

D.C.
"Pilot"

written by
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D.C.

Full Pilot -- 7/13/99

TEASER

FADE IN:

1 EXT. CAPITOL LAWN - DAY **1**

On a very long lens, we tilt down to find MASON SCOTT (22), running with a file. He's dwarfed by the buildings around him.

MASON (V.O., cont'd)
In Washington D.C., you are your job.
You are who you work for. That is
your identity.

Mason reaches the steps of the Capitol, which he takes two at a time.

MASON (V.O., cont'd)
(cont'd)
I work for William Abbott, the senior
senator from Virginia. I'm a
Legislative Correspondent, which means
I answer a lot of phone calls, write a
lot of letters, and when the situation
calls for it, run as fast as I can.

Reaching the top, he sprints to the left.

1B INT. SENATE HALL - DAY [VIDEO] **1B**

A live image from C-SPAN, showing a very wide shot of the entire floor. There's milling about, a lot of GUYS IN DARK SUITS. They're all just dots.

MASON (V.O., cont'd)
Okay, upper left corner. I'm coming
up right...There!

VIDEO FREEZES. We very slowly ZOOM IN on that spot, the pixels getting bigger, the picture less distinct.

MASON (V.O., cont'd)

I swear that's me. Now, in terms of access to power, being on the Senate floor isn't nearly as cool as getting to go to a committee meeting, or even a hearing.

(beat)

But hey, look at me. I'm in Congress.

1C EXT. WASHINGTON D.C. - DAY

1C

Over the opening six notes of the NATIONAL ANTHEM, a series of WHIP PANS:

THE CAPITOL

A MOTORCADE

A BACK-LIT FLAG

CUT TO:

2 EXT. BLACKTOP BASKETBALL COURT - MORNING

2

PETE KOMISKY (22) hangs in mid-air, extreme SLOW MOTION as he reaches for the rim. As he tips the ball in, we're suddenly at FULL SPEED.

We're HANDHELD in a pick-up basketball game, all elbows and pushing. There are three courts running, a mix of D.C. STAFFERS and black HIGH-SCHOOLERS.

On our court, the most important players are Pete and MASON SCOTT (22). They're best friends and roommates. At the moment, they're in the zone, passing and rebounding like pros. VARIOUS CUTS: Shots blocked, feints made, points dogged.

Off a basket, WHIP TO Pete. Victory, game over. Mason low-fives him. As he collects the ball...

GARCIA

Mason! Pete! D'You hear?

GARCIA (22) waves them over. He's on the other side of the chain-link fence, already dressed for work.

GARCIA

Buckman is out.

PETE

You're kidding.

GARCIA

My roommate's girlfriend is an LC for him. Apparently, Buckman has terminal cancer. A month to live or something.

MASON

That's terrible.

An almost-respectful beat, then...

PETE

Who's taking over his committee?

GARCIA

That's what everyone's talking about. The next most senior senators are Michaelson of Indiana and...

MASON

Abbott of Virginia. My boss.

Pete looks over to Mason.

GARCIA

I gotta run. Catch you at happy hour.

PETE

Later.

MASON

Thanks.

Garcia heads off one way, our guys the other. Pete says what Mason isn't allowing himself to think.

PETE

If Abbott gets chairman, you are golden. Agriculture puts out 70 bills a year.

MASON

The committee has its own staff to do it.

*

PETE

The first thing Abbott will want to do is put one of his guys on that staff. If that's not you, it's somebody above you. That leaves an opening, and odds are, you move up.

Mason has to admit it. Pete's right.

PETE

This is your lucky day.

*

2A INT. CNL / DESK AREA - DAY

2A

A phone RINGS on a desk. We TURN to find SARAH LOGAN (23) running to grab it.

SARAH

(answering)

Sarah Logan.

We continue to CIRCLE her. She doesn't sit down. There's no time in this office.

SARAH

Hi. Uh-huh. What time?

*

To her right, she spots her superior, PACKMAN (55), Washington bureau chief. He's the classic fire-breathing old-timer with the heart of gold -- only without the heart of gold.

He's an anti-mentor.

She talks to him as he approaches and passes...

SARAH (cont'd)

Buchman's out, officially. There's a press conference at 11. Do you want full-team or just camera?

She has to follow him, stretching the phone cord as far as it will go.

PACKMAN

Just camera. Who's taking over his committee?

SARAH

Either Michaelson or Abbott.

PACKMAN
 (short)
 Which one?

SARAH
 No one knows.

PACKMAN
 Let's be the first to find out.

With that, he's gone. Back to her phone call...

SARAH
 I'll send camera to meet you. I'm
 going to work on the committee thing.

A passing STAFFER lets us...

WIPE CUT TO:

4 INT. GYM SHOWERS - DAY

4

A shower curtain WHIPS back, revealing Mason, wet and dripping.

MASON
 "My Fellow Americans..."
 (explaining)
 You have to start with My Fellow
 Americans.

PETE
 Given.

Pete is toweling off. Mason grabs his own towel, drying off as he continues his speech -- practiced, but sincere.

MASON
 "On this, the occasion of my
 inauguration, I am reminded of my
 childhood growing up in the woods of
 Virginia..."

PETE
 ...a mansion in the woods in
 Virginia...

MASON

(ignoring)

"Among those trees, some hundreds of years old, one could sense the ghosts of fallen patriots, still fighting for the ideals they were willing to die for: truth, freedom, and the nobility of every man and woman. These are the values I look to uphold as I begin my presidency."

PETE

I'm crying. I have actual tears.

MASON

Fine. Let's hear yours.

PETE

"My Fellow Americans, absolute power corrupts absolutely. So forgive me in advance for the next four years."

A beat.

MASON

Do you remember the exact moment your idealism was crushed?

Pete thinks, a long beat. He almost answers, then stops. Finally...

PETE

No. No, I don't.

5 INT. STREET LEVEL PARKING GARAGE / BOOTH - DAY

5

A line of cars waiting to get out, the PARKING ATTENDANT looks over, someone KNOCKING on the window behind him.

It's FINLEY SCOTT (22). Merely frantic on an ordinary day, today she has enough caffeine in her that if she died this instant, her body could keep running for another two weeks.

FINLEY

Hi. Hello. I'm parked over there...

She points to her father's old Volvo station wagon, its flashers going. It's parked in front of a large NO PARKING sign.

ATTENDANT

You can't park there.

FINLEY

I know, that's why I wanted to talk to you. All of my earthly possessions are in that car.

The attendant looks over. What Finley says is true.

FINLEY

So even though you don't know me or my whole deal, if you could put yourself in my position -- just pretend you are me, in this state and with these needs and hopes and fears -- and guard that car with your very life, I would so appreciate it.

ATTENDANT

You can't park there. It's the rules.

A horn HONKS. Finley moves to let the car through.

FINLEY

Frank.

