

I don't.

AXTON

How can you not know?

ELLA

Because...

AXTON

Because what?!

ELLA

(yelling)

Because I didn't see you!

AXTON

What?

ELLA

When you asked me a couple of weeks ago where I saw myself in 20 years - I didn't see you. I don't see you.

If a person could break into pieces, Axton would in this moment. He stares, crushed, struggling to say anything.

AXTON

I'll make sure no one sees me leave.

He goes, closing the door softly behind him - leaving Ella, broken just the same. We stay with her a beat.

NEWS HOST (PRE-LAP)

This is devastating.

END FLASHBACK

As we cut quickly through a series of news CLIPS:

CLIP 1: A serious NEWS HOST addresses the camera.

NEWS HOST (CONT'D)

If you're just joining us, the world sits stunned tonight as shocking 22-year-old photos threaten the globe's most important geo-political alliance.

CLIP 2: A PANEL debates the repercussions.

PANELIST 1

No doubt damning for both leaders.

PANELIST 2

But Ella Walker has the most explaining to do.

PANELIST 3

I don't see her surviving this.

CLIP 3: A PARTISAN HOST whips up his TV audience.

PARTISAN HOST
To think this lie - this
international conspiracy - would
have continued if not for some
random Oxford student who happened
to come across the incriminating
evidence. Kevin Paxhouse tried to
warn us. Tells you everything you
need to know about President Axton
and *Ella Walker*!

CLIP 4: A former Oxford STUDENT's interviewed on LONDON LIVE.

RANDOM FORMER OXFORD STUDENT
I was cleaning out my flat when I
saw them.

The production cues up a series of PHOTOS. They show the Oxford student huddled in a corner, dry heaving. It's familiar to us.

RANDOM FORMER OXFORD STUDENT (CONT'D)
It was the Millennium. I was kind
of out of my head when my mates
took these. Not the most flattering
photos of me.

In the background, the pictures show Axton and Ella at her dorm door. Three quick shots reveal the damning progression: Ella and Axton getting close, kissing, and entering her dorm.

LONDON LIVE HOST
Considerably less flattering for
the Prime Minister and American
President, I'd say.

INT. WHITE HOUSE - PRIVATE DINNING ROOM

Axton rises - as pissed as the London Live Host is smug.

AXTON
Is Becca briefing?

ANITA
Yes.

He's on the move quickly into...

ANITA (CONT'D)
Sir, where are you going?

INT. WHITE HOUSE - OUTER OVAL OFFICE - CONTINUOUS
Axtон barges through. Anita and Ben behind him.

AXTON
To rip the press to shreds.

BEN
Mr. President--

AXTON
To tell the world the truth. That
none of this is Ella's fault.

ANITA
Slow down. That's literally the
worst thing you could do right now.

As they step down into...

INT. WHITE HOUSE - LOWER PRESS OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

Where Billy sits, stunned, next to the sliding door to the briefing room, which we see via a TV hanging above Billy. Becca is fending off an unruly press corps.

REPORTER (ON TV)
Becca, did the President have
anything to do with Ms. Walker's
divorce?

Axtон moves toward the door, ready to slide it open.

ANITA
What? You're going to give a big
speech? Be Ella's knight in shining
armor?

AXTON
I'm going to do what's right.

ANITA
And what's that? There's no one to
attack. This wasn't Vitaly or
Paxhouse or anybody. It was...
random.

AXTON
All the same, I'm--

ANITA
As your Chief of Staff, I order you
not to go out there.

AXTON
That's not how this works.

ANITA
As a woman then!

She didn't want to say it. Last resort. But it was the truth, and it resonates with Axton who stops dead in his tracks.

REPORTER 2 (ON TV)
Did the Prime Minister use her
romantic relationship to...

Axton retreats. Doesn't say a word. Realizes he's helpless to fix this: because of who he is and because of who Ella is.

INT. 10 DOWNING STREET - OFFICE - DAY

Ella - shattered all over again - watches a TV, which shows:

NEWS REPORT (CONT'D)
Paxhouse continues to build a
coalition as Walker's polls
plummet.

A slimy LATE NIGHT HOST has a laugh at her expense:

LATE NIGHT HOST
I guess the British really are
coming!

As the laughter on screen fades, Sandra enters to find Ella.

SANDRA
Do I need to read you the quote
about "the man in the arena"?

ELLA
There's a reason it's called the
man in the arena. A face "marred by
dust and sweat and blood" is indeed
worthy of credit, but add a little
make-up...

