

MS. SLOANE

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1/11/2015

FADE IN:

**INT. U.S. CONGRESS - WAITING ROOM - DAY**

**ELIZABETH SLOANE** (48) stares at us contemptuously. Articulate, quick-witted and direct:

ELIZABETH

Lobbying is about foresight. About anticipating your opponent's moves and devising countermeasures. The winner plots one step ahead of the opposition, and plays her trump card just after they play theirs.

She's actually speaking to her attorney, **DANIEL POSNER** (40s), who stands, frustrated, as that wasn't the answer he wanted.

POSNER

Tell me you're going to take this seriously when you're in there.

He motions to the DOOR. An atmospheric BUZZ of anticipation emanates from behind it. Elizabeth is seated, unruffled.

ELIZABETH

It's about making sure you surprise them, and they don't surprise you.

POSNER

You're gonna say that? Come on, again:

(interrogatory)

Could you please describe the nature of your work?

ELIZABETH

(petulant)

Upon the advice of counsel, I must respectfully decline to answer your question, based on my rights under the Fifth Amendment to the United States Constitution.

Posner claps sarcastically.

POSNER

Those words - when you're not taking the oath or confirming details - those words, in that order, are all you're gonna say.

(interrogatory)

Ms. Sloane, on average, would you say you bribed public officials more or less than once a month?

ELIZABETH

Upon the advice of counsel - am I allowed to deviate slightly? On the advice of counsel? On the advice of my attorney? I understand if that last one's too adventurous for you.

POSNER

You do not-

ELIZABETH

This would be a whole lot easier if I could just shout 'Fifth'.

POSNER

No deviations.

ELIZABETH

Can I use a silly voice?

(silly voice)

Upon the advice of counsel...

That's the last straw. Posner deflates, shuts down. A pause. The first time we hear the full extent of the RUCKUS outside the waiting room. Softly:

POSNER

This isn't a joke. They want you behind bars. You make one statement, correct one nefarious allegation, that's it. You waive your right to the Fifth and you're compelled to answer everything. You're being taken to the woodshed in front of the national press, they're gonna rile you so bad they'd make Gandhi wanna cut their tongues out.

ELIZABETH

Daniel. When I take the stand, you'll see nothing but a granite wall.

POSNER

Good.

Elizabeth stands up straight, shoulders back. She makes a minor adjustment to her professional business attire. No one but her would've noticed the near-imperceptible blemish.

Posner glances at his watch.

POSNER (CONT'D)

You're on in five.

(extends hand)

Ms. Sloane. Good luck.

She does not shake.

ELIZABETH

You're on retainer, Mr. Posner, to remove luck from the equation.

With a subtle shake of the head, Posner turns and trudges out. The pervasive BUZZ ratchets up the second the door is opened, and mutes once more as it closes.

Now alone, Elizabeth EXHALES deeply, a valve abruptly unblocked. As if suddenly weak in the knees, she sits back down. Stares into the middle distance; determination extinguished from her eyes.

She snatches her Fendi handbag and rummages in it. Her hands now tremble, nerves taking hold. She finds what she's looking for - a small TRINKET BOX.

She considers it for a moment, hands still fidgeting. Her eyes snap shut. DEEP BREATHS to calm a racing heart.

Breathe. Breathe... *Breathe.*

Definitively, she closes her palm on the box as those determined eyes blink back into existence.

Elizabeth steps to the desk and rockets the trinket box into the trash can. She grabs her handbag and strides out, head held high.

#### **EXT. UNITED STATES CAPITOL - DAY**

A REPORTER gives a live news update.

REPORTER

Elizabeth Sloane is set to take the stand for the first time any moment now; the controversial lobbyist faces charges of bribery and corruption-

#### **INT. CONGRESSIONAL HEARING ROOM - DAY**

SUPER: September 14, 2015

The biggest hearing room available to Congress is packed to the rafters. JOURNALISTS jostle for a better position. The public gallery full of important-looking SUITS. TV cameras pan the room. Every square inch taken. The knives are out.

CROSS-FADE NEWS REPORTS:

ANALYST (V.O.)

... Traditionally a free-market and anti-tax advocate, Elizabeth Sloane has more recently led a full-frontal assault on the Second Amendment, going up against the Gun Lobby in support of the Heaton-Harris Amendment on gun control; a veritable David vs. Goliath battle for the veteran strategist. Congress is set to allege that Ms. Sloane has made a career out of subverting American democracy...

ANCHOR (V.O.)

Allegations abound of dirty tricks, from giant inflatable rodents to hiring movie extras to...

A BARRAGE OF FLASHBULBS greet Elizabeth and Posner as they enter the arena, flanked by FOUR CAPITOL POLICE OFFICERS.

The media go into overdrive.

ELIZABETH

This is tight. You'd think they'd choose a more appropriate venue.

POSNER

Turns out the Redskins had a home game.

Elizabeth takes the stand to face SEVEN CONGRESSMEN. Three sit on either side of the man leading the assault:

Congressman **RON M. SPERLING** (60s, D-Ohio), Chairman of the House Committee on Ways and Means. A doddering old bumpkin, harmlessly paternal, chummy and relatable. He speaks with the solemn authority of someone doing the moral, wholesome bidding of the people.

CONGRESSMAN SPERLING

Please raise your right hand. Do you solemnly swear that you will tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, under pains and penalties of perjury?

ELIZABETH

I do.

CONGRESSMAN SPERLING

Please sit. Will the witness please state her full name for the record?

ELIZABETH

Madeline Elizabeth Sloane.

CONGRESSMAN SPERLING

And could the witness please confirm these details are accurate, aaahhh...  
(fumbles through notes)  
Date of birth, September 18, 1966,  
current address, 4 Heron Court, Chevy Chase Section 5, Montgomery County, Maryland?

ELIZABETH

Correct.

CONGRESSMAN SPERLING

You won an academic scholarship to study Law at Yale University, where you graduated Summa Cum Laude?

ELIZABETH

Yes.

CONGRESSMAN SPERLING

And you were employed by Cole, Kravitz and Waterman LLP for a ten year period between 2004 and 2014, before moving earlier this year to-

ELIZABETH

Eleven year period.

CONGRESSMAN SPERLING

Excuse me?

ELIZABETH

There are eleven years between 2004 and 2014.

That kills his momentum. He refers back to his notes, shakes his head. One of his staffers will pay for that. Elizabeth smiles very faintly. A small victory. Posner shakes his head.

CONGRESSMAN SPERLING

What was the nature of your work at Cole, Kravitz and Waterman LLP?

ELIZABETH

(deep breath)

Upon the advice of counsel, I must respectfully decline to answer your question, based on my rights under the Fifth Amendment to the United States Constitution.

A MUTED GROAN from the press as their expectations are met. She's true to her word. A wall of granite.

CONGRESSMAN SPERLING

Did you, November 29th of last year, accept as a client the government of the African Republic of Kenya, for the purpose of campaigning against the levy of additional Federal duties on the importation of palm oil into the United States?

ELIZABETH

Upon the advice of counsel, I must respectfully decline to answer your question, based on my rights...

And so it continues.

**INT. COLE, KRAVITZ AND WATERMAN LLP - BATHROOM - DAY - PAST**

SUPER: 7 MONTHS PRIOR

Elizabeth, swamped and running on fumes, is followed into the toilets by her young protégé, **JANE MOLLOY**.

JANE

Today's a landmark day, you know why? Because I'm free.

ELIZABETH

Name one thing you can do today that you couldn't've done yesterday.

JANE

Quit my job.

ELIZABETH

You could have done that yesterday, but it would've been stupid.

JANE

But I can quit today and-

ELIZABETH

It'll still be stupid. You clear your college debt and celebrate by enrolling in post-grad and returning to square one?

JANE  
Academia's more my scene.

Elizabeth enters a stall and latches the door.

ELIZABETH  
You didn't follow me into the crapper  
to gloat about freedom. Talk to me  
about the Nutella tax.

Elizabeth reaches into her handbag for a bottle of water. She takes two pills out of the TRINKET BOX we glimpsed earlier, and gulps them down.

JANE  
We're really calling it 'Nutella  
tax'?

ELIZABETH  
Palm oil is a key ingredient in  
Nutella. If the Federal Government  
taxes it at 300%, it'll cost more for  
us to gorge ourselves on it.

JANE  
Isn't palm oil in pretty much  
everything?

ELIZABETH  
We could have called it Soap Tax, but  
the public cares more about Nutella  
than it does soap. Ross did surveys.

JANE  
OK, Estevez, Frame and Albert are in  
the bag, Hodges-

ELIZABETH  
See, that should elicit some kind of  
reaction, but it just doesn't.

JANE  
-is under pressure. The F&B sector  
are organized. They represent 7% of  
the North Carolina economy and  
accounted for two thirds of job  
growth over the last twelve months.  
They're getting loud and he can't  
afford to ignore them.

ELIZABETH  
Sounds like critical mass to me.

JANE  
What are you gonna do?

Elizabeth FLUSHES the toilet (she never went) and exits.

ELIZABETH  
It's time we made our move on the  
sallow little gimp who's sponsoring  
this larceny. Tell the Kenyans  
they're going to host Senator Davis  
on an all-expenses-paid field trip to  
one of their plantations.

JANE

You never washed your hands.

Elizabeth shrugs it off and washes.

ELIZABETH

He'll take the wife and kids, and whatever luxuries the Kenyan government confer on him will stay between he and them. He'll come back hailing their conservation efforts and his bill will die a quiet death.

They exit the ladies' room into --

**INT. COLE, KRAVITZ AND WATERMAN LLP - DAY - PAST**

-- a stuffy, conservative stalwart of the D.C. legal industry. Walk and talk:

JANE

That's legitimate? They can ply him with champagne and truffles?

ELIZABETH

And diamonds, gold watches, and whatever else. The Congressional gift ban doesn't apply to sovereign states.

JANE

So a Congressman can technically get rich by sponsoring bills that screw foreign governments and wait for them to buy him off?

ELIZABETH

That's a little too much work for a class of people who exempt themselves from insider trading laws.

JANE

You see? This is why I'm thinking about post-grad.

ELIZABETH

Jane, we go to school because it prepares us for the real world. You happen to find yourself at the sharp end of the real world at the age of twenty-nothing.

JANE

I'm not so sure I like the 'real world.'

ELIZABETH

So you're going to bury your head in the Socrates?

JANE

You know that Socrates never actually wrote anything.

ELIZABETH

That's beside the point. If you don't like it, strive to change it. Which is what you're already doing, that's why you're here. See? You're exactly where you belong.

Reasoned into a corner, Jane is silenced. Elizabeth is hounded by a young intern (SPENCER).

SPENCER

Ms. Sloane! They're ready for you upstairs.

ELIZABETH

Spencer, did you know that Americans care more about Nutella than they care about soap?

SPENCER

(shrugs)  
OK.

ELIZABETH

(to Jane)  
See that? No reaction.

They enter...

**INT. STRATEGY ROOM - CONTINUOUS - PAST**

Pins stuck in maps, files, boxes, C-SPAN and CNN on the TVs. This is where the ritual morning meeting takes place between Elizabeth and her team of around TEN LOBBYISTS.

Note that these guys are out of kilter with the uptight, wood-paneled ambiance of the firm. Very few of them wear suits; these aren't old boys' club lobbyists. They're a young, ambitious team of varying backgrounds who go harder than anyone else and pay lip service to industry mores.

They continue to work and confer during the meeting, flitting in and out of conversation with their leader. Elizabeth makes her rounds. This happens fast, rapid-fire.

ELIZABETH

Alright, this should be short.

LOBBYIST # 1 (**ALEX**)

You always say it's gonna be short.

LOBBYIST # 2 (**LAUREN**)

It's never short.

ELIZABETH

It is today. Ross, how many are they expecting at the IMF rally?

**ROSS** is the statistical whizz, early 30s -

ROSS

Between five hundred and a thousand.

ELIZABETH

There's a margin of 100%?  
 (hopeful)  
 Does that technically mean nobody  
 might show up?

ROSS

Five hundred is really a minimum. The  
 rest depends on things like weather;  
 seems more people hate banks when the  
 sun's out.

Enter **PAT CONNORS** (40s, Boston-Irish, foul-mouthed and  
 fiercely loyal; the de facto second-in-command).

CONNORS

Liz! It's time we sold Davis on  
 Kenya.

ELIZABETH

I know-

CONNORS

When Hodges falls we've got critic-

ELIZABETH

Critical mass, I'm aware-

CONNORS

We get him a first class ticket, they  
 give him face and he'll drop it.

ELIZABETH

Did you just come from the ladies'  
 room?

CONNORS

I have no idea what you're talking  
 about.

ELIZABETH

Ross, how's the weather forecast for  
 later?

ROSS

They put one of these over the whole  
 of Manhattan.

Ross draws a weather symbol on the whiteboard - a cloud with  
 rain falling and sunshine behind it.

ELIZABETH

What the hell is that?

CONNORS

It's the internationally recognized  
 meteorological symbol for 'we don't  
 have a fucking clue'.

ELIZABETH

Alright, put Metro Talent on notice,  
 we may need reinforcements. And prep  
 non-disclosures.

LAUREN  
We're really gonna use movie extras?

ELIZABETH  
What's the quickest way to end an anti-capitalism protest?

CONNORS  
Throw a bar of soap in the crowd?

ELIZABETH  
Corrupt their message. Their arguments are immature, but some of these people make valid points. The guy shouting about taxpayers subsidizing bankers' failure becomes a lot less credible when he's standing next to a guy styled as a hobo toting a banner that reads "abolish money".

CONNORS  
"Shit is fucked up and bullshit". Best banner at Occupy. Tell me that was one of yours.

ELIZABETH  
(shakes head)  
That was creative way beyond my capabilities.  
(moving on)  
Franklin! Shmallow Cakes?!

**FRANKLIN** is a slightly geeky junior.

FRANKLIN  
Ah - yeah!

ELIZABETH  
So, does sales tax apply to chocolate-covered cakes and chocolate-covered biscuits, or only to one and not the other?

FRANKLIN  
I... Don't know.

ELIZABETH  
You don't know?  
(to all)  
Alright guys, listen up! I'm going to tell you a story.

CONNORS  
Please no.

ELIZABETH  
A priest is giving a young nun a lift home from church one day, and as he's shifting gear, he rests his hand on the nun's knee.

CONNORS  
This is offensive and inappropriate.

ELIZABETH

The young nun looks at the priest and says 'Father, remember Luke 14:10'. The priest withdraws his hand, embarrassed. Next time they stop at lights, the priest rests his hand a little higher up on her thigh, and again, the nun says 'Remember Luke 14:10, Father'. The priest apologizes, 'The flesh is weak', he says. So he drops her off, and when he gets back home, the priest reaches for his bible and flips to Luke 14:10. Anyone know what it says?

Blank stares.

ELIZABETH

What does it say, Pat?

CONNORS

(rolls eyes)

Friend, come up higher; then shalt thou have glory!

Chuckles and sniggers.

ELIZABETH

Know your subject, people! Failure to do so may result in the loss of a golden opportunity.

(to Franklin)

When I see you this afternoon, you'd better be ready to recite that tax code in Esperanto.

(to all, heading to door)

That's it, get to it!

ALEX

What, we're done?

LAUREN

That was short.

ELIZABETH

I said it'd be short.

LAUREN

You always say it'll be short.

ELIZABETH

(exiting; mild disdain)

I don't always have to meet with the prunes.

**INT. COLE, KRAVITZ AND WATERMAN - EXEC OFFICE - DAY - PAST**

The Executive Office is reserved for the most important clients, and feels more like a country club. This morning's occupants are:

**GEORGE DUPONT** (a belligerent 82. Head of Government Affairs and one of the biggest hitters in the whole firm);

**R.M. DUTTON** (poster-boy lobbyist, 50s, a cold and inhuman tactician with piercing blue eyes); and

**BOB SANDFORD** (60s; powerful and well-connected President of the Gun Lobby, and potential golden goose client).

They sit in chesterfield leather seats, waiting.

BOB SANDFORD

So I'm told I should offer my hand.

GEORGE

How d'you mean?

BOB SANDFORD

When we meet? I'm told she doesn't do all the kissy-kissy crap most women do these days.

GEORGE

You two have never met?

BOB SANDFORD

We've attended the same functions, but never been introduced.

GEORGE

In a town this small, how does that happen-

There is a perfunctory KNOCK on the door.

BOB SANDFORD

So I should offer my hand?

R.M. DUTTON

(mildly peeved)

I wouldn't worry about it.

Elizabeth enters.

GEORGE

Ah, here she is. Liz? Bob Sandford, President of the Gun Lobby.

She's quick out of the blocks in offering her hand, a polished and professional evasion of awkwardness.

ELIZABETH

I'm amazed it's taken this long.

BOB SANDFORD

I wanted to introduce myself at the Free Enterprise dinner, I'd done my homework - there I got a glimpse into the enigma that is Liz Sloane. You throw the biggest party of the year, and you're first out the door.

ELIZABETH

Minor crisis on the hill.

BOB SANDFORD

A lesser commander-in-chief would have left that to a soldier, which is exactly why I'm here. Liz, my organization has reservations about the Heaton-Harris Amendment.

ELIZABETH

Really... I'm not overly familiar with it, but I heard the Gun Lobby was responsive to proposals to increase the effectiveness of background checks.

BOB SANDFORD

We are, broadly. But the language here is extensive. Longer delays, some Big Brother-type criminal and mental health database, for use on all sales of firearms? Between father and son? Lifelong friends? Our members will view this as an intolerable fetter on the Second Amendment. We want you to be the one to make sure this bill never sees the light of day.

ELIZABETH

Mr. Sandford, you understand that I deal primarily in taxation and Federal Government interference in free enter-

BOB SANDFORD

We're well aware. But you and your team take no prisoners and get things done. The reputation you've garnered over the past few years, we've been practically waiting for an excuse to hire you.

ELIZABETH

(beat)

As I say, I'm not familiar with the wording, but if this bill will reduce the likelihood of firearms falling into the wrong hands, it may be in your long-term interests to support it.

George and Dutton share a panicked look.

GEORGE

Liz?

BOB SANDFORD

I don't understand-

ELIZABETH

Every time a madman opens fire in public, more support amasses for truly extensive prohibitions on firearms; the more precarious the position of every reasonable gun owner in America.

(MORE)

ELIZABETH (CONT'D)  
 Rigorous background checks should be the Gun Lobby's best friend. Of course, this would entail telling your five million plus members something they don't want to hear. Which will guarantee that you'll be a one-term president of the Gun Lobby. But by my reckoning, it's your best option to secure the future of the Second Amendment. It's just a question of whether you'd be willing to make the personal sacrifice.

BOB SANDFORD  
 Personal sacrifice?  
 (long, uneasy pause)  
 Liz... These are extensive.

ELIZABETH  
 I see. Well, why don't I look at the wording and we'll proceed from there?

**INT. COLE, KRAVITZ AND WATERMAN LLP - DAY - PAST**

Dutton just about keeps pace with George, on the warpath.

GEORGE  
*I'll look at the wording and proceed from there, who the hell does she think she --*

R.M. DUTTON  
 This can be spun. At least they know she's not out to bilk them, that it's their interests she's representing. For the purposes of building trust, that may have been the right tactical move.

GEORGE  
 And do you believe, for one nanosecond, that lobbyist-client bond-building was at the forefront of her mind when she effectively told Bob Sandford to take his business and shove it up his gun barrel?

R.M. DUTTON  
 I was just saying...

Dutton peels off, and George storms into his office, yelling out to his SECRETARY on the way -

GEORGE  
 I want Sloane in my office now!

SECRETARY  
 Ah, Mr. Dupont!

**INT. GEORGE'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS - PAST**

George marches in and is taken by surprise-

ELIZABETH  
(re: Secretary)  
She's good, isn't she?

GEORGE  
You'll look at the wording. Well, I'm sure the President of one of the most powerful representative groups on the hill, will be honored that *Her Majesty* has agreed to look at the fucking wording!

ELIZABETH  
Did you consider that my lack of enthusiasm might demonstrate to them that I'm protecting their int-

GEORGE  
Don't feed me that crap and call it ice cream. What's going on with you?

ELIZABETH  
Remember when you interviewed me? Eons ago. You asked if I could represent a client whose position I vehemently disagreed with.

GEORGE  
So what?

ELIZABETH  
Foolishly, I told the truth, I said 'No.' Not for money, respect, nor professional integrity. I thought I'd just blown the interview. The next two and a half words out of your mouth were 'You're hired'.

GEORGE  
What I didn't tell you is that you're supposed to have grown out of that infantile, save-the-world idealism by your second year!

ELIZABETH  
I do whatever it takes to win because I only fight for causes I actually believe in-

GEORGE  
You're suddenly a proponent of gun control?

ELIZABETH  
The current system is so porous, it floats. The Heaton-Harris Amendment is necessarily extensive to redress it.

GEORGE  
I thought you had to 'look at the wording'-

ELIZABETH  
I know very well what it says.

GEORGE

When did this happen? I don't remember you ever caring one way or the other about gun control?

ELIZABETH

I guess my position solidified somewhere between Columbine and Aurora. Right now, background checks only apply to sales from federally licensed gun dealers. Leaving any two-bit thug or head-case free to procure a thirty-eight special from a gun show, the internet, or his buddy from the Bowl-o-rama. Heaton-Harris puts a full-stop to this stupidity, and about time too.

GEORGE

Christ, Liz, this isn't any old client waltzing through the door, this is the Gun Lobby. No, something happened - someone you know was a victim of a gun crime.

ELIZABETH

Nonsense. I formed an opinion.

GEORGE

You're a champion of the free market. You abhor taxation and frivolous government spending, meddling, patronizing-

ELIZABETH

I would hardly categorize responsible gun control as frivolous-

GEORGE

Kenyans! For Christ's sake, you rep Kenyans!

ELIZABETH

To stop our all-consuming government from looting one of their few sources of income. There's a cause I can get behind. And what's wrong with Kenya? We're about to close Len Davies with a field trip there.

GEORGE

Is that a promise or a threat? I can just picture the good Senator being boiled in a cauldron with all these natives dancing around him.

Elizabeth puts her head in her hands, despairing.

GEORGE (CONT'D)

Get some Fortune 500 clients. Your colorful representations are the cause of a lot of industry back-chat this firm's good name can do without.

ELIZABETH

Could it do without the thirty grand a month retainer?

GEORGE

You bully people, Liz. You're a bully, with your unorthodox tactics and endless supply of inflammatory quotes. Senior Partners are banging on my door fearing for our rep, and that's something I can do without.

ELIZABETH

You're hardly a stranger to "unorthodox tactics". It'd be quicker to list the Congressmen you haven't strong-armed, threatened or blackmailed. I apply tactical, creative, ethical methods, and that's how I sleep at night.

GEORGE

Really, Sloane? Those little pills in your purse are the kind that lull you to sleep?