(his name tag)

Your name is Frank? Let me summarize the last 12 hours of my life. Eight p.m., I'm at Cornell, trying to write this paper on Georges Seurat -- he was a French neo-impressionist painter...?

Frank doesn't care. Anyway...

FINLEY

The point is, I'm looking at this painting in a book, when I should be looking at the real thing, which is in the National Gallery in Washington, D.C. So I think, roadtrip. I'm packing, I'm packing, and I just don't stop. It was this moment of tremendous clarity -- why should I be writing about other people's interpretation of life when I could be experiencing it myself? So I pack everything. I drive all night, and now I'm here at...

(checks watch)

7:23 a.m., and you, Frank, are the first person I have spoken to since my life took this tremendous turn.

ANGLE ON Frank. Why does this have to happen on his shift?

FINLEY

I just need to find this one person.
It'll take 20 minutes.

ATTENDANT

(finally)
Twenty minutes.

FINLEY

You're a star, Frank. Twenty minutes.

She heads for the elevators.

6 INT. MEN'S LOCKER ROOM - DAY

6

In a locker bay, Mason and Pete are getting dressed.

PETE

So he's in the elevator with Fred
Grandy -- the Love Boat's Gopher, but
still, a Congressman -- he's in the
elevator with him and he turns to him
and says, "Lido Deck, please."

MASON

(disbelieving)
No.

PETE

He was out on his ass before lunch.

FINLEY

(from behind)
Mason? Surprise.

He turns to see her. A beat, astonished.

MASON

Finley, what are you doing here?

FINLEY

I drove all night. I had a
revelation.
(introducing to Pete)
Hi, I'm Finley.

PETE

Pete.
(they shake)
Notorious twin sister.

FINLEY

And you sleep with everyone.

Pete nods, guilty. Mason pulls Finley into the bay, turning her head so she's only looking at lockers. He and Pete are still in their underwear. Some OTHER GUYS are looking over.

MASON

What are you doing here now?

FINLEY

I went by your apartment. Your neighbors said you always go to the gym before work.

(turning to Pete)

He's very habitual.

PETE

I've noticed that.

Mason turns her head back, then continues dressing.

MASON

You're supposed to be at graduate school. What, are you running away?

FINLEY

I'm running towards. Like I said, I had a revelation. It's been a long time coming, weeks and months, maybe my whole life -- but just last night I realized that all this preparation, all this schooling has kept me from actually living my life. I'm like a butterfly trapped in the chrysalis. If I don't break free now, I'll die.

MASON

You were watching Mariah Carey: Behind the Music, weren't you?

A beat.

FINLEY

Yes. But that's unrelated.

7 EXT. FRONT OF THE GYM - DAY

7

PETE

See you later. Good to meet you.

Pete takes off with a wave. His hair still wet, Mason stays behind with Finley, ready to have it out.

FINLEY

I know this is sudden, but aren't most great ideas sudden? I mean, do you think Einstein sat around pondering the theory of relativity?

MASON

Yes. He did. And what great idea do you have, specifically? Come to D.C. and mooch off your brother?

(not letting her interrupt)

Just because we shared a womb for nine months does not give you first dibs on my life. I'm sick of being your fall-back plan.

FINLEY

Just let me stay with you for a few weeks while I figure out what specifically I want to do. You know that if I don't stay with you, Mom and Dad will freak out.

MASON

They'll freak out anyway.

FINLEY

They'll freak out less.

A beat. A few PEDESTRIANS look as they pass by, wondering what the disagreement's about.

FINLEY

Mason, your entire life, all you've ever talked about is coming here, doing this, and eventually freeing the world or something. You have this razor-sharp vision of what you want to do with your life. I don't. But everything is telling me that I won't find it in grad school. So please. Just let me stay with you for a while. I won't be any nuisance, I swear.

Mason checks his watch, already running late. Finally deciding, he digs out his keys, hands them over. She hugs him.

FINLEY

You won't regret it.

MASON

It's only because I know you're going to change your mind. And by next week, normal life will resume.

MUSIC runs over the montage:

8 EXT. CONVENIENCE STORE/DELI NEAR CAPITOL HILL - DAY **8**

Mason emerges with a bagel and an apple, eating the former as he nearly jogs, late. OPENING CREDITS play over.

TRACKING WITH MASON

He checks his watch, walks faster. Beyond him, we see nothing but marble steps and ornate pillars, the feet of massive monuments. The city is majestic in the way American cities never are.

STOPPED AT A CROSS-WALK

Amid the TOURISTS, we see two other GUYS who could be clones of Mason: shirt, tie and khakis. Mason leads the way across, against the light. We let him pass us, looking right to see

THE CAPITOL

in the distance, shining like a palace.

9 INT. RUSSELL BUILDING / SECURITY CHECKPOINT - DAY **9**

A line at the metal detector. Mason holds his apple in his mouth as he takes off his bookbag, showing the GUARD his hard-card pass.

10 INT. RUSSELL BASEMENT HALLWAY - DAY **10**

Mason grabs a Roll Call newspaper off the shelf by the post office. Seeing the CROWD at the elevator, he heads for the stairs.

11 INT. RUSSELL BUILDING 3RD FLOOR - DAY **11**

Mason emerges from the stairs. The hallway is lined with flags in front of each office. He tosses his apple core in the trash can as he heads into the office of

SENATOR WILLIAM ABBOTT
COMMONWEALTH OF VIRGINIA

The door shuts behind him.

12 INT. SENATOR'S OFFICE - DAY / LATER

12

CLOSE-UP: On video, we see live coverage from the Senate floor on C-SPAN. Graphics superimpose, the results of a vote.

A hefty stack of mail THUMPS down in front of the screen. PULLING BACK, we see that we're at

MASON'S OVERSTUFFED DESK,

one of eight in the crowded front office. TV's play on desks throughout the office, all tuned to track the news: C-SPAN 1 and 2, MSNBC and CNL.

Flipping through the letters -- constituent mail -- Mason is horrified.

MASON

These can't all be for us.

NEIL

Not for us. For the endangered Red Ring-Tailed Squirrel of Jackson Forest.

NEIL (25) is Mason's pudgy, prickly supervisor. Mason flips through the letters.

NEIL

I want three replies. Jackson 1: I'm as concerned about the environment as you. Jackson 2: My support for responsible industry is unparalleled. Jackson 3: Jobs, jobs, jobs. I understand and I'm working my ass off.

MASON

What's the turnaround?

NEIL

Give me all three by noon.

MASON

Can I get Chang?

They both look up to bewildered intern CHANG (17), who's standing near the door with a sheet of paper.

NEIL

Chang, what are you doing?

CHANG

Robert told me to hold this until he got back.

MASON

How long has he been gone?

CHANG

About an hour.

NEIL

You're with Mason.

A beat as Chang tries to decide what to do with the paper. He finally sets it down on the floor where he was standing.

