

VERVE

# **FRIEND OF THE SHOW**

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FADE IN:

INT. OLD WOODEN SHIP - NIGHT

A dirty, cramped boat in the early 1900s. Tossed by choppy seas. People are dirty. Children cry. Mothers pray.

COMMERCIAL NARRATOR (V.O.)  
Give me your tired, your poor, your  
huddled masses.

A YOUNG IRISH GIRL hugs her knees to her chest.

COMMERCIAL NARRATOR (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
Yearning to breathe free.

EXT. ELLIS ISLAND - DAY

The Young Irish Girl steps off the boat. She sees the Statue of Liberty and takes a joyful breath.

EXT. MODERN DAY, WAR-TORN MIDDLE EASTERN CITY - DAY

The sounds of explosions and gunfire. A family in the rubble that was once their home.

COMMERCIAL NARRATOR (V.O.)  
The wretched refuse of your teeming  
shore.

EXT. TRAIN - NIGHT

A TEENAGE LATIN GIRL rides on top of a train, bound for America. Lights in the distance. Relief washes over her.

COMMERCIAL NARRATOR (V.O.)  
Send these, the homeless, tempest  
tost to me.

INT. CLASSROOM - DAY

A roomful of refugees and immigrants. An American flag hangs in the corner. A smiling teacher with a little Statue of Liberty on her desk.

COMMERCIAL NARRATOR (V.O.)  
I lift my lamp beside the golden  
door.

EXT. POLITICAL RALLY - DAY

The commercial's narrator, SENATOR DAVID IKWUAKOR [late 40s, black, handsome, charming], shakes hands with overjoyed immigrants at a crowded, energetic political rally.

DAVID (V.O.)  
 Whoever you are, wherever you're  
 from, you're welcome here.

The crowd watches David speak at a podium. The Middle Eastern  
 family. The Latin teen...

DAVID (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
 It's who we are.

...And, even the Little Irish Girl from the 1900s.

DAVID (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
 It's who we've always been.

FREEZE FRAME. SUPER: DAVID IKWUAKOR FOR PRESIDENT.

DAVID (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
 I'm David Ikwuakor, and I approve  
 this message.

INT. KING'S COURT STUDIO - NIGHT (ON-AIR)

FRANKLIN KING [mid 60s, full of righteous bluster] at his  
 desk. The show is KING'S COURT.

FRANKLIN  
 Doesn't that make you sick? Right?  
 It's so brazenly manipulative, I  
 can't get through the whole thing  
 without this gross burning feeling  
 in my throat. Like bile rising.  
 (beat)  
 Make no mistake. America is under  
 attack. Our way of life faces  
 constant threat from people who  
 want to see us become like the rest  
 of the world. Become lesser.  
 (beat)  
 Newsflash. America is not like the  
 rest of the world. We are a beacon  
 on a hill. A shining white light.  
 And, I for one, don't want to see  
 our light dimmed by castaways and  
 runoff.  
 (beat)  
 Senator David Ikwuakor says he's a  
 Republican, but it's clear to me he  
 doesn't share that party's values,  
 doesn't understand what it means to  
 be a true American. If a man like  
 that gets power in this country,  
 say goodbye to the America we love.  
 (MORE)

FRANKLIN (CONT'D)  
 R-I-P freedom. R-I-P liberty. R-I-P  
 U-S-A. 1776 to 2020.

INT. CONTROL ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Flat screen monitors and a million buttons. JOSH [mid 30s, schlubby, over it] sits at a screen, monitoring video feeds.

Beside him is ERIN [mid 20s, bottle-blonde, inexperienced but ambitious]. On her screen is David Ikwuakor himself, waiting to be interviewed.

ERIN  
 Senator Ikwuakor, can we get a mic  
 check please?

DAVID (ON MONITOR)  
 A-B-C-D--

ERIN  
 Great. We'll be with you in a  
 moment. When you see the light,  
 you're on-air.

DAVID (ON MONITOR)  
 Thank you.

Erin turns back toward THALIA [mid-40s, icy, professional], the producer in-charge.

ERIN  
 Feed's good.

Thalia nods and leans into her mic. On her screen, Franklin rants on. Thalia impatiently waits for a pause.

FRANKLIN (ON MONITOR)  
 Senator Ikwuakor may have bowed to  
 the pressure of a bleeding heart, P-  
 C culture, but we cannot. Do we have  
 it in us to fight back? Are we angry  
 enough? Are we strong enough? I  
 think we are. And that scares them.

THALIA  
 (sighing to herself)  
 Take a breath.

FRANKLIN (ON MONITOR)  
 They're scared of us because they  
 know we have this great nations's  
 best interests at heart! And, if  
 they want to burn it down, they  
 have to go through us first!

He pauses and Thalia pushes the intercom button on her mic.

THALIA

Toss to the guest, Franklin.

INT. KING'S COURT STUDIO - CONTINUOUS (ON-AIR)

Franklin settles down into professional host mode.

FRANKLIN

Here to tell me why I'm wrong, the man himself. Welcome, Senator.

DAVID

Mr. King.

FRANKLIN

First of all, I have to commend you for coming on my show. Into the lion's den, so to speak.

Stone-faced, David nods. He's not here to banter.

FRANKLIN (CONT'D)

You're aware we have a Republican president right now? Why are you challenging him in a primary?

DAVID

I have some fundamental disagreements with the man, and that's what primaries are for.

FRANKLIN

Are you sure you're a Republican? Or did you maybe check the wrong box on a form once? And now it's too much hassle to fix it?

DAVID

I'm a proud Republican, and I have no intention of leaving the party. It's the party that's left people like me.

FRANKLIN

That right?

DAVID

I'm a moderate in a culture that no longer tolerates moderation. I can acknowledge the need for a strong military but pray to never use it.

(MORE)

DAVID (CONT'D)

I believe scientific data and the existence of God are not mutually exclusive ideas. I understand the founding fathers didn't foresee the AR-15 when they penned the second amendment. And, I damn sure know America is the only nation not founded on a people or a culture, but on an ideal. And, to deny immigrants and refugees the opportunity to pursue the American dream is to turn our backs on who we proclaim ourselves to be.

FRANKLIN

We both know they're not sending us their engineers and astronauts. Why should we be a dumping ground for the world's trash?

DAVID

(deep breath)

Trash like my mother? Who fled the only home she'd ever known so the child inside her could have an honest shot at a life without violence and war?

FRANKLIN

I'm sympathetic to the world's problems, Senator, but we don't need those problems here. Do we? What's to stop those people from bringing their wars to us?

DAVID

I'm much more frightened of the war that's already brewing here. And the person responsible for that war, Franklin King, is you.

INT. CONTROL ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Erin shoots a surprised look at Josh.

ERIN

What did he just say?

INT. KING'S COURT STUDIO - CONTINUOUS (ON-AIR)

DAVID

Night after night, you talk nonstop about the threats this country faces.

(MORE)

DAVID (CONT'D)

But, our greatest threat is division. We are barreling toward a second civil war because of partisan talking heads like you.

FRANKLIN

A little dramatic, Senator. Americans are divided, yes, but--

DAVID

We're divided because you divide us. With conspiracy theories, imaginary crises. Turning anyone who doesn't look and sound like you into some sort of bogeyman.

FRANKLIN

I'm just calling it like I see it.

DAVID

See, no. I honestly doubt you believe half of what you say. All that matters to you is your ratings. You'll say anything to keep people watching you. And, that is what makes you dangerous.

INT. CONTROL ROOM - CONTINUOUS

The control room is shocked. Josh cracks a little smirk.

JOSH

Oh shit.

INT. KING'S COURT STUDIO - CONTINUOUS (ON-AIR)

FRANKLIN

Dangerous? I'll tell you what's dangerous.

DAVID

What's dangerous is--

FRANKLIN

No. Great speech. You're mad as hell. You're not gonna take it anymore. We all get it. But, this is my show, and it's my turn to talk. Cut his mic.

(beat)

What's dangerous, sir, is elitist, condescending fools like you. You're accusing me of selling out for ratings?

(MORE)

FRANKLIN (CONT'D)

Of dividing this country to, what,  
line my pockets?

(beat)

I say what I mean and I mean what I  
say. This great nation was born of  
blood and fire, and maybe we are in  
need of a revolution to save us  
from people like you.

DAVID

You can't possibly--

FRANKLIN

People like you have no respect for  
the United States of America or  
what She stands for.

DAVID

How dare you--

FRANKLIN

How dare you! You, Senator, are a  
traitor to real Americans. And back  
when this country was great,  
traitors like you were walked out in  
front of a goddamned firing squad!

INT. CONTROL ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Everyone sits for a beat in stunned silence.

THALIA

Go to commercial. Go to fucking  
commercial!

Josh hits a button and cuts to a commercial: Money-For-Gold  
or some similar apocalyptic bullshit.

INT. KING'S COURT STUDIO - CONTINUOUS

Thalia barges in, Erin scampering behind her.

THALIA

What the hell was that?

FRANKLIN

I think that's what one might call  
good television.

THALIA

A firing squad? You called a  
Senator, a black Senator--

FRANKLIN  
That's got nothing to do with--

THALIA  
A traitor. You basically called for  
a fucking lynching.

FRANKLIN  
Well, when you put it like that--

THALIA  
Fuck! You're so-- Fuck!

Thalia storms back out. Franklin looks at Erin, forces a reassuring smile.

FRANKLIN  
It's fine... It's fine.

She nods, unsure. He fidgets and fiddles with his scripts.

INT. FRANKLIN KING'S OFFICE - MOMENTS LATER

Franklin sits in front of a mirror, wiping the makeup from his face. Looking older. Sadder. Emptier.

INT. NATIONAL NEWS NETWORK BUILDING - NIGHT

Franklin walks through the halls of N3, the National News Network. Employees mill about and avoid eye contact with him.

EXT. NATIONAL NEWS NETWORK BUILDING - MOMENTS LATER

Franklin steps into the waiting, open door of a town car. The driver shuts the door.

INT. TOWN CAR - NIGHT

Franklin sits in the backseat, all alone. Watches the lights of Atlanta slowly roll by.

He's on his phone. Twitter. #FireFranklinKing is trending.

"Offensive." "Racist." "Vile." "Fire Franklin King."

INT. ELEVATOR - MOMENTS LATER

Franklin rides the elevator to the top floor.

INT. FRANKLIN'S PENTHOUSE - MOMENTS LATER

The elevator doors open directly into Franklin's spacious, lonely penthouse.

He turns on his giant TV. News anchors show clips of his show. Dissect it. Has Franklin King gone too far this time? He watches a second before flipping over to a Red Sox game.

After a beat, a LOUD THUD. Franklin jumps. Slowly steps toward the balcony. Opens the door.

EXT. FRANKLIN'S BALCONY - CONTINUOUS

Franklin steps out and finds a badly injured dove. He hesitates over its writhing body.

He reaches to a potted plant and picks up a spade. Holds the little shovel over the dying bird.

Scoops it up and deposits it on the railing. Watches it twitch in pain, unsure what to do. Raises the spade...

He can't do it. Franklin puts down the shovel. Steps inside.

INT. FRANKLIN'S PENTHOUSE - MOMENTS LATER

Franklin pours himself a bourbon at his bar.

FEMALE VOICE (O.S.)  
I'll take a gin and tonic, if  
you're offering.

Franklin whips around.

FRANKLIN  
Fuck--

REBECCA [early 50s, sultry, no bullshit] stands behind him.

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

REBECCA  
Having a drink.

FRANKLIN  
Rebecca, you can't be in my home  
when I'm not here.

REBECCA  
Fine. Tell me to go, and I'll go.

He pauses. Looks at her, his eyes giving away his loneliness.

INT. FRANKLIN'S BEDROOM - LATER

Franklin and Rebecca lie in bed together, half-dressed. Equal parts comfort and regret. She smokes a joint.

FRANKLIN

Did you watch the show tonight?

REBECCA

You know I don't watch your fucking show.

FRANKLIN

I thought that's why you came over.

REBECCA

I came over for the only reason I ever come over. We may not be married anymore, but you're still an easy lay.

She passes him the joint. He considers, then hits it.

FRANKLIN

I might have gone too far tonight.

REBECCA

I don't want to hear about it--

FRANKLIN

Rebecca...

She looks at him for a beat. Sees how badly he needs this.

REBECCA

Isn't that what you do? Go too far. It's your whole shtick.

FRANKLIN

This time's different. I think I might lose my job.

(beat)

Can I ask you something?... Do you think I'm a bad person? Outside of what I do. When I'm not on T-V. When I'm just me. Am I bad person?

REBECCA

(hits her joint)

You really wanna know what I think?

FRANKLIN

I do.

REBECCA

Franklin. Sweetheart. When the cameras are off and you're not in character or whatever it is you call it...

(MORE)

REBECCA (CONT'D)  
I don't think you're any kind of  
person at all.

Franklin turns away. Rebecca stands and gets dressed.

FRANKLIN  
Have you talked to Anna? Will you  
tell her to call me sometime?

REBECCA  
If your daughter wanted to call,  
she'd call.  
(beat)  
Good night, Franklin.

She gives him a pity kiss and walks out the door.

EXT. FRANKLIN'S BALCONY - MORNING

Franklin steps onto his balcony, drinking coffee. The dove is gone. A small spot of blood remains.

He looks up, maybe expecting to see it in the sky.

INT. HARRISON EDELMAN'S OFFICE - MORNING

Franklin and Thalia sit in a ridiculously large office overlooking Atlanta. The room is filled with television screens, rich dark wood, and awkward silence.

THALIA  
How'd you sleep?

FRANKLIN  
I'll sleep when I'm dead. Or fired.

THALIA  
Same thing, right?... You've got  
some muffin on your shirt.

FRANKLIN  
Wha--Ah, fuck.

Franklin dusts off his shirt. The doors open and HARRISON EDELMAN [late 70s, gruff with a smile] bursts in. Franklin and Thalia both stand.

HARRISON  
Sit, sit, sit. I'm not a general.  
No need to rise to attention.

They sit. Harrison sits across from them.

HARRISON (CONT'D)  
Oh, did I miss the muffins?

Shit. Franklin dusts himself off more.

HARRISON (CONT'D)  
Let's get down to it. About last night's show--

FRANKLIN  
I'm sorry, sir. It was inappropriate. I flew off the handle. It won't happen again.

HARRISON  
"Won't happen again?"

FRANKLIN  
No, sir. But, if you have to fire me, I understand--

HARRISON  
Fire you? Cheese and crackers, Franklin. Are you crazy? Your job, my boy, is to bring us eyeballs, and right now we've got every last goddamn one of them.  
(beat)  
Keep up the good work.

Relief dawns Franklin's face.

INT. N3 ELEVATOR - MOMENTS LATER

Franklin and Thalia are stunned silent. Franklin begins to chuckle. Laugh. Guffaw. Thalia can't help but laugh along.

INT. NEWSROOM - DAY

Franklin struts through the newsroom, where Josh and Erin sit in a messy cubicle, drinking coffee and sharing a muffin.