Elizabeth's eyes narrow. He's crossing a line.

ELIZABETH

My point: we're different animals in the same cage. And I still win, which is why the Gun Lobby just walked through our front door-

GEORGE

And you sent them straight back out of it! You're right! The only reason you and your team of sneaker-wearing ragamuffins are still here is that your arrogant pranks might generate enough buzz to attract clients like the Gun Lobby. Meaning, if you don't personally dedicate yourself to their cause, the partnership won't really have any use for you. Your billings for this firm's reputation is a trade they'd be happy to make. Now go away, re-read that amendment, and start telling the world how goddamn extensive it is!

**INT. DOCTOR'S OFFICE - DAY - PAST**

Elizabeth consults with her **DOCTOR**. She can't get out of the room fast enough. She reads and responds to emails on her Blackberry, fingertips blistering over the tiny keys like a stenographer on coke.

DOCTOR

Any dizziness?

ELIZABETH

No.

DOCTOR  
Nausea?

ELIZABETH  
None.

DOCTOR  
No disorientation at all?

ELIZABETH  
Doctor, I'm fine, really. Whatever it was you gave me did the trick.

DOCTOR  
What time d'you go to sleep most nights?

ELIZABETH  
Well, it varies-

DOCTOR  
What time did you go to sleep last night?  
(beat)  
This morning?

ELIZABETH  
These are busy times.

DOCTOR  
So I see, by your eagerness to get this over with. You don't need a doctor to tell you you're working yourself into an early grave.

ELIZABETH  
The pills did help me sleep.

DOCTOR  
Pills aren't the answer. The long hours and levels of stress you're exposed to would be dangerous for a twenty year-old.  
(beat)  
I'm going to write you a prescription, but it'll only cover you for the next two weeks.

The Doctor scribbles down a prescription and hands it over.

DOCTOR  
I want to see you back here in a fortnight, with your phone off, and eight hours under your belt.

**EXT. DOCTOR'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS - PAST**

Elizabeth strides out at pace. Scrunches the prescription and deposits it in the nearest trash can.

**INT. D.C. FUNDRAISER - NIGHT - PAST**

The ballroom of a five-star hotel is alive with Washington's most powerful. Phoney affectations, champagne and canapes.

**INT. TOILET STALL - CONTINUOUS - PAST**

Elizabeth sits atop a closed commode with her head in her hands, savoring invisibility and relative quiet. A lifetime of 'being on' has taken its toll; like she herself is building towards critical mass.

She reaches into her handbag and flips open her trinket box. She looks tired, burnt out. She considers the four pills inside long and hard, but denies herself. She flips it shut, flushes (she never went), and exits.

**EXT. JEFFERSON HOTEL - NIGHT - PAST**

Elizabeth strides from the hotel on a crisp winter's night, and is caught up by a **PERSISTENT MAN** in his 40s.

PERSISTENT MAN  
Early night?!

She doesn't stop.

ELIZABETH  
If you're here for a quote, you're wasting both of our time.

Neither does he.

PERSISTENT MAN  
I've just watched you extricate yourself from three conversations to use the ladies' room in the space of thirty minutes.

ELIZABETH  
You busted me. I'm incontinent. Go ahead, write it up.

PERSISTENT MAN  
I hope I'm wrong, but one could be forgiven for thinking you're sick of this town.

She looks at him for the first time.

ELIZABETH  
I haven't seen you before. You work for the Post? How'd you get in?

PERSISTENT MAN  
I'd like five minutes of your time.

ELIZABETH  
The walk to my car is three, get to the point.

PERSISTENT MAN  
Word on the hill is that the Gun Lobby approached you to bury Heaton-Harris. And you refused.

ELIZABETH  
I don't comment on 'the word on the hill'.

PERSISTENT MAN

I know there's no way you'd do that... Unless you support gun control. You know why you're good, Liz? Same reason Ayrton Senna was the greatest auto racer of his time. The same reason terrorists are scary.

ELIZABETH

I'm not sure a three-way comparison between myself, a dead race car driver, and Al-Qaeda is a good use of your remaining hundred-and-thirty-five seconds.

PERSISTENT MAN

A terrorist will strap himself to a bomb for his cause. Senna believed God was protecting him from harm, so he threw himself around corners, fully committed. You won't find a mercenary on Earth willing to do either. You're good because you believe in your clients' causes; conviction-lobbying. And belief motivates people in ways money just can't.

ELIZABETH

I said 'get to the point' -

PERSISTENT MAN

The Sloane Ranger, sticking up for corporate America against the thieves on the hill, clawing at hard-earned profit to fund frivolities like healthcare.

Her ears prick up. Her retort is instant and impassioned.

ELIZABETH

Or because private property is the foundation of civilized society, I object to any entity being forcibly expropriated of the product of their labor. And you wanna talk about frivolities, those thieves on the hill just spent nearly a million dollars of someone's hard labor funding research into methane emissions made by dairy cows. I accept a minimum rate of taxation for necessities, but a meddling, all-consuming government constricts freedom, throttles innovation, and subverts the free market. All of which destroy standards of living.

PERSISTENT MAN

(shrugs, nonplussed)

Personally, I'm all for more gun control. Will you admit the present system is unfit for purpose?

ELIZABETH

I remain committed to the Second Amendment.

PERSISTENT MAN

Dildos are illegal in Texas, but Joe Public can walk into a sports store and emerge five minutes later with a shotgun.

ELIZABETH

That would explain the low rate of dildo-related murders in Texas.

The Man LAUGHS heartily.

ELIZABETH

It wasn't that funny.

PERSISTENT MAN

No, but you just proved my point. The mere mention of taxation elicits a libertarian polemic. All I get from gun control is a sarcastic deflection. You do support Heaton-Harris, and you abhor the tactics your leadership would employ in discrediting it.

ELIZABETH

Alright. You have unusual acuity for a member of the D.C. press. What do you want?

PERSISTENT MAN

Your quote.

ELIZABETH

Fine: a *conviction*-lobbyist never cheats; she exposes cheaters.

He scribbles on a notepad.

PERSISTENT MAN

That's a keeper. One more thing - off the record - d'you know anything about the Gun Lobby's opponents?

ELIZABETH

What, Brady? I know they're going to lose because their total budget comes to less than what the Gun Lobby pay to get their shoes shined-

PERSISTENT MAN

What about their lobbyists, Peterson Wyatt? They're a boutique law firm with a bi-partisan Government Affairs division-

ELIZABETH

'Boutique' is a euphemism for 'little fish' and 'bi-partisan' denotes a bunch of hippies in suits, some of whom are mercenary enough to swing right when times get hard.

PERSISTENT MAN

D'you know anything about their President? Guy named Schmidt?

ELIZABETH

Never heard of him. But if the firm is built in his image, he's probably a simpering wuss with a Ph.D in style-over-substance.

PERSISTENT MAN

Got it.

(beat)

I never introduced myself, by the way. Rodolfo Schmidt, President of Peterson Wyatt.

Elizabeth stops. She is, for once, speechless.

RODOLFO SCHMIDT (CONT'D)

What's the matter? Am I not simpering hard enough?

ELIZABETH

(thinking out loud)

Your firm's only twelve years old, you'd think your name would either be Peterson or -

(snaps out)

What's this about?

RODOLFO SCHMIDT

You're pro-Heaton-Harris and it's an open secret you're at war with your firm's leadership.

(beat)

The Brady Campaign want you to lead the fight to pass the bill. Peterson Wyatt will employ you as a consultant, you'll run defense out of our office, and when it's over you're free to choose from any of the D.C. behemoths in line for your signature. This is *their* quote.

He writes down a number we don't see and tears off the piece of paper he scribbled on earlier. She regards it with a smirk, now wise to his strategy.

ELIZABETH

(re: offer)

I don't know if I should be flattered or insulted, Mr. Schmidt, but you clearly have the wrong opinion of me. Especially considering the battle you've got ahead of you.

RODOLFO SCHMIDT

I think my opinion of you is spot-on.

His earnestness halts any immediate retort from her. She studies him.

RODOLFO SCHMIDT (CONT'D)

Don't even think about telling me you don't wanna take a swing at this. Maybe you're the only one in this town who can pull it off. Anyway, it's on the table. I've overspent my three minutes.

Rodolfo walks off, but turns back -

RODOLFO SCHMIDT (CONT'D)

Where's your car?

Long pause. Elizabeth motions back down the street, from where they came.

ELIZABETH

Three blocks that way.

**INT. ELIZABETH'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - NIGHT - PAST**

It's late. All is quiet, dark. Elizabeth downs a tall glass of milk. She puts the bottle back in the fridge, but stops before she closes the door. Considers the milk.

**EXT. ELIZABETH'S HOUSE - NIGHT - MOMENTS LATER - PAST**

Elizabeth carefully sets down a saucer full of milk on her front doorstep. Takes a wistful look around the posh, peaceful neighborhood. The pervasive stillness a touch unsettling.

**INT. ELIZABETH'S HOUSE - NIGHT - LATER - PAST**

Elizabeth sits in an armchair and leans forward. Her eyes dart around the room, she fidgets, unable to turn her brain off.

As if deciding to stop thinking once and for all, she leans back, closes her eyes and ceases all movement. Deep breaths, an attempt to induce sleep.

It's no use. She snaps out of it quickly, turns on a lamp and snatches a book next to her - John Grisham's *The Litigators*. Starts reading from her bookmark (she's not far in), but discards it in no time. She's wired. An idea has taken hold.

She glimpses around her place. It's not a home; more a warehouse for files, boxes, and neatly-organized work-related clutter. No family portraits. No photographs of a husband or children.

On hearing a faint MEOW, Elizabeth glances out the front window. A stray cat and two kittens lick the milk she set out. Elizabeth lets out a SIGH, as if this provides her some small measure of comfort. She catches her reflection in the window. Ruffled and sleepless.

She removes something from her pocket - the torn-off SHEET OF A NOTEPAD given to her by Rodolfo Schmidt. She considers it - then grabs her cell and makes a call.

ELIZABETH (INTO PHONE)  
Jane, hi -- I know what time it is,  
just listen. I had a thought... So,  
if Socrates never wrote anything, how  
is it that anyone has ever heard of  
him?

(beat)  
Yes, I'm fine. Look, we need to  
meet... No, as in, now.

**INT. COLE, KRAVITZ AND WATERMAN - STRATEGY ROOM - DAY - PAST**

The morning meeting in full swing. Elizabeth quizzes her young  
charge, Jane:

ELIZABETH  
They're staying at the Lantana?

JANE  
Yes.

ELIZABETH  
That's the one on the beach?

JANE  
Yes!

ELIZABETH  
OK, make the bookings. Cover it out  
of the pooled account.

New fish Franklin is within earshot.

FRANKLIN  
Is that OK? Technically, I mean?

ELIZABETH  
It's fine. Don't worry about it.

FRANKLIN  
It's just - the Kenyan government are  
paying for this, right? That's how we  
get around the gift ban. The pooled  
account's, well... Pooled. There's  
money in there from the F&B  
Association, Wal-Mart, anyone with an  
interest in selling anything with  
palm oil in it.

(off their surprise)  
I majored in Finance, I go over  
accounts when I want to look busy-

ELIZABETH  
So you'll know the Kenyans'  
contribution to that account is big  
enough to cover Senator Davis'  
expenses ten times over and have  
change for a small Caribbean island.  
Do I look unduly concerned?

FRANKLIN  
OK.

Connors steams in, wolfing down a chocolate muffin.

CONNORS

George told me what happened with the Gun Lobby, are you retarded?

ELIZABETH

No, but coming from someone who just walked in an hour late, looking like he pulled his face out of a cow pie, that's mildly amusing.

CONNORS

That wasn't funny and I don't get it.

ELIZABETH

Pray tell, why are you eating a chocolate cake for breakfast? Have you no shame?

CONNORS

It's a muffin, you never ate a muffin for breakfast?

ELIZABETH

A muffin, let me see... Eggs, flour, sugar, cocoa powder, milk, chocolate. Sounds exactly like a cake, but of course no civilized person could ever eat chocolate cake for breakfast. So some bright spark in marketing divvied up yesterday's leftovers, re-branded them as 'muffins' and started hawking them as breakfast food.

CONNORS

You've lost your mind-

ELIZABETH

Franklin, are you getting this? 'Cause I'm really talking to you.

FRANKLIN

Huh?

ELIZABETH

Shmallow Cakes aren't really cakes. They're marshmallow paste sandwiched between two biscuits covered in chocolate. America's fourth favorite snack is 80% graham cracker. And while our ever-rational tax code deems cakes luxury items and hits them harder, biscuits are *obviously* necessities, and exempt. Are you getting this?

FRANKLIN

What?

ELIZABETH

Have Shmallow Cakes re-designated as biscuits, argue the 'cake' in the name is merely marketing puff.

(MORE)

ELIZABETH (CONT'D)

You'll need evidence in court, so have a team of scientists chemically analyze their composition and opine they are in fact 80% biscuit and zero percent cake. That's how you win.

FRANKLIN

You knew that all along?

ELIZABETH

You'd have got there eventually.

FRANKLIN

Then why are you telling me this?

ELIZABETH

In case you're not coming with me.

CONNORS

What the hell's going on?

ELIZABETH

Everybody, listen up! As you may have heard, I took a meeting with the Gun Lobby a week ago, and advised them to support the Heaton-Harris Amendment.

(deep breath)

Effective immediately, I've decided to leave Cole, Kravitz and Waterman and take up station as a consultant for the Brady Campaign at Peterson Wyatt.

Muted GASPS. Raised eyebrows. Nobody saw this coming.

ELIZABETH (CONT'D)

In negotiating terms, I secured places on my team for everyone in this room with no change to your current rates of compensation. Now who's with me on this? Pat?

CONNORS

I just walked in an hour late 'cause I've been assuring the Gun Lobby that we're the right firm to lead the fight against Heaton-Harris. We just got the green fucking light.

ELIZABETH

Are you saying I should put you down as a maybe?

CONNORS

You can't possibly win this.

ELIZABETH

Who's with me?

Silence. Nobody dares make the first move... Until:

ROSS

I'm with you.

Ross, the statistician, goes and stands behind Elizabeth.

CONNORS  
Ross, come on, I need you.

ROSS  
She needs me more.

Franklin follows suit.

FRANKLIN  
Guns frighten me.

CONNORS  
The fuck is this? Jerry Maguire?!

ALEX  
You've seen Jerry Maguire? That's not gay at all.

CONNORS  
It's because I'm not gay that I've seen Jerry Maguire, you fag prick.

MURMURS. Lauren and Alex defect to Elizabeth's side.

ELIZABETH  
So, Sloane et. al. versus Connors, and who else? Ramirez. How many Tec-9s do you own again?

LOBBYIST # 3 (**RAMIREZ**)  
Enough to defend my property. Plus two more to piss off lefties.

ELIZABETH  
Travis, Wickham and Moore, the God-squad, the Bible says thou shalt not kill, yet you openly endorse instruments of death.

LOBBYIST # 4 (**TRAVIS**)  
For some silly reason I thought you hated government interference in people's lives.

ELIZABETH  
Silly indeed. I hate unnecessary interference; those bits of interference which prohibit private citizens from purchasing anti-tank ordnance, or weapons-grade plutonium, I can live with.

She turns to Jane, who sits motionless, staring into space.

ELIZABETH  
Jane...  
(no response)  
Jane?

JANE  
I don't know where I stand on this.

ELIZABETH  
I do, you stand with me.

CONNORS

Seriously kid, go. I couldn't care less.

JANE

Actually... The Gun Lobby will need someone to tally their vote count in Ross' absence... I'll stay.

ELIZABETH

Jane!

JANE

You were right before. I'm at one of the best firms in the city. People come and go. I won't let that affect my career here. I'll miss you, but the 3am wake-up calls? Not so much.

CONNORS

No shit, I take it back. Welcome aboard.

ELIZABETH

(wounded)

Fine. And for what it's worth, you've some way to go until your vote counts are anywhere near as accurate as Ross'.

(snaps to Ross, who beams)

Don't let it go to your head.

(his smile dies; to all)

I'm off to say my goodbyes to the bean-counters. Ordinarily, I'd say good luck, but-

CONNORS

You're going down harder than Bin Laden.

ELIZABETH

(exiting)

Your ass is mine, punk.

**INT. CONGRESSIONAL HEARING ROOM - DAY - PRESENT**

Back in the hearing, Elizabeth is stone-faced, but fidgets slightly. The wall of granite slowly being chipped away.

We now recognize some of the faces in the public gallery: George Dupont, Connors, Rodolfo Schmidt.

Congressman Sperling is doddery and sanctimonious as usual.

CONGRESSMAN SPERLING

We'll come back to the African Republic of Kenya later, but...

(sickly pious)

You see, what troubles me is the amount of influence you had... We've seen communications from senior figures in Washington; it's like you had this aura, nobody dared get in your way.

(MORE)

CONGRESSMAN SPERLING (CONT'D)  
 Upstanding, democratically elected  
 officials feared you, a lobbyist,  
 could destroy their careers with a  
 snap of your fingers, I...

He stops, looks down, shakes his head in disbelief.

CONGRESSMAN SPERLING (CONT'D)  
 Folks whose careers took decades of  
 hard work, they... Is this reputation  
 something you actively cultivated,  
 Ms. Sloane?

ELIZABETH  
 Upon the advice of counsel, I must  
 respectfully decline to answer your  
 question, based on my rights under  
 the Fifth Amendment to the United  
 States Constitution.

CONGRESSMAN SPERLING  
 You see, it's bad enough one person  
 having that much influence, but if  
 they're out of control - if she has a  
 problem, an addiction... Which  
 precludes her from exerting her  
 influence even-handedly... It'd be  
 like the ship of American politics  
 being steered by a drunk. Do you, or  
 have you ever had, any problems with  
 substance abuse, Ms. Sloane?

Elizabeth's eyes narrow. Unsure what he's getting at.

ELIZABETH  
 (sharply)  
 Upon the advice of counsel, I must  
 respectfully decline to answer your  
 question, based on my rights under  
 the Fifth Amendment to the United  
 States Constitution.

The media pick up on her tone and WAKE from their slumber.

CONGRESSMAN SPERLING  
 I understand you have difficulty  
 sleeping? We subpoenaed medical  
 records, you're a long-time sufferer  
 of chronic insomnia. You regularly  
 work over sixteen hours a day. So you  
 suffer from a lot of fatigue, but  
 can't get off to sleep, is that  
 accurate?

Elizabeth is indignant, her privacy violated. Thrown by this  
 line of questioning, she stumbles over her wording:

ELIZABETH  
 Upon the advice of counsel, I  
 respectfully - I must respectfully  
 decline to answer your question,  
 based on my rights under the Fifth  
 Amendment of the United States  
 Constitution. To the Constitution.

(MORE)

ELIZABETH (CONT'D)  
 (under breath)  
 Whatever.

The media STIR more, sensing the next chapter of the scandal.

CONGRESSMAN SPERLING  
 You were prescribed multiple courses of benzodiazepines, but according to the deposition of one of our witnesses, you've been procuring, off-prescription, and against the advice of your medical practitioner, a course of psycho-stimulants, with the aim of keeping you awake and alert for longer. Is this correct?

MURMURS in the public gallery and among the media. Elizabeth aims a venomous stare at George Dupont, knowing him to be the only one with that information. He sits up straight and puffs out his chest, revelling in vengeance for her betrayal.

Her next death-stare falls on Posner. He can only endure it, helpless. He has no grounds to object.

Flashbulbs POP in her face.

CONGRESSMAN SPERLING (CONT'D)  
 Ms. Sloane?

ELIZABETH  
 (reeling it off, fast)  
 Upon the advice of counsel, I must respectfully decline to answer your question, based on my rights under the Fifth Amendment to the United States Constitution.

CONGRESSMAN SPERLING  
 OK... Returning to this business in the African Republic of Kenya-

ELIZABETH  
 (involuntary blurt)  
I am not a drug addict and this line of questioning has no relevance to this case.

MEDIA FRENZY. A barrage of FLASHES. Her silence broken. Posner bows his head. She's blown it.

ELIZABETH (CONT'D)  
 (fast and angry)  
 My medication doesn't affect my judgment any more than a double espresso, and speaking of intoxication, I can recite from memory a list of 'upstanding, democratically elected' Congressmen who have voted on legislation while severely inebriated. And just so you know, I think, by now, everyone in this room is fully aware, and in no danger of forgetting, that Kenya is a republic which happens to be situated on the continent of Africa.

A long pause. All eyes, all cameras, on Elizabeth. She deflates a little, the consequences of that outburst now weighing on her mind.

Congressman Sperling smiles a cunning, near-imperceptible smile. A huge victory. There's a lot more to this guy than his fuddy-duddy demeanor.

CONGRESSMAN SPERLING

Ms. Sloane. Welcome to the party.

**INT. U.S. CONGRESS - WAITING ROOM - DAY - PRESENT**

Posner is furious. Elizabeth remains phlegmatic throughout.

POSNER

Five years, was it really worth it?  
Five years minimum-

ELIZABETH

What's five years-

POSNER

All for some puerile quip about Kenya being in Africa, can't you see that whole construct was designed to -- and it worked!

ELIZABETH

You want to tell me what five years is?

POSNER

You fell for it! The smartest operative on the hill just got played by Grampa Simpson!

ELIZABETH

Is it how long this recess will feel like?

POSNER

It's the going rate for perjury before Congress. Which, now that you've thrown the Fifth out the window, anyone who wants you in the ground - and that's a lot of people - they're hard at work, dedicating the sum total of their creative and intellectual efforts to catch you in a lie.

ELIZABETH

What if I stay silent?

POSNER

Well, that's a good idea! Shit, why didn't your lawyer think of that?!

ELIZABETH

If I simply refuse to answer-

POSNER  
They'll throw you in jail for  
contempt of Congress. You've just  
blown this thing wide open.

He paces, agitated. Elizabeth looks at him, smiles.

ELIZABETH  
Easy, Daniel. You're starting to look  
like you care.

POSNER  
I don't care about you any further  
than I can throw you. I work for the  
one ethical lobbying practice on the  
hill, and I wind up defending the  
poster-child for the most morally  
bankrupt profession since faith  
healing. Rest up, Sloane. You're  
gonna need it.

Posner snatches his briefcase and storms out. Elizabeth  
remains seated, alone in the large, empty room.

ECU: she clamps her palms together, her trembling hands  
struggling to settle.

**INT. LUXURY HOTEL - LOBBY - NIGHT - PAST**

SUPER: 6 MONTHS, 2 WEEKS PRIOR

Elizabeth strides into the lobby, talking on her Blackberry.  
She makes a beeline for the elevators without stopping to  
admire the decor. She knows her way around this place.

ELIZABETH (INTO PHONE)  
We need to get to it right away,  
office space or not.  
(beat)  
I think you'll find I started working  
for you the night we met.