13 INT. SENATOR'S OFFICE - DAY

13

Mason works on his letters, typing away.

Coming in from the hallway, a RECEPTIONIST calls out --

RECEPTIONIST

Incoming.

The office that was busy-but-casual suddenly becomes frantic-and-military. The other three LA's (like Neil) scramble to get their notes together, while LC's and INTERNS throw away lunch containers and mash down the trash cans.

NEIL

(to Mason)

Do you have them?

MASON

Printing.

CLOSE ON the printer, the first page emerging. The second. Neil SNAPS his fingers -- he needs it. But then, a blinking light.

MASON

It jammed.

Like a Marine breaking down his rifle, Mason opens the printer, rolls the gate, whipping out the crumpled sheet of paper, and slamming it back shut.

We WHIP BACK to the door, where SENATOR WILLIAM ABBOTT enters. White-haired and solid, he's either your favorite grandfather or a fiery old son-of-a-bitch, his mood determined by unseen forces.

He sweeps through the room like a hurricane, headed for his office. LA's and LD's (Legislative Directors) swirl around him, trying to get a moment of his attention.

The page finally emerging from the printer, Mason hands it off to Neil, who tries to cut in. But the CHIEF OF STAFF blocks the door to the inner office.

A moment later, the Senator re-emerges, heading back out. The process repeats in reverse, Neil never getting a chance to hand off the drafts to the Senator.

After the Senator is gone, a happy calm returns to the office. The danger is over.

14 INT. RUSSELL BUILDING HALLWAY - DAY

14

Checking his watch, Pete cuts through the busy hallway to find an office door: 328-A, Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition and Forestry. He tries the knob, but it's locked. He peers in through the wavy glass window.

SARAH LOGAN (24) sits across from the doorway, waiting.

SARAH

They're running late. They left a note...

(shows post-it note)

"Running Late."

That's all the note says.

PETE

Ah! Very specific.

SARAH

Does it mean, "Sorry, wait for us" or "Sorry, come back later"?

PETE

How long have you been waiting?

SARAH

Ten minutes.

PETE

You're trying to see who's replacing Buchman.

SARAH

I know it's either Abbott or Michaelson.

PETE

My roommate works for Abbott.

SARAH

You know anything?

PETE

Nada.

Pete stays on his side of the hallway, various STAFFERS walking between him and Sarah. He checks her out a bit. She's his type. But then, so are all women.

She's checking him out, too.

SARAH (cont'd)

I've met you before.

PETE

Really.

SARAH

I don't know where. Sarah Logan. I work for CNL.

PETE

Pete Komisky. Lobbyist.

A beat, then...

SARAH

Pete! Oh my God.

He smiles, still no idea.

SARAH

High school. National debate championships, Ann Arbor.

*

PETE
 (remembering)
 Assisted suicide...

SARAH
 ...or murder by another name.

PETE
 Which side were you on?

SARAH
 Does it matter?

PETE
 No, wow. Sarah. Look at you.

SARAH
 Look at you.

PETE
 Look at us, all grown up.

SARAH
 Where do you work?

Pete steps across the hallway to take a seat beside her.

PETE
 This group, Animals First?
 (she's never
 heard of it)
 Greenpeace has whales, PETA has veal.
 We have all the loser animals. And
 you, you work for CNL? You're a
 reporter?

SARAH
 Field producer. Junior field producer
 I'm often reminded.

Her BEEPER goes off. She digs in her bag to find it.

SARAH
 I actually just moved down from New
 York, still sleeping on couches. So
 if you know of a place...

PETE
 I'll keep an eye out.

She checks her pager. Damn. She has to go.

*

SARAH
 (getting up)
 Listen, let me give you my card.

PETE
 I can do the same.

They trade cards. A beat.

SARAH
 It was good to see you.

PETE
 Likewise.

Pete looks down at the business card, then back up at her walking away.

15 INT. COPY ROOM / LATER - DAY

15

Mason is making copies when the Receptionist looks in, panicked.

RECEPTIONIST
 Where's Neil?

MASON
 I don't know. Why?

RECEPTIONIST
 Robert's with the Senator at
 committee. They need some P-31 file.
 They're freaking out.
 (deciding)
 I'll page Neil.

MASON
 No, I know what it is.

16 INT. SENATOR'S OFFICE - DAY

16

Mason roots through Neil's desk, finding the file in question. He quickly skims through it, making sure it's all there.

MASON
 Tell Robert I'll be there in two
 minutes.

RECEPTIONIST
 I already paged Neil.

MASON

When he calls in, tell him I took care
of it.

He grabs his jacket as he leaves.

17 INT. CONFERENCE ROOM - DAY

17

The meeting has yet to start, just a few SENATORS up on the dais. The others mill about, their STAFFERS busily running through the agenda.

Abbott's Legislative Director, ROBERT (30), waves Mason over, taking the file from him. He flips through it, saying only...

ROBERT

Alright.

His job finished, Mason should head back. But he doesn't.

Like a freshman at his first frat party, Mason tries to look like he's supposed to be there, not staring too long at any one thing. He's just waiting for someone to kick him out.

The Senator is just two feet away, in the middle of a conversation with a fellow COMMITTEE MEMBER. Mason is listening.

SENATOR

Robert! Three years ago, I met with that African. Masura, Masire -- what country was that? The diamond place.

ROBERT

I don't remember.

Suddenly...

MASON

Botswana.

SENATOR

Botswana.

(beat)

You want to know how to get re-elected
-- hire smart kids.

He knocks Mason in the shoulder. Mason smiles, surprised to be noticed by the Senator.

A few GAVEL KNOCKS. Our attention goes to the front...

COMMITTEE CHAIRMAN

If we can get started now.

The other staffers gather near a table at the side of the room, a few REPORTERS taking seats. Mason follows Robert to the staff table. A few looks shot his way -- he shouldn't really be here.

At the door, we see Neil come in, a little freaked. Stuttering a step, Mason comes up to him.

MASON

(matter-of-fact)

Robert called and said he needed the P-31 file.

Neil holds up a file folder.

NEIL

This P-31 file?

A heart-stopping moment while Mason wonders if he grabbed the wrong file. He turns his head to the side, reading the label.

MASON

No. This was before the riders were split off. I took the right file.

NEIL

But you could have taken the wrong file. Which would have been bad for you, and a hell of a lot of worse for me.

One by one, the other STAFFERS have stopped their work to watch the slow-speed brawl at the doorway.

MASON

I didn't take the wrong file. I've been paying attention.

NEIL

No, evidently you haven't. If you had been paying attention, you would realize that you are a Legislative Correspondent. You are responsible for constituent mail. They write the letters, and you answer them. That is your job, and that is your only job. Do you understand?

MASON

I understand.

NEIL
Have you been paying attention?

MASON
(you dick)
Rapt attention.