SANDRA
Ella--

ELLA
I spent my whole life trying not to
be defined by men and now it's all
I'll ever be.
(then, realizing)
(MORE)

ELLA (CONT'D)
It's 25 years later and the world
found something else to talk about.

SANDRA
What?

ELLA
Nothing.

Lindsey enters in the background, sorting papers.

SANDRA
Permission to speak freely?

ELLA
Oh, Jesus.

SANDRA
You need to fight this. So what if
the world's talking--

ELLA
Sandra, I'm exhausted. I'm not sure
I even want the job anymore.

SANDRA
Would a man ever say that?

ELLA
You work for a woman.

Sandra leaves. Lindsey, in the background, mumbles something
that goes unheard as she leaves, too.

INT. 10 DOWNING STREET - OFFICE - LATER

A BLURRED PERSPECTIVE. Ella looking through the bulletproof
glass of her office, down to the street. She turns back to
the TV, which shows a WOMAN on the street being interviewed.

REPORTER (ON TV)
What do you think about the scandal
enveloping the Prime Minister?

WOMAN ON STREET (ON TV)
I always had a bad feeling about
her. Now I know what it was!

Ella's struck by this. We hold on her - something inside her
growing - as Lindsey enters the background with tea and an
ANALYST bloviates on TV.

ANALYST (ON TV)
She speaks for so many. A nation
shocked, but maybe not surprised.

As the analyst continues on, Ella's attention turns to:

ELLA
Lindsey. What did you say earlier?

LINDSEY
Ma'am?

ELLA
When I was talking to Sandra, you
mumbled something. What was it you
said?

LINDSEY
I'm sorry, I-- After you said she
works for a woman. She being Ms.
Whetstone, Sandra, I mean... I just-

ELLA
Go on then.

Lindsey musters confidence, looks her boss square in the eye.

LINDSEY
She works for the Prime Minister.
We all do.

Lindsey, pleased to have gotten it out, exits. Ella thinks a beat before - like lighting - calling to:

ELLA
Sandra!

SANDRA
(entering)
Parliament?
(Ella nods)
When?

ELLA
Now's good.

INT. OVAL OFFICE - DAY

Anita enters to find Axton behind his desk.

ANITA

Statement's out to press making
clear this was a six week
relationship 22 years ago. That it
is not and never was ongoing. Now
we work to weather the storm.

AXTON

I want to thank you. For earlier.
For keeping me from making a fool
out of myself. And Ella.

ANITA

Part of the job description.

Axton smiles. Then:

AXTON

I lied to you. When I said we
didn't love each other. That was a
lie. I loved her.

ANITA

I know.

AXTON

I looked into her a few years after
Oxford. Saw she was engaged. Her
plan was right on track. So I spent
years trying to forget her.

ANITA

That's a long time to try and
forget someone.

(then)

I know this is normally the kind of
conversation you'd have with Ben,
but I appreciate--

AXTON

I'm glad to be having it with you.
When this is all over, I want you
and Ben to come down to the island
with me. Bring your families. We
can celebrate eight great years.
Complicated, but great.

Anita nods. Starts to head out.

AXTON (CONT'D)

It's going to be significantly
harder this time.

(off Anita's confusion)

To forget her. Now that she's...

NEWS REPORT (PRE-LAP)
The most famous woman on Earth.

EXT. ESTABLISHING SHOTS - LONDON - DAY

A typically drizzly London day set against the backdrop of:

NEWS REPORT (V.O.)
For all the wrong reasons.

EXT. PALACE OF WESTMINSTER - CONTINUOUS

Ella exits the back of her Jaguar. We barely see her through the hordes of press and umbrellas.

NEWS REPORT (ON RADIO)
Prime Minister Walker will address
Parliament today as the legislature
considers a vote of no confidence.

INT. BRITISH PARLIAMENT - MOMENTS LATER

Parliament. Boisterous. Ella enters. All eyes on her. MPs tiered behind her and in front. Paxhouse smirks as Ella reaches the rostrum. She steps up. Holds a beat before:

ELLA
(counting each word on her
fingers)
There's. Just. Something. About.
Her. I. Don't. Like. Sound
familiar?
(off the room's unease)
I've heard those eight words a lot.
During my career. My campaign. My
preiership. Some of you are
probably thinking it right now!

MPs hoot and holler. Ella gamely smiles along with them.