ERIN  
That doesn't look like someone who just lost his job.

JOSH  
What he gets away with. Millions of dollars to go on T-V and say shit that'd get literally anyone else fired on the spot. I'm sick of it.  
(beat)  
When I got hired here, I thought I'd be doing, like ya know, news.  
(MORE)

JOSH (CONT'D)  
Hard-hitting, boots-on-the-ground  
journalism. And this ain't that.

ERIN  
It's debate. It's editorial. That's  
journalism too. Millions of people  
watch us for a reason.

JOSH  
Ratings. Jesus. Is that the only  
thing everyone here cares about?  
People watch us because we tell em  
what they wanna hear. That's not  
what real news is supposed to be.

ERIN  
What we do isn't real news?

JOSH  
Are you kidding? Erin, come on. No  
one's gonna confuse Franklin fuckin  
King for Edward R. Murrow. What we  
do is reality T-V. Worse. At least  
reality T-V tells you what it is.  
We hide it, dress it up, put it in  
a suit, but it's the same bullshit.  
(beat)  
I'm done. I quit.

ERIN  
What?

JOSH  
I should. I should march into  
Franklin's office and tell that  
pompous prick--

ERIN  
Josh, calm down.

Franklin, big smile on his face, walks into his office and  
shuts the door. Josh spots him.

JOSH  
Franklin! Franklin!

Josh storms toward Franklin's door. Before he gets there,  
Erin steps in front of him. The entire newsroom crane their  
heads to watch Josh's outburst.

ERIN  
Josh. Think about this.

JOSH  
Trust me, I've been thinking about  
this for years.

ERIN  
I get it. I do. But... Do you  
really want to burn a bridge with  
the biggest news network in the  
country?  
(beat)  
You wanna do something good?  
Something real? Do it here.

Josh looks at Erin, looks around. Everyone is staring.

JOSH  
Erin, you're new here. You don't  
get it. They won't listen.

ERIN  
Then make them.

Josh thinks a beat. Nods. Relaxes. Erin smiles at him. The  
newsroom goes back to work.

EXT. BOOKSTORE - DAY

A large bookstore. A banner announces a book signing.  
Franklin King's new book: "By Decree of the King."

Graffiti'd on the banner in bright red: #FIREFRANKLINKING.  
Franklin stands in front of the banner with Erin. She's  
holding an itinerary.

There's a handful of shouting protestors behind a barrier.

FRANKLIN  
They're hash-tagging graffiti now?  
I don't understand your generation.  
(beat)  
Do you think we should cancel?

Erin takes down the banner, rolls it up.

ERIN  
...You could. But, wouldn't that  
look like you're running from what  
happened? Like a tacit apology?

FRANKLIN  
I have nothing to apologize for.

Erin takes a clean banner out of her bag and hangs it.

ERIN

Then get out in front of it. Own it. Besides, the people who are offended right now are always mad about something. In two days, a Kardashian will take a selfie in the Holocaust Museum, and everyone will forget this whole thing.

She gives him a reassuring look.

ERIN (CONT'D)

There's nothing to worry about.

FRANKLIN

I'm not-- Just thinking from a P-R perspective. I'm not worried.

ERIN

(nods, then)

...Who's he?

Standing at Franklin's other side is CASH [40s, stone cold, over-muscled bodyguard].

FRANKLIN

Who? Oh, Cash? He's my bodyguard. Sometimes. He insisted on tagging along. He's a worrier. This is more for him than me. Right, Cash?

CASH

Yes, sir.

FRANKLIN

See, there ya go.

Franklin pats Cash on the back. Cash leads the way. Franklin and Erin follow.

INT. BOOK STORE - LATER

Franklin sits at a table stacked with copies of his book. Erin stands over his shoulder, Cash, vigilant, to the side. Franklin signs a book for PATRICIA [60s, starstruck].

PATRICIA

I pray for you every night.

FRANKLIN

You're a doll.

PATRICIA

God bless you. God bless you.

Someone new steps to the table. Franklin takes his book.

FRANKLIN

Who am I signing this to?

A quiet beat. Franklin finally looks up at the MAN [early 40s, Southern, an unsettling little oddball].

MAN

You're real brave coming out here today, sir. People were saying you might cancel.

FRANKLIN

Wouldn't dream of it.

MAN

That's what I said. They were sayin you'd cancel, but I told em. Told em you ain't scared of nothin.

FRANKLIN

I appreciate it. What's your name?

MAN

I watch your show all the time. Got all your books. You get it. You get how the world works.

FRANKLIN

(getting uncomfortable)

And you have good taste. Name?

MAN

This country's goin to pot, sir. The whole world. You've been sayin it for years. You saw it comin. Blood and fire. And, I want you to know, I'm on your side.

FRANKLIN

Uh, yeah. Well, it's viewers like you who keep the lights on. Who am I making this out to?

MAN

How bout...A friend of the show.

The man smiles a creepy little smile. Then rethinks it.

MAN (CONT'D)

Actually, TOM. If you could... Tom. T-O-M. That'd be good.

Franklin scribbles down a signature and slides the book back.

FRANKLIN

There we go. Thanks for coming out.

TOM

Wait, wait, wait. I'm sorry. I'm a little all over the place. I didn't think I'd be this twisted up in front of ya.

(beat)

It's an honor to meet you. You're a hero to me, sir. You mean a lot to a whole lotta people... Hey, listen, I--

Tom leans in close. Cash steps forward, and Tom backs off.

TOM (CONT'D)

Whoa, hey, okay. He's jumpy, huh? Don't worry, I'm not offended or nothin. Can't never be too careful.

He eyes Cash a second. Then Erin, who's staring. Tom's eyes go back to Franklin.

TOM (CONT'D)

Maybe now's not a good time.

FRANKLIN

I think you're right.

Tom nods a little too long. Opens the book to the signature. "To Tom, a real friend of the show -- Franklin King."

TOM

Thank you for this.

Tom turns and leaves. Franklin exhales. Erin watches him go.

INT. CONFERENCE ROOM - DAY

Franklin, Thalia, Erin, Josh and more employees of King's Court are all squeezed into an N3 conference room.

LOH [late 30s, Asian, no-nonsense] and HOPPER [late 50s, black, wisecracking] address the room.

LOH

I'm Agent Loh. This is Agent Hopper. We're with the United States Secret Service.

JOSH  
Cool. Is the President here?

Loh stares Josh down a beat before continuing.

LOH  
Recently, there have been a number  
of death threats against Senator  
David Ikwuakor.

FRANKLIN  
What does that have to do with us?

HOPPER  
You're kidding, right?

LOH  
Every presidential campaign  
receives some threats, that's true.  
But, since your last show, we've  
seen what can only be described as  
a dramatic spike.

THALIA  
What do you need from us?

HOPPER  
For starters, you can tell your  
talent here to take a break from  
the end-of-the-world, start-a-  
revolution bullshit.

FRANKLIN  
You can't blame me for what some  
whackos out there are saying.

LOH  
They're not "some whackos." They're  
your whackos.

HOPPER  
Your website's comment section,  
usually all upstanding, church-  
going citizens, I'm sure, is  
currently a hotbed of hate speech  
and terroristic threats.

LOH  
(reading from a file)  
Ikwuakor needs to eat a bullet.  
Blow his head off. Lynch him up.

HOPPER

Not the best spellers either, but that's a whole 'nother issue.

FRANKLIN

That's what this is about? Some posts on the internet? If you took down every hateful, stupid thing on the internet, the only thing left would be the porn.

LOH

We're going to need the registration details of your users. Names, I-P addresses.

THALIA

Of course.

FRANKLIN

What happened to free speech? You're both fine with the United States being a surveillance state?

HOPPER

Take it down a notch. There's no cameras in here.

FRANKLIN

If you want to waste your time, go for it.

Franklin stands up to leave. Hopper gets in his way.

HOPPER

It would behoove you to take this a little more seriously.

FRANKLIN

I'm sorry, am I under arrest for talking?

HOPPER

Don't you ever get tired of being this guy? Cuz it's been about three minutes and I'm already sick of him.

Josh stifles a chuckle.

LOH

Mr. King, maybe you haven't done anything illegal. But, how will you feel when some deranged fan snaps and actually acts on what you say?

(MORE)

LOH (CONT'D)

(beat)

To your credit, you've really tapped into something. There are millions of people eating right out of your hand. But, what do you do with that responsibility?

HOPPER

You poke the bear. Get it riled up. Here's the thing, though. Ten times outta ten, the bear gets loose.

LOH

And, if that happens, we're holding you personally responsible.

HOPPER

If you're still around, that is. The trainer usually gets bit first.

If this rattles Franklin, he hides it pretty well. Erin looks at him, thinks a beat...

INT. KING'S COURT STUDIO - EVENING

Franklin sits at his desk in the studio. Erin slides her laptop in front of him.

FRANKLIN

What's this?

ERIN

I wrote up some talking points for your first segment.

He starts to look them over.

ERIN (CONT'D)

I hope that's okay. I don't want to overstep, but I thought you might want to--

FRANKLIN

You wrote this?

ERIN

Yes, sir.

FRANKLIN

It's good. Really good.

ERIN

Thank you, Mr. King.

FRANKLIN  
Franklin, please.

She hesitates a bit. Wants to say something...

ERIN  
I hope this isn't unprofessional.  
As you know, I'm pretty new here.  
Still learning, getting adjusted. I  
was hoping you might be willing to  
sit down with me and talk about the  
industry, how you got where you  
are. What I should be doing if I  
want to succeed.  
(beat)  
Who better to learn from, right?

FRANKLIN  
Well, you got me there.

ERIN  
Maybe after the rundown meeting  
tomorrow, or--

FRANKLIN  
Dinner tonight?

INT. CONTROL ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Josh looks up at the monitor in front of him. He sees and  
hears everything in the studio.

FRANKLIN (ON MONITOR)  
If you don't have plans, I mean--

ERIN (ON MONITOR)  
No... Dinner is good.

Josh lets out a disappointed sigh.

Erin struts through the studio, Josh tracking her movement on  
the monitors. She disappears and enters the control room.

She notices the monitors, glances at Josh. Realizes he heard  
everything. He doesn't return her look.

INT. KING'S COURT STUDIO - NIGHT (ON-AIR)

Franklin King is back in his element, doing his show.

FRANKLIN  
Ladies and gentlemen. I don't  
normally do this, but tonight I'm  
going to get a little personal...  
(MORE)

FRANKLIN (CONT'D)

In the past 24 hours, I have been the subject of some debate in the media and online. Folks are saying I crossed a line, went too far.

INT. NEWSROOM - CONTINUOUS

Loh and Hopper stand in the newsroom, watching the show.

FRANKLIN (ON TV)

I thought about it. Did some soul-searching. If you were offended, here's my from-the-heart, no-spin response. Good.

They shoot each other a glance.

INT. KING'S COURT STUDIO - CONTINUOUS (ON-AIR)

Franklin's on a roll.

FRANKLIN

Are we so weak in this country that we're afraid of words now? Is that what we've become? The revolver I keep at home isn't to defend myself from mean words, I'll tell you that right now.

(beat)

If we, as a country, can't handle hearing things we don't like, what are we going to do when the crap really hits the fan?

INT. ITALIAN RESTAURANT - NIGHT

A dimly lit, cozy bistro. Erin sits across from Franklin.

FRANKLIN

How long have you worked for me?

ERIN

Three months. Right around there.

FRANKLIN

And, where are you from? Wait, don't tell me, Tennessee? Kentucky?

ERIN

West Virginia, originally. Is my accent that noticeable? I've been trying to lose it.

FRANKLIN

Why in the world would you want to do that? It's nice. It's cute.

ERIN

I mean, if I want to be on TV--

FRANKLIN

That is an outdated school of thought, my dear. In my day, sure, newscasters were interchangeable drones. But now, it's all about personality. People don't tune in for the news. They tune in for you. That accent makes you unique. Hold onto it.

She smiles, nods. Takes it in. A waiter refills their wine.

FRANKLIN (CONT'D)

*Grazie, signore.*

(back to Erin)

What are your goals? What are your dreams?

ERIN

Well, I do want to be on-air.

FRANKLIN

Hell, everybody wants to be on T-V. The janitor tried to pitch me a home improvement segment. Be more specific. What do you want to do?

ERIN

To be honest, I think we could do more to reach young people.

FRANKLIN

What, like funny listicles? Those little GIF things?.. Or is it JIF?

ERIN

No. I mean... My generation likes authenticity. They don't want to be told what to think. They want to see what's really going on and make up their own minds.

(beat)

Old school field reporting. Going out and getting the real hard news.

Franklin nods. Impressed.

FRANKLIN

Maybe one day you'll get your shot.

Franklin puts his hand on hers, pats it.

She stops, looks down at his hand. Back up to him. He smiles.

She takes his hand in hers. Smiles back.

ERIN

You think so?

INT. TOWN CAR - NIGHT

Erin and Franklin sit in the back of the town car. It's quiet and awkward, and then the car comes to a stop.

FRANKLIN

Here we are.

Erin looks out the window at Franklin's building, which stands tall and bright.

ERIN

Wow. This is your building?

FRANKLIN

Not all of it. Just the top floor.

He laughs. She forces a laugh too.

FRANKLIN (CONT'D)

Do you want to come up? Have a cup of coffee?

ERIN

...I don't know.

FRANKLIN

Come on. It's early. Get a little face time with the boss.

ERIN

...Okay. Yeah. What the hell.

FRANKLIN

(smiling)

What the hell.

She steels herself, closes her eyes, and starts to lean in for a kiss. Franklin doesn't notice.

FRANKLIN (CONT'D)

You remind me of my daughter.

Erin's eyes pop open and she quickly leans away.

ERIN  
What?

FRANKLIN  
Yeah, she's about your age. Maybe a little older.

ERIN  
Uh-- That's.. Uh... What?

FRANKLIN  
What's wrong?

ERIN  
Nothing. I... I didn't know you had a daughter.

FRANKLIN  
I don't really talk about it much. She's not around anymore. Moved to San Francisco when she was 18. Took her mom's name. She was never a fan of what I do.

The driver opens the car door. A pregnant pause.

FRANKLIN (CONT'D)  
Shall we?

ERIN  
Actually, I'm pretty tired. Maybe next time.

FRANKLIN  
Okay, well.. See you at work, kid.

Franklin gets out of the car, turns back to her.

FRANKLIN (CONT'D)  
You're gonna do well at N3. There's something special about you.

She smiles. Franklin turns to the driver.

FRANKLIN (CONT'D)  
Get her home safe.

DRIVER  
Yes, sir.

Franklin whistles as he walks to his door, oblivious to the dead dove he steps over on the way.

INT. FRANKLIN'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Franklin's asleep in bed. Suddenly, there's a NOISE coming from somewhere in his penthouse. He opens his eyes. Listens.

There it is again. What is that? Muffled steps? Is there someone else in his penthouse?

FRANKLIN  
Goddamn it.

Franklin grumbles and stops out of his bedroom.