Neil hands Mason his squirrel letter drafts, soaked through with red marks.

NEIL
I made some corrections. Type type
type.

He moves aside, letting Mason through the doorway. He shuts it behind him.

END OF ACT ONE

ACT TWO

18 EXT. CAPITOL CITY BREWERY - NIGHT 18

Establishing.

PETE [O.S.]

She's this girl I met back in high school.

19 INT. THE FOUR HORSEMEN - NIGHT 19

A dart hits the board. We TURN TO REVEAL the Capitol City Brewery, a classic brick-and-brass rail affair. It's happy hour, and spirits are being lifted.

Mason and Pete retrieve their darts from the board.

MASON

So, did you sleep with her?

PETE

Over lunch?

MASON

Back in high school.

PETE

I don't know.

MASON

What do you mean?

PETE

I can't remember. I mean, I have a generally positive impression of her, but c'mon. It was senior year in high school. Most of those brain cells died an herbal death.

Finley arrives with three pints. Taking his beer, Pete trades her for his darts.

PETE

I hereby deputize you to kick your brother's ass.

He heads off for the restrooms. It's just a look, but there's palpable chemistry between Pete and Finley -- they run at the same speed. Noticing her gaze...

MASON

If you do, I will kill you. I will kill him, and then I will kill myself.

FINLEY

You worry too much.

MASON

I have enough stress at work, I don't need two little pheromone factories running in my apartment.

FINLEY

Nothing's going to happen.

They each throw a few darts.

FINLEY

Question. If you hate your job so much, why don't you quit?

MASON

Quitting's your thing, remember?

(throws)

It's a crappy job, but it's a prestigious crappy job. Abbott is well-respected, and he's on three big committees. If you want to learn policy, that's where to do it.

FINLEY

You're a cog in the machine. If you want to get anywhere, you have to strike out on your own.

She throws. OFFSCREEN, we hear a guy HOLLER. It didn't hit him, but it scared the hell out of him.

FINLEY

Sorry. My bad.

20 EXT. VARIOUS WASHINGTON - DAWN

20

To establish...

21 INT. MASON AND PETE'S BATHROOM - DAY

21

Groggy and decaffeinated, Finley sorts through the towels hanging on various hooks, sniffing to find one that's acceptable. She gingerly pulls back the grimy shower curtain. Turning the knobs unleashes a horrifying SHUDDER. The pipes gear up for what can only be a geyser.

But in fact, it's just a trickle. And a rusty one at that. No matter how far she turns, that's all the water there is.

The pipes still RUMBLING, Finley cranks the knobs off.

A KNOCK at the door before it opens. It's her brother.

MASON

Shower doesn't work. That why we use the ones at the gym.

FINLEY

What am I supposed to do?

MASON

Go back to graduate school.

22 INT. CONVENIENCE STORE / DELI - DAY

22

Looking grubby, Finley gets coffee with Pete. Mason is already at the counter, paying.

FINLEY

(low, conspiratorially)
You're aware that you're living in third world conditions.

Pete drinks half his cup before re-filling, much to the chagrin of the MANAGER who's watching. Mason is reading the headlines, still out of earshot.

FINLEY

We should be living someplace great, like Georgetown.

PETE

First, what's with "we?" Second, Georgetown is too far. It's fifteen minutes just to get to the Metro.

The Manager gives Pete a look about drinking the coffee.

FINLEY

Where would you want to live?

PETE

Dupont Circle. Adams-Morgan. But trust me, we can't afford it.

(off reaction)

What?

FINLEY

You said "we."

PETE

You're stretching and you smell.

FINLEY

If I found a place, would you back me up?

PETE

Sure. But only because I know you can't.

He heads off with Mason, who waves goodbye to her. As she pays for her coffee, we see a look of determination.

23 EXT. DUPONT CIRCLE / MONTAGE - DAY

23

Finley emerges from the Metro station to a crowd of food carts and incense vendors.

LEAVING KRAMERBOOKS

Finley sorts through a folding map of the city, trying to orient herself.

20TH STREET

Finley makes her way down the sidewalk, tall trees and townhouses on either side. It's a beautiful part of town.

VARIOUS DOORWAYS

Finley is turned away by several prospects

Finley is momentarily rebuffed, but we can see the wheels spinning in her head.

24 EXT. ARCHED WALKWAY - DAY

24

Mason carries a mail crate, overfilled with letters. Pete emerges from a doorway behind him, catching up.

PETE

Hey.

MASON

Hey. What are you doing here?

PETE

Lobbying. I'm a lobbyist. I had a meeting with Piedmont's new LA.

MASON

Kristi?

PETE

Oh yeah.

MASON

Never happen.

PETE

That's what they said about space travel, but look at us now.

(re: mail)

Red ringed-tail squirrel?

MASON

Apparently the creatures themselves have learned how to write.

PETE

No, I found out about your squirrel. We have a file on it.

He digs it out of his bag, handing it over.

MASON

You are the roommate of the gods.

PETE

Re: the squirrel. Yes it's endangered and yes it's a forest. But what no one's saying is that the squirrel in question only lives in the north-east part of it. Two-thirds of that forest it is squirrel-free.

MASON

So you could just set the one part
aside.

PETE

And permit away.

MASON

The squirrels get a home, people get
jobs and suddenly there is no problem.

PETE

All because of a plucky young LC who
took some initiative.

Mason skims through the file. Pete checks his watch, gets up.

PETE

Gotta go. I got a WOW.

MASON

A what?

PETE

A WOW. Wealthy Old Widow. Later.

MASON

Later. Thanks.

He flips through the file, curious.

25 INT. SENATOR'S OFFICE - DAY

25

He continues flipping through the pages. Hitting a new line, he
dials out.

While it rings, he glances over to the far side of the office,
where Neil is berating Chang for some offense.

MASON

(on phone)

Yes, I'm calling from Senator Abbott's
office in Washington. I wanted to
confirm some information.

CROSSFADES, various shots overlapping. Mason takes notes, dials
new numbers, rechecks his facts.

MASON

(on phone)

So theoretically, a set-aside would be possible. Uh-huh.

(another)

Now, I just talked with Dr. Rayborn, who led that study...He spoke well of you, also.

(another)

What you tell me goes in a memo. I'm just trying to gather the facts.

(another)

I'm glad you think it makes sense, because it makes sense to me too.

A glance, Neil looking over. What are you doing? Mason shakes his head, nothing.

26 INT. RUSSELL CAFETERIA - DAY

26

Mason folds down the top on his to-go box. A voice behind him...

NEIL

Apologies.

Mason turns to see him, surprised.

MASON

For what?

NEIL

Paranoia. My genuine if unwarranted belief that anyone showing more than mere competence at their job is somehow a threat.

MASON

You're saying I'm more than merely competent?

NEIL

(a smile)

Apologies are new to me. Praise is still an alien concept.