ELLA (CONT'D)
But what does it mean? What don't
we like? Surely, some of you were
miffed that I used my maiden name
when I first ran for office, even
though I was married. There was
something about it you just didn't
like.

(MORE)

ELLA (CONT'D)

When Madeleine Eaton came back to Parliament just a month after she and her husband had a baby, surely some of you snickered over drinks at the Westminster Arms. There was just something about it you didn't like. And when I ran for PM, a single divorcee, there was just something about it Kevin Paxhouse didn't like.

Paxhouse is less comfortable than before.

ELLA (CONT'D)

It's why he ran against my ex-husband more than me. It's why the basis for the vote he's asking you to take is the identity of my ex-boyfriend. For those of you who've asked whether I might be unduly influenced by the American President: Have you also wondered whether he might be unduly influenced by me? If not, why not?

The room is beginning, slowly, to turn.

ELLA (CONT'D)

Our biases run deep. They're vexing things. No single speech or person is going to wipe away what generations of Kevin Paxhouses have wrought. Instead, I'm simply asking you to recognize them. So the next time you say, "There's just something about her I don't like," you know what you're really saying is: "There's just something about women in politics I don't like."

Grumbling in the crowd.

ELLA (CONT'D)

Which is true. It's upsetting. It's a little threatening. Even though we know everything's not perfect, when somebody different steps up to try and help, we become unnerved. It disrupts the natural order of things. The natural order that instantly compares me to Thatcher, but gives Kevin Paxhouse space to get his bearings.

(MORE)

ELLA (CONT'D)

The natural order that's quick to point to women as "bloody difficult" and men as "mavericks." Women as "nasty" and men as "tough." Here's the thing about this job though. There's just something about it I like. There's just something about it that suits me. It's why employment is up, and the debt is down. It's why we're tackling some of the challenges we've too long ignored. And today, right now, right here, we're tackling one more.

A beat.

ELLA (CONT'D)

I am not a newer Margaret Thatcher. I am not Hillary Clinton with an accent. I am Ella Walker. And I am not going anywhere.

INT. WHITE HOUSE - RESIDENCE OFFICE - DAY

We pull out from a TV playing Ella's speech to find Axton transfixed. A door opens. We're on Axton.

AIDE (O.S.)

Sir, motorcade's on the South Lawn.

INT. THE BEAST - DAY

Axton staring, still transfixed, peering out the window of the Beast - where this all began. The rain pelting quietly against impenetrable steel and ballistic glass. Ben's there.

BEN

Do you want to talk about it?

Axton doesn't answer. He peers out the window - speeding through the rain - to a group of onlookers braving the weather for a glimpse. Axton looks beyond Ben to the driver.

AXTON

Stop. Stop!

EXT. SIDEWALK - DAY

We're with the crowd. In the rain. The Beast slowly reverses into frame. Axton gets out, greets the ecstatic crowd.

Axton sees them, and they see him.

AMERICAN NEWS REPORT (V.O.)

News from across the pond. In a rebuke to Kevin Paxhouse, there will be no vote. Ella Walker has the full confidence of the British Parliament and, it seems, the British people.

EXT. LONDON STREET - DAY

Another woman on the street is interviewed for local news.

ANOTHER WOMAN ON STREET

I don't give a damn who she bonked 20 years ago. Ella Walker is in charge, and I am here for it!

BEGIN MONTAGE - VARIOUS

- Ella, having seen the report on TV, smiles wryly, then gets back to work, signing legislation.
- Axton campaigning passionately. Soaking it up.
- Ella shaking hands with a world leader.
- Axton playing basketball. Billy fouls him. Axton hits the ground. Billy's afraid.

Just as the momentum peaks, we slow down to find...

- Ella, in her faded Oxford sweatshirt, looks to the tattered book Axton bought 22 years ago: "The History of Number 10."
- Axton, alone in the Treaty Room. He eyes the "London" clock. Thinks better of calling and then goes back to work.

END MONTAGE

INT. WHITE HOUSE - LOWER PRESS - DAY

Axton steps down into Lower Press, more composed than his last visit. He approaches the sliding door. Billy's there, very nervous. Anita and Ben stand behind Axton. He looks to them. They nod. Axton's about to open the door. But first he turns and FIST BUMPS Billy.

We're on Billy. That meant the world to him. We find the TV above Billy and see Axton at the podium.

