

TRUTH HURTS

Written by

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INT. LANGSTON HOTEL - NIGHT

Housekeeper TONYA WILLIAMS, late 20s/early 30s African-American, pushes a large cart of towels and bedding down a hallway. She unlocks and opens a maintenance door, checks to make sure no one is looking, then pulls a large, narrow canister from deep within the cart and enters the room.

On another floor, housekeeper JENNIFER TOMPKINS, very early 20s, does the same.

On yet another floor, Tonya exits an elevator with her cart. Three men in black suits, with short haircuts and earpieces, are stationed there. They run a wand over her and search her cart thoroughly. Tonya is patient. Finding nothing, they wave her through.

Two more men, looking a lot like the three at the elevator, are stationed outside a room. Tonya walks past them and enters a room two rooms away. This room is unoccupied; its bed is made. The bedside clock reads 2:45 AM.

Tonya turns down a corner of the bedspread to reveal one end of another large, narrow canister, parallel to the wall and hidden with the pillows. The canister has a hose attached. Tonya runs the hose to a ventilation grill and shoves it through.

On yet another floor, Jennifer exits a room two rooms away from more men guarding a hotel room. She passes still more men guarding the elevator landing on this floor and pushes her cart into the elevator.

On the ground floor, Tonya and Jennifer see each other from a distance. Tonya gives a small nod. Jennifer returns it.

Jennifer exits an elevator on yet another floor, still pushing her cart. She enters an unoccupied room, shuts the door, and turns the light on and off three times at two-second intervals.

INT. A ROOM IN THE PRESTON HOTEL - NIGHT

ANDY MATHEWSON, keeping a lookout at the window, sees the blinking light in the Langston Hotel half a block away.

ANDY

Show time.

Andy is early 20s. The four people in the room with him are all late 20s/early 30s: NATHAN FORESTER, GRACE NOLAN, STEVE GRANBURY, and DAVID CASSOWARY. Grace has a bit of a goth look to her.

They put on light jackets and pick up bags. As Nathan puts on his jacket, Andy notices he's wearing a pistol in a holster.

ANDY (CONT'D)

Hey! The fuck is that?

NATHAN

Problem?

ANDY

Yeah. We agreed -- no violence, no bloodshed.

NATHAN

Doesn't mean I can't take precautions.

ANDY

(to Steve)

You okay with this?

NATHAN

Hey, it's too late now. Come on, we need to roll!

Andy glares at Nathan. Grace smirks at Andy. Nathan leads them out the door.

INT./EXT. THE LANGSTON HOTEL - NIGHT

In the parking garage, Nathan and the others pull up in an SUV by the hotel doors. Wearing gas masks, they rush inside.

BRAD PINCHER, a nationally recognized news anchor, begins the montage of news excerpts.

BRAD (V.O.)

Stunning news out of Los Angeles today. All three presidential candidates were kidnapped simultaneously some time after midnight!

Carrying a bag and wearing a gas mask, Tonya goes behind the front desk, where hotel employees are passed out. She enters a room containing security camera screens and starts pulling equipment out of her bag.

NEWS ANCHOR #2 (V.O.)

Authorities are not releasing any details at this time...

On an upper floor, men in black suits by the elevator lie on the ground, still. Jennifer, wearing a gas mask, meets Andy and David at the elevator.

NEWS ANCHOR #3 (V.O.)

We're hearing reports from some of the hotel employees that they passed out, and that all security footage was either destroyed or removed...

Nathan and Grace stand by CARSON HIGHTOWER, asleep in his bed, HIS WIFE next to him. Carson is late 50s Caucasian, somewhat handsome. They swab his upper arm and prepare to make an incision.

NEWS ANCHOR #4 (V.O.)

We're not hearing reports of any fatalities at this time, although we have heard reports of an explosion...

Andy and David dump an unconscious TED FLETCHER and a laptop into Jennifer's cart. Ted is mid 40s Caucasian, somewhat handsome. Inside his room, Jennifer pockets his phone. Then she goes into his bathroom, quickly examines several pill bottles, and pockets one.

BRAD (V.O.)

Police are now saying they believe the purpose of the explosive device was to spread pieces of paper, perhaps some kind of propaganda.

Steve comes out a service door onto the hotel roof. He uses zip ties to attach a device to some pipes near the edge.

BRAD (V.O.)

Chris Conrad is on the scene.
Chris, what do you have?

Tonya rushes her cart down a hallway, past men in black suits passed out, frantically pushing them to one side. Andy and David exit a room carrying CANDICE STEINWAY and a laptop, and dump both into Tonya's cart. Candice is late 40s Caucasian, attractive.

CHRIS CONRAD, a nationally recognized TV reporter, takes over.

CHRIS (V.O.)

Yeah, Brad, I'm just outside the Langston Hotel, where the
(MORE)

kidnapping is said to have occurred...

Nathan and Grace rush down a hallway with Carson unconscious on a luggage cart. A bandage is around Carson's upper arm. Grace carries a laptop.

A door opens behind them. Nathan whips out the pistol and points it at the noise, and sees ALEXANDER BAINBRIDGE, an elderly man, stumble out of his room. Alexander holds a cloth to his face, but the gas is obviously affecting him.

CHRIS (V.O.)
...and where apparently all three candidates were staying...

Alexander and Nathan lock eyes for a moment, then Alexander's eyes grow wide when he sees the gun. Alexander falls to his knees, clearly close to passing out.

Nathan puts the gun away, and he and Grace rush off with their captive.

CHRIS (V.O.)
...all here in LA in preparation for what was to have been their second debate tonight.

The kidnapppers place their captives in the SUV, pile in with all their equipment, and speed away.

CHRIS (V.O.)
And I have here one of the pieces of paper which have fallen over the city like confetti.

The device Steve left on the hotel roof detonates. Thousands of small pieces of paper scatter across the cityscape.

CHRIS (V.O.)
Each piece of paper we've seen so far has the same thing written on it. It's a location on the dark web!

INT. BUNKER - NIGHT

The kidnapppers enter, pushing the captives ahead of them. The captives are walking, wearing hoods and handcuffed.

The bunker is a large rectangular space with a high ceiling. Only one door, in a corner. No windows. Lighting is okay but not great.

At the near end, by the door, Tonya and Andy sit at desks loaded with high-tech computer and A/V equipment and begin working quickly. Each works so smoothly that they are obviously the ones who commonly work at these desks, which are on a platform about eighteen inches above the floor, giving them a more commanding view of the bunker.

Directly in front of their desks are a couple of tables with chairs around them, acting as a general communal area.

Along one wall are two other desks with more standard computer equipment.

Along the other wall are three crude but solid structures built of plywood, each about the size of a bedroom, with plumbing pipes and electrical cables leading in and out of them.

At the far end, lights and video cameras point towards a makeshift studio area backed with hanging black cloth. Here, the kidnapers chain their captives to three chairs, facing the cameras, and remove their hoods.

Nathan stands before the captives. The remaining kidnapers stand back to watch.

NATHAN

Candice Steinway, the Republican
presidential nominee.

Candice gives Nathan a what-the-fuck? look.

NATHAN (CONT'D)

Ted Fletcher, the Democratic
presidential nominee.

Ted glares at him.

NATHAN (CONT'D)

Carson Hightower, an independent --
so you claim -- who has a real shot
at winning the presidency of this
great nation.

CARSON

What the fuck do you want?

CANDICE

Isn't it obvious? They're going to
kill us. Why else would they show
us their faces?

ANDY

Believe it or not, we actually don't want to hurt you. At all.

NATHAN

We're proud to show our faces because when this is over, the three of you might still be alive, but we will be heroes.

TED

You're a fucking loser. There's no way you're getting out of this alive!

CARSON

They're all losers...but with a shitload of inside information. They knew about the GPS in my arm! I can count on one hand the number of people who knew about that. But I trust them all!

NATHAN

Nice try, but nope. We're just really good at hacking and spying -- and you're not as good at keeping your information secure as you think you are.

TED

Well, how's this for your hacking and spying: I need special medicine twice a day or I could die!

His fellow captives look surprised at this.

TED (CONT'D)

So how's that for "not wanting to hurt us?"

Jennifer steps forward and takes the pill bottle out of her pocket, showing it to them.

JENNIFER

We know.

Ted is too stunned for words.

CARSON

(to Ted)

What do you mean, you need medicine? You have a health problem you been keeping secret?

TED

Oh, like you haven't.

CARSON

Bullshit!

NATHAN

Nice to see political discourse at its finest, gentlemen.

(to Tonya)

How we doin'?

TONYA

About five hundred thousand.

NATHAN

Is that all?

ANDY

For the dark web, that's awesome.

TONYA

There'll be enough people recording to keep eeeeeeveryone happy.

NATHAN

All right!

(to the captives)

Sorry about showing you to the great American public in your PJs and no makeup, but it's show time!

Jennifer turns on the studio lights. Grace operates a camera, showing Nathan standing in front of the captives.

Tonya points to Nathan as if to say, "You're live." Nathan speaks into the camera.

NATHAN (CONT'D)

My fellow Americans.

Nathan smirks.

NATHAN (CONT'D)

Ah, I love that phrase. My fellow Americans. My name is Nathan Forester. Welcome to our little corner of the dark web.

Tonya monitors her equipment. She seems to like what she sees.

NATHAN (CONT'D)

As you can see behind me, my merry band has kidnapped all three -- count 'em, three! -- U.S. presidential candidates.

The captives glare stone-faced into the camera.

NATHAN (CONT'D)

Like many of you, we are sick of the constant stream of lies and bullshit that comes streaming out of politicians' pie-holes.

The kidnapppers look on.

NATHAN (CONT'D)

As the years have gone by, the lies have gotten worse, as has the stupidity of the people who believe and defend them.

Andy looks as if Nathan is an inspiration.

NATHAN (CONT'D)

No more.

Jennifer nods.

NATHAN (CONT'D)

Today, we cut the crap. Today, we change the rules.

The captives look on with worry.

NATHAN (CONT'D)

These three were supposed to have a televised debate tonight. And they will. Here, with us. Only, we're gonna have a real debate. 'Cause, you see...

Nathan holds up the pistol.

NATHAN (CONT'D)

...we're not fuckin' around. Our rules are simple. These politicians you see behind me will speak the truth, or they will die.

The captives look horrified.

NATHAN (CONT'D)

We will fact-check everything they say in real time. With, I am proud to say, no bias whatsoever.

Carson rolls his eyes.

NATHAN (CONT'D)

And if any of these fine people dodge a question or utter a single lie during the debate, I will use this gun to blow out that person's brains, live, on stage. No. Second. Chances.

Ted is horrified.

NATHAN (CONT'D)

And the debate will then continue with those who remain.

Candice shakes her head in disbelief. Nathan's fellow kidnappers look resolute.

NATHAN (CONT'D)

We'll have a debate each of the next four nights, starting tonight. Once we've had our real debates, if our candidates are still alive, they'll be released unharmed. But probably not unchanged.

Nathan smirks.

NATHAN (CONT'D)

So, come back to our little corner of the dark web tonight at eight PM Eastern, five PM Pacific. You deserve to know your candidates... and we're gonna make sure you do.

Nathan nods to Tonya, who flips a switch. Jennifer dims the lights.

CANDICE

You're insane.

NATHAN

Genius is often mistaken for insanity.

TED

You really think we're gonna go through with this?

NATHAN

You can back out by taking a bullet.

Carson shakes his head.

NATHAN (CONT'D)

Hey, you were crazy enough to lie like a rug and think you could get away with it.

CANDICE

Lovely. Victim-blaming on top of everything else.

NATHAN

Don't you dare play the victim card, bitch. Don't you dare pull the shit you've pulled and then whine when you get called out!

Nathan glares at all of them.

NATHAN (CONT'D)

Tonight, we're gonna have a reckoning.

INT. BUNKER AND CLOTHING STORE - DAY

MONTAGE

Each captive is locked in one of the plywood structures. Tonya roughly ushers Candice into her cell, almost shoving her through the door. Candice gives Tonya a baffled look, but Tonya just glares at her with hatred as she shuts the door.

POLITICAL COMMENTATOR #1 (V.O.)

...an unprecedented assault on our democracy and on our political process...

Each plywood structure contains: a twin bed; sink; toilet; small shower; table; mirror; small dresser and chair; floor lamp; and an empty bar for hanging clothes. It's very cramped.

NEWS ANCHOR #2 (V.O.)

...secretary Larson has labeled the kidnapers as terrorists...

Each captive finds they have been supplied with television makeup and basic toiletries.

NEWS ANCHOR #4 (V.O.)
...dozens of world leaders have
denounced the kidnappers,
including...

Ted sets his medicine on his table.

NEWS ANCHOR #3 (V.O.)
Well, John, it is true that the
kidnappers somehow accomplished
what they did with no real lasting
harm to anyone, at least physical
harm...

Steve and Jennifer enter a high-end clothing store.

BRAD (V.O.)
...joining us now is a woman who
went to college with Mr.
Forester...

Jennifer and Steve, consulting some notes, pick out expensive
suits and skirts.

NEWS ANCHOR #3 (V.O.)
...A surprising number of Americans
have expressed support for the
kidnappers...

Still dressed in their nightclothes, each captive tests their
cell for any means of escape, but there are none.

POLITICAL COMMENTATOR #3 (V.O.)
A friend of mine told me just an
hour ago that his grandmother now
wants to know how to access the
darknet.

Off-screen audience laughter.

POLITICAL COMMENTATOR #4 (V.O.)
Uh oh, Granny's headed for the Silk
Road!

POLITICAL COMMENTATOR #3 (V.O.)
Right!

More audience laughter off-screen.

Steve and Jennifer continue to pick out clothing.

BRAD (V.O.)
...a petition to ask Congress to
exonerate and protect the
(MORE)

kidnappers had already reached
three million signatures by two
 o'clock this afternoon...

Jennifer and Steve leave the store with a load of clothes.

CHRIS (V.O.)

Joining me now is Jeremy Flanagan,
 a mechanic here in the LA area.
 Jeremy, what do you make of these
 kidnappers and their plans for
 tonight?

Steve and Jennifer return to the bunker with the clothes.

JEREMY (V.O.)

I think they's righteous dudes!
 Man, I wish I had the balls to pull
 off what they doin'. We're not
 gonna hear those politicians' usual
 crap tonight, I can tell you that.
 I can't wait to see it!

The kidnappers bring the new clothes to their captives and
 hang them on the bars.

NEWS ANCHOR #2 (V.O.)

Jan Worley, the Green Party's
 presidential nominee, issued a
 statement today saying she was
 deeply offended that she was not
 deemed worthy of being kidnapped.

Candice glumly looks through the assorted suits and skirts
 now hanging in her cubicle.

POLITICAL COMMENTATOR #2 (V.O.)

...but we have to remember there
 are security concerns here, too.
 Two of those kidnapped are U.S.
 Senators, and we've received word
 that their electronic devices may
 have been taken, also, and who
 knows what sensitive information
 may be on those?

Ted scowls into the mirror as he tries on his new suit.

POLITICAL COMMENTATOR #5 (V.O.)

What these terrorists are doing is
 reprehensible, but even more
 reprehensible is the way so many
 people think this is a good thing--

POLITICAL COMMENTATOR #6 (V.O.)

It is a good thing. This may be the best thing to happen to our country in a long time!

The kidnapppers help apply television makeup to the captives, who are now dressed sharply.

POLITICAL COMMENTATOR #5 (V.O.)

Excuse me, I was talking--

POLITICAL COMMENTATOR #6 (V.O.)

And it's time for apologists like you to shut the hell up. We have long been facing a crisis of truth in this country, and these heroes are just the ones to finally take it on!

INT. BUNKER - DAY

The captives sit at a table facing the main cameras. They are cleaned up and well-dressed. Each has a microphone pinned to their collar.

A few feet in front of them, off to one side, is a large monitor, placed so they can see it easily.

About twenty feet in front of them, a single empty chair faces them. This chair has a small table beside it, a small section of black cloth hanging behind it, and a camera on a tripod facing it.

David stands near the captives, kind of antsy, waiting for Jennifer to apply the final touch of makeup to Ted.

JENNIFER

(to all the captives)

Sorry we don't have any obligatory American flag pins for your lapels. We're really more interested in facts and policy than subliminal marketing.

Grace attaches shackles to Candice's ankles. The other captives already wear ankle cuffs.

CANDICE

Is that necessary?

Grace doesn't even look at her.

GRACE

Precautions.

Grace walks away. David steps up to Ted.

DAVID

Senator Fletcher, you were chairman of the Armed Services Committee for three years.

TED

That's right.

JENNIFER

Not now, David.

DAVID

I've just gotta know, sir...the aliens at Area Fifty-one...

Jennifer grabs David by the ear and drags him away.

JENNIFER

Come on.