Mason nods, letting him off. They both head to get drinks. Neil has his own to-go food.

NEIL

(lower voice)

Listen, the Senator's probably going to get committee chairman.

(off Mason's look)

That's not official, but assume it's happening. When it does, everyone has a chance to move up. You, me, everyone. The more impressive we can be, the better.

Mason takes a beat, deciding how much he'll say...

MASON

I may have a solution to the red squirrel-slash-Jackson Forest issue.

NEIL

Really?

MASON

I'm not sure yet. Still checking into it.

He puts a lid on his drink. Did he say too much?

NEIL

Listen, Mason. When you're ready to go with this, you should let me check it out. I'm pretty good with telling what Robert and the Senator like. I could help get you set it up in the right way.

Still a little wary...

MASON

No, I will. Thanks.

27 OMIT

27

28 EXT. STREET IN DUPONT CIRCLE - DAY

28

Finley is at a pay phone.

FINLEY

(on phone)

Amelia! It's Finley...No, don't get him...In D.C. with Mason, you can't tell him.

(MORE)

FINLEY (cont'd)

Swear to me...Listen, my mother was saying last week about some family friends who got appointed ambassadors to something...Lithuania! That's it! Who was it?...I remember them. Vaguely. Do you have their address?

Finley smiles as she writes it down on her hand, a brilliant plan forming.

29 INT. TOWNHOUSE LIVING ROOM - DAY

29

A moving box WIPES PAST to reveal Finley, dressed to the nines -- the perfect socialite daughter. She sits on the couch with perfect posture, having tea with MRS. SORENSEN, an elegant woman in her early 50's.

FINLEY

That weekend at the lake continues to be one of my favorite memories. My family still talks about it to this day.

A THUMP from the hallway as two MOVING MEN haul a trunk towards the door. Mrs. Sorensen looks rattled.

FINLEY

Who will be watching your house while you're away?

MRS. SORENSEN

(still worried about
the movers)

Lupe will be coming by once a week, just to check on it.

FINLEY

Oh.

Finley makes a tiny facial motion. Mrs. Sorensen catches it.

FINLEY

No, I'm sure your housekeeper is great. I mean your home is spotless. It's just, I remember what happened when we left the house in Seal Harbor unoccupied one winter.

A look from Mrs. Sorensen -- what happened?

FINLEY

A branch knocked out a window, which let snow and water in -- ruined the floors -- then the pipes froze. A toilet shattered. All my mother's rugs, and her antique quilts, well...

Finley glances over -- she's scaring her, but the deal's not done.

FINLEY

And then there were the spiders.

MRS. SORENSEN

Spiders?

FINLEY

Hundreds of them. Thousands. They got into the sheets, the food, everything. I remember going to open a box of cereal and...

Mrs. Sorensen raises a hand -- stop. She can't take any more.

FINLEY

And the tragedy was, we had somebody coming by the house every week. That all happened in just three days.

She stops to sip her tea, letting Mrs. Sorensen worry.

FINLEY

(innocently)

Had you considering having a housesitter?

MRS. SORENSEN

Honestly, no. We hadn't.

(a beat;

a subtle shift)

I suppose my standards for a housesitter are just so high, no one would be able to do it.

FINLEY

Really?

MRS. SORENSEN

This house is over a hundred years old.

(MORE)

MRS. SORENSEN (cont'd)
 The day to day maintenance would be significant -- the landscaping, the cleaning, re-oiling the countertops, making sure no one puts their heels up on an antique table. It's a tremendous responsibility.

An eerie detente -- both sides know what's really being discussed, but neither will tip her hand.

MRS. SORENSEN
 Add to it the fact that my husband and I could come back from Lithuania at any moment just to visit. I just wonder if anyone would be willing to take that job, given those conditions.

FINLEY
 (nodding, thinking)
 Mmmm. It's a good question.

A beat. And another. Somebody has to go first...

MRS. SORENSEN
 Finley, you don't suppose you and your brother would consider...

FINLEY
 ...housesitting? I could ask him.

30 EXT. FRONT HALL OF APARTMENT BUILDING - NIGHT

30

Arriving home from work, Mason checks the mailbox, sorting through bills. He turns to see Finley and Pete hauling boxes down the stairs.

MASON
 What happened?

PETE
 We're moving. Finley found a place.

Mason is bewildered.

FINLEY
 Before you complain, you at least have to see it.

31 EXT. TOWNHOUSE - NIGHT

31

We TILT DOWN from the top to reveal Mason, Pete and Finley admiring their new home. If anything, the house is even better by night, under the glow of a dozen lamps.

Pete and Finley stand behind Mason, convinced he'll approve.

FINLEY

Admit it. I did very, very, very well.

PETE

Plus, there's a guest apartment we can rent out.

Mason looks over, incredulous.

PETE

Okay, you have scruples. We find that charming. Plus, I know this great girl who's looking for a place. We'd be helping the homeless.

The others don't see it, but with that smile, there's no way he'll say no.

MASON

Okay.

With a small "woo-hoo," Pete kisses Mason on the forehead.

PETE

I'm calling a room.

He leaps up the front steps, unlocking the door. Suddenly, there's a tremendous BARK. Pete jumps back, freaked.

A MASSIVE GREAT DANE

stands at the foot of the stairs, watching them with an eerie sadness. It's the Largest Dog on Television.

PETE

What is that?

FINLEY

That's Lucy. We just sort of have to watch her for a while. Until they can ship her over. To Lithuania.

31A INT. CNL EDITING ROOM - NIGHT

31A

Sarah sits with a husky, bearded EDITOR, watching raw footage. It's SENATOR BUCHMAN at his press conference the day before. She's on the phone.

SARAH [ON PHONE]
I'm sorry, I'm still at work. I have to re-cut something for the weekend show. What time do restaurants close here? Okay, I'll meet you there at 9:30.

She starts to hang up, then realizes she forgot to say...

SARAH [ON PHONE]
Love you.

*

She hangs up. The editor has the piece cued up. It plays.

ON VIDEO

Buchman (45, younger than you'd think) finishes reading his statement. He's crying, but plowing through it. His family stands behind him: WIFE, SON and BABY DAUGHTER.

BUCHMAN
I think all one can hope for is that they leave the world a slightly better place than when they came. To me, that legacy is not my career in Washington, but my family...
(choked, really crying)
My wife Christine, son Brandon and daughter Anne, who remain my greatest achievement and greatest inspiration.

He has more, but that's all he can say.

SARAH
I didn't know he had a family.

He leaves with...

BUCHMAN
Thank you.

*

The minute he steps away from the microphone, a REPORTER'S VOICE calls out...

REPORTER'S VOICE

Do you know who will be taking over
the agriculture committee?

Buchman shakes his head, not believing somebody asked that at a
time like this. The tape stops with a CLANK.

We PUSH IN on Sarah, still unsettled by Buchman's speech. We
FADE OUT.