INT. FRANKLIN'S PENTHOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Franklin steps into his large living room, looking around for the source of the noise.

FRANKLIN  
Rebecca? What did I say about coming over here without--

Franklin stops. It's not Rebecca. It's Tom, the bookstore creep. He's perusing Franklin's apartment.

TOM  
Good evenin, sir. I didn't wake you, did I? I was tryin to tiptoe.

FRANKLIN  
What are you doing in my home?

TOM  
I just wanted to finish our chat... Remember, at the bookstore, I said, "Now's not a good time." And you said, "You're right; it's not."  
(beat)  
So here I am.

FRANKLIN  
Listen, if you leave now, we'll forget this ever happened. I won't call the police, or--

TOM  
The police? What? I don't...  
(dawning on him)  
This is weird. It's weird that I'm here right now, isn't it? I just--We had such a good talk, I thought. We really connected. And then I barge in here uninvited, and I scare you. That's my bad. I apologize. Truly.  
(MORE)

TOM (CONT'D)

(beat)

Let's both take a deep breath, calm down, and have a seat. That sound alright?

Tom gestures to the table. Franklin hesitates, rushes to his phone. Before he can raise it to his ear, Tom is on him.

TOM (CONT'D)

Stop. Hey, relax.

Tom yanks the phone away from Franklin.

TOM (CONT'D)

What happened here is we got off on the wrong foot. Let's start over.

Tom sits down at the table. Franklin doesn't budge. He notices a tattoo on Tom's hand. The letters G-R-H.

TOM (CONT'D)

I'm Tom. Nice to see you again. You have a lovely home.

FRANKLIN

What do you want?

TOM

There we go. Now we're conversing. The only thing I want is to have a dialogue with ya. So, please, sit down with me.

Franklin sits across from Tom.

FRANKLIN

How do you know where I live?

TOM

You're focusin on all the wrong things, sir. What matters is we're both here now. In the same room. This is a monumental occasion! There's a crackle in the air! You feel that, right?

(beat)

I bet the foundin fathers got that same tingle in their privates when they were writin up the Declaration of Independence. They knew. Buncha farmers and nobodies, but they knew they were gonna change the world.

FRANKLIN

You're going to change the world?

Tom grins a creepy, knowing grin.

FRANKLIN (CONT'D)

What are you going to do?

TOM

Stand up for our country, sir. Now, I ain't blessed with a golden tongue the way you are. But, I am a doer. You point me toward somethin, I don't stop til I git'r done. And, you have given me direction.

FRANKLIN

Listen, Tom. Whatever you think I want you to do... I don't.

TOM

What do ya mean?

FRANKLIN

On my show, I'm not talking directly to you. Do you understand?

Tom pauses, then starts laughing.

TOM

I know that! You think I'm some kinda nut or somethin? Is that how I'm comin across?... I ain't crazy, sir. I don't think you're beamin your thoughts directly into my head or nothin.

Tom composes himself.

TOM (CONT'D)

Every night, you talk all about how the country we love is under attack. That we need to fight back. Well, I've heard that call. And I'm prepared to answer it.

FRANKLIN

No, listen to me. Whatever you're planning, please don't do it.

TOM

I'll be real with ya... This here really didn't go the way I thought it was gonna go.

(MORE)

TOM (CONT'D)

I thought we were on the same page.  
I mean, I'm just following your  
lead.

(beat)

But it makes sense, I guess. You're  
not used to gettin your hands  
dirty. So, I'll be your hands. I'll  
do what we both know needs done.

FRANKLIN

Okay, wait. Wait. I get it. You're  
right. You caught me off-guard, but  
I hear you. I do. I hear you. And,  
I want to help you.

TOM

Yeah?

FRANKLIN

Yes. In fact, I have something for  
you. May I...?

Franklin slowly stands. Walks over to a desk. Reaches into  
the drawer and, hands shaking, picks up a revolver.

He barely knows how it works. He struggles to open the  
chamber to check if it's loaded. It is.

He pulls back the hammer, turns around, and raises his gun.

Tom is standing, pointing a large pistol at Franklin.  
Franklin immediately puts his hands up.

TOM

It's a little hard not to take that  
personal, sir. I get this night  
took a turn you weren't expectin,  
but is that really necessary?

FRANKLIN

I'm sorry, I--

TOM

Put it down. Kick it away.

Franklin does as he's told.

TOM (CONT'D)

I do expect you'll see the good in  
what I'm doin. I'll even let ya  
sleep on it. But, in the mean time,  
I'm gonna be holdin onto this.

Tom holds up Franklin's cell phone, then pockets it. He casually walks to the elevator. The doors open. Steps inside.

TOM (CONT'D)

See ya soon.

The doors close. Franklin immediately runs over to the intercom. It's hanging off the wall.

FRANKLIN

Fuck!

INT. FRANKLIN'S PENTHOUSE - NIGHT

Police officers and federal agents scour the penthouse. Franklin sits in a chair, a blanket draped over his shoulders, drinking cocoa. Cash stands over him.

Loh and Hopper saunter in.

HOPPER

These are the King's chambers, huh? To be honest, I was expecting more gold. Or maybe a nautical theme.

CASH

Can this wait? Mr. King's been through enough for one night.

HOPPER

I can see that. Not only was his home broken into, but apparently he was pulled out of the Chattahoochee River. In January.

Franklin slides the blanket off his shoulders.

CASH

Gentlemen, if you leave your contact information, Mr. King will be hap--

Franklin stands.

FRANKLIN

It's fine, Cash. I can speak for myself. I'm not a child.

HOPPER

Is that cocoa?

Franklin glares.

LOH

Tell us what happened.

FRANKLIN

There was a violent fucking psychopath in my home. Ranting about starting a revolution.

HOPPER

And you're upset because that's your job?

LOH

Did he make any threats?

FRANKLIN

Nothing specific.

LOH

Did he tell you his name? What did he look like?

FRANKLIN

Tom. He said his name is Tom. He was white. About 5'8. Kinda chubby. Early 40s. Brown hair, buzzed short. Like a military cut, maybe.

Loh writes it down.

LOH

If you see him again, call us right away. Take down our number.

FRANKLIN

The guy took my phone.

HOPPER

Great. That's helpful.

FRANKLIN

No, it's not. It's a brand new phone. Apple sent it to me. It's not even released to the public--

HOPPER

...Right. But, if he turns it on, we can track it.

FRANKLIN

Of course. Yes. Do that.

LOH

...We're going to take a look around.

FRANKLIN

Agents. This guy was for real. He knew what he was doing. I'm afraid you're not going to find anything.

INT. SECURITY OFFICE - DAY

Loh, Hopper, and Franklin watch a security camera video. Cash guards the room.

On the screen, Tom rides down the elevator. He's satisfied. Cocky.

He looks up, notices the camera. Double takes.

TOM

(no audio)

Shit!

He ducks down, but is still in frame. The elevator doors open and Tom crawls out, looking back up at the camera as he goes.

HOPPER

Yeah, what we got here is a real criminal mastermind.

LOH

We'll put the whole Service on this. May God protect us all.

Hopper and Loh walk out, chuckling dismissively.

INT. NEWSROOM - DAY

Josh leans back in his chair. Erin, head in the game, walks to his cubicle.

ERIN

Did you finish those graphics for the B-Block?

JOSH

Not yet.

ERIN

...Will you?

JOSH

Yeah, sure, I'm just super swamped right now.

ERIN

...Fine, I'll do it myself.

JOSH

Sure. Somebody's gotta be teacher's pet, right?

ERIN

Excuse me?

JOSH

No, I get the attraction. Those baby blue eyes, that vein that pops out of his temple when he really gets to screaming--

ERIN

Josh.

JOSH

Honestly, is getting on T-V that fucking important to you?

ERIN

You need to drop it.

JOSH

See, there's two kinds of people here, Erin. The first kind, this is a job. Regardless of how they feel about the politics or the message or whatever, they come in every day, make the best show they can.

(beat)

The second kind, they don't drink the Kool-Aid, they shoot it right the fuck into their veins. And, those people, you learn pretty fast, will do anything to succeed here. They'll shoot you in the head if it helps them move up the ladder and sit in that big boy chair.

ERIN

Whatever happened last night is none of your business. I don't owe you anything, you patronizing ass.

JOSH

Hey, I have been looking out for you since you got here--

ERIN

Who asked you to do that? I can take care of myself. And, I don't need to fuck anyone to get ahead.

(MORE)

ERIN (CONT'D)

I'll get ahead because I'm smart,  
I'm fucking good at what I do, and  
because I want it more.

(beat)

And this thing you're projecting on  
me, this idea that I'm gonna sit  
beside you in the back of the class  
and laugh at your dumb jokes. That  
one night we'll be working late,  
just the two of us, and who knows?  
Maybe something happens, maybe  
there's a spark--

(beat)

Get that shit out of your head  
right now. We work together, I  
thought we were friends, but that's  
it. Got that?

JOSH

...Yeah.

Erin starts to walk away, but turns back.

ERIN

Honestly, Josh, this over-it thing  
you've got going on... Is that  
really who you want to be?

Josh's head drops in reflection. Thalia rushes in looking  
frazzled.

THALIA

Conference room, now!

She rushes by. Josh and Erin look at each other, suddenly  
concerned.

INT. CONFERENCE ROOM - DAY

Agents Loh and Hopper speak to the King's Court employees.  
Hopper hands out papers.

Loh points to the projector screen: an image of Tom crawling  
out of the elevator and looking straight up at the camera.

LOH

This is the man who broke into  
Franklin King's penthouse. We don't  
know if he has any plans to come  
here, but he has demonstrated a  
dangerous obsession with your show.  
So, stay on your toes.

HOPPER

If you see him, do not approach him  
yourself. We don't want to do  
anything to set him off or--

The door flings open and everyone jumps. Some scream. Loh  
starts to draw his gun.

It's Cash. He quickly surveys the room.

CASH

Clear!

Franklin enters.

JOSH

Fuck, dude!

THALIA

What the hell, Franklin?! You  
scared the shit out of us.

FRANKLIN

What do you all have to be scared  
of? I'm the one he wants.  
(to the agents)  
Continue.

HOPPER

May we? Thank you so much.

LOH

As we were saying, if you see this  
man, call 9-1-1. Call us.

ERIN

Have you figured out who he is?

LOH

Not yet. But, we hope to know more  
shortly.

ERIN

What about Franklin's phone? Were  
you able to track it?

LOH

That's actually what I was  
referring to. His phone was turned  
on in the last hour, and we've  
narrowed down a location. We're  
sending some agents down to--

FRANKLIN  
Wait. You found him?

LOH  
We don't know. He could have ditched the phone. Someone else could have picked it up. Could be nothing. But, we're hopeful.

FRANKLIN  
What are we waiting for? Let's go.  
(to Josh)  
Grab a camera.

Josh looks surprised. Almost excited.

JOSH  
Seriously? Yeah.

HOPPER  
Oh, hell no.

FRANKLIN  
This is huge. "Franklin King confronts his own stalker."

LOH  
This isn't a news story, Franklin.

FRANKLIN  
Not with that attitude.

ERIN  
Franklin's the only person here who's seen him up close. He can identify him.

The agents reluctantly back off. Franklin claps. Josh shoots up, looking a little more alive. Erin stands too.

FRANKLIN  
Whoa, what are you doing?

ERIN  
Coming with you.

FRANKLIN  
No, you're not.

ERIN  
I can run camera.

JOSH  
I'm running camera.

ERIN  
I can field produce. I can support.  
Don't leave me out--

FRANKLIN  
Erin, sweetheart, you're not ready.  
This is dangerous.

He slaps Josh on the back.

FRANKLIN (CONT'D)  
Mount up!

Franklin follows Loh and Hopper out, Cash chasing after them.  
Josh flashes a little smirk at Erin, then runs out.

INT. SUV / EXT. ATLANTA - DAY

Loh drives, Hopper rides shotgun. Cash stares out the window.  
Josh has a small handheld camera pointed at Franklin, who  
wears an N3 bulletproof vest, like a reporter in a war zone.

FRANKLIN  
(into the camera)  
Exciting.

INT. RUNDOWN APARTMENT BUILDING - LATER

Loh and Hopper make their way through the dim hallways of an  
old, shitty apartment building, followed by Franklin, Josh,  
and Cash. They stop at a door, apartment 14.

Loh knocks. No answer. Knocks again.

LOH  
No one's home.

He tries to turn the knob. It's locked. Hopper looks at Cash.

HOPPER  
Big fella?

INT. TOM'S APARTMENT - MOMENTS LATER

CRASH. Cash shoulders down the door. Loh and Hopper enter,  
guns drawn.

HOPPER  
Clear.

Franklin, Cash, and Josh enter. Josh films the room, taking  
it all in. He's in reporter mode, and it's the most lively  
we've seen him.

The room is filthy, littered with trash. The walls are covered. An old map. Newspaper clippings. Photographs, many of Franklin.

Josh's camera finds an old, weathered flag. On it: a cross, a medieval-style trumpet, a fist holding a sword. "G-R-H."

The camera continues to scan the room: A set of blueprints on the wall. Pinned to it, several photos of a building's interior. Too generic to be recognizable.

Josh holds the camera on a photo. A beautiful gold fountain.

Hopper grabs a cell phone off the table.

HOPPER (CONT'D)

This yours?

FRANKLIN

Yeah, that's--

Hopper yanks the phone back, puts it in his pocket.

HOPPER

Uh uh uh. Don't touch the evidence.

LOH

What's that smell?

They follow the smell to bags and bags of fertilizer. Circuits and wires. Bomb-making materials.

JOSH

Holy shit.

They all hear something and turn to the door. Tom stands in the entrance. He takes off running.

HOPPER

Freeze!

Loh, Hopper, and Cash all chase after Tom, followed by Franklin and Josh.

INT. RUNDOWN APARTMENT BUILDING - CONTINUOUS

The chase continues down the hall. Franklin turns to camera.

FRANKLIN

We are in hot pursuit of the crazed fan who broke into my home. Putting my life on the line, for you.

Tom runs into a stairwell. Down the stairs. Everyone else close behind.

Cash gets ahead of the agents and leaps down a flight of stairs, tackling Tom to the ground hard. He stands and picks Tom up with one hand.

HOPPER  
Good Mongo!

Loh takes custody of Tom. Cuffs him.

TOM  
I thought you understood, sir.

FRANKLIN  
(mugging for the camera)  
I understand you're under arrest.  
Take him away, boys.

Loh and Hopper give Franklin the side eye, refusing to play along for the camera.

FRANKLIN (CONT'D)  
Take him away. Let's go...

Loh grumbles and leads Tom down the stairs.

EXT. RUNDOWN APARTMENT BUILDING - MOMENTS LATER

Loh and Hopper walk Tom toward the S.U.V, Cash and Josh trailing. Franklin's still acting tough for the camera.

HOPPER  
This how you saw your day going?  
Tell us, what was the plan?

TOM  
Why do you say "plan" like that?

HOPPER  
Like what?