**INT. WELL-APPOINTED HOTEL ROOM - NIGHT - PAST**

Elizabeth opens the door, but stops dead in her Ann Taylors.  
Her glare cuts into --

**FORDE**, sprawled out on the bed. It's immediately obvious he's  
a different animal to the D.C. crowd we've met thus far. 30s,  
rugged good-looks, easy smile and natural confidence. Bourbon  
glass resting on his toned chest, above hard-earned abs.  
Jeans' top button unhooked. His Southern accent drawls like a  
dulcet tune.

FORDE  
Evenin', ma'am.

ELIZABETH  
What happened to the usual guy? Mark.  
If that's his real name.

FORDE  
Mark's moved on. You can call me  
Forde.

ELIZABETH

Is that your real name?

FORDE

Is to you. What do I call you,  
gorgeous?

Elizabeth scoffs at the flattery, enters the room. She peers around, suspicious.

ELIZABETH

Nothing.

FORDE

Alright, Nothin'. You a politico, or  
one'a these corporate-types? And what  
brings a fine lady like you to room  
409?

ELIZABETH

Not the conversation.

She motions to a tumbler of bourbon on the bedside table.

ELIZABETH (CONT'D)

How much have you had to drink?

FORDE

With a free minibar, I'd say not  
nearly enough.

He salutes her and drains his glass. Elizabeth inhales.

ELIZABETH

You know, you're not allowed to smoke  
in here.

FORDE

You're not allowed to buy company in  
here, yet here you are-

ELIZABETH

Smoke is detectable. It could draw  
attention. It's unprofessional.

FORDE

OK. Corporate-type. Lawyer maybe.

ELIZABETH

If we're to go forward, I require  
certain standards of-

FORDE

Agency rules, Ms. Nothin'. Payment in  
cash, we're not seen in public,  
unless that's what ya want, and I'm  
the only one to ever lay eyes on you  
or know this li'l party ever  
happened. Tonight, that's with half a  
minibar down my gullet.

(beat)

'Course, I understand if you were...  
Lookin' for somethin' else.

A rare moment of vulnerability. Elizabeth looks him over.

ELIZABETH  
You'll do just fine. Let's get to the point.

All business, Elizabeth unbuckles the belt on her pantsuit and fastidiously lays it over the back of the chair.

**INT. PETERSON WYATT - STRATEGY ROOM - DAY - PAST**

A very different meeting room in a modern, open plan, and somewhat pretentiously "progressive" neo-industrial office. Art installations made from used milk bottles, etc.

The four defectors from Elizabeth's team sit awkwardly with FOUR of their new COLLEAGUES (30s, three female, all Democrats). They've said their hellos, sat down (in their factions), and are now struggling for small talk.

PETERSON WYATT LOBBYIST (**BRIAN**)  
So... What d'you guys think of the new office?

FRANKLIN  
It'll take some getting used to.

ROSS  
I kinda like it. Reminds me of Willy Wonka's chocolate factory.

ALEX  
That's funny, you remind me of an Oompa Loompa.

ROSS  
The vending machine downstairs is weird. It wouldn't dispense my beverage unless I told it my gender and age range.

PETERSON WYATT LOBBYIST (**ESME**)  
The vending machine company sells our personal details to Big Advertising. I already lodged a complaint with upper management.

ROSS  
It's OK, I just lied.

ALEX  
What, you told it you're an adult male?

PETERSON WYATT LOBBYIST (**CLARA**)  
Why are you so horrible to him?

ALEX  
It's polite to reciprocate.

LAUREN  
(checking phone)  
Davis dropped the Nutella Tax.

FRANKLIN  
When did this happen?

LAUREN

I just got it-

PETERSON WYATT LOBBYIST (**CYNTHIA**)

The tax on palm oil? You're the ones who killed it?

ROSS

Dead with the dodo.

CYNTHIA

Along with how many other unique species in the Kenyan rainforest?

FRANKLIN

(to Ross)

Not your greatest analogy there.

ROSS

(to Cynthia)

I guess that's for them to decide, after all, it is, you know, their country.

ESME

D'you know how much pollution their slashing and burning pumps into the atmosphere?

ROSS

Less than 0.2% of global greenhouse gas emissions. Would you like to know by how many orders of magnitude the American industrial revolution eclipsed them, so we could grow fat off all that Nutella?

ESME

I'd love to. But I know you can't tell me, 'cause it's not even close to quantifiable.

ALEX

Oh God, it's started already.

CLARA

Are the rumors true?

LAUREN

Elaborate.

CLARA

Sloane-zilla. Is she the personification of an ice cube?

ALEX

Melts at room temperature and gave Canadians a national pastime?

CLARA

Frigid and heartless.

ROSS

She pees standing up. I don't even do that.

ESME

Do you think before you speak?

CYNTHIA

Why don't we just focus on the future? OK?

ROSS

Let's.

Silence makes an instant return. People check their phones.

Backs straighten as Elizabeth and Rodolfo enter.

RODOLFO SCHMIDT

I was thinking we start by going round the room and introducing our-

ELIZABETH

Let's spare ourselves the tedium and get to it. If you want to break the ice, do it with insight. Whatever our differences, political or otherwise, we're all here to ensure safe passage of the Heaton-Harris Amendment into Federal law. How do we do it?

A brief silence.

ESME

Realistically, we don't. We fight them as hard as we can, build a strong base of support, so we have a better chance when they table next year's Heaton-Harris, or the one after that.

ELIZABETH

While I appreciate your pragmatism, I didn't just move across town with the aim of losing as slowly as possible. Name and seniority?

ESME

Esme Manucharian, nine years.

ELIZABETH

Manucharian. I've heard that name.

RODOLFO SCHMIDT

Esme's our authority on gun control. When it comes to facts and figures, she has no equal.

Ross' note scribbling practically does a record scratch. That needles him.

ELIZABETH

You led the fight to preserve the concealed carry ban in Illinois.

ESME

Ultimately unsuccessfully, but yes.

ELIZABETH

Esme. Why are we going to lose?

ESME

For every dollar we can donate in campaign contributions, you know how much the Gun Lobby can donate?

ROSS

Thirty-eight.

ESME

Thirty-eight.

ELIZABETH

(grins at rivalry)

So Congressmen bow to money, but why? It's not going into their own accounts, that'd be bribery.

CYNTHIA

Like what the Kenyans just did to Senator Davis?

ELIZABETH

That was legal, sovereign-backed bribery, but yes.

(beat)

Every rational entity protects their interests. The priority of a Congressman isn't representing the people, it's keeping his ass in office. Campaign contributions are a means to that end, which is why Congressmen sell their votes to get them.

CYNTHIA

That is so cynical.

ELIZABETH

There is no cynicism. Only a word used by Polly-Annas to denote an absence of the naivety they so keenly exhibit.

RODOLFO SCHMIDT

(to Elizabeth)

You settle in fast.

ALEX

So Congressmen bow to money so they can get re-elected, and we're shit out of money.

CLARA

So we do it the old-fashioned way, by direct appeal to voters.

Elizabeth regards Clara with a fleeting glance. But still more than any one person (bar Esme) has received from her.

ELIZABETH

Thank you. The average lobbying fight is won rather plainly: greasing the right Congressmen at the right moments.

(MORE)

ELIZABETH (CONT'D)

But to win here, against these odds, will require us rounding those bases many times over - and so will our strategy...

(CLAPS hands)

Everybody up! We're going mobile.

RODOLFO SCHMIDT

We are?

ELIZABETH

This is about appealing to Jane and Joe Public. It may be a political battle, but it needs to be fought on the street. We approach this, not as Washington insiders, but as normal Americans.

RODOLFO SCHMIDT

You're going to try to be normal?

LAUREN

(sotto voce)

This I have to see.

ELIZABETH

You can work in this sanitized sardine can if you want. I'll be at America's favorite pastime with 40,000 of our marks.

**INT. CAMDEN YARDS BASEBALL STADIUM - SKYBOX - SUNSET - PAST**

An Orioles game is well underway as sunset crayolas the Baltimore skyline. The ten members of the team look out on 40,000 spectators from a private skybox.

ELIZABETH

Campaign contributions don't create binding obligations, they're debts of honor. If, on polling day, a Congressman thinks a vote against will be political suicide, he'll betray the Gun Lobby to save his ass even if they funded surgery to whiten his teeth.

RODOLFO SCHMIDT

A skybox? At a hundred times the price of an average ticket? This is your attempt at being *normal*?

ELIZABETH

We can talk shop in relative privacy. I'm compromising.

ESME

However much we spend to get the public on our side, the Gun Lobby can afford to drown us out.

ELIZABETH

And here's the beauty of it; the reason we have any chance at all: we don't need to spend to get the public on our side. They already are. There are 40,000 people in this stadium. Polls show that 32,000 of them favor gun control, just not vehemently enough to change their vote over it, and further objurgate the painfully-obscure language of the Second Amendment.

FRANKLIN

So we spend to make gun control the deal-breaker.

ELIZABETH

Exactly. America has endured 31 school shootings since Columbine, more than double the amount in the rest of the world put together. Yes, Franklin. We make guns a deal-breaker. We start a movement, build a consensus, do everything we can to make it snowball. That's how we win.

Down on the field, players trudge off for a time-out.

Sixpence None the Richer's *Kiss Me* BOOMS around the stadium.

ROSS

This is moot, but just so you know, baseball isn't America's favorite pastime anymore. Statistically, I mean. The NFL has polled-

ELIZABETH

I already knew that, and it's not moot. The NFL season kicks off little over a month before Heaton-Harris goes to vote. Average attendance of 67,000, tens of millions watching on TV.

The romantic music has the effect of making Elizabeth more aggressive.

ELIZABETH (CONT'D)

This is where Jane and Joe reside. I want pro-Heaton-Harris ads on the big screen, I want TV spots; the public don't pay heed to politicians, they listen to their heroes. We get hold of sports agents and brow-beat them into having their charges pledge support for increased gun control-

She stops, as some of her team become distracted.

LAUREN

(to Clara)

Ah, guys...

Horror washes over Clara's face, as she looks to --

THE JUMBOTRON. KISS CAM has homed in on her, standing beside Alex. He smirks, relatively unruffled. Clara pleads with the big screen as though it can understand her.

CLARA

No, no, we're not - we just met!

The crowd grow restless as Alex and Clara stand, not kissing. Playful BOOS begin to ring out. This is awkward.

ALEX

Ah, what the hell...

Alex grabs Clara and pulls her close in front of him, tilts his head to the right. From the camera view on the giant screen, they appear to be kissing.

NEW ANGLE - they are, in fact, not quite touching. Alex closes his eyes and expertly caresses her cheek with his fingertips.

ALEX (CONT'D)

(whisper)

Tilt your head ever so slightly to the right.

She does. The crowd GOES NUCLEAR. Alex pulls back, smiles. Kiss Cam moves on to the next unsuspecting couple.

FRANKLIN

Very well saved.

Clara, despite her best efforts, looks genuinely impressed.

ALEX

(cocky bastard)

You wanna try the real thing.

ELIZABETH

Are you done? Can we get back to it now?

ROSS

So much for 'relative privacy'.

RODOLFO SCHMIDT

Should've stayed in the office.

**INT. GUN LOBBY - BOB SANDFORD'S OFFICE - DAY - PAST**

GUNS. Pictures of guns. Model guns. A golden gun. He's a 200-pound bull and you wouldn't mess with him anyway, but Bob Sandford's office isn't designed to make you feel welcome.

He leans back in his executive chair, King of his empire. Even the hardened Connors is unusually subdued.

BOB SANDFORD

We're a powerful institution, Pat. There's over five million of us. And we're armed. Now I'm not saying we set out to intimidate, but when the Gun Lobby wants to meet you, you damn well meet.

CONNORS

Who are we talking about here?

BOB SANDFORD

Wickman, Democrat, Wisconsin. Always seems to be unavailable to take our call.

**INT. COLE, KRAVITZ AND WATERMAN - STRATEGY ROOM - DAY - PAST**

ECU ON A FLAT-SCREEN TV: News coverage of a press conference. A grief-stricken father, **JOEL PATTERSON**, sniffles and fights tears as he speaks.

JOEL PATTERSON (ON TV; FILTERED)

We've seen this a million times before. This speech. This situation. It seems so far away. You never think this is going to be you giving it. My girls died...

He takes a long pause, trying to compose himself.

Connors, R.M. Dutton, and Jane watch the TV. There is genuine sympathy in the eyes of the latter.

CONNORS

(rolls eyes; to himself)  
Jesus Christ.

JOEL PATTERSON (ON TV; FILTERED)

We could have stopped this...

On the TV, Joel breaks down in tears. It's rather heartbreaking. However, R.M. Dutton is nonplussed.

R.M. DUTTON

We get the idea.

Jane clicks off the TV.

JANE

Joel Patterson, high school history teacher. There was a renewed wave of anti-gun sentiment in Wisconsin after his wife and two children were shot dead in a mall.

CONNORS

That was months ago-

JANE

It hasn't died down. Big media still runs coverage on him. Mothers against guns marches, there was an online pledge to vote against anyone who opposes gun control-

CONNORS

This is her. Public outrage after a gun attack lasts around a week per casualty, this whole Pattinson story should be in the ground by now.

JANE  
Patterson.

CONNORS  
 Huh?

JANE  
 Their name. The Patterson family.

CONNORS  
 I don't give a shit if they were the  
Partridge Family. She's revived this.

JANE  
 Actually, she's cultivated it. Public  
 support for gun control's up 8% in  
 the last two weeks alone. Wickman's  
 avoiding the Gun Lobby 'cause if he  
 gives them what they want, there's a  
 very real chance he won't make it  
 through fall.

R.M. DUTTON  
 Why didn't we close him earlier?

CONNORS  
 It's Wisconsin, it's not exactly...  
 Where is she now?

**INT. PETERSON WYATT - STRATEGY ROOM - DAY - PAST**

The team hard at work, making calls, crunching numbers.

An entire wall is dedicated to bio mugshots of Congressmen,  
 with red slashes over some and green ticks over others. Some  
 have no markings. This is their vote count.

Ross stands and admires it with Cynthia, Franklin and Esme.

ROSS  
 217's the magic number. 217 gets us a  
 majority-

CYNTHIA  
 I thought 218 is a majority-

ESME  
 (cutting in)  
 In a House of 435, it is, but three  
 vacant seats gives us 432, meaning  
 217-215 is the smallest possible  
 winning majority.

ROSS  
 As. I. Was. Saying...  
 (eyeing Esme)  
 By my reckoning, the Gun Lobby has  
 191 votes pretty much locked -  
 (motions to wall)  
 That's this side. I'd say we have 183  
 locked over on this side. That leaves  
 58 who are in play: these fine  
 gentlemen in the middle. Heaton-  
 Harris provisionally makes it to the  
 floor in 179 days.

(MORE)

ROSS (CONT'D)

The good news is, if we lock down 34 of these money-sucking leeches, we're over the line.

FRANKLIN

The bad news being that the Gun Lobby are rich beyond our wildest dreams?

ROSS

There is that-

CYNTHIA

Or that it's not a whole lot of time to steal 34 votes from the most powerful lobby in D.C.

ROSS

That too-

ESME

What Ross is fumbling around is, they only need 26.

ROSS

(finally)

Yes.

Elizabeth marches through the office, on the phone:

ELIZABETH (INTO PHONE)

No, we need the media there, that's the whole point. It has to be recorded on celluloid, ready to be trotted out should he ever think about backing down - hold on -  
(calling out)  
Ross?! You get it?

ROSS

Yeah! Twelve billion a year, \$32 per gun in circulation!

ELIZABETH (INTO PHONE)

OK, good. I'm sending you a photo of Clara Thomson, she'll be seated front-left, wearing -  
(calls out)  
Clara, what are you wearing?!

CLARA

One-shoulder black crepe dress!

ELIZABETH (INTO PHONE)

A one-shoulder black crepe dress. If you're really lucky, she'll find you at the reception. Thank you, Carlos.

She hangs up. To Alex, passing by -

ELIZABETH (CONT'D)

Alex, tell me it's feasible that a doctor wouldn't have time for all this social media lark?

ALEX  
If you're pulling fifteen-hour shifts, I guess.

ELIZABETH  
Great.

ALEX  
Linked In. If he's a doctor he'd probably be on Linked In.

ELIZABETH  
Could you not have just stopped when I said 'great'?

She collapses into a chair and snatches up a medical text titled PULMONARY PATHOPHYSIOLOGY. Rodolfo Schmidt passes.

RODOLFO SCHMIDT  
Light reading?

ELIZABETH  
D'you even know what Pulmonology is?

RODOLFO SCHMIDT  
It's the study of... Pulmon.

ELIZABETH  
Did you know your lungs are asymmetrical? Your right lung has three lobes, but your left is smaller, it has two. You know why?

RODOLFO SCHMIDT  
Your heart needs the real estate?

ELIZABETH  
Bravo.

RODOLFO SCHMIDT  
Though I guess that's not a problem for you.

ELIZABETH  
Ouch, that hurt. Come, what do they got? Let's have it.

RODOLFO SCHMIDT  
(consults notes)  
It's the first step toward a national register of firearms.

ELIZABETH  
Nobody's even come close to proposing that, and if anyone did, it'd have its own day in Congress. Linking that to Heaton-Harris is scare mongering.

RODOLFO SCHMIDT  
The new rules will increase wait times by as long as two weeks.

ELIZABETH  
Two *whole* weeks, how will they survive?

(MORE)

ELIZABETH (CONT'D)  
 Welcome to America, where you'll wait  
 six months for a routine operation,  
 but hey, you can buy an AR-15 in five  
 minutes flat.

RODOLFO SCHMIDT  
 Anderson Cooper's earliest booking is  
 late-May. You going to be that  
 flippant on CNN?

ELIZABETH  
Yes. Pussyfooting isn't memorable.  
 Sound bites are, and the appropriate  
 one here goes like this: anyone that  
 desperate to get their hands on a gun  
 shouldn't be allowed anywhere near  
 one.

**INT. FIVE-STAR HOTEL - NIGHT - PAST**

The ballroom is decked out for a big fundraiser. Banners for  
 the AMA (American Medical Association) adorn the podium as  
**CONGRESSMAN WALLACE** gives a speech.

Clara, wearing a black, one-shoulder crepe dress, weaves her  
 way through tables while on the phone.

CLARA (INTO PHONE)  
 You think he'll go for it?

OUTSIDE THE BALLROOM, Elizabeth paces, on her cell:

ELIZABETH (INTO PHONE)  
 He knows the media is here and won't  
 risk being heckled at his own  
 fundraiser. You'll back him into a  
 corner and he'll have no choice.

LATER - Congressman Wallace stands on the platform and the  
 roving MC selects people to ask questions.

MC  
 Just a couple more questions for the  
 Congressman and we'll wrap up.

Clara's hand shoots up. The MC sees her, but his glance moves  
 further afield.

MC (CONT'D)  
 Yes, the lady in white.

Clara puts her cell phone to her ear. The unseen lady in white  
 has a bland, scripted Q and A with the Congressman.

CLARA (INTO PHONE)  
 He was supposed to go to me third,  
 what's he doing?

ELIZABETH (O.S., FILTERED)  
 Following orders. Three tables behind  
 you, four to your left.

Clara looks back. Connors, R.M. Dutton, Jane, and Ramirez  
 share a table. Connors catches her gaze. She looks away.

ELIZABETH (O.S., FILTERED) (CONT'D)  
 They've been following us since  
 Wisconsin. They'd have had everyone  
 on that list vetted. You're blown.

CLARA (INTO PHONE)  
 You made me delete my Facebook  
 account. I had my bio removed from  
 our website-

ELIZABETH (O.S., FILTERED)  
 To make it look like we tried.

CLARA (INTO PHONE)  
 What d'you mean?

MC  
 And the final question goes to...

Clara's hand shoots up again, but the MC reads from a card.

MC (CONT'D)  
 Dr. Raj Amarasekara - I hope I'm  
 pronouncing that right - of the  
 Pulmonary Associates of America.

**RAJ AMARASEKARA** stands to pose his question.

RAJ AMARASEKARA  
 Mr. Congressman. Where I work, on any  
 given night, it's a safe bet we'll  
 see three or four gunshot victims.  
 Some are kids, teenagers. I think we  
 can all agree this is a problem, so  
 I'd like you to tell us how you  
 intend to vote on the Heaton-Harris  
 Amendment when it's put before  
 Congress. Thank you.

The question receives LOUD APPLAUSE from the audience. You can  
 tell the press in the room because they just scrambled for  
 their cameras and phones, and proceed to record the moment.

ON ELIZABETH, inconspicuous towards the back, on the phone.

ELIZABETH (INTO PHONE)  
 I mean Raj Amarasekara is a working  
 actor whose real name is Matthew  
 Kantaria. They thought he was about  
 to ask a benign question about a  
 clean air initiative.

Connors is steaming mad. R.M. Dutton, death cooled down.

The Congressman does his best to conceal his unease. Pause.

CLARA (INTO PHONE)  
You decoyed me?

ELIZABETH (O.S., FILTERED)  
 Raj Amarasekara has personally  
 plagiarized seven research papers,  
 all available online. He even has a  
 Linked In account.

CONGRESSMAN WALLACE

Well... As you said, and have experienced, gun violence is a real problem... And while our sympathies must always be first and foremost with the families of the victims, it must also be noted the enormous strain gun violence puts on our healthcare system.

(uneasy pause; in a bind)

That's why, when put to vote... I will whole-heartedly support the Heaton-Harris Amendment.

LOUD APPLAUSE. Congressman Wallace puts on his best plastic smile and laps it up, but behind it lurks one angry man.

Elizabeth surveys a sea of camera phones held up by attendees, which just captured the moment.

ELIZABETH

(to herself)

And that's a wrap.

She turns on a sixpence to exit, but stops - she catches Jane's gaze from across the room. Her old protégé, now an adversary. Neither dwells on it - Elizabeth strides out; Jane sips her drink casually.

BACK IN THE OFFICE, CLOSE-UP ON THE VOTE COUNT: Congressman Wallace's face gets a BIG GREEN TICK stuck over it.

**INT. LUXURY HOTEL - ROOM 409 - NIGHT - PAST**

Elizabeth rolls off Forde in bed, post-coital. They stare at the ceiling. It takes a moment for her breathing to normalize, but when it does:

ELIZABETH

I could use this room tonight. I have work to do.

She gets out of bed and dresses. Forde rolls onto his side.

FORDE

Big case?

ELIZABETH

Forde, human interaction is an exchange. My money for your...

FORDE

(sotto voce)

Dick?

ELIZABETH

Let's call it "skill set" - is the only exchange I'm willing to make.

FORDE

Now ya sound like a banker.

(beat)

I was hopin' we could getta know each other a li'l.

(MORE)

FORDE (CONT'D)

If you ever need an excuse to get outta the office, or wherever it is you work, I'd be happy to meet downtown for a cup of Joe. Just as two normal people. Not, you know...