END OF ACT TWO

ACT THREE

32 INT. CNL HALLWAY - DAY

32

Sarah walks with Packman, who's checking copy.

SARAH

Michaelson won't talk, but his chief of staff says they're holding out for the Foreign Relations Committee. That leaves Abbott the front runner.

PACKMAN

I went to college with Bill Abbott. He was an idiot then, he's an idiot now.

(handing off copy)

Eight years ago, I was this close to showing he took a kickback on some highway construction. He would have fried.

SARAH

What stopped the story?

PACKMAN

A lack of proof. See, back then, innuendo and gossip didn't go as far.

Coming around a corner, Sarah almost literally bumps into Pete. She's surprised to see him, but motions to wait a second. Catching up to Packman at his office...

SARAH

What do you want me to get?

PACKMAN

His head on a platter.

He shuts the door. A beat.

PETE

He seems nice.

33 INT. CNL / SARAH'S DESK AREA - DAY

33

PETE

It's a guest unit with its own entrance. You'd have to share a kitchen.

SARAH

It sounds great.

PETE

It'll be four of us, but there's actually enough space.

A beat, something catching her strangely.

SARAH

Oh. Okay. Here's where it gets suddenly awkward. When I saw you yesterday, I honestly wasn't sure I'd ever see you again, so I didn't move into full disclosure mode.

PETE

You're dying.

SARAH

I have a boyfriend. Lewis. He's clerking for the Supreme Court.

She takes a framed photo from her desk, hands it over. ANGLE ON Pete, trying not to visibly react to her news.

SARAH

We met at Yale, but he's from here. I actually moved down with the intention of moving in with him, once we found a place.

PETE

This place is big enough for two.

SARAH

You're sure?

He's not, but he's gone too far to back away. He hands the photo back.

PETE

Come over tonight and check it out.
Hey -- it's always good to have a
lawyer in the house. We live in
litigious times.

He hands her the address.

SARAH

You're sure you're sure.

PETE

I'm certain I'm certain.

SARAH

We'll come by tonight.

PETE

Til then.

SARAH

Til then.

Pete heads off. We LEAD HIM out, seeing the first twinge of
regret on his face.

34 INT. SENATOR'S OFFICE - THE SAME DAY

34

Mason watches as Neil flips through the memo he's written.

NEIL

So you set aside a thousand acres and
the squirrel is fine?

MASON

No one's objecting to the rest of the
plan. It's actually fairly
conservative.

NEIL

And everybody wins.

(beat, considering)

Listen, let me call these people and
make sure they're game. If it checks
out, I'll give it to the Senator.
I'll have to put my name on it so
he'll take it seriously...

(preempting
objection)

...but I'll tell him you helped out.

(MORE)

NEIL (cont'd)
I'm not trying to bone you on this. I
just want it to actually happen.

What can Mason say but...

MASON
Okay.

NEIL
Good work.

35 INT. GUEST APARTMENT - NIGHT

35

Sarah and her boyfriend LEWIS FREEMAN, mid-twenties and black, check out the much smaller apartment. It's nice for the size, and smartly furnished.

Finley and Pete watch from the doorway.

SARAH
Yes.

Lewis GRUMBLES.

SARAH
No. Sorry.
(mocking Lewis)
I wasn't supposed to say yes. It
takes away our leverage.

While Lewis' back is turned, Sarah nods a "yes" to Pete. Lewis motions for a sidebar with his girlfriend.

LEWIS
Do you really like it?

SARAH
Yes. I love it. And not just because
I've been sleeping on couches.

LEWIS
(to Finley and Pete)
There's a lease we can sign? An
actual, physical lease?

FINLEY
(a lie)
Absolutely.

ANGLE ON Pete, reacting to her shameless lie.

A beat, Lewis weighing his decision.

LEWIS AND SARAH

We'll take it.

PETE

Sold.

LEWIS

Don't you have one more roommate to consult?

PETE

What's he going to do, filibuster?
You're in.

Pete and Finley head back up the stairs, leaving Sarah and Lewis alone. Around other people, they seem like just friends, but when they're alone, they're a close and affectionate couple, a good sense of humor between them.

Sarah falls back on the bed. Lewis joins her. We LOOK DOWN on them.

SARAH

I am going to sleep here tonight.

LEWIS

You are?

SARAH

And tomorrow night, you're going to sleep here with me. In our apartment, together.

LEWIS

That's redundant.

SARAH

I'm happy. I'm joyfully happy.

36 OMIT 36

37 EXT. TOWNHOUSE - NIGHT 37

To establish...

38 INT. TOWNHOUSE FOYER - NIGHT 38

Just arrived home, Mason puts his keys on the rack. From another room, we hear BANGING. A CLATTER.

39 INT. KITCHEN - NIGHT

39

Mason looks in to find Sarah digging through the cupboards, finally removing a pot. She catches him out of the corner of her eye.

Startled, she drops the pot, which CLANGS and RATTLES on the floor.

MASON

Sorry.

SARAH

(embarrassed)

You must be Mason. Sarah.

MASON

Good to meet you.

40 INT. KITCHEN - LATER

40

Tomato soup spills into a mug -- Mason's. Sarah puts the pot back on the stove.

SARAH

So I'm at the Capitol today, trying to get in to talk with this representative. I'm on the phone back to the office -- you know those phones on the first floor by Vandenburg?

(he nods)

I'm there, and there's a zillion people and Congressmen and tourists and I look around suddenly it hits me. This is my life. I work here.

Mason smiles.

SARAH

It was like this sudden sugar rush, I was giddy. There was this high school field trip going through -- girls with the hair -- and I could see myself in them but I wasn't them anymore. I was the grown-up wage earner. Me. It was bizarre.

MASON

That's happened to me. It's like this moment.

(MORE)

*

MASON (cont'd)
You always talk about what you're going to do when you're an adult, and then suddenly, you are an adult. Just like that.

Crossing, she takes a seat on the counter. It's very subtle, but she's straining to seem casual.

SARAH
You work for Abbott, right?

MASON
I do.

SARAH
So what's the word? Is he going to take over for Buchman?

MASON
Officially? I don't know.
Unofficially, probably. At least that's the gossip in the office.

SARAH
What's Abbott like?

MASON
He's good. He always calls me "son."
I've never heard him yell at anyone.

SARAH
Anything that puts you on edge?
Skeletons in the closet?

Mason's about to say, "No." Then he stops himself. Looks at Sarah, a long beat. There's a definite shift in the mood.

MASON
Why are you asking this?

SARAH
I'm curious.

MASON
You're also work for CNL. Is it the roommate who's curious, or the reporter?

SARAH
I'm sorry, I didn't...

MASON

I barely know you. I don't feel like I can trust you yet. And if we're going to be sharing a house, I don't want to only be able to talk about the weather with you.

SARAH

I apologize.

