

THE ORACLE

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THE ORACLE
Screenplay by Rick Alan Rice

FADE IN:

1 - INT. WHITE HOUSE MEETING ROOM - DAY

1

White House staffers file into a cramped meeting room where EXECUTIVE STAFF is already seated. The EXECUTIVE STAFF includes eight men, six of whom are older, two of which are young alpha males. One of the alpha males is senior policy advisor KARL COVET, a balding, circumspect looking character in his early 50s.

The incoming staff fill the remaining seats around the long conference table, with the lower ranking taking seats along the outside wall. There is a brief minor incident when two staffers each attempt to seat themselves next to Covet. One staffer leans over to say something to Covet and lowers himself onto the chair next to him only to find himself sitting on the lap of another ambitious junior advisor, whose reaction draws a brief titter from other junior staff, and disapproving frowns from the seniors. The embarrassed alpha male stands, shoots a sharp glance at his rival who stole his seat, and then moves to a seat further away from Covet, which a lower rank staffer surrenders to take a seat along the wall.

Just as everyone is settled, junior policy advisor RILEY DONALDSON enters the room. He is overloaded with documents in large binders, which he holds in a bundle to his torso, both arms wrapped around, one hand holding a large and full Starbucks coffee, black and steaming. As he goes to an available seat along the wall, making his way through a mine field of brief cases on the floor before the seated staffers, he leans to see where he is stepping and inadvertently dumps his hot coffee into the lap of another junior staff member who screams like a girl before muffling himself. Staffers on either side of the "victim" jump up and there is a brief commotion of furious wiping.

The senior policy advisors watch this with a mixture of judgment and amusement.

VICE PRESIDENT DICK WESTERMAN, seated at the head of the table, glances at Karl Covet.

WESTERMAN

(out of the side of his
mouth)

Is it any wonder we are at 28
percent?

Covet looks with bemused contempt toward his junior staff, as the commotion subsides, and the "victim" sits scalded and paralyzed with embarrassment.

2 - INT. WHITE HOUSE HALLWAY - DAY

2

West Wing staffers HIX, PRATT, JONESEY and others follow in a gaggle as KARL COVET hurries down a busy hallway, talking as he goes.

KARL COVET

(agitated)

Get me some numbers on Missouri, I need some pulse out there. And set up focus groups, Florida and Ohio. I'll provide the questions. And what the hell is going on in Missouri?

HIX

The show me people.

KARL COVET

What are they needing to hear? And Colorado! How are we losing Colorado?

PRATT

It's all the Californicating.

KARL COVET

Yea, well fuck California. We don't need California. We need Missouri and Ohio and Florida and diddle-fuck Carolina.

JONESY

And Texas.

KARL COVET

And Texas.

3 - EXT. WASHINGTON D.C. 12TH STREET - DAY

3

RILEY DONALDSON is walking along 12th Street in downtown Washington D.C. He stares into his phone as he walks obliviously into obstacles in his way: light posts, newspaper bins, bollards, people. Lost in his SmartPhone, he seems not to notice that he progresses down the street like a human pinball.

RILEY DONALDSON arrives at the corner of 12th and G streets, where he stops among a group of pedestrians waiting for the crossing light. A city bus turns the corner to the right in front of them and when the driver speeds away a cloud of black exhaust bursts from the exhaust high on the bus sending a cloud of dark soot that settles over the crowd standing there. A few of the passengers cough as a result, but RILEY DONALDSON freezes in place, his eyes fluttering. The light changes and the crowd enters the intersection, except for Riley who convulses on the sidewalk.

4

- INT. WHITE HOUSE STAFF OFFICE - LATER

4

Junior policy advisors sit in an open office, papers everywhere. They sip on coffee, looking exhausted; shirt sleeves rolled up, ties off. Suit coats hang on racks and backs of chairs.

JONESY

They hate us.

BENNETT

Why? What's not to like? We hold the line on taxes, we get the government out of their lives, we build a fence to keep out the *new* Mexicans.

PRATT

Which, not ironically, has cost us New Mexico.

WHITAKER

Diminishing returns. People are working harder and feeling less secure. It's not making sense for middle class people.

KAT

Classified as people working over twenty-eight hours per week. *There's* the problem.

JONESY

We have 38 percent of Republicans saying they are willing to vote Democrat in the next election cycle.

BENNETT

Disaster.

JONESY

Worse than disaster. It is the ghosts of Harry Reid and Nancy Pelosi back with a full tank. They will drive us back to the sixties. We'll be building block housing and giving away Hep C shots. We'll each be mandated to adopt a black family.

HIX

I'll watch over Halle Berry's people.

(glances over at another staffer)

There must be some less fortunate Berrys.

WHITAKER

I'll take the Knowles.

PRATT

What's Rihanna's last name?

KAT

I hope the Minaj's have money.

Another staffer suddenly throws open the door and bursts into the room.

STAFFER AT THE DOOR

Riley Donaldson is in the hospital. He's in pretty bad shape. Apparently he has had some kind of a seizure.

WHITAKER

(Concerned, alarmed)

Oh my God.

JONESY

Where did this happen?

STAFFER AT THE DOOR

Somewhere over by the Metro Station, I think.

JONESY

Where is he now?

STAFFER AT THE DOOR

They usually take them over to George Washington, don't they?

(MORE)

STAFFER AT THE DOOR (CONT'D)

I think they do emergency services
for downtown.

JONESY

I met his parents once, maybe I can
get their number.

KAT

I'll pull up his calendar to see
what we'll need to do to cover for
him.

WHITAKER

I'll pick up his voicemail.

PRATT

I'll get his office supplies.

5 - INT. HOSPITAL - DAY

5

DOCTOR OPPENHEIMER, DOCTOR RABINOWITZ and a HOSPITAL
ADMINISTRATOR sit in an office with MRS. DONALDSON and MR.
DONALDSON, Riley Donaldson's septuagenarian parents.

DOCTOR OPPENHEIMER

Mr. and Mrs. Donaldson, what we
believe your son has is a rare
condition known as Creutzfeldt-
Jakob Disease. We refer to it as
CJD. This only occurs in one of
every one million people, and
usually in people much older than
your son. If we are correct in our
diagnosis, what Riley has is a kind
of a spongiform encephalopathy
caused by abnormal brain proteins.
Prions, we call them.

MRS. DONALDSON

How do you treat it?

OPPENHEIMER

Well, typically with a range of
drugs: amantidine, steroids,
interferon, acyclovir, antiviral
agents, and antibiotics.

MR. DONALDSON

(seeming relieved,
glancing at his wife)
So it's treatable.

OPPENHEIMER

(glances at his
colleagues)

We have treatments, but I need to be completely straight forward with you. There is not currently a treatment that can cure, or even control CJD. Opiates can be used to relieve his pain, and clonazepam and sodium valproate can be used to relieve myoclonus.

MR. DONALDSON

(husband and wife blanche
with shock at the
unexpected news)

What are you telling us? Are you telling us that Riley has a terminal disease?

OPPENHEIMER

To be perfectly frank, we don't completely know how to assess your son's prognosis. CJD usually presents itself in people around age 60, usually as failing memory, behavioral changes, lack of coordination and visual disturbances. Has Riley mentioned anything like that?

MRS. DONALDSON

We don't see him that often anymore now that he is working at the White House.

MR. DONALDSON

I am not aware of him being in anything other than good health.

OPPENHEIMER

What we suspect will happen is that his condition will degenerate, but there are different forms of the disease that progress at different rates. There is a variant known to exist in Great Britain and France that sometimes affects younger patients, usually presenting as a psychiatric disorder. There is a panencephalopathic form in Japan that strikes older people and plays out longer.

RABINOWITZ

Has your son mentioned anything about dizziness, clumsiness, loss of balance, involuntary muscle movements?

MR. DONALDSON

No! My god, it sounds like you are describing Mad Cow disease or something.

OPPENHEIMER

We are.

MRS. DONALDSON

(audible gasp)

Are you telling me that my son is going to die?

(Husband and wife clutch each other's hand)

HOSPITAL ADMINISTRATOR

Mr. and Mrs. Donaldson, CJD, if that is what your son has, is a progressive and fatal disease. How long it may take for the disease to progress is uncertain, but there may be an alternative course of action.

MRS. DONALDSON

What do you mean?

HOSPITAL ADMINISTRATOR

Your son is fortunate to be at one of the few research hospitals in the country that is studying a potential treatment for CJD. We would like to enroll Riley in the program.

MR. DONALDSON

This sounds more like experimentation than treatment. What kinds of risks are we talking about?

OPPENHEIMER

Only the one, really. The risk is that the treatment won't work and that your son won't survive.

(MORE)

OPPENHEIMER (CONT'D)

Quite honestly, that is also the likely result of any of the other treatment alternatives we have at present.

MR. DONALDSON

So we have nothing to lose...

MRS. DONALDSON

But Riley.

6 - INT. HOSPITAL - NIGHT

6

RILEY DONALDSON lies in a hospital bed, I-V connected to his arm. He appears to be sleeping. PRATT sits in a chair in the room. JONESY has just come into the room and stands at the foot of his bed.

JONESY

Is he asleep?

PRATT

He seemed kind of awake when I first got here, but then he goes in and out.

JONESY

(frowns and looks at Riley)

He looks happy.

PRATT

He probably is. I think they've got him pumped full of opiates.

JONESY

What did he do to deserve that?

PRATT

Riley leads a charmed life. Surely you've noticed.

JONESY

I hardly find seizing out in downtown D.C. to be charmed. It's my worst nightmare. Just the humiliation.

PRATT

Seriously, haven't you wondered how a guy like Riley gets through life at all?

(MORE)

PRATT (CONT'D)

And yet here he is, our brother-in-arms, at the White House. How do these things happen?

JONESY

Have you ever heard of fate?

PRATT

I've heard of it, I just don't believe in it.

JONESY

Inshallah. For some God is willing.

PRATT

(frowns suspiciously)
I've never seen this side of you before. Are you, like, a Muslim now?

JONESY

No, just looking for answers to life's great mysteries.

PRATT

Well, what do you want to know?

JONESY

I want to know what is going to happen to us if we can't get to a second term. This is the best job I have ever had, so what's next?

PRATT

You'll turn thirty, your hair will fall out, and you'll get married. Nobody knows what is going to happen next. When did you even start to care?

JONESY

I can't say. Maybe having Riley lying there.

PRATT

We all like Riley.
(looks questioningly at Riley)

I haven't thought of him as reason for examining my soul, but maybe I've missed something.

JONESY

Do you think the President will be re-elected?

PRATT

He's got a better chance than anyone else.

JONESY

Seriously! I don't know how we got him elected in the first place. The guy is aloof, self-centered, utterly void of ideas.

PRATT

Snap out of it, dip shit, that's why we have jobs. Not real jobs, maybe, or jobs that pay particularly well, but there's the benefits package.

JONESY

All going away, that's what I see happening.

PRATT

You are a defeatist.

JONESY

I'm not a defeatist. Well, yes I am I guess, but I can also read, which if you are reading polls doesn't help.

PRATT

Polls change. We'll get our poll guy going.

JONESY

Yeh, well you can change the questions but the answers people are giving say they don't like us. We are down by five points in Oklahoma. Okla-fuckin-homa! Those people are a little right of Stalin, for Christ sakes. And we are losing them?

RILEY

(sleepy sounding)

They think we're incompetent.

JONESY
(glances from Riley to
Pratt)
Did he say something?

PRATT
(leans in toward Riley)
Riley?

RILEY
(coherent but not really
"there")
Incompetent.

PRATT
(looks at JONESY)
He's talking to you.

JONESY
The Okies think we are incompetent?

PRATT
I don't think they like being
called Okies.

RILEY
Tulsa Conference. Signs.

PRATT
What are you talking about, Riley?
What about Tulsa?

RILEY
Send the President.

PRATT
(to Jonesy)
What's he talking about?

JONESY
There is an energy conference
coming up in Tulsa. I think it's
next month.

RILEY
Simmons.

PRATT
Ted Simmons?

RILEY
Trade the pipeline.

PRATT waits for RILEY to say more, but Riley seems to drift away. PRATT leans back in his chair and looks over at JONESY, acknowledging that Riley said something but not quite understanding what.

7 - INT. OVAL OFFICE - DAY

7

Journalist ROBERT DONASK, an ancient Washington journalist and tough guy, sits in the Oval Office with the PRESIDENT and policy advisor KARL COVET.

DONASK

Mr. President, my feeling is that the American people are needing to see that this administration has direction. It probably doesn't even matter where the needle points to on the compass. Even if it spins like a top it would be viewed by the majority of those I talk to as preferable to what they now see as paralysis.

PRESIDENT

Well, Bob, I think that is a perception issue, and that's why we have you in to talk about what we are doing.

DONASK

Well what do you want me to tell my readers about what you are doing to lower fuel prices and reduce our reliance on foreign oil?

PRESIDENT

We are bottled up on that one, Bob. Bottled up by Democratic leadership in Congress. They don't want to drill. They don't like fracking. They want to put a lot of regulations on car makers that are an intrusion into someplace the government doesn't belong.

DONASK

So what are you doing to relieve people from paying such high gas prices?

PRESIDENT

We are fighting for a future in which we control the supply of gas in the pipeline, and control prices, which we cannot do now given our dependence upon foreign oil.

Over an intercom a secretary's voice is heard.

SECRETARY

Mr. President, Mr. Covet's staff is here with the documents he requested.

PRESIDENT

Fine, Sherry, send him in.

The three men return to their discussion, as in the background a door opens and PRATT walks in.

DONASK

In all frankness, Mr. President, the American people are going to need to see something a lot more concrete than a statement like that. That is, unless you want them to start to seriously consider options they haven't considered in awhile?

KARL COVET

Like what?

DONASK

Like voting Democrat, for instance.

PRESIDENT

Well Bob, it is not like we can just throw a switch somewhere and get Democratic Senate and House leaders to get behind our energy proposals. They put up strong resistance to common sense solutions...

DONASK

Like drill, drill, drill...

PRESIDENT

Like drill where it makes sense to do so, with strict environmental protections in place, so that we can be in control of our own domestic supplies.

DONASK

What about these people who say sure, you can drill, but you won't see the benefits of that drilling for another ten years?

PRESIDENT

It's a long-term solution to a long-term problem. Oil industry people are planning 50 to 100 years out.

DONASK

(grins and shakes his head)

It's a long wait for something to happen at the gas pump. People need to feel like the cavalry is coming now, not a hundred years from now.

PRATT

(walks over to Karl Covet, bending down and speaking quietly to him as he hands him a set of papers)

Here are the overnights from the battleground states.

KARL COVET leafs impatiently through the pages, looking for specific information.

PRESIDENT

Any good news, Karl?

KARL COVET

Yes. Your wife is very popular. Past that...we...

Failing to find something good to report, Karl Covet pauses before looking without speaking from Donask to the President, exhaling dramatically so his cheeks puff out.

8- INT. KARL COVET OFFICE - DAY

8-

KARL COVET sits behind his desk with several of his staff gathered in his office.

KARL COVET

Folks, we need some ideas to pivot this opinion out there that this administration is not taking tangible steps to control fuel costs.

JONESY

The polling just says that the public isn't confident that we have an energy policy in place that offers tangible reductions any time soon.

KARL COVET

We don't, but that isn't what we do anyway. The President does that. We do perception.

WHITAKER

The President should just address the nation, do something from the Oval Office.

KARL COVET

And say what?

PRATT

That's his speech writer's problem.

WHITAKER

That we have no coherent energy policy?

PRATT

That he is a speech writer and has to explain it.

KARL COVET

An Oval Office speech is an awful idea. It would elevate the politics, add to a sense of crisis, which is not what we need.

JONESY

Maybe not an Oval Office address then. Maybe something we could stage and get a bunch of press coverage without actually doing anything.

WHITAKER

How would we do that?

PRATT

Riley thinks we should do an event
in Tulsa.

KARL COVET

Who thinks this?

JONESY

Riley, in the hospital.

KARL COVET

I thought he was in a coma.

JONESY

He is.

PRATT

But he is also lucid and clever. He
thinks about Tulsa in his sleep.

KARL COVET

(suspicious of where this
is going)

Is he from Tulsa?

JONESY

No, he's never been to Tulsa as far
as I know. He's from...

(looks for help from
Pratt)

Where is Riley from?

PRATT

Yale.

JONESY

(turning back to Covet)

Riley thinks the President should
attend the Tulsa Energy Conference.

KARL COVET

Are you both out of your minds? We
ruled that out six months ago. It
will look like we are in the pocket
of the oil industry.

PRATT

Aren't we?

KARL COVET

Did you just fall from a United
Airlines toilet? Our relationship
with the oil industry is not what
we are trying to highlight.