The captives find themselves unattended as the kidnapers prepare for the debate. They whisper among themselves.

CANDICE

You guys see any way out?

TED

Not me.

CARSON

No. Nor can I figure out where we are.

CANDICE

They only drove for a few hours after we woke up, and I don't think we were out for long. We must still be in the LA area.

TED

I think some of that driving was to make us think we're further than we really are.

CARSON

Why do you say that?

TED

Eh, just a feeling. I could swear I heard a close airplane twice a few hours apart, like we were near LAX each time. And I thought I heard Andy mention something about "circling around" more than once.

Candice looks around the bunker.

CANDICE

I don't see any identifying features. Nothing we could say to give people a hint to where we are.

TED

What do you make of these people, Carson?

CANDICE

Sure. Don't ask me. I'm just a woman.

TED

Fine. What do the two of you make of our captors?

The kidnapppers bustle around the room, preparing for the debate. The captives look at each one as they talk about them.

CARSON

David's their weak point. I don't even know what he's doing here.

CANDICE

He insisted I knew something about the Philadelphia Experiment.

CARSON

He asked me about Bigfoot.

TED

Seriously?

CARSON

I'm serious. And so was he.

CANDICE

I think Andy's telling the truth when he says they don't want to hurt us.

TED

I agree. Same with Jennifer. Those two need to be at a campus protest or something, not here.

CARSON

Tonya's obviously their tech genius.

TED

Andy, too. He's almost as good as Tonya.

CANDICE

I can't get any kind of read on Steve at all.

CARSON

I can't get a read on Grace.

TED

I think Steve is some kind of explosives expert.

CANDICE

And I think Grace is an anarchist who's just here for the shits and giggles. I also think she's Nathan's girlfriend.

Nathan approaches the empty chair facing them, carrying a stack of notes and the gun.

TED

And what do we make of Nathan?

The others don't answer that. Nathan places the pistol on the table. THE GUN looks menacing.

Brad is somber. His words are the only sound.

BRAD (V.O.)

Good evening. It's five minutes before the hour...

MONTAGE - NEWS WARNING ACROSS AMERICA - CONTINUOUS

BRAD (V.O.)

...and a solemn time for our nation.

THE ARCHER FAMILY is in their living room. They are a husband and wife, on the sofa with their arms across each other's shoulders. To one side is a baby in a playpen.

Brad is on their TV, looking into camera.

BRAD

We come to you tonight with a special program, a warning, and an explanation.

Cars travel down Fifth Avenue in Manhattan. It is dusk on the East Coast.

BRAD (V.O.)

In just a few minutes, we will be showing the live stream provided by the terrorists...

Pedestrians mill around the base of the Gateway Arch. In St. Louis, the sun hasn't quite gone down.

BRAD (V.O.)

...who kidnapped the presidential candidates early this morning.

THE BRISCOLL FAMILY is in their living room. A single father and his college-age daughter watch the TV; his high-school-age son clowns around with a football behind the sofa. The father tells him to knock it off.

BRAD (V.O.)

We do not make the decision to air this program lightly. You could certainly view it on line whether we showed it or not.

Pickup trucks travel down a road in a Midwestern rural town, silhouetted against the setting sun. Two boys and a dog walk alongside the road. One of the boys carries a stick, absently poking at the ground with it as he goes.

BRAD (V.O.)

We debated this decision for hours. Not all of us agree with it. Not all of you will agree with it.

EMILY CONSTANTINE, a single mother, watches a small TV as she frantically cooks dinner in her cramped, dingy apartment. Her three-month-old and two-year-old children are nearby.

BRAD (V.O.)

Indeed, we feel there is no right answer in this bizarre situation.

A busboy wipes off tables on a patio at a restaurant, sunlight striking the tops of the Rocky Mountains behind him. Some departing customers smile at him on the way by, and he

smiles in return with a head bob greeting and wishes them good night.

BRAD (V.O.)

We despise giving terrorists a platform, thus legitimizing their methods.

A man in waders stands in a stream fly fishing.

BRAD (V.O.)

Yet we have a duty to report newsworthy events as they happen.

ALLISON DREXLER, a single woman in her late 20s, is curled up under a blanket on her sofa, eating ice cream. Her dog lies beside her. All her curtains are drawn tight. The only light is the flickering of the TV.

BRAD (V.O.)

Therefore, we have established a connection with their live stream from the dark web...

People walk along the Las Vegas strip a couple of hours before sunset. Most seem to be having a great time.

BRAD (V.O.)

...and we will bring it to you on a five-second delay.

In a park, an ice cream vendor reaches down to give a cone into the outstretched hands of a small boy, his parents behind him. Everyone is smiling.

BRAD (V.O.)

If anything too graphic occurs, we will not show it.

Traffic is heavy on the Golden Gate Bridge. On the West Coast, several hours of daylight remain.

BRAD (V.O.)

The program we are about to show may contain situations and/or images unsuitable for a younger audience. Viewer discretion is strongly advised.

People stroll, jog, and rollerblade alongside a California beach.

BRAD (V.O.)

All of us here join with all of you
in our thoughts and prayers...

THE EVERTON FAMILY, husband and wife, watches TV in their living room. Mrs. Everton's elderly parents, the FRANKLINS, sit nearby. Toys scattered to one side indicate that the Evertons have an eight-year-old and a ten-year-old who are not present.

Brad is on their TV screen.

BRAD

...that the candidates, and our
nation, endure this attack with as
little harm as possible.

INT. BUNKER - DAY

INTERCUT AMONG BRAD'S NEWSROOM AND LIVING ROOMS ACROSS THE
NATION

Andy and Tonya work at their desks.

Andy has four small screens and one larger screen in front of him. Three of his small screens show the view from each of the two main cameras and Nathan's camera; the others are dark.

Tonya's main monitor is dark, but two of her smaller monitors read "Web Traffic" and "Firewall."

Nathan sits in the chair facing the captives, attaching a microphone to his collar. He half turns to address Tonya and Andy.

NATHAN

Make sure nothing's visible behind
me.

Andy starts to answer but Tonya beats him to it.

TONYA

No shit, Nathan! I did that five
minutes ago!

NATHAN

Do it again! Our lives depend on
it, so make sure. I need my web
guru and my director to stay sharp!

Enraged, Tonya silently mouths "Fuck you!" to Nathan, but he doesn't see. Andy sighs.

Without moving very much, the captives converse quietly.

TED

We all agreed? We don't cooperate with this farce any more than we have to?

CARSON

Agreed.

CANDICE

Agreed. But I gotta tell you...

Ted eyes her suspiciously.

CANDICE (CONT'D)

...there are some things I've kept quiet about. But if this is the night I die...

She looks Carson in the eye.

CANDICE (CONT'D)

...I won't have any reason to keep quiet about them any more.

Carson gives her a puzzled look.

Jennifer takes a position to one side, within Nathan's field of vision. David and Steve sit at the desks along the side wall. Grace operates the first main camera.

NATHAN

(to the captives)

Thirty seconds.

CARSON

Why go through with this farce? You have no intention of letting us live.

NATHAN

I've told you the rules, and unlike you, I don't lie.

CARSON

You lie to yourself. You want to kill us. You want it so badly. I can see it in your eyes.

Nathan gives him a curious look, but doesn't seem to know what to say to this.

Tonya activates a control. A quotation appears both on the screen facing the captives and on the fourth small monitor in front of Andy. Andy selects that image and it appears on his main monitor.

TONYA

Five, four, three...

Tonya activates another control and points to Jennifer. Jennifer points to Nathan, then goes to operate the second main camera.

Nathan reads the quotation aloud.

NATHAN

Besides, as the vilest Writer has
his Readers, so the greatest Liar
has his Believers...

In a news room, Brad and a group of his colleagues solemnly watch the live stream.

NATHAN (V.O.)

...and it often happens, that if a
Lie be believ'd only for an Hour,
it has done its Work, and there is
no farther occasion for it.

The Archers watch sadly.

NATHAN (V.O.)

Falsehood flies, and the Truth
comes limping after it; so that
when Men come to be undeceiv'd...

Emily watches, holding her three-month-old.

NATHAN (V.O.)

...it is too late; the Jest is
over, and the Tale has had its
Effect. Jonathan Swift.

Andy makes the view fade from the quotation to Nathan, looking into camera.

NATHAN

That quotation can be summed up
with the modern adage, "A lie makes
it halfway around the world before
the truth even gets its boots on."

Nathan gives a little smile.

NATHAN (CONT'D)

Good evening, America. Welcome to the first of four real debates, a debate more real than most of you have seen in your lifetimes. I'm your host, Nathan Forester, and you can be damned sure no one has shared any questions with the candidates ahead of time.

Nathan's smile is super charming.

NATHAN (CONT'D)

I won't introduce the candidates, you know who they are. I'll give each of them two minutes for opening remarks. Mr. Hightower, we'll start with you.

Carson snorts lightly and shakes his head.

CARSON

This so-called debate is an attack on us and on our country. It is a mockery of our political process. I am only participating because I have been told I will be killed if I do not, and I will not dignify these proceedings with any further voluntary comments.

Andy cuts to Nathan.

NATHAN

All right. Now the other two candidates will say exactly the same thing while trying to sound like they're not copying the first guy. Senator Steinway, any opening remarks?

CANDICE

Go. To. Hell.

Mr. Briscoll gives a small snort of amusement. His daughter gives him a disapproving look. His son now sits on the sofa.

NATHAN

Nicely done. Senator Fletcher.

TED

When I am President, it will be my supreme pleasure to send each of you to prison for the rest of your
(MORE)

lives. Each and every one of you is a complete piece of shit, and you can fact-check that statement all you like.

Andy shows a little smile of admiration.

NATHAN

Also nicely done! Wow, we're off to a rollicking good start. Okay! Here we go. Now, some ground rules about lying.

The captives look apprehensive.

NATHAN (CONT'D)

We're not gonna waste time belaboring the points of little piddly lies which can be passed off as poor interpretation, or explained away with a casual "I just misspoke."

Nathan checks his notes.

NATHAN (CONT'D)

For example: Senator Fletcher, you have said several times that the list of voters the North Carolina Republicans tried to purge was two-thirds black and Democratic.

TED

That's right.

NATHAN

But you were talking about one town, when your words made it sound as if you were talking about the whole state, and those stats don't apply to the whole state.

Nathan looks at Ted appraisingly.

NATHAN (CONT'D)

When you look at the whole state, the party percentages are pretty even. So you say something which sounds dire, but if you're ever called on it, you've got that back door of "oh, I was just talking about that one town."

(shrugs)

Eh. We'll give you a pass.

TED
I'm thrilled.

The Evertons and Franklins are engrossed with the program.

NATHAN
Another example: Senator Steinway, in twenty-fifteen, in an effort to criticize President Obama, you claimed that ninety-two million Americans were not working.

CANDICE
That figure is entirely accurate.

NATHAN
It is accurate. You're not. You completely failed to mention that that number included more than thirty-seven million people over the age of sixty-five, and almost twelve million in high school or just starting college!

Nathan grins as if to say, "You sly devil, you!" Candice glares at him sternly.

NATHAN (CONT'D)
But again, that's piddly shit. We'll give you a pass. Mr. Hightower--

CARSON
Don't even bother. We get the point.

NATHAN
No, no, I don't want you to feel left out. See, I'm also trying to educate our viewers on spotting half-truths and spin. It's a public service, no need to thank me.

The captives look pained. So do Brad and his colleagues, and so do the Archers. Nathan consults his notes.

NATHAN (CONT'D)
Mr. Hightower, you often boast that when you were mayor of Whitten, you lowered property taxes and the town still grew richer.

CARSON
Correct.

NATHAN

You neglect to mention that as the property tax rate went down, the sales tax rate went up. Also, the county raised the vehicle tax, and some of that money was apportioned to Whitten.

CARSON

Has it ever occurred to you that the vehicle tax would have been raised anyway, so I was still saving the people money?

NATHAN

(makes a buzzer sound)
Ehhhhhh! That doesn't pass the smell test, and you were in complete control of that sales tax raise.

Nathan sits back in his chair.

NATHAN (CONT'D)

But like I said, this is all piddly shit. But I bring all this up to make another point about lying by omission. A half truth is a whole lie, and it's the worst kind of lie, and it'll getcha a bullet faster than any other kind of lie. Just lettin' you know.

Nathan eyes Ted.

NATHAN (CONT'D)

Senator Fletcher, you are HIV positive and have withheld this information from the public. Why?

The Archers look at each other with surprise. Mrs. Franklin is shocked.

TED

Because it's nobody's business but my own.

NATHAN

Your immune system has suffered, has it not?

TED

Yes. I went undiagnosed for too long. I started treatment late.

NATHAN

When were you diagnosed?

TED

Three years ago.

NATHAN

How did you contract HIV?

TED

I don't know.

Ted meets Nathan's gaze evenly. His face reveals nothing.

NATHAN

No law requires you to reveal health information, but a compromised immune system is a concern.

TED

Only if it affects my ability to do my job, which it never has and never will.

NATHAN

I disagree. Stress and lack of sleep both lower a person's immunity, and yours is low to begin with. In a prolonged emergency, such as a large terrorist attack, you would be more vulnerable than most.

TED

Bullshit! The only one who has the right, or the authority, to make a final judgment of a person's health and physical ability is themselves. Certainly not you, unless you've got a medical degree up your ass!

Emily, bottle-feeding her baby, watches.

NATHAN

Not there or anywhere else. But I still maintain your compromised immune system is a matter of public concern, and supersedes your right to privacy.

TED

And who made you God to make that decision?

NATHAN
No God, just logic.

Ted looks at Nathan with contempt.

NATHAN (CONT'D)
But let's talk about your boat,
Senator Fletcher.

TED
I don't have a boat.

NATHAN
Yeah, you sold it for three hundred
thirty thousand dollars -- after
you announced your campaign, which
makes the money from that sale look
a lot like an illegal contribution.

TED
The FEC had no problem with it.

NATHAN
Did the FEC know about this photo?

Tonya presses a button and a photo appears on the monitor facing the captives. It also appears in front of Andy, who cuts to it; it appears on the Briscoll's TV. Mr. Briscoll looks at it curiously. The photo shows Ted and some other people having a great time on a luxury houseboat.

NATHAN (CONT'D)
This photo was taken of you, on the
very boat you supposedly no longer
own, three weeks after you sold it
to James Emerson, a well-known
major contributor to many PACs.

Nathan places his hand on the gun, his finger nestling on the trigger. His eyes are bright with anticipation.

The Evertons and Franklins are tense.

NATHAN (CONT'D)
Now, think very carefully, sir. Do
you want to tell us again how you
"sold" your boat?

Ted looks intently at Nathan for a few seconds, then his eyes flick to the gun and his shoulders slump.

TED

You're right. I didn't really sell my boat. It was a campaign contribution.

Nathan breathes deeply, looking triumphant. Andy smiles.

Brad and his colleagues absorb this information. Allison is astonished.

NATHAN

Senator Steinway, is there anything you'd like to say about the truth we've just uncovered?

CANDICE

Am I under threat to do so?

NATHAN

No.

CANDICE

I have nothing to say.

Nathan looks at Carson, but Carson just shakes his head before Nathan can say anything. Nathan shrugs.

NATHAN

Mr. Hightower, let's talk about the rolling blackouts when you were governor.

CARSON

(contemptuously)

Are you going to ask any questions about policy or current events?

NATHAN

Eventually. We just need to clear some things up, first.

CANDICE

You have no idea how to actually run a debate, do you?

TED

This isn't a debate. It's an inquisition.

CARSON

You're like a child with a toy you don't know how to use.

Nathan is taken aback by the sudden united attack on his character. Then he smiles.

NATHAN

Whatever my flaws, they pale in comparison to yours. And as it happens, yes, we will have a debate. But first, we're gonna address the big lies you've been telling.

Nathan gives them a hard look.

NATHAN (CONT'D)

To discuss the future, we first have to clear away the past. Years of it in some cases. Like the blackouts.

Nathan glares at Carson.

NATHAN (CONT'D)

Mr. Hightower, when you were governor of California, during a press conference, you called for an end to all federal and state investigations of Enron. Correct?

CARSON

If you say so.

NATHAN

I do, and so does historic record. But you gave this press conference after the FERC had released their findings that Enron participated in a number of energy scams. So why did you want the investigations halted?

Nathan places his hand on the gun. Again, his eyes are bright with anticipation.

The Archers watch with trepidation.

CARSON

I hadn't read the FERC report at the time.

Without turning around, Nathan raises his other hand and makes a give-it-to-him signal. Tonya places a video on the monitor. It shows a younger Carson at a press conference listening to a reporter's question (which is inaudible on the video), then answering.

CARSON (CONT'D)

(on the video)

I've read the FERC report, there's nothing there. Anyone who reads it will see there's nothing there.