(beat)

But I will say this. It's naive to think that your job stops at the front door. In D.C., I don't think there is a differentiation between your work life and your home life. It's 24 hours.

41	OMIT	41
42	OMIT	42
43	OMIT	43
43A	INT. GUEST APARTMENT - NIGHT	43A

We DOLLY past moving boxes to find Lewis on the floor, playing with Lucy the Dog. Sarah sits down behind them.

SARAH

I think I just made an enemy.

LEWIS

I just made a friend.

(beat)

I always wanted a dog. My aunt and uncle would never let us get one.

SARAH

They were raising five kids.

LEWIS

Exactly, plenty of people to take care of a dog.

He makes smooshy faces at Lucy. He's in love.

SARAH
I'm going to lose you to this dog,
aren't I?

LEWIS
Very likely.

A beat, then a small kiss.

43B INT. FINLEY'S ROOM - NIGHT

43B

Amid more half-unpacked boxes, we MOVE TO FIND Finley and Pete on the bed, looking through her photo album. Reaching the last page...

FINLEY
This was senior prom. The dress is a
Badgely Mishka.

PETE
Who's the guy?

FINLEY
Adrian. I didn't really like him that
much, but he was very photogenic, and
I knew that was important, because a
prom photo is forever.

She reaches across him to grab another photo album. Pete just looks at her, amused. She notices his gaze.

FINLEY
What?

*

He shakes his head, nothing. But there's a flirty chemistry between them, and both feel it.

43C INT. UPSTAIRS HALLWAY - NIGHT

43C

Pete comes out of Finley's room just as Mason comes out of the bathroom.

MASON
Do me a favor?

PETE
Yeah, what?

MASON
Don't sleep with my sister.

PETE

Scout's honor.

They each head their own way.

43D EXT. DC - MORNING

43D

MONTAGE of shots, the city waking up.

44 INT. RUSSELL HALLWAY - DAY

44

CLOSE ON the men's room door. It opens to reveal Mason, coming out.

A WOMAN'S VOICE

Mason.

It's Sarah. She was waiting for him.

SARAH

They said you were here. We have to talk.

45 EXT. ROOF OF RUSSELL BUILDING - DAY

45

Mason and Sarah walk out onto the roof. We can see the Capitol in the distance.

SARAH

So this morning I'm making calls about Abbott, mostly background stuff. And I'm starting to hear this rumbling about Jackson Forest and these squirrels. Nothing bad, just that Abbott's involved.

On Mason. He can't help but smile a little, hearing that his work is being recognized.

SARAH

The weird thing is, every place I'm calling, just got off the phone with a reporter from the Richmond Herald. The way he's portraying it, Abbott is trying to force this compromise down their throats.

*

MASON

That's not the case. The Senator
doesn't even know about it yet.

SARAH

I didn't think so.

(a beat)

I feel ethically weird coming to you
with this, and honestly, I probably
wouldn't be coming here if we weren't
sharing a house.

(beat)

I don't know what the angle is, but
somebody thinks there's a story worth
reporting here. And if there is, I'm
going to have to cover it. I just
wanted to warn you.

MASON

(sorting through it)

Something's not right. I was very
careful on the phone. I was just
gathering information. Everyone knew
that.

SARAH

Was anyone else calling?

A beat. Mason's heart drops three floors.

MASON

Neil. Neil was calling to verify. If
he said the wrong things...

A VOICE

Mason?

It's Chang. He's back at the door, nervous as always, with a
handful of pink phone slips.

CHANG

Mason? There's a bunch of messages
for you.

MASON

I'll be right down.

As Chang heads off, Sarah calls after him...

SARAH

Are any of those from the Richmond
Herald?

CHANG

Yes. One.

We PUSH IN tighter on Mason. This is getting worse.

SARAH

(to Mason)

What are you going to do?

MASON

I don't know.

(fuck!)

I don't know.

He heads back in, leaving Sarah alone. Should she have even come?

46 INT. CONFERENCE ROOM - DAY

46

While the committee meeting continues, Mason leans down to Neil at the aides' table, whispering into his ear. This is important.

47 INT. OUTSIDE CONFERENCE ROOM - DAY

47

Groups of TOURISTS go past, checking out the exhibits.

NEIL

So what's the "big crisis" Mason?

MASON

When you called these people, what did you tell them?

NEIL

I asked them if they could make this compromise.

MASON

Did you say you were calling on behalf of the Senator?

NEIL

I gave them that impression. That's how you get things done.

MASON

I just got a call from the Richmond Herald, asking about this deal the Senator was trying to make on Jackson Forest.

NEIL

What was the spin on it?

MASON

It turns out the Senator's brother owns 3,000 acres of Jackson Forest. This deal goes through and he profits personally.

The news hits Neil like a shotgun blast.

NEIL

Why didn't you check into this? Robert has a list of the Senator's investments.

MASON

It's not the Senator, it's the Senator's brother. I can't be expected to have information that I could not conceivably know.

(not letting him interrupt)

If you had let this go through the proper channels, the Senator himself would have seen there was a conflict.

A few beats as Neil tries to think of way out of this. A TOURIST GROUP passes, a few people looking at them.

NEIL

You're fired.

MASON

I'm what?

NEIL

You're fired. I want you out of the office by the time I get back.

MASON

This is eighty percent your mistake. I wasn't the one speaking on the Senator's behalf.

NEIL

But guess what? You don't have as far
to fall.

Neil heads back into the conference room, leaving Mason alone in
the hallway. If he had something to throw, he'd throw it now.

END OF ACT THREE

ACT FOUR

48INT. CAPITOL HILL CLEANERS - THE SAME DAY

48

On his lunch hour, Lewis picks up his dry-cleaning. He counts through the hangers, making sure all his shirts came back.

The CLERK hands the bill to the FEMALE CASHIER, who's busy arguing with an OLD MAN at the register. Both are black.

OLD MAN

No, look. You look! There are two buttons missing. Here and here.

CASHIER

(overlapping)

I told you, that is not our responsibility. Buttons are not our problem. If you look at your stub, it says it.

OLD MAN

How can buttons not be your problem?

She takes his stub to show him the fine print where it's written. Over the Old Man's shoulder, we see Lewis waiting to pay, watching.

CASHIER

(frustrated)

It says it right here. "Loss or damage of buttons are not the provider's responsibility." You agreed to this.

Confused, the Old Man has to adjust his glasses to look. Lewis feels he has to step in.

LEWIS

It's not a contract.

CASHIER

Excuse me?

LEWIS

It's not a contract.

CASHIER

It says it's a contract. Right here. "This is a contract."

LEWIS

Unless he signs it, it's not enforceable. Did you sign anything?

OLD MAN

I did not.

LEWIS

Then there is no contract. The company puts that language on the receipt to confuse and intimidate people who don't understand their most basic legal rights. If he chooses to, he can pursue damages in small claims court.