JONESY

But how about our relationship with the green people? Riley wants the president to take Senator Simmons with him aboard Air Force One.

KARL COVET

Is Riley Donaldson *not* in a coma?

PRATT

Seriously comatose, except for the lucidity.

KARL COVET

(sarcastic)

Did he happen to say *why* the President should do this?

JONESY

Maybe just for the optics. We could put some images out of the President bridging the gap between the environmentalists and the oil guys.

WHITAKER

There's the *perception* you've been talking about, Karl. We've got Imhoff and that entire oil contingent...

KAT

So we visually associate with the greenies.

PRATT

Whitaker and Kat are sympatico. Same garage, different doors.

KARL COVET

This sounds pretty thin. We are talking about rearranging the schedule of the President of the United States here. And on a couple weeks notice. It can't be done.

WHITAKER

It adds drama, we could leverage that.

PRATT

Make it will look like something's happening.

KARL COVET

But is there rationale here for going to the Chief of Staff with this proposal for rearranging the President's schedule. Does Simmons have anything to do with this?

JONESY

Not unless he's been visiting Riley in the hospital.

KARL COVET

Would you put your nuts on the block for this idea?

KAT

What is it with guys and nuts in these situations?

PRATT

Your threat is foiled, Karl. Jonesy has no nuts.

KARL COVET

(to Jonesy)

Well, would you?

JONESY

I don't think it's a terrible idea.

PRATT slams a book shut, mimicking the sound of a guillotine. An out-of-ideas Karl Covet thinks for a moment.

KARL COVET

So we've come to this - following the lead of a guy in a coma.

BENNETT

It's been done before. Remember FDR?

PRATT

Remember Reagan?

KARL COVET

(reluctantly)

I'll talk to the President about it.

(mutters to himself)

I must be out of my mother-fuckin' mind.

9- INT. AIR FORCE ONE - DAY

9-

THE PRESIDENT sits in his office in Air Force One across from SENATOR TED SIMMONS.

SENATOR SIMMONS

Mr. President, I want to thank you for this invitation to come with you to Tulsa. This means a lot to me.

PRESIDENT

You may want to wait and see what kind of a reception we get before you thank me.

SENATOR SIMMONS

That's the thing. It takes courage on your part to show up to that crowd dragging a damned environmentalist along with you. Some people there will take it as an endorsement of things they don't believe in, like science.

PRESIDENT

Oh, I'm hoping that we'll be surprised. All these oil energy guys are geologists and engineers. They can listen to a reasonable scientific argument.

SENATOR SIMMONS

They can, it's the people they work for who need to be managed.

PRESIDENT

What is it going to take, Ted? You have been at this game a long time and you must have some feeling for what will break this deadlock and get oil prices under control.

SENATOR SIMMONS

I suppose you control the things you can control, and that's not imports, it's domestic. Those prices are gouging us because the oil guys feel like they had better get their profits out now before they experience some kind of a government takeover.

PRESIDENT

Believe me, this administration has no interest in nationalizing the oil industry. We just want to lower pump and heating oil prices.

SENATOR SIMMONS

I know that, I'm just saying that something needs to be done to let them feel that it is in their best interest to deal.

PRESIDENT

But deal what?

SENATOR SIMMONS

How about stakes on the future of the energy industry? What if we ensured the oil companies a place in the 22nd Century by legislating control of alternative energy distribution to them. You know, sun, wind, ocean.

PRESIDENT

What, nationalizing alternative energy sources but leaving the oil and gas industry to run it all? I don't think we could get it passed even if it were constitutional.

SENATOR SIMMONS

Not the sources, the distribution. Besides, in all candor, Mr. President, who is this all-powerful opposition who would stop it from happening? The Supreme Court? Not likely, they are free market types and would see the national benefit in it all. Mr. President, you cannot create a revolution in green energy on the backs of entrepreneurs and startup innovators. That's why nothing is happening on that front. You need the confidence and control of the existing energy distributors.

PRESIDENT

(following Simmons' logic)
Who are also energy *producers*.

SENATOR SIMMONS

So they reduce their future investment risks while guaranteeing future control of energy profits. That's all these guys think about.

PRESIDENT

And in turn we get price reductions?

SENATOR SIMMONS

We could do even better, from my point of view - and from the perspective of most voters. We could kill the Keystone pipeline.

PRESIDENT

Would there be votes in the Senate for that?

SENATOR SIMMONS

Mr. President, that is all under the control of Senator Imhoff, and I believe there is a way to work with him. Imhoff's a retired Navy command guy. He's got a project over at the CIA that he would like to get green-lighted.

PRESIDENT

I know what you are referring to and if you divulge this conversation to anyone I'll deny that we ever had it.

SENATOR SIMMONS

Understood. If Imhoff could be convinced that part of the savings on, say, per-barrel oil prices, would be channeled to his Russia scheme, he could probably get us the votes to make the deal.

PRESIDENT

Senator, I am not a CIA veteran and I don't know anything about black-ops. I do believe you are making a deal with the devil if you are calculating taking out a principal competitor in the oil and gas industry through financial shenanigans or any other means.

SENATOR SIMMONS

I believe we are saving the environment from the Keystone Pipeline running through the Ogallala Aquifer and imminent domain acquisition of the property of the American people. And we are lowering gas prices for everybody.

PRESIDENT

And what of the inevitable charge that we stacked the deck for the oil and gas producers? That we shut the developing alternate energy producers out of the bigger profit picture?

SENATOR SIMMONS

You could take every vote available from the green industry and not tally enough to buy yourself a chicken sandwich. Oil and gas, on the other hand - they own the grocery.

PRESIDENT

And the risks. What about international blowback?

SENATOR SIMMONS

As far as what is going on with Imhoff and the rest of his crazies, that is all going to happen on some scale one way or another. I would suggest that you get ahead of it, control what you can, and get some mileage out of the public benefits.

10- INT. OFFICE HALLWAY - DAY

10-

HIX races down a hallway in the West Wing of the White House trying to catch up with KARL COVET, who leads a passel of staffers in a march toward his office. He catches up and shoves some papers toward Covet, his boss.

HIX

We just got the overnights in on the President's event in Tulsa. It got big coverage on Fox and CNN and tons of residual on MSNBC. The networks were all over it.

KARL COVET
 (stops and shuffles
 through the papers,
 reading)
 So what is this saying?

HIX
 It shows a twelve-point jump in the
 public's confidence that the
 President is managing the fuel
 crisis and a three-point bump in
 the President's approval rating.

KARL COVET
 Really? All from talking to the
 Okies?
 (thinks for a moment)
 Is Riley Donaldson still out?

PRATT
 He is still in the hospital.

KARL COVET
 Send him a get well card and give
 him the news. He had a good idea.

11- INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - NIGHT

11-

JONESY and PRATT are in Riley's hospital room visiting with
 their ill friend, who appears to be asleep.

JONESY
 Have you talked with Riley's
 parents today?

PRATT
 I talked with his Mom. She says he
 has been in and out of a sleep
 state all day. They are worried
 that he isn't coming out of it by
 now, waking up.

JONESY
 Has he said anything else? Did they
 say?

PRATT
 No. In fact, his poor mother is
 beside herself, with Riley talking
 to us the other day but saying
 nothing to her. It must be horrible
 for the poor thing.

JONESY

You are scaring me. Do you have a heart?

PRATT

It's vestigial, a hangover from growing up in the heartland.

JONESY

(pauses, thinking)

Did you see what the President sent to Karl?

PRATT

That humidor?

JONESY

Yea, that pretty-fuckin'-cool humidor.

PRATT

It's just a humidor.

JONESY

With an engraved fuckin' plaque and a personal note from the President of the United States.

PRATT

It's still just a humidor.

JONESY

That isn't the point. The point is that the President thinks Karl is the smartest guy in the world, a freakin' genius for this "Tulsa initiative". I heard Brian Williams call it the "Tulsa Initiative".

PRATT

Karl is pretty smart.

JONESY

Smart enough to take what's his where he finds it. I wish to fuck Riley would say something.

PRATT

(glances over at the sleeping Riley)

I wish Riley would wake up and be his old self again.

JONESY

No, I like his new self.

PRATT

What do you mean?

JONESY

What exactly is this stuff they have Riley on? I understand that it's experimental.

PRATT

Yea, so...

JONESY

Well don't you think that was weird the other day, when he said that stuff about Tulsa? And then somehow it comes together like it has, with the big bump in the polls. Don't you think that's weird?

PRATT

I think it's weird that a guy in a coma talked at all.

JONESY

(pauses, looks over at Riley unconscious in his bed, and then goes quickly to his side)

Let's try something.

PRATT

What are you doing?

JONESY

(leans down close to Riley to speak into his ear)

Riley, what do you think about the Consumer Protection Commission?

PRATT

I ask again, what are you doing?

JONESY

(to Pratt)

What if that stuff they've got Riley on has given him some special powers of insight? What if somehow it lets him see connections that others don't?

(turns back to Riley)

Riley, what about the CPC?

PRATT
 Seriously, you think Riley, in his
 present state, has become the
 Oracle of Sinai?

JONESY
 Maybe Delphi.

PRATT
 We're in a hospital, Jonesy.

RILEY
 Spitzer.

JONESY
 (looks at Riley eagerly)
 What? What did you say? Did you say
 Spitzer?

Flash to PRATT, who stares incredulous.

RILEY
 Recess appointment.

JONESY
 (looks at Riley eagerly)
 What, Riley? Did you say Spitzer?
 As in Elliott Spitzer?

RILEY
 Recess appointment.

JONESY
 The CPC? That'll work in the polls?

RILEY
 Recess.
 (appears to lapse back
 into coma)

12- INT. OVAL OFFICE - NIGHT

12-

KARL COVET and THE PRESIDENT are in the Oval Office.

THE PRESIDENT
 So you want me to re-establish the
 financial industry consumer watch
 dog group we fought to dismantle,
 which is diametrically opposed to
 everything our party stands for.
 And you think I should appoint a
 sex pervert and our chief critic to
 be its Czar.

Karl Covet seems none too sure of his own suggestion.

THE PRESIDENT (CONT'D)

Karl, just out of curiosity, who came up with this idea? Is this one of yours?

KARL COVET

Can I tell you after we see if it works?

13- INT. RESTAURANT - NIGHT

13-

KARL COVET sits at a table with members of his White House Staff, including all of the key junior staffers (Jonesy, Pratt, Whitaker, Hix, Kat and Bennett).

KARL COVET

We deserve to reward ourselves, so order big, buy expensive wine, and we'll expense the whole thing to the White House. I'm thinking the President will pay out of pocket. I've never seen him in such a good mood.

KAT

Rasmussen is polling his favorable rating among Democrats at 43 percent - highest ever.

PRATT

And Zogby says the Arabs are behind him big, like 19, 20 percent. We're huge in Lebanon.

KARL COVET

Well, whatever, the polls are moving and we haven't given a single concession of significance.

PRATT

Still the evil force in the universe, only eviler.

HIX

Seriously, folks, this period may go down as one of the most politically productive in modern times. We have the Democrats signed on to a health care initiative that they rejected for years.

(MORE)

HIX (CONT'D)

We have the environmentalists off our backs. The oil companies are drilling off shore and no one is crying foul. We've got gas prices down, infrastructure spending up. And I think we've got a deal on taxes that will reduce the corporate rate to twenty-five percent and reinstate the Bush era tax cuts.

KAT

And suddenly the public loves us. When was the last time a Republican president had an approval rating over forty-five percent?

PRATT

There was that time we demolished the World Trade Center.

JONESY

You better quit saying shit like that if you don't want to be enrolled in the al-Qaeada database, which I happen to have right here.
(he pulls out his smart phone)

HIX

I never thought that in my lifetime I would see the kind of bi-partisan, across-the-aisle outreach we have seen over these past two months.

JONESY

I'm telling you, it's Riley Donaldson and whatever that shit is they have him on. The guy has access to some deeper vein of information. He knows things about people he's never met. Like...
(turns to Pratt)
What's his name?

PRATT

Are you talking about historic figures?

JONESY

No! The pencil-neck from Iowa...

KAT

Gidrickson.

PRATT

Oh, Gidrickson, of course.

JONESY

Gidrickson! Who would have believed that he would have moved on ethanol subsidies?

WHITAKER

Who would have believed that he wanted to be Ambassador to Spain?

PRATT

Certainly not Mrs. Gidrickson, who won't travel out of her home state.

HIX

More to the point, who would have believed that he would rat out Archer Daniels Midland?

KARL COVET

It's known as "blackmail", but whatever, it has worked out brilliantly for everyone involved. There is *genius* at work here.

PRATT

Don't be so hard on yourself, Karl.

KARL COVET

I think a toast is in order.

JONESY

I think we should raise a glass to Riley.

PRATT

The Oracle.

JONESY

That's right - to the Oracle!

The group raises their glasses to toast.

KARL COVET sits on a chair in RILEY DONALDSON's hospital room, talking to the comatose Riley.

KARL COVET
 (speaking softly in close
 confidence)
 Riley, this is Karl. I want to
 thank you for everything you've
 done. You have given us ideas that
 have connected dots we would not
 have known were there. Is this
 something you can do now, Riley?
 Because if it is, we could sure use
 some thoughts on Israel.

Suspecting he would sound like an idiot to anyone who heard
 him, Karl waits for a response of some kind, gets nothing,
 leans back on his chair, and lets his gaze wander around
 Riley Donaldson's private hospital room.

RILEY
 Council of Arab Economic Unity.

KARL COVET
 (surprised that Riley
 spoke)
 What?

RILEY
 Social security. Fund ALESCO.

KARL COVET
 (eyes wide)
 I'm not following.

RILEY
 Muslim Brotherhood.

KARL COVET
 The Muslim Brotherhood?

RILEY
 Talking points. Admadenijad deal.

KARL COVET
 Are you talking about a Muslim
 social security system?

RILEY
 Fund ALESCO.

KARL COVET
 The President - the country - will
 never go for dealing with
 Admadenijad in any form. And he
 doesn't have that kind of sway with
 the Arab League anyway.

RILEY
No war with Islam.

KARL COVET
That's not the storyline we've been going with, Riley. And besides, there are a hell of a lot of people in Congress who do want war, and war against those who are trying to kill us!

RILEY
Isolate them.

KARL COVET
There are other forces at work that don't see any future in a peace benefit.

RILEY
Fit the problem.

KARL COVET
(confused)
Which problem?

RILEY
E-T.

15- INT. OVAL OFFICE - DAY

15-

KARL COVET is in sales mode. He sits with THE PRESIDENT, who wears the expression of a guy who is talking to a prankster.

THE PRESIDENT
Karl, let me understand this. You are telling me that we need to prepare for an attack from outer space? And I am supposed to go before the American people and tell them this?

KARL COVET
Reagan did.

THE PRESIDENT
Thank God, you must be one of the few people alive who remember that.

KARL COVET
It did not hurt him, Mr. President. Star Wars.
(MORE)

KARL COVET (CONT'D)

It confused some Democrats into thinking he was just an out of the box thinker.

THE PRESIDENT

That's just sad, Karl.

KARL COVET

It is not sad to use coded language to steer opinion, not when you are on the right side of things. Let me give you an example. We need to take an active role in helping the Arab world see the United States as allies in a larger issue that affects us all: survival.

THE PRESIDENT

Alien attack, Karl? Do you have some information that I have not received about an alien attack?

KARL COVET

We need to alter the dynamic, go from us versus them to us versus *them*.

THE PRESIDENT

(not buying this)

Well I'm sure being attacked by Martians would have that effect.

(wanders around the room, thinking aloud, mocking)

I'll be the President who finally played the space alien card.

KARL COVET

What I am suggesting is a multi-pronged approach to unifying the Middle East. The E.T. thing is just a means of bringing world leaders into a new thought paradigm.

THE PRESIDENT

Yeah, one in which I look like an idiot.

KARL COVET

One in which you look like a righteous man. We initiate some sort of a program to gather policy statements from world leaders - clear statements of unity with the people of Earth.

THE PRESIDENT

(throws his head back and
laughs loudly)

The people of Earth?

KARL COVET

All of the people of Earth, sir.
Stay with me. All of us are in this
together when it comes to combating
those forces with the power to
impact us all. And what are we all
impacted by?

THE PRESIDENT

Death and taxes?

KARL COVET

Our health! Our being human! We all
suffer from this, and that's the
key. If we can get key leaders in
the Middle East focused on shared
threats that have nothing to do
with Israel and all of us infidels,
and on things that scare the shit
out of us all, we have a basis for
agreement.

THE PRESIDENT

Agreement on what, fighting alien
invaders?