Tom looks at him. He knows something they don't.

TOM  
Like it's over.

Suddenly, a hail of GUN SHOTS. Tom tackles Franklin to the ground and covers him. Loh, Hopper, Cash, and Josh all fall in a red cloud of blood.

JACKSON [late 20s, tatted-up but baby-faced] stands over them, his assault rifle still smoking.

He helps Tom to his feet, cuts his plastic cuffs. Gives him a gun.

Josh, still on the ground, looks to his left and right. Loh, Hopper, and Cash aren't moving. They're riddled with bullets.

Josh looks down at his leg. He's been hit in the thigh. He puts a hand on the wound and recoils in pain. Josh looks over - Franklin's fine, but in utter shock.

Slow, menacing footsteps toward Josh. He closes his eyes, slows his breathing. Plays dead like his life depends on it.

Tom looks down at Josh. Kicks at his camera.

TOM (CONT'D)

Hey, you get all that?

Josh doesn't answer, doesn't move a muscle.

Tom smirks and puts his boot down on Josh's leg wound. Josh winces and screams.

Tom grabs the camera. Josh tries with all his might to hang onto it, but Tom yanks it from Josh's grasp.

Turns the camera on himself, sneers into the lens.

A van screeches up and throws open the door. LUCAS [early-40s, quietly intense] waves them in. Jackson throws Franklin into the van.

Tom smashes the camera. Turns to Josh. Kicks him hard in the face. On IMPACT we cut to--

INT. VAN / EXT. ATLANTA - CONTINUOUS

The van speeds down street. Tom dials a number on a flip phone. Franklin is still shocked.

FRANKLIN

You killed them. You fucking...  
What the fuck is going on?

TOM

Like I told ya, sir. You mean a lot  
to a lotta people.

Tom hits send.

TOM (CONT'D)

Fire in the hole.

Behind them, Tom's apartment EXPLODES.

FRANKLIN

Oh my god.

Jackson slides Tom and Lucas a duffel bag, and they start changing clothes. BAKER [40s, big & scary] drives with surprising precision.

A police chase through the streets of Atlanta. Baker sideswipes a black-and-white and sends it into a light pole.

Jackson leans out the window and fires his AR-15 at a police car. Bullets shatter the windshield and the car veers away.

The van comes up on a construction site, a half-finished building. It bursts through a barrier and speeds inside.

INT. CONSTRUCTION SITE - MOMENTS LATER

The van doors open. Tom and Lucas emerge, both wearing police uniforms. Lucas has a tight hold on Franklin.

Tom grabs Jackson by the neck and brings their foreheads together in a soldierly embrace.

TOM

Every man dies. But, patriots live forever. Blood and fire.

JACKSON

Blood and fire.

BAKER

Come on!

Jackson gets back in the van and slams the door. Baker speeds out the gate and rams two cop cars. The pursuit continues.

Lucas walks over to a covered car and pulls the top off. It's a police car. He opens the back and Tom pushes Franklin in.

TOM

Stay down!

Tom gets in the passenger seat. Lucas in the driver's seat.

EXT. ATLANTA - MOMENTS LATER

The cop car emerges from the garage and blends in with the others in the pursuit of the van.

Baker keeps driving. Jackson keeps shooting. A squad car bumps the van hard and Baker can't regain control.

The van flips onto its side, sliding and sparking to a stop.

Cop cars surround the van, and officers jump out. Guns drawn, taking cover. A news helicopter circles overhead.

Jackson runs to the backdoors of the van. Uses his gun to break the window and starts shooting. Officers return fire.

Baker shakes the cobwebs from his head and grabs a grenade launcher. He kicks out the windshield and slides out.

From his cover, he fires a grenade, blowing up a police car.

OFFICER

Pull back! Pull back!

Cops get back in their cars and back away from the perimeter they've set.

In the chaos and commotion, one cop car drives away from the scene and keeps going.

INT. POLICE CAR - CONTINUOUS

Lucas keeps driving. Tom shoots an angry look at Franklin, then faces forward.

Franklin peaks a look out the back window at the violent chaos, his eyes wide with terror.

INT. NEWSROOM - CONTINUOUS

Thalia, Erin, and everyone in the newsroom watch news-copter footage of the city under attack. Everyone is silent.

EXT. VAN - CONTINUOUS

Jackson fires at a the police cars around him.

JACKSON

Get some! Get some!

EXT. ROOFTOP - CONTINUOUS

Two snipers in SWAT gear are perched on the roof of a nearby building. They take careful aim at Jackson and Baker.

SERGEANT (RADIO)

Do you have a shot?

SNIPER

Yes, sir.

SERGEANT (RADIO)

On my count. Three. Two. One.

INT. NEWSROOM - CONTINUOUS

The newsroom watches as two near-simultaneous GUNSHOTS ring out. Both Jackson and Baker are hit and drop to the ground.

Erin gasps and puts her hand over her mouth.

EXT. VAN - CONTINUOUS

Jackson, badly wounded, looks over at Baker's body. Most of his head is gone.

Jackson puts the barrel of his pistol in his mouth. BANG--

EXT. OUTSIDE THE CITY - EVENING

A billboard in the middle of nowhere. It reads: "Jesus is coming back. Are you ready?"

The stolen police car is parked behind the billboard. Tom and Lucas are back in their normal street clothes. Franklin sits on the ground, unable to speak.

Lucas pours gasoline all over the car and lights a match. It immediately goes up in flames. Franklin watches it burn.

Tom grabs Franklin by the shoulder and lifts him to his feet. He and Lucas walk Franklin to a waiting Jeep, which idles nearby. They all get in.

The Jeep pulls out onto the road and drives into the dark.

INT. HOTEL SUITE - NIGHT

SIERRA [early 40s, black, scared but strong] sits on the couch, watching news footage of the attack in Atlanta.

Sitting across from her is her husband, David Ikwuakor.

DAVID

It's going to be fine. The tour will go on as scheduled. The last thing I can afford to do right now is look weak. We don't know what they want. We're still gathering all the facts. But, at this juncture, there is no reason to think I'm any kind of target.

SIERRA

...At this juncture?.. Baby, please don't talk to me like I'm a news camera.

DAVID

Sorry, you're right. It's hard to turn off sometimes.

SIERRA

And do you honestly think you're not a target?

DAVID

I don't know, Sierra.

SIERRA

Three days ago, that disgusting man calls you a traitor on television. Says you should be executed. And, then all of this?! You can't call this a coincidence.

DAVID

Of course it's not a coincidence. I know that. But what can I do? Quit?

SIERRA

Yes! Quit. Drop out. Resign.

DAVID

And let them win?

SIERRA

Screw them. What has this country ever done for people like us?

Sierra sits up straight, locks eyes with David.

SIERRA (CONT'D)

When we were dating, and you told me you wanted to be president, I laughed. You were so mad. I didn't think you were serious. I mean... Why would anyone want that job?

(beat)

But, I put on my brave wife face and I stood beside you. Every fundraiser, every gala, every election. And, damn it, you were so good. You kept winning. But, even through all that, I don't think I ever thought we'd be here.

DAVID

Well, thank you very much.

SIERRA

You know what I mean.

(beat)

David, baby, half the people out there will never accept you. They wouldn't trust you walking down their street. Why would they trust you to run their country?

DAVID

It's not their country, Sierra. Not anymore.

(beat)

"We hold these truths to be self-evident..."

SIERRA

Oh God--

DAVID

...that all men are created equal." Maybe they didn't mean it, but the founding fathers painted themselves into a corner with that line. Maybe we've never lived up to that, and maybe there's people out there who don't want us to, but I believe we can. And that's worth fighting for.

SIERRA

Goddamn. Write that down for later.

DAVID

It's good, right?

SIERRA

Really good.

David starts writing. Sierra hugs him from behind, kisses him on the cheek, but he's lost in his notes. She sits back and turns back toward the TV.

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - MORNING

Josh, looking awful but alive, sleeps fitfully, tossing and turning. Sweat beading down his face. He FLASHES BACK to Tom's apartment.

The shrine of Franklin's photos. Maps. Blueprints.

The black flag. "G.R.H."

Tom walking in. Chasing him outside.

Gunshots.

Josh wakes with a gasp. Takes a few breaths to calm himself down. Reaches over and grabs a napkin and pen from the table beside him.

Laser-focused, Josh sketches out a symbol. It looks vaguely like a hand, a sword, but not quite. Struggles to remember.

A knock on the door. Josh hides the napkin under his plate.

AGENT TIMMONS [early 40s, FBI and proud of it] marches in. Shuts the door behind him. Flashes his badge.

TIMMONS

My name is Agent Timmons. I'm with the Federal Bureau of Investigation. Can I have a moment of your time?

JOSH

Of course.

TIMMONS

How's the leg? Hurts like a bitch, right? I got shot once. By a civilian. A kid, if you can believe it.

Timmons steps closer to Josh.

TIMMONS (CONT'D)

Mr. Kaplan, three men were assassinated yesterday, including two highly-trained government agents. You were clipped in the leg.

Josh's wheels start turning.

TIMMONS (CONT'D)

Your life was spared. Why? What's your connection to this group?

JOSH

...I don't-- I don't know anything about these people. I was just doing my job.

TIMMONS

The thing is, most victims of gun violence are actually shot by people they know. The kid who shot me?

(MORE)

TIMMONS (CONT'D)

He said it was an accidental discharge. But, I had just started dating his mother, so who's to say.

JOSH

Are you insinuating I purposefully got myself shot?

TIMMONS

I can't figure out why I've got three sniper shots, and you took one to the thigh. Meanwhile, your boss is missing.

JOSH

But--

TIMMONS

You don't really care for Franklin King, do you?

JOSH

...What?

TIMMONS

He's a polarizing guy. I get it. I'm not a fan either.

JOSH

Okay, we're not best friends or anything, but he's--

TIMMONS

A moron?

JOSH

What?

Timmons reads from his notes.

TIMMONS

An insufferable asshole? A soulless bottom-feeding snake oil salesman single-handedly tearing this country apart? A... fuckhead?

(beat)

That's from your secret Twitter account, isn't it? At-Chex-N\_Balances?

All the air is shocked out of Josh.

TIMMONS (CONT'D)

So, you hate your job, you hate your boss. "Hashtag-Fire-Franklin-King," right? You decide to get rid of him. Maybe even get yourself a juicy story in the process.

JOSH

No. I wouldn't--

TIMMONS

But, the guys you got in with were a little scarier than you were ready for. Had their own agenda.

(beat)

Who are they, Josh?

JOSH

I. Don't. Know.

(beat)

Agent Timmons, am I under arrest? Because, if not, I'd like to focus on healing this hole in my leg.

Timmons nods. Silently puts his card down on the table.

TIMMONS

You're on some pretty heavy meds. Why don't you call me when you're thinking straight.

Timmons exits. Josh pulls out the napkin. Studies it.

EXT. WOODS - MORNING

Lucas and Tom lead Franklin along a path in the woods. Franklin's got a black bag over his head.

FRANKLIN

You don't have to do this. You can let me go. I haven't seen anything.

Franklin trips. Tom catches him. Pushes him back to his feet.

LUCAS

Take that thing off him. We're close enough.

Tom rips the bag off Franklin's head.

FRANKLIN

Close enough to what? Where are you taking me?

LUCAS

It'll be easier for you to understand when we get there.

FRANKLIN

Who are you? Why are you doing this? You killed all those people..

TOM

No! You killed those people. You did. No one had to die.

LUCAS

Tom.

TOM

I told you to wait. Didn't I? I told you I would handle it. All you had to do was nothin. Those people are dead because of you. None of that had to happen. If you hadn't called those federals--

LUCAS

Shut up, Tom!... Jesus, you talk too much.

They continue to trudge through the woods.

INT. JOSH'S APARTMENT - MORNING

A mess of notebooks and printed articles. His sketch - the flag from Tom's apartment - starts to take shape.

Supported by a cane, he paces back and forth. Types in his laptop. Scribbles down notes.

Winces and clutches his leg. Pops a pill.

Josh's laptop screen reflects in his glasses. Photos of the attack's aftermath. The bodies of Jackson and Baker. Notices a tattoo they both share. The letters G-R-H.

Josh writes those letters in on the flag he was drawing.

In a printed-out article, a black-and-white picture from the 60s/70s. Militant men waving the same flag. Josh highlights the text: "God's Right Hand."

EXT. FORT SANGUINE - DAY

Tom, Lucas, and Franklin emerge from the woods and walk into a clearing. Franklin can't believe what he's seeing.

Cabins and gardens, a general store, a school, a church. A functioning little pioneer commune in the middle of nowhere.

There's people too. Not just the soldierly men we've seen to this point. Wives hang clothes on the line. Children play in the field. Men, women, and even older children openly carry rifles over their shoulder.

They walk Franklin through the town. Everyone stops what they're doing to watch Franklin with reverence and awe. Like Jesus has come to town.

MICHAEL [early 60s, cunning, good humor hides his edge] approaches the group with open arms. He's the town patriarch.

MICHAEL

Ladies and gentlemen. The King has arrived.

Townsfolk greet Franklin with joyous faces and enthusiastic applause. Franklin is flabbergasted.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

Welcome to Fort Sanguine.

Michael walks shellshocked Franklin through the town.

FRANKLIN

What is this place?

MICHAEL

This is home. Our little patch of heaven, free from the sin of the world. From what this country has become.

FRANKLIN

Where'd it come from?

MICHAEL

We've been buildin it up slow for a long time. Started with that cabin over there. My old man built it when I was a kid. He worked for the railroad, my daddy. A conductor on a coal train. He was always gone. Days at a time. Weeks. Worked real hard, but everyone did back then. We'd come here once or twice a year to fish or hunt. When I was in the war, those are the times I'd go to in my mind.

(beat)

What'd your daddy do?

FRANKLIN

Only two things I know for sure  
were beat my mother and leave.

MICHAEL

We carry our fathers with us, don't  
we? I sure learned a lot from mine.  
He'd do anythin to take care of his  
family. Which is why it about killed  
him when they took his train from  
him. See, coal started dyin off.  
Then the trains. Then everythin  
else. Our whole town shriveled up,  
like a peach fell off a tree.

(beat)

My daddy only went back to the old  
rail yard one more time. To park  
his Chevy on the tracks.

Franklin looks at Michael with something like understanding.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

I'm not tryin to tell you a sob  
story or nothin, because you and I  
both know my experience is in no  
way unique in America right now.  
Real folks are sick of hurtin. Sick  
of bein left out in the cold by the  
elites, the one percent. But you  
know what they don't realize yet?  
There's way more of us.

FRANKLIN

What does this have to do with me?

MICHAEL

Franklin, I'm not one for favors or  
handouts, but I'm afraid I do have  
somethin to ask of you.

FRANKLIN

Money? This is about money?

MICHAEL

No! Well, if you're offerin...

Michael laughs. Then, gets serious.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

You see, people like you and me,  
the forgotten Americans, they've  
let their frustrations and their  
anger smolder for years.