The video stops. Nathan grips the gun and stares hard at Carson.

NATHAN

Mr. Hightower, were you lying then, or are you lying now?

CARSON

It's been ten years. I don't remember reading the FERC report, but if I said I did, I must have.

NATHAN

And you told reporters there was nothing there.

Carson says nothing.

At the Briscolls, the son seems very interested now.

NATHAN (CONT'D)

But the FERC report clearly states, in detail, several scams perpetrated by Enron. In clear black and white, in words any junior high student can understand. Shall we read it together?

CARSON

There's no need.

NATHAN

Isn't there? The entire report is being added to our website as we speak. I encourage people to read it for themselves. And I'm going to ask you one more time, Mr. Hightower...

Nathan holds up the pistol.

NATHAN (CONT'D)

Why did you tell reporters the FERC report contained nothing, and why did you call for the investigations to end?

Carson breathes deeply, purses his lips, and finally answers.

CARSON

I had friends at Enron. I didn't want them to get hurt.

NATHAN

So when you looked a reporter in the eye and said the FERC report had nothing, you were lying, weren't you?

CARSON

Yes.

Jennifer looks at Carson sternly.

Nathan seems almost disappointed. He slowly lays down the gun.

The Archers slowly breathe out.

NATHAN

Tell me, Mr. Hightower -- why is it okay to declare an organization innocent without disclosing they gave millions to your PAC?

CARSON

Those contributions were a matter of public record. I didn't hide them.

NATHAN

The average Joe on the street doesn't know that and doesn't have time to look it up, and you know that perfectly well. It's both common courtesy, and the most basic level of common sense, to disclose those connections.

Mrs. Everton nods.

NATHAN (CONT'D)

As a matter of journalistic integrity, op-ed writers are expected to disclose such connections, even if they are a matter of public record elsewhere. People who seek public office should do the same. Don't you think?

CARSON

I do now.

NATHAN

We'll see if you practice that new belief in the future. If you have one.

Nathan looks at Ted and Candice.

NATHAN (CONT'D)

Either of you want to comment on any of this?

They both shake their heads.

NATHAN (CONT'D)

Mr. Hightower, was Barack Obama born in Kenya, and the U.S. government faked his birth in Hawaii over three decades earlier in case he might run for President one day?

Allison watches intently, her ice cream forgotten.

CARSON

I don't believe so.

NATHAN

That didn't stop you from saying it publicly several dozen times.

CARSON

I never made that claim.

NATHAN

No, you just stated that other people made that claim. Repeatedly. Remember we talked about back doors earlier? That's a classic.

CARSON

Well, it's true. Others were making that claim.

NATHAN

There are people who claim the Earth is flat. Do you repeat that, too, just to hear yourself talk? Cut the bullshit. Right now. You repeated this claim as often as you could, purposefully, knowing more people would believe it the more you said it.

CARSON
I was trying to win an election.

NATHAN
By spreading a lie, knowing it was
a lie.

Nathan holds up the gun.

NATHAN (CONT'D)
Isn't that right?

CARSON
You are correct.

Nathan looks at Carson appraisingly, and seems a little
disappointed. He lowers the gun again.

Brad and his colleagues watch intently.

NATHAN
Well, you weren't the only one, Mr.
Hightower. Senator Steinway, is
Barack Obama Muslim?

CANDICE
No.

NATHAN
Was Hillary Clinton running a child
sex ring out of a pizza parlor?

CANDICE
No.

NATHAN
Was Barack Obama planning to attack
the state of Texas by sending the
U.S. Army through tunnels under
abandoned Walmarts?

CANDICE
(sighing heavily)
No.

NATHAN
So you've seen the light on all
these topics?

CANDICE
I have never believed any of those
things.

NATHAN

Here's a video of you speaking to the Family First Council in twenty-twelve.

Tonya brings up a video of Candice giving a speech.

CANDICE

(on video)

We cannot afford another four years of a president who betrays everything we hold dear for his fellow Muslims!

On the video, the audience cheers.

AUDIENCE MEMBER ON VIDEO (O.S.)

That's right!

Tonya stops the video.

CANDICE

I misspoke that day. I should have said, "his Muslim friends."

The Franklins don't seem to like what they're seeing.

NATHAN

Are Muslims our enemy?

CANDICE

Are you an idiot? Do you not pay the slightest bit of attention to the news?

NATHAN

I want you to answer yes or no. Are Muslims our enemy?

CANDICE

The killers are!

NATHAN

Do you think any of Obama's Muslim friends are killers, or participate in terrorism?

CANDICE

I think he made horrible decisions which benefited extremist Muslims who are killers, and they rejoiced with every decision he ever made!

NATHAN

So that's what you mean by "Muslim friends"?

CANDICE

Well if he was helping them, they weren't his enemies, were they?

Mrs. Franklin nods.

NATHAN

So you live in a binary universe where "not his enemies" somehow equals "friends." Good to know.

Candice glares at him.

NATHAN (CONT'D)

Only a small percentage of Muslims are terrorists, or condone terrorism in any way. So as long as you're going to be pathetic enough to claim that a bunch of killers are Obama's friends, couldn't you at least say "Obama's terrorist friends" instead?

CANDICE

They're also Muslim, so my statement is accurate.

NATHAN

The fact that they're Muslim as well as terrorists is irrelevant.

CANDICE

Their religion is an intrinsic part of their terrorism and their ideology, so it is relevant. That's why I say it.

NATHAN

Okay. But when you and others constantly harp on the fact that they're Muslim, you inspire prejudice towards millions of other Muslims who are innocent. It causes harm.

CANDICE

And that's a shame. I wish it were otherwise, because that's awful. But I'm not going to stop saying they're Muslim terrorists when

(MORE)

their religion is a part of what they do. Turning a blind eye to that fact would cause even more harm.

NATHAN

In your opinion.

CANDICE

In my very strong opinion, yes.

Allison watches thoughtfully, idly sucking on the spoon.

NATHAN

Fair enough. But millions of voters have a knee-jerk reaction to the word "Muslim," especially if they are conservative Christians who see Islam as an ideological threat. Dropping that buzzword as many times as possible gets your base really riled up...which is why you do it.

CANDICE

That accusation is outrageous.

NATHAN

Well, I certainly can't prove it, because you've got your back door escapes all lined up neatly. Like saying you "misspoke" by saying "fellow Muslims" instead of "Muslim friends," which is something that's really hard to say by accident. But let me hit you with this: Over ninety-five percent of suicide bombings are carried out by Muslims.

CANDICE

Absolutely true.

NATHAN

And over ninety-five percent of mass shooters are male. But you never go out of your way to mention gender when talking about mass shooters. Why is that?

CANDICE

If we ever prove a correlation between gender and a given type of
(MORE)

crime, I'll have no problem pointing that out, as well.

NATHAN

Half your base are law-abiding men. I predict that suddenly you'll have a problem doing that.

Candice fumes.

Mr. Archer gives a small snort as if to say, "Huh, that's a good point."

NATHAN (CONT'D)

Let's talk about the person who shot up a pizza parlor because they thought Hillary Clinton was running a child sex ring out of its non-existent basement. I won't give the shooter the dignity of using their name.

CANDICE

Neither will I, and the shooter had nothing to do with me.

NATHAN

After the incident, you tweeted that you, quote, "understood his anger," unquote.

CANDICE

And I immediately apologized because I realized that was a poor choice of words.

NATHAN

'kay, but here's the deal: There are children who know better than to make absurd, outrageous statements like that.

The Briscolls watch thoughtfully.

NATHAN (CONT'D)

If you hear about a crackpot shooting up a restaurant because he believed a conspiracy theory that not even an earthworm would have believed, and your first thought is, "Wow, I understand his anger!", then you have revealed something extremely disturbing about yourself.

CANDICE

I'm sorry, am I getting preached at by the kidnapper with the gun?

Mr. Everton schnorts and Mrs. Everton points at the screen.

NATHAN

The kidnapper with the gun is not running for President. You are.

CANDICE

The kidnapper with the gun might as well be running for President, considering how easily you assume to impose your will on the rest of us.

NATHAN

I seek to impose objective truth. If I sought to impose my will, I'd be telling you how to lead, not how to be honest. But we're talking about your empathy with a crackpot who could have killed innocent people.

CANDICE

I have no empathy with him, nor did I ever. In fact, within a day of that attack, I ordered my people to see if that nutjob had sent me a campaign contribution. It turned out he had, so I returned it.

Nathan looks at Steve and David, whose fingers are flying over their keyboards. A few seconds pass.

CANDICE (CONT'D)

Is this the part where I die if your fact-checkers can't prove what I just said?

Nathan gives the tiniest shrug.

CANDICE (CONT'D)

I might die of boredom first.

NATHAN

IBM's Watson wasn't available.

Steve shakes his head and makes a circular motion with his hand.

NATHAN (CONT'D)

It'll take a while to fact-check that one, but yes, if we find absolute proof that you just lied, it will be your death.

CANDICE

And what happens when you bozos can't find any proof one way or the other?

NATHAN

No harm no foul, especially since it's a minor claim. Let's talk about operation Jade Helm. Why did you believe the U.S. Army was invading Texas?

CANDICE

I have already told you I never believed any such thing.

Nathan wearily makes a motion with his hand and Tonya cues up a video showing Candice speaking on a political talk show.

CANDICE (CONT'D)

(on the video)

We should all be wary of Washington, and I heartily support Governor Abbot for mobilizing the Texas National Guard to protect all Texans.

The video stops. Nathan just looks at Candice.

CANDICE (CONT'D)

There's nothing wrong with sending the National Guard to monitor a joint federal military exercise in one's own state.

Emily, now simply holding her baby, watches.

NATHAN

Why did you need to monitor it?

CANDICE

Just standard and sensible precaution.

NATHAN

You are so full of shit your eyes are brown! One third of all Texas Republicans actually believed the
(MORE)

U.S. was about to invade one of its own states to impose martial law and take their guns. A third! And Governor Abbott was one of them! He sent the National Guard to monitor the U.S. Army because he actually believed this shit. And so did you!

Candice sighs.

CANDICE

The people I represent have always had good reason to fear Washington's overreach. During Jade Helm that fear might have gotten a little out of hand, but I still had to represent those people to the best of my ability.

NATHAN

You mean you had to pander to them. Of course, as a public servant elected to lead, you could have just told them straight up they were being stupid.

Candice is tired of this.

CANDICE

If you want to call it pandering, go ahead. I don't give a damn.

NATHAN

I will call it pandering, and I'll call it something worse: spreading lies. We have somehow reached a point where a dangerous number of people are consistently believing things not even my cat would believe, which is pure insanity, and you helped that phenomenon spread!

ANDY

(whispering to Tonya)
Nathan has a cat?

Tonya makes an I-don't-know-what-he's-talking-about face and shakes her head quickly.

CANDICE

Maybe I did. Maybe I've made mistakes. But even if I have, you
(MORE)

are not the person to whom I have to answer.

NATHAN

If it wasn't for me, you would never have admitted to making mistakes in the first place.

Candice has no answer.

Allison seems displeased with what she's hearing.

Nathan takes a deep breath and lets it out, pausing for a moment.

NATHAN (CONT'D)

Let's talk about the death of Larry Varnell.

Candice groans. Mr. Briscoll's son rolls his eyes.

CANDICE

Must we?

NATHAN

I'm afraid we must, because of this photo right here.

There is a pause. Andy looks at Tonya, who suddenly realizes Nathan is waiting on her. She hurriedly cues up a photo. It's a distant shot of a woman who might be Candice standing in profile on the deck of a houseboat at dusk.

NATHAN (CONT'D)

You have consistently claimed over the years that you were in your cabin from nine PM onward the night Larry died. But this photo shows you out of your cabin at nine-forty-five PM.

CANDICE

Now who's believing conspiracy theories? That is not me in the photo, as I have stated many times.

NATHAN

Several photographic experts claim it's you. And the woman in the photo is wearing clothing very similar to what you were wearing earlier that day.

CANDICE

There were other women on that boat, and we were all wearing similar clothing. That is not me. I was in my cabin with my husband. We were both asleep. Larry was still alive and partying with people when we went to bed. One of those people was Carson Hightower, who will confirm that.

Carson gives a little snort and shake of his head at being roped back into the conversation.

CARSON

Yes, Larry was still alive and with us when you left, although I wouldn't call it "partying." And I don't know that you went to bed, I just know you and your husband wandered away. I actually thought you were off gossiping about the rest of us.

Candice scoffs.

CANDICE

You were never worth my time. The day you broke from the Republican party and went independent, I didn't even stop to blink.

CARSON

Don't give me that! During that weekend you didn't talk about anything else but me. You knew I was there to get Larry's support away from your father, and you were scared witless!

CANDICE

You're delusional. My father had Larry's support sewn up completely, and you know it! That's why you-

Candice stops.

CARSON

That's why I what?

It slowly dawns on him.

CARSON (CONT'D)

Killed him? Is that what you were going to say?

Candice just looks away.

CARSON (CONT'D)

My God! You really believe that, don't you? You really believe I killed Larry because he was supporting a rival candidate for governor?

Candice explodes.

CANDICE

God damn right you killed him!

Brad and his colleagues are stunned. The kidnappers are stunned. The Archers are stunned. Emily is stunned. The Evertons and Franklins are stunned. Ted looks really awkward.

CANDICE (CONT'D)

You knew Larry wanted my father to be governor. You knew you weren't his first choice! And you knew you couldn't win without his support. My family knew Larry and Irene for years. Larry was never so drunk that he would just fall off his boat and not cry out for help. He was pushed and held under!

Carson is almost too stunned for words. He shakes his head.

CARSON

If your father was so damned certain he had Larry's support, why did he bail on that fundraiser in Sacramento and rush to Larry's side that weekend? He was practically in a panic about losing Larry. That was obvious to everyone!

CANDICE

He was in a panic, but not about losing Larry's support! He...

Candice falters.

CANDICE (CONT'D)

He had just come to grips the night before that he was an alcoholic. He was scared of what it meant.

The Archers watch, spellbound.

CANDICE (CONT'D)

He was scared of the blackouts he was having. He bailed on the fundraiser and rushed to Larry's side because he needed advice and didn't have anyone else he could trust!

Silence. Carson and Candice stare at each other.

CARSON

I...I...I didn't know.

CANDICE

My father was going to drop out of the race, anyway. He knew he needed help. Larry would have supported you when that happened.

CARSON

I...I thought your father dropped out because Irene pledged me her support in Larry's memory.

CANDICE

No. When you secured Irene's support, that made a great excuse to bow out. He retired and kept his privacy.

CARSON

I'm so sorry, Candice.

CANDICE

Save it.

CARSON

Really. Your father was a good man, and I'm sorry to hear this. But you have to know, I have never, and would never, commit murder!

CANDICE

No one else had a motive!

CARSON

That we know of. And no matter how well you think you know someone, Larry's death could still have been an accident.

Candice looks haggard.

CANDICE

My heart tells me someone pushed
Larry overboard that night. If not
you, then someone.

Carson shakes his head, baffled.

Nathan looks like an addict riding the ultimate high.

NATHAN

Well, let's not leave poor Ted out
of this.

TED

The hell? I wasn't on the boat that
night. I have nothing to do with
any of this!

NATHAN

But you're fascinated by it. A
mysterious death nine years ago
which involves both of your
competitors for President. If
someone could prove some kind of
shenanigans that night, it would
tar both of them with the same
brush and leave you lookin' pretty
good. A twofer from heaven! What a
nice juicy scandal that would be.

The Evertons and Franklins watch intently.

TED

I have always taken the high road
on this matter! Whatever happened
on Larry Varnell's boat that night
was a tragedy, and as long as the
authorities ruled it was an
accident-- which they did -- it
has nothing to do with our current
election.

NATHAN

That is indeed what you say
publicly. What you say privately to
CNN's Marcus Granville is something
else.

Tonya puts a video on the monitor. It is a screen-capture
video of someone opening one email after another in Ted's
account. Sensitive information is blurred out.

Ted puts his face in his hands.

NATHAN (CONT'D)

For the last six months, you and Marcus have been close buddies about this.

Allison is fascinated.

NATHAN (CONT'D)

We've uncovered a trove of emails in which the two of you plot how you'll take the high road publicly while he'll pound on the death of Larry Varnell all day and all night on your behalf, all while claiming to be unbiased. Ooh, here's an email in which you direct him toward a lead your research team found. That was just two weeks ago.

The Archers' eyes are wide. Mrs. Franklin slaps her thigh in a an I-knew-it! gesture.

Carson and Candice are both aghast.

CANDICE

You...really, Ted?! Really?

CARSON

That's pretty sick.

TED

Are you two really going to legitimize what this terrorist is doing?

CANDICE

You're politicizing the death of my friend!

TED

You would have done the same. Both of you!