KARL COVET

We work through the Council of Arab
Economic Opportunity to establish
funding mechanisms for an Islamic
social safety net, a healthcare
provider. And our bargaining chip
is Jerusalem.

THE PRESIDENT

(now certain that Karl
Covet has lost his mind)

Jerusalem.

KARL COVET

We establish a Middle East social
security blanket that any citizen
of the region can participate in
without conflict with existing
programs.

(MORE)

KARL COVET (CONT'D)

All locally administered in accordance with religious practices and the services of their choosing, and all funded by the contributions of the emirs and sultans and chiefs of state, along with investments from Shell and ExxonMobil and ConocoPhillips and all the rest.

THE PRESIDENT

Jerusalem.

KARL COVET

Israel gets security in the way of assurances from their Arab neighbors that there will be a cessation of violence, and full acceptance of Israel's legitimacy as a Jewish state.

THE PRESIDENT

Jerusalem.

KARL COVET

And Jerusalem becomes the equivalent of a papal state, like Vatican City in Rome, but a shared place sacred to Jews, Christians and Muslims, as it always has been.

THE PRESIDENT

And why would we be able to get agreement on this now?

KARL COVET

Well, possibly avoidance of annihilation, for one. But mostly because people are greedy and vain, Mr. President. Because Hamad bin Isa bin Salman Al Khalifa wants, more than anything else, to remain King of Bahrain. This is his wet dream. He's the one who turned an emirates into a kingdom, specifically *his*. But for a guy locked into a Medieval mindset, this guy is forward thinking, a sort of a realist. He sees the untapped possibilities. He's got a degree from Cambridge and from the United States Army Command and General Staff College at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas.

(MORE)

KARL COVET (CONT'D)

He is smart enough to leverage the fact that Bahrain has been in bed with international oil since 1932. They are strategically located in the Arabian Gulf. And he knows that there is a huge future in providing European-style social services to the Islamic World in the Middle East. We're talking independent of Sunni, Shiite and Alawite because the delivery of services is entirely local. He can sell this because he's got all the money in the world and he knows that keeping the lid on the Middle East is all about providing essential services to the street, which they have the capacity to do. Al Khalifa has the will.

THE PRESIDENT

(unconvinced but now
listening)

What about the Knesset? What about Netanyahu?

KARL COVET

The Israeli government sees the writing on the wall. The Muslim Brotherhood on one side, Hamas in Lebanon, Syria's Ba'athists and Alawites, and Iran with nuclear capability. Iraq under Shiite control. They will opt for survival over destruction, and over world condemnation should they somehow prevail with the help of the United States.

THE PRESIDENT

This country's entire inner establishment is committed to the security of Israel. No one is going to dare suggest that the U.S. not support Israel should there be an all-out war at Mageda.

KARL COVET

That gets us back to Admadenijad. He wants to remain President of Iran as much as Al Khalifa wants to remain King of Bahrain. These are vain, ambitious men, Mr. President. You know the type.

(MORE)

KARL COVET (CONT'D)

They are looking for answers, just like us, playing it the only way they know, using what they've got.

THE PRESIDENT

Are you suggesting that we support these people? Al Khalifa and his son have been killing protesters in the streets.

KARL COVET

Which doesn't seem to keep us from stationing the United States Naval Forces Central Command, the Fifth Fleet and six-thousand military personnel there. No one cares, Mr. President. As long as oil is plentiful and cheap and kids from the suburbs aren't going off in desert camouflage to some country where people cut their heads off, no one cares!

THE PRESIDENT

So what do you think we can give them?

KARL COVET

Admadenijad wants a public statement that the United States will militarily guarantee the security of Iran against attack from Israel. And he wants an American University named after him, preferably one in the Ivy League.

THE PRESIDENT

(laughs heartily and loud)

And how about Al Khalifa. What does he want?

KARL COVET

Al Khalifa wants more F16s and F5s, Blackhawks and M60A3s, and he wants the Disney company's help in developing a giant theme park with characters modeled after those in the Hollywood film "The Hills Have Eyes".

Flash to the President who wears an expression of amazement.

KARL COVET (CONT'D)
I'm just telling you what I know.

THE PRESIDENT
Was "The Hills Have Eyes" a Disney film?

KARL COVET
No, I don't think so. It's just that Al Khalifa places a lot of faith in the Disney people, and wonders if we couldn't arrange something - sort of work as a go between.

THE PRESIDENT
Do you know anybody at Disney? I don't know anybody at Disney.

KARL COVET
I don't know any of those Hollywood people but I can make some calls, ask around to see who someone might talk to.

THE PRESIDENT
A designer of some kind, I suppose. Someone who can make those horrible masks.

KARL COVET
Maybe the actual actors are still available. How much work can they be getting?

THE PRESIDENT cocks his brow at Karl Covet.

KARL COVET (CONT'D)
I am kidding sir, of course. Just injecting a little humor.

THE PRESIDENT
You mean some of what you've said has been serious? Please provide some kind of written summary.

THE PRESIDENT puts on a suit coat that has been draped over a chair.

THE PRESIDENT (CONT'D)
Karl, I'm going to have to ask for you to excuse me. I've got an event down the hall in a few minutes.
(MORE)

THE PRESIDENT (CONT'D)
 But this has been an entertaining
 chat. You'll see yourself out?

KARL COVET
 No problem, Mr. President. Thank
 you for your time.

THE PRESIDENT pauses before he leaves the room to look back
 at Karl Covet.

THE PRESIDENT
 Admadinajad does know that we don't
 have the power to rename private
 institutions, even if we were so
 inclined, doesn't he?

KARL COVET
 I don't know what Admadinajad
 knows, sir.

THE PRESIDENT
 (starts to leave but turns
 once again to Covet)
 Just out of curiosity, which one
 would you consider putting his name
 on?

KARL COVET
 Brown, sir. I would say Brown.

THE PRESIDENT
 (smiles and nods his head
 in agreement)
 Yeah, that's what I was thinking.

16 INT. MEET THE PRESS SET - DAY

16

State Department Spokesperson MARGARET SAWYER sits across
 from Moderator DAVID GREGORY.

DAVID GREGORY
 So, Ms. Sawyer, I must admit to
 being eager to have you on because
 we are hearing some pretty wild
 rumors about what is going on at
 the State Department these days.

MARGARET SAWYER

Thank you for having me on, David. There are developments that we at the State Department are watching very closely, key among them being the potential for a lasting agreement between Israel and the Palestinians.

DAVID GREGORY

To be sure, there are huge developments going on there, and I want to get back to that, but I want first to ask you about this survey the State Department is said to have taken of world leaders regarding their government's commitments to defense against hostile extra-terrestrials - aliens.

MARGARET SAWYER

(smiles in a deflecting way)

That is a project that we have recently completed and that yielded some really interesting findings.

DAVID GREGORY

Like what? Can you say?

MARGARET SAWYER

Oh yes, none of this is classified to any great degree. We simply asked the world's leaders if they felt it would be worthwhile to convene a conference on the management of risks associated with an alien encounter.

DAVID GREGORY

(smiles quizzically)

And what are these risks perceived to be?

MARGARET SAWYER

That is what we hope to mount this conference to discuss. What might the risks be and what can we be doing as planetary citizens to address them?

DAVID GREGORY

In all honesty, if someone had told me that one day I would be interviewing a U.S. State Department official who was speaking openly about planning for an encounter with an alien race, I would have thought they were nuts. What did the world's leaders say to this survey? How did they respond?

MARGARET SAWYER

Well, nearly all of them agreed that it would be to the benefit of us all to view this as something we should plan for just as we do natural disasters. On this there is unanimous consent. As a human race, we need to think in terms of what each of us can contribute to ensuring our well-being and survival.

DAVID GREGORY

No snide remarks or polite declines to participate?

MARGARET SAWYER

No, nothing like that. You know, David, two out of every three people surveyed worldwide believe that either we have been or are being visited by extraterrestrial intelligence. That makes it a responsibility of governments worldwide to consider the issue as one of public and defense policy, because what is the alternative? What if we were subject to some kind of an invasion from some alien species, and we had not done one thing to prepare for it? Had no planned response, established no communications protocols or structures for coordinating our defenses? I don't think people anywhere in the world would go for that. We are not all on the same page on Planet Earth, but we all want to continue to live here and thrive together.

DAVID GREGORY
 (smiling, incredulous)
 Really? Are we really still on
 Planet Earth here?

17 INT. CAPITOL HILL HALLWAY - DAY

17

A newspaper headline reads - "People Approve of Alien Defense Plan"

KARL COVET stands surrounded by reporters, each of whom are shoving microphones into his face. From the top, his bald head looks like the hub of a wheel, in which the spokes are the microphones and the extended arms, and the rubber is an orbiting mass of humanity, squeezing in on him.

TIMES REPORTER
 Karl, people are referring to you as the President's brain. Is that how you see it?

KARL COVET
 No, the President has his own brain. I am just a policy advisor and come re-election time a campaign consultant.

POST REPORTER
 Who does get the credit for the roll this administration has been on over the past three months? This administration has gone from being written off as a sure one-term deal to all the sudden looking like it has momentum. Aren't you the architect of that?

KARL COVET
 No, no, I just work for the President, along with a lot of other people, and we all bring our good ideas - well, some of them are good - and the President listens and makes decisions.

FOX NEWS REPORTER
 People are suggesting that the White House has fallen under a previously unknown influence. One that isn't always amenable to Republican principles. What do you think of that?

KARL COVET

I think a lot of those people must be on something. The Administration has been in office for 30 months now, and we have hit our stride. We are now organized to deliver on the promises we made on the campaign trail. I know that will seem weird to those people out there who you are talking about. I think of them as the *non-believers*.

AP REPORTER

There is a story going around town that depending upon what happens in the next election that you might have political ambitions of your own, maybe even for the presidency.

KARL COVET

Well, I would just ask you to think back to the last time a short, bald man was elected to the highest office in the land.

MSNBC REPORTER

Eisenhower.

KARL COVET

Point well taken and I accept your nomination.

18 INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - DAY

18

KARL COVET sits next to the comatose Riley Donaldson.

KARL COVET

This is Karl, Riley. I am hoping you can help us with something. It's the banks, especially in Europe. The whole European Union is falling apart. First Greece, then Italy and Spain. Portugal is going to go. The U.S. Banks are in deep there, way over exposed...

RILEY

Olives.

KARL COVET
 (pulls back from close
 confidence, looks
 quizzical)
 Did you say olives?

19 INT. KARL COVET'S OFFICE - NIGHT

19

KARL COVET leans against his desk watching a network news report.

TV NEWS REPORTER
 There was a significant development regarding the crisis in the European Union today, with EU Commissioners tentatively approving a plan that would designate exclusivity of key commodities to specific union members for a 10-year period. Profits from commodities such as olive oil would be channeled into a special fund that would collateralize investment from the world's banks in certain struggling economies. The model focuses on the olive oil industry, but the plan, rumored to be forwarded to the Commission from the President through German Ambassador Philip Murphy, is designed to be applied to a range of exports essential to the economies of certain countries.

Karl Covet's cell phone rings and he picks up the call. It is the President.

THE PRESIDENT
 Karl, I just got off the phone with Angela Merckel. She seems to think she can get this idea of yours through - your big olive plan.

KARL COVET
 Mr. President, that's great news!

THE PRESIDENT
 There's a Wall Street Journal poll that says we've got a forty-eight percent approval rating - from Democrats!

(MORE)

THE PRESIDENT (CONT'D)

I'm beginning to think there may be something to this notion that you are the brains of this outfit.

KARL COVET

Oh no sir, just a humble servant doing what I can to serve your administration.

THE PRESIDENT

Well, you are doing good work, Karl. I just wanted to let you know that I appreciate it.

KARL COVET

Thank you, Mr. President.

THE PRESIDENT

Good night Karl, and thanks again.

20 INT. HOSPITAL CORRIDOR - NIGHT 20

JONESY and PRATT arrive to visit the comatose Riley Donaldson. Walking down the long hallway on the way to Riley Donaldson's room they see KARL COVET exiting the room and leaving down a stairway at the far end, marked for emergency exit only.

The two staffers look at each other as if to say, Did you see that?

21 - INT. WHITE HOUSE STAFF ROOM - DAY 21

JONESY, PRATT, WHITAKER, HIX and KAT, plus other staffers seat themselves around a conference table at which KARL COVET is already seated at the head, leafing through papers.

JONESY

Good morning Karl.

KARL COVET

Good morning everyone.
(continues to look through his papers before him)

JONESY glances conspiratorially at PRATT.

JONESY

Karl, before we get started I just wondered if it wouldn't be good to offer a kind of an update on Riley Donaldson.

(MORE)

JONESY (CONT'D)

No one has mentioned him in a while
and I thought it might be good to
let everyone know his status.

KARL COVET

(looks up, suspicious)
Please, go ahead.

JONESY

Well, dipshit and I
(motions to PRATT, who
nods acknowledgement)
visited Riley last night, as we
have regularly since he became ill.
He remains in a coma, though his
general health seems well. You
wouldn't know that he is that sick
by his color, which is good. He has
lost a lot of weight and he has the
problems associated with long-term
coma. The nurses have to roll him
over and take care of all of his
basic needs.

A squeamish discomfort infects the room.

KAT

Have you talked with his parents?
What do the doctors say is his
prognosis? I feel so awful that I
haven't been to visit him for so
long. He's been there for months.

JONESY

Six months. I can't imagine the
kinds of bills he must be buried
under; or his parents, however that
works.

PRATT

Not to put you on the spot, Karl,
but have you talked with Riley's
parents, or gone to see him?
Learned anything more about how he
is doing?

KARL COVET

No, asshole, and thanks for
bringing it up. I have not talked
with his parents and I feel
terrible about it. I really need to
give them a call.

JONESY

Have you been to see Riley?

PRATT

We had the weirdest thing happen last night when we went to the hospital. We thought we saw you leaving Riley's room.

KARL COVET

Last night?

(looks nervously around)

No, I was having dinner over at Sax with some of my wife's relatives.

JONESY

Amazing. You have a Doppelgänger.

KARL COVET

That poor bastard. Well, thanks for the update on Donaldson and the reminder that I need to be in touch with his parents. Right now we have a lot of items to get to. Shall we get started?

22 INT. APARTMENT - NIGHT

22

JONESY and PRATT sit in a living room having drinks.

JONESY

So what do you think he's up to?

PRATT

As if I can explain Karl Covet.

JONESY

But he is clearly lying. Why would he do that? Why would he be surreptitious about visiting Riley Donaldson?

PRATT

Why would he visit Riley at all? I always thought he was going to can him for general incompetence.

JONESY

What do you suppose the chances are that Riley is talking to him - you know, telling him weird shit like he told us about the Tulsa conference? The Spitzer appointment?

PRATT

Weird flukes. In six months I have heard Riley say something like...three times. And once it was to say his nipple itched.

JONESY

It was weird though, right? The way it worked out? Which brings me back to Karl - and don't tell me that wasn't fuckin' Karl we saw coming out of Riley's room last night!

PRATT

Short, bald, moved like a spider. It sure seemed like Karl to me.

JONESY

Think about it. What do you fuckin' bet that Karl is in Riley's room like a vampire suckin' ideas out of him.

PRATT

Well, it's more than Riley could give in life.

JONESY

I'm serious! Karl is ruthless. What if he has found some way to tap into Riley's conscious mind, which for some reason is now better than it ever was before, and he is using it to his own advantage?

PRATT

I'd say that's why we are working for Karl, rather than the other way around. Besides, this is Washington D.C. and he is Karl fucking Covet. Would you expect anything else? I'm surprised he hasn't eaten poor Riley.

JONESY

Should we do something? Should we stop it?

PRATT

We shouldn't let him eat him.

JONESY

I'm serious! What if Karl is doing something to Riley, exploiting him in some way?

PRATT

Who is the victim here? Ever since Riley went into that coma things have gone a lot better here for us all. I don't know that one thing had anything to do with the other...

JONESY

What about the Tulsa conference?

PRATT

Well, maybe the Tulsa conference, but whatever the case, what is the issue? We are all getting over. It's a win-win. The Democrats are under control, the banks are optimistic, the stock market is bullish. The fuckin' military industrial complex is hammering so loud I have to sleep with a pillow over my head. What is the problem?

JONESY

I don't know. Maybe it's just that I don't like Karl that much.

23 INT. HOSPITAL - NIGHT

23

KARL COVET is met on a back stairway by a HOSPITAL ADMINISTRATOR who brings him to RILEY DONALDSON's room through a back way used only for emergency exit.

ADMINISTRATOR

I have to say, Mr. Covet, that I am a little confused by this. I thought all of this intrigue would now be over.

KARL COVET

What do you mean by that?