ELIZABETH

(smiles)

While I admire your persistence, that's never going to happen.

FORDE

Suit y'erself.

(rolls out of bed)

I got prep to do anyways.

ELIZABETH

Prep for what?

FORDE

(dressing)

'Nother client, tomorrow night.

A flash of irrational disappointment registers on Elizabeth's face, upon being reminded that Forde sees other women.

ELIZABETH

You do prep?

FORDE

For functions. Believe it or not, not everyone hires me for my "skill set". Half my clients only want me on their arm. Some just wanna sit 'n talk to someone from a different neck'a the woods, who ain't gonna judge 'em.

ELIZABETH

Dear God, that's pathetic.

FORDE

Functions are different. I gotta be in character.

(disdainful)

The agency gave me a list'a covers, 'cause God forbid, I go as a country boy who came to town as a PT. Insurance exec, marketin' guy. Tomorrow, oil 'n gas.

We get a strong sense that Forde loathes this deceptive aspect to his work.

He is dressed and ready to go; Elizabeth digs an envelope out of her handbag, and offers it to him. His bitterness evaporates and he's back to his playful self.

ELIZABETH

I'll be seeing you.

FORDE

I think you owe me somethin' more.

ELIZABETH

It's all there. Count it.

FORDE

This covers my services. But I just gave ya a whole lotta info 'bout my line'a work. On your principles of exchange...

He motions for her to reciprocate.

ELIZABETH

That was more of a voluntary donation on your part.

FORDE

You a real enigma, ya know that? Nothin' like the typical client.

ELIZABETH

Old?

FORDE

Strong. You ain't here to live out some bizarro fantasy 'bout bein' a master or a slave. You're here for somethin' else.

Elizabeth regards him, ambivalence subdued behind her reflective gaze.

ELIZABETH

You asked me once what brought me to this room. I guess I'm playing a role too. I pay you so I can imagine a life I chose to forego in pursuit of my career.

FORDE

Why imagine it, when ya could just go out'n get it?

The question strikes a chord with Elizabeth. She hardens, becomes defensive.

ELIZABETH

No, it's not for me. Not when I was in my twenties, and sure as hell not now.

FORDE

So no house ya call home, no folks ya call family sorta thing, huh? Ever regret that choice?

ELIZABETH

Not for a second.

Forde lets that settle. Peers into her unreadable expression.

FORDE

Well, least now we're peelin' a layer.

ELIZABETH

(beat)  
And that is all my "principles of  
exchange" will transact. Goodbye,  
Forde.

FORDE

Bye, Nothin'.

Forde smiles and takes his leave.

All business again, Elizabeth shuffles through some documents she's taken out of her Bottega Veneta briefcase. She stops, sets down the file. She sits on the edge of the unkempt bed. Now, still and silent. Mind distant.

**EXT. PINEHURST GOLF COURSE (N. CAROLINA)- GREEN - DAY - PAST**

Connors lines up a putt on the green as Bob Sandford and **CONGRESSMAN BURNS** (50s, even-tempered businessman-turned-politico) look on intently.

Connors steadies himself and sinks a fifteen yard putt, nerveless. He pumps his fist, exhilarated by victory.

CONNORS

Fucking A right!

His two rivals applaud ruefully. They all shake hands.

CONGRESSMAN BURNS

And there I thought lobbyist  
etiquette forbids you from beating  
your client, much less a Congressman.  
You don't get to our heart by  
damaging our fragile egos.

BOB SANDFORD

I'll tell you, Frank, this one here  
plays by his own rules.

**EXT. PINEHURST GOLF COURSE (N. CAROLINA) - LODGE - DAY - PAST**

The three now enjoy scotch and a breathtaking view.

CONGRESSMAN BURNS

I'm a little surprised you even made  
it out here. The public swings well  
in favor of gun control, and I'm an  
the enviable position of financial  
independence.

BOB SANDFORD

We're well aware, Frank.

CONGRESSMAN BURNS

I know it may be unusual for a  
lobbyist to hear, but when I pledged  
not to accept campaign finance from  
the Gun Lobby, I meant front and back  
door.

CONNORS

We're not offering finance. I know  
your approval rating's sky-high.

(MORE)

CONNORS (CONT'D)

You could practically vote for Sharia law and you'd still keep your seat. I also know you're an old school patriot who cares about the future of America. About what America stands for.

CONGRESSMAN BURNS

There's nothing wrong with exercising vigilance over who gets their hands on a firearm.

CONNORS

Tell me, Congressman. When I say 'America', what's the first word you think of?

CONGRESSMAN BURNS

(knowing nod)

Freedom.

CONNORS

Yeah. It's in our DNA. And every time this Big Brother, nanny-state makes a new incursion into citizens' freedoms, it dilutes what makes this country great. Self-sufficiency is celebrated here. You started with nothing and made a fortune buying and leasing aircraft; try doing that in Europe. Everyone in this great nation of ours has it in their power to succeed by their own hand, and everyone has the right to defend what's theirs.

CONGRESSMAN BURNS

Some incursions into freedom might be necessary. Heaton-Harris isn't the end of gun rights.

CONNORS

No, but it's a continuation of a culture of erosion. Slowly, they're taking more and more - slow enough so we won't really feel it over the course of our lifetimes. But in a hundred, two hundred years, what'll be left of the Second Amendment?

Connors' passion is manifest and genuine. Sandford regards him proudly, sipping his scotch and nodding to arguments he doesn't have the cogency to enunciate.

CONNORS (CONT'D)

I know you're not a religious man, so let me put it in evolutionary terms. Fish became amphibians, then reptiles, all the way through primates, and then humans. A monkey didn't one day give birth to a human baby. But with a series of tiny, imperceptible changes, over millions of years, what started as a fish became something completely different.

(MORE)

CONNORS (CONT'D)

Sure, Heaton-Harris doesn't change much on its own. But the cumulative effect of a series of incursions will turn the Second Amendment into something very different to what our Founders intended. Same goes for all of our freedoms. Hell, I'm not here because I love guns; honestly, I don't. I do love freedom.

CONGRESSMAN BURNS

Is that not evolution?

CONNORS

Evolution isn't necessarily positive. Not when we stand to lose one of the things that makes it great to be American: the right to refuse to be a victim.

Congressman Burns sighs, looks out at the resplendent fairway, thinking hard. Opening up.

**EXT. CLUB HOUSE (N. CAROLINA) - DAY - PAST**

Connors walks with Bob Sandford, towards a luxury sedan which has pulled up out front of the club house.

BOB SANDFORD

I never had a great amount of respect for freelance outfits like you. Always figured you're ready to piss whichever way the wind's blowing to make a buck - that's why I wanted Sloane. But seeing you at work just now... You really believed what you were saying.

CONNORS

(firm)  
I do. Unshakably.

BOB SANDFORD

(beat)  
Then I'm glad Sloane said No. She did me one helluva favor.

He offers his hand to Connors, who shakes it vigorously.

BOB SANDFORD (CONT'D)

I'll see you, Pat.

Connors nods. Those words meant the world to him. Sandford gets in the back seat and the car pulls out.

**INT. PETERSON WYATT - STRATEGY ROOM - DAY - PAST**

On the vote count, Congressman Burns' face gets a BIG RED SLASH stuck over it by Alex, who speaks to colleagues.

ALEX

Fuck Monty Burns. We're sitting on a new five hundred grand. That's over 12% of our budget.

ESME

It's now 9.3%!

LAUREN

It came in anonymously, but everyone's thinking Bloomberg.

CYNTHIA

If you were donating that much, why would you do it anonymously?

ROSS

The obvious reason.

CYNTHIA

What, privacy?

ROSS

What? No. It makes you look noble when you leak your identity.

CYNTHIA

Oh my God. Were you born that cynical?

ROSS

(parrotting Elizabeth)  
*There's no such thing as cynicism, only a word to denote the absence-*

CYNTHIA

*Of the naivety I so keenly exhibit, yeah, right.*

**EXT./INT. GRAND PUBLIC BUILDING - DAY - PAST**

Clara keeps pace with Elizabeth as they quick-step up the stone staircase into the airy and imposing public building.

CLARA

I deleted every vestige of my online existence-

ELIZABETH

And you didn't replace it, leaving a Clara-sized hole in Google, which they obviously flagged when they were doing their due diligence. Why'd we lose Burns?

CLARA

I did replace it. First hit on Clara Thomson gets you a Canadian English teacher in South Korea, but I made a small footprint two rungs down. I'd just returned from a two-year stint with Medcins Sans Frontiers. It was solid.

ELIZABETH

What can I say? They're good. Burns. North Carolina. What the hell happened?

CLARA

There's ten of us. How many d'you think we're up against at Waterman? Thirty? We don't have the manpower nor the funding to keep up with the Lobby, and we just hadn't gotten to him yet. They got lucky and picked one who was wide open.

Elizabeth grimaces, knowing her point is valid.

CLARA (CONT'D)

Unless, of course, it wasn't luck.

ELIZABETH

What d'you mean?

CLARA

You didn't tell me about Raj Ama...

ELIZABETH

Amarasekara. Just call him Matthew.

CLARA

I checked with Finance, he wasn't paid from the firm's account. You ran him out of your own pocket.

ELIZABETH

It's good practice to keep your circle small. I needed you sharp with the question in case you slipped through their net, I had nothing to gain by telling you.

CLARA

But you had something to lose. You think we might have a leak.

ELIZABETH

Clara, 25 years in this industry has taught me it's always best to assume that in this town, no matter where you are, you're never more than two meters away from a rat.

Clara's pace fades, trying to process if there was an implication being made there. Elizabeth strides into --

**INT. LIBRARY OF CONGRESS - READING ROOM - CONTINUOUS - PAST**

The vast main reading room of the world's biggest library. Giant marble columns, bronze statues set high up in the balustrades, and the centerpiece - sunlight seeping through arch windows beneath a huge, ornate dome.

The other eight members of the team work at a reading table. Some have laptops, others scribble on notepads. Elizabeth and Clara take their places. Throughout, Clara taps away on her laptop, as if taking notes, not fully invested in the conversation.

LAUREN

(to Elizabeth)

Why are we meeting in a library?

ESME

Illinois has six Republicans in the House, a little of this money would go a long way to-

ELIZABETH

OK, stop.

CYNTHIA

We need to make up 25 votes, I was thinking we contribute to Russell, Stefanovic-

ALEX

Screw contributions, we'd be toe-to-toe with the Lobby and we'd lose.

ELIZABETH

I said stop.

ON CLARA'S LAPTOP SCREEN: she sets up a new Facebook account.

RODOLFO SCHMIDT

Tell me you haven't already spent it.

ELIZABETH

We're gonna take this money and use it to send a message. We're going to swing a state we have absolutely no right to swing.

RODOLFO SCHMIDT

Please God, don't say...

ELIZABETH

Florida. This right here is our turning point.

RODOLFO SCHMIDT

You're aware that America now calls Florida "The Gunshine State"?

ELIZABETH

I'm being optimistic for a change, I thought you'd approve.

RODOLFO SCHMIDT

The whole five hundred grand, gone?

ELIZABETH

Out the door.

RODOLFO SCHMIDT

(in jest)

Serves me right for hiring a woman.

ELIZABETH

Sexism from a Democrat, well I never.

RODOLFO SCHMIDT

Almost as shocking as you being optimistic.

ELIZABETH

Look around you. Magnificent architecture, peace, quiet, and every worthwhile text ever published. What's missing?

The team look out at the huge, brilliant space. An OLD GUY sleeps at a table nowhere near us. A few TOURISTS walk around the outskirts, snap photos, mesmerized by the giant dome.

BRIAN

Tumbleweed? This place is a ghost town.

ELIZABETH

Correct. This is where Mr. and Mrs. Public do not reside. We're reading fewer books than ever. Persuasion through long-winded argumentation doesn't work, who has time when we have screens to stare at?

Elizabeth aims a pointed look at Clara, whose attention is consumed by her laptop. She eventually looks up at Elizabeth.

ELIZABETH (CONT'D)

We need to market Heaton-Harris the same way they market Big Macs. We're dropping direct mail pamphlets and buying ad space online instead. Alex, you're in charge of the banners, you have a two o'clock with JWT on 14th Street. Now, to the phone banks.

RODOLFO SCHMIDT

I liked you better as the merchant of doom.

ESME

Elizabeth. I'm familiar with the Democrat campaign machinery in Illinois, if I get out there, I can deliver at least two-

ELIZABETH

I want two phone pitches by end of tomorrow. Clara, Brian, Lauren, you're team one, Cynthia, Esme, Franklin, you're team two. Ross, provide stats to both.

(to Esme)

When you're done here, you get started in Illinois.

(to all)

Now, the second reason we're here is that I'd like you all to read Packard's exposé of psychological techniques of commercial advertisers from 1957-

MASS GROAN. "Oh Gods".

ELIZABETH (CONT'D)

- Which remains dead on point in today's world of i-nonsense.

Clara's attention is distracted by something on her SCREEN: a friend request from ALEX DE JONG. The message reads:

*Welcome back to civilization :)*

ELIZABETH (CONT'D)

As you all know, good marketing burrows insidiously into your target's brain and results in action, for example, buying a Big Mac.

Clara glances to Alex, his laptop open in front of him. He gives her a smile, knowing she got the request. Clara notices Elizabeth eyeing them, and she expertly recovers:

CLARA

Our phone pitch has to "burrow insidiously into Floridian brains?"

ELIZABETH

Yes. And so too your ad banners. They must burrow so deep, your targets are inspired to flood their elected official with pro-Heaton-Harris letters, and use those *delightful* social networks to implore their friends to do likewise. Now, read the exposé, and take to the media-verse!

CLARA

Good thing I'm back on Facebook.

Clara didn't do much to mask her supercilious tone. Alex closes his laptop and gets up, a little smirk on his face. It's not lost on Clara.

ELIZABETH

Super. Their pompous shareholders can breathe again.

CLARA

It's a public company.

ELIZABETH

Better still, I can profit personally from your compulsion to tell the world what you ate for breakfast.

(sarcastically)

I take it all back, God bless e-America.

(on her way out)

Everyone, get to it!

**GUN CONTROL MINI-MONTAGE:**

- A strong turnout at a GUN CONTROL MARCH, anti-gun banners waved, alongside pictures of a YOUNG GIRL.

- WORKERS plaster the finishing touches on a huge BILLBOARD in Times Square. ONE KID KILLED BY A GUN EVERY 3 HOURS

- A van with a large billboard in its trailer tours a city center. 150 AMERICANS SHOT DAILY // YOU COULD BE NEXT.

- A large and vociferous gathering outside a city hall.

NEWS ANCHOR (V.O.)

Members of a group called Ceasefire  
PA rallied outside Senator Jim  
Mandel's office in Philadelphia,  
after a man opened fire in a park,  
killing a fourteen year-old girl-

SENATOR MANDEL stands at a lectern outside his office, and has  
to shout over chants of WE WANT CHANGE.

SENATOR MANDEL

I'll vote to put the issue of renewed  
background checks on the Senate  
floor, and I will support the Heaton-  
Harris Amendment!

The crowd ERUPTS. The Senator beams. Everyone's happy.

- A BIG GREEN TICK is stuck over Senator Mandel's face.

- A BIG RED SLASH over another Congressman's face. Dollar  
signs drawn in his eyes. A GREEN TICK over another.

- 11 VOTES LOCKED, 23 TO GO is scrawled on a whiteboard,  
underneath - DAYS TO VOTE: 148.

**INT. POSNER'S OFFICE - DAY - PRESENT**

Back to present day. A muddle of boxes and files. Posner  
crosses items off a checklist, while Elizabeth talks to  
**HARRISON** (60s), a long-time ally.

POSNER

(to Elizabeth)

Tax avoidance. Any offshore bank  
accounts, undeclared income?

ELIZABETH

No.

Posner crosses it off. He does this with every new query.

HARRISON

(to Elizabeth)

Look, if I'm interrupting, I can-

ELIZABETH

Not at all. What can I do for you,  
Harrison?

HARRISON

There's no more you could possibly do  
for me, Liz. Look, there's no easy  
way to say this-

ELIZABETH

Oh, thank God.

HARRISON

What?

ELIZABETH

You've come to your senses. You're  
going to publicly flog me, and about  
time too.

HARRISON

I was going to use the term "distance ourselves".

ELIZABETH

Where's the fun in that?

HARRISON

I have shareholders to think about. From a PR standpoint... You...

ELIZABETH

Stop fumbling for a euphemism, Harrison. I'm so toxic I glow in the dark. You're doing absolutely the right thing, and you've nothing to apologize for.

Elizabeth reaches into a folder, pulls out a stack of papers.

POSNER

(to Elizabeth)

Recreational drug use?

ELIZABETH

(to Posner)

No!

(to Harrison)

See these? Cards and letters of apology from clients who felt they had to do the same for the sake of their business. Your corporate spokesman will denounce me in the strongest possible terms. I didn't help get you where you are only to see you tarnished by this nonsense.

HARRISON

This sucks.

ELIZABETH

In your personal capacity as my friend, yes. But you're not denouncing me as my friend, you're denouncing me as CEO of Harper's, who's duty-bound to act in the best interests of his company. And right now, that entails running from me as fast as you can screaming evil.

HARRISON

You'll get through this.

At that moment, Harrison goes to hug Elizabeth. She's taken by surprise, and panic flashes across her face for a fraction of a second. She meets his embrace awkwardly, but begins to lean into it. She closes her eyes, enjoying a fleeting moment of release from the stress of her predicament.

The moment lasts a second too long, and Posner can't help but observe a side to Elizabeth he never knew existed.

Harrison smiles at her warmly, nods goodbye, and exits.

POSNER  
Never? I mean on the drug use.

ELIZABETH  
 (sarcastic)  
 Oh, I thought you were just talking  
 about this morning. No, never.

Posner sets down his pen and removes glasses from strained eyes. He takes a moment to regard Elizabeth, who fastidiously straightens papers on the desk to regain her composure.

POSNER  
 I can't believe you're OK with your  
 most loyal client stomping on you.

ELIZABETH  
 He should have done it weeks ago.

POSNER  
 Why don't you quit? This place?

ELIZABETH  
 Sorry?

POSNER  
 I've known you long enough now to  
 surmise your feelings toward this  
 city. Sitting in that hearing,  
 listening to them go over your  
 medical records...

ELIZABETH  
 (stops; long pause)  
 I wanted to. But I can't. I can't  
 imagine what in the world I would do.  
 I've been reading *The Litigators* for  
 the last two years, I haven't made it  
 past a hundred pages. I've gone  
 through eleven doctors, they all want  
 rid of me for ignoring their  
 exhortations to slow down. I want  
 to slow down. But this job is the only  
 means I have of making myself useful.

She rests against the desk, stares reflectively upon the D.C. cityscape beyond the floor-to-ceiling windows.

ELIZABETH (CONT'D)  
 Did you know, ideology is dead? The  
 philosophies of the left and right  
 are driven by the self-interest of  
 those who advance them.

Elizabeth turns back to Posner, a wistful sadness lingering behind her tired eyes.

ELIZABETH (CONT'D)  
 Neither side cares for the merits of  
 their argument; they just happen to  
 spout it because it suits their  
 position in the world.

(MORE)

ELIZABETH (CONT'D)

They'd switch in a heartbeat if a millionaire lost everything, or a broke socialist won the lottery, or better still, earned a fortune by their own hand. People have no real ideology. All their political proclamations are governed solely by self-interest.

POSNER

That would include you?

ELIZABETH

Behind all of my conscious brain's grandstanding, I would think so. I don't know why, but part of me wishes I hadn't ever realized that.

A meaningful silence overtakes the room. They both gaze upon the dusking sun. Finally:

POSNER

Happy birthday, Elizabeth.

Elizabeth gently swivels her neck to face him. Takes in his sincere expression. A touch flattered he knew of the occasion.

ELIZABETH

Thank you, Daniel.

She returns her rueful stare to the high-powered world sprawled out beyond the glass. And softly exhales.

FADE TO BLACK

**EXT. K STREET - DAY - PAST**

SUPER: 4 MONTHS PRIOR

Elizabeth marches down the sidewalk towards Peterson Wyatt's office and unloads into her cell phone. Rodolfo Schmidt busts a lung to catch up to her.

ELIZABETH (INTO PHONE)

Gunshot victims cost the American taxpayer \$12 billion a year. That's \$32 per gun in circulation. Now get your house in order.

She hangs up.

RODOLFO SCHMIDT

Liz Sloane, making a stand for the taxpayer, even from the left.

ELIZABETH

Come off it. Heaton-Harris might get three guns out of the hands of three psychopaths, but the gun injury horse has long bolted.

RODOLFO SCHMIDT

Was it ever in the stable?

ELIZABETH

What's up?

RODOLFO SCHMIDT

David Badgley, Senator from Michigan. Came out in support months ago, but he just gave a quote saying now he wants to "wait and see". His PAC received twenty-five grand from the Gun Lobby two weeks ago.

ELIZABETH

A one-eighty.

RODOLFO SCHMIDT

"Wait and see" were his words, so it's really more like a ninety.

ELIZABETH

We have him on celluloid pledging his support?

RODOLFO SCHMIDT

Bang to rights.

ELIZABETH

So we'll just have to make him feel it. Grand unveiling - you coming?

RODOLFO SCHMIDT

I have a con-call.

ELIZABETH

Make them wait.  
(glimmer in eye)  
You'll want to see this.

They enter the modern, glassy office building.

**INT. PETERSON WYATT - STRATEGY ROOM - DAY - PAST**

The team sit around the table, and flip through tabbed binders of documents, which contain sample AD BANNERS, PHONE PITCH SCRIPTS, and verification materials.

CLARA

Alex, these are... Good!

ALEX

They're burrowing insidiously into your brains as you read.

LAUREN

Hold on, the numbers are wrong. The House delegations, Florida has 27-

ELIZABETH

We're not going to Florida.

CYNTHIA

What?

ELIZABETH

Florida's out.

CYNTHIA

But you said, we're gonna swing  
Florida, isn't that what this is-

ALEX

Turn to Tab Twelve, please.

They do. Team members remove an ENVELOPE, and take out what appear to be photos. Faces go blank.

CYNTHIA

I don't have anything at Tab Twelve-

Cynthia peers over at Brian's photos - long distance shots, a telephoto lens - Cynthia meets Connors on a park bench.

Rodolfo is already on the phone:

RODOLFO SCHMIDT

Security, we're in C1, get in here.  
Lock down Cynthia Green's office,  
secure her files and hard drives, and  
escort her off the premises.

He hangs up. To Cynthia:

RODOLFO SCHMIDT

Your Blackberry, now.

Cynthia is speechless. Rodolfo HAMMERS his fist on tempered glass.

RODOLFO SCHMIDT

NOW!

Cynthia fumbles her Blackberry onto the table.

SECURITY GUARDS enter.

CYNTHIA

He offered me a partnership track...