CARSON

I'm sorry you think so.

NATHAN

For what it's worth, Mr. Hightower, I think you would have, too.

Carson glares at Nathan.

NATHAN (CONT'D)

And let's not forget -- we not only uncovered Senator Fletcher's hypocrisy, we outed a major media figure who's been covering up an agenda in his reporting and isn't nearly as non-partisan as he would have us believe. What a night!

Nathan grins. The captives are miserable. They can't look at each other.

NATHAN (CONT'D)

Hey -- while we're all in a good mood, let's talk immigration for a while.

INT. BUNKER - DAY

MONTAGE - DEBATE AFTERMATH AND AMERICA LOVES THE KIDNAPPERS

Carson, in an undershirt and boxer shorts, exercises inside his cell.

BRAD (V.O.)

America is waking up this morning to the Earth-shattering secrets revealed last night...

Ted lies in his bed staring glumly at the ceiling.

NEWS ANCHOR #3 (V.O.)

Overnight, supporters of the kidnappers have taken to calling them the "Forest Fire," a play on Nathan Forester's name. The moniker seems to have come from Reddit...

Candice stares into the mirror. She looks ragged but resolute.

NEWS ANCHOR #4 (V.O.)

The FBI is offering a fifty-thousand-dollar reward for any information leading to the rescue of the presidential candidates...

A man sells T-shirts out of the back of his pickup in a parking lot. People trying on the shirts reveal that the front reads "I Can Feel the Heat of the Forest Fire!" with the words "Forest Fire" in a much larger font. The back reads "Gettin' It Done!"

NEWS ANCHOR #2 (V.O.)
 Thousands of people, including
 President Wilkinson, are calling on
 Marcus Granville of CNN to
 resign...

A man applies an "I Can Feel the Forest Fire!" bumper sticker
 to his car.

NEWS ANCHOR #3 (V.O.)
 A couple in Grand Rapids, Michigan
 has come under heavy criticism for
 naming their newborn son "Nathan,"
 in honor of Nathan Forester...

Andy tinkers with the camera pointing at the chair Nathan sat
 in the previous night, a scowl on his face.

BRAD (V.O.)
 Police in Madison, Wisconsin are
 investigating an incident involving
 high school students who allegedly
 posted a photo of themselves
 wielding guns...

Steve naps in a hammock strung between the two desks along
 the side wall.

BRAD (V.O.)
 ...boasting they were going to give
 the local city council a "forest
 fire of their own." At least one
 parent of the children involved
 insists it was a joke, but is
 worried because the children's
 school has a zero-tolerance policy
 about gun threats.

In a far corner of the bunker, half hidden behind the hanging
 black cloth, Grace works out with a punching bag.

NEWS ANCHOR #2 (V.O.)
 At least three Nathan Forester fan
 clubs have sprung up overnight,
 with over thirty thousand members
 between them. They're already
 arguing viciously over which one of
 them should be his official fan
 club...

A new sign hanging on the door of the first cell reads
 "Judean People's Front."

POLITICAL COMMENTATOR #1 (V.O.)

The Senate Ethics Committee is meeting today, and I don't envy them their task. They can't ignore what they learned about Senator Fletcher's boat sale last night, but at the same time, they don't want to legitimize the work of terrorists.

A new sign on the second cell reads "People's Front of Judea."

NEWS ANCHOR #4 (V.O.)

According to an informal poll conducted on our website overnight, seventy-three percent of you think the kidnapers are doing good work and you want them to continue...

David hangs a sign which says "Judean People's Popular Front" on the door of the third cell.

POLITICAL COMMENTATOR #2 (V.O.)

Well, Bob, even if the candidates were released unharmed right now, the dynamics of this election have been permanently, and significantly, altered...

INT. BUNKER - CONTINUOUS

Nathan and Jennifer watch a news show on a monitor on Andy's desk.

BRAD

(on the monitor)

Joining us today is Alexander Bainbridge, believed to be the only person who got a look at the kidnapers. Mr. Bainbridge, good morning.

ALEXANDER

(on the monitor)

Good morning.

BRAD

Mr. Bainbridge, you might have a unique perspective on all this because you are actually friends with all three kidnapped presidential candidates.

ALEXANDER

I am.

BRAD

So, what did you think of the debate last night?

ALEXANDER

Oh, I didn't watch it. These people are my friends, and any of them could have been killed live! That's disgusting. Why would I watch that? Why would anyone?

BRAD

Perfectly understandable. So how do you think the candidates are dealing with their ordeal?

ALEXANDER

Oh, all three of 'em are tough as nails. They just gotta get through this somehow, and they'll be okay.

BRAD

What did you see the night they were kidnapped?

ALEXANDER

I had gotten up briefly to use the restroom, and as I went back to bed, I noticed I was really groggy. Well, I been through enough surgeries to know the effect of a knockout gas when I feel it. I knew somethin' was in the room, so I opened the door to clear it out. I didn't know it was the whole hotel.

BRAD

And you saw one of the kidnappers?

ALEXANDER

Two of them, actually. They had someone laid out on a luggage cart, Carson I think, and I think he was unconscious. I didn't understand what I was seeing at first. The next thing I know, this guy wearing a gas mask is pointing a gun at me.

Jennifer glances at Nathan, who is enrapt with the newscast.

BRAD

Was it Nathan Forester?

ALEXANDER

I don't know. It was a man, I could tell that much.

BRAD

Did either of the kidnappers speak?

ALEXANDER

I don't believe so, no. It was getting hard to concentrate at that point. The man pointed his gun at me for a few seconds, then he put it away and they went on. That's all I remember.

BRAD

On their website, the kidnappers state that they mean no harm to any innocent people, and point to the lack of bloodshed during the kidnapping as proof of this. But now we know that at least one of them did indeed have a gun.

ALEXANDER

Correct. For all I know, they all did.

Jennifer mutes the video and turns to Nathan, who looks almost high from hearing about himself on the news.

JENNIFER

You just had to bring a gun, didn't you?

Nathan's high crashes.

NATHAN

It was only for protection. And you obviously failed to notice I didn't use it.

Nathan stalks away. Jennifer goes after him and turns him around.

JENNIFER

You still shouldn't have done it!
And you know what else? You shouldn't have made Senator Fletcher's health problems public. That wasn't your place.

NATHAN

Sweetheart, if I want your opinion,
I'll rattle your cage.

Nathan walks away. Jennifer's jaw drops. She stares after him with amazement and disgust.

Ted bangs on his cell door.

TED

Hey! Will you guys let us out into
the larger space? Without shackles.
We need to walk around!

Nathan begins to answer but Andy is already unbolting Ted's door. Nathan scowls. Jennifer's phone pings and she checks it.

NATHAN

Only if they stay on that end of
the bunker.

He motions to the studio area.

NATHAN (CONT'D)

At all times. They don't even
approach any of the computer
equipment.

Jennifer leaves the bunker. Andy and David let Candice and Carson out, also. The captives, all wearing casual clothes, amble towards the studio area.

Andy returns to tinkering with the camera. David rushes to one of the desks along the side wall, returns with a thick file folder, and approaches Ted.

DAVID

So, uh, Senator, what I have here
is all the credible evidence I
could find that chemtrails-

Tonya calls to David from the other end of the bunker.

TONYA

David, why don't you come help me
strengthen our firewall?

David quickly looks back and forth between Ted and Tonya.

DAVID

But I...uh...I-

TONYA
Now, David!

David hurries to help Tonya.

NATHAN
(quietly to Tonya)
Don't let him actually touch
anything.

Tonya gives Nathan a no-shit! look.

Jennifer returns carrying sacks from a fast-food restaurant
and a tray of coffees. She approaches the captives.

JENNIFER
All right, guys, presidential
breakfast.

The captives sit at the table and Jennifer hands them food
and coffee.

Andy looks around the bunker and sees something of interest
by Tonya's desk. He goes over and begins unscrewing a small
camera behind her desk from its mount.

David sits in front of a row of smaller monitors next to
Tonya's desk.

TONYA
(to David)
Just keep watching those numbers
and tell me if any of them fall
below two-point-five.

Tonya secretly gives Andy an exasperated look which makes it
clear what she thinks about babysitting David, then notices
that Andy is messing with her camera.

TONYA (CONT'D)
What are you doing?

ANDY
Nathan's camera is giving me hell
with the color balance.

TONYA
So you're just gonna take mine?

ANDY
Well, yeah. A camera's a camera.

TONYA
No. That is my camera.

ANDY

The...cameras belong to all of us?

TONYA

Not that one. That's my security. My black ass has been harassed by police too many times. If anything happens, I want witnesses. I flip one switch and that camera goes live. I want everyone to see that my hands are up.

As she turns away from him, she knocks a notebook off her desk.

TONYA (CONT'D)

Goddammit! Piece of shit.

She picks the notebook up and SLAMS it back onto her desk.

TONYA (CONT'D)

(to no one in particular)

I'm not askin' for much. I'm really fuckin' not!

Andy eyes her warily.

ANDY

So...what do I do about Nathan's camera?

TONYA

I don't give a fuck! Find some other way to fix it, or go buy a replacement. We have a budget. But you leave my camera alone!

Andy shows his palms in a sign of surrender and slinks away.

At the other end of the bunker, Jennifer stands alone with the captives, who have just finished eating.

CANDICE

What are you doing here with these people, Jennifer? Shouldn't you be calling your parents to bail you out after getting arrested occupying Wall Street?

JENNIFER

We're shining a light on all corruption. This will change everything!

CARSON

Shine a light? In this horrid bunker, with no windows? There's no sunlight here.

JENNIFER

That's your own fault. The lies you've been telling.

TED

Surely you understand the end result of vigilantism. Oh, it looks great in a Chuck Norris or a Batman movie, but this is the real world. We have police procedure and rule of law for a reason.

Suddenly, Nathan, standing some meters away...

NATHAN

That's not good enough when it's legal for you to lie and half the country believes you.

CANDICE

That would sound sooooo much better coming from someone who's not a psychopath.

NATHAN

You claim a moral high ground?

CANDICE

Over a gutter rat like you? Every day.

NATHAN

There has to be a punishment for lying. There has to be. And right now, there isn't one, and it's destroying us! If a bullet is the only thing that will penetrate your fucking skulls, then that's what we'll use! How could I possibly be a psychopath for wanting my politicians to tell the fucking truth?

CARSON

Half the country believes the other half's lies are truths and vice versa. Out of all those millions of people, what gives you the right to hold the gun?

NATHAN

A little thing called objective evidence.

Jennifer closes her eyes and shakes her head slightly. She seems disappointed in Nathan.

CANDICE

Do you even listen to yourself? Even the most extreme conspiracy theorists claim to have objective evidence.

TED

Everyone believes all the objective evidence in the world is always on their side. What the hell do you hope to accomplish with this farce?

Nathan explodes with the rage of a lifetime.

NATHAN

I want you broken!

Silence.

NATHAN (CONT'D)

You people look right into cameras and tell lies that are blatantly, provably false, and there are no repercussions, and I'm sick of it! I want every politician who ever told a lie to admit it! No spin, no pride, no arrogance, no lawyers, just stand in front of all their fans and all their believers and confess their lies, then go straight to prison and rot!

The captives stare at him for a very, very long moment.

Tonya calls out from the other end of the bunker.

TONYA

CNN just fired Marcus Granville. He admitted his bias.

Nathan smirks at his captives.

NATHAN

Score one for the vigilantes.

He walks away.

INT. BUNKER - DAY

INTERCUT AMONG BRAD'S NEWSROOM AND LIVING ROOMS ACROSS THE NATION

The captives again sit at the table in the studio area, dressed nicely, made up, ankles chained.

Nathan and David stand near the desks along the side wall. Nathan has a stack of index cards in his hand. Scowling, he holds one out to David, who doesn't take it.

NATHAN

I'm not asking these.

DAVID

But you said we each get to ask three questions! That was part of the deal!

Nathan sighs and holds up the index card.

NATHAN

I'm not asking these questions.

David is flabbergasted. Nathan shoves the card into David's chest, forcing him to take it. As David walks away, Steve walks up and holds out a stack of cards.

STEVE

These are all my notes. In order.

Nathan sighs.

NATHAN

Look, I don't know if we have time for climate change tonight.

STEVE

You promised!

NATHAN

Yeah, I know-

STEVE

You know how important this is to me. Did you forget this is the only reason I'm here?

Nathan sighs.

STEVE (CONT'D)

(indicates his notes)

Look, I've got to say this! But we
(MORE)

all agreed that you're the only one who goes on camera, so you've gotta say it for me. And you've gotta say it like you were me.

NATHAN

There's a speech in those notes, isn't there?

STEVE

The most important speech ever, and you agreed to give it. Dude, we've talked about this so many times. You've heard me say all of this. You know what I would say, and you know how I would say it. You've gotta be my voice!

Nathan hesitates.

STEVE (CONT'D)

Nathan...this is the only thing I've ever asked of you. Now keep your promise.

Tonya calls out from across the bunker.

TONYA

Thirty seconds, guys!

Nathan eyes Steve's cards for a moment, then takes them.

NATHAN

All right, all right. I'll make it the first topic. Maybe the second.

STEVE

In order. Like you were me. And don't skip anything!

NATHAN

I got it.

Steve goes to his desk. Nathan sits in his chair facing the captives.

Grace brings Nathan the gun, sliding an ammo clip into it just before she lays it on the table.

GRACE

You were too soft on 'em last night, babe.

Grace glares at the captives. The look in her eyes makes it clear that, although her loading of the pistol seemed like it was nothing special, she wanted the captives to see that clip go in.

The captives glare back; the look in their eyes makes it clear that they understand this quite well.

Nathan winks at her.

NATHAN

Babe...you ain't seen nothin', yet.

Grace smiles grimly and steps to her position at the first camera. Everyone else is in position. Jennifer hits the studio lights.

Tonya activates a control. A quotation appears on the screen facing the captives.

The Archers are again on their sofa watching TV. Tonight they have a pizza.

TONYA (V.O.)

Five...

The Evertons and Mrs. Franklin are watching again. Mr. Franklin is absent tonight.

TONYA (V.O.)

Four...

Brad and his colleagues watch the live feed in the newsroom.

TONYA (V.O.)

Three...

Tonya activates a control and points to Jennifer. Jennifer points to Nathan, then goes to her position at the second camera.

Nathan reads the quotation aloud.

NATHAN

There is a cult of ignorance in the United States, and there always has been.

The Briscolls sit in their living room, watching.

NATHAN (V.O.)

The strain of anti-intellectualism has been a constant thread winding (MORE)

its way through our political and
cultural life...

Allison sits on her sofa, watching. No ice cream tonight, but
the dog is with her again.

NATHAN (V.O.)

...nurtured by the false notion
that democracy means that "my
ignorance is just as good as your
knowledge." Dr. Isaac Asimov.

The quotation fades. Nathan is on camera.

NATHAN

Good evening, America. Welcome to
the second of four real U.S.
presidential debates. I'm Nathan
Forester and you're not.

Nathan grins, relishing his Chevy Chase SNL reference. Emily
looks puzzled, as if she doesn't get it. Jennifer rolls her
eyes.

The captives appear distinctly unthrilled to be there.

NATHAN (CONT'D)

My merry band is glad to see that
Marcus Granville is no longer
employed, and we're sorry to see
the Senate Ethics Committee lacks a
spine. Onward. Tonight's lesson,
boys and girls, is all about the
way politicians can lie without
lying. We'll start with the I'm-
just-the-messenger approach favored
by Mr. Hightower.

Carson gives Nathan a wary look.

NATHAN (CONT'D)

Last night, I pointed out how Mr.
Hightower would often mention that
other people claimed Barack Obama
was born in Kenya, without ever
actually making that claim himself.
But President Obama isn't Mr.
Hightower's only target; he's got
plenty. Let's look at some of Mr.
Hightower's grrrrreatest hits!

Tonya starts a video compilation of Carson speaking in
various interviews and talk shows.

CARSON
 (on video)
 You know, they say Obama was born
 in Kenya, so I don't know...

Next video segment.

CARSON (CONT'D)
 (on video)
 I don't know about Senator
 Steinway. They say she receives
 campaign contributions from the
 Saudis, so I don't know...

Next video segment.

CARSON (CONT'D)
 (on video)
 I've heard a lot of top people, top
people, say the FBI has illegally
 wiretapped my campaign, so I don't
 know...

Next video segment.

CARSON (CONT'D)
 (on video)
 You know, I hear so many people say
 nowadays that Senator Fletcher made
 all these, you know, backroom deals
 when he was a prosecutor, you know,
 taking a little extra money to let
 criminals walk free. That's what
 they say, so I don't know, I just
 don't know...

The video stops. Nathan looks into camera.