AXTON (ON TV)

Good afternoon. For 11 months, my Administration has negotiated with Iran through Russia. A path of least resistance. That ends today. Crippling sanctions are going into effect against Anatoly Vitaly and his closest advisors.

(a beat)

I've got eight months left, and I'm going to do this the right way. Here's my plan.

CUT TO BLACK:

TEXT ON SCREEN: "EIGHT MONTHS LATER"

INT. WHITE HOUSE - BASEMENT CROSS HALL - MORNING

The elevator dings.

NEWS REPORT (V.O.)

After eight years as President of the United States, Harry Baker Axton was asked this week if he had any last words for the American People. He said simply: Thank you.

The elevator door opens. Axton exits, turns a corner to find:

The entire hallway is lined with STAFFERS. It's impossible not to be overwhelmed by the sheer number of them. Axton begins to make his way down the line. Shaking hands. Hugging.

NEWS REPORT (V.O.)

Today marks his final full day in the White House. His last year saw its share of turbulence, but these final few months have been historically productive for a lame-duck Administration. The President's aides cite progress in Yemen and unprecedented relief to the 18 million under-insured Americans.

His eyes well. He looks like he needs to take a deep breath, but can't. We close in on him, taking it all in, until we find him finally in the...

INT. OVAL OFFICE - NIGHT

His last night. Anita enters quietly.

ANITA

Messages are pouring in from around the world. There'll be plenty of time to look at them, but I thought you might want to see this one. Secret Service almost didn't let it through.

She hands him a small box. We pull away as she departs. Axton begins to open it. We don't see what's inside, instead pulling back - appreciating the full scope of the darkened Oval Office.

... As one President transitions to the past.

EXT. BLUE SKY - DAY

Air Force One, now the Special Airlift Mission, soars.

EXT. ISLAND AIRPORT - DAY

A gorgeous tropical island. The dull roar of jet engines on the tarmac drowns out most other noise. AIRPORT WORKERS make preparations. A SUPERVISOR rolls up in a cart, gives a signal. The workers begin to disperse.

INT. SPECIAL AIRLIFT MISSION - DAY

Axton sits contentedly in the conference room. The small package by his side. The onboard map behind him lets us know: He's crossing the Atlantic...

INT. 10 DOWNING STREET - CABINET ROOM - AFTERNOON

Ella leads a meeting of the cabinet. Sandra, back-benching, reacts to something on her phone. She approaches Ella.

SANDRA

(whispering)

A large plane that looks suspiciously like Air Force One just touched down at Heathrow.

EXT. LONDON STREETS - AFTERNOON

News helicopters track a small caravan of black SUVs snaking their way through the streets of London toward...

INT. 10 DOWNING STREET - CABINET ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

A television now tuned to the news. Ella watches. So does the rest of the Cabinet.

NEWS ANCHOR (ON TV)
An unexpected first visit by the now-former President of the United States.

NEWS ANCHOR 2 (ON TV)
Hundred pounds says I know where he's headed.

ELLA
Excuse me.

As Ella exits and closes the door, the Cabinet members jump to their feet, huddling by a window - looking down.

EXT. 10 DOWNING STREET - MOMENTS LATER

Ella exits the famous black door just as the SUVs stop short. The press - a lot of them - are assembled in their usual spot across the street, having heard the news...

Axton exits his car. Approaches Ella in full view of the press who snap away.

AXTON
I got your package. I think we should talk.

ELLA
I lied to you.

AXTON
(lighthearted)
I'm very confused. You are or are not allergic to roses--

ELLA
I saw you. I saw you, and it scared me.

This means everything to Axton.

AXTON
Can we go somewhere?

Ella looks to the hordes of reporters, cameras. Turns back...

ELLA
Here's fine.

She pulls him in... And for the first time in 23 years, they kiss. The press go wild. They keep kissing. Ella wants the world to see.

INT. 10 DOWNING STREET - MOMENTS LATER

Ella and Harry enter the foyer of Number 10.

ELLA
I'll see if I can get someone to
give you a tour.

Harry smiles, sits down. We hold on him as he places the package by his side. He eyes it. For the first time, we see what's inside.

It's a flare.

Axton smirks. And, with the weight of the world literally lifted, he exhales as we...

SLAM CUT TO:

INT. 10 DOWNING STREET - CABINET ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Ella swings the door open assuredly. No sense of dishevelment. Just polish and poise. She sits before the cabinet. *Her* cabinet.

ELLA
Let's get back to work.

And they do.

CUT TO BLACK.