ADMINISTRATOR

Well, with Mr. Donaldson's release...

KARL COVET

What? His release?

Karl opens the door to RILEY DONALDSON's room to find the bed stripped and the room empty.

ADMINISTRATOR

Yes, he was released to the care of his physician this morning. I assumed that you knew.

(a curious look comes over the Administrator's face)

Have you not been in communication with Mr. Donaldson's parents? They approved all of this.

KARL COVET

(glancing around, concerned, looking for an idea, feigning composure)

Yes, of course. I just didn't realize it was happening so soon...

(looks back at the empty bed with a look that asks "What am I going to do now?")

24

I/E. CLINIC - DAY

24

KARL COVET is met by DR. EHRLICHMAN at the door to his private research clinic. DR. EHRLICHMAN is tall and thin, late sixties. Not particularly imposing.

DR. EHRLICHMAN

Mr. Covet, please come in.

KARL COVET

Thank you, Dr. Ehrlichman. I appreciate you taking the time to speak with me.

The two proceed to Dr. Ehrlichman's study.

DR. EHRLICHMAN

So, I understand that you are Mr. Donaldson's employer.

KARL COVET

Yes, Riley is one of my favorite staff members. It is awful what has happened to him.

DR. EHRLICHMAN

He is a rare case, a medical anomaly, if you will, which most will tell you is the last thing you want to be. You know, not fitting into the existing protocols, rather like a peg without a corresponding shape.

(pauses)

I understand that you are also a close friend of the Donaldson family.

KARL COVET

Only in the sense that I like to get to know the backgrounds of all of my staff, particularly the inner circle that Riley is a part of.

DR. EHRLICHMAN

I appreciate the optimism in your statement, but I'm not sure that Mr. Donaldson will ever again be able to resume anything like a normal life. Do you understand that?

KARL COVET

I think I understand.

(glances around the office, which is bare of personal photographs, only framed diplomas and legal documents)

I understand that you are associated with the University of Maryland Medical Center. Do you teach?

DR. EHRLICHMAN

No, I haven't done any teaching in quite a long while. I am semi-retired, I guess you would say. My association with the University is entirely funding related. I am endowed to perform special research, which is why I have Mr. Donaldson here.

(MORE)

DR. EHRLICHMAN (CONT'D)

In cases where there is long-term care required, which can only be managed in the hospital environment for a few months, the patient is typically moved to a residential treatment center. I am licensed by the state to provide that level of care for certain research cases that have been approved by the hospital staff for enrollment in experimental studies.

KARL COVET

This place doesn't seem much like a research facility.

DR. EHRLICHMAN

This is my home, but I can take you to see Mr. Donaldson if you would like. We try to keep him in a home-like setting, though it is equipped just as any long-term care facility would be. Hopefully it is comfortable. We feel that is important to the patient's well being.

KARL COVET

You say "we".

DR. EHRLICHMAN

Myself and my assistant. I have a nurse who assists me three days a week, mostly maintaining Mr. Donaldson in a comfortable state. Turning him over, that type of thing.

KARL COVET

Do you live here by yourself, Dr. Ehrlichman?

DR. EHRLICHMAN

Yes I do. Why do you ask?

KARL COVET

Oh, no reason. I just didn't see any indication of anyone else around. It must be pretty quiet out here?

DR. EHRLICHMAN

It is one of the pleasures of the suburbs.

(MORE)

DR. EHRLICHMAN (CONT'D)

It is secluded and quiet, all of which, quite honestly, are part of the reason why I am supported in my research as I am. The University doesn't worry about me being terribly visible to the public. Some of what I do has received some bad, if inaccurate, press, so we like to stay below the radar, if you will. I know a man of politics, such as yourself, can appreciate that.

KARL COVET

Indeed I can, Dr. Ehrlichman.

DR. EHRLICHMAN

Would you care to look in on Mr. Donaldson? See how he is doing in his new environment?

KARL COVET

Yes, that would be great.

KARL COVET follows DR. EHRLICHMAN to another part of the building where they find RILEY DONALDSON lying in bed with intravenous drugs being fed into ports in his inner arms.

KARL COVET (CONT'D)

Has he said anything?

DR. EHRLICHMAN

Said anything? How funny of you to ask. In fact, the first day that he was here he did say something - something quite peculiar. He said that the serum we have him on has long-term side effects, which is something we have been very concerned about. It's another of the reasons Mr. Donaldson is here, rather than in a more, shall we say, transparent environment. We have learned to be more cautious when conversing about his case in his presence. He is cognizant, in some respects.

KARL COVET

(nods over at Riley, an unspoken request)

Do you mind?

DR. EHRLICHMAN

No, I don't see any harm. I'll go make a note in his visitor records that you were here. It's part of the protocol.

DR. EHRLICHMAN leaves KARL COVET alone with RILEY DONALDSON lying in bed. Karl walks over to Riley's bedside, leans down close and whispers in his ear.

KARL COVET

Riley, this is Karl. Have you any thoughts?

RILEY

CDC, Memphis. Bird flu.

KARL COVET

Where, Riley? What do we do?

RILEY

Stricker. Sicker at Stricker.

25 EXT. CAR INTERIOR - DAY

25

KARL COVET is on the cell phone to the President's office.

KARL COVET

Hi, Ari, this is Karl. We need some immediate action that comes directly from the President. There is a meat processing facility in Memphis, Tennessee - a Memphis Meat Processing, it's on Stricker Road. I'll give you the details later but you need to alert the CDC to get a team over there right now. It is influenza, bird flu, possibly of an airborne variety.

26 INT. KARL COVET'S OFFICE - NIGHT

26

KARL COVET is watching an evening news broadcast showing HAZMAT workers cordoning off a production facility and decontaminating exposed workers.

TV REPORTER

NBC News has learned that the Center for Disease Control in Atlanta has dispatched an engagement team to a meat processing facility in Memphis, Tennessee. Details have not yet come in but there are reports of several employees at the facility becoming ill and dying, while several others are reported to be in grave condition. There is fear that this is an airborne pathogen, a variation of bird flu, that ranks among the CDC's greatest concerns. How exactly this reached the well-established Memphis Meat Processing facility is not known at this time. The facility processes meat from a one-hundred mile radius, which does include area poultry operations. The CDC has quarantined the facility and all patients who might possibly have contracted some special strain of the influenza.

Karl's cell phone rings and KARL COVET answers.

KARL COVET

Good evening, Mr. President.

(pause to listen)

Yes, yes, thank you sir. We got lucky on this one, I agree.

(pause)

How did I know? I'm from Memphis, Mr. President, and still have family there. One of them told me something odd that one of their doctors said, and the pieces just started coming together. Call it a hunch.

(pause)

Yes, agreed, the Memphis hospitals were about to sound the alarm, but yes, it's good politically to be ahead of it. It is good we got our people in place early, almost ahead of the story. It makes us look good.

(pause)

No doubt. Thanks so much.

(pause)

Just lucky, Mr. President, just lucky this time.

(MORE)

KARL COVET (CONT'D)

(pause)

Thank you sir. Good night.

KARL COVET ends the call and then does a karate kick and strike move in a burst of victorious celebration.

27 INT. RILEY'S CLINIC ROOM - DAY

27

JONESY and PRATT enter Riley's room, accompanied by DR. EHRLICHMAN.

JONESY

Thank you so much for having us in. I had to call Riley's parents to find out where he had been moved to. Has there been any change in his condition?

DR. EHRLICHMAN

No, no change, but Mr. Donaldson's is an odd case. I have performed long-term observation and care of many patients in a comatose state, but Riley stands out. Comatose patients are typically quite different in appearance from someone who is simply sleeping. Their low performing system shows. They don't look healthy, but Riley...

(looks over at RILEY
DONALDSON lying in bed,
unconscious)

...Riley looks as if he might wake up and start his day. His color is good, vitals are strong.

PRATT

So why is he still in a coma?

DR. EHRLICHMAN

That's the mystery we are trying to solve. All of the markers in his blood, his proteins, enzymes and his glandular functioning - it all shows a condition unchanged from when we made our initial prognosis.

JONESY

Mad Cow.

DR. EHRLICHMAN

I prefer spongiform encephalopathy.

PRATT

Of course.

(shoots an expression at
JONESY, who glances back
unimpressed)

DR. EHRLICHMAN

The regimen I have Riley on is...

(pauses apologetically)

I may ask to be forgiven for
becoming too personal with my
patients. This is not surgery, you
know, we are not violating our
patients beyond giving them
injections. Surgeons have a
distance they keep from their
patients. In my field we are caring
for them and administering chemical
treatments. That does affect the
way we relate, you know.

(looks back at Riley
Donaldson)

And you get that sense of presence,
with Riley.

PRATT

Almost more now than before.

(another glance between
the two Staffers)

DR. EHRLICHMAN

(considers the thought for
a moment)

One of the disadvantages I am
always at with these cases is that
I never have previous knowledge of
the patient before he or she
arrives on my doorstep in a
comatose state. Like all physicians
who do the type of research that I
do, we must rely on anecdotal
information about who we should
expect the patient to be in a
normal state.

PRATT

Oh, we can help you there.

(another ornery glance met
with disapproval)

DR. EHRLICHMAN

I would appreciate scheduling some time so that we might chat about who Riley has been, and a little bit about his personality.

JONESY

I would be happy to do that. My schedule today...

DR. EHRLICHMAN

(waves him off)

I understand, just when you find yourself with some extra time, perhaps during a visit. Though I must say, it is hard to know how long Riley's stay here might be.

JONESY

What is that about?

DR. EHRLICHMAN

Well, my licensing is to perform clinically-based research, and should a patient be removed from the research regimen that is their reason for being here, they will be relocated to long-term residential care.

JONESY

Where would that be? I mean, in Riley's case.

DR. EHRLICHMAN

I really don't know, that is a matter between Riley's insurance carrier and his guardians, who are his parents.

JONESY

So there is a chance that he could just be warehoused?

DR. EHRLICHMAN

(glances again at Riley,
across the room, and
lowers his volume to a
whisper)

There is a pretty good chance that the Donaldson's could be facing some difficult decisions very soon.

(MORE)

DR. EHRLICHMAN (CONT'D)

We know that there will be certain side effects to the treatment he is receiving, and there is a danger of brain hemorrhage. It is the most likely outcome if he remains on the regimen past a certain length of time.

JONESY

Are you near the end?

DR. EHRLICHMAN

From the standpoint of medical ethics, yes. If Riley doesn't show signs of coming out of a comatose state, we will have to assume the need for a permanent care facility. I could request an extension on the experimental treatment being given to Riley, but that would not be wise.

JONESY

Because...

DR. EHRLICHMAN

Because his brain is packed like a chemical bomb. And quite frankly, I don't want to be around should it explode.

All three men look warily over at the comatose RILEY DONALDSON.

28 INT. WHITE HOUSE STAFF ROOM - DAY

28

JONESY and PRATT, and KARL COVET sit at a conference table, with the rest of the White House strategy and communications team.

KARL COVET

Let's get started with work plan status.

JONESY

Karl, if you would excuse my interruption, I wondered if it wouldn't be of interest to people to get an update on Riley Donaldson, who has now been moved to a new facility.

KAT

How is he doing? And where is he at? I mentioned that I should go visit him in the hospital and now I hear he isn't even there anymore. I feel terrible about myself.

(her tone betrays her claim to shame)

JONESY

Riley was moved into a private clinic care facility a few days ago, and we

(motioning to PRATT)

have visited him there, as I believe has Karl.

WHITAKER

How is he doing?

JONESY

No change, he's in a coma. He does show occasional signs of consciousness, but they don't last long and his doctor seems to believe that it is more of an effect of the drugs he is on than a real break from his vegetative state.

HIX

His vegetative state?

PRATT

He's like a talking carrot.

JONESY

You get that this is hyperbole. I think Riley has talked a handful of times since he became ill.

(looks at KARL COVET)

Have you ever heard him say anything when you've visited, Karl?

KARL COVET

(had been listening intently, startles a bit to have attention suddenly turn back to him)

Just...just sounds, I guess you'd call them. Grunts and moans.

PRATT

For the record, he never does that with us. You may be pushing in a little close, Karl.

Nervous twitter of momentarily laughter around the room, stopping abruptly with no one present wanting to be the last laughter.

JONESY

Nothing coherent?

KARL COVET

(nods his head)

No.

JONESY

There is this story going around that you take credit for the idea of sending the President to the oil conference in Tulsa last fall.

KAT

I never heard that! Who said that?

KARL COVET

(shaken)

Well I never said that, though I did personally lobby the President to attend that conference for months before...before any of you knew about it.

Staffers around the room glance at each other.

PRATT

Illuminati. See! I knew it!

KAT

First I've heard of that, too.

There is a moment of nervous rustling and then the room goes quiet.

HIX

Do I not recall that being Riley Donaldson's idea?

JONESY

Well, to finish with the Riley thing, I understand that he will probably be moved soon to a long-term care facility.

(MORE)

JONESY (CONT'D)

I think the doctors are changing strategy, giving up on the experimental drugs they have him on, and looking more toward around the clock permanent care.

KAT

Oh my god - that doesn't sound good.

JONESY

I don't think it is good for anybody involved. I'm sure this is going to bankrupt Riley and his parents, too.

WHITAKER

That poor bastard needs a miracle.

PRATT

(looking at Karl Covet)
He needs an agent and a lawyer.

29

INT. DONALDSON FAMILY RESIDENCE - NIGHT

29

KARL COVET arrives at the home of RILEY DONALDSON'S parents. He is greeted at the front door and invited in to the living room.

MRS. DONALDSON

Mr. Covet, it was so nice of you to call.

KARL COVET

Karl, please - and it is my pleasure. I am very concerned about Riley's long-term well-being and, as I believe Dr. Ehrlichman told you, I have been to see him at the clinic on several occasions.

MR. DONALDSON

He told us that you have been a frequent visitor, and we really appreciate your concern.

KARL COVET

Riley is a wonderful young man and valuable to the White House team.

MRS. DONALDSON

That was his greatest thrill, to be able to work at the White House. What an honor.

KARL COVET

It is an honor to have Riley on our team, Mrs. Donaldson. That's what brings me here.

(pauses in a sincere way
to gather his thoughts)

We at the White House are all concerned about the care that Riley will receive in the future should his condition remain unchanged.

Riley's parents instinctively reach for each other's hand.

KARL COVET (CONT'D)

As an employee of the White House, Riley receives the insurance coverage provided for government employees. I receive that coverage myself and am familiar with its covenants, key among which are limitations on the lifetime amount of convalescent or long-term residential care.

MR. DONALDSON

This is something my wife and I have discussed.

KARL COVET

As I know you know, 24-hour care is extremely expensive, and quite frankly it bankrupts the resources of most families after the maximum insurance coverage is met and exceeded.

MRS. DONALDSON

At least he can't be dropped from the coverage.

KARL COVET

That's true, but the rates will go up. And they'll be covered in part by government subsidies but it won't be nearly enough. Not to be insensitive, but Riley could live for decades requiring that kind of constant nursing care.

(MORE)

KARL COVET (CONT'D)

We are talking about millions of dollars beyond what the government's insurance program will cover without supplemental coverage.

MR. DONALDSON

Supplemental coverage?

KARL COVET

There are going to be two factors in Riley's long-term care. One is the availability of supplemental coverage to manage his expenses, which you understand could continue long after you two die.

(glances nervously at the two)

I guess I could have put that a little differently.

MR. DONALDSON

I appreciate your candor, Mr. Covet. And what is the other factor?

KARL COVET

Choice of long-term care facility. Some cost more than others. Part of the reason I wanted to talk with you is to offer help with both issues.

MRS. DONALDSON

How can you help, Mr. Covet?

30 INT. EHRLICHMAN CLINIC - NIGHT

30

A vehicle like a hearse backs into the underground garage at the Ehrlichman clinic, where DR. EHRLICHMAN is signing documents while standing with the transport supervisor (THE SUPERVISOR), who wears white institutional clothing.

DR. EHRLICHMAN

(looking quizzically at the long black vehicle backing into his garage)

What is this?

THE SUPERVISOR

Not what you are used to, huh?

DR. EHRLICHMAN

They usually send an ambulance,
unless the patient has died.

THE SUPERVISOR

This is a special case. We get
dispatched regarding supplemental
insurance riders, and apparently
this guy

(glances at his papers)

Riley M. Donaldson has one.

DR. EHRLICHMAN

(studies the papers in his
hand)

And you are supposed to deliver him
to the Virginia Paugh Residential
Treatment Facility, correct?

THE SUPERVISOR

That's what it says right there.

(taps his finger on the
papers Dr. Ehrlichman
holds)

Won't be our first.