NATHAN
 Got it, kids? How many of you have
 watched Mr. Hightower spew garbage
 while giving himself the back door
 of only being the messenger, and
believed his lies? Pay attention.
 Learn how to listen to what people
 say, how they say it, and how
 they're manipulating you.
 (to Carson)
 Right, Mr. Hightower?

Carson glares daggers at Nathan, who looks back into camera.

NATHAN (CONT'D)

Another way a candidate can smear an opponent is to use a whisper campaign.

Brad scribbles on a notepad, glancing occasionally at the screen.

NATHAN (CONT'D)

Low-level supporters go out to college campuses, parks, rec centers, churches, et cetera, and gossip about the candidate's opponent, spreading false stories on the ground.

Emily watches attentively.

NATHAN (CONT'D)

One notorious whisper campaign came from evil genius Karl Rove, who never met a lie he didn't like. Mr. Rove made a career out of getting people elected by any means necessary.

Mr. Briscoll props his feet on the coffee table and pops open a beer.

NATHAN (CONT'D)

In nineteen-ninety-four, he used a whisper campaign to smear an opponent as a child molester. A whisper campaign is an especially insidious way to lie, and it's very difficult to fight.

The Evertons and Mrs. Franklin look concerned.

NATHAN (CONT'D)

And then there's the push poll. Senator Fletcher, I bet you can tell me what a push poll is, can't you?

Ted eyes Nathan warily.

TED

It's a poll which is designed to sway people's opinions by the way the questions are phrased.

NATHAN

Barely passing grade. Not just to sway opinions, Senator, but to make people believe lies.

Nathan addresses the camera again.

NATHAN (CONT'D)

Karl Rove is also the creator of my faaaaaavorite push poll, because he took it to new depths. Mr. Rove took an already-horrible practice and topped it off with some good old-fashioned racism!

The Archers are alarmed.

NATHAN (CONT'D)

Mr. Rove was George W. Bush's chief strategist during the 2000 election, during which he created a push poll in South Carolina. It asked people if they would be less likely to vote for John McCain if they knew he had fathered an illegitimate black child.

Allison's face screws up into an ew-really? look.

NATHAN (CONT'D)

Now, Senator McCain never fathered an illegitimate black child. And furthermore, no one claimed he did! Ever! But once the average person heard the question, they believed that he had. And that was all that mattered.

Nathan gives the camera an are-you-getting-it-now? look.

NATHAN (CONT'D)

Questions phrased like this are a type of logical fallacy called loaded questions. Loaded questions are ones which are worded in such a way that they persuade people to accept something that isn't true.

Mr. Briscoll's daughter appears very interested.

NATHAN (CONT'D)

In this particular format of loaded question, all you have to do is ask someone, "If such and such were
(MORE)

true, what would you think?" For example, someone could ask you,
 (dramatic voice)
 "If you found out Joe Blow embezzles his employer, would you still support him?"

Mrs. Everton scrunches her face up in confusion.

NATHAN (CONT'D)

The question could be completely meaningless, but the moment you hear those words, most of you will respond, "Oh, wow, does he really do that? Gosh, I had no idea!"

Jennifer's eyes flick from Nathan to the captives, who look morose.

NATHAN (CONT'D)

It's natural. You will assume Joe Blow embezzles his employer, because otherwise, no one would ask the question in the first place, right? Especially if the person asking the question represents a polling agency and therefore seems to have some legitimacy.

Brad and his colleagues watch with interest.

NATHAN (CONT'D)

And as long as you walk away believing Joe Blow embezzles his employer, the questioner has achieved their purpose, and you have been manipulated.

Mr. Briscoll gives a tiny snort, as if to say, "Huh, that's interesting."

NATHAN (CONT'D)

Even worse, if you ever confront the questioner about this, they'll simply say, "I didn't claim anything. I just asked a simple question. Gosh, don't get your undies in a twist!" They will gaslight you into thinking you're overreacting.

Emily absorbs this information thoughtfully. So do the Archers. Nathan addresses Ted again.

NATHAN (CONT'D)

Senator Fletcher, you're not quite in Karl Rove territory -- few people are -- but last month, you gave it the old college try.

TED

(wearily)

What am I supposed to have done now?

NATHAN

People throughout the Midwest report receiving phone calls asking the question,

(checks his notes)

"If you knew Carson Hightower was responsible for the drug overdose death of one of his friends in college, and then covered it up, would you be less likely to vote for him?"

Carson looks aghast.

NATHAN (CONT'D)

Of course, there's no evidence that Mr. Hightower did any such thing.

Ted snorts.

TED

And this push poll is my fault?

NATHAN

The phone number belongs to the same firm that does your internal polling. We find no similar links between this firm and Senator Steinway.

TED

That doesn't mean I created that poll, or authorized it.

Nathan lays his hand on the gun.

NATHAN

Did you?

Ted eyes the gun for a moment.

TED

I honestly don't remember. An assistant may have run the idea past me and I signed off on it while I was in a hurry.

Carson snorts and shakes his head.

Nathan narrows his eyes at Ted thoughtfully and taps the gun, then glances sidelong at Steve and David. David makes a circular motion with his hand and shakes his head. Nathan looks back at Ted.

NATHAN

A'ight. Without proof to the contrary, we'll accept your statement...for now.

Nathan looks into camera.

NATHAN (CONT'D)

Politicians use an endless array of gimmicks to manipulate people into believing something that's not true while allowing them to deny they ever actually lied. Pay close attention.

The Evertons and Mrs. Franklin appear disturbed.

NATHAN (CONT'D)

When Mr. Hightower says "they say," demand to know who "they" are, then demand proof, and if he can't provide either of those things, tell him to shut the hell up.

Carson glares at Nathan.

NATHAN (CONT'D)

Demand facts rather than colorful phrases and cute messages. If you think a complex political issue can be summarized on a bumper sticker, you've already gotten it wrong.

Allison nods slowly.

NATHAN (CONT'D)

Proper and honest communication in politics -- both speaking and listening -- is vital for the future of humanity. Thus. Endeth. The lesson.

Emily watches thoughtfully.

Andy monitors his equipment while keeping an eye on the proceedings.

Nathan moves Steve's notes to the top of his stack and thumbs through them for a moment. His eyes flick to Steve's, just for an instant, then he looks at Carson.

NATHAN (CONT'D)

Mr. Hightower, is climate change real?

CARSON

Apparently.

NATHAN

Is it man-made?

CARSON

I don't believe so, no.

NATHAN

Every credible scientific report in the last four decades says it is. Every report saying it isn't has been debunked. NASA's website has links to numerous scientific organizations around the world explaining that it is, as well as truckloads of information breaking down climate change for the average person to understand. Are you a scientist?

CARSON

No.

The Archers watch calmly.

NATHAN

So when you refute findings consistently made by scientists around the world for four decades, what credibility do you have?

CARSON

None. I'll concede that it may be man-made. I just think we need more research before we start spending billions of dollars to re-order society.

Mr. Briscoll's son looks a little bored.

NATHAN

The cost to reverse climate change now is far less than the cost will be when it's too late. The Natural Resources Defense Council estimates that inaction will cost us over two-hundred-seventy billion dollars in damages by twenty-twenty-five, almost double that again by twenty-fifty.

Emily is astonished.

NATHAN (CONT'D)

But you say we "need more research." We've been hearing that refrain for decades. Scientists have generated a mountain range of research all pointing to the same conclusion, and "need more research" has always been the excuse to kick the can down the road. When does the research become enough?

Carson sighs.

CARSON

You say the research which claims climate change is not man-made has been debunked. I disagree.

The Evertons and Mrs. Franklin watch intently.

NATHAN

The research claiming climate change is not man-made is almost universally funded by energy companies who don't want it to be true. They therefore conduct and publish that research with a bias, whereas true scientists do not. True scientists live in a world of peer-reviewed evidence and consistently repeated observation.

CARSON

I'm still not convinced.

Nathan raises his eyebrows in a what-do-I-have-to-do? face.

NATHAN

The same people who today claim that climate change is not man-made
(MORE)

claimed thirty years ago that climate change wasn't happening at all. One of those people was you.

Allison watches, fascinated.

NATHAN (CONT'D)

You consistently made statements to that effect while a California state senator. Many oil companies contributed very nicely to your campaigns, then and now. Apparently it took actual video of melting ice caps to change your minds, and even then it was like herding cats. You were wrong then. Why are you right now?

CARSON

As I clearly said, I'm willing to believe climate change is man-made. I just don't find the evidence that compelling.

Tonya looks concerned.

NATHAN

Maybe you should talk to Jim Bridenstine.

CARSON

I don't know who that is.

NATHAN

A U.S. Representative from Oklahoma, land of oil wells. He was also a climate change denier until he was appointed head of NASA in twenty-eighteen. Six weeks later he was completely on board. Seems going to work with actual scientists every day opened up a whole new world for him.

CARSON

(exasperated)

Fine. I would be happy to talk with him.

NATHAN

Great.

Nathan turns to Steve and they lock eyes. Steve holds his breath.

Nathan looks into the camera.

NATHAN (CONT'D)

I'm going to take this opportunity to ask our candidates, and the nation in general -- may we please have more scientists in government, and may we please teach science better in our schools?

Steve lets out his breath, a little bit of relief on his face.

The Archers watch with interest.

NATHAN (CONT'D)

Too many people today don't even know what science is, or how it is conducted, researched, and advanced, and those people grow up to become public servants or self-appointed experts on our TV screens.

At the Briscoll's, the son seems more interested now.

Nathan reads Steve's notes, then continues speaking into camera.

NATHAN (CONT'D)

Meteorologist Joe Bastardi has claimed that global warming would violate the First Law of Thermodynamics, which states that energy can be neither created nor destroyed.

Allison scowls.

NATHAN (CONT'D)

Any third-grader would know, or at least should know, that energy travels to the Earth from the sun and global warming is simply a matter of the Earth trapping more of it than before. So Mr. Bastardi is either an idiot of epic magnitude or a liar. His claim is the equivalent of claiming a race car is powered by hamsters in a wheel cage. It is that asinine.

The Evertons and Mrs. Franklin are slightly puzzled, as if this is simply not a topic they deem worthy of discussion.

Nathan goes to the next index card.

NATHAN (CONT'D)

U.S. Senator James Inhofe of Oklahoma claims man-made climate change can't be real because the god he believes in would never let us be that powerful. Good to know. Wonder if he's ever seen a nuclear bomb go off. Rumor has it man made those, too.

Mr. Archer gives the slightest of chuckles.

NATHAN (CONT'D)

I also wonder if he's ever heard of Copernicus and Kepler, and the way religious zealots in the fifteen hundreds insisted those two men had to be wrong even though they were both absolutely correct.

Emily picks up her two-year-old while watching the TV.

NATHAN (CONT'D)

Throughout all of human history, every time religion and science have conflicted, two things have remained true: religion started the fight and religion lost. Science's win record is perfect.

Brad and his colleagues watch with interest.

Next card.

NATHAN (CONT'D)

Many people think cold weather means the Earth isn't getting warmer. Even a third-grader would know, or should know, the difference between weather and climate.

Mrs. Archer nods enthusiastically.

NATHAN (CONT'D)

Global warming refers to the increase in average temperature around the globe, not whether it's snowing in Minnesota. It's bad enough that the average Joe on the street thinks that, but when public

(MORE)

officials craft policy based on
this nonsense, we have a problem.

The captives watch Nathan sullenly.

NATHAN (CONT'D)

When a U.S. Senator uses a snowball
as a prop, claiming it's proof that
climate change isn't real, during a
speech on the Senate floor, as
Inhofe did in twenty-fifteen, we
have a very, very bad problem with
leaders who are shockingly ignorant
of basic third-grade level science
and reality.

Jennifer nods. Mr. Everton shakes his head in bafflement.

Next card.

NATHAN (CONT'D)

But Pennsylvania gubernatorial
candidate Scott Wagner makes
Senator Inhofe look like a
professor.

Emily struggles to hold her two-year-old as she watches.

NATHAN (CONT'D)

Wagner admitted in a speech that he
hadn't been in a science class in a
long time, then went on to claim
that people's body heat contributes
to climate change, which it could
not do even if you multiplied the
Earth's population by a hundred.

Mrs. Archer shakes her head with a what-the-fuck? expression.

NATHAN (CONT'D)

Mr. Wagner also claimed the Earth
is getting closer to the sun all
the time, a claim my generation
knew to be untrue when we were in
grade school. A grown man running
for governor said these things.

Mr. Briscoll's daughter silently mouths, "Wow."

Next card.

NATHAN (CONT'D)

And -- wow, I hate to even say his
name -- Rush Limbaugh claims that
(MORE)

scientists are just mistaken, that because air conditioning is better than it used to be, it just feels warmer outside than it used to feel.

Allison's mouth hangs open. She is gobsmacked.

NATHAN (CONT'D)

Wow. Forty years of peer-reviewed evidence by thousands of scientists around the world with extremely high IQs using strict scientific method and highly advanced equipment, all shredded by a shock jock who's a college dropout. And millions of people who are equally as ignorant he is believe this shit!

Emily's child has won the battle so he's now on the floor. Emily makes herself coffee as she watches.

Next card.

NATHAN (CONT'D)

And then there's the multitude of politicians, including Senator Rick Santorum, who claim that green energy is unfeasible due to clouds, nighttime, and periodic lack of wind.

The Evertons watch intently. Mrs. Franklin has left the room.

NATHAN (CONT'D)

Even if we set aside the fact that even a partial usage of wind and solar energy would be a great thing, their statements are still absurd. These people are either shockingly ignorant about how the electricity grid actually works, or they are lying. The fact that oil companies consistently write them checks suggests to me the latter.

At the Briscoll's, the son is texting so the father grabs his phone out of his hand.

Next card.

NATHAN (CONT'D)

There are people who claim it actually takes more dirty energy to erect a wind turbine than the energy the wind turbine will ever produce. That is simply not true, and is an example of the many lies and disinformation used to discredit actual science.

Next card.

NATHAN (CONT'D)

But man-made climate change is not the only way in which average people, or our public servants, are scientifically ignorant.

Brad watches thoughtfully.

NATHAN (CONT'D)

We're seeing more measles outbreaks because too many people think vaccines are a vast conspiracy somehow kept secret by millions of doctors and medical researchers around the world for the last century.

Steve's face is full of hope as he watches Nathan speak his words. There are almost tears in his eyes.

NATHAN (CONT'D)

I heartily welcome anyone who thinks vaccines are a conspiracy to go live in nineteen-eighteen for a while and have themselves a blast dodging the influenza pandemic, which killed fifty million people because mankind had not yet invented vaccines.

Mrs. Franklin has returned with a cup of tea. She seems unconcerned with Nathan's words, but the Evertons look worried.

NATHAN (CONT'D)

We have government officials claiming that wind turbines cause cancer. News flash: They don't. We even have a resurgence of people who believe the Earth is flat!

The Archers nod slowly.

NATHAN (CONT'D)

We are so flooded with disinformation and conspiracy theories that we, as a society, are going backwards! Mankind invented communication satellites so we can send signals over the horizon, only to see a new generation of people believe the horizon doesn't even exist.

Emily is spellbound.

Next card.

NATHAN (CONT'D)

Every American child should know basic science when they reach junior high school. And if they have trouble grasping science, as some people naturally do, then they should be taught to respect and believe the ones who do.

All the Briscolls nod in agreement.

Nathan looks at Steve. Steve is on cloud nine and shakes his fists triumphantly. Nathan nods back, takes a deep breath, and moves some other notes to the top of his stack.

NATHAN (CONT'D)

All right, onward. Senator Fletcher, is hypocrisy a form of lying?

TED

I suppose "yes" is the answer you want me to say.

NATHAN

Indeed it is. Can you tell me why?

TED

Oh, to give a snarky answer or not.

Ted thinks for a moment. Mrs. Franklin takes a sip of tea.

TED (CONT'D)

Since hypocrisy is the act of taking different positions in similar situations, the hypocrite must be lying in at least one of those situations.

NATHAN

Not how I would have put it, but close enough for an A. Senator, is it okay for someone who holds public office to drop the occasional curse word in public?

TED

That question is too vague.

Allison looks irritated.

NATHAN

You dropped the F-bomb on the Senate floor in twenty-fifteen, yet when Senator Farrell dropped the word "shit" in exactly the same place, you demanded his resignation.

TED

Yes I did. And I was wrong to do so after my own indiscretion. I apologize.

Nathan gives him an appraising look of mild surprise.

NATHAN

Hmm. Well, let's move on to something a little more harsh than warty dirds. In twenty-sixteen, the DOJ investigated the possibility of nepotism affecting the practice of awarding government contracts in Afghanistan and Iraq.

Mrs. Franklin leans forward, very interested.

NATHAN (CONT'D)

Deputy Attorney General Lexington refused to recuse himself from that investigation even though he had provable and significant ties to at least two of the corporations involved. You demanded his resignation in person when you questioned him during his Senate testimony.