The Cashier levels an icy gaze upon him.

CASHIER

For two buttons.

LEWIS

You might win. The judge could rule that the receipt showed disclosure of standard business practices. But the real cost isn't money, it's time. Two hours, four hours, maybe all day, sitting in a crowded court room. And I'm guessing this man has a lot more free time than you do.

(the Old Man nods)

So the question becomes, is it better just to fix the buttons, regardless of who's at fault?

A beat. The Cashier looks at the Old Man, looks at Lewis. Finally, she takes the shirt back, handing it off to the other Clerk.

She takes Lewis' receipt, rings it up.

CASHIER

Eleven-fifty.

Lewis pays her. She gives him his change and leaves the counter.

OLD MAN

(to Lewis)

Thank you very much. These people are always trying to cheat me.

That hits a nerve with Lewis.

LEWIS

Cheat you how?

OLD MAN

Taking my money and doing a bad job.

LEWIS

Then who's fault is that? We live in a capitalist democracy with an abundance of dry cleaners. Black-owned dry cleaners, if it matters. If you don't like this one, then take your business somewhere else. There are no victims here.

With that, he leaves. The Old Man is confused again -- whose side was Lewis on?

49 INT. TOWNHOUSE STAIRWELL - DUSK

49

Sarah and Finley head down, passing Mason and Lewis as they haul a trunk upstairs.

SARAH

We should do something to cheer your brother up.

FINLEY

He got fired. He didn't get cancer.

SARAH

(genuinely curious)
Have you ever had a job?

FINLEY

Believe me, I've been fired many times.

SARAH

No, I believe you.

50 INT. UPSTAIRS BEDROOM - DUSK

50

Mason and Lewis set the trunk down, taking a moment to catch their breath.

LEWIS

So what's your plan?

MASON

You mean about my job?

(a nod)

Flattered you think I have a plan.

LEWIS

Some advice? Not legal, just good advice?

MASON

Sure.

LEWIS

Don't go out like a dog.

(beat)

Easiest thing to do now is to roll over and play dead. What's done is done. The trouble is, if you don't make this right, and make it right soon, that's as good as being wrong.

MASON

I can't make it right. It's out of my power.

LEWIS

Then go talk to the Senator.

MASON

He can't give me my job back. It was partly my fault.

LEWIS

You don't want your job. You want your potential. I mean, look at your old job. You were underpaid, overworked. You didn't have any real power. The only thing you had was the potential to be getting a better job, and then a better job after that.

MASON

I was paying my dues.

LEWIS

Exactly. Take some of your dues back.

We hold on Mason for a beat, thinking it over.

51 INT. RUSSELL BUILDING / ENTRY - NIGHT

51

The building is nearly empty, just the few last EMPLOYEES leaving. Mason tries to talk his way past the GUARDS at the station.

MASON

Listen, I don't have my pass. I just need to get up to see...

Over to his left, he spots our favorite intern...

MASON

Chang.

CHANG

Hey Mason.

Stepping off to the side...

MASON

Is the Senator still here?

CHANG

He's gone. He's at a dinner party with Piedmont. I heard what happened. I'm really sorry.

MASON

It's okay.

CHANG

Robert told Neil he didn't have the authority to fire you.

MASON

Really?

CHANG

But then Neil told Robert about the story, and about how Robert was going to look bad too, so then I guess Robert said that you're still fired anyway.

On Mason, great.

CHANG

I think it sucks.

*

MASON
 (a smile)
 So do I, Chang. So do I.

He starts to walk out. Apprehensive, Chang calls out after him.

CHANG
 Mason...What's your password? I have
 to do all your letters.

Mason smiles, sympathetic.

MASON
 Democracy.

52 OMIT 52

53 OMIT 53

54 OMIT 54

55 EXT. DC - NIGHT 55

VARIOUS SHOTS, the city at night, monuments lit.

56 OMIT 56

57 OMIT 57

58 OMIT 58

59 EXT. GEORGETOWN STREET / FRONT OF TOWNHOUSE - NIGHT 59

Mason watches through windows as a dinner party winds down
 inside. A few moments later, the Senator is at the door,
 shaking his goodbyes and putting on his coat.

Walking up, Mason stops at the bottom of the steps.

MASON
 Senator?

He turns, surprised to hear someone addressing him.

MASON

I'm really sorry to be bothering you.
I just wanted to apologize and explain
before it became too late to do
either.

(beat, gathering thoughts)

What happened was partly my fault, but
it wasn't because of misguided
ambition or some sort of power trip.
I genuinely believed I could fix a
situation, quickly and effectively,
not costing anybody anything. I mean,
I came to DC because I wanted to be
part of a system that could make
people's lives better on a macro
scale. Even if it's often confused
and frustrating, that's what I think
government is supposed to be -- a way
to help guarantee the safety, freedom,
and nobility of every person. I know
I screwed up, and I'm deeply sorry
about that. But I don't want to be
knocked out of the game just for
trying too hard.

That's it. He's spoken his peace.

SENATOR

(overwhelmed)

Well. I appreciate your conviction.

MASON

Thank you.

SENATOR

(a beat, still sorting out)

Now, you're saying you used to work
for me?

A beat. Mason very nearly laughs.

He could explain, but really, what's the point?

MASON

Listen, I'm very sorry to bother you.
Have a good night.

He turns and starts walking away, disbelieving.

Back on the steps, the Senator is still not clear on what just
happened.

SENATOR

Son! How old are you?

MASON

(stops, turning)

Twenty-two.

A beat, nothing said. Was the Senator just curious?

SENATOR

I was your age when I came here, and full of the most impractical ideas. I truly believed I could change the world.

(beat)

What you see here, my career, everything. I'd give it all up to be you right now.

Mason takes that, weighs it.

With a nod, he smiles. Another look to the Senator, who then goes back to the other guests.

As we CRANE UP, Mason heads back down the quiet streets of Georgetown.

60 INT. LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

60

Lights are low, the house is quiet. Sarah takes a seat on the couch, hands Mason a beer.

SARAH

He had no idea who you were?

MASON

No clue. I think that's why he always called me "son."

The five housemates sit in a circle, each with a beer. Lucy lies on the floor, droopy.

FINLEY

Of course he didn't recognize you -- you guys all dress the same. I'm serious, would it kill you to wear a color?

PETE

(to Mason)

You'll get another job.

MASON

I know. I'm strangely not freaked out about it.

(beat)

There are these moments when you feel your life changing. You don't know what's going to happen, but you're excited that it's happening. And I'm convinced this, here, Washington, is still exactly where I should be. Whatever may come.

A beat, acknowledgements. Then...

LEWIS

(a toast)

To whatever may come.

Various "here-here's."

As the housemates CLINK bottles, we CRANE UP, looking down on the ensemble.

A poke, a LAUGH, and we...

FADE OUT.