ELIZABETH

Good luck with that.

Cynthia is escorted out of the room. Rodolfo tosses the photos onto the table in front of Elizabeth, and follows them out.

RODOLFO SCHMIDT

(to Elizabeth; exiting)  
We'll talk later.

BRIAN

The whole Florida thing was a ruse?

ELIZABETH

I'm not that optimistic. But the Gun Lobby just bought a cabal of Floridian Congressmen they owned all along, while we're about to emerge from left field and sweep Colorado before they can figure out what hole they just got screwed in.

CLARA  
We're taking this to Colorado?

ELIZABETH  
You have tonight to re-write your pitches. Get to it.

The entire team SCRAMBLES - half of them turn straight to Ross, and ask for stats and info.

ROSS  
Eeeuuuuggggghhh.

**INT. REMOVAL VAN - DAY - PAST**

The inside of a van has been transformed into a mobile surveillance unit. Elizabeth introduces Rodolfo to **BIG SAM** and **LITTLE SAM**, who sit at home with high-end equipment.

ELIZABETH  
Meet my unofficial support team.

BIG SAM  
Hi. Call me Big Sam.

LITTLE SAM  
Little Sam.

RODOLFO SCHMIDT  
I'd introduce myself, but judging by this set-up, you may already know me very well.

BIG SAM  
There are six of us, four are out on assignment.

RODOLFO SCHMIDT  
And you're ex..?

BIG SAM  
NSA.

ELIZABETH  
So Badgley's flip-flopping. In my experience, the quickest way to bring him in line is to mine for sordid details and let him know we're in possession of them.

RODOLFO SCHMIDT  
What exactly are you gentlemen capable of?

LITTLE SAM  
Standard 24-hour audio and video surveillance, cell phone and online account hacking, financial transactions, location tracking, and, with our latest tech, close-quarters audio, anytime, any place.

RODOLFO SCHMIDT  
How'd you manage that one?

LITTLE SAM  
 You know the expression 'a fly on the wall'? We're not that small yet, but...

Little Sam reaches for a plastic container for a small pet, perhaps a lizard or a gerbil. He pulls out a COCKROACH.

LITTLE SAM  
 Meet the cutting edge in eavesdropping.

RODOLFO SCHMIDT  
 It's a cockroach.

BIG SAM  
 Yes. It can be retro-fitted as a cybernetic robo-roach with this.

Big Sam holds up a tiny 'electronic backpack'.

BIG SAM  
 We glue electrodes to the legs, perforate its thorax, and we can control its movement remotely.

ELIZABETH  
 Don't call PETA, Schmidt.

LITTLE SAM  
 Incorporated into the backpack is a class A listening device. Gone are the days of manual bugging. These guys can crawl under doors, into crevices, bags, cars, undetected. They can go without food for weeks and still be mobile.

RODOLFO SCHMIDT  
 My God...

ELIZABETH  
 If there's anything in his life worth excavating, these guys won't take long to get it.

RODOLFO SCHMIDT  
 It's mind-boggling, ingenious, and completely unacceptable.

ELIZABETH  
 Booooo.

RODOLFO SCHMIDT  
 You're talking about blackmailing a member of Congress, and I won't entertain it.

ELIZABETH  
 You're only here because I figured you might say that.

Rodolfo regards her. Is she testing his ethics?

RODOLFO SCHMIDT

Now, I appreciate that you often employ more *creative* tactics - to great effect, I might add - and, without prejudice to the undoubtedly stellar job you guys do... Our firm has certain standards below which we're simply not prepared to stoop.

ELIZABETH

Rodolfo. I wouldn't have it any other way.

Now she regards him. He is a different animal than George Dupont.

RODOLFO SCHMIDT

Good. Find an alternative.

Rodolfo Schmidt exits the van. Elizabeth makes a phone call:

ELIZABETH (INTO PHONE)

Johnny! Liz. I'm going to need the largest inflatable rat you've got.

**INT. "INFLATABLES R US" STORE - DAY - PAST**

Elizabeth and Clara walk through a maze of inflated superheroes on display for moms planning a garden party.

CLARA

You knew there was a leak from when?

ELIZABETH

I had my suspicions after the AMA fundraiser.

CLARA

And you had her watched? By a PI?

ELIZABETH

That's right. Ah, here we are.

They arrive at a GIANT INFLATABLE RAT.

ELIZABETH (CONT'D)

Say hello to Senator Badgley's new best friend.

(calls out)

Johnny! Wrap it up!

CLARA

How did you know it was her?

ELIZABETH

Sorry?

CLARA

The leak - you had Cynthia watched, how did you know it was her?

ELIZABETH

I didn't. I had you all watched.

Elizabeth walks off.

**INT. HOTEL BALLROOM - NIGHT - PAST**

Influential figures from business and politics rub shoulders and clink champagne flutes. The placard at the entrance tells us we're at a charity dinner for the prevention of sexual violence in conflict. The disconnect is glaring.

FORDE stands in a small circle of ATTENDEES with his CLIENT, a Vera Wang-clad corporate career woman in her 30s. His posture and demeanor are different here; in character, he is polished and gentlemanly. He fits right in.

MALE ATTENDEE

So we reached the 18th, and I knew all I needed was par to win-

FORDE

I thought the golden rule was to never beat your client?

MALE ATTENDEE

Exactly! But he tees off and shanks it into the boonies, how the hell am I not gonna win this?!

Polite LAUGHTER from the circle.

FEMALE ATTENDEE

(to Forde)

Calvin, do you get the chance to golf down in Austin?

FORDE

Not nearly as much as I'd like to. I got a set of Titleist irons gathering dust in my garage. *All the gear, and no idea.*

More phoney LAUGHTER. Forde's client touches him on the arm.

CLIENT

Excuse me a moment, dear.

She goes to the ladies' room. Forde's eye catches something, and he peels off from the circle after perfunctory farewells.

ELSEWHERE in the ballroom, Elizabeth empties a glass of champagne and returns the flute to a passing waiter.

FORDE

Howdy. Cal Sneider, I'm in banking and actuarial. You know, you look familiar to me...

Elizabeth regards him with no recognition whatsoever.

ELIZABETH

I'm sorry, I think you have the wrong person.

She moves away, uncomfortable. He pursues.

FORDE

You can do better than that.

ELIZABETH

(cold)

Really, Mr. Sneider, I've no idea who you think I am. Excuse me.

She walks away. Forde watches her go, bemused.

FROM A CORNER of the ballroom, R.M. Dutton has observed the whole exchange.

**INT. COLE, KRAVITZ AND WATERMAN - STRATEGY ROOM - DAY - PAST**

Connors watches the TV, pissed. ON THE TV - **CONGRESSMAN BADGLEY** of Michigan fights through press and anti-gun protesters in the shadow of a GIANT RAT.

CONNORS

I can't fucking believe they're showing - can you fucking believe - I don't fucking believe.

JANE

Eight of the top ten national news outlets are running it.

CONNORS

She's bought them - she's bought the whole goddam-

R.M. DUTTON

She doesn't need to buy them, they swing left all on their own.

CONNORS

He took that twenty-five grand, we need to make it crystal clear to him what happens if he backs down.

R.M. DUTTON

I think someone just beat us to it.

JANE

It has its own Twitter feed.

CONNORS

Huh?

JANE

The rat.

**INT. OFFICE - DAY - PAST**

A dejected Congressman Badgley sits through a strategy meeting with his **SPIN DOCTOR**.

SPIN DOCTOR

Every day that thing follows you around, the more people at the protests, the more voters are-

They're both distracted by the ominous specter of a giant RAT EAR, visible in the window. It 'waddles' outside throughout, a big stupid grin on its face.

CONGRESSMAN BADGLEY  
How do we get this fucking thing out  
of my face?

SPIN DOCTOR  
Ride it out. Might take weeks. Enough  
time to forge a career-long  
association between you and a giant  
rodent. Or you can clarify your  
position on Heaton-Harris.

CONGRESSMAN BADGLEY  
Can I just stick a knife in it?

SPIN DOCTOR  
If you want the entire news cycle to  
yourself, be my guest.

Congressman Badgley buries his head in his hands and SIGHS.

**INT. PETERSON WYATT - STRATEGY ROOM - NIGHT - PAST**

SLAP. Congressman Badgley's mugshot is the latest to get a big  
green tick stuck over it.

SLOWLY PULL BACK to reveal the team working quietly,  
efficiently. Brian, who just stuck on the tick, talks on his  
cell and updates the whiteboard to:

DAYS TO VOTE: 98. 18 VOTES LOCKED, 16 TO GO.

BRIAN (INTO PHONE)  
You know we're not supposed to be  
having this conversation, right?

CROSS-CUT between Brian, and...

**INT. TV STUDIO - BACKSTAGE - CONTINUOUS - PAST**

Elizabeth, having her make-up done, hating every second.  
INTERCUT with strategy room where necessary:

ELIZABETH (INTO PHONE)  
There's no way in hell Rosen is  
tacking on his Assault Weapons Ban to  
Heaton-Harris.

BRIAN (INTO PHONE)  
It's kind of flattering he sees it as  
a moving train though, right?

Rodolfo Schmidt sees Brian on the phone.

RODOLFO SCHMIDT  
Is that her?

Busted, Brian hands it over.

RODOLFO SCHMIDT (INTO PHONE) (CONT'D)  
I thought we agreed you'd focus on  
the debate, for just thirty minutes-

ELIZABETH (INTO PHONE)

The Assault Weapons Ban is a vote-winning ploy which sounds appealing to the uninformed. It's Potemkin legislation designed to help Rosen keep his hand in the cookie jar. It doesn't help people, it helps him.

RODOLFO SCHMIDT (INTO PHONE)

Banning assault weapons doesn't help people? Say, people who might otherwise have been victims of assault weapons?

ELIZABETH (INTO PHONE)

You rest my case on the 'uninformed'. All guns are assault weapons, the AWB bans cosmetic features like pistol grips. I don't remember too many gun victims being beaten to death with a telescoping stock. The sum total of the AWB is that it makes gun-wielding lunatics look a little less scary as they kill people.

RODOLFO SCHMIDT (INTO PHONE)

I see you're in the mood for war, that's good. Focus on the debate.

**INT. ANDERSON COOPER 360 - NIGHT - PAST**

Connors sits in stone-faced silence. **ANDERSON COOPER** smiles at him amiably, but Connors stonewalls him, clearly not a fan.

Elizabeth steps onto set. Harsh lighting already annoying her.

CONNORS

Liz! If you're thinking I'm gonna go easy, I can't do that.

ANDERSON COOPER

Ms. Sloane, please, take a-

ELIZABETH

(to Connors)

Making bullshit job offers to my staff, you've plumbed new depths.

CONNORS

The student becomes the master.

ELIZABETH

Really? How much did you spend again to secure Florida?

CONNORS

You taught me how to control a Congressional office. Offer to double their chief of staff's money when his term's up, he's all yours-

ELIZABETH

That's different. You just ruined that young lady's career.

CONNORS  
 Me? She's not paying for her bad call? Or does individual responsibility no longer exist? You really have gone soft and liberal.

PRODUCER (O.S.)  
 Live in four, three, two...

**INT. PETERSON WYATT - STRATEGY ROOM - CONTINUOUS - PAST**

Packed house, popcorn being consumed by the bucket. ON TV:

ANDERSON COOPER (ON TV; FILTERED)  
 Hello, and welcome to this special edition of Anderson Cooper 360.

CLARA  
 You used to work with this guy?

ALEX  
 Connors? Yeah. Loud, foul-mouthed, and very effective.

CLARA  
 But she can take him, right?

ALEX  
 Put it this way: I wouldn't want to be either of the men at that table.

**INT. ANDERSON COOPER 360 - NIGHT - PAST**

Mid-debate. Anderson Cooper, little more than a spectator, looks like he hasn't blinked in ten minutes.

CONNORS  
 This is the latest incursion into individual liberty by an all-powerful federal government-

ELIZABETH  
 What, like drivers' licenses?

CONNORS  
 Drivers' licenses? I'm not really seeing the connection.

ELIZABETH  
 It's illegal to operate a car without going through rigorous theoretical and practical assessments, that's a clear constraint on the freedom of individuals to drive cars, as with pilots to fly planes.

**INT. PETERSON WYATT - STRATEGY ROOM - CONTINUOUS - PAST**

ROSS  
 Fugu chefs. Come on. Fugu chefs!

**INT. DEMOCRATIC PARTY HQ, ILLINOIS - CONTINUOUS - PAST**

A cluttered campaign office. Esme and a group of STAFFERS eat takeout, glued to the TV.

ELIZABETH (ON TV; FILTERED)  
 In Japan, chefs have to train for  
 seven years before they're allowed to  
 serve a poisonous blowfish called  
 fugu-

ANDERSON COOPER (ON TV; FILTERED)  
 We're deviating slightly off topic-

ELIZABETH (ON TV; FILTERED)  
 Do you think the government should  
 abolish drivers' licences?

Esme can't suppress her smile as Elizabeth cuts into Connors,  
 about to twist the knife.

CONNORS (ON TV; FILTERED)  
 Of course not-

**INT. ANDERSON COOPER 360 - CONTINUOUS - PAST**

ELIZABETH  
 Why, they're a government incursion  
 on individual liberty, are they not?  
 We accept them because they make  
 sense; the more dangerous the  
 machinery, the more rigorous the  
 tests should be. We wouldn't want  
 unfit drivers in cars any more than  
 novice pilots flying 747s, because  
 dangerous machinery in the wrong  
 hands poses a threat to public  
 safety. I think we can extend our  
 definition of 'dangerous machinery'  
 to semi-automatic firearms.

**INT. PETERSON WYATT - STRATEGY ROOM - CONTINUOUS - PAST**

RODOLFO SCHMIDT  
 That's his cue...

ALEX  
 Go on, bite you son-of-a-bitch.

ON THE TV:

CONNORS (ON TV; FILTERED)  
 The Second Amendment to the  
 Constitution doesn't guarantee the  
 right to drive cars, it guarantees  
 the right to keep and bear arms.

CHEERS from members of the team. Alex and Clara hi-five.

ALEX  
 Boom!

**INT. ANDERSON COOPER 360 - CONTINUOUS - PAST**

ELIZABETH  
 The Second Amendment was signed in a  
 time where the average life  
 expectancy was 38, and the population  
 of the largest city in America would  
 fit inside the Orange Bowl.  
 (MORE)

ELIZABETH (CONT'D)

What may have been perfectly sensible in those alien times is wholly inadequate to solve the problems of the present.

CONNORS

The Constitution is the highest legal document in the land, it's unimpeachable and explicit, 'the right of the people to keep and bear arms shall not be infringed.'

ELIZABETH

Nothing is unimpeachable, not even the Constitution. The clue lies in the title of the very legislation you're so quick to parrot.

ANDERSON COOPER

Hold on Liz, now that's a very forceful argument; the wording of the Second Amendment is explicit-

ELIZABETH

Really? Do you find it forceful?

ANDERSON COOPER

Well, ah, I'm just saying, a lot of people would-

ELIZABETH

Because I find it the weakest, most mind-numbing retort in their arsenal; sort of a last refuge for those with no real argument at all-

CONNORS

You're talking about the United States Constitution-

ELIZABETH

And I can't stand to see people hide behind it just as they hide behind the Bible to deny gay people rights. Literalists need to stop reciting their sacred parchments and exercise their brain power. If they can produce a rational winning argument, I'll gladly migrate to their side, but 'because it says so in the Constitution, the Bible, or my horoscope' is not a winning argument. It's a ripcord; the intellectual equivalent of a yellow, pant-pissing wimp cowering behind mommy's skirt.

Deathly silence. Elizabeth and Connors eyeball each other.

ANDERSON COOPER

OK, time out! We're going for a break, and when we come back, maybe these two will stop playing so nice and the gloves'll really come off.

ELIZABETH  
 (to Connors)  
 Still think I've gone soft?

**INT. PETERSON WYATT - OFFICE FLOOR - NIGHT - PAST**

Later that night. Everyone has gone home. Elizabeth kicks off her shoes, reclines in a chair and reads The Washington Post.

Rodolfo Schmidt approaches, catches her unaware.

RODOLFO SCHMIDT  
 You ever sleep?

ELIZABETH  
 Not when I'm 16 votes short.  
 (re: Washington Post)  
 This sometimes does the trick.

RODOLFO SCHMIDT  
 You put on quite a show.

ELIZABETH  
 He had it coming.

RODOLFO SCHMIDT  
 You really believe Heaton-Harris is going to make a big difference...

ELIZABETH  
 Not really.

RODOLFO SCHMIDT  
Really?

ELIZABETH  
 America's awash with guns. They're a part of our culture, that's irreversible. But the stakes are such that Heaton-Harris doesn't need to make a big difference. If it keeps one gun out of the hands of one lunatic, that could be the difference between the life and death of an innocent civilian. And all our work would have been worth it.

RODOLFO SCHMIDT  
 Did you know someone..? Someone who was a victim of gun-

ELIZABETH  
 No, why does everybody assume that? It's insulting.

RODOLFO SCHMIDT  
 It's not insulting, it's-

ELIZABETH  
It's insulting, it implies I can only see the merits of an argument when I feel the effects personally.

(MORE)

ELIZABETH (CONT'D)

There was a Congressman, I forget his name - spent his entire career opposing gay rights, only to do a U-turn when his brother came out. How absurd is that? His whole life, it's disgusting and he's against it, but suddenly it's OK because his brother does it? What a well-reasoned basis for an opinion. Quick, someone give this man a gavel and put him in a courthouse!

RODOLFO SCHMIDT

I see you're still in kill mode.

ELIZABETH

I only have one setting, you should know that by now.

RODOLFO SCHMIDT

Well, then I'll just say I didn't mean to insult you and leave it at that.

Rodolfo steps to the door, but stops -

RODOLFO SCHMIDT

Liz?

(beat)

Thank you for doing this.

They regard one another before he takes his leave. The sentiment lingers behind her softening eyes. Then she thrusts The Washington Post back up into her line of vision as we --

CUT TO BLACK. A moment's silence.

AUTOMATED TELEPHONE VOICE (FILTERED)

Caller --

CLARA (O.S., FILTERED)

Clara Thomson

AUTOMATED TELEPHONE VOICE (FILTERED)

Has entered the conference.

CLARA (O.S., FILTERED)

Hello?

FADE UP:

**EXT. PUBLIC BENCH - DAY - PAST**

Alex sits sentry outside a fancy restaurant, phone to his ear. Gaze firmly fixed on the entrance.

ALEX (INTO PHONE)

Hey. We're the first two on, I guess we're a little early.

Intercut as necessary with --

**INT. DONUT FACTORY - CONTINUOUS - PAST**

A popular donuts and coffee chain. Clara sits at a table, plugged into her laptop, stacks of papers in front of her.

CLARA (INTO PHONE)  
Hey! OK, ah - d'you want me to dial back in a couple minutes?

ALEX (INTO PHONE)  
You kidding? I'm going out of my mind here. I should have been a sports agent. This guy's been at lunch for the last two hours. Lunch is literally his job.

CLARA (INTO PHONE)  
That can't be good for your waistline. What's he look like?

Alex flips open a file and regards a bio mugshot of a fat, porcine SPORTS AGENT.

ALEX (INTO PHONE)  
You have a point.  
(deep breath)  
Anyway, while we're on that topic... One of these days, if you're not too busy, I was thinking maybe we could-

AUTOMATED TELEPHONE VOICE (FILTERED)  
Caller --

ELIZABETH (O.S., FILTERED)  
(sarcastic deadpan)  
The Easter Bunny and her Merry Little Helper.

AUTOMATED TELEPHONE VOICE (FILTERED)  
Has entered the conference.

THREE-WAY INTERCUT with --

**INT. PETERSON WYATT - STRATEGY ROOM - CONTINUOUS - PAST**

Elizabeth and Rodolfo Schmidt hover over a conference phone on speaker.

ELIZABETH (INTO PHONE)  
Who do we have so far?

ALEX (INTO PHONE)  
Me and Clara.  
(quick correction)  
Clara and I.

RODOLFO SCHMIDT (INTO PHONE)  
Hey guys. Let's give it a couple minutes then.

CLARA (INTO PHONE)  
(playful)  
Alex, why don't you go ahead and finish your thought? Maybe we could..?

ALEX (INTO PHONE)  
 (panic; in a bind)  
 I was just spit-balling, ah, maybe we  
 could - go see Mel Whitman,  
 Congressman Perez's chief of staff,  
 lock up his vote once and for all-

ELIZABETH (INTO PHONE)  
 The same Perez who appeared on Good  
 Morning America last week, beating  
 the Heaton-Harris drum? I hardly  
 think that's the best use of your  
 time. Speaking of which, what the  
 hell are you two-

AUTOMATED TELEPHONE VOICE (FILTERED)  
 Caller --

ESME (O.S., FILTERED)  
 Esme Manucharian.

AUTOMATED TELEPHONE VOICE (FILTERED)  
 Has entered the conference.

FOUR-WAY INTERCUT with --

**INT. DEMOCRATIC PARTY HQ, ILLINOIS - CONTINUOUS - PAST**

Esme is on both her cell and a landline intermittently, as she  
 shouts over the DIN of CROSS-TALK and RINGING PHONES in this  
 campaign boiler room.

ESME  
 (into landline)  
 Hold just a second please.  
 (into cell)  
 Illinois says hi, guys. We're  
 gaining, I'm doing the rounds on  
 local TV, I'm on again tomorrow  
 morning. Rumor out of Perry's camp is  
 that he's gonna come out in favor  
 early next week.

RODOLFO SCHMIDT (INTO PHONE)  
 Sounds like time well spent. Clara?

CLARA (INTO PHONE)  
 In a Donut Factory, going over  
 polling data.

ELIZABETH (INTO PHONE)  
 In a Donut Factory?

CLARA (INTO PHONE)  
 You know, with Joe and Jane Public?

ELIZABETH (INTO PHONE)  
 Very well. Alex?

ALEX (INTO PHONE)  
 Getting nothing from sports agents.  
 None wanna stick their heads above  
 the parapet 'cause it'll limit their  
 clients' commercial appeal.  
 Apparently, we're not cool enough.

ELIZABETH (INTO PHONE)  
Where are you now?

ALEX (INTO PHONE)  
Waiting for Seth Leventhal to roll his fat ass out of Mario's Trattoria. Been trying to set up a meeting with this pear-shaped bastard all last week, so now I'm just gonna ambush him.

ELIZABETH (INTO PHONE)  
Hold off. The solution's right there. If Heaton-Harris isn't cool enough-

AUTOMATED TELEPHONE VOICE (FILTERED)  
Caller --

ROSS (O.S., FILTERED)  
Hel -- Hello? How do I get this thing to w-

AUTOMATED TELEPHONE VOICE (FILTERED)  
Has entered the conference.