Ted gives a mild snort and looks down. He seems to know what's coming next.

Andy and Tonya divide their attention between their equipment and the proceedings.

NATHAN (CONT'D)

Two weeks later, the Washington Post uncovered evidence that you also had a significant connection to one of the corporations in that same matter. When the public and your fellow Senators called on you to recuse yourself from the investigation your own committee was conducting, you refused.

Nathan places his hand on the gun, his finger curling around the trigger. The Archers watch intently.

Ted sighs.

TED

That's correct. The balance of power on the committee between Republicans and Democrats was too close and the matter was too important. I felt my voice was desperately needed.

NATHAN

Wow. What a way to describe what you did without saying it was wrong.

TED

It was wrong. I should have recused myself, you are correct.

Mrs. Franklin sits back, astonished.

Nathan TAPS THE GUN absentmindedly and again gives Ted a thoughtful look. Ted gazes back evenly.

NATHAN

Very well. Let's pursue this theme of hypocrisy with you, Senator Steinway.

Candice looks at Nathan wearily.

NATHAN (CONT'D)

During the Senate's confirmation of Brett Kavanaugh to the Supreme Court, Democrats sabotaged the confirmation, forcing it to be delayed until after mid-term elections.

Emily watches, still holding her coffee.

NATHAN (CONT'D)

You repeatedly criticized them for doing so. Yet two years earlier you were one of the most vocal supporters of Senator McConnell's agenda when he stalled the confirmation of Merrick Garland for nine months until after the presidential election.

Nathan's hand rests on the gun and his eyes are bright with anticipation.

NATHAN (CONT'D)

So which is it? Is delaying a Supreme Court nomination a good thing or a bad thing?

CANDICE

We delayed Garland's nomination because we wanted the people to have a say in it. Kavanaugh's nomination already fit that qualification.

NATHAN

The people did have a say in Garland's nomination. They did that when they elected Barack Obama President in twenty-twelve.

CANDICE

Obama was a lame duck.

NATHAN

Obama was not elected to serve three years and then sit twiddling his thumbs the fourth. No president is. A president is elected to serve four years, and to execute his duties all four of those years. Duties such as filling Supreme Court vacancies.

Nathan moves the gun a little bit.

NATHAN (CONT'D)

So find another excuse, because I'm really sick of hearing the phrase "lame duck." That's a bullshit phrase which means nothing, and it needs to disappear!

Andy and Tonya watch intently.

NATHAN (CONT'D)

Public officials serve until the day they leave office, exactly as the voters intended. Now answer my question: Is delaying a Supreme Court nomination a good thing or a bad thing?

CANDICE

It's a good thing when it prevents the Supreme Court from becoming more liberal, and it's a bad thing when it prevents the Supreme Court from becoming more conservative. Why don't you take your hand off that stupid gun of yours and ask a more intelligent question?

Nathan smirks, getting a kick out of her attitude. Emily's eyes grow wide.

NATHAN

So Merrick Garland would have made the Supreme Court more liberal?

CANDICE

Yes, which we cannot afford.

NATHAN

That's funny, because that's not what you said about him before he was actually nominated.

Candice closes her eyes. The Evertons watch intently. So do Brad and his colleagues.

NATHAN (CONT'D)

Two days before Obama nominated Garland, you were convinced Obama would nominate someone too liberal for your tastes, so you recommended Garland as a good, moderate alternative!

Candice sighs.

Tonya starts a video which shows Candice walking outside the Capitol Building with reporters trying to keep up.

CANDICE

(on video)

The President told me several times he's going to name a moderate, but I don't believe him. He could

(MORE)

easily name Merrick Garland, who is a fine man. He probably won't do that because this appointment is about the election. So I'm pretty sure he'll name someone his liberal Democratic base wants.

The video stops. Nathan holds up the gun and looks at Candice with anticipation.

NATHAN

Senator Steinway, were you lying that day when you said Garland was a moderate and a fine choice, or were you lying to me just now when you said he was a liberal and a terrible choice?

CANDICE

Senator McConnell didn't want Merrick Garland on the Supreme Court. As a member of the Republican Party, I toed the party line and cooperated with him in that endeavor, even though privately I disagreed and would have voted to confirm Mr. Garland.

Nathan cocks the pistol and points it at her, his eyes hard.

NATHAN

You did not answer my question, and I will not repeat it.

Brad and his colleagues erupt halfway out of their seats, staring at the screen in horror.

The Archers are suddenly terrified. Mrs. Archer puts her hands over her mouth.

Grace breathes out slowly, her face full of sadistic desire and anticipation, as if willing Nathan to pull the trigger.

Candice shows the first sign of real fear but handles it well.

CANDICE

I lied to you about Merrick Garland being too liberal for the Supreme Court. It's an easy thing to say because I have said it so many times in the past two years in order to toe the party line

(MORE)

publicly. I actually believe he is
a moderate and always have.

No one moves. Nathan glares at her, sighting down the pistol, the rage visible in his eyes. Candice gazes back as steadily as she can. The Evertons are spellbound and horrified, as are the Briscolls, and Brad and his colleagues.

Grace licks her lips.

NATHAN

(quietly)

A lie told so often that you
believe it yourself is still a lie.

Everyone holds their breaths.

Nathan uncocks the pistol and slowly lays it down.

NATHAN (CONT'D)

Thank you for recognizing that.
Recognize it more quickly in the
future. And don't you dare dodge a
question again.

CANDICE

I understand.

Nathan continues giving her a hard look.

Emily puts her hand on her chest to still her beating heart. Mrs. Archer still has a hand over her mouth. Grace looks like someone just knocked her ice cream cone in the mud.

NATHAN

Why did you choose Governor
Singleton as your vice presidential
candidate?

Candice is still shaken, but she holds herself together pretty well.

CANDICE

His policies largely align with my
own. My team felt he would be very
attractive to voters over fifty. He
passed our vetting process with a
ninety-one percent, um...

She takes a moment to pull herself together.

CANDICE (CONT'D)

...a ninety-one percent approval
from...from our...our vetting team.

Nathan looks pained.

NATHAN

Did your vetting team look at his public comments about rape?

Without moving, and very subtly, distress washes over Allison's face, as if she has just been triggered.

CANDICE

I, uh...don't remember. He isn't a perfect person, but then, no one is. I remember we didn't like everything he said, but as an overall impression, we liked him a lot.

NATHAN

Let's take a look at something Governor Singleton said just two years ago.

Tonya brings up a video showing GOVERNOR SINGLETON, a Caucasian man, late 60s, on a political talk show.

GOVERNOR SINGLETON

(on video)

Now, I'm of the understanding that in many cases of rape it does not involve any pregnancy because of the trauma of the incident. That may be true with incest a little bit.

The Archers watch sadly.

GOVERNOR SINGLETON (CONT'D)

Pregnancy doesn't happen as often as it does with consensual sex, because of the trauma involved.

The video stops. Candice closes her eyes and shakes her head a little.

NATHAN

It is shameful that I have to point out, to anyone, that Governor Singleton's statement is blatantly false.

Emily scowls.

NATHAN (CONT'D)

His claim is similar to one made by U.S. Representative Todd Akin, who said, quote, "If it's a legitimate rape, the female body has ways to try to shut that whole thing down," unquote.

Mrs. Archer is aghast.

NATHAN (CONT'D)

Representative Akin later claimed the phrase "legitimate rape" was a term regularly used by police, but it is not. And his claim regarding the way the human body works is not only false, it is idiotic.

Candice purses her lips.

NATHAN (CONT'D)

Now, first of all, I bring up Representative Akin's claim, along with Governor Singleton's claim, to demonstrate another example of a shocking lack of basic scientific knowledge. These absurd claims were made by grown men with college degrees holding public office.

Mr. Everton scowls and folds his arms.

NATHAN (CONT'D)

So my question, Senator: Since Governor Singleton is so incredibly uneducated that he doesn't understand the human reproductive system, how could he possibly be a good Vice President?

CANDICE

The governor may be uneducated about that very particular subject, but he is very well educated about many others, especially the economy.

The Briscolls watch with interest.

CANDICE (CONT'D)

I once knew a grown man, very intelligent, who first saw a pecan in its shell when he was nineteen and had no idea what it was, simply
(MORE)

because he'd never seen one still
in its shell before.

Emily squints at the screen in confusion.

CANDICE (CONT'D)

Most of us have at least one story,
if we're not too embarrassed to
admit it, of not knowing something
as an adult which others would find
astonishing.

Brad and his colleagues watch attentively.

CANDICE (CONT'D)

The governor is an older gentleman,
from a time when sex education was
never really talked about, so if he
lacks knowledge you take for
granted, I won't judge him for
that, and I trust he will close any
such gaps in his education as he
comes across them.

Nathan applauds vigorously. A grin lights up his face.

NATHAN

Holy smokes! My admiration,
Senator! No, seriously. I'm not
mocking you. You faced a gun barrel
followed by a tough question, and
you came back with that! Too cool!

Candice glares at him pityingly.

NATHAN (CONT'D)

Hey, since we're on the subject of
human reproduction, let's talk
about abortion.

Candice gives him a very wary look.

NATHAN (CONT'D)

You are staunchly anti-abortion,
even in cases of rape and incest.

CANDICE

Until my dying day.

NATHAN

So is Governor Singleton. How much
weight did you give his anti-
abortion stance when choosing him?

CANDICE

I told my vetting team it was the number one issue. I would not accept anyone whose beliefs were any less than my own.

NATHAN

Does it bother you that some of his statements, and some of your own statements, concerning abortion are flat out false?

CANDICE

I'm not aware of any such false statements.

NATHAN

Then let's try them one at a time. You and Governor Singleton have both stated repeatedly that abortion increases a woman's chance of breast cancer.

CANDICE

Because it does.

NATHAN

No, Senator Steinway, it does not.

CANDICE

I'm disappointed, Mr. Forester. And here all along I was believing your claim of being unbiased. It was your only good quality. I'm sorry to see it wasn't so.

Nathan gives her a funny look.

NATHAN

I am unbiased, Senator, I assure you.

CANDICE

You just repeated a leftist talking point.

Nathan gives her an even funnier look and pauses to gather his thoughts.

NATHAN

Let me be perfectly clear, Senator. I don't care about your position on abortion. I myself don't have an opinion on the subject one way or
(MORE)

the other. Truly. I actually see, and sympathize with, both sides of that issue.

Emily purses her lips in irritation.

NATHAN (CONT'D)

My only concern is when you, or anyone on either side of the issue, tells a lie to support your position.

Candice looks at him sternly.

NATHAN (CONT'D)

You are entitled to your own opinions; you are not entitled to your own facts. And society can never successfully deal with any issue if the facts surrounding it are distorted.

Mrs. Archer nods. Mr. Archer looks concerned.

NATHAN (CONT'D)

And yes, your assertion that abortion increases the risk of breast cancer is patently false. So say both the American Cancer Society and the National Cancer Institute, among many others.

CANDICE

Fine. When I finally get out of this hellhole I will research that.

Nathan makes a yeah-okay-whatever face.

NATHAN

Well, while you're at it, research your claim that abortion rates don't drop in states with comprehensive sex education and access to birth control, because they do.

CANDICE

The studies on those topics are inconclusive.

NATHAN

Compare California and Texas from nineteen-ninety to the present. And
(MORE)

look closely at Colorado since two-thousand-nine.

CANDICE

I have done so, and I admit both are compelling studies. But there are others which do not support the correlations.

NATHAN

True, some don't. But most do, more than enough to give them a lot of merit. But you repeatedly make the flat claim that comprehensive sex ed is ineffective, and that access to birth control is ineffective, thus ignoring the many studies which produce an answer you don't like.

CANDICE

I don't cherry-pick my beliefs, Mr. Forester. I'll take what you've said under consideration, and that's all I'll say about that.

NATHAN

Fair enough. Let's move on to the more egregious stuff. Senator Steinway, does Planned Parenthood sell baby parts for profit?

CANDICE

It's unfortunate Holly O'Donnell is no longer alive. You could have just asked her.

NATHAN

The video of Holly O'Donnell was edited to make it look like she said something other than what she really did. The LA Times viewed the unedited video and reported on it in detail.

Candice scoffs.

CANDICE

I have my doubts that the liberal media reported that accurately in any way.

NATHAN

By all means, continue insisting
you don't cherry-pick your beliefs.

CANDICE

My "beliefs" are based on all the
videos produced by the Center for
Medical Progress!

NATHAN

Which were all edited to be
dishonest. And the CMP's little
sting operation failed, because the
clinic they targeted wasn't the
least bit interested in committing
a crime!

Nathan glares at her.

NATHAN (CONT'D)

So, aside from some debunked videos
and an embarrassing sting operation
from a gang of Scooby Doo rejects,
do you have any substantive reason,
at all, to believe Planned
Parenthood sells baby parts for
profit?

Candice is just a tiny bit flustered.

CANDICE

Aside from those things you so
conveniently dismiss, no, I don't
have any substantive evidence. But
it wouldn't surprise me one bit if
they do.

NATHAN

Governor Singleton falsely claims
they do. Does that bother you?

CANDICE

Not really.

Tonya's jaw drops. Nathan pulls a moue.

NATHAN

I have to confess I wasn't
expecting that. Do you recall what
I said earlier about society
needing to know all the facts
clearly in order to deal with a
situation?

CANDICE

I loathe Planned Parenthood, and abortion, with the passion of a thousand suns. Abortion is a disease, and I want it eradicated from the face of the Earth. I don't even want it to be a thought in people's heads. It's murder. Anything which leads to that eradication is, by definition, a good thing.

Nathan's moue is now out of this world. Tonya glares at Candice with hatred.

NATHAN

Well, all-righty then. But I have the passion of a thousand suns for truth no matter where it leads. Your veep claims Planned Parenthood sells baby parts for profit. Over fifteen separate investigations across the country cleared Planned Parenthood of doing any such thing.

Candice scowls.

NATHAN (CONT'D)

One of those investigations was led by U.S. Representative Jason Chaffetz, who was chomping at the bit to find Planned Parenthood guilty of something, so it certainly wasn't for lack of effort.

Mr. Briscoll's daughter seems a little upset.

Candice is tense.

NATHAN (CONT'D)

The facts are that Planned Parenthood once donated fetal tissue for medical research, always with the patient's consent, and charged nothing more than operational costs. They stopped these donations due to the inflamed rhetoric surrounding the issue.

Brad and his colleagues watch intently.

NATHAN (CONT'D)

The assertion that Planned Parenthood sells baby parts for profit is not true and never has been. So, again, Senator, I say that Governor Singleton is allowed his opinion that abortion is wrong, but he is not allowed to lie, and the fact that a presidential candidate doesn't understand this simple concept is alarming!

CANDICE

Our country murders over five hundred thousand babies each year. You'll forgive me if I find that a far more serious issue.

Tonya's glare of hatred ratchets up to eleven.

Nathan scratches the back of his neck.

NATHAN

Huh. I made rules for lying. It never occurred to me to make any for when you're honest about lying and just don't give a shit. Does your attitude also cover things like this?

Nathan wearily signals Tonya, who furiously starts a video, her eyes never leaving Candice. The video shows Candice making a campaign speech.

CANDICE

(on the video)

The baby is born. The mother meets with the doctor. They take care of the baby. They wrap the baby beautifully. And then the doctor and the mother determine whether or not they will execute the baby.

On the video, the crowd groans and boos.

The video stops. Nathan glares at Candice.

CANDICE (CONT'D)

What I said in that video is an exaggeration, I'll admit. But it reflects my abhorrence of abortion, especially late-term abortion.

NATHAN

An exaggeration? Really? Senator, those words were an outright lie. Doctors and mothers do not jointly murder newborn infants!

CANDICE

They do murder unborn infants, and that's all that matters.

NATHAN

And that makes it okay to lie?

CANDICE

To save lives, I will tell an exaggeration, yes.

NATHAN

(sighing heavily)
Ugh, the Jon Kyl approach.

CANDICE

Am I supposed to understand that reference?

NATHAN

Jon Kyl, Senator from Arizona. He claimed that ninety percent of Planned Parenthood's activities are abortions, which is nowhere near the truth. When he was confronted, his office simply said that it wasn't intended to be a factual statement.

Emily watches while feeding her baby.

NATHAN (CONT'D)

Huh. Boy, I wish I'd thought of that when I was a kid. I could have lied about sneaking out of the house at night and then just told my dad it wasn't intended to be a factual statement. Who knew it was that easy?

CANDICE

Am I supposed to answer for Senator Kyl's words?

NATHAN

Nah, just sayin' you two'd get on like a house on fire.

Nathan gathers his thoughts for a moment.