DR. EHRLICHMAN

It's a good facility. Several of my
patients have been transferred
there. This is the first to have
gone off in a hearse.

THE SUPERVISOR

This is no hearse, Dr. Ehrlichman.
State of the art, all the way, and
brand new. Would you like to have a
look?

DR. EHRLICHMAN

(somewhat imperiously)

Yes, I would.

The SUPERVISOR walks over to the back of the vehicle, opens
the back door, and crawls inside.

THE SUPERVISOR

This is the state-of-the-art in
ambulatory transportation, Dr.
Ehrlichman. Everything that you
would expect to see in an ambulance
is encased within these walls and
packed in around the chassis.

(motions to him)

Slide in here and look at this.

DR. EHRLICHMAN reluctantly leans into the back of the transport.

DR. EHRLICHMAN
(frowning)
This doesn't appear to have any of the services required to transport a comatose patient.

THE SUPERVISOR
Not so, Doc. Here's the oxygen, you just pull the mask from here.

The SUPERVISOR produces an oxygen mask from the pocket of his white lab coat and surprises DR. EHRLICHMAN by pushing the breathing cup over the doctor's face. DR. EHRLICHMAN struggles but the SUPERVISOR forces the doctor to breathe into the oxygen mask until he passes out.

31 INT. EHRLICHMAN CLINIC - LATER

31

A hand is seen turning a placard over to indicate that the facility is closed.

A hand activates a voice recorder, and a woman's voice is heard creating an answering phone message.

THE SUPERVISOR
Dr. Ehrlichman has been called away on family business in Europe, but he will be picking up calls while overseas. At the sound of the beep, leave your message.

32 I/E. DONALDSON RESIDENCE - LATER

32

The long black hearse backs into the Donaldson family residence, a large estate located in a hilly wooded neighborhood and not easily seen from the street or surrounding homes. The SUPERVISOR and two ASSISTANTS quickly unload the comatose RILEY DONALDSON as well as the drug-incapacitated DR. EHRLICHMAN. KARL COVET is there to meet them.

DR. EHRLICHMAN
(nightmare delirium)
What are you doing? Get off of me!

KARL COVET
Relax, this is not a kill operation, this is a re-election campaign.

33 INT. BASEMENT BEDROOM - LATER

33

The SUPERVISOR and his ASSISTANTS deposit DR. EHRLICHMAN, still mostly unconscious, on a bed in a basement bedroom of the Donaldson Family Home. KARL COVET walks in with instructions.

KARL COVET

Just park him there so he can sleep it off.

THE SUPERVISOR

So is that it then?

KARL COVET

That's it. I appreciate your good deeds.

KARL COVET hands THE SUPERVISOR a cash gratuity. THE SUPERVISOR looks at it and then looks quizzically up at KARL COVET as if to say "Seriously?" KARL COVET makes a physical expression that says he has no idea if that was appropriate. THE SUPERVISOR returns a physical expression that seems to say "Well, okay". He puts the money in his pocket.

34 INT. DONALDSON LIVING ROOM - LATER

34

KARL COVET walks into the room where MR. and MRS. DONALDSON sit nervously together on the couch. It is dead quiet, like a waiting room.

MR. DONALDSON

Mr. Covet, I need to know what is going on here.

KARL COVET

It is as I told you, Mr. Donaldson. If there is going to be adequate care provided for Riley then we are going to need to take over your family's affairs for a time.

MRS. DONALDSON

(scared)

What do you mean by that?

KARL COVET

Mrs. Donaldson, it is like when Katrina hit the Gulf Coast and the Federal Emergency Management Agency rushed in to manage the situation.

MR. DONALDSON

I don't see what that has to do with our son, and you taking over our home.

KARL COVET

I don't think you understand your son's importance to the security of this nation. The President of the United States is facing an uphill battle for re-election - a re-election that is critical to completing an agenda that was his defining purpose for seeking the office in the first place.

MRS. DONALDSON

(desperate)

What does Riley's medical care have to do with all of that?

KARL COVET

Well, everything, to put it succinctly. Your son has become the principal brain trust of our West Wing operations.

MR. DONALDSON

(flabbergasted)

He's in a coma!

KARL COVET

Exactly! And in that state he is like a freaking oracle. It's like he knows things the rest of us just cannot! He sees connections, causal relations...

MR. DONALDSON

(a look of horror coming over his face)

You are insane.

KARL COVET

This is not about me, Mr. Donaldson, nor, quite frankly, is it about anyone other than Riley and The President of the United States. Now for you to get into alignment with what needs to happen...

MRS. DONALDSON

What needs to happen?

KARL COVET

We need to keep Riley on his medication at least through the election season.

MR. DONALDSON

Dr. Ehrlichman is taking Riley off that treatment.

KARL COVET

Dr. Ehrlichman has had a change of heart.

MR. DONALDSON

He told us that to continue the experiment would put Riley at risk.

KARL COVET

Experiment! That's the exact right word! It is an *experimental* treatment, and you knew this going in, and nobody knows exactly how the *experiment* will end, but we know two things right now. One is that Riley is still alive, right? The other is that as long as he is taking this treatment he is guiding this nation in directions that it desperately needs to go. Now are you going to stand in the way of that?

MR. DONALDSON

You are out of your god-damned mind!

MRS. DONALDSON

George!

MR. DONALDSON

I am not going to let you kill our son for the sake of your political agenda. Christ, I'm not even a Republican!

MRS. DONALDSON

Yes he is too a Republican, Mr. Covet. He's just upset.

KARL COVET

I understand, Mrs. Donaldson, we are all upset. These are upsetting times.

(MORE)

KARL COVET (CONT'D)

These are huge stakes, maybe the future of American democracy itself. And your son is in the unique position to affect the course of future events - and for the better! But it is a burden that God himself has bestowed upon Riley, no doubt knowing that it puts his life on the line. Riley is a classic hero, Mr. and Mrs. Donaldson. It is our job to help him see it through.

35 EXT. DONALDSON RESIDENCE - DAY

35

Workers are seen installing security bars over all of the doors and windows at the back and sides of the residence. Two workers converse.

WORKER ONE

This seems like a lot of security for this neighborhood. Has anyone ever been burglarized here?

WORKER TWO

In this neighborhood? I doubt it. Maybe whoever lives here is just paranoid.

WORKER ONE

I might be afraid I couldn't get out of this prison. You know, like if there's a fire.

WORKER TWO

These bars all release from the inside, right?

WORKER ONE

Yeah, if you can get to the releases. I wouldn't put these things on my house, and I live in Anacostia. This is the weirdest one I've done. It's almost like the whole shebang is designed to keep someone in.

36 INT. RILEY DONALDSON ROOM - DAY

36

DR. EHRLICHMAN injects RILEY DONALDSON with the experimental medicine while KARL COVET watches.

Karl Covet picks up the bottle from which Dr. Ehrlichman has drawn the injection and reads the cover: PATIENT - RILEY M. DONALDSON PATIENT NUMBER - 1105735 ANTI-PHOSPHOLIPID - TRIAL 7C - BATCH.

DR. EHRLICHMAN

In my forty-five years of medical practice I have never been so ashamed of what I am doing.

KARL COVET

Oh spare me the dramatics, doc. You and the Donaldsons ought to get together for a pathos party. Do you not get that you are doing a service for your country?

RILEY DONALDSON's eyes suddenly pop open and he draws a big, startled breath.

RILEY

The President's daughter is in trouble.

Without hesitation, KARL COVET pulls out his cell phone and calls the White House.

37 INT. KARL COVET OFFICE - DAY

37

THE PRESIDENT paces back and forth while KARL COVET sits behind his desk, head in hands.

THE PRESIDENT

How in the world are we going to handle this Karl? And how in the world did you find out about it?

KARL COVET

I'm telling you, Riley Donaldson told me.

THE PRESIDENT

How would he know this?

KARL COVET

How would he know any of the stuff he comes up with? I have no idea.

THE PRESIDENT

She is fifteen, Karl.

KARL COVET

I know, I know.

THE PRESIDENT

She cannot have this baby! So what do we do?

KARL COVET

We can arrange an abortion.

THE PRESIDENT

Which contradicts everything we stand for. For God's sake, have we no values left?

KARL COVET

It could be handled like a top secret, you know, operation.

THE PRESIDENT

It would have to be.

KARL COVET

There is no reason that anyone ever need to know about it.

THE PRESIDENT

It's nobody's fucking business!

The two men think silently for a moment.

THE PRESIDENT (CONT'D)

We can't have a doctor coming to the White House. We cannot be the Republican administration that performed an abortion in the People's House. And Victoria cannot be seen going to a hospital or clinic...

KARL COVET

I know of a private residence and a doctor who could perform the procedure.

THE PRESIDENT

Who?

KARL COVET

The doctor whose caring for Riley Donaldson could do it, right in the private facility where Riley is being kept.

THE PRESIDENT

You make it sound like he's in custody.

KARL COVET

No, no - he's not in custody.

THE PRESIDENT

My wife will want to be there.

KARL COVET

I don't think that's wise, Mr. President. The First Lady can't leave the White House without a security detail, and they'll be followed.

THE PRESIDENT

I'm not sending my daughter by herself someplace I've never been to myself to have an abortion.

KARL COVET

I can tell you one other thing you won't be doing if this somehow becomes public knowledge, and that's getting re-elected.

THE PRESIDENT

(realization and pause)

I can't be there for her.

KARL COVET

Of course not, Mr. President, but I can. I can be there in your place making sure that Victoria is well cared for, that the procedure is done safely, and that no one ever becomes aware of its having happened.

THE PRESIDENT

You can promise that?

KARL COVET

On my word as a citizen.

38 INT. DR. ERHLICHMAN ROOM - DAY

38

DR. ERHLICMAN listens to KARL COVET's request. He is aghast.

DR. EHRLICHMAN

I am not an abortionist! I have never performed the procedure in my life!

KARL COVET

I did some research, doc. It's a pretty simple procedure. They call it an Aspiration, it's a vacuum thing. We can get you the equipment.

DR. EHRLICHMAN

You are out of your mind! First you abduct Riley Donaldson and myself, and his parents, and now this. What is wrong with you, man!

KARL COVET

What if I told you that you would be doing a service to your nation?

DR. EHRLICHMAN

I have no idea what you are talking about.

KARL COVET

The patient is the President's fifteen year old daughter, Victoria.

DR. EHRLICHMAN

(stares at him for a long moment in dead silence)

The daughter of the President of the United States? She's just a child.

KARL COVET

Now you're getting it, doc. This isn't just any patient. This one requires special care.

DR. EHRLICHMAN stares at him in shocked silence, his lip trembling.

39 INT. RILEY DONALDSON ROOM - DAY

39

DR. EHRLICHMAN and KARL COVET are with RILEY DONALDSON, who is lying in bed.

KARL COVET

Riley, can you hear me? This is Karl with Dr. Erhlichman. He is here to give you your medication.

DR. EHRLICHMAN goes about the process of preparing Riley for his injection.

KARL COVET (CONT'D)

Dr. Erhlichman is quite a hero,
Riley, all because of the
information you gave us about the
President's daughter. The President
wants to send you his best and
thank you for your service.

DR. EHRLICHMAN examines Riley, after giving him the
injection.

DR. EHRLICHMAN

We are going to need to reposition
him to get him some relief from his
sores. I am just too old to do all
of this by myself. It was not
helpful for you to let my assistant
go.

(he stops himself, thinks
about what he is saying)

Will you for the sake of God end
all of this! We need to get Riley
some proper long-term care and quit
subjecting him to this cruelty. I
am scared to death that he is going
to hemorrhage, and then what will
your explanation be? We don't have
the emergency facilities here to
handle an event like that. He would
need to be moved to a critical care
unit...

RILEY

American Flight 1567. Bomber.

KARL COVET

What did you say, Riley? A bomber?

RILEY

Doha International, 1567. Nineteen-
A.

40 INT. WHITE HOUSE PRESS ROOM - DAY

40

Press Secretary MATT WILLIAMSON addresses the press corps.

MATT WILLIAMSON

This morning at 4 a.m. Riyadh time,
American special forces personnel,
assisted by security personnel from
the Saudi government, raided a
terrorist bomb-building facility.

(MORE)

MATT WILLIAMSON (CONT'D)

In the process, Muhammad al-Sharad, who has been listed as the master bomb designer of the al-Shirat terrorist organization, was shot and killed, along with nine other accomplices. Bomb-building materials and elaborate instruction manuals were seized at the scene, along with computer hard drives suspected of containing a treasure trove of information about the al-Shirat organization. This administration feels that this is one of the most important events in the history of our war against terror, and that the citizens of the United States can feel far more secure today than they could previous to this morning's events in Saudi Arabia.

AP REPORTER

Can you give us some background on how the location of this facility was discovered, or how this bombing plot was uncovered?

MATT WILLIAMSON

Yes. A confidential source contacted the White House with information about a plan to detonate a bomb aboard a United States-bound commercial carrier. The information was specific, including the flight and even the seat number that had been booked for the terrorist passenger who would detonate this bomb.

TIMES REPORTER

Can you tell what type of a device was to be used?

MATT WILLIAMSON

Our understanding is that it was a device that could be secreted aboard the airplane without being detected at the security check in.

TIMES REPORTER

Was this an underwear bomb, or a shoe bomb? Can you be more specific about the type of device that was planned to be used?

MATT WILLIAMSON

There will be more information on this as we get details, but my understanding is that it was a suppository device. It was a bomb that was designed to be carried in the bomber's anus.

POST REPORTER

(leans to the NBC REPORTER sitting beside him)

He was going to blow the shit out of everything.

41 INT. WEST WING MEETING ROOM - DAY

41

KARL COVET meets with the White House strategy team.

KARL COVET

Good morning, everyone. I think you probably all saw the polls this morning that show that we have made some significant gains in our Approval ratings. We are now up to forty-nine percent, which is as good as we've been since the third quarter of this administration, but still lower than we want to be as we enter the re-election year.

(analyzing what he sees from a report he is reading)

Overall, the country feels we are doing a good job in the fight against terrorism, in responding to emergencies, in lowering fuel prices, and they like the first family, and feel they set an appropriate example for the nation. They even like our re-opening of Project Blue Book. Past those gains, we are in the dumper on the economy, taxes, the deficit, health care, employment, and labor relations. Few trusts our intentions toward the environment or our perceived commitment to future-forward technologies, whatever that means. In fact, close to half of the polling respondents find us generally untrustworthy.

(puts down his report)

(MORE)

KARL COVET (CONT'D)

So, those are our challenges for the next four quarters. Any thoughts?

KAT

That type of polling is irrelevant. We don't need some big national shift to get re-elected, we just need percentages in the swing states, which will be what they always are: Ohio, Florida, Virginia...

JONESY

I wonder what Riley would say, Karl, if he were here.

PRATT

He would admit to having missed the question, unless he was asleep.

HIX

You guys keep saying things like that. What are you talking about?

JONESY

Tell them, Karl.

KARL COVET

(looks suspiciously at
JONESY)

Not what we're here to talk about. Besides, we've talked before about how Riley Donaldson has occasionally come out of his comatose condition to utter a few words. I find it a little indecent to make it the butt of jokes.

PRATT

You'd know if he was joking, Karl, no one would be laughing.

KARL COVET

(shoots a cold glare at
PRATT)

Would you like to run this meeting? We have some pretty damned serious issues on our plate, but if you have another agenda, or some sort of accusations to make...

JONESY
 Nobody said anything about
 accusations.

HIX
 Okay, reset! Why are we doing this?

JONESY
 Nobody's doing anything.

HIX
 You are acting weird. Don't you
 think Karl?

KARL COVET
 I don't know what your point is.
 Riley Donaldson, poor bastard, has
 nothing to do with our jobs here in
 this administration. Now if we all
 want to keep our jobs in this
 administration we had better be
 focused on the issues at hand. Can
 we agree on that?

Alarmed by Karl Covet's tone, those in the room exchange
 nervous glances.

42 EXT. DONALDSON HOME - NIGHT

42

JONESY AND PRATT are at the front porch of the Donaldson
 home, ringing the doorbell. A large MALE NURSE wearing scrubs
 answers the door.

JONESY
 (looking surprised)
 Hello.
 (looks the man up and
 down, noticing his
 scrubs)

MALE NURSE
 Hello. What do you need?

JONESY
 Is Mr. or Mrs. Donaldson home?.

MALE NURSE
 They're not here.

JONESY
 Are you a nurse or a doctor? Is
 everything all right with them?

MALE NURSE

They are fine. Do you want me to tell them something?

JONESY

We were wondering about their son Riley. You wouldn't happen to know where he has been moved to would you?