(MORE)

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

Eatin away at themselves, at their families, but never growin beyond that dull little roar.

(beat)

What you've done, is you came along and started stokin that fire. And these angry people, well suddenly they're startin to get angry at the right things. You gave them what every man needs. Purpose.

(beat)

The fire's ragin now, Franklin. And it's finally pointed the right way. Now, we need you to throw a little gas on it.

FRANKLIN

I don't understand.

MICHAEL

Sure you do. You're the voice of our revolution. And, my friend, the time's come to rally the troops.

Franklin's face goes flush. Michael is positively giddy.

INT. JOSH'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

The door opens and Josh hurriedly limps in. Erin trails a few feet behind him. She looks around at the mess.

ERIN

What is all this?

JOSH

A story. A real one.

He flashes her a smile, then pops a pain pill.

ERIN

Josh, after everything that happened, what you've been through, do you think you should be working like this? You need to rest--

JOSH

No, I can't. I-- An F-B-I agent came to see me at the hospital. Accused me of being in on it. I'm a suspect because I was there. Because I walked away.

(beat)

If you can call this walking.

ERIN

...What are you going to do?

JOSH

I'm gonna find the people who did this. I'm gonna save Franklin.

Erin takes it all in. Looks around at the mess of notes and articles. Considers it.

JOSH (CONT'D)

I know how this sounds, but it's my chance to do something important.

ERIN

...Show me what you found.

Josh picks up a stack of articles and hands it to her. She starts to thumb through.

JOSH

God's Right Hand was a far-right hate group that operated in the area 40 years ago. Their leader was a man named Michael Coors.

Erin scrolls through more pictures. Men carrying guns. Burning a cross. Wearing white hoods. She shakes her head.

JOSH (CONT'D)

In the late 70s, they disappeared. People assumed they disbanded. But, God's Right Hand didn't go away. They went underground. Waiting for their moment.

Pictures of burnt-out buildings. Dead bodies riddled with bullets. Erin gasps. Puts the photos down.

ERIN

How are we going to find them? I mean, if they've managed to stay hidden this long.

JOSH

Actually... I've got a lead.

ERIN

Are you serious?

JOSH

I keep reading rumors of a militia camp outside the city.

He shows her his screen. It's a 4chan-style message board: IntelStorm. He scrolls as he walks her through it.

JOSH (CONT'D)

I went back to that toxic comment section on the King's Court site. A lot of the same users congregate on the IntelStorm message boards. It's mostly racist jokes and deep state conspiracy theories, but I found chatter about a white supremacist settlement near Atlanta.

ERIN

Josh... Wow. This could be big.

JOSH

My neck's on the line here. I have to prove I'm innocent. I have to protect myself, and I don't know who I can trust.

ERIN

Who else have you told about this?

JOSH

No one. Not yet... I need your help. I can't do this on my own.

(beat)

You're a believer, Erin.

ERIN

...Okay. Okay, I'm in. But, we need to keep this to ourselves. Fuck N-3. This is ours.

Josh nods along to the plan.

ERIN (CONT'D)

Create an account on that message board. Say you're in Atlanta and you're looking to hook up with with the G-R-H.

Josh's eyes light up to the idea.

EXT. FRANKLIN'S QUARTERS - EVENING

Franklin steps out the door of his log cabin-esque quarters. The sun's setting. It's really quite a lovely evening.

Franklin looks around. There aren't many people nearby and no one's paying him much attention.

He peers over at the thick treeline. Not too far. Maybe he can make it. Maybe no one will notice.

JENNY (O.S.)  
Beautiful, ain't it?

Franklin jumps. Turns to see JENNY [late 20s, old-fashioned & sweet] tending a nearby garden.

FRANKLIN  
Uh, yeah. It's nice.

JENNY  
Nice? Heck, I've never seen a sunset like that anywhere else. And, wait til the stars come out. You've never seen so many.  
(beat)  
People in the city... I dunno. That dull gray empty night sky. I think that does something to ya, to your soul. The absence of stars.  
(beat)  
Out here, it's different. It's peaceful. No light pollution, no phones, no Facebook. Nothing to distract from the stuff that really matters. Family. Community. God.  
(beat)  
No wonder this country got so screwed up. It's easy to forget about God when you don't get to look up and see His best work.

MICHAEL (O.S.)  
Well, that's why we're gonna bring the fear of God back to 'em.

Michael approaches the cabin.

JENNY  
(reverential)  
Michael.

MICHAEL  
Jenny Wilson, you've talked this man's ear off enough for one night. Shouldn't you be off getting ready? Go on. Scoot.

She gives Franklin one last glance then heads off toward her own quarters. Michael turns back to Franklin.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

I think she likes you. Get used to that feeling. Everybody's real happy to have you here.

(beat)

Matter of fact, we're havin a little event tonight in your honor. The kids are puttin on a play at the schoolhouse. It'd mean so much to them if you'd come out and watch. Should be real cute.

FRANKLIN

...Okay.

MICHAEL

Great. Cuz... It ain't optional.

Michael chuckles like it was a joke. It wasn't.

INT. SCHOOLHOUSE - NIGHT

The whole town is packed into the small, old-fashioned schoolhouse auditorium. Franklin sits to Michael's right.

An older woman plays the organ. The tune is recognizable as "This Land Is Your Land," but on the organ, it sounds almost like a hymn.

The song dies down and the curtains open. Two KIDS in brown face run on-stage and speak in exaggerated Spanish accents.

KID IMMIGRANT 1

We made it to America!

KID IMMIGRANT 2

Finally! All the beans we can eat!

The crowd laughs. Franklin's stomach drops.

KID IMMIGRANT 1

Cocaine! Heroin! Who wants to buy some drugs?

The kid tosses baggies into the crowd, like t-shirts at a basketball game.

KID IKWUAKOR, dressed in a suit and blackface, walks on.

KID IKWUAKOR

What's going on here?!

KID IMMIGRANT 1

It's David Ikwuakor!

The crowd boos and hisses.

KID IMMIGRANT 2  
Aye yay yay!

The audience laughs again.

KID IKWUAKOR  
I only have one thing to say.  
(beat)  
Welcome to the United States!

A chanting throng of kids dressed as upstanding white members of society marches onstage and surrounds them.

KID SWARM  
We must secure the existence of our  
people and a future for white  
children.

KID IKWUAKOR  
No! Stop!

KID SWARM  
We must secure the existence of our  
people and a future for white  
children.

The crowd loves this. Franklin's terror grows.

KID SWARM (CONT'D)  
We must secure the existence of our  
people and a future for white  
children.

The Swarm encircles and entraps Kid Ikwuakor.

KID IKWUAKOR  
Nooooo!

The stage goes dark. A video screen behind the stage lights up. It's a clip from *King's Court with Franklin King*.

In the audience, Franklin's jaw drops in horror and guilt.

FRANKLIN (ON THE SCREEN)  
Make no mistake. America is under  
attack. Our way of life faces  
constant threat. -- This great  
nation was born of blood and fire,  
and maybe we need a revolution.

Cheers. Franklin's own words stab at his chest.

FRANKLIN (ON THE SCREEN) (CONT'D)  
Do we have it in us to fight back?!

CROWD NAZI (O.S.)  
Yeah!

Franklin can't believe this is happening.

FRANKLIN (ON THE SCREEN)  
Back when this country was great,  
traitors like you were walked out  
in front of a \*bleep\* firing squad!

The lights come back up and Kid Ikwuakor is dead on the ground, surrounded by the proud Kid Swarm, all holding plastic guns. An angelic LITTLE GIRL steps forward.

LITTLE GIRL  
Freedom is never more than one  
generation away from extinction. It  
must be fought for, or one day we  
will tell our children and our  
children's children what it was  
like in the United States when men  
were free.

Wild cheering. Michael gives Franklin a slap on the leg. Franklin forces himself to clap along with the crowd.

INT. JOSH'S APARTMENT - DAY

Josh is at his computer, mainlining coffee. He's frazzled, unwashed. The guy's a mess of nerves.

He's perusing the latest IntelStorm posts, and the hate looks like it's literally making Josh sick.

With a DING, a private message arrives. Reluctantly, he clicks it. It's from a user named Aryan\_Reigns.

Aryan\_Reigns: **"Why r u asking about G R H?"**

Josh thinks a second. Types.

Whitey\_J: **"Lookin to hook up w them. Join the fight."**

Aryan\_Reigns: **"We know who u r. Who ur with."**

Josh nervously watches the ... symbol as Aryan-Reigns types.

Aryan\_Reigns: **"U'll be hearing from us."**

Aryan\_Reigns: **"Josh."**

Josh backs away from his computer, freaked the fuck out. Paces, looks out the window. His street is silent, still.

INT. FRANKLIN'S QUARTERS - MORNING

Franklin lies in bed, probably didn't sleep a wink.

Suddenly, there's a GUNSHOT. A beat, then another shot. Franklin jumps to his feet and runs out the door.

EXT. FRANKLIN'S QUARTERS - CONTINUOUS

Fort Sanguine is calm. No sign of where the shots came from.

After a beat, a wounded elk limps into the street, blood trailing behind it. The elk pauses and looks at Franklin. Franklin stares into the creature's eyes.

Another SHOT. Franklin jumps and the beast falls dead. Three children with rifles run up to their kill, celebrating.

INT. MESS HALL - MORNING

A big hunk of meat is plopped onto Franklin's tray, next to some eggs and roasted potatoes. He sits down at a table and pokes at the fresh meat.

He's quickly joined by Jenny and her friend BRIANA [late 20s, sunny].

JENNY

What's the matter? Don't you like venison?

Franklin looks up and sees that Tom is at another table, watching them. Staring daggers.

FRANKLIN

Oh, no, it's fine. Thank you. I guess I'm not really hungry.

JENNY

You have to eat something.

BRIANA

You need protein. Keep up your strength.

She feels his muscle.

BRIANA (CONT'D)

Not that you're not strong already.

JENNY  
Bri!

BRIANA  
Jenny!

Lucas marches up to Tom's table.

LUCAS  
Tom. Your daddy wants to see you.

TOM  
What for?

LUCAS  
Didn't say. C'mon now. Let's go.

Lucas walks Tom out. Franklin turns back to the girls.

FRANKLIN  
I don't want to be any trouble, but  
do you have any steak sauce?  
Barbecue sauce? Any kind of sauce?

JENNY  
I think we have some ketchup left  
over from Memorial Day!

BRIANA  
I'll get it!

JENNY  
I know where it is!

Bri and Jenny run off toward the kitchen.

Franklin stealthily slips the knife into his pocket.

INT. THALIA'S OFFICE - DAY

Thalia works on her computer. A knock at the door and Erin walks in, carrying a package.

ERIN  
Thalia--

THALIA  
Not now, Erin.

ERIN  
You need to see this.

Thalia takes the box, opens it up. Her face drops in fear.

A series of photographs. A home. Children playing. Thalia with them. Her family.

THALIA

Oh my God...

(beat)

Where did this come from?

Erin shakes her head. *No idea.*

Thalia takes a worried breath. Turns to the next page. Photos of other houses. Other people. The last page is a list.

ERIN

What is that?

THALIA

Everyone who works for the show.

Names, addresses...

Thalia, thoroughly terrified, starts to read a letter aloud.

THALIA (CONT'D)

(reading)

Dear N-3. God's Right Hand has been in hiding long enough. Follow these instructions to the letter, or there will be dire consequences.

(beat)

You will help us get our message out to the world. Send a reporter to our compound. If you alert the authorities in any way, we will come for you and your families.

(beat)

The reporter will be--

INT. THALIA'S OFFICE - LATER THAT DAY

JOSH

Me?

Josh stands with Erin and Thalia. He's reading the letter.

ERIN

You and the... the pretty blonde from the bookstore.

JOSH

Why would they ask for us?

THALIA

That's a good question, Josh. Why would they ask for you?

JOSH  
Okay, I've been working on a story.

THALIA  
A story?

JOSH  
The attack. Who did it, where they  
are...

(beat)  
I was going to tell you, but I  
wanted to make sure I was on the  
right path.

(beat)  
Looks like I was.

THALIA  
No, Josh, this is exactly the wrong  
path. You are not a cop. You are  
not F.B.I. This is reckless. You  
put everyone here at risk.

JOSH  
That's the job.

THALIA  
Don't give me that sanctimonious  
crap. Not now.  
(to Erin)  
Did you know about this?

ERIN  
...A little.

THALIA  
Goddamn it.

ERIN  
Thalia, this is huge. This could be  
the biggest story in the country.  
In the world.

THALIA  
There is no story. We will not  
negotiate with domestic terrorists.

JOSH  
We can't do nothing. They have  
Franklin. They'll kill him.

THALIA  
I'm not putting anyone else at  
risk. Not you, not the people out  
there, not my family.

ERIN  
Thalia--

THALIA  
You go, and neither of you will  
have a job when you get back.

ERIN  
...No.

THALIA  
What was that?

ERIN  
No. This isn't your decision.

THALIA  
Erin--

ERIN  
This is news, Thalia! This is what  
real news looks like. It's not  
supposed to be safe or easy. That's  
not why we do it.

ERIN (CONT'D)  
So, you can either get out of our  
way, or you can bid against every  
other network in this country when  
we get back here with the story of  
the decade.

Thalia doesn't respond. Josh looks at Erin, impressed.

INT. FORT SANGUINE OFFICE - DAY

Hand-crafted wood, taxidermy animals, a God's Right Hand  
flag, a rifle hung up on the wall. Michael sits at a big  
shiny wood desk. Two tough-looking men sit opposite him.

The door opens and Tom enters the office, followed by Lucas.

TOM  
Hey, Pop.

MICHAEL  
Tom, you and I are past due for a  
heart-to-heart.

The men stand and move behind Tom. Tom sits.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)  
What happened in Atlanta?

TOM

What do you mean?

MICHAEL

You were supposed to make contact with Franklin. Bring him here peacefully. So... What happened?

TOM

We didn't have a choice. He surprised us. Brought federals to my door.

(beat)

Pop, I know Mr. King is important to your plan, but I don't think he's ready for what we got cookin.

MICHAEL

You're questioning my plan? You don't trust me?

TOM

I ain't sayin that. I'm just sayin. Mr. King ain't exactly been receptive to us. He called the authorities first chance he got. I don't think we can trust him.

MICHAEL

What would you propose?

TOM

You want a face, you want a voice? There are other options. Real believers.

MICHAEL

It sounds to me like you're blamin Franklin King for your mistakes. This was your responsibility, Tom. And what you need to understand is, actions have consequences.

Michael looks at Lucas and the other men. They grab Tom, slam him down on the desk. Hold him there. Tom yelps.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

How dare you question me! Who the fuck do you think you are? You will respect me in my office.

Tom continues to scream and struggle.

TOM  
Stop, please--

MICHAEL  
Franklin King means more to the  
cause than you, or me, or anyone  
else! And the cause is the only  
thing that matters!

TOM  
Daddy--

Tom continues to struggle. Lucas and the men keep him pinned  
down. Slam his hand on the desk.