NATHAN (CONT'D)

You mentioned late-term abortions -- which is a misnomer, by the way, as medically, "late term" refers to the second week after the due date, not just to the latter stages of a pregnancy in general.

Tears roll down Allison's face.

NATHAN (CONT'D)

You and Governor Singleton, and other abortion opponents, really hammer late-term abortions as especially evil. How many abortions do you think are late-term?

CANDICE

I'm not aware of the exact figures, but I know they're in the thousands.

NATHAN

And they represent thousands of grieving parents whose trauma has been politicized. According to the CDC, only one-point-three percent of abortions take place after twenty weeks.

Mr. Briscoll's daughter appears a little more upset. He gives her a concerned look, but doesn't seem to know what to say.

NATHAN (CONT'D)

According to health care professionals across the nation, when such an abortion happens, it is due to the mother's life being in danger or a terrible fetal anomaly, and is absolutely brutal and agonizing for the parents, who wish they could keep their child!

Mrs. Franklin shakes her head.

NATHAN (CONT'D)

The notion that a woman carries a pregnancy for twenty weeks and then just casually aborts because she suddenly changes her mind is completely false and completely

(MORE)

asinine. No one does that. No one would do that.

CANDICE

I guess you've heard from different health care professionals than I have.

NATHAN

I guess so--

Nathan sees that Candice is now looking behind him. The sound of rapid footsteps begins to be heard off screen. Nathan starts to turn, but--

Tonya storms past him, snatching the gun off the table as she blows by. Nathan is too astonished to stop her.

Tonya strides up to Candice and points the gun at her face.

TONYA

Why don't you tell them about the day you called me a whore, bitch!

Everyone is shocked, kidnappers and captives alike. Brad and his colleagues are on their feet. Nathan's face is a explosion of horror and terror.

NATHAN

What are you doing?!

Candice remains still. She looks at the gun, then into Tonya's eyes.

NATHAN (CONT'D)

Put. That. Gun. Down. Now.

Tonya doesn't take her eyes off Candice.

TONYA

Shut it, Nathan!
(to Candice)
Tell them!

CANDICE

I don't know what you're talking about.

NATHAN

(whispering)
Goddammit, put the gun down!

The Archers are horrified. So are the Evertons. Mrs. Franklin hurriedly leaves the room.

Jennifer is frozen with terror.

Tonya's face is so tight she can barely get the words out.

TONYA

You were leading a protest at the
Spiegelsen clinic on the day I
went. You and your followers. I was
raped the night before! By a man I
thought was my friend!

Tears stream down Tonya's face.

TONYA (CONT'D)

I was there for emergency
contraception and STI testing! And
as I walked from my car to the
door, with my whole world already
turned upside down because I'd been
raped, you and your followers stood
in front of me, got in my face, and
called me a whore!

Candice's face is full of emotion. Everyone in the bunker, in
their living rooms, and in the newsroom is utterly
transfixed.

TONYA (CONT'D)

Do you remember me now?!

CANDICE

I'm very, very sorry for your-

TONYA

Do you remember me?!

Candice takes a moment to collect herself.

CANDICE

I confess, I do not. But I assure
you, beyond all doubt, I am sorry
for everything I ever did to you.

They stare at each other. No one moves. Nathan silently
mouths, "Please." Jennifer silently mouths, "Oh, God, no!"

TONYA'S FINGER TIGHTENS ON THE TRIGGER. She glares at Candice
with hatred and rage.

Grace glows like an addict about to receive the biggest high
of her life. She silently mouths, "Do it!"

Without firing, Tonya whirls around and stalks away.

TONYA
 (yelling to Andy)
 We're done tonight! Shut this off!

She SLAMS the gun onto Nathan's table on her way by, and the pistol spins in place. Nathan flinches and lands back in his seat. Grace scowls at Tonya. Nathan quickly covers his microphone with his hand.

NATHAN
 (hissing)
 Tonya!

TONYA
I said shut it off!

Tonya runs for the door.

Andy frantically stumbles to Tonya's desk. His hands shake as he kills the live stream. Everyone else is still too stunned to move.

The screen showing the live stream in Brad's newsroom goes dark. Brad and his colleagues look deeply troubled.

Nathan watches Tonya as she SLAMS the door open and runs out.

Grace glowers at the open door with contempt. The other captors look at each other in distress and disbelief.

Candice is still deeply shaken. Ted comforts her awkwardly.

Nathan lowers his gaze to the pistol, slowing its spin. It comes to rest...pointing...at him.

Nathan looks at it, his face dark and troubled.

INT. BUNKER - DAY

The captives, dressed in casual clothes, sit at the table in the studio area. Coffees, bowls of half-eaten cereal, and sacks and food wrappers from a fast food restaurant lie in front of them. Candice and Carson look bored. Ted reads the comics section of the newspaper.

CANDICE
 You read the funnies?

TED
 (without looking up)
 Every day.

Candice thinks for a few moments.

CANDICE

Ted.

TED

(still not looking up)

Hmm.

CANDICE

Why didn't you tell people about
your illness?

Ted looks at her.

CANDICE (CONT'D)

You could have, you know. It
probably would have been okay.

TED

I didn't want it to become my
identity.

CANDICE

Do you really think it would have?
You could have used the adversity
to inspire people.

TED

And my opponents would have accused
me of using it to garner sympathy.

He shrugs.

TED (CONT'D)

I want to be President Fletcher,
not the President Who Has HIV.

Candice nods in understanding. Ted goes back to his paper.

Candice looks across the bunker at the sound of the door
opening. Tonya enters; she doesn't look at the captives, just
goes straight to her desk. Candice watches her.

Tonya dumps her purse in a lower drawer of her desk. Nathan
walks up to her with the air of someone holding back what he
really wants to say.

NATHAN

Did you, perhaps, forget that I'm
the only one who's supposed to
appear on camera?

Tonya sighs. She obviously does not want to have this
conversation.

TONYA

Sorry. Won't happen again.

NATHAN

I half expected the FBI to bust down the door overnight-

TONYA

I said -- it won't happen again.

NATHAN

You almost murdered someone last night!

TONYA

The hell?! That's the whole point of this enterprise! Or are you the only one who gets to point a gun at the bad politicians?

NATHAN

Yeah, actually, I am the only one. I'm the leader. This is my project, my idea-

TONYA

It was my right.

She glares at him.

NATHAN

I need to know your head is in the right space and you're with us on this.

TONYA

Or what, Nathan?

She leans forward, challenging him.

TONYA (CONT'D)

Is that gun of yours meant for us, too, if we get out of line?

NATHAN

Don't be absurd.

TONYA

I wouldn't dare.

NATHAN

Look, we only have a couple of days left. After that, we never have to see each other again. Just promise

(MORE)

me you'll keep your emotions in
check and help us all see this
through to the end!

They glare at each other. Tonya grinds her teeth.

TONYA

Fine. She got the message anyway.

She turns to her monitor, obviously dismissing him.

Nathan shakes his head and walks away.

Candice has been observing all of this. Steve comes to
collect their breakfast trash.

CANDICE

(quietly)

Steve, would you ask Tonya to come
talk to me?

Tonya puts on headphones and drowns herself in heavy metal.
It's loud enough that anyone standing next to her would hear
it. Steve glances across the bunker at her, then nods.

STEVE

(gently)

Yeah, I'll ask her.

Candice nods her thanks.

Jennifer is sitting beside Andy's desk with a cup of coffee,
eyeing Tonya with concern. Andy wearily plants himself in his
seat next to her. He looks like he's been up most of the
night.

ANDY

New schedule. Thanks to Tonya,
Nathan's afraid we'll get busted
before we're done, so he's moved
the next debate to one o'clock and
the last one to tonight at six.

JENNIFER

So by midnight, it'll all be over,
and we can face the music.

She pauses a moment, and her voice softens.

JENNIFER (CONT'D)

Doesn't feel real that it's finally
here.

ANDY
You ready for prison?

Jennifer gives a tiny shrug.

JENNIFER
It's what we signed up for.

By the desks along the side wall, David pesters Nathan.
They're loud enough to draw attention.

Nathan walks away from David.

NATHAN
No.

DAVID
But the Illuminati exist!

NATHAN
(wearily)
David, please...

Andy and Jennifer watch them.

ANDY
Where did you find him?

JENNIFER
Who?

ANDY
David.

JENNIFER
What are you talking about? I
didn't find David.

ANDY
You brought him to the meetings.

JENNIFER
Excuse me?! You brought him!

ANDY
No, I didn't! The first time I ever
met him he was with you! You said,
"This is my dorky friend, David."

JENNIFER
That was Chuck! You brought David
to the meetings!

ANDY

No, I didn't!

They look at each other for a moment, then they look at David, still getting on Nathan's last nerve.

ANDY (CONT'D)

That's weird. Where did David come from?

Jennifer takes a sip of her coffee.

INT. CANDICE'S CELL - DAY

Candice sits at her dresser, the knots in her stomach plainly evident on her face. There's a rough knock on the door.

CANDICE

Come in.

Tonya enters, shuts the door, and stands looking at her.

Candice awkwardly motions to the bed.

CANDICE (CONT'D)

Have a seat. Please.

Tonya sits. They look at each other for a moment.

CANDICE (CONT'D)

I just wanted you to know that I meant what I said last night. I'm sorry. I didn't want you to think I only said that because you had a gun in my face.

For a moment, Tonya doesn't seem to know what to say.

TONYA

Why'd you do it?

CANDICE

As God as my witness, I do not remember doing that.

TONYA

I do.

Candice nods.

CANDICE

And you're sure it was me?

Tonya speaks as if she's just describing an ordinary day.

TONYA

You were there as part of your
Senate campaign, scoring points.
You had the bullhorn, and gave all
the protesters a pep talk. Told
them you'd fight for them in
Washington.

Candice listens attentively.

TONYA (CONT'D)

You wore this...gray and black
pantsuit, with a blue flower
corsage. Your assistant, Janice,
was there. Yeah. It was you.

CANDICE

And I got in your face and called
you...that?

Tonya nods.

Candice shakes her head, baffled.

CANDICE (CONT'D)

I despise that word. I never say
it. Is it possible that the other
protesters did this, and because I
was there that day, your memory
cheats and you think it was me
personally?

Tonya shakes her head.

TONYA

I...I'm aware of how the memory can
cheat, especially in times of
stress. But...I could swear it was
you in my face.

CANDICE

No matter who it was, that's awful.
That should never have happened. If
it truly was me, then I apologize
with all of my heart.

TONYA

Thank you.

A tear runs down Tonya's face.

TONYA (CONT'D)

But even if it wasn't you, those people were riled up into a frenzy. Because of you. And you can say you're sorry all you want, but you and I both know that one day, you'll be out there again, at a clinic, with a bullhorn, whipping everyone into another frenzy. A frenzy you can't control once you unleash it! And more women who are only there to get screened for cancer, or because they were raped, will get treated like shit just because they need help.

Candice looks down, unable to meet her gaze.

TONYA (CONT'D)

Please tell me you understand that. That not everyone who goes to a clinic is your target!

CANDICE

I understand. And I'm sorry that this is so callous, but we don't know who our targets are, so we blanket protest everyone. We have to, because we can't tell which woman is carrying a life we need to save, and...there's just no other way to do it.

TONYA

So calling rape victims "whores" is a necessary evil?

CANDICE

No protester should use that word, or get that ugly. Ever. I will do everything I can in future to make that clear whenever I participate -- which, you're right, I will do again.

TONYA

Let me tell you something about your protesters, and all the anti-abortion politicians. They all hate abortion...until they need it.

Candice looks severely disturbed.

CANDICE

That's an awfully broad brush
you're painting people with.

TONYA

I have a friend who works at an
abortion clinic. One of the
protesters got special permission
to come in under a hoodie to hide
her identity and get an abortion at
the very clinic she protested at
every day!

Candice looks stricken.

TONYA (CONT'D)

They helped her. And the next day,
she was out there with her sign,
calling the people inside
"murderers."

CANDICE

That's horrible. But again, that's
just one pers--

TONYA

And then there's Scott DesJarlais.
He's this Congressman who's anti-
abortion all the way, unless he's
asking his mistresses to get them.

Candice begins to speak.

TONYA (CONT'D)

And...oh, what's his name...Tim
Murphy! He's another anti-abortion
Congressman. He did the same thing!

Tonya shakes her head.

TONYA (CONT'D)

You people think the only women who
get abortions are just sluts who
deserve what they get. Until it's
someone you know, and then
suddenly, in secret, you're all for
it, because you're different!

CANDICE

Those are awful examples, but
you're using a few anecdotes about
bad individuals to taint all of us
who are against abortion!

TONYA

But I believe that most of you are truly like that! I think even you would reconsider if it was suddenly your daughter who needed one.

Candice can no longer contain her tears, though she's still fighting hard. She can't look at Tonya. In a flash, Tonya understands.

TONYA (CONT'D)

Oh. Oh...I'm...

Tonya is suddenly holding her hand and weeping with her.

TONYA (CONT'D)

When did it happen?

CANDICE

Two years ago. She and her boyfriend didn't use protection. She was only sixteen! It...it would have ruined her life!

Tonya looks at her with pain and sympathy in her eyes.

TONYA

Ruined her life...or yours?

Candice bursts into sobs.

Tonya holds her for a long, long time.

INT. BUNKER - DAY

Jennifer is still sitting by Andy's desk, now alone. She watches Nathan, sitting at one of the desks by the side wall.

Nathan is engrossed in his task of reading the computer screen and making notes, muttering and cursing under his breath. He is highly stressed and barely controls his fury. He doesn't notice Jennifer watching him.

Steve walks up to Jennifer with two pieces of paper.

STEVE

Agenda for both debates.

He hands the papers to Jennifer. She takes them but her eyes don't leave Nathan.

JENNIFER

You know you shot yourself in the foot last night.

STEVE

How so?

JENNIFER

That big beautiful speech about climate change?

Steve's face lights up.

STEVE

Yeah! It was everything I wanted. Everything that needed to be said!

JENNIFER

But as far as the world is concerned, it came from Nathan.

Steve looks over at Nathan, still engrossed in his task.

JENNIFER (CONT'D)

And Nathan will never be a hero. He will go down in history as just another crackpot with a gun. Which means people will scorn every word he ever had to say...

She looks up at Steve.

JENNIFER (CONT'D)

...even if it was right.

Steve's smile fades and his face pales as he slowly looks at her.

JENNIFER (CONT'D)

You just handed climate change deniers the biggest, shiniest weapon you possibly could have, all gift wrapped with a pretty bow.

Steve swallows hard and looks at Nathan in a new light. Jennifer looks at Nathan, too.

JENNIFER (CONT'D)

This whole thing was a mistake. Nathan's just a dangerous and unhinged monster, and we need him out of our lives.

Jennifer and Steve look at each other, then Jennifer notices Grace some meters away watching them.

Grace gazes steadily at Jennifer for a moment, then walks away. Jennifer watches her go. It's unclear how much Grace overheard.

Tonya comes out of Candice's cell, walks to her desk, and sits down.

JENNIFER (CONT'D)

(to Tonya)

You okay?

Tonya looks as if a huge part of her has healed. She smiles for the first time, just a little bit, and nods.

TONYA

Yeah. Better than I've been in a long time.

Jennifer smiles.

INT. BUNKER - DAY

INTERCUT AMONG BRAD'S NEWSROOM AND LIVING ROOMS ACROSS THE NATION

The captives sit stone-faced at the table in the studio area, looking nice and sharp. Jennifer applies the last bit of make-up to Carson.

Tonya walks up to Candice.

TONYA

I...just wanted to say...good luck.

Candice gives a small smile.

CANDICE

Thank you...I think.

Tonya gives her an awkward smile and a nod, and walks away.

Nathan takes his seat. He looks royally pissed. As Tonya walks past him, he half glares at her, half ignores her. Grace, manning her position at the first camera, also gives Tonya a sidelong sullen look as she goes by.

NATHAN

(to the captives)

Thirty seconds.

Jennifer hits the lights, then stands at her position to one side. Tonya reaches her desk. Everyone else is in position.

Tonya activates a control. A quotation appears on the screen facing the captives.

Brad and his colleagues watch a monitor in the newsroom. An intern passes out sandwiches and coffee.

TONYA (V.O.)

Five...

Allison watches in her living room while exercising on a stationary bike.

TONYA (V.O.)

Four...

Mr. Everton and the Franklins watch. Mrs. Everton is absent.

TONYA (V.O.)

Three...

Tonya activates a control and points to Jennifer. Jennifer points to Nathan, then goes to her position at the second camera.

Mr. Briscoll and his daughter sit in their living room, watching. The son is absent.

Nathan reads the quotation aloud.

NATHAN (V.O.)

It is easier to fool people than to convince them that they have been fooled. Mark Twain, attributed.

The quotation fades. Nathan is on camera.