MALE NURSE

I don't know anything about that.
(starts to close the front door)

JONESY

(pushes the door from being shut)
Wait, wait. May I ask who you are? Are you caring for the Donaldson's in some way?

MALE NURSE

That's right. I'll tell them you called.
(closes the door firmly)

As the door is closing PRATT catches a glimpse of DR. EHRLICHMAN, walking impeded down a hall on the other side of the house.

PRATT

(excited)
Did you see that?

JONESY

What, the guerilla in the nurses' uniform? Yeah, I saw that!

PRATT

No, I mean Ehrlichman! I saw Ehrlichman in there!

JONESY

Riley's doctor Ehrlichman?
(turns back and knocks impatiently again on the front door)
What the fuck?

PRATT

What are you doing?

JONESY
 Something weird is going on in
 there?

PRATT
 Well let's call the cops!

The words only just leave his lips when the door opens and
 THE SUPERVISOR steps out onto the porch, closing the front
 door behind him. He hovers over the staffers.

THE SUPERVISOR
 I believe you were told to leave.

JONESY
 Nobody told us to leave. Why is Dr.
 Ehrlichman here. I want to talk
 with Dr. Ehrlichman.

THE SUPERVISOR
 There is no one by that name here,
 now let's go.

THE SUPERVISOR reaches his arms around both staffers and
 begins to escort them off the porch, but JONESY spins away
 from him.

JONESY
 Who are you? And who was the guy
 who answered the door? And where
 are the Donaldson's?

THE SUPERVISOR
 The Donaldsons are out of town and
 I'm watching the property. Now get
 lost.

The two staffers reluctantly return through the dark to their
 parked car.

43 I/E. JONESY'S CAR - LATER

43

JONESY and PRATT sit in Jonesy's car wondering what just
 happened.

JONESY
 This is bullshit. There is some
 kind of bullshit going on here.

PRATT
 Let's call the cops.

JONESY

And say what?

PRATT

That we are concerned that something may have happened to the Donaldsons. That's pretty solid. And where is Riley? Isn't that weird? And Ehrlichman, are you fucking kidding me? Something is going on.

JONESY

Do you suppose Karl knows anything about this?

PRATT

What's the chance of getting the clap from Ke\$ha?

JONESY

I've gotta know what is going on here.

JONESY opens the car door and starts back toward the Donaldson property on foot.

PRATT

(chasing behind)

Wait, what are you doing?

44 EXT. DONALDSON HOME - LATER

44

JONESY AND PRATT approach the property making certain to remain unseen, moving behind bushes and trees to gain entry to the expansive residence, and then work their way around to a side of the house. There they encounter a fortress-like structure festooned with security bars on doors and windows.

JONESY

(quietly)

Look at this place. Did this always look like this?

PRATT

I don't know. I was here once but not to break in.

The two make their way along the side of the house until they find a light coming through a window well-above the ground. Shadow movements on the curtained window show a presence in the room.

JONESY
 (looks at PRATT)
 Can you boost me up there? So I can see in?

PRATT
 Seriously? You must weigh over fifty pounds! You think I'm Charles Atlas?

JONESY
 You want me to boost you?

PRATT
 I don't want to look in there. I'm thinking of nurse we just talked to.
 (bends over and cups his hands to boost JONESY up to the window)

PRATT boosts JONESY up to the window far enough that he can look inside. There he sees RILEY DONALDSON with MR. AND MRS. DONALDSON at his bedside, and DR. EHRLICHMAN there with them.

JONESY catches only a glimpse of this quartet inside when a security light illuminates the side of the house and dogs begin to bark. JONESY and PRATT look toward the blackness at the back part of the property, from which there emerges a pack of vicious guard dogs running toward them.

45 INT. KARL COVET OFFICE - DAY

45

KARL COVET watches a bank of television screens, each with "Breaking News" banner headlines: West Wing Staffers Killed by Wild Animals.

NEWS READER
 The D.C.-area is in shock this morning at the gruesome discovery of the bodies of two popular White House aides who were found dead this morning in Wheaton Regional Park near Silver Spring. Both men appear to have been mauled to death by animals, though their exact causes of death will not be known until autopsies are completed, which is expected to take a few days.

(MORE)

NEWS READER (CONT'D)

Authorities are concerned that there may be a pack of wild dogs, or possibly even wolves, in the heavily-wooded area, which is near to residential areas. Police do not know why the West Wing co-workers, neither of whom live in the area, would have been in the regional park at night.

Karl's cell phone rings and KARL COVET answers it to find THE PRESIDENT on the other end of the line.

THE PRESIDENT

My God, Karl, this is awful. I just heard about this.

KARL COVET

Yes, Mr. President, it is. Thank you so much for calling. I just heard about it myself and feel in shock.

THE PRESIDENT

Karl, I know this isn't the best time to ask, but were they gay? Because if so, I did not know that...

KARL COVET

No, no, no, Mr. President. They weren't gay. Neither one was married, but you know young guys with crazy work schedules and no time for social lives.

THE PRESIDENT

But what were they doing in Wheaton Regional Park?

KARL COVET

I have no idea, sir, though you raise an interesting point.

THE PRESIDENT

I have security people telling me that there are parts of that park that are popular meeting spots for gays.

KARL COVET

Seriously, Mr. President, I have no idea about anything like that, though we do a thorough background check of all of our staff members.

THE PRESIDENT

Just to be on the safe side, I think you better be coming up with some action plans for what happens if this thing goes viral, like it could. About the last thing this administration needs right now is some kind of a sex-oriented scandal. Not this close to fifty percent, we don't. I'm no comeback kid like Bill Clinton. I'll get screwed to the wall like a donkey tail just for having gays in my inner circle.

KARL COVET

I really don't think there is an issue with that, Mr. President, but I'll look into it just in case.

THE PRESIDENT

Please do, and thank you. And please do send my condolences to the parents of those young men. Just make damned sure it's a masculine gesture. Don't let on that we know about the gay thing.

46 INT. WEST WING MEETING ROOM - DAY

46

KARL COVET convenes a staff meeting.

KARL COVET

Well, I guess it goes without saying that our team has suffered its share of shocks and set-backs these past months, even while making some forward progress on behalf of the President. First Riley Donaldson, and now this. I, like the rest of you, feel shocked by this loss. That said, we have some real challenges ahead of us that must be faced without delay.

(looks around the room)

Now this is going to be hard to talk about, but we are going to need some ideas about how to minimize the damage when the gay rumors start to hit the media.

(MORE)

KARL COVET (CONT'D)

This administration is on shaky ground now with conservative elements within our party, and we've done a lot to roll back state initiatives on same-sex marriage. We do not want to be seen as harboring gay lifestyles in our inner circle.

KAT

Excuse me, Karl, but what are you talking about? Those guys were not gay. I did a three-way with them to celebrate the election and I can tell you that neither one of them was gay. They accidentally touched and the whole thing fell apart.

WHITAKER

So was it consummated?

KAT

None of your business. Sorry I brought it up, except to say that those guys were breeders.

JOHNSON

So what were they doing out in a regional park miles from nowhere - apologies to Spring Lake - in the middle of the night?

BENNETT

(summary thinking aloud)

They weren't gay, and they weren't campers.

EDELSTEIN

Maybe they were murdered and dumped there.

Everyone in the room turns and looks at the new guy, EDELSTEIN, each with an expression of shock and horror.

KARL COVET

(after a long silence)

Okay, we maybe should also plan for the possibility a White House murder investigation, just in case.

47 INT. RILEY'S ROOM - DAY

47

KARL COVET positions himself next to RILEY DONALDSON, who lies in a coma on the bed. Standing by is DR. EHRLICHMAN, looking wan.

KARL COVET
How is he doing, doc?

DR. EHRLICHMAN
(subdued, angry)
There has been no change. It has been helpful to have the nursing assistance you provided. But I did want to ask, is he going to kill me, too? I mean when this is over?

KARL COVET
What do you mean?

DR. EHRLICHMAN
Like those young White House aides?

KARL COVET
I have no idea what you are talking about.

DR. EHRLICHMAN
Pardon me, Mr. Covet, but you and I both know that is bullshit. Those young men were here the night they died, I saw them. Now does that make me next, when this whole thing falls apart?

KARL COVET
For a man of medicine you sound like a pathetic little girl.

DR. EHRLICHMAN
Well for a man who stands near the controls of this nation, you sound like a psychopath, and I want to know what you intend to do with me, in the end.

KARL COVET
Why do you keep saying that, like something is going to happen...

DR. EHRLICHMAN

Because it is! If we continue to pump this young man full of these chemicals his brain is going to explode! Are you okay with that? Because I think you are.

KARL COVET

And what if I am? Don't you think the forward progress - the very survival of this nation - is worth the sacrifice of a Riley Donaldson?

RILEY

It's not.

DR. EHRLICHMAN and KARL COVET both look at Riley Donaldson.

DR. EHRLICHMAN

Riley, did you say something?

KARL COVET moves in close.

RILEY

(whispers just loud enough to hear)
Dead. All of us.

48 INT. D.C. HOMICIDE - DAY

48

KARL COVET is shown into a room where two detectives await his arrival. DETECTIVE GAINES and DETECTIVE KISHYNSKI.

DETECTIVE GAINES

Mr. Covet, thank you for coming in. Please, have a seat.

KARL COVET

As I told you on the phone, I really don't have anything more that I can tell you, but I'm happy to help as I can.

DETECTIVE GAINES

What can you tell us about the two staffers who were found in Wheaton Regional Park?

KARL COVET

They were bright young men, dedicated to their jobs at the White House.

DETECTIVE KISHYNSKI

Why would they have been in Wheaton Park, any ideas?

KARL COVET

None whatsoever. I have never personally been to that facility.

DETECTIVE KISHYNSKI

It's a place where certain segments of the homosexual community meet. Any idea about the two deceased?

KARL COVET

You mean were Pratt and Jonesy gay? Not that I was ever aware, but I don't pry into my employees' personal lives.

DETECTIVE GAINES

Even during the hire process?

KARL COVET

Both of those guys joined the campaign to support the President, and both had excellent work backgrounds. Jonesy was the wordsmith of our group, and Pratt the networker.

DETECTIVE KISHYNSKI

What do you mean networker?

KARL COVET

He was good at coordinating efforts with Senate and House staffers, getting people organized around ideas and talking points. He knew everybody.

DETECTIVE GAINES

Someone said he was a smart ass. Did he ever piss anybody off?

KARL COVET

Pratt? Probably. He pissed me off all the time...

DETECTIVE KISHYNSKI

Like about what?

KARL COVET

Just being Pratt.

DETECTIVE KISHYNSKI

Did he ever piss anybody off enough that they would want to kill him? Or how about you? Did you ever want to kill him?

KARL COVET

No, of course not! Am I under some kind of suspicion here?

DETECTIVE GAINES

No, it's just that there seems to be a lot of mystery spinning around your staff. And you being their boss and all...

KARL COVET

What do you mean?

DETECTIVE KISHYNSKI

About eight months ago you had another staff member go off the radar. Some guy named Riley Donaldson.

KARL COVET

Oh yes, he became very ill. The last I knew he was in a coma someplace in a long-term care facility. Great staffer, the poor devil.

DETECTIVE GAINES

You don't know where he was receiving his medical treatment?

KARL COVET

Yes, he was over at George Washington Medical Center.

DETECTIVE GAINES

He hasn't been there for some time.

KARL COVET

Well, he may have been moved then, it's just that George Washington was the last place I knew of him to be.

DETECTIVE KISHYNSKI

You ever hear of a Doctor Leonard Ehrlichman?

KARL COVET

No, should I?

DETECTIVE KISHYNSKI

He took over caring for Riley Donaldson.

KARL COVET

I didn't know...

DETECTIVE GAINES

Then why was your name in his visitor's log?

Karl Covet sits quietly for a moment, looking back and forth between the two detectives. Suddenly a thought seems to come over his face, like he remembers something.

KARL COVET

Oh, wait a minute. What am I thinking, I do remember that Riley Donaldson was moved someplace and I visited him there. I'd totally forgotten about that. I've just got so many things going on, it slipped my mind. Now I hope you don't infer something from that.

DETECTIVE GAINES

And about Dr. Ehrlichman?

KARL COVET

Was that his name? Riley's doctor?

DETECTIVE GAINES

Who is also missing.

Karl Covet sits quiet again, absorbing this information.

KARL COVET

What do you mean missing?

DETECTIVE KISHYNSKI

Gone, like Riley Donaldson himself.

KARL COVET

I'm not sure what you are saying. Are you telling me that Riley and his doctor have disappeared?

DETECTIVE GAINES

It doesn't stop there, either. Riley Donaldson's parents haven't been seen in weeks.

(MORE)

DETECTIVE GAINES (CONT'D)

None of their friends have heard from them, none of the merchants who are used to seeing them downtown.

KARL COVET

Incredible. Is there a possibility that something has happened to all of these people?

DETECTIVE GAINES

We are looking for answers, Mr. Covet, trying to find out.

KARL COVET

Horrible. Just horrible.

DETECTIVE GAINES

Mr. Covet, if you think of anything that might be of assistance to us as we investigate the deaths, and these missing persons, I want you to give us a call. Okay?

DETECTIVE KISHYNSKI

You plan on taking any trips out of the area?

KARL COVET

I travel frequently for fund raisers and meetings on behalf of the President.

DETECTIVE KISHYNSKI

We'd like for you to curtail that for awhile.

DETECTIVE GAINES

Until we sort some of this out. Can you do that?

KARL COVET

You are asking me to curtail my work for the President of the United States. Am I a suspect?

DETECTIVE GAINES

No, you are not, and we cannot compel you to comply with our request because you are not being charged with anything. You are not even a person of interest.

(MORE)

DETECTIVE GAINES (CONT'D)

But you would do yourself a world
of favors by keeping us posted on
your whereabouts.

49 EXT. WASHINGTON D.C. STREET - LATER 49

KARL COVET walks around the corner of the police building he has just come out of and falls back into a recessed area, out of sight, where he fights to collect himself and quell a panic attack.

50 INT RILEY'S ROOM - AFTERNOON 50

MR. DONALDSON and MRS. DONALDSON walk with difficulty into RILEY DONALDSON'S room. Their ankles are shackled with short plastic cuffs, and they are also shackled to each other. With them is the LARGE MALE NURSE who opens the door to the room to let them in.

MRS. DONALDSON

(leans in close to Riley
and speaks softly)

Riley. This is your mother, dear.
Your father and I are here with
you. I hope you can hear me.

MR. DONALDSON

I'm here, Riley. We're both here
with you.

MRS. DONALDSON

We want you to know how much we
love you and want for you to get
well. Dr. Ehrlichman is here with
us, and he is taking care of you. I
don't want you to worry about
anything, just get better.

MR. DONALDSON hands MRS. DONALDSON a Star Wars action figure, which she folds into Riley's hand.

MRS. DONALDSON (CONT'D)

Your father thought you might like
to have the company of an old
friend.

(looks at her husband)

Is that... Who is that?

MR. DONALDSON

It's Qui-Gon Jinn, Riley. I know
you always liked him.

MRS. DONALDSON

You are back in your old room, Riley. Do you know that? It is like it was when you were growing up and here with us all the time. I can remember back to the way you used to sleep in on Sunday mornings, sometimes past noon.

MR. DONALDSON

You didn't want to go to church.

MRS. DONALDSON

That's what your father always said. You didn't have any trouble getting up on Saturday.

MRS. DONALDSON runs her hand along the bed Riley lies in, pausing for a moment with her thoughts.

MRS. DONALDSON (CONT'D)

This is your bed, Riley. The one you grew up in.

RILEY suddenly begins to convulse and hemorrhage, vomiting blood, which runs from his nose and ears. MRS. DONALDSON lets out a cry of horror.

MR. DONALDSON

Dr. Ehrlichman!

DR. EHRLICHMAN, also shackled with plastic bands at the ankles, enters the room at the sound of the commotion. He sees that Riley is in an emergency condition. He turns to the LARGE MALE NURSE.

DR. EHRLICHMAN

Call 9-11! We need an ambulance!

LARGE MALE NURSE

I'll call Karl.

DR. EHRLICHMAN

Call 9-11 for Christ sakes! We cannot help him here!

AS RILEY goes into severe hemorrhaging DR. EHRLICHMAN checks his vital signs.

DR. EHRLICHMAN (CONT'D)

We need labetolol!

DR. EHRLICHMAN looks to see the LARGE MALE NURSE leaving the room and crossing over to a makeshift nurses station that has been established in an adjoining room. He is talking on a cell phone.

Seeing the cell phone, DR. EHRLICHMAN attempts to cross the room but shackled at the ankles he creeps like a zombie up behind the LARGE MALE NURSE, who doesn't see him coming.