MICHAEL  
You're right he called the federals  
and two of ours died, but if you  
want to blame somebody, look in the  
goddamn mirror! You broke into his  
home in the middle of the night?!  
Whose stupid fucking idea was that?  
How did you think he was going to  
react?!

TOM  
I thought--

MICHAEL  
You don't think, Tom! They got you  
on camera. By now, they probably  
know who you are! Who we are! Your  
stupid fat ass has threatened  
everything! And you want to point  
fingers?!

Lucas holds Tom's hand still. Michael picks up a hammer.  
Tom's eyes go wide. A tear falls down onto the desk.

TOM  
Daddy, please, no. I'm sorry, I--

MICHAEL  
Shhh shhh. Tom. This is the only  
way you're gonna learn. Spare the  
rod, spoil the child.

Michael raises the hammer over Tom's hand.

TOM  
No, no no no--

Michael brings the hammer down on Tom's fingers. Tom screams  
in agony. Again. And again. Tom bellows and whimpers.

The men release Tom and he falls onto the ground, clutching his hand.

MICHAEL  
In the future, Tom, don't make me  
do things like that. I get no  
pleasure from it.

Michael turns to the men.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)  
Get him to Doctor Bevel.

LUCAS  
Yes, sir.

They pick up the whimpering Tom. Michael puts on his jacket and marches toward the door.

INT. PARKING GARAGE - MORNING

Erin and Josh wait in a mostly empty parking garage, a camera bag between them. He shows her his trembling hand.

JOSH  
Look at this, I'm fucking shaking.

ERIN  
It's okay to be scared.

JOSH  
Scared? Fuck that. I'm excited.  
Erin, this is what we signed up  
for. What it's all about.

She can't help but smile.

JOSH (CONT'D)  
I'm glad you're here with me.

ERIN  
...Me too.

A Jeep tears into the parking garage and stops right in front of them.

JOSH  
Hey, are you the--

Two big, scary dudes grab Erin and Josh.

JOSH (CONT'D)  
Hold on--

Pull bags over their heads. Throw them into the back of the Jeep and speed away.

INT. FRANKLIN'S QUARTERS - MORNING

Franklin sits on his bed. He has the knife he stole from the kitchen in his hands. He's got a plan.

A knock on the door.

JENNY (O.S.)  
Mr. King?

Franklin hides the knife.

JENNY (O.S.) (CONT'D)  
Mr. King. Can I come in? I have something for you.

FRANKLIN  
Yeah. Come in.

The door opens and Jenny walks in. She's carrying a suit and tie. It's old and out-of-style.

FRANKLIN (CONT'D)  
What is this?

JENNY  
Wardrobe. Is that what they call it? In the business? The biz.

FRANKLIN  
Uh...

JENNY  
Do you not like it? Is it the color? Or... I'm sorry, sir. I can try to find something else. We don't have much, but I'll--

FRANKLIN  
No, no. But... Wardrobe for what?

EXT. FORT SANGUINE CHURCH - MORNING

Franklin, wearing the suit Jenny brought him, walks toward the church, where Michael is waiting.

MICHAEL  
There he is. The man of the hour.

FRANKLIN  
What is this? What's going on?

Michael opens the door to the church, walks Franklin inside.

INT. FORT SANGUINE CHURCH - CONTINUOUS

A single room, rough wooden pews. A big cross over the altar.

MICHAEL

Today's the big day, Franklin. It's time for you to play your part.

Michael hands Franklin a small stack of papers.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

Here's your script.

FRANKLIN

My script for what?

Franklin reads through. His face drops.

FRANKLIN (CONT'D)

I'm not gonna say this shit.

MICHAEL

Sure, make it sound like you. Put it in your own words.

FRANKLIN

No. I'm not going to help you. I want no part of this.

MICHAEL

What are you sayin?

FRANKLIN

I don't believe in any of this shit. Do you understand? The things I say on T-V...

(beat)

If you don't exaggerate, nobody watches anymore. It's fake. It's entertainment. That's all it is.

MICHAEL

(losing it)

You're not--You're not one of us? You're pretendin? You're full of shit? This whole time? Why would someone do that? For ratings? For money? No. No no. No no no no.

Michael looks like his whole world has been rocked. But, then, comes out of it. Looks at Franklin with clear eyes.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

I know that! Shit. Of course you're fake. What kind of backwoods rube do you think I am? I went to Duke, you condescending prick.

FRANKLIN

Why did you bring me here?

MICHAEL

My people are sick of being held down. Of living under the boot of the rich, the godless. The Jews and the mongrels. We are finally fighting back. And you, whether you like it or not, whether you believe in it or not, are part of it. You, Franklin King, are the voice.

FRANKLIN

I'm not like you.

MICHAEL

There are hours of footage that beg to differ. All I'm asking is you do what you do so well.

(beat)

We're gonna make this as easy on you as possible. We even found someone from your show to come out here for the scoop. Pretty young thing. You know the one. You had the veal. She had eggplant parm.

FRANKLIN

How long have you been following me?

MICHAEL

Say your lines, do your part, and everything will be fine.

Franklin takes an intimidating step toward Michael.

FRANKLIN

No. You listen to me...

Franklin pulls the knife out of his pocket. Michael takes a half step back, raises his hands.

FRANKLIN (CONT'D)

You're going to call off the interview and you're going to let me walk out of here.

MICHAEL

A knife? Jesus Christ. Do you know how many guns we have? You won't make it ten feet out that door.

FRANKLIN

I don't have to kill them all. I just have to kill you.

MICHAEL

...Alright. I'm intrigued. Do you have it in you, Franklin? Let's find out, what kind of man are you?

Franklin hesitates a beat, then lunges at Michael. Michael dodges the strike and punches Franklin in the stomach. Knocks him to the ground.

Stomps his hand, kicks away the knife.

Kicks Franklin in the stomach. Kicks him again. Franklin coughs and groans.

FRANKLIN

You're gonna have to kill me.

MICHAEL

Don't think I won't.

Michael kneels next to Franklin. He pulls a stack of photographs out of his pocket.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

But, I think I'll start with her.

Michael hands the pictures to Franklin. His eyes go wide.

They're all of ANNA [early 30s] in San Francisco. In her car. In her home with her husband.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

Your daughter's prettier than you are, but I can see the resemblance. She has your eyes.

In the last picture, she's pushing a stroller down a quiet little street.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

Did you know she had a baby? Mazel tov, Grandpa.

FRANKLIN

If you hurt her--

MICHAEL

She's fine, and I'd like her to stay that way. But, really, that's up to you.

FRANKLIN

How did you find her?

MICHAEL

People think we're a bunch of Bible-thumpin, gun-totin, cousin-humpin hicks runnin around barefoot in the woods and wipin our assholes with leaves. But, we're much more than that, I promise you. And we're very good at what we do.

FRANKLIN

You son of a bitch.

Michael picks up the knife.

MICHAEL

What's it going to be, Franklin?

Franklin looks up at Michael. Rage. Fear.

Defeat.

EXT. FORT SANGUINE - DAY

The black hoods are pulled off of Erin and Josh. Their eyes adjust to the light. Franklin is the first person they see.

He's weak, beat-up. He tries to cover the desperation in his eyes with the biggest smile he can muster.

FRANKLIN

Erin! Josh! It's good to see you.

They can't believe their eyes.

EXT. FORT SANGUINE CHURCH - MOMENTS LATER

Josh sets up the camera on its tripod. He scopes the scene for evidence, anything he can use. A crowd has gathered to watch. Wearing their Sunday best and big, creepy smiles.

JOSH

...How's it goin?

JENNY

Very well. It's a beautiful day. Thank you for being here.

Josh fakes a smile and nods. Pivots to Erin and Franklin. Standing together a few feet in front of the camera. She's holding a microphone.

ERIN  
You almost ready?

JOSH  
Yeah, yeah, I-- Shit. I think I left the mic cable in the Jeep. I'll grab it.

EXT. FORT SANGUINE - MOMENTS LATER

Josh, camera in hand, walks through town, which is pretty empty. Everyone is gathered by the church.

Josh peaks in a couple windows. Nothing. Keeps walking.

He comes up on the window to MICHAEL'S OFFICE, looks inside. Reaches into his pocket and pulls out a small digital camera. Points it in the window. Starts snapping pictures.

Josh spots a map of the United States. A red pin in Atlanta. Red pins all over the country, especially the south and midwest. Kentucky, Oklahoma, West Virginia... All over.

Josh hears footsteps behind him and quickly pockets the camera. Turn around. It's Tom.

Josh recognizes him right away. Tries to hide his fear.

TOM  
Ya lost?

JOSH  
Sorry, yeah, I was looking for the Jeep. I think I left--

TOM  
Jeep ain't in there.

Tom studies Josh a little closer. Smiles.

TOM (CONT'D)  
I remember you.

He pokes at Josh's cane with his foot.

TOM (CONT'D)  
I'm bettin you remember me too.  
Don't ya?  
(beat)  
(MORE)

TOM (CONT'D)  
I hope you know what you're doin.  
Cuz this here's real important--

MICHAEL (O.S.)  
Enough.

Michael approaches.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)  
That isn't how we treat our guests.

Tom backs off, grumbling. Michael puts a friendly hand on Josh's shoulder.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)  
Son, these are professionals.  
Masters of their craft. I trust  
this young man to do right by us.

Josh forces a nod.

Michael holds up a cable.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)  
This what you were looking for?

JOSH  
Uh, yeah, that's it... Thanks.

MICHAEL  
Then, as they say, let's get this  
show on the road.

Michael gives Josh a big grin.

EXT. FORT SANGUINE CHURCH - MOMENTS LATER

Josh walks back to his tripod and puts his camera on it. Erin walks up to him. They whisper to each other.

ERIN  
What was that? Where'd you go?

JOSH  
Something's off. I don't like this.

ERIN  
We'll get what we need and be out  
of here before you know it.

JOSH  
It's not that. It's, I don't know.  
This feels like a set-up.

ERIN  
This is what we live for. Let's get  
to work. Are you rolling?

JOSH  
(hits the button)  
Yeah.

Erin walks back to Franklin, sets herself. Reporter posture.  
Reporter voice.

ERIN  
Three-two-one.  
(beat)  
This is Erin Raynes, reporting from  
the secret compound of God's Right  
Hand, a compound its residents call  
"Fort Sanguine."

Josh watches Erin. Can't believe how calm and professional  
she is in these circumstances.

ERIN (CONT'D)  
I'm standing here with Franklin  
King. Franklin, how are you?

Franklin pauses. Forces it out.

FRANKLIN  
Erin, I've never been better.

ERIN  
You've been missing since you were  
abducted in the attack on Atlanta--

FRANKLIN  
Abducted? I wasn't abducted. As you  
can see, I'm in perfect health and  
here of my own free will. What  
happened in Atlanta, while  
regrettable, was our shot across  
the bow. A sign of what's to come.

ERIN  
You were part of the attack?

The gathered crowd looks proud, jubilant. Tom, watching from  
the sidelines, looks conflicted.

FRANKLIN  
Erin, we are standing on the  
frontlines of the revolution.  
(MORE)

FRANKLIN (CONT'D)

It's what I've been saying for years: this country no longer has the best interests of its people at heart, and I have joined the fight.

ERIN

Fight? What do you mean, "fight?"

Franklin pauses a beat. Mustering his next words. He looks over at Michael, who's watching intently.

FRANKLIN

We are calling for David Ikwuakor to immediately withdraw from the presidential race and resign from the United States Senate.

Josh sees Michael practically mouthing Franklin's words.

FRANKLIN (CONT'D)

If he refuses, he will be marked an enemy of the people and dealt with as such.

(beat)

When he is dead and his blood waters the tree of liberty, the revolution will be upon us.

INT. NEWSROOM - CONTINUOUS

Everyone gathers around a screen, watching the story. Shocked into silence.

FRANKLIN (ON TV)

Remember. Every man dies. But, patriots live forever.

The video ends. It takes a few beats before anyone can talk.

THALIA

You shouldn't have done this--

ERIN

I've already put in calls to the other networks. If you don't want it--

THALIA

But, I'm glad you did. This is amazing work. This is--

JOSH

Bullshit. It's bullshit.

ERIN

Josh, what are you talking about?

JOSH

Franklin is a lot of things, but he isn't a fucking terrorist. They can spin it however they want, he was kidnapped. They made him say those things.

HARRISON

It doesn't matter. Whether Franklin's a hostage or a leader, there is a terrorist group on American soil, threatening a presidential candidate.

(beat)

And we have the fucking exclusive.

He's practically licking his lips.

ERIN

Josh, this is what you wanted. On-the-ground reporting. Real news.

JOSH

It's not news! It's a call-to-arms! Putting this on our network gives them a platform. Credibility. That's exactly what they want. We're playing into their hands!

THALIA

I know this is personal for you--

JOSH

It's got nothing to do with what happened to me!

(beat)

Erin, come on. You know this is wrong. Don't do this.

ERIN

...It's a really big story, Josh.

Josh's heart drops.

ERIN (CONT'D)

It's important. Powerful. It's--

JOSH

No, I get it. I'm sure everyone's gonna love it. I hope you get fucking famous.

(MORE)

JOSH (CONT'D)  
 (beat)  
 I quit.

Josh takes off his security badge and tosses it at the group.  
 He storms out.

Erin picks up Josh's badge.

MONTAGE:

- An "EXCLUSIVE" News Bumper on N3.
- Anchorman Gary Gardner reports on the news.

GARY  
 And now, an N-3 exclusive...

- BREAKING NEWS on CNN.

CNN ANCHOR  
 A revolutionary movement in America.

- BREAKING NEWS on CBS.

CBS ANCHOR  
 And, is Franklin King leading the  
 charge?

- An MSNBC Cable News Panel.

COMMENTATOR  
 He's been telling us for years who  
 he is. We should have listened.

- MULTIPLE STATIONS AT ONCE. "Traitor." "Traitor." "Traitor."
- ABC NEWS. David Ikwuakor being interviewed in-studio.

DAVID  
 I don't believe Franklin King is a  
 traitor.

INT. ABC NEWS STUDIO - CONTINUOUS (ON-AIR)

David is being interviewed by the ABC ANCHOR.

ABC ANCHOR  
 He's called for your execution. Not  
 once, but twice. And you're  
 defending him?

DAVID  
 I've criticized Mr. King for many  
 things. He's a showman, sure.  
 (MORE)

DAVID (CONT'D)  
 A grifter. But this? This is beyond  
 anything he's ever said.  
 (beat)  
 I think it's very likely he was  
 abducted in order to help broadcast  
 this groups's violent agenda.

INT. JOSH'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Josh paces his apartment, watching the news.

ABC ANCHOR (ON TV)  
 How do you explain what authorities  
 found in his home? The white  
 supremacist literature. The God's  
 Right Hand treatise.

DAVID (ON TV)  
 I can't. But, I think he should  
 have the opportunity to explain  
 those things for himself.

Josh is struck by something, the wheels in his head turning.

INT. FRANKLIN'S QUARTERS - EVENING

On the small black and white TV in his quarters, Franklin  
 watches the interview, replayed on N3.

ABC ANCHOR (ON TV)  
 Do you really believe Franklin King  
 is a good man?

DAVID (ON TV)  
 ...I believe he still can be.

David looks earnest. Franklin is on the verge of tears.

EXT. FORT SANGUINE - NIGHT

Franklin sits on a bench, alone and miserable. But, around  
 him, it's a hoedown in Fort Sanguine. The townsfolk dance to  
 the music of a live bluegrass band. Drinking and celebrating.

Even Lucas is kicking back and dancing with his young wife.

Briana and Jenny dance together, looking to Franklin for  
 approval.

Michael walks over and gives him a drink.

MICHAEL

You could at least try to look like you're having a good time. You see how happy you made these people?

Michael walks onto the dance floor and takes Jenny by the hand, spinning her into a dance move. Lucas and his wife dance over.

LUCAS

Where's Tom? I wouldn't think he'd miss this.

MICHAEL

You know him. Probably off sulking somewhere. He'll get over it.

The band winds down their song and everyone stops dancing to clap and cheer. Michael steps onto the stage.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

How's everybody feeling tonight?!

They cheer for their leader.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

Me too.

He looks around at his expectant, joyous followers.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

As I stand here and look out at all of your faces, I don't just see friends, neighbors, soldiers. I see a family. I am blessed to call each and every one of you my family. This whole little community we've created for ourselves, Fort Sanguine...

(beat)

You know, it used to be one cabin. That's it. Just one rundown, rottin cabin in the woods. Nothin and no one else for miles. And I know most you have heard me tell this story a few thousand times, but you're going to hear it again because I'm too galdern happy to hold anything in right now.

The crowd laughs and cheers.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

Back then, do you know why I would come up here? To hide.

(MORE)

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

When I'd get sick of the filthy heathen world out there, this was where I'd come to hide. I think that's why most of us found this place. Why we've loved it so much. Fort Sanguine was our hidin place from everything we'd come to despise. But, we are not hidin anymore!

Everyone erupts into a cheer. Franklin watches, dumbstruck.

INT. JOSH'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Josh works on his laptop, scribbles down notes. Erin enters.

ERIN

Josh, what is so important you couldn't tell me on the phone?

He barely registers she's there. He's in it.

ERIN (CONT'D)

What's going on? Is everything okay? Josh?

JOSH

I figured it out, Erin.

ERIN

Figured what out?

JOSH

This isn't about God's Right Hand. It's way, way bigger than that.

ERIN

Bigger how?

JOSH

Look at this.

Josh takes out his small camera. Shows her pictures of Michael's map. The red pins.

JOSH (CONT'D)

There are hundreds of extremist hate groups in this country, groups that have been around since the Civil War. And most of them, they don't have their own hidden compounds. They're just people. They could be anyone.

(MORE)

JOSH (CONT'D)

The government, judges, cops, the media. Like sleeper agents. Waiting for a leader, someone with the power to inspire them all for one common purpose.

ERIN

What purpose?

EXT. FORT SANGUINE - CONTINUOUS

Michael's speech crescendoes.

MICHAEL

The time is upon us to return America to its former glory! The death of David Ikwuakor will be the signal fire for our fellow soldiers across this nation to rise up! And we, as one people, will take our country back!

Wild cheers. The crowd is eating this shit up.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

Si vis pacem, para bellum! "Pray for peace, prepare for war."

(beat)

I say we've said enough prayers. If war's the answer, then we'll give them war!

Michael raises his rifle and the crowd roars!

INT. JOSH'S APARTMENT - CONTINUOUS

Josh is still putting pieces together, laying them out.

JOSH

They set Franklin up. Used him to spread their message. Used us.

ERIN

You're paranoid.

JOSH

I'm not, Erin. I promise you I'm not. But, maybe it's not too late. Franklin said Senator Ikwuakor's death is the trigger, right? If they don't kill him, maybe that stops it.

(beat)

We need to call the F-B-I.

Erin thinks a beat.

EXT. FORT SANGUINE - CONTINUOUS

The crowd is still cheering for Michael. Men fire their guns into the air.

As the crowd settles and they've stopped firing their guns, we hear one more GUNSHOT.

Michael looks shocked. He puts his hand on his chest, and it comes back bloody.

Michael falls to the ground. Everyone screams.

LUCAS

Michael!

From the WOODS, FBI agents in SWAT gear emerge and advance on the Fort Sanguine party, led by Agent Timmons. A helicopter flies above them, shining a spotlight down.

LUCAS (CONT'D)

Take cover!

The men take defensive positions behind buildings, rocks, piles of wood. They shoot back at the agents.

Franklin dives into the hay behind a shed.

Women and children run for cover in their homes, the church, the school, anywhere they can find.

It's a chaotic, bloody firefight. Most of the men of Sanguine get cut down quickly. They're outmatched and outgunned.

Many of the women who've run inside poke rifles out of their windows and fire on the agents.

Lucas shoots an agent, stabs another.

The agents return the women's fire into their houses, shattering glass and kicking up splinters and blood.

Franklin peaks up from his hiding spot. It's war out there.

FRANKLIN

Holy shit.

Jenny takes cover behind Franklin's shed, shotgun in hand. She turns and sees Franklin hiding.

She points the gun at him.

JENNY  
You did this.

FRANKLIN  
I didn't! I swear to God--

JENNY  
You son of a bitch!

Jenny aims her gun at Franklin.

FRANKLIN  
No no no!--

GUNSHOTS. Jenny is hit and drops to the ground.

Franklin makes a run for the treeline.

Michael, clinging to life, watches Jenny die in the dirt.  
Watches Lucas take a bullet and fall.

Watches his people die. Get arrested. Taken away. There's  
nothing he can do.

Michael crawls underneath the stage. He lifts a hatch and  
drops down, closing it behind him.

INT. TUNNEL - CONTINUOUS

Michael hits the dirt with a thud. He's in an escape tunnel,  
dug beneath the town.

He stands up and turns around to see Tom. Sitting in a chair,  
a gun in his hand.

TOM  
How's the party?

Michael is dumbfounded.

MICHAEL  
Tom?  
(beat)  
What did you do?

TOM  
I'm sorry, Pop. But... Actions have  
consequences.

Michael shakes his head in disbelief.

TOM (CONT'D)  
You understand, don't ya? It's for  
the good of the cause.  
(MORE)

TOM (CONT'D)

See, they know about you and the compound. It was only a matter of time before they found us on their own. You put us all at risk.

Michael's putting something together.

MICHAEL

Come up with this all on your own, did ya?

INT. JOSH'S APARTMENT - CONTINUOUS

Erin watches Josh pace. He's onto something.

JOSH

I wanted a story. I wanted to do something important. I didn't see what was right in front of me.

(beat)

That agent was right. God's Right Hand has to have someone at N-3.

ERIN

Josh--

JOSH

How else could they have known about the raid? Known so much about Franklin? How to make contact, where he lived? They knew you and I would go to the compound.

(beat)

It makes sense, right? If you want to spread your message, what better place to work than--

He turns to look at Erin.

She's pointing a gun at him.

JOSH (CONT'D)

Erin... What are you doing?

ERIN

I'm sorry, Josh. But you said it yourself.

(beat)

I'm a believer.

INT. TUNNEL - CONTINUOUS

Michael is seething mad. Tom, cool as a cucumber.

MICHAEL

You two really think you're ready to step up, huh?

TOM

She's got a good plan. A better plan. You should be proud of her, really. We'll succeed where you never could.

MICHAEL

You stupid son of a bitch. My only failure was not killing you a long time ago.

Tom chokes back his emotions.

TOM

Well, we all have regrets.

Tom pulls the trigger.

INT. JOSH'S APARTMENT - CONTINUOUS

Erin still has her gun on Josh.

JOSH

...Why?

ERIN

Because you're right. This country has gone to shit. N-3? Shit. But, it can be so much more. The resources are there. The audience. So much power and potential.

JOSH

Erin, this isn't you. I know you. You're not a killer. You're not--

Erin quickly raises her gun.

JOSH (CONT'D)

Wait!--

Erin shoots Josh in the head and he falls dead to the floor.

She grabs his laptop, camera, and notebook. Flees the apartment.

EXT. WOODS - CONTINUOUS

Franklin races through the woods, putting Fort Sanguine behind him as fast as he can.

Sees flashlights in front of him, surrounding him. FBI agents encircle him.

TIMMONS

Stop! Put your hands up!

Franklin drops to his knees, raises his hands.

FRANKLIN

I'm Franklin King!

The agents push him onto his stomach. Cuff him. He whimpers.

FRANKLIN (CONT'D)

I'm Franklin King.

They lift Franklin off the ground and start walking him away.

EXT. OUTSIDE THE CITY - DAY

The outskirts of Atlanta. The same billboard from after the attack -- "Jesus is coming back. Are you ready?"

Erin, steely and cold, meets with Tom, who's a ball of nervous energy.

ERIN

What the hell happened, Tom?  
Where's Franklin?

TOM

I don't know.

ERIN

Did he escape? Was he arrested?  
Where did he go?!

TOM

I don't know! It was chaos. All  
those people...

He's visibly upset. Erin calms herself down.

ERIN

I know. But, we did what we had to  
do. Michael didn't give us a  
choice. Remember? He was going to  
get us caught, or killed.

TOM

...Yeah.

ERIN

We have to find Franklin. Okay? We need him. You can do this.

(beat)

It's you and me now. We're calling the shots.

He nods. Determined.

INT. INTERROGATION ROOM - DAY

Franklin sits in an FBI interrogation room. Agent Timmons sits opposite him. Franklin guzzles a bottle of water.

FRANKLIN

I had no idea water could taste this goddamned good. Thank you.

TIMMONS

You've had quite the ordeal, huh?

FRANKLIN

I'm just so relieved it's over.

TIMMONS

Mhm.

FRANKLIN

I want to go home, sleep in my own bed. Put this whole fucking nightmare behind me.

TIMMONS

Mr. King, I don't think that's going to happen for a while.

FRANKLIN

What? I don't...

(beat)

Am I under arrest?

No answer.

FRANKLIN (CONT'D)

You don't think... Do you think I'm part of this?

(beat)

I was kidnapped. They forced me to say those things. I had nothing to do with what happened. With any of it.

(beat)

I want to go home. Please.

(MORE)

FRANKLIN (CONT'D)  
 (beat)  
 Believe me.

Timmons isn't so sure.

FRANKLIN (CONT'D)  
 ...I get a phone call, don't I? I  
 want my phone call.

INT. FBI OFFICE HALLWAY - MOMENTS LATER

Franklin holds the phone receiver to his ear. *Ring. Ring.*

FRANKLIN  
 It's Franklin. Listen! They think  
 I'm part of it. I need your help. I  
 need you. You're the only one who  
 can help me clear my name. Call  
 Edelman. Call my lawyer, call--

INT. NEWSROOM - CONTINUOUS

Erin has a phone to her ear. A smirk creeps across her lips.

ERIN  
 Franklin, slow down.  
 (beat)  
 Where are you?

EXT. ATLANTA FBI FIELD OFFICE - DAY

The Atlanta FBI building stands tall. Buzzing with activity.  
 Serious-looking agents marching in and out.

Erin walks up to the building, looks it up and down like  
 she's sizing it up.

Watches some of the passing agents who pay her no mind.

Confidently, she steps inside.

INT. FBI HOLDING CELLS - MOMENTS LATER

Timmons walks Erin down a long hallway of holding cells.  
 Steel doors and reinforced glass.

They reach Franklin King's cell. He's wearing a blue jumpsuit.

When he sees Erin, he jumps up and rushes to the glass.

FRANKLIN  
 Erin! Oh my God, it is so good to  
 see you! I'm glad you're alright!

ERIN  
You too, Franklin.

FRANKLIN  
I can't believe this is happening  
to me! I don't deserve this!

ERIN  
Try to calm down.

FRANKLIN  
Calm down?! The F-B-I thinks I'm a  
goddamn terrorist!

Franklin looks at Timmons, who watches him, glaring.

Franklin leans closer to Erin. He's beyond desperate.

FRANKLIN (CONT'D)  
Erin, please, you have to help me.

ERIN  
I'm going to get you out of here,  
Franklin. Trust me. I have a plan.

INT. SENATOR IKWUAKOR'S OFFICE - DAY

Senator Ikwuakor shakes hands with a visitor to his office -  
Erin. Sierra stands behind her husband.

ERIN  
Senator. Mrs. Ikwuakor. Thank you  
for your time. I know you're both  
very busy, so I'll get right to it.  
(beat)  
Sir, I'm here to present you with  
an opportunity that I believe will  
help your campaign.

David and Sierra narrow their eyes.

ERIN (CONT'D)  
Franklin King sits in jail, accused  
of crimes he didn't commit. You've  
publicly stated your belief that he  
was abducted and manipulated.  
(beat)  
We both know he's innocent.

SIERRA  
Franklin King is a racist and a  
damn fool--

DAVID

Sierra, please... You're not wrong.  
But, let's hear Miss Raynes out.

She opens a picture on her phone. A poster mock-up. David Ikwuakor and Franklin King facing off.

ERIN

What I'm proposing is the biggest news event of the year. The decade. You and Franklin King. A live, town hall event.

(beat)

A chance for him to clear his name. And a chance for you to show the world your empathetic leadership.

DAVID

Miss Raynes, I appreciate your loyalty to Mr. King, but I would have to refer you to my campaign manager.

He gestures toward Sierra. She waves.

SIERRA

Hello.

ERIN

Mrs. Ikwuakor. I understand your hesitance, but this is a P-R opportunity that money can't buy.

(beat)

This would be an historic act of compassionate diplomacy that will forever define your husband.

David ponders, smirks.

SIERRA

Thank you for your interest and enthusiasm, Miss Raynes. But, our answer is no.

DAVID

Now, hold on...

SIERRA

David. You can't really be considering this. After everything he's said about you--

DAVID  
Don't you think he deserves to tell  
his side of the story?

SIERRA  
...No!

DAVID  
Sierra, that man has been through  
hell.

SIERRA  
So have we! He put us through hell.

DAVID  
Well, then. We'll have something to  
talk about.

ERIN  
Thank you, sir. You won't regret  
this. I promise this night will be  
one for the history books.

David gives Sierra a reassuring look.

FLASHY NEWS GRAPHIC - BREAKING NEWS!!

INT. CNN NEWS STUDIO - EVENING (ON-AIR)

CNN ANCHOR  
Senator David Ikwuakor has agreed  
to sit down with suspected  
terrorist and confirmed muckracker  
Franklin King?  
(beat)  
Is Senator Ikwuakor demonstrating  
leadership or committing career  
suicide?

INT. MSNBC STUDIO - EVENING (ON-AIR)

MSNBC ANCHOR  
Can Franklin King even be trusted?  
The way I see it, he's either a  
puppet or a terrorist.

INT. MORNING SHOW STUDIO - MORNING (ON-AIR)

MORNING SHOW ANCHOR  
Love her or hate her, one thing's  
for certain. Erin Raynes has landed  
herself the news event of the year.

INT. NEWSROOM - EVENING

Erin stands in front of a large monitor watching the news coverage. All about her.

She's the talk of the entire news world.

The glow of the television illuminates Erin's icy smile.

EXT. OUTSIDE THE CITY - MORNING

Erin and Tom meet at the "Jesus Is Coming Back" billboard.

She gives him an N3 hat and jacket. Tom can barely contain his excitement.

TOM

It's finally happening. The shot heard round the world. Ikwuakor dies, and the revolution begins.

ERIN

I'll be the new face of the movement, and Tom, you'll be right there by my side.

She hands Tom a camera bag. He opens it and lifts up the camera, revealing a small disassembled rifle underneath.

ERIN (CONT'D)

Say it again.

TOM

"I was a victim and nothing more."

ERIN

Good. When Franklin says that, that's your cue.

Tom nods, absolutely giddy.

ERIN (CONT'D)

Tom, this is important... You need to kill them both. Franklin first.

Tom is taken aback.

TOM

...Franklin? You want me to kill Franklin?

ERIN

I know. But, it's a necessary sacrifice. Franklin knows too much. We can't leave any loose ends.

Tom hesitates.

ERIN (CONT'D)

You believe in me, don't you?

TOM

I would die for you. For the cause.

She brushes his face, reassuringly.

EXT. MAGNA BRATUS HOTEL - EVENING

A large crowd lines up outside the lavish hotel. Hold signs. Chat excitedly. Buy and sell merchandise. Shirts, pins, bobbleheads. Franklin King and David Ikwuakor Rock 'Em Sock 'Em Robots. The air crackles with energy.

INT. MAGNA BRATUS CONVENTION CENTER - CONTINUOUS

N3 crew set up cameras. A director operating a switch in the back. Thalia overseeing the work.

Secret Service, police, and FBI walk the scene with bomb-sniffing dogs.

EXT. MAGNA BRATUS HOTEL - CONTINUOUS

An FBI van pulls up to the side of the building. Franklin, still in a jumpsuit and handcuffs, is walked inside.

INT. MAGNA BRATUS HOTEL ROOM - CONTINUOUS

David frantically scribbles down notes, deep in thought. Sierra stands over him, concerned.

INT. MAGNA BRATUS CONVENTION CENTER - CONTINUOUS

Erin steps into the hotel's large convention center. Walks by the beautiful, over-sized golden fountain. The same fountain seen on a picture in Tom's apartment.

She looks around at the majesty of this place. Takes in the location. Breathes in the moment.

EXT. MAGNA BRATUS HOTEL - CONTINUOUS

An N3 news van pulls up to the security gate. The driver hands the badge to the guard, who looks it over.

The name on the badge is JOSH KAPLAN. But, it's not his picture. The picture is of TOM.

Tom, now with his head shaved and a patchy beard, drives the van. He's wearing the N3 hat and jacket.

The guard looks at Tom a beat, then hands back the badge. Opens the gate. Tom drives into the garage.

INT. MAGNA BRATUS GREEN ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Franklin sits in the green room, still cuffed. Agent Timmons and other agents guard him.

Erin stands in front of him.

FRANKLIN

I'm shaking. I haven't been nervous going on T-V in thirty years.

ERIN

You're gonna do great. You're a pro. There's no better way for you to clear your name.

For the first time in a long time, Franklin smiles.

ERIN (CONT'D)

When we're out there, I'm going to ask you if you feel responsible for what's happened. Okay? And, here's what you say. Exactly this.

(beat)

The people responsible are dead. They targeted me because of my show...

(beat)

I was a victim and nothing more.

Franklin nods. She leans in. Deathly serious.

ERIN (CONT'D)

Say it back to me.

INT. MAGNA BRATUS CONVENTION CENTER - CONTINUOUS

The stage is set up with three chairs, illuminated by bright white lights. The crowd watches with hushed anticipation. The cameras are rolling.

Erin stands on the wings. She puts an earpiece in her ear.

A P.A. cues her and she walks onto the stage. Addresses the audience.

ERIN

Ladies and gentlemen. To everyone here tonight, and the millions watching at home, thank you for joining us for what promises to be an historic occasion...

INT. MAGNA BRATUS CONVENTION CENTER HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

A guard stands posted at a door. Tom approaches.

GUARD

Sir, you can't be up here.

TOM

It's okay. I'm with the news.

GUARD

Press pool's down in the main room.

TOM

It's cool, check it.

Tom flashes the press pass with one hand, stabs the guard with the other. Tom drags the guard in the door with him.

INT. MAGNA BRATUS CONVENTION CENTER - CONTINUOUS

Erin on-stage.

ERIN

Please welcome, first to the stage, Senator David Ikwuakor.

Senator David Ikwuakor walks onto the stage to camera flashes and applause.

Sierra applauds from her seat in the front row.

INT. GREEN ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Franklin can hear the cheers in the green room. Timmons turns to him. Starts to unlock his cuffs.

It's time.

INT. MAGNA BRATUS CONVENTION CENTER, UPSTAIRS - CONTINUOUS

Tom watches Erin shake hands with Ikwuakor. He puts in an earpiece.

Tom unzips the camera bag, takes out the camera. He looks at it a beat, then tosses it aside.

Beneath the camera, a small, disassembled rifle.

TOM

In position.

INT. MAGNA BRATUS CONVENTION CENTER - CONTINUOUS

Erin subtly touches her ear, acknowledging Tom.

David takes a seat.

ERIN

And, now, appearing in public for  
the first time since his horrific  
ordeal began, Franklin King!

Franklin walks out onto the stage. The crowd is hushed a  
beat, then cheers wildly.

Franklin draws energy from the applause. He and Erin shake  
hands. He leans in close to her, whispers in her ear.

FRANKLIN

Thank you.

Franklin waves at the crowd.

INT. MAGNA BRATUS CONVENTION CENTER, UPSTAIRS - CONTINUOUS

Tom assembles and sets up his rifle, watches Franklin.

He takes a deep breath.

INT. MAGNA BRATUS CONVENTION CENTER - CONTINUOUS

Franklin turns to Ikwuakor and shakes his hand. Everyone  
takes their seats.

ERIN

Thank you both for being here.

DAVID

Thank you, Miss Raynes, for this  
opportunity to speak frankly and  
openly about something that I feel  
is very important right now.

(beat)

In recent days, we've all gotten a  
reminder that words have real,  
tangible power. If you know how to  
talk, and you've got enough people  
willing to listen, you can change  
the world.

(beat)

(MORE)

DAVID (CONT'D)

The Declaration of Independence set this country free. The Constitution established our rights as citizens. The Emancipation Proclamation ended the most reprehensible chapter of our history.

(beat)

I think Franklin King understands better than most what words can do.

ERIN

How are you holding up, Franklin?

FRANKLIN

I'm good. Better than I've been in quite some time. The last few weeks have been a nightmare. The abduction. Being held at that compound. Then, when I thought I was finally free, languishing in an F-B-I cell.

(beat)

Senator, the things I said, was made to say... That's not who I am. Not what I believe. I'm sorry for what you've been through.

DAVID

I believe you. And, I accept your apology.

(beat)

But, before you were taken, before this whole ordeal, you did say I should be killed. On your program, you called for my execution. For a violent revolution.

FRANKLIN

...I didn't mean that.

DAVID

It's a bit of a coincidence, wouldn't you say? Everything that happened after you made those threats.

ERIN

You don't think Franklin had something to do with what happened?

DAVID

(to Franklin)

Do you?

The audience is silent. Thalia listens intently in the back.

FRANKLIN  
...No. It was just a show.

DAVID  
And you didn't believe the things  
you said on your show?

FRANKLIN  
...Not always.

INT. MAGNA BRATUS CONVENTION CENTER, UPSTAIRS - CONTINUOUS

Tom, gun pointed at Franklin, lets out a disappointed sigh.

INT. MAGNA BRATUS CONVENTION CENTER - CONTINUOUS

David is gearing up. Franklin on his heels.

DAVID  
Then why say them?

FRANKLIN  
It was my job. It was my job to keep  
people watching.

DAVID  
No matter the cost?

Franklin searches for an answer.

ERIN  
Franklin... Do you feel responsible  
for what happened?

INT. MAGNA BRATUS CONVENTION CENTER, UPSTAIRS - CONTINUOUS

Tom readies his trigger finger. Sweat drips down his face.

INT. MAGNA BRATUS CONVENTION CENTER - CONTINUOUS

Franklin looks at David. The crowd. The cameras. A long,  
uncomfortable beat.

ERIN  
Do you? Do you feel responsible?

FRANKLIN  
...Yes.

ERIN  
Franklin--

FRANKLIN

I thought it was just words. Just good T-V. I didn't-- I never realized...

(beat)

I thought I was a good person. That it didn't matter what I said because, deep down, I knew I was good.

INT. MAGNA BRATUS CONVENTION CENTER, UPSTAIRS - CONTINUOUS

Tom hesitates, unsure what to do.

TOM

Erin?

INT. MAGNA BRATUS CONVENTION CENTER - CONTINUOUS

Erin ignores the voice in her ear. Stares at Franklin.

FRANKLIN

But, we are the things we say and do. That's all we are. That's all we can be.

TOM (O.S.)

Erin?

ERIN

The people responsible are dead. You're a victim--

FRANKLIN

No!

(beat)

I never built a bomb, I never pulled a trigger. But, I started this. This is my fault.

(beat)

I'm the voice.

Erin looks up at Tom's position. Franklin tracks her eyes.

INT. MAGNA BRATUS CONVENTION CENTER, UPSTAIRS - CONTINUOUS

Tom has Franklin's head in his sights.

INT. MAGNA BRATUS CONVENTION CENTER - CONTINUOUS

Franklin sees the glint of Tom's rifle. Looks at Erin. They lock eyes.

FRANKLIN

No...

He looks to David, still unaware.

Franklin bolts up and rushes toward David.

BANG.

A gunshot rings out and strikes Franklin in the gut. He recoils, but doesn't stop. He has to get to David.

Tom's rifle scope moves to David--

BANG.

Franklin takes another shot, this one to the chest, as he tackles David to the ground.

Franklin hits the stage hard, completely unaware one of those bullets was meant for him.

INT. MAGNA BRATUS CONVENTION CENTER, UPSTAIRS - CONTINUOUS

Tom chambers another bullet.

TOM

Goddamn it!

INT. MAGNA BRATUS CONVENTION CENTER - CONTINUOUS

Security is quickly on Erin, pulling her away from the scene.

Onstage, David is still on the ground next to Franklin. Their eyes locked.

FRANKLIN

(weakly)

I'm sorry. I'm sorry.

DAVID

I know...

David reaches a comforting hand to Franklin.

In a flash, Secret Service agents grab David, lift him up, and rush him away. He tries to look back at Franklin, who isn't moving.

DAVID (CONT'D)

Wait! Help him. He needs help!

INT. MAGNA BRATUS CONVENTION CENTER, UPSTAIRS - CONTINUOUS

Tom watches as David is carried away. He doesn't have a shot.

TOM

No no no!

INT. MAGNA BRATUS CONVENTION CENTER - CONTINUOUS

Franklin weakly looks out into the chaos. The cameras. A million bright lights.

He reaches out for help, but the cameras just keep rolling.

As Erin is pulled away, she and Franklin make eye contact.

Franklin stares out at her, his eyes filling with tears.

Her face is stone-cold.

The lights grow brighter and brighter until Erin's face is gone and there is only white light.

INT. NEWS VAN / EXT. ATLANTA STREETS - MOMENTS LATER

Tom drives away from the scene. Angrily screaming and punching the ceiling of the news van.

TOM

(tries to calm down)

Erin, can you still hear me? Erin?

(beat)

I'm sorry! I tried. I really tried.

(beat)

It's gonna be okay, right? Tell me it's gonna be okay.

(beat)

It's not over. We'll figure it out. We'll come up with something, you and me.

(beat)

Talk to me. Tell me it's going to be okay. Tell me it's not over.

ERIN (O.S.)

It's not over, Tom.

RING. RING.

A cell phone rings. Not Tom's.

It's coming from the back of the N3 van.

Tom's eyes go wide.

RING--

The van explodes in a giant fireball.

EXT. MAGNA BRATUS HOTEL - CONTINUOUS

Erin takes out her ear piece, pockets it.

ERIN

Now it's over.

She snaps her convenience store cell phone shut. Breaks it in half. Wipes it clean and throws it in a garbage can.

She picks up a camera and tripod and casually strolls toward the chaos.

EXT. ATLANTA STREETS - CONTINUOUS

The news van burns in the street.

In the debris, a copy of Franklin's book. Opened to the autographed page.

"To Tom, a real friend of the show -- Franklin King."

It burns to ashes.

CUT TO:

EXT. CEMETERY - DAY (NEWS FOOTAGE)

A broken-hearted ANNA is interviewed by a reporter.

ANNA

My father died a hero. He was a good man, and I hope that's how people will always remember him.

INT. THE HOT TAKE SET - NIGHT (ON-AIR)

N3's new flagship show. Erin sits in the anchor chair.

Over her shoulder, a graphic of Franklin King. 1954-2019.

ERIN

It's a sad day at N-3 as we mourn the loss of beloved host and my personal mentor Franklin King. A true patriot.

(beat)

(MORE)

ERIN (CONT'D)

Franklin was the victim of a conspiracy to frame him for the Atlanta attack and the attempted assassination of Senator David Ikwuakor. We here at the network and around this great country will forever carry him in our hearts.

A moment of silence.

A graphic of JOSH appears over her shoulder.

ERIN (CONT'D)

N-3 would like to offer our sincerest apology to you the viewer, as a disgruntled King's Court staffer, Joshua Kaplan, was found to be a conspirator and member of the extremist group behind the attack.

(beat)

N-3 has taken all necessary measures to ensure nothing like this ever happens again.

The Josh graphic dissolves.

ERIN (CONT'D)

Franklin King's story is a powerful reminder of the influence that comes with a national spotlight. And how, we as journalists, commentators, and pundits have a special responsibility to our viewers nationwide.

(beat)

A responsibility we take very seriously.

Erin pivots to another camera.

ERIN (CONT'D)

Turning now to the upcoming election. As presidential hopeful David Ikwuakor hits the campaign trail, I have to ask the question..

(beat)

If Franklin King knew what a disaster Ikwuakor would be, do you think he would have even bothered saving his life?

The panelists on Erin's right and left both gasp and tsk.

PANELIST ONE  
You don't mean that.

PANELIST TWO  
That's too far. You can't say--

ERIN  
I can say what I want.

PANELIST ONE  
You can't say that. Franklin  
King was a hero--

PANELIST TWO  
Like him or not, David  
Ikwuakor will be President--

ERIN  
Alright, alright. This is my show.  
Cut their mics.  
(beat)  
Cut it!

SMASH TO BLACK.

THE END.