NATHAN

Good afternoon, America. I apologize for the short notice, but we had to accelerate our schedule. Such is the life of a revolutionary.

He tries his regular charming smile, but it seems tight and forced.

NATHAN (CONT'D)

I also apologize for the fact that last night's debate ended abruptly, and for the circumstances under which it did so.

Andy cuts to a shot of all three captives.

NATHAN (CONT'D)

As you can see, Senator Steinway is unharmed, and my team has ironed out the problems we had last night and put them behind us.

Tonya scowls.

NATHAN (CONT'D)

Onward. Senator Fletcher, would you care to tell our viewers what "fast track" means?

The Archers watch with interest.

TED

Congress has a duty to approve any trade agreement negotiated by the President. One way of doing this is called "fast track." When we use the fast track method, Congress can only approve or deny the agreement; we can't amend it, and Senators can't filibuster it.

NATHAN

In twenty-fifteen, President Obama wanted Congress to approve the Trans-Pacific Partnership using the fast track method.

Emily watches in her kitchen, holding her baby.

NATHAN (CONT'D)

Many people, including myself, think the agreement had no chance of being approved unless Congress used the fast track procedure. But there was a problem with that.

Instead of his usual flippant self, Nathan speaks harshly.

NATHAN (CONT'D)

Would you care to tell the viewers what that problem was?

Nathan sits back and idly rests his hand on the gun, but his eyes are hard. He's obviously itching for a fight.

TED

The problem was Malaysia. In order for a trade agreement to qualify
(MORE)

for fast track, it can only include countries which have earned a certain approval rating from the State Department. Malaysia was a member of the agreement, but their rating wasn't good enough for fast track.

Allison pauses her cycling to wipe sweat off her brow and take a drink of water.

NATHAN

Why wasn't their rating good enough?

TED

Because they hadn't cracked down enough on human trafficking. The State Department still had Malaysia ranked at Tier Three.

NATHAN

And how was this problem resolved?

TED

The State Department simply raised Malaysia's rank to Tier Two.

NATHAN

On President Obama's order?

Andy watches with interest.

TED

I don't know whether President Obama gave any such order. I just know that Malaysia's rank was suddenly better right when he needed it to be.

NATHAN

Did Malaysia do anything to deserve this improvement in rank?

TED

Eh, Politifact thought President Obama was correct when he said Malaysia had made significant improvements. But the vast majority of human rights groups strongly disagreed. So did a number of Congressmen, both Democrats and Republicans, who wrote a letter to
(MORE)

the State Department urging them
not to change Malaysia's status.

Nathan seems impatient.

NATHAN

But what do you think?

Ted considers for a moment.

TED

I don't believe Malaysia had done
enough to merit the change.

NATHAN

But you approved of the TPP.

TED

I wanted that agreement to happen.
I also voted in favor of extending
the President's fast-track power.

NATHAN

Even though you knew about the
problem with Malaysia.

Ted nods, looking ashamed.

TED

That is correct. I felt the TPP
would benefit American workers so
much that I was willing to turn a
blind eye to some evil to make it
happen. In politics, we sometimes
make deals with devils for the
greater good.

The Archers look disgusted.

NATHAN

Prosperity at the cost of human
trafficking. Is that really the
greater good?

TED

I told myself so at the time.

NATHAN

And now?

TED

Now? No.

He almost seems surprised at his own answer.

TED (CONT'D)

No, it doesn't seem a worthwhile thing to do.

NATHAN

So you would vote differently today, given the same circumstances?

Mr. Everton and the Franklins are fascinated.

TED

Yes, I...I believe I would.

Nathan nods thoughtfully, then looks at Carson.

NATHAN

Mr. Hightower, you once took out full page ads in multiple newspapers calling for the execution of the Central Park Five. Are they guilty of the crime for which they were convicted?

CARSON

I believe you answered your own question when you said "convicted."

NATHAN

Mr. Hightower, are the Central Park Five guilty of the crime for which their convictions were vacated?

Carson sighs.

CARSON

The Central Park Five confessed.

NATHAN

The Central Park Five have always claimed from the beginning that their confessions were coerced through torture.

Carson shakes his head dismissively.

NATHAN (CONT'D)

Furthermore, the DNA tests exonerated them, and another person gave an uncoerced confession which the police found credible.

One of Brad's colleagues whispers something in his ear. Brad listens, then nods quickly.

NATHAN (CONT'D)

That's why the same district attorney whose office originally prosecuted them asked for their convictions to be vacated. Mr. Hightower, do you know more about their case than the DNA testers or the district attorney?

Mr. Briscoll and his daughter watch with interest.

CARSON

I know that the Central Park Five were misfits of society who were nowhere near saints.

Nathan points the gun at him.

NATHAN

Dodging the question.

CARSON

Wait! Wait! I'll answer the question!

Nathan holds. He looks harshly at Carson. The gun doesn't move. Jennifer gives Nathan a very worried look.

Brad and his colleagues look deeply concerned, but they're not out of their seats like they were the first time Nathan leveled a gun at someone.

CARSON (CONT'D)

No, I don't know more than a DNA tester, nor do I know more about their case than the district attorney.

Nathan doesn't move. The gun is rock steady. Although his face is stone, the message is clear: he can wait all day.

CARSON (CONT'D)

And...since the district attorney knows more about the case than I do, I suppose I would be wise to accept his judgment that the Central Park Five are indeed innocent of that crime.

Nathan slowly puts the gun down. Carson looks exasperated.

NATHAN

I'll say it again: You are allowed your own opinions. You are not
(MORE)

allowed your own facts. A corollary to that is that you are not allowed to ignore facts you don't like. It's long past time you politicians got that.

Carson explodes.

CARSON

Don't you get it? Everything about politics is theater! None of it has anything to do with facts!

Nathan gives him the most amazed look in the world. The other kidnapers are astonished. Ted and Candice look troubled. Mr. Everton and the Franklins are dumbfounded.

NATHAN

Theater. Well, that explains the way you treated Senator Steinway in Memphis two weeks ago. During your debate, you never interrupted Senator Fletcher. Not even once. But we counted twenty-eight times you interrupted Senator Steinway.

Nathan looks at Candice.

NATHAN (CONT'D)

Is that the same number your team came up with?

CANDICE

It is.

NATHAN

Is that part of being a woman in politics?

CANDICE

It's part of being a woman.

CARSON

Oh, come on. You're being absurd!

TED

No, they're not. I noticed it, too. You interrupted her constantly, but you usually let me talk. It was really obvious.

Carson sighs, and seems to think hard about what they're saying, as if it might be true and he'd just never seen it before.

CANDICE

Carson, it's something women endure every day. But it's a thousand times worse when you're a politician. You and Ted have never gone on line to discover hundreds of fake nudes of yourself.

Candice's lower lip trembles. Tears almost come.

CANDICE (CONT'D)

You're not interrupted all the time. You're not called crazy when you lose your temper in public.

Brad and his colleagues are enrapt.

CANDICE (CONT'D)

You're not criticized for wearing skirts and then criticized for wearing pants. You're not criticized when you wear the same outfit twice in a year.

Carson and Ted both pay attention, their faces sad as they absorb Candice's grief.

CANDICE (CONT'D)

You're not accused of being unfit to lead because you ovulate. You're not told at least once a week that you should talk less and smile more.

Tears run down Candice's face. The Archers are spellbound.

CANDICE (CONT'D)

You've never had a fellow lawmaker say he'd vote for your legislation if you slept with him.

Tonya breathes in sharply, shocked. Mr. Everton and the Franklins are also stunned.

CANDICE (CONT'D)

So yes, when you interrupt the woman twenty-eight times but never the man, you don't get to call me absurd for pointing it out!

Carson and Candice stare at each other for a long moment.

CARSON

I truly never knew I did that. I'm sorry. I will do better in future.

Candice nods and wipes her tears away.

NATHAN

(to Candice)

Senator, we need to move on. It's time to talk about Benghazi.

Candice snorts.

CANDICE

Hillary isn't here.

NATHAN

Luckily for us. But you also had a role to play in that fiasco, as a member of the

(quickly checks his notes)

State Department and Foreign Operations Subcommittee of the Appropriations Committee.

Emily looks deeply concerned. She no longer holds her baby.

NATHAN (CONT'D)

After the Benghazi attack, you blamed Democrats for failing to protect U.S. personnel. And you're right; they did indeed deserve a lot of the blame.

Mr. Briscoll's face is tight and full of emotion.

NATHAN (CONT'D)

But the attack in Benghazi occurred at the end of fiscal year twenty-twelve. When the committee you were on decided the State Department's budget for that year, the Democrats wanted more funding for the security of our overseas facilities, while you and your fellow Republicans cut that part of the budget.

Nathan slaps his hand down onto the gun, grips it, and gives her a hard look.

NATHAN (CONT'D)

So tell me, Senator: Doesn't that mean there's enough blame to go

(MORE)

around for everyone...including
you?

Nathan looks like the stress of the last eighteen hours has gotten to him hard. He looks like he's had enough of the world's bullshit and is beside himself to do something about it.

Candice breathes out slowly.

CANDICE

We had to rein in government spending somehow. A large part of my job is constantly looking for ways to do that, both large and small. The State Department did not need all the money they were requesting.

NATHAN

The State Department provided a detailed list of exactly why they needed those funds.

Nathan levels the pistol at Candice.

NATHAN (CONT'D)

Senator Steinway, you just lied.

CANDICE

Wait, hear me out!

Candice looks at Nathan with a mixture of pleading, fear, and exasperation. He doesn't lower the gun.

Brad and his colleagues look worried. So do the Archers.

CANDICE (CONT'D)

The State Department's problem was not a lack of funding, but a misuse of the funding they already had. Their security lapses were well-documented by every single Benghazi investigation, and it's the reason the State Department's head of diplomatic security resigned!

Emily looks deeply concerned.

CANDICE (CONT'D)

Now, I don't have the power to dictate to the State Department how they use their money, so I use the only power I have: cutting it off
(MORE)

in the hope that they'll use what they do have wisely.

Allison pedals slowly as she watches.

CANDICE (CONT'D)

I'm sad to say they didn't do it, and I remain convinced to this day that had we given them the money they wanted, they would simply have wasted it, and our personnel in Libya would have died anyway. The Democrats' solution of just throwing more money into a sinking pit wasn't the answer.

Nathan gives her a long look, then lowers the gun. He's still really edgy.

NATHAN

Yes, the various Benghazi investigations did report the woefully inadequate protection. But those assessments only came to light after the attack occurred. You voted to cut those funds before the attack occurred, when you couldn't possibly have known about those inadequacies. That tells me that your motives were not what you say they were.

Candice looks at him with contempt.

CANDICE

First, departments always ask for more funding than they need, knowing they won't get all of it. That's a bureaucratic game played in corporations and governments around the world.

Mr. Everton and the Franklins watch intently.

CANDICE (CONT'D)

Second, this is the State Department appropriations subcommittee you're talking about! We had, in fact, received reports about their poor security arrangements. We were not ignorant!

Mr. Briscoll is irritated.

CANDICE (CONT'D)

Third, the money we cut from security was only one-point-seven percent of the State Department's request!

Candice glares at Nathan, as if daring him to argue further.

Nathan checks his notes for a long moment, then looks up, his face resolute. He gets out of his chair and approaches Candice, who quickly backs up, alarmed. Nathan raises the gun and, without expression, blows her brains out.

NATHAN

It was eight-point-three percent, you lying bitch.

In the bunker, pure shock. Tonya has both hands over her mouth, her eyes wide.

Brad and his colleagues erupt.

BRAD

Kill the feed! Kill it!

Brad scrambles to his anchor desk, frantically applying his microphone, and looks into camera. His director points at him.

BRAD (CONT'D)

(to his viewers)

Ladies and gentlemen, we have cut the live feed. It...grieves me deeply to report that our five-second delay was justified.

The Archers look on with shock. So does Allison. Mr. Everton is stunned. The Franklins begin to cry.

Carson and Ted stare in horror at Candice's body, then at Nathan.

CARSON

(in a hoarse whisper)

You son of a bitch.

Nathan swivels the gun to point at him, but finds Tonya in his way, looking at him with shock, horror, and revulsion.

Jennifer turns and calls to Andy across the bunker.

JENNIFER

Shut it down!

Andy, in shock, barely nods, then clumsily makes his way to Tonya's desk to shut down the live feed.

Nathan and Tonya stare eye to eye. Neither moves.

Jennifer is there. She places a hand on Nathan's gun arm and slowly lowers it.

JENNIFER (CONT'D)

(gently)

Nathan, you've done enough damage
for one day. Stop this. Stop it
right now.

Nathan slowly lowers the gun, then turns to face his fellow kidnappers. Grace looks at him with grim pride, her eyes shining with adrenaline and admiration. The rest stare at him in revulsion and horror.

NATHAN

(quietly)

I always knew the rest of you were
spineless.

MONTAGE OF AMERICANS SOBERING UP

The only sound is sad, soulful music.

Mr. Archer holds his wife while she sobs on his shoulder.

The man who proudly put the "Forest Fire" bumper sticker on his car has trouble scraping it off.

Allison's living room is empty.

Emily holds her stomach, shaking, looking as if she has just vomited.

A man in a suburban neighborhood gets his mail. He and the man walking his dog can't quite look each other in the eye.

Brad continues speaking into his camera while his studio crew look grim. It's unclear what he's saying.

Brad's image is on Mr. Everton's TV, which suddenly switches off. Mr. Everton sits alone on the sofa, the remote in his hand, looking collapsed and lost, staring at the blank screen.

A sprinkler waters an empty golf course, its droplets sparkling in the sun.

A woman, tears streaming down her face, burns her "Forest Fire" T-shirt in a barrel. The heat from the flame blurs the air.

INT. BUNKER - DAY

INTERCUT WITH BRAD'S NEWSROOM

Everyone in the bunker, captors and captives alike, sits on chairs, tables, or desktops in a loose group near Andy and Tonya's desks. Tonya sits at her desk. It is the first time Ted and Carson have been at this end of the bunker since they came through the door.

Except for Nathan and Grace, no one can quite look at each other. Tonya, Jennifer, and Steve weep silently.

At the other end of the bunker, Candice's body lies covered with a sheet.

NATHAN

So, I just have one question for all of you: Did you honestly not understand that it could come to this? Did you?!

No one answers. If looks could kill, Tonya's fury would melt Nathan on the spot.

Tonya looks at the WHITE KNUCKLES OF NATHAN'S HAND AS HE GRIPS THE GUN, then looks back at Nathan's face. Suddenly, as if her hand is acting on its own, she flips a switch on her master console without moving the rest of her body.

The RED LIGHT ON HER PERSONAL CAMERA, mounted behind her, comes on. The VIEW ON ITS SMALL SCREEN includes almost everyone. No one notices.

One of Brad's colleagues sees the kidnappers' live stream come back to life, showing the view from Tonya's camera. On the screen, Nathan yells at everyone around him.

NATHAN (CONT'D)

(on screen)

She! Lied! What part of that do you not get?!

The colleague snaps his fingers at everyone around him.

BRAD'S COLLEAGUE

Guys! Hey, guys!

In the bunker, a moment of silence passes.

STEVE

Actually, Nathan...I'm not sure she did.

Nathan sloooooowly turns his rage onto Steve. Steve looks as if the man before him is a stranger.

STEVE (CONT'D)

(quietly)

When she said one-point-seven percent, she was talking about the following year's budget, FY twenty-thirteen. She wasn't lying. She just got her years mixed up. That's all.

The group's horror deepens. Nathan, his face working with emotion, glares at Steve, who just stares back.

Ted snorts and shakes his head.

TED

(quietly)

You goddamned fucking asshole.

Carson lays a gentle warning hand on Ted's arm.

TED (CONT'D)

The day we execute you for this, I will give you the injection myself.

Nathan swings around and points the pistol at Ted, but finds Andy standing between. They lock eyes.

The bunker door silently eases open. No one notices. The door isn't visible on Tonya's camera, so Brad and his colleagues don't know, either. They watch, enrapt.

NATHAN

Get out of my way or join them.

ANDY

Really, Nathan?

Andy steps closer.

ANDY (CONT'D)

Really? After everything we set out to do?

NATHAN

Because of everything we set out to do!

Grace's eyes are hungry for blood.

GRACE

Do it, babe! If you don't, I will!

Grace glares at Jennifer as if to say, "And you're next if you don't watch it!" Only Jennifer notices.

Andy and Nathan stare at each other a moment longer.

Nathan suddenly smirks and swivels his gun to Carson and fires. It's a split-second move. Andy can't react in time.

But Nathan's shot misses Carson by millimeters, and it's Nathan who falls to the floor. There were two shots at the same time. The second came from Alexander Bainbridge, standing behind Nathan with a pistol of his own. Everyone whips their heads around to stare at him.

Nathan