LARGE MALE NURSE
(talking on the telephone)
He is hemorrhaging and needs to be
in an ICU. He needs imaging and a
neurosurgeon fast.

DR. EHRLICHMAN grabs at the phone.

DR. EHRLICHMAN
We need help!

The LARGE MALE NURSE pushes DR. EHRLICHMAN away and there is a struggle. The elderly doctor trips with his shackled ankles. As DR. EHRLICHMAN falls his head strikes the side of a table and he is instantly killed.

MR. DONALDSON, dragging MRS. DONALDSON behind, attacks the LARGE MALE NURSE, knocking him to the floor with an object he picks up from the desk.

Just as the LARGE MALE NURSE falls, THE SUPERVISOR arrives to investigate the racket and he slips a garrotte around MR. DONALDSON's neck until he, too, lies limp on the floor. MRS. DONALDSON, fighting ineffectively to help her husband, is left alone with THE SUPERVISOR as the LARGE MALE NURSE begins to return to consciousness.

51 INT. RILEY'S ROOM - NIGHT

51

KARL COVET stares in disbelief at the scene. RILEY DONALDSON lies dead in his bed, the sheets covered with blood. DR. EHRLICHMAN is dead on the floor, a nasty gash on the side of his head And MR. DONALDSON lies on the floor, dead of a heart attack, while an in-shock MRS. DONALDSON sits next to him, staring traumatized upon the scene, covered in the blood of her dead son.

KARL COVET
(hands on his head as if
to keep his brain from
exploding)
What have you done here?

LARGE MALE NURSE

The patient began to hemorrhage and Dr. Ehrlichman wanted to call for an ambulance, and I remembered your instructions, but he came at me. I didn't mean to hurt him. He fell and hit his head.

(looks at the THE SUPERVISOR)

I don't know what happened after that. I woke up and the old fella there was down, and the old woman looked like that.

KARL COVET looks at the THE SUPERVISOR.

THE SUPERVISOR

I heard sounds and came down to find Nurse Nancy there on the floor and the old fella here holding something in his hand. I just meant to shut him down, you know? I don't think I broke his neck.

LARGE MALE NURSE

He probably had a heart attack.

KARL COVET

Imbeciles. Do you know what you have done? Nothing was wrong! We were taking care of a guy - a family - who needed help!

(runs the possibilities over quickly in his mind)

I am not taking the fall on this. None of this is my doing!

THE SUPERVISOR

(nods toward Mrs. Donaldson)

What about her? She saw everything, knows everything.

THE SUPERVISOR takes KARL COVET aside for a private whisper session, their backs turned to MRS. DONALDSON. Karl Covet seems to react to something he is told. He looks up at the big man next to him, and then lowers his gaze and for a moment seems to fall into thought.

Karl Covet turns to MRS. DONALDSON and looks at her piteously.

KARL COVET

Oh, Mrs. Donaldson, for Christ's sake. I am so sorry.

THE SUPERVISOR pulls his garrotte back out of his coat and starts toward MRS. DONALDSON. In the background Karl Covet is seen gesturing his disbelief at what is happening.

MRS. DONALDSON's legs can be seen kicking, and then the movement stops.

THE SUPERVISOR pulls his cell phone out of his pocket.

THE SUPERVISOR

(into the phone)

We are going to need some cleaners over here.

52 INT. KARL COVET'S OFFICE - NIGHT

52

KARL COVET watches the nightly newscast.

NEWS READER

The *New York Times* broke the story today that investigators from the Washington D.C. Homicide Division have been questioning West Wing White House staff regarding the recent discovery of two staffers found mauled to death in Wheaton Regional Park.

53 I/E. DONALDSON RESIDENCE - DAY

53

Washington D.C. Police SWAT Team members break open the front door of the Donaldson residence. They enter the home to find it completely empty of carpet and furnishings, just a shell of a house.

54 INT. OVAL OFFICE - NIGHT

54

THE PRESIDENT moves around the Oval Office, talking with KARL COVET who sits on a couch.

THE PRESIDENT

Karl, what is happening in your office?

KARL COVET

(shakes his head)

It is as if we have been hit by a typhoon of bad news, none of which is anybody's doing.

THE PRESIDENT

Do you know that the D.C. Police served a warrant on the Donaldson family home this morning?

KARL COVET

No - what is that about?

THE PRESIDENT

I don't know, I was hoping that you might have learned something from the Police. You've been talking to them, right?

KARL COVET

I have talked with homicide detectives on two occasions, though I am not clear why homicide investigators would be looking into this. Pratt and Jonesy were killed by animals.

THE PRESIDENT

My understanding is that they got a warrant to search the Donaldson residence, broke their way in, and found the whole place empty. Of everything.

KARL COVET

Really?

THE PRESIDENT

You don't know anything about this?

KARL COVET

No! Why would I know anything?

THE PRESIDENT

I was under the impression that you had been in touch with the Donaldsons, and with Riley Donaldson.

KARL COVET

I visited them once in their home just to offer my support.

(MORE)

KARL COVET (CONT'D)

That's the last I've been in touch with any of the Donaldsons.

THE PRESIDENT

They lived out around Cloverly?
That's the residence you visited?

KARL COVET

Yes, that's right.

THE PRESIDENT

What about Riley Donaldson? He was going to be transferred to another facility, but the University of Maryland Medical Center has no information about where he is at.

KARL COVET

Wow, that's weird. We may be able to use that somehow. Something there about patient information, medical records. We are always behind the curve on the technology issues, maybe we could leverage this.

THE PRESIDENT looks at Karl Covet, walks and thinks.

THE PRESIDENT

Karl, I am hearing some odd stories.

KARL COVET

Welcome to my world.

THE PRESIDENT

I heard a rumor attributed to someone on your staff that Riley Donaldson was behind all of these ideas and leads, that seem to come out of the blue, and that have helped turn our polls around.

KARL COVET

Oh brother. That all comes from a joke that was going around the office because Riley supposedly said something once. Somebody thought it would be funny were he the source of our strategic thinking. You know, being in a coma.

THE PRESIDENT

Has it?

KARL COVET

(looking shocked)

Seriously?

THE PRESIDENT

The rumor is that whatever the doctors gave him had side effects. He is said to know things and to sometimes speak insights.

KARL COVET

It's a joke, Mr. President! We have toasted to it - Riley Donaldson, Oracle - but it's a joke!

THE PRESIDENT

Someone showed me a graph that charted this administration's approval ratings from the point of Riley Donaldson's falling ill.

KARL COVET

(aghast)

What?

THE PRESIDENT

It shows a correlation, with significant gains in polling since Donaldson went under treatment.

KARL COVET

And you believe this?

THE PRESIDENT

I'm just asking, Karl. What type of treatment was Donaldson receiving?

KARL COVET

I'm sorry, Mr. President, that is outside of my purview. I don't know anything about his medical care.

THE PRESIDENT

So there is nothing to these rumors?

KARL COVET

(shakes his head)

I've heard these stories, and you know who from? Jonesy and Pratt!

(MORE)

KARL COVET (CONT'D)

They weren't serious, Mr. President. Riley Donaldson was no chemically-induced *oracle*.

THE PRESIDENT

Why was?

KARL COVET

I mean *is*, wherever he is. He's not an oracle.

THE PRESIDENT

Well I wish to God we would find him, because we could use some help.

55 INT. KARL COVET'S OFFICE - NIGHT

55

Karl Covet watches a news broadcast on one of the bank of screens in his office.

BRIAN WILLIAMS

The President's approval rating took a big hit this week, apparently impacted by two major developments. One is the investigation into the deaths of two West Wing staffers, plus the whereabouts of another missing staffer and his family. The other was a stinging defeat in the House today on a bill backed strongly by the White House that would have laid the groundwork for massive revisions in Social Security and Medicare payment eligibility. Let's start with the investigations into the West Wing staff story, and for that let us go to Matt Allenby, our Washington Bureau Chief. Matt, what have you learned?

MATT ALLENBY

It was a double-whammy for the White House today, with the Washington D.C. Coroner's office announcing the results of the autopsies on the two West Wing staffers found dead in Wheaton Regional Park last Saturday.

(MORE)

MATT ALLENBY (CONT'D)

According to the Coroner's report, both men died from massive wounds suffered in particularly vicious animal attacks. We stipulate "attacks" because the Report found evidence of more than one animal, possibly as many as half-a-dozen. There was some question as to whether the staffers died in the park and if their bodies were later ravaged by animals. This has been ruled out. It appears that the two were attacked and killed by canines. This raises the disconcerting possibility that there is a pack of wild dogs, or possibly coyotes or even wolves, running loose in the Wheaton area. Residents have been warned to avoid walking at night, and particularly in Wheaton Regional Park, until this situation can be further clarified and, if there is a pack of killer animals in the Wheaton area for them to be found and brought under control.

BRIAN WILLIAMS

This story is having a decisively negative effect on the President's approval ratings. Can you tell us more about that?

MATT ALLENBY

It is cumulative, Brian, the result of a string of strange stories that has shaken the public confidence in the White House. This comes after months of improving polls, which have taken the President from being viewed as a vulnerable one-term leader to having a good shot at a second term. Now this story has the public wondering what is going on in the West Wing? The animal mauling intrigue takes place against the backdrop of another investigation into missing West Wing staffer Riley Donaldson, and the whereabouts of his family.

BRIAN WILLIAMS

Strange, strange story, but that is far from all there is to report tonight. The vote in the House today on the entitlements package, what can you tell us about what went wrong for the administration, and the President who personally lobbied and made phone calls to win support for this package?

MATT ALLENBY

About everything imaginable, Brian. The administration-backed legislation that would have set the stage for raising Social Security and Medicare payment eligibility, possibly to as high as 70 years of age, went down in flames. Democratic leadership successfully leveraged last minute doubts on the part of House Republicans about the language in this legislation. Part of what makes this so interesting is that it had been the responsibility of the two staffers found dead in Wheaton Regional Park on Saturday to organize last minute talking points and messaging around this legislation, and to coordinate the staffs of key House members. Sources are telling me that there was just too much about this legislation - which backers have been counting votes on for months - that at the last minute just didn't add up. Sources are further telling me that the legislation will be resurrected in another form, that this is a primary legislative initiative for the Republican Party leadership in this Congress.

56

INT. VICE PRESIDENT'S RESIDENCE - NIGHT

56

KARL COVET is shown in to the study of the Vice President of the United States, DICK WESTERMAN. Westerman shakes Covet's hand and motions for him to have a seat.

WESTERMAN

Hello Karl, thank you for coming over.

KARL COVET

Thank you, Mr. Vice President. I appreciate you seeing me.

WESTERMAN

So, pretty crappy day, huh?

KARL COVET

That would be putting a blush on it.

WESTERMAN

(pauses to collect his thoughts)

You know, Karl. You did a lot of ingenuous things to put this administration into office. We replaced a "successful" Democratic administration with a presidential candidate who people once thought of as a joke, and me, the Vice President no one likes.

KARL COVET

Your numbers have been better of late.

WESTERMAN

Don't bullshit me, Karl. I poll lower than Dennis Kucinich, whose been unemployed since 2012. I'm not the point anyway, the point is the agenda, which we have been struggling with.

(looks at Karl directly)

For awhile there we were doing better, coming up with creative ideas. But of late we've returned to form - the one we showed in our first two years in office, which was not good. So why do we get these performance inconsistencies from your office?

KARL COVET

(taken back by the question)

Well part of it is that I have lost a quarter of my team in the last nine months. Not having Jonesy and Pratt for the entitlements vote was devastating. We do not have anyone who can immediately step into those shoes.

WESTERMAN

And what about this Donaldson kid?

KARL COVET

There again, tragic. You ask why we've been a little inconsistent in our progress on the agenda, and of late it's been stuff like this - people lapsing into comas, getting killed by dogs.

WESTERMAN

Colorful history aside, we need for you to get your office together. If we need to get additional resources, we will make that happen, but we have got to turn this performance issue around, and I mean right now. I never thought it was a good idea to mix campaign management with White House strategy, and your failures are proving me right.

KARL COVET

(insulted)

Mr. Vice President, we have known each other for a long time. Until you became Vice President, it was Karl and Dick. Remember?

WESTERMAN

You've been a good soldier, Karl, and done a lot of good work. But you and I are just cogs in something bigger. This recent debacle in the House shows that every cog has a necessary purpose, or it wouldn't be in place. But none of us are bigger than the agenda, Karl. None of us. And not personal relationships, either. They don't mean a thing against saving the world from democracy.

58

I/E. KARL'S DRIVE HOME - LATER

58

KARL COVET drives away from Vice President Westerman's residence and notices that he is being tailed by two men in a dark Ford Crown Victoria. It is the detectives, GAINES and KISHYNSKI. Following the meeting with WESTERMAN, Karl Covet is nervous, panicky. As he pulls into his drive, the Crown Victoria comes to a stop at the curb in front of his house.

The tinted window on the passenger side goes down to reveal the two detectives.

DETECTIVE GAINES

Hello Karl.

KARL COVET

Can I help you with something?

DETECTIVE KISHYNSKI

We just happened to be driving by the Vice President's house and noticed you driving away. Everything okay?

KARL COVET

That's an odd question.

DETECTIVE KISHYNSKI

Not so much under the circumstances.

KARL COVET

What do you mean by that?

DETECTIVE KISHYNSKI

Oh, nothing. You have a good night's sleep, you hear?

The detectives speed away.

59 INT. KARL COVET'S OFFICE - DAY

59

KARL COVET walks into the meeting area outside of his West Wing office, where his secretary sits.

SECRETARY SUE

Good morning.

KARL COVET

Hi Sue. How are you?

SECRETARY SUE

Fine, thanks. There is staff in your office.

KARL COVET opens a double-door to his office suite to find KAT, WHITAKER and BENNETT sitting in chairs at his desk, waiting for him.

KARL COVET

(suspicious)

What's going on?

KAT

Sorry to let ourselves in this way,
Karl. We wanted to catch you before
you got swept away by the day.

KARL COVET

I hope to god you've come with some
good ideas for keeping the wolves
fed.

The staffers glance nervously at one another.

WHITAKER

That's not really what we have,
Karl.

KARL COVET

(more suspicious)
What is it?

WHITAKER nods over at three documents laid out side-by-side
on Karl's desk. Karl Covet picks them up and briefly scans
each

KARL COVET (CONT'D)

You are quitting?

KAT

We wanted to talk to you
personally, rather than just drop
these letters on you.

KARL COVET

What is this about?

BENNETT

We all have other offers, Karl, and
it seems like the right time to
strike while the iron's hot.

KARL COVET

You have made a commitment to this
President.

WHITAKER

There is just a lot of heat here,
Karl. Our best play is to get out
while we have standing in the
industry.

KARL COVET

Are you fucking kidding me?
Standing in the industry gets you a
job at the White House!

WHITAKER

Which gets you a better paying job
at Sidley Austin.

KARL COVET

Is that where you are going?

WHITAKER nods yes.

KARL COVET (CONT'D)

And how about you two?

KAT

Mentzer.

BENNETT

Heritage Foundation.

KARL COVET

You fucking traitor sons-a-bitches!
Get the fuck out of my office!

KAT, BENNETT and WHITAKER hurry out of the room. KARL COVET covers his head with his hands and tries to control his panic and rage.

60

EXT. KARL COVER'S RESIDENCE - NIGHT

60

KARL COVET charges from his home in pajamas and a bath robe. He goes to a car parked at the curb, opens the door, steps inside, and closes the door shut. Behind the wheel is THE SUPERVISOR. In the backseat sit two men like dark, faceless forms. Karl Covet looks back at them in horror and then at THE SUPERVISOR.

KARL COVET

What are you doing here? You never
come here! You need to move this
car, the cops are watching the
house.

THE SUPERVISOR

Relax, they aren't watching at the
moment.

KARL COVET

What do you want?

THE SUPERVISOR

I want to complete the deal.

KARL COVET

What do you mean?

THE SUPERVISOR

We committed considerable resources to your operation, which have not been adequately compensated to date.

KARL COVET

I'm working that out, I told you that.

THE SUPERVISOR

Well, let me make it easier for you.

THE SUPERVISOR hands KARL COVET a piece of paper.

KARL COVET

What's this?

THE SUPERVISOR

It's an invoice for services.

KARL COVET pulls out his cell phone and uses its screen to light the paper for reading.

KARL COVET

Fifty million...
(in disbelief)
This isn't our deal! This is some kind of extortion!

THE SUPERVISOR

What do you want us to do with the bodies, Karl? We could just leave them for you here on the front lawn.

KARL COVET

Our deal was not for fifty million dollars!

THE SUPERVISOR

Nor was it for five dead bodies, but that's what we got.