FIVE-WAY INTERCUT with --

**EXT. BUSY URBAN PEDESTRIAN-ONLY ZONE - CONTINUOUS - PAST**

Ross speaks into a cell phone while Franklin conducts pedestrian surveys in this crowded shopping thoroughfare.

ROSS (INTO PHONE)  
Hello? We're here!

ELIZABETH (INTO PHONE)  
Ross, let me guess: your highly complex and refined survey of American youth is about to tell us that Heaton-Harris isn't cool enough.

ROSS (INTO PHONE)  
Quite the understatement. Listen to this...

Ross puts his phone on speaker and accosts a SHOPPER (20s).

ROSS (CONT'D)  
Excuse me, are you in favor of more thorough background checks for gun owners?

SHOPPER  
Yeah, definitely, with everything that's going on with all the, like, shootings and stuff-

ROSS  
Have you ever heard of the Heaton-Harris Amendment?

SHOPPER  
That a colon cleanser?

ROSS  
Thank you, that's all I needed.  
(into phone)  
You get that?

ELIZABETH (INTO PHONE)  
Alex, if it's not cool enough, the solution is to make it cooler. Your agents would talk their sports-star clients into endorsing it all by themselves. Where the hell's Brian when you need-

AUTOMATED TELEPHONE VOICE (FILTERED)  
Caller --

BRIAN (O.S., FILTERED)  
Brian and Lauren here.

AUTOMATED TELEPHONE VOICE (FILTERED)  
Has entered the conference.

SIX-WAY INTERCUT, with --

**INT. EDITING STUDIO - CONTINUOUS - PAST**

Brian and Lauren sit with two EDITORS in a cutting room, sharing a headphone each and the phone receiver.

BRIAN (INTO PHONE)  
Hey guys, the TV spot's almost done. We'll be good to submit it to the NFL for opening day clearance by the end of the week.

ELIZABETH (INTO PHONE)  
Good. Now we're all here, let's get to it. Ross?

ROSS (INTO PHONE)  
Levels of support aren't the problem, the problem is that we're not reaching enough people, so support doesn't translate into action.

BRIAN (INTO PHONE)  
Our message is good. We just need a big enough platform to blast it out so that everyone can hear it.

ELIZABETH (INTO PHONE)  
Any of our friends in the media will tell you that's only accomplished with scandal and controversy. Our message isn't penetrating to younger voters, most of whom are pro, but few of whom are politically active. In short, we need to make gun control cool. Brian, you have a background in marketing.

BRIAN (INTO PHONE)  
We could use a meme. Like a slogan, a unit of cultural-

ELIZABETH (INTO PHONE)  
I've read Dawkins, I know what a meme is.

BRIAN (INTO PHONE)  
You don't reach these guys with direct mail pamphlets.

Brian notices that a hip young Editor beside him is engrossed in her phone.

BRIAN (INTO PHONE) (CONT'D)  
You reach them on their smart phones.

IN THE DONUT FACTORY, Clara listens to the conversation while staring into her laptop SCREEN: Alex's friend request remains unanswered. The cursor hovers above ACCEPT. She hits it.

ELIZABETH (INTO PHONE)  
Let's do it. They're young, gullible, easily manipulated, and move in herds.

ON THE BENCH, Alex half-listens, on his tablet. Something on his screen gets his attention - Clara's Facebook notification. Alex smiles to himself.

ELIZABETH (INTO PHONE) (CONT'D)  
So what's our meme?

Crickets.

ELIZABETH (INTO PHONE) (CONT'D)  
Alright, I'm no good at platitudes, but we have at least four democrats on the team. You're supposed to be all creative. Come up with something.

She flicks off the speaker phone, abruptly ending the call.

**INT. PETERSON WYATT - STRATEGY ROOM - DAY - PAST**

Ross, Alex, Clara, Brian, and Franklin sit around the table, bereft of ideas. Ross writes something in his notebook. Everyone looks at him eagerly. He notices.

ROSS  
No, I'm just reminding myself to buy a new toothbrush.

TIME CUT TO:

Now there's empty pizza boxes and beer bottles littered atop the table. Esme is on speaker phone:

ESME (O.S., FILTERED)  
Here's what I got: most people are pro-Heaton-Harris, but in their minds only. If they want change, they need to get politically active, maybe for the first time in their lives. They need to get loud. Therefore...  
#GetLoud.

FRANKLIN

Talk is cheap; it's actions that count. Change is brought about not by words but by actions: letters, petitions, marching on town halls. It's kinda long, but... Actions Speak Louder Than Guns.

BRIAN

How about this: eighty percent say they want change, but how many are prepared to do something about it? How many are prepared to be the change? It's a quote from Gandhi. *Be the change that you wish to see in the world.* #BeTheChange.

ELIZABETH (O.S.)

That one makes me want to puke more than the other two put together.

They look to Elizabeth, hovering in the background.

BRIAN

Really? You don't like it?

ELIZABETH

Don't like it? I despise it with every fiber of my being. We're running with that one.

**INT. PETERSON WYATT - RODOLFO'S OFFICE - DAY - PAST**

Rodolfo works quietly at his desk, while Elizabeth sits on the couch, on her cell, mid-rant:

ELIZABETH (INTO PHONE)

We've crafted the message already, and yes, it conforms to the word limit for the attentionally challenged youth of today.

(listens)

Of course not, I got one of our cool people to do it.

(listens)

No Ari, not Matt Damon. We've already got the Damon crowd, we want the Timberlake crowd.

(listens)

Not politically interested but all too willing to board a bandwagon.

(listens)

Beaver? Look, get him too. Get as many taste-makers as you can to regurgitate it. Re-tweet, whatever, just herd the damn sheep, would you?

She hangs up on him. Immediately starts making another call. Rodolfo smirks and shakes his head a little.

ELIZABETH (TO RODOLFO)

What?

Rodolfo just shrugs. Someone answers Elizabeth's call:

ELIZABETH (ON PHONE) (CONT'D)  
Tracey Jacobs, please.  
(listens)  
Liz Sloane.

As she waits, Elizabeth glances over to Rodolfo again, and notices a framed photo on his desk: Rodolfo and his wife with close friends at a ski resort in Chamonix. Mont Blanc towers over them in the background.

The group stand tight, skis buried in powder; all look relaxed and happy. Elizabeth's face softens, pensive.

Someone picks up and she SNAPS back to reality. Moment over.

ELIZABETH (ON PHONE) (CONT'D)  
Tracey, hi. I'm fine. I need you to  
make some calls.

**SERIES OF SHOTS:**

- Justin Timberlake's Twitter page. #BeTheChange is all we need to see. Other celebrities follow suit.
- 'Retweet' and 'Favorite' are clicked repeatedly.
- FACEBOOK pages light up with gun control posts and images.
- NATIONAL TRENDS - #BeTheChange is first on the list.
- A bevy of American sports stars' Twitter pages blitz the cause. Kobe Bryant, Kevin Durant, LeBron James, Derek Jeter, Tom Brady implore their legions of followers to #BeTheChange.
- The pedestrian area in Times Square is chock-full as protesters clutching BE THE CHANGE banners and placards merrily CHANT the mantra and soak in summer sunshine.
- AT AN ANONYMOUS TOWN HALL, a dusty old book rests on a plinth beneath a sign that reads PUBLIC PETITIONS. A weary-eyed JANITOR trudges in and gets a shock - members of the public (some wear Be The Change T-shirts), male and female, young and old, are queuing out the door to sign the book.
- SLAP SLAP SLAP. A glut of green ticks plastered over Congressmen's faces.
- The whiteboard reads DAYS TO VOTE: 76. A HAND erases the numbers in 18 VOTES LOCKED, 16 TO GO and updates them - 22 VOTES LOCKED, 12 TO GO.

**INT. COLE, KRAVITZ AND WATERMAN LLP - NIGHT - PAST**

The pro-gun team (Ramirez, Travis, Wickham, Moore, Jane, R.M. Dutton and a few more JUNIORS) endure a Connors tirade.

CONNORS  
Be the change, be the change, I see  
this bullshit everywhere I go.  
They're walking all over us! We need  
to counter this crap, right the fuck  
now. Tell me one person in this room  
has something.

Silence. Heads down.

R.M. DUTTON  
You got something?

CONNORS  
 Got nothing.

RAMIREZ  
 This ain't fair. They got lefties on  
 their team, they're good at all that  
 creative shit.

TRAVIS  
 I'd like to see one of those fuckwits  
 in a bar fight.

**INT. PETERSON WYATT - STRATEGY ROOM - NIGHT - PAST**

Brian and Clara eat takeout and shoot the shit.

BRIAN  
 You think we ought to prepare for a  
 counter? I mean, we're wide open.  
 They could just make Be The Change  
 into Beat The Change, as in, beat the  
 amendment.

CLARA  
 Pull the trigger on gun control?

BRIAN  
 Heaton-Harris is... Heathen malice.

**INT. COLE, KRAVITZ AND WATERMAN LLP - NIGHT - PAST**

Blank stares all round.

CONNORS  
 Anything... Anybody...

**INT. PETERSON WYATT - STRATEGY ROOM - NIGHT - PAST**

BRIAN  
 No dilution of the Constitution.

CLARA  
 Control criminals, not guns.

BRIAN  
 So what d'you think? Should we prep  
 counters for some of these?

Both consider for a second. They look at each other.

CLARA  
 Nah.

**INT. COLE, KRAVITZ AND WATERMAN LLP - NIGHT - PAST**

Connors snaps, breaks the silence.

CONNORS  
 Alright, fuck this. We're gonna spend  
 big on TV spots, I want Clint  
 Eastwood directing Chuck Norris, no  
 expense spared.

The whole room breathes a SIGH of relief.

**INT. LUXURY HOTEL - ROOM 409 - NIGHT - PAST**

Elizabeth enters and closes the door softly behind her. It's bucketing rain outside and she's half-soaked.

Forde sits at the desk and looks out the window at the deluge. He turns to look at her.

FORDE  
 You're Madeline Elizabeth Sloane. You  
 work in government affairs at a  
 communications company.

ELIZABETH  
 Well, hooray for Google. "Government  
 affairs" and "communications" are  
 just fancy words for lobbying. The  
 only person to ever call me Madeline  
 was my mother.

She grabs a towel and dries her hair, unperturbed.

FORDE  
 What was that? The other night? You  
 pretended like we were strangers.

ELIZABETH  
 In public, we are.

FORDE  
 We were alone-

ELIZABETH  
 In a room full of Washington's  
 finest. I can't be associated with  
 you there, at least one other person  
 knew the truth about you.

It wasn't intended, but Forde is a little hurt by this.

FORDE  
 Yeah. I hear you lobbyists ain't so  
 good with truth.

ELIZABETH  
 Says who? The man with four  
 identities, who sleeps with strangers  
 for money?

Elizabeth regrets that instantly. There is a moment's silence as Forde is again reminded of his status as a leper.

FORDE  
 I work at my covers. I was just  
 surprised how much of a natural you  
 are. The way you just switched? You  
 need to teach me how to do that.

ELIZABETH

Decades of experience. Forde, deception is an integral part of social interaction. The average man lies six times a day, women three.

FORDE

So I experienced.

ELIZABETH

So what's the problem?

FORDE

No problem. I'm fine.

ELIZABETH

You know, you just uttered the most common lie told by both sexes.

FORDE

Alright. It's wrong. Satisfied?

ELIZABETH

That's a little simplistic.

FORDE

Guess I'm a simple guy.

ELIZABETH

Why then do you lie for a living?

FORDE

Pays the bills faster than showin' "Washington's finest" how to use a stairmaster.

ELIZABETH

There are degrees of wrongness. Immoral as a harmless lie may be, it may be perfectly moral to tell a hundred of them to prevent a truly pernicious outcome. Lies and half-truths are a lobbyist's stock in trade. But I've never deployed one for a cause I didn't believe in.

FORDE

(defeated shrug; beat)

So... We gettin' down to business or what?

Elizabeth hesitates. Things have changed. Her secret is out and she no longer feels the need to be curt with him.

ELIZABETH

Are you hungry? I wouldn't mind... Just ordering room service tonight.

Forde looks at her, intrigued. He straightens out, for the first time with her feeling like he's a respectable human, and not a support system for his manhood.

LATER - Elizabeth and Forde sit over room service.

FORDE

You once told me this was pathetic.

ELIZABETH

If you were a total stranger, it would be.

FORDE

Your line of work... It's all 'bout reputation, right? Nobody's gonna cut ya any slack if they got dirt on you.

ELIZABETH

Dirt has been known to end careers in this town, yes.

FORDE

(smiles)

I must be worth somethin'... You're takin' quite a risk, bein' here.

ELIZABETH

It would only be a risk if I didn't trust your discretion. But I must say, I didn't expect you to be quite so... Principled.

Elizabeth chuckles to herself sarcastically.

ELIZABETH (CONT'D)

You know, this is the closest I've ever come to a date?

FORDE

You never been on a date?

ELIZABETH

I went about my business and got on with my professional life; I took the view that if I ever stumbled upon it, I'd explore it. But I never sought it out. Nor did I 'stumble upon it'. So, here we are.

FORDE

What'd you do in college? Don't tell me you were-

ELIZABETH

Studying, which is, after all, the objective of college.

FORDE

It's fair to say you 'n me had very different objectives.

Elizabeth adjusts her Patek Philippe watch, regards it. Retreats inside herself for a softened beat.

ELIZABETH

(slows down)

You know, I'm not from money. Quite the opposite, in fact. Not many people know that.

FORDE

Can't say I ever thought about it.

ELIZABETH

When you're growing up as an only child, and you and your single mother sleep together on the floor 'cause she can't afford a bed... Let's just say it focuses you. Distractions like relationships pale into insignificance.

FORDE

You don't get lonely?

ELIZABETH

I've no time to get lonely. Speaking of which...

Elizabeth reaches into her handbag and pulls out an envelope. Hands it to Forde. He does not take it.

FORDE

For what? Tonight's my night off.

ELIZABETH

What d'you mean?

FORDE

I didn't work tonight. I had dinner with a friend. As it would happen, a single, female friend. Maybe next time we can get together for that coffee ya were so quick to shoot down.

Elizabeth's demeanor changes. She withdraws, becomes defensive.

ELIZABETH

No. Don't be ridiculous. Take it.

FORDE

Fair exchange without. You got my company, I got yours.

ELIZABETH

Damn it, Forde, take the fucking money.

He pauses. Realizes she isn't yet ready for this to be personal. Always business.

FORDE

Suit y'erself.

He takes the envelope.

**INT. PUBLIC BUS, ILLINOIS - DUSK - PAST**

Esme sits near the back among weary COMMUTERS after a hard day's work. She taps at her phone robotically. Nobody talks. Nobody even looks at anyone else.

The bus stops and new passengers get on. A MIDDLE-AGED MAN gets up and offers his seat to a LADY who can't be much older than him.

LADY  
Oh, I'm fine, thanks.

MIDDLE-AGED MAN  
(looks down)  
But for how much longer in those?

She's wearing a clunky pair of heels to his comfy Air Max 90s. Conceding, the Lady smiles and takes a seat. The Middle-Aged Man steps closer to the front of the bus.

Esme lowers her phone, and rests her head softly against the window. She's just closing her eyes, when --

A SCUFFLE breaks out near the front of the bus. Esme cranes her neck to see what all the fuss is about --

AN ERRANT GUNSHOT RINGS OUT!

People SCREAM. Some hit the deck - some are thrown off-balance as the bus SCREECHES to a halt.

A guy with a BUZZ CUT (20s) barges his way through commuters - in his hand - A FN HERSTAL 5.7 -

He's on a beeline, fixing his determined glare squarely ON ESME - he strides with purpose right for her.

She realizes and tries to scramble out of her seat -

Buzz Cut raises the gun -

He has a clean shot. All he has to do is pull the trigg--

BANG! BANG!

Buzz Cut JOLTS forward, hit twice in the back. His FN Herstal drops to the floor behind him, skidding to a pair of firmly-planted Air Max 90s. BLOOD appears at the corner of his mouth and he collapses, dead.

Behind him stands the Middle-Aged Man who offered his seat, stern expression behind a smoking Glock 9. Rock-solid stance of someone who spends a lot of time at the firing range. His name is FRANK MCGILL.

Like a pro, he kicks the fallen FN Herstal out of Buzz Cut's reach. Only then does he glance up.

Esme is on the floor, pressed up against a seat. She shivers, in shock. Her watered eyes meet the focused stare of her savior.

CUT TO BLACK

**INT. CONNORS' HOUSE - DAY - PAST**

Morning in the Connors household. His WIFE and obnoxious young KIDS are at the breakfast table. Connors has his phone to his ear, and is glued to a TV NEWS REPORT. On the phone:

CONNORS (INTO PHONE)  
Yeah, I'm getting it.

REPORTER (VIA T.V.)  
We understand the assailant was a firearms enthusiast, and was targeting a leading figure in the gun control movement, who was traveling as a passenger on the bus. The assailant was then shot dead himself by a civilian passenger who was carrying a registered concealed firearm. Two people were rushed to hospital with non-life-threatening injuries in an incident that could've been much worse had this brave man not...

CONNORS (INTO PHONE)  
George? You there? Get ready to spend some money.

**EXT. STARVED ROCK STATE PARK (ILLINOIS) - DAY - PAST**

A secluded spot that feels like a million miles from civilization. Sunlight filters through treetops and all that can be heard is the electric BUZZ of cicadas.

Esme sits on a bench. She stares into space, lifeless.

She doesn't so much as turn her head when Elizabeth sits next to her, softly. Elizabeth sets down her carry-on, clearly fresh from a plane.

The pair don't look at each other for a while. Elizabeth takes her time here, not her usual belligerent self.

ELIZABETH  
All the time I spend in the city,  
somehow I'm still more comfortable  
here.

ESME  
When I was a kid, we had a family get-together... We were sitting around the table at breakfast, talking about what animal we'd be if we were reincarnated. Some said birds. My uncle wanted to be a hippo, wallowing in mud all day. When my turn came, I thought I'd be clever. I said 'human'. Over the next twenty years, I slowly realized everyone else at that table had already considered that option and ruled it out.

ELIZABETH  
I had a look at your staff profile. You're one of the most prominent anti-gun campaigners in D.C. You went to high school in Colorado in the late '90s. The name of the school isn't stated.

She hasn't looked at her yet, but Esme gives Elizabeth the tiniest of nods to confirm her suspicion. A long beat.

ESME

I locked myself in a classroom and hid under a desk. I covered my ears, but it did nothing. People were dying outside. I heard knocks on the door. I didn't have it in me to even try to help. I couldn't move... I never wanted to feel that way again.

She gazes upon the verdant landscape; her eyes moistening, composure weakening.

ESME (CONT'D)

Yesterday... Yesterday, I felt the exact same way I did when I was eighteen. I got very good at acting tough, but nothing changed underneath. Nothing really changes at all.

Elizabeth spends a moment digesting her words. Her intonation slower, more considered here.

ELIZABETH

You may find this hard to believe, but I'm no stranger to those sentiments myself.

ESME

You were involved in a shooting?

ELIZABETH

(beat)

No. But I spent much of my formative years with my hands over my ears, trying, and failing absolutely, to block out the sounds of my father beating my mother.

Esme looks at Elizabeth. It's the first time she's ever heard anything from her that isn't work-related.

ELIZABETH (CONT'D)

Eventually, there came a point at which I could no longer tolerate it. Brave or stupid, one day, when he got violent, I stood up to him. When you grow up in fear of someone, they hold a certain power over you that subsists, regardless of your age or relative strength. But that first time, at the age of fourteen? That was the hardest thing I've done by a distance.

ESME

... What happened?

ELIZABETH

It took him by surprise. The immediate backlash for me wasn't pretty...

(MORE)

ELIZABETH (CONT'D)

but he wasn't so quick to get violent the next time. That stand changed everything. When he did take his swings, my mother and I stood up to him together. Ultimately, it gave us the confidence to run away from the bastard and never look back. It wasn't an inspiring ending, by any stretch, but some battles, believe it or not, are best won by turning your back. And some can only be won by not backing down.

Elizabeth regards Esme, not as a subordinate or even a colleague, but more like a proud parent.

ELIZABETH (CONT'D)

It's oh-so-easy to keep your mouth shut and let it slide, but you and I both managed to find that courage inside of us. Especially you, Esme. And when one person nails their colors to the mast, you'll find that others will be quick to follow. That's how change happens.

Esme retains her sense of despondency, but on some level she is buoyed by Elizabeth's showing of respect.

**MEDIA MONTAGE:**

- Frank McGill is held up as an all-American hero.
- McGill graces the covers of newspapers and magazines, holding up his Glock 9.
- He receives an award from a city OFFICIAL. Flashbulbs POP.
- POSTERS are stuck on windows, car bumpers. McGill points his Glock at us. OUTLAW GUNS AND ONLY OUTLAWS WILL HAVE GUNS. In another poster, a whole crowd of Frank McGills with guns on their hips. LET'S ALL BE FRANK. PROTECT YOUR COMMUNITY.
- SLAP SLAP SLAP. Red slashes plastered over mugshots.
- ON THE WHITEBOARD - DAYS TO VOTE: 42. The vote count reads 25 VOTES LOCKED, 9 TO GO. The numbers are replaced: 21 VOTES LOCKED, 13 TO GO. The team's now losing ground.

**INT. PETERSON WYATT - STRATEGY ROOM - DAY - PAST**

The team works in the usual melee of RINGING PHONES and CROSS-TALK. Esme steps in and the room falls silent. People stop what they're doing. Elizabeth lowers a phone from her ear as her eyes meet Esme's. She scans the silenced room. Then:

ESME

We're losing ground. What can I do?

Moment over. Esme is surrounded by colleagues, updating her and asking for her input. Ross sidles up to her, sheepishly.

ROSS

How are you doing?

ESME

I'm okay.

An awkward beat.

ROSS

D'you know the statistical likelihood of being struck by lightening twice?

ESME

(a bit annoyed)  
No, Ross, I don't.

ROSS

... Neither do I.

They finally share a smile.

**INT. PETERSON WYATT - STRATEGY ROOM - NIGHT - PAST**

Elizabeth and the team are morose, quiet. They sit and wait. Brian gets off the phone.

BRIAN (ON PHONE)

OK, thank you. Bye.  
(hangs up)

That was the advertising standards division of the NFL. Our TV spot was rejected.

LAUREN

(indignant)  
What?! How can they do that?!

BRIAN

We now fall foul of the 'extreme political sensitivity' clause.

LAUREN

Bloomberg funded anti-gun spots during last year's superbowl-

ESME

Not right after Frank McGill.

The killer blow. A brief moment's silence, until --

Ross enters. Everyone straightens out.

ROSS

OK, so it's not great. Finance was tailing off anyway, but on current projections, we can afford phone-

ELIZABETH

Let's get to the point. With our best foot forward, based on your best guess, how do things shake out come the vote?

ROSS

We'd run them close. And we've gone further than I ever imagined.

(MORE)

ROSS (CONT'D)  
 But on latest projections, at our  
 best pace... We'd come up anywhere  
 between three to five votes short.

ELIZABETH  
 How accurate is your vote count?

ESME  
Very.

Despite the dour circumstances, Esme regards Ross with a nod.  
 Always the sloucher, he straightens.

ELIZABETH  
 (beat; considers)  
 Alright, that's all. There's nothing  
 more we can do tonight.

The team lethargically get up, suddenly reluctant to abandon  
 their post.

FRANKLIN  
 Elizabeth, I don't need to leave.  
 Could rally the troops on the West  
 Coast and-

ELIZABETH  
 Get some rest, Franklin. You've done  
 enough for today.

CLARA  
 (channeling Elizabeth)  
 Not if we're going to be three to  
 five votes down.

ALEX  
 I'll take to the streets right now  
 and rip down those fucking Frank  
 McGill posters one at a time if I  
 have to.

ROSS  
 That's a logistical nightmare I'd  
 happily partake in.

ESME  
 ... Our colors are still nailed to  
 the mast, Elizabeth.

Elizabeth looks at the intrepid faces of her small, loyal  
 team. Her exterior barely registers it, but she's genuinely  
 touched and impressed.

ELIZABETH  
 The war will still be here tomorrow,  
 guys. Go home and sharpen your  
 knives. See you all first thing.

After a beat, they relent and take their exits. Elizabeth  
 remains in her seat. Rodolfo gives her a moment as she affixes  
 her stare on her young colleagues as they file out.

RODOLFO SCHMIDT  
 What now?

ELIZABETH  
We fight the good fight, and hope for  
the best.

RODOLFO SCHMIDT  
You coming?

She shakes her head and Rodolfo exits. Elizabeth hesitates. Decisively, she pulls out her cell, and makes a call.

FEMALE VOICE (O.S., FILTERED)  
Hello?

ELIZABETH (INTO PHONE)  
It's me.

FEMALE VOICE (O.S., FILTERED)  
I'm sorry, you have the wrong number.

ELIZABETH (INTO PHONE)  
Silly me. I should have written it  
down.

She hangs up, and puts her phone away. Savors the silence for a moment. She gropes in her handbag for the TRINKET BOX. Flips it open to reveal two little white pills. Elizabeth stares at them contemptuously. Wants them, but knows she shouldn't.

Jaw clenched in frustration, Elizabeth gets up and stomps over to a trash can, heels stabbing the floor with every stride.

Her hand hovers over the receptacle, but wavers - she can't let go. Until -- she drops the trinket box in the trash, and turns away quickly. Paces. Hands fidget, eyes dart around the room.

Frustration builds, and Elizabeth lets out a FERAL SCREAM - KICKS the trash can over - papers scatter across the floor.

Near breaking-point, she gathers herself. Calms her breathing.

The trinket box sits on the floor, glistening under tube lights. Taunting her. She walks over and picks it up, a disappointment in her eyes for a battle lost.

**INT. PETERSON WYATT - UNDERGROUND PARKING LOT - NIGHT - PAST**

Elizabeth walks toward her car, finally finished for the evening. She sees Clara and Alex in conversation near her black Mercedes S-Class, and initially thinks nothing of it, removes the key fob from her pocket.

A little closer in, she stops. Observes them from a distance. They're talking, smiling, as though both know they should go their separate ways, but neither wants to part. Like awkward college kids on a first date.

Elizabeth smiles faintly, a touch ruefully. She hangs back, not wanting to interrupt.

She looks elsewhere for a moment, but can't help but look back to see Clara give Alex a quick kiss and smile before splitting off to their cars.

Elizabeth unlocks her car and gets in.

**INT. MERCEDES S-CLASS - CONTINUOUS - PAST**

Elizabeth closes the door and silence envelops the luxury cabin. She hits the start button and the engine PURRS. The MP3 player resumes some vaguely upbeat classical music - Rachmaninov's Italian Polka.

No more than two seconds pass before Elizabeth shoots an arm out to shut it up. She sits for a moment's silence, sealed off in her little bubble. Finally, she belts up and pulls out.

**INT. COLE, KRAVITZ AND WATERMAN - STRATEGY ROOM - DAY - PAST**

Jane presents stats to Bob Sandford and the Gun Lobby team.

JANE

The public is overwhelmingly in favor of gun control. They've exploited this and secured the finance necessary to mount a serious challenge.

CONNORS

Is there not some saturation point? Where everyone who's backed their position will have coughed in?

JANE

Yes, but with 80% of the American public on their side, there's still some way to go. With McGill in the news, this is as good as it gets for us.

GEORGE

What are your projections?

JANE

If we take all the uncommitted Congressmen and split them 50-50, they win. 60-40, they still win. We'd need 64% to scrape it.

BOB SANDFORD

Good God.

GEORGE

How accurate is your count?

JANE

Very.

BOB SANDFORD

Buy them.

GEORGE

They're already on the payroll.

BOB SANDFORD

Buy them again!

CONNORS

Voter pressure's too strong.

BOB SANDFORD

(to George Dupont)

You said you would take care of this. The whole reason I came to this firm was for the woman who's putting you all to shame-

GEORGE

Bob. This bill will not pass.

BOB SANDFORD

How exactly do you plan to stop it?

GEORGE

(beat)

Clear the room please.

Those who know to exit take their leave. George, Bob Sandford, Connors, and R.M. Dutton remain.

GEORGE (CONT'D)

The only reason we're here is because of one person. Without her, we walk all over them.

BOB SANDFORD

What are you suggesting?

GEORGE

We need a way to remove her from the Heaton-Harris campaign, put her on the defensive. For example, a Congressional hearing into her unorthodox lobbying practices.

BOB SANDFORD

How would such a thing come about?

GEORGE

I know of a Congressman who may be open to the idea. But it would take a lot of persuasion.

BOB SANDFORD

I'll put up whatever it takes to kill that amendment.

R.M. DUTTON

Hold on. You'll need a convincing allegation of impropriety as the basis for an investigation.

CONNORS

I'd give my left nut to drag her rep through the dirt, but you're not gonna get it. She's a CYA specialist, I never met anyone so pedantic in my life.

GEORGE

The least we can do is look for it.

(gets up)

(MORE)

GEORGE (CONT'D)

I want everyone in this whole damn firm interviewed - no - I want anyone who ever shared a room with her interviewed. We'll see how well covered her ass really is.

CROSS-CUT STAFF INTERVIEWS:

MOORE

She wouldn't let us cut corners. A large part of my job involved researching the legality of our strategy, if there was any exposure she'd hold off.

CUT TO:

R.M. DUTTON

Any questionable surveillance, tapping, anything of that nature?

TRAVIS

Everybody knows she did it, but we never dealt with those guys. She kept them separate. For evidence purposes, they don't exist.

CUT TO:

JANE

She'd ply Congressmen with benefits. Free meals, tickets to events, golfing weekends. All paid for by our clients, via the firm.

GEORGE

Well, that right there's enough-

JANE

No, it's not. She'd make a point of invoicing them. Every single benefit, from a flight ticket to a glass of champagne, she made me keep receipts and invoice the Congressmen. Sure, there was an understanding they'd never pay, but we'd always send an invoice. The debt shows as an asset on our balance sheet, we can theoretically call it in any time we want.

GEORGE

And that's legal?

JANE

Apparently so. You know, now that you ask, there was a time...  
(hesitates)  
Ah, it's nothing.

GEORGE

Tell me about it.

JANE

Just a silly technicality, I didn't even notice, it was Franklin-

GEORGE

Jane. I know she mentored you, and you have a lot of respect for her, but you chose this firm. If you have any inkling of misconduct...

JANE

What would happen? To her?

GEORGE

(lying)

Nothing! We're mining for leverage, get her to stay out of Nebraska.

JANE

(beat)

There may have been a financial irregularity she glossed over. With the Kenyans, palm oil, the Nutella tax. I think she might have violated the gift ban.

**INT. PARKING LOT - NIGHT - PAST**

George Dupont approaches a parked Lexus. He gets into the passenger side.

**INT. LEXUS - CONTINUOUS - PAST**

George Dupont closes the door and takes a brief repose, EXHALES. In the driver's seat sits the man leading the charge in our congressional hearing: Ron M. Sperling. In private, his paternal, sanctimonious demeanor gives way to a curtness expected of a seasoned political schemer.

GEORGE

Things not looking so good for the mid-terms, Ron. You ask me, you're gonna need a lot more TV time.

CONGRESSMAN SPERLING

I didn't ask you.

GEORGE

Now, who might just be able to fund those coveted TV spots?

CONGRESSMAN SPERLING

I'm committed to Heaton-Harris, I can't vote for it with one hand and choke it with the other.

GEORGE

It needn't look that way. You'll be leading an inquiry into Sloane's affairs in response to an article exposing her litany of misdeeds.

CONGRESSMAN SPERLING

What article?

GEORGE  
We're arranging it.

CONGRESSMAN SPERLING  
The cost of hearings run into the millions. That's public money-

GEORGE  
Ron, the Gun Lobby have identified you as the man to pull this off. If you decline, I can't stop them blitzing you with negative finance, which, sure as your shit doesn't smell like root beer, they will. They won't stop until they annihilate you. D'you know the root meaning of the word 'annihilate'? It's Latin. It means, reduce to nothing. That's what they're going to do to you, Ron.

CONGRESSMAN SPERLING  
So what, I'll be taking a wedge from the Lobby and leading the attack on Heaton-Harris' biggest proponent? A sixth-grader could connect the dots.

GEORGE  
We can create a structure to obfuscate the source. Your big wedge will arrive courtesy of eight to twelve smaller entities with no affiliation to guns.

CONGRESSMAN SPERLING  
How big a wedge are we talking?

GEORGE  
Big enough to be the difference between the continuation of your duties as a member of Congress, and the reduction of your career to nothing. The article's coming.

George exits the car, leaving Sperling to consider his words. Suddenly agitated, Sperling BRUSHES vigorously at his forearm, which rests on the center console, as if swatting at some persistent itch.

**INT. PETERSON WYATT - RODOLFO'S OFFICE - DAY - PAST**

Rodolfo Schmidt and Elizabeth's secretary LORRAINE sit at a table. Elizabeth takes her seat.

ELIZABETH  
This had better be good. I've got viral video to produce.

LORRAINE  
I was sorting your letters, and between the hate mail and death threats, I found this.

Lorraine hands Elizabeth a letter.

LORRAINE (CONT'D)  
 Pru West of The Star is running a  
 feature on the lobbying industry.  
 Actually, on you.

ELIZABETH  
 (reading; then:)  
 And she wants to meet me, why the  
 hell did she send a letter?

RODOLFO SCHMIDT  
 Because she doesn't really want to  
 meet you. She wants to say she  
 reached out to you for an interview  
 and never heard back.  
 (off Elizabeth's look)  
 An insider at The Star got in  
 contact. Word is, it's a hit.

ELIZABETH  
 Well, the least I can do is  
 disappoint her.  
 (to Lorraine)  
 Set it up.

RODOLFO SCHMIDT  
 You're not leaving this damn building  
 without an attorney. Our in-house  
 guy's perfect. I don't believe you  
 two have met.

**INT. PETERSON WYATT - POSNER'S OFFICE - DAY - PAST**

Rodolfo Schmidt and one Daniel Posner are mid-argument.

POSNER  
 You know how I feel about this, I was  
 against you ever hiring her-

RODOLFO SCHMIDT  
 Because your job isn't winning  
 lobbying fights, it's keeping us from  
 getting sued-

POSNER  
 And the woman's a liability, quite  
 independently of her being utterly  
 contemptible-

**INT. PETERSON WYATT - OFFICE FLOOR - CONTINUOUS - PAST**

Elizabeth sits and waits outside. She can see them in silent  
 heated discussion behind the glass. Rodolfo opens the door.

RODOLFO SCHMIDT  
 Liz, meet your protection.

POSNER  
 Daniel Posner, Head of Legal.

ELIZABETH  
 Liz Sloane, contemptible liability.  
 And amateur lip-reader! Whose idea  
 were the glass walls, seriously?

**INT. CAFE - DAY - PAST**

Elizabeth shakes hands with **PRU WEST**, who introduces **GORDON**.

PRU WEST

So kind of you to meet at short notice. This is Mike Gordon from our legal department.

ELIZABETH

Daniel Posner from ours.

Pru West and Elizabeth sit. Gordon and Posner follow. Gordon sets a dictaphone down on the table. Posner does likewise. There's a very obvious hostility behind all the niceties.

PRU WEST

Ms. Sloane. You're at the forefront of an industry with a very bad rep. D'you think it's deserved?

ELIZABETH

Yes. When a company forks out campaign contributions to a Congressman who then supports legislation favorable to that company, the public see bribery. Because that's what it is.

PRU WEST

Can the system change?

ELIZABETH

Even if you take the money out of it, lobbying will never go away. At its core, lobbying is about relationships. You can't outlaw relationships.

PRU WEST

But the bribery you described earlier, that can change?

ELIZABETH

Yes, but it won't. The two parties capable of effecting change have no interest in doing so. Why would Congress change a system they profit from?

PRU WEST

Who's the second party?

ELIZABETH

You are. The media. It's far easier to generate hatred for individuals than it is for abstract systems, so you don't go for the system, you go for the personality. You choose scandal over insight, and who can blame you, readers respond to it. If you don't feed it to them, your rival will, you'll go bust and lose your job. Which brings me to my question for you: why are you wasting my time?

PRU WEST

Excuse me?

ELIZABETH

You're asking me abstract questions about the nature of lobbying which, sure as you were born crying, will not form the basis of your article. I'm going to go out on a limb and say this meeting is nothing more than an exercise in box-ticking, and your article's already written.

GORDON

(to Pru West)

Don't respond to that.

(to Elizabeth)

That's purely speculative on your part, if you have any evidence of this, by all means produce it.

ELIZABETH

Like I said, I'm going out on a limb.

Pru West smiles smugly, knowing Elizabeth is right but powerless to stop the process.

ELIZABETH (CONT'D)

Who is controlling you?

POSNER

Let's not do this.

ELIZABETH

Why now?

GORDON

The fact is, you have no way of knowing what Ms. West intends to do with the information gleaned from-

ELIZABETH

It's clear you have no interest in what I have to say-

GORDON

And how would you know that?

ELIZABETH

(beat)

Your dictaphone's off.

Elizabeth exits. Posner grabs his dictaphone and follows.

**INT. PETERSON WYATT - STRATEGY ROOM - DAY - PAST**

The entire room engrossed in the D.C. Star.

ALEX

It's a hit alright.

ELIZABETH

I thought it could've been worse.

ROSS  
I got four factual errors so far.

RODOLFO SCHMIDT  
This isn't good.

ELIZABETH  
Stop fussing. Put The Star in the recycling. They'll make pencils out of it, maybe one will find its way into the hand of a reporter with some integrity. It'll go away.

**INT. PETERSON WYATT - RODOLFO'S OFFICE - DAY - PAST**

WHACK! A week has passed, and Ross dumps two large lever arch files, both bursting at the seams, on Rodolfo's desk.

ROSS  
Every attack since the Pru West hack-job that kicked it all off. Every single one just the right side of libelous.

RODOLFO SCHMIDT  
So much for it going away.

ROSS  
My personal favorite is the one about how you toppled the High School Head Prefect in a fabricated plagiarism scandal. I'm assuming that's not libelous 'cause I can totally see it.

ELIZABETH  
God, that witch was insufferable.

RODOLFO SCHMIDT  
This is serious. That Sperling's got the hots for you, do you two have a past?

ELIZABETH  
I barely know him, it's a put-up.

RODOLFO SCHMIDT  
This could result in an indictment.

ELIZABETH  
I'll have to resign anyway.

ROSS  
Are you kidding, for what?! Why?!

ELIZABETH  
(points to folders)  
That. Heaton-Harris gets colder with every day I remain associated with it.

ROSS  
We're 29 days 'til the vote, still five votes down and losing ground. If they're orchestrating this, that's exactly what they want-

ELIZABETH

And our only play is to give it to them.

RODOLFO SCHMIDT

She's right.

ROSS

We can't run the campaign without-

ELIZABETH

Nonsense, of course you can. I need to lawyer up for an indictment.

ROSS

You didn't do anything.

ELIZABETH

No, but we did. We got too close.

**INT. PETERSON WYATT - POSNER'S OFFICE - DAY - PAST**

Posner reclines in his chair.

POSNER

Dan Steinitz. Len Watts. Edmund Gross. High-profile Federal indictment, that's who you hire.

ELIZABETH

I want you.

POSNER

Great! My first action as your attorney is to advise you to fire me, and hire one Dan Steinitz, Len Watts, or Edmund Gross.

ELIZABETH

We may have our differences-

POSNER

You didn't just wander into the offices of Hackney Carriage, alright? If I wanted to work for people like you, I'd have taken the offer from Cole Kravitz Waterman.

ELIZABETH

So we can't agree on the color of the sky, I can't help thinking you've misjudged me.

POSNER

I can live with that.

ELIZABETH

This will be news for months. Career-defining. If you can make room for the possibility you might be wrong about me... Don't tell me you don't want a swing at this.

Posner folds his arms. He does want a swing at this.

**INT. U.S. CONGRESS - WAITING ROOM - DAY - PRESENT**

SUPER: September 21, 2015

Posner, Alex, and Elizabeth talk at crossed purposes.

POSNER

(to Alex)

We're on in minutes, you need to get out of here-

ALEX

Shearman, Ohio, d'you know anything we can hit him with?

ELIZABETH

Not off the top of my head, I'll look into it first chance I-

POSNER

This isn't her job any more!

ALEX

(to Posner)

You work for the Lobby now? 'Cause that was their plan all along.

POSNER

I. Don't. Care. My job is keeping her out of jail. You're done here.

Alex exits. Elizabeth calls out:

ELIZABETH

How's it looking?

Alex shakes his head. Not happening.

ELIZABETH (CONT'D)

Find a way, get to it!

**INT. CONGRESSIONAL HEARING ROOM - DAY - PRESENT**

Congressman Sperling questions Elizabeth.

CONGRESSMAN SPERLING

Regarding your representation of the Kenyan government... Senator Len Davies, the sponsor of the bill you dubbed the 'Nutella Tax', was flown to Kenya first-class and put up in a five-star hotel, only a week before the bill was dropped. Our audit puts the cost of this trip at over \$20,000. Did the Senator ever reimburse these expenses?

ELIZABETH

No.

CONGRESSMAN SPERLING

Was he ever invoiced for them?

ELIZABETH

No.

CONGRESSMAN SPERLING

Was there any expectation that Senator Davis would repay this?

ELIZABETH

The trip was paid for by the Kenyan Government. If you're implying I violated the gift ban, you're barking up the wrong tree. Sovereign states are exempt from the gift ban under Chapter 2 of the House and Senate Ethics Manuals.

CONGRESSMAN SPERLING

You sure the Kenyans paid for that trip? See, I don't think they did.

(beat)

The trip was funded from a pooled account. Is it not true that one of your staff raised a concern, which you hastily dismissed?

ELIZABETH

I'll tell you what I told Franklin Walsh. The Kenyan Government contributed enough to that account to cover the trip five times over.

CONGRESSMAN SPERLING

But it's true that the account contained funds from private entities? F&B conglomerates?

ELIZABETH

Their contributions made up one quarter of the total, yes.

CONGRESSMAN SPERLING

Is it not also true that, because the Kenyans instructed you late on this, funds from private entities were already in the pooled account when the Kenyans transferred their funds in?

ELIZABETH

Yes, I believe so.

Posner looks crestfallen. He knows what this means. MEDIA BUZZ ratchets up. They smell blood.

CONGRESSMAN SPERLING

(beat; nods)

Well. We have ourselves a smoking gun. This is a violation of Chapter 2 of the Senate Ethics Manual, which prohibits the furnishing of money or gifts from a private entity to a member of Congress.

ELIZABETH

I repeat, the trip was furnished by the Kenyan government-

CONGRESSMAN SPERLING

I'm afraid that's not accurate. In accordance with Regulation 17, subsection (d) of the Financial Accounting Standards Board guidelines, funds in a pooled account are to be treated under a principle known as FIFO. First In, First Out. It means that money paid into a joint account first, is the first money to be paid out of it when the account is drawn upon. The effect of this, is that the Kenyan Government didn't contribute one dime towards the \$20,000 that was spent on Senator Davis' trip. It was covered by the sixteen private entities who first contributed to that account. Which puts you, as the one who authorized the transfer, in violation of the Congressional gift ban.

Elizabeth freezes for a moment, blind-sided. It doesn't last.

ELIZABETH

(incredulous)

FIFO? That's your trump card? You drag me in for a week of hearings, indelicately wedge an endoscope up my posterior, and all this time, the only incriminating item in your possession is an accounting snafu? One wonders why this wasn't over in two hours flat. It's almost as though you've held some kind of special interest in dragging this process out as long as possible.

CONGRESSMAN SPERLING

I have a duty to be thorough in my investigations. After all, I represent the people of the United States of America.

(beat)

This concludes my questioning of the witness. Thank you, Ms. Sloane.

Elizabeth gets out of the hot seat and takes up a position next to Posner. As she does, Congressman Sperling announces:

CONGRESSMAN SPERLING (CONT'D)

We have one further witness we'd like to call.

POSNER

(whispers, to Elizabeth)

FIFO? Seriously?. Maybe you're not so sleazy after all.

CONGRESSMAN SPERLING

The people call Mr. Robert Forde.

Elizabeth's face drops upon hearing the name.

ELIZABETH  
I wouldn't bet on it.

Seeing her reaction, Posner knows this is bad and pipes up.

POSNER  
Mr. Chairman, I don't recall being given notice of your intention to-

CONGRESSMAN SPERLING  
We have only recently been able to locate the witness, Mr. Posner.

ELIZABETH  
(to Posner)  
Let it play.

POSNER  
Mr. Chairman, a moment with my client please.

They confer. For the first time, Elizabeth seems broken.

POSNER  
What is this? Who's Robert Forde?

ELIZABETH  
I don't know why I'm even surprised. How stupid I've been...

POSNER  
I can raise an objection, we can-

ELIZABETH  
Let it play, damn it, they'll get it out there one way or another.

A beat. Posner relents.

LATER, Forde is escorted to the stand by a Capitol Police officer. He looks at Elizabeth but she won't meet his gaze.

CONGRESSMAN SPERLING  
Mr. Forde, please raise your right hand. Do you solemnly swear to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, under pains and penalties of perjury?

Forde hesitates for a moment. A quiet anger on his face.

FORDE  
Yeah. I swear.

CONGRESSMAN SPERLING  
Mr. Forde, could you please describe the nature of your work?

FORDE  
I got many jobs. PT, fitness modelin' on the side...

CONGRESSMAN SPERLING  
What would you say earns you the bulk of your income at present?

Forde clenches his jaw. He leans forward.

FORDE  
I work as an escort in D.C.

The media BUZZ heightens.

CONGRESSMAN SPERLING  
You... sleep with women for money?

FORDE  
I meet the client's needs. Sometimes, that's bein' on their arm. Sometimes more. You'd be surprised how many women just wanna sit 'n talk to someone from a different neck'a the woods, who ain't gonna judge 'em.

Forde glances to Elizabeth, remembering their earlier conversation. She can't even look at him.

CONGRESSMAN SPERLING  
But... part of your job entails having intercourse for payment?

FORDE  
... Yes.

CONGRESSMAN SPERLING  
Have you ever met Elizabeth Sloane?

FORDE  
Yep.

CONGRESSMAN SPERLING  
Could you please identify her?

Forde nods to Elizabeth. Her head remains bowed and she continues to avert her gaze.

CONGRESSMAN SPERLING  
What was the nature of your relationship?

Forde hesitates. The media salivate.

FORDE  
I was attendin' a function with a client. Ms. Sloane was there. I tried to introduce myself, but she bucked me off.

Congressman Sperling's face hardens. In the gallery, George Dupont shoots R.M. Dutton a piercing glare, who looks just as shocked. Elizabeth now looks at Forde. Not the answer any of them was expecting.

CONGRESSMAN SPERLING  
Mr. Forde, have you ever entertained Ms. Sloane as a client?

FORDE  
... No.

Elizabeth tries her best to hide her surprise, but there's a touch of confusion on her face; Forde's behavior is not conforming to her expectation nor world view.

CONGRESSMAN SPERLING

Mr. Forde, may I remind you that you are speaking under oath, and any statement which is later proved to be materially inaccurate may expose you to liability for perjury before Congress. This is a serious offense, and carries the suitably serious sanction of incarceration. I ask again, did you entertain Ms. Sloane in any capacity as a client?

FORDE

... No. I didn't.

CONGRESSMAN SPERLING

(hardened)

Thank you, Mr. Forde. You're dismissed.

Forde exits the stand and is walked out by Capitol Police.

Elizabeth watches him go, confused and genuinely touched that he put his head on the block to protect her.

**INT. PETERSON WYATT - POSNER'S OFFICE - NIGHT - PRESENT**

Elizabeth, Rodolfo Schmidt, and Posner sit in silence.

RODOLFO SCHMIDT

FIFO. You're supposed to be the most debased, corrupt operative on the hill, and the only thing they can nail you with is FIFO.

POSNER

It's enough to put you behind bars.

ELIZABETH

I doubt they'll bother. They got what they wanted.

POSNER

They wanted you behind bars.

ELIZABETH

Ross!

Ross appears in the doorway.

ELIZABETH (CONT'D)

How's our old friend Heaton-Harris?

ROSS

Comatose on its death bed. The whole issue's gone cold.

ELIZABETH

(to Posner)

That's what they wanted.

RODOLFO SCHMIDT  
Shameless bastards. That stunt with  
the prostitute - anyone who knows  
anything about you will know how  
utterly preposterous that is.

Elizabeth and Posner exchange a quick glance.

RODOLFO SCHMIDT (CONT'D)  
We fought the good fight. Got closer  
than we had any right to.

ELIZABETH  
You didn't hire me to get close.  
(To Ross)  
What would it take to revive it?

ROSS  
Right now, it's not even making it to  
the floor.

ELIZABETH  
What would it take to revive it?

ROSS  
Seriously? An earthquake.

Elizabeth nods, as if finally conceding defeat.

ELIZABETH  
Well. I should get going.

RODOLFO SCHMIDT  
We'll all be there tomorrow.

ELIZABETH  
(exiting; stops)  
Hope for an earthquake.

**INT. ELIZABETH'S HOUSE - NIGHT - PRESENT**

Dim lighting in Elizabeth's living room. Something about it has changed since we were last here: a sparse arrangement of high-end furniture, coffee tables and tasteful lamps.

Most notable is the absence of work-related clutter. No papers, folders, or file boxes. A vibrant potted plant where there was nothing before. Dare we say, like a home.

*The Litigators* lies face-down on a side table. Next to it, in the comfortable armchair used for reading, Elizabeth reclines, in deep, peaceful sleep.

**INT. CONGRESSIONAL HEARING ROOM - DAY - PRESENT**

It's packed to the rafters and BUZZING. Public gallery full of familiar faces. Connors, George Dupont, R.M. Dutton, Jane, Rodolfo Schmidt and the whole of the Peterson Wyatt team.

**INT. U.S. CONGRESS - WAITING ROOM - CONTINUOUS - PRESENT**

The same room where we first met Elizabeth and Posner. Professional to the last, Posner coaches her on proceedings.

POSNER

They're going to ask you if you want to make a statement before they read your sentence. Don't make a statement. Got it? No good can come of you making a statement. You'll expose yourself to contempt of Congress, defamation-

ELIZABETH

I understand.

POSNER

Don't make a statement. Just decline, and move on.

ELIZABETH

Anything else? Or can we just go in there and get this over with?

Posner nods. Elizabeth stands, straightens her jacket: she too, professional to the last. She turns to leave when --

POSNER

Liz?

Posner hesitates. Extends his hand to Elizabeth. He wouldn't dare admit he was wrong about her, but they both know that's what it means. This time, she shakes. Proudly.

**INT. CONGRESSIONAL HEARING ROOM - DAY - PRESENT**

Elizabeth is marched to the dock by CAPITOL POLICE OFFICERS. The ever-sanctimonious Ron M. Sperling presides.

CONGRESSMAN SPERLING

Ms. Sloane. Before we proceed to the business of sentencing, you are entitled to make a statement, reflecting on your crime. Is there something you'd like to say?

ELIZABETH

Yes, Congressman, there is.

Posner closes his eyes. Why does he even bother?

CONGRESSMAN SPERLING

Take all the time you need.

ELIZABETH

When I received an offer to take up a position advocating for gun control, I was under no illusions of how difficult it would be.

CONGRESSMAN SPERLING

Ms. Sloane, is this a reflection on your crime, or your recent efforts to-

ELIZABETH

Mr. Sperling, you've effectively spent the last seven days prying into every detail of my personal and professional existence, not to mention the fact you just permitted me to take 'all the time I need'. So, with all due respect, shut up.

A pregnant collective pause permeates the entire room. Sperling studies her, a suppressed smirk beneath his pervasive professional decorum.

CONGRESSMAN SPERLING

Proceed.

Elizabeth hesitates to compose herself, gather her thoughts.

ELIZABETH

My work as a lobbyist has been defined by a peculiar kind of conflict. I've made a career from defending my clients' attempts to maximize their profit. I loathe to use words such as 'duty' and 'responsibility', because I don't believe such concepts to be bases for human behavior. I've advocated strongly for self-interest as the only rational basis.

She looks at Posner.

ELIZABETH (CONT'D)

I recently told my attorney that ideology is dead; that people merely co-opt whichever political school of thought best serves their desire to profit personally. Looking back on my history of representations, I can only marvel at how wrong I was.

Backs straighten in the public gallery, surprised at the hint of contrition.

ELIZABETH (CONT'D)

My decision to refuse the Gun Lobby, and to work for the Heaton-Harris campaign, was decidedly contrary to the interests of my career, reputation, my bank balance, and sanity. I've been branded a master manipulator, and a parasite on American democracy. I must say, I took the job at Peterson Wyatt for reasons which weren't entirely consistent with my world view.

Forde stands at the back of the gallery, listening intently to her every word. Elizabeth's eyes flash to him.

ELIZABETH (CONT'D)

I guess, sometimes, people challenge themselves - do things they don't fully understand, that don't make sense to them, or even things they're not comfortable with... Not from any self-serving impulse to protect their lot, but as a matter of principle. Because they happen to believe, in the circumstances, it's plainly and simply the right thing to do.

Forde straightens, raises his head, as if he knows she's talking to him.

ELIZABETH (CONT'D)

Next Sunday, it will have been eight months since Claudia, Lisa, and Hannah Patterson were shot dead, without rhyme or reason, in the Southridge Mall, Greendale, Wisconsin.

**INT. PATTERSON RESIDENCE (WISCONSIN) - CONTINUOUS - PRESENT**

Joel Patterson (from page 41), who lost his wife and children in the shooting, is glued to Elizabeth's speech on TV, taking it all in, resolute in his efforts to hold back tears.

ELIZABETH (ON TV; FILTERED) (CONT'D)

(beat)

I wasn't personally acquainted with these people, nor have I ever known a gun victim. But there are many out there who aren't so lucky. Joel Patterson, a loving husband and father. Their friends and teachers, past and present. Anyone whose lives those three innocent people would have touched. They need a voice.

**INT. CONGRESSIONAL HEARING ROOM - CONTINUOUS - PRESENT**

ELIZABETH (CONT'D)

The truth is, I took on each and every one of my representations because I believed, as a matter of ideology, in the causes I for which advocated.

(echoing George Dupont)

Some may regard this as 'infantile, save-the-world idealism', but I've come to realize that conviction-lobbying served my interests very well; it catapulted me over the legions of mercenaries, to the very top of my industry; all without playing golf, or being a man.

CHUCKLES from the crowd. Rodolfo Schmidt smiles widely, eyes glazed, remembering their very first conversation.

ELIZABETH (CONT'D)

My point is this, and there's no better place to make it than on national TV, before America's assembled press...

Brian and Ross share a look, remembering when they bemoaned the absence of a platform for their under-publicized cause. Their wheels turning: *Did Elizabeth orchestrate all of this?*

ELIZABETH (CONT'D)

What sets humans apart is our capacity for reason. The foresight to realize that our interests are best served not by short-term grabs for personal gain, but by holding a real ideology... Cherishing it; using it as a guide for all our decisions and our actions. We can maximize our gain not by engaging in zero-sum games of I-win-you-lose, but by cooperating - doing what we believe is right, not just for ourselves, but for everyone. We'd all be better off this way, individually and collectively; we could all have it so much better - with so little effort, if only we could just see--

Elizabeth, usually so controlled and eloquent, stumbles over her words. The wall of granite has crumbled. She looks to her colleagues in the gallery, each full of pride and admiration.

ELIZABETH (CONT'D)

Now, I know I'm not the easiest person in the world to work with, but in this room sit two sets of people with very different ideologies. They found common ground and made huge sacrifices in their careers and personal lives, all in the name of doing what they believe is right. One almost lost her life in the process.

Esme holds her gaze, her own walls finally coming down.

ELIZABETH (CONT'D)

Some put their identity on the line to serve a cause which ultimately protects the essence of what that very identity means to them.

Clara clenches Alex's hand, a lump in her throat, knowing that Elizabeth has finally given her the acknowledgement she's longed for.

ELIZABETH (CONT'D)

These people are not disinterested altruists. They're just smart enough to realize that their own interests are best served by doing the right thing for society as a whole.

The team sit, wide-eyed, surprised, and moved by her tribute. In another section of the public gallery, Jane sits next to George Dupont. She shares their expression.

Elizabeth casts her gaze toward the six present Congressmen who sit on the panel. They contemplate her words.

ELIZABETH (CONT'D)

I urge members of Congress to do likewise, and exercise their power and influence in a manner that benefits everyone, not just themselves. Many an honest politician has tried, only to be promptly voted out, because there's always someone - some rat - who's prepared to stoop lower than the rest to get his nose in the trough, and by so doing, turn the entire electoral process into a race to the bottom.

Now she aims a pointed stare at Congressman Sperling himself, who sits in stone-faced silence.

ELIZABETH (CONT'D)

Make no mistake. These are the real parasites on American democracy.

Elizabeth tightens up her softening emotions, and levels her chin, takes in the room.

ELIZABETH (CONT'D)

This game is one of trust; it only works when everyone is playing. People say, ad nauseam, that they want change. I appeal to our finest nature - for want of a better expression - to be that change.

The packed room is stunned quiet. Journalists regard her earnestly. Photographers have stopped snapping, put their equipment down. Nobody expected this, not even Elizabeth.

BRIAN

(whispers)

That's not exactly the meme.

LAUREN

(emotional; under breath)

Shut up, Brian.

BRIAN

Right. It's not important.

In the public gallery, Jane turns to George Dupont.

JANE

Mr. Dupont. I'd like to discuss my future.

GEORGE

This is hardly the time.

Back on the stand, Elizabeth sips from a glass of water, and composes herself. Partially restores the granite wall.

ELIZABETH

Lobbying is about foresight. About anticipating your opponent's moves and devising countermeasures. The winner plots one step ahead of the opposition, and plays her trump card just after they play theirs. It's about making sure you surprise them, and they don't surprise you.

Posner's eyes narrow. He's heard this spiel before, right at the start of the hearings.

ELIZABETH (CONT'D)

I anticipated that if I got sufficiently close with Heaton-Harris, there may be an assault against me personally to stall our momentum and tarnish our credibility.

Jane turns to Dupont again.

JANE

Actually, it is.

She hands him an envelope.

JANE (CONT'D)

My resignation.  
(she stands)  
Academia's more my scene.

Jane pivots and exits. Dupont regards the envelope like it contains test results for Anthrax poisoning.

CONGRESSMAN SPERLING

Ms. Sloane, I think it's about time-

ELIZABETH

Before I left Cole, Kravitz, and Waterman, I retained an operative of mine in their ranks.

This sends the media into a FRENZY. Dupont's eyes WIDEN. He looks back after Jane. His ass is on fire.

SERIES OF FLASHBACKS:

- *Ross breaks bad news to the team:*

ROSS

*We'd run them close. And we've gone further than I ever imagined. But on the latest projections... We'd come up anywhere between three to five votes short.*

- *Elizabeth alone in the Strategy Room, phone to her ear:*

ELIZABETH (INTO PHONE)

*Silly me. I should have written it down.*

- *Jane briefs the Bob Sandford and the Gun Lobby team:*

JANE

*If we take all the uncommitted  
Congressmen and split them 50-50,  
they win. 60-40, they still win. We'd  
need 64% to scrape it.*

GEORGE

*How accurate is your count?*

JANE

*Very.*

**EXT. PARKING LOT - NIGHT - PAST**

ECU on ASPHALT. A cybernetic COCKROACH, wearing an electronic backpack scurries along the black top.

VIA A TELEPHOTO LENS - *George Dupont approaches a parked Lexus.*

LITTLE SAM

*That's it, he's going for the car.  
Black Lexus.  
(mock German)  
Vo ist Ahnuld?*

BACK IN THE PARKING LOT, the robo-roach scuttles up beside the front right tire.

FROM THE CORNER OF THE PARKING LOT, Big Sam, styled as a homeless guy, controls the cockroach with his iPhone.

*Dupont stops to open the car door -*

LITTLE SAM (CONT'D)

*Now!*

The cockroach CHARGES out and clings to the heel of George's shoe, just as he gets into the car.

FLASHBACK: IN CAR --

GEORGE

*Things not looking so good for the  
mid-terms, Ron. You ask me, you're  
gonna need a lot more TV time.*

CONGRESSMAN SPERLING

*I didn't ask you.*

BACK TO SCENE:

ELIZABETH

*A plot was hatched to use public  
funds to bankroll a trumped-up  
hearing at the behest of the Gun  
Lobby. I had George Dupont under  
surveillance until he met with a  
member of Congress who exhibited  
sufficient moral bankruptcy to adhere  
to such a plan. That Congressman was  
Ronald Michael Sperling.*

The media climb on top of one another to get a shot.

CONGRESSMAN SPERLING  
*Order!* This is not a platform you can  
 use to make malicious, defamato-

ELIZABETH  
 Input DNS address 193.184.216.119  
 into to a browser, download a file  
 named... Earthquake.

Everyone in the room bar Elizabeth and Sperling make a mad  
 rush for their phones and laptops. It's PANDEMONIUM.

INSERT VIDEO - Close-up zoom of Sperling and George Dupont  
 through a car windshield, on a night-vision camera. High  
 quality audio is seamlessly synced.

CONGRESSMAN SPERLING (ON VIDEO)  
 I'm committed to Heaton-Harris, I  
 can't vote for it with one hand and  
 choke it with the other.

GEORGE (ON VIDEO)  
 It needn't look that way. You'll be  
 leading an inquiry into Sloane's  
 affairs in response to an article  
 exposing her litany of misdeeds.

CONGRESSMAN SPERLING (ON VIDEO)  
 What article?

GEORGE (ON VIDEO)  
 We're arranging it.

FLASHBACK: IN CAR -

*Sperling BRUSHES his forearm vigorously, as if swatting at  
 some persistent itch.* The source of the itch: Mr. Cockroach,  
 which burrows under the floor mat.

BACK TO SCENE:

The entire hearing room has descended into a febrile din of  
 cross-talk. Congressman Sperling hyperventilates; his act has  
 crumbled. Connors eyeballs space, red-faced, jaw clenched at  
 1,000psi.

George is more fatalistic; stony gaze zeroed in on Elizabeth.  
 He rips open Jane's envelope. Together with her resignation  
 letter is an old, crumpled sheet from a NOTEPAD - the same one  
 given to Elizabeth by Rodolfo the night they met. On it, in  
 Rodolfo's handwritten scrawl:

*A conviction-lobbyist never cheats. She exposes cheaters.*

Below, Rodolfo's quote for Elizabeth is written simply:

*\$0*

George's eyes betray a glimmer of regret. He got played -  
*tactically, creatively, and ethically* - and he knows it. Some  
 admiration, even.

A panelist Congressman BANGS his gavel and shouts:

CONGRESSMAN

In light of these allegations, this hearing is adjourned!

He BANGS his gavel again as the room continues to pulsate. Elizabeth's eyes meet those of Rodolfo Schmidt. She gives him a subtle, knowing shrug. He nods, now wise to her strategy.

They finally exchange a sincere smile.

FADE TO BLACK

**INT. MINIMUM SECURITY WOMENS' PRISON - DAY - PRESENT**

Visiting hour. Posner sits opposite Elizabeth. She has gained a little weight, the color has returned to her face.

POSNER

You look good.

ELIZABETH

Prison's not so bad if you don't have a penis. The guys shank each other, we form self-help groups. There's a black market economy in lip gloss.

(beat)

You know, you're my first visitor? I wasn't sure I'd see you here.

Posner regards the sentiment with a gentle nod.

POSNER

I'm curious. FIFO. That was you, throwing them a bone. Without it, they really would've had nothing to incite the hearing?

ELIZABETH

See? Not so terrible after all. I was hoping nobody would notice the breach was committed on the day I departed.

POSNER

(figuring)

And you withheld this part of your strategy from your *deposable* team members because...

ELIZABETH

Five years minimum.

Posner regards her, realizing the extent to which he has misjudged this woman.

POSNER

You instigated the whole thing. Brought the roof of the US Capitol crashing down on your head, put yourself - among others - through all of this. For what, a gun bill?

ELIZABETH

How's that doing, by the way?

POSNER

The Gun Lobby has supplanted Wall Street as America's most hated. You'd have to talk to Ross for the numbers, but it's moving again.

ELIZABETH

Then it worked. I wouldn't have moved without a plan to win.

POSNER

But for what? This was career suicide. No firm's going near you, not now. You're too high-profile.

ELIZABETH

I knew this would be my last hurrah the moment I conceived it.

POSNER

You're the champion of self-interest, right? I fail to see how self-immolation in furtherance of a gun bill is in your interests. This was disinterested altruism.

ELIZABETH

(beat)

Career suicide might sound bad... but it's not when you consider the alternative is suicide by career. Any of my eleven doctors would tell you I've served my interests very well.

POSNER

(gets it)

You really think you can slow down?

ELIZABETH

I took two years to read a hundred pages of *The Litigators*. I read the remaining three hundred in four days.

POSNER

And on the outside?

ELIZABETH

At least now, I have a chance to find out.

(she stands)

Thank you for coming, Daniel.

She offers her hand. Posner gets up, but does not shake.

POSNER

Actually, we're not quite finished here. We couldn't do this earlier because of depositions for the Sloane-gate hearings.

ELIZABETH

Do what earlier?

Posner motions to the waiting area of the visitation wing, behind a wall of reinforced glass. Elizabeth looks over --

POSNER  
You got some visitors.

-- to see her ENTIRE TEAM:

Rodolfo Schmidt, head high, full of admiration and respect;

Jane, smiling, tears welling;

Alex and Clara hold hands, now a couple;

Ross applauds from afar, his mind still blown by her ruse;

Esme, dressed casually and looking more relaxed than ever;

Brian, Lauren, and Franklin complete the equation. They make their way past security.

Elizabeth doesn't know how to react; the idea that they've all taken time out of their busy lives, traveled all this way - just to see her, to be there for her - it's too much.

She starts to tear up, and turns away instinctively, loathes to show any weakness in public. But this is the one battle she knows she can't win. She turns back and moves toward her colleagues - now, unequivocally, her friends too.

Jane is first to greet her, and they enter into a long embrace. Emotions bubble over. The rest of her team gather round. All look very much at ease. Dare we say, like a family.

FADE TO BLACK

**INT. CONGRESSIONAL HEARING ROOM - DAY - PRESENT**

A familiar sight. A packed house, not a spare seat in the gallery. Cameras SNAP. That pulsating BUZZ of anticipation.

REPORTER (V.O.)  
We're live from Capitol Hill where George Dupont and Congressman Ron Sperling are due to face charges of conspiracy, corruption, and abuse of powers. If found guilty, both men could face lengthy jail sentences...

MEDIA FRENZY as Congressman Sperling and George Dupont are marched to their seats by a phalanx of CAPITOL POLICE.

REPORTER # 2 (V.O.)  
... Far-reaching scandal involving key players from D.C. lobbying firm Cole, Kravitz and Waterman; Bob Sandford, President of the Gun Lobby; award-winning journalist Pru West...

**INT. MINIMUM SECURITY WOMENS' PRISON - DAY - PRESENT**

Elizabeth is handed a bag of personal effects. She hugs three FEMALE INMATES she has befriended during her stay.

REPORTER # 3 (V.O.)

... Accused of buying a series of Congressional hearings to smear and frustrate pro-gun control advocate Elizabeth Sloane in her efforts to promote the Heaton-Harris Amend...

REPORTER # 4 (V.O.)

... Expected to be signed into law on Tuesday, meaning, for the first time in America's history, it will be impossible to buy a gun from anyone without undergoing extensive criminal and mental health background checks.

**EXT. MINIMUM SECURITY WOMENS' PRISON - DAY - PRESENT**

Elizabeth is shown out of a discreet side exit. She's dressed in casual, comfortable clothing. A sharp contrast from her usual urban warrior business attire.

She tries to hail a cab, but the first one to pass is occupied. Her eye catches something across the street...

FORDE leans against the side of his pickup, a cup of coffee in each hand. Their eyes meet. They hold the stare for a long moment. Forde plays it cool as ever. He casually observes her, waiting for a reaction.

Elizabeth straightens out. A smile creases her cheeks...

FADE OUT