KARL COVET

Five?
(counting dead people in his mind)
Oh no. No, no, no, no, no! The nurse?

THE SUPERVISOR

You have created a mess here, my friend. Now cleaning that up is a lot different deal than providing nursing care to a vegetable.

KARL COVET

Where do you think I'm going to get fifty million dollars? Without attracting suspicion?

THE SUPERVISOR

(to a guy in the back)
Show him the list.

One of the dark figures in the back seat hands Karl Covet another piece of paper.

KARL COVET

What is this?

THE SUPERVISOR

It's the list of the fifteen top political consulting firms in Washington D.C., who were paid around a quarter billion dollars for services rendered in the last election cycle. You got a lot of friends, Mr. Covet. A lot of friends with money.

KARL COVET

I don't have any friends! What are you talking about? Why do you fucking think I'm in politics!

THE SUPERVISOR

Make some calls, Mr. Covet. I figure you got about ten days.

KARL COVET

Ten days until what?

One of the dark figures in the back seat suddenly loops a garrotte around Karl's neck and pulls it tight, shutting off his ability to breathe.

THE SUPERVISOR

Ten days to live, Karl. When you are getting rid of a pile of bodies you are better off to do it all at once. There is a lot of coordinating involved.

The dark figure releases the pressure on the garrotte and KARL COVET gasps for air. THE SUPERVISOR reaches across him and releases the door handle, then kicks Karl out the door. Still struggling to breath, Karl Covet rolls out onto the lawn near the curb as the door closes and the car speeds away down the street.

61 INT. KARL COVET'S OFFICE - LATER

61

KARL COVET goes back into his home and to his private study, where he sits to think about his situation. It is the dead of night, and his wife sleeps upstairs unaware of his travail. He examines the humidor on his desk, with the plaque with the inscription from the President calling him "a great public servant". He lets his eyes wander around the room, at the campaign memorabilia, the framed recognitions, and his college diploma. In the library case is book-after-book of campaign histories, biographies of political leaders, and books on winning friends and influencing people. There are framed photographs with him shaking hands with immediately recognizable political figures: George W. Bush, George H.W. Bush, Dick Cheney, Condoleeza Rice, Donald Rumsfeld, and others. He picks up a desk photo of his wife, a plain woman of no distinction beyond a happy smile. Karl smiles wistfully back at her. He unlocks a drawer in his desk and opens it up. There is a pistol, but as he opens it further there are also a number of amber-colored vials, the remaining store of the chemicals Dr. Ehrlichman had been administering to Riley Donaldson. Karl reaches first for the gun, but then instead picks up one of the vials. He reads the label, marked as had been the one he had seen at the Donaldson residence, then looks around again at the volumes of political knowledge and history gathered around him. Karl produces a hypodermic needle from the same drawer and draws an amount of the chemical into the syringe. Then he rolls up his shirt sleeve, ties off a vein, and administers an injection of the chemicals that had been given to RILEY DONALDSON.

62 INT. OVAL OFFICE - DAY

62

THE PRESIDENT meets with KARL COVET.

THE PRESIDENT

I like it Karl. It may just be a master stroke. It gives us an opportunity to bring fresh, professional faces to the West Wing right when we are needing them most.

KARL COVET

We've got guys from American Rambler and Bully Pulpit, and I think we've even picked off one from Mentzer. This puts our media operation back in full force and begins to replace the coordination we lost with Pratt.

THE PRESIDENT

The money is most impressive, Karl. If we can be assured of these kinds of fundraising successes, it means I can spend a lot more time talking to voters and less to fat cats with lobbying interests.

KARL COVET

This buys us some tailwind, Mr. President, and gives us a knowledge base greater than we have had before.

63

I/E. CAMPAIGN MONTAGE - DAY/NIGHT

63

Montage of shots that show the President on the campaign trail intermixed with snippet scenes of a harried Karl Covet shooting up. We see the political map, with swing states gradually re-shading from Blue to Red as the President is seen at campaign events and on stage at debates. Newspapers and television shots show that his polls get better and better as The President becomes more animated and begins to connect better with voters.

SENIOR CITIZEN ONE

I like what he's done in the first term. Not so much for the big corporations, you know, or the fat cats. I feel like he thinks about the rest of us.

SENIOR CITIZEN TWO

I been voting for fifty years. This will be the first time I ever voted for a Republican. I didn't vote for him last time, but I feel like a change has come over him. He's doing things that benefit all the people.

KARL COVET walks down East Monroe Street, where he grew up, an area of scattered housing, cobbled together by working class people long ago. It is marginally developed, with wood-sided single story ranch style homes and randomly styled red-brick edifices. The residents are mostly Blacks, who tend small yards bordered with a mix of short chain-link and wood fences. Weeds grow from the cracks in the street and sidewalk, but the neighborhood is otherwise neat. There are trees but no canopy. On small covered porches, some residents sit on cheap lawn furniture taking in the day, nursing drinks, some smoking.

KARL COVET walks to the fence along the sidewalk in front of a small wood-framed structure, which is in need of repair. As he stares at the home, an African-American lady, MRS. HIGHSMITH, two doors down hollers out to him from her porch.

MRS. HIGHSMITH

You got some business with those people?

KARL COVET

Oh, no. I was just looking.

MRS. HIGHSMITH

Well the Makings live there, and I don't know that they would like a stranger watching their place. You maybe should move along before there's a misunderstanding.

KARL COVET

Mrs. Highsmith, is that you?

MRS. HIGHSMITH

Whose asking?

KARL COVET

It's Karl, Karl Covet. You probably don't remember me, but I grew up in this house.

MRS. HIGHSMITH

No, is that who you are? You Karen and Otto's son?

KARL COVET

Yes I am, Ma'am. And I know just who you are. You used to watch over me when I was just...

(indicates with his hand)

This tall, maybe.

MRS. HIGHSMITH

Yes I did, sir. Indeed I did.

KARL COVET

And you are still here!

MRS. HIGHSMITH

This is my home, honey. I am not leaving my home, no matter what anybody does.

KARL COVET

Is Mr. Highsmith still...

MRS. HIGHSMITH

Oh no, he passed a long time back, around the same time your Dad left us.

KARL COVET

Is that right. Gosh, I'm so sorry, I... I remember that now. He had a stroke, as I remember.

MRS. HIGHSMITH

Oh yes, a major stroke. It was the Lord's blessing that it took him then, because he was hurt real bad.

KARL COVET

My Dad passed of a heart attack, you know.

MRS. HIGHSMITH

Oh, I remember. I stayed with your Mother through that...

KARL COVET

I remember that you did. She just appreciated so much that you did that. You were always so good to our family.

MRS. HIGHSMITH

Well, it's nothin' to be good to good people. So you have been gone from here a long time. Did I hear you got yourself some government work?

KARL COVET

Well, yes, sort of. Are you still a nurse?

MRS. HIGHSMITH

Not for a long time. My hips just got to bothering me so bad, I had to quit.

KARL COVET

Thank God for insurance, huh?

MRS. HIGHSMITH

What world you been living in? I worked all those years over there at the medical center, and you think I ever got no health insurance? And it's a hospital!

KARL COVET

Seriously? As a full-time worker?

MRS. HIGHSMITH

I never got no full time. I never got the shifts past part time, so never got no benefits. It ain't right. You tell those government people that it ain't right, you hear?

KARL COVET

I agree, it's not right Mrs. Highsmith.

MRS. HIGHSMITH

So where is Karen at? Your mother, where she at?

KARL COVET

She passed away a few years back. I'm so sorry you didn't know.

MRS. HIGHSMITH

Oh, dear. Not many of us left from the old neighborhood.

KARL COVET

No, I'm sure that's true.

MRS. HIGHSMITH

Was she with you when she passed? Because all I got left of family is my son George, and I want him to be around when I go.

KARL COVET

No, I had Mom over in Memphis at a care facility. She was there for the last three years.

MRS. HIGHSMITH

Oh, my. Well I'm so sorry to hear about that. She was a real nice lady. You come from a nice family.

KARL COVET

Thank you, Mrs. Highsmith.

MRS. HIGHSMITH

You were a pleasure to take care of as a child. You had more hair then.

KARL COVET

Well, a long time ago. A long time ago.

Karl lapses back into memory looking at his childhood home.

MRS. HIGHSMITH

I got to go back in now, but it's been good talking to you. A lot of memories.

KARL COVET

Good talking with you, too, Mrs. Highsmith.

MRS. HIGHSMITH

Remember that insurance, now. You tell those government people.

KARL COVET

I will for sure, Mrs. Highsmith.

65 INT. MEET THE PRESS SET - DAY

65

DAVID GREGORY talks to a panel of politicians late in the campaign season.

DAVID GREGORY

Who would have thought, back at the mid-term elections when the Republicans lost House and Senate seats, that we would now be looking at an administration that seems like a shoe-in for a second term. How do you explain that?

HOWARD FINEMAN

I think you have to look at the team that Karl Covet has put together...

GEORGE WILL

Or at Karl Covet himself.

HOWARD FINEMAN

Well that's right. Lest we forget that barely three months ago we were all focused on investigations, missing staff members. Covet himself has been under investigation, but somehow through it all he has engineered what I think are some of the most daring campaign innovations of any of our lifetimes.

GEORGE WILL

Agreed. Who would have thought that the Republican party would be able to make a play on California. This is the biggest egg in the basket, the state with the most electoral votes, and one that has consistently gone Democrat at the national level. A Republican tide in California completely resets the playing field, and credit Karl Covet with somehow seeing what others haven't, which is the nexus between the telecommunications and technology centers, the defense industry, the service economy, and the entertainment industry.

DAVID GREGORY

What do you mean by that, George?

GEORGE WILL

These are industries dominated by radically different personality types. That traditionally has meant that Republicans were going to literally be able to bank on some, and Democrats others. Karl Covet has located the commonalities, the things the dominant companies in each sector, all wanted.

DAVID GREGORY

Intellectual property rights.

GEORGE WILL

Exactly! He fought the behind the scenes war for funding and negotiated agreements rather than running a traditional campaign. He, in essence, took us, the journalists who make our livings covering traditional campaigns, out of the opinion-leader process.

PEGGY NOONAN

And see, that has all been through those daily broadcasts from the President's campaign channel, another innovation that couldn't exist without clever use of the Internet.

HOWARD FINEMAN

Absolutely. He got us all covering his campaign innovations, and especially those daily check-ins with the candidate, who happened to be the President of the United States.

PEGGY NOONAN

Yes, and we got to know the President personally, and people found out they sort of liked him. Not profoundly...

HOWARD FINEMAN

It isn't love.

PEGGY NOONAN

Not by a long-shot. But this is a President who had a twenty-eight percent approval rating at one point. And I think he is going to win re-election, and it is because of Karl Covet and some really out-of-the-box thinking.

KARL COVET is alone in a small cabin aboard an airplane that is in flight. Before him are newspapers with headlines touting the day's positive polling results, and reports from campaign staffers. Karl does not look well. He has a laptop computer open before him and he begins to type:

KARL COVET

(voice over text)

Dear Wife - I don't really know what possesses me to write this, but for whatever reasons there are things I want you to know. I expect that we will win this campaign for the President's re-election. There is an electricity in the air unlike any I have ever known to exist around this candidate. People are crediting me, and while I don't know if that is right - we have hired a lot of good people for this effort - it feels pretty good to be appreciated. It is, I guess, what is must feel like to be liked, though of course that has always been your job alone. You have always been the one there. I guess that's what I'm thinking tonight, as we cut through the dark skies on our way home. I love you butter-cakes, and I just wanted you to know. I'm on my way home. - Karl

KARL COVET reads back what he has written, starts to hit the Send button, but stops, instead Saving As Draft. He closes his eyes and thinks for a moment, and then rolls up a shirt sleeve to reveal an ugly bruised inner arm. He produces a needle and injects himself just as THE PRESIDENT opens the cabin door and looks inside. THE PRESIDENT stares in disbelief, and then without saying anything slowly backs out of the room and closes the door.

67 I/E. NEWS BROADCAST - LATER

67

A montage of network news reports shares the screen, with the voices of anchors overlapping and fading out as a new one breaks in.

NEWS READERS

A shocking tragedy aboard Air Force One... White House strategist and campaign manager Karl Covet... Dead tonight at fifty-one... Apparently suffered a massive hemorrhage... President's physician was aboard Air Force One... Nothing could be done to save Covet, who died... The first known such event to occur aboard...

(MORE)

NEWS READERS (CONT'D)

Comes on election eve, just as it appears... President's team is anticipating victory...

68 INT. OVAL OFFICE - NIGHT

68

THE PRESIDENT sits at his desk in the Oval Office on the evening of his re-election. On a bank of television screens, he sees NBC news man DAVID GREGORY discussing the death today of Karl Covet.

DAVID GREGORY

Brian, it is not probably accurate to say that there will not soon be another quite like Karl Covet. For most of his long career as a campaign manager and political strategist, Karl Covet had often been reviled as a scorched earth type of consultant who was never happy to merely defeat an opponent, but wanted instead to destroy them politically, often even personally. His means and methods were often derided as hackneyed, more frontal assault than clever strategy, but he won. He got our current President elected, not once but now twice. But most astonishing were the changes that seemed to come over him in the last year or so of his life. During that time, he rewrote the book on political campaign strategy that most of us thought had already been written, but he made it better. He took the Web-based campaign model established by AKPD Message & Media and made it attractive for the Republican base, which was no small thing. These older, deep-pocketed party enthusiasts always tended to be beyond the reach of the technological tools of modern campaigning. Karl Covet used voice activation software in ways no one had ever thought about before. He delivered the Internet as an organizing and communications tool for his and the President's constituents.

(MORE)

DAVID GREGORY (CONT'D)

He seemed to see ways to do this that had not occurred to others before, but his biggest stroke of genius was his "You and Me" formula, in which every policy proposal provided something tangible for every impacted party. Unheard of in U.S. politics, or as far as I know, politics of anytime, anywhere. In the last year of his life, Covet seemed gifted with special sight. Is the world better, overall, for the successes of this highly partisan political figure? I believe most people would say yes.

Sitting along the outside wall of the room, inconspicuously, is VICE PRESIDENT WESTERMAN. He leans comfortably back and smokes a cigar.

WESTERMAN

That mother-fucker can drone on, can't he?

THE PRESIDENT

Karl was quite a guy, Dick. He has left us with some huge challenges.

WESTERMAN

Look, you got a second term. Anyway, this is not the night to get your nuts all tightened up about the next four years. It's a night to celebrate.

THE PRESIDENT

I suppose you're right. I just haven't really done any of this without Karl, you know?

WESTERMAN

(getting up to leave)

I know, you feel lost without your oracle. You'll be fine. You are surrounded by good people to help you every step of the way. Now you better clean up and get over to the ballroom and your victory party! As for me, I am repairing to my residence for the night.

WESTERMAN shakes THE PRESIDENT'S hand.

WESTERMAN (CONT'D)
Congratulations Mr. President.

THE PRESIDENT
Congratulations to you too, Mr.
Vice President.

WESTERMAN
Goodnight. Now go have some fun.

THE PRESIDENT
Yes sir.

WESTERMAN leaves the office, leaving THE PRESIDENT alone. He stares again at the bank of television screens, the volumes now all muted. Headings flash across the screen like a laundry list of problems: Israel Reacts to the U.S. Election. Al-Qaeda Issues A New Threat. Telecommunications Leaders Show Cracks in the President's Solidarity Strategy. Economy Expected to Slow, Remain Sluggish. European Union Closer to Collapse. Russians Plan Strategy to Collapse U.S. Oil Initiative. Real U.S. Unemployment May Be As High As Twenty Percent. Individual Savings Reach Lowest Point Ever. Unions Uneasy With Industry Pacts. Climate Change Past Recovery Point. Suicides Among U.S. Veterans At Record High. Rumors of a White House Abortion Scandal. Bodies Found in Landfill May Be Parents of Missing Staffer. The President Wins Re-Election with Over 320 Electoral Votes of the 270 Needed.

The voice of a secretary comes over the intercom.

SECRETARY
Mr. President. Security will be ready in six minutes to escort you to the ballroom for your victory speech. Congratulations, Mr. President.

THE PRESIDENT
Thank you Sue, I'll be ready.

THE PRESIDENT turns to look out of the Oval Office windows, staring for a moment, though there is not much to see. A darkened grounds without line of site to anything of interest, a green prison. THE PRESIDENT closes his eyes for a moment in meditation, or pain, then sits down behind his desk.

From a briefcase THE PRESIDENT produces a syringe of Riley Donaldson's serum. He rolls up his shirt sleeve, ties off a vein, and as the camera pulls away through an Oval Office window he administers the serum.

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FADE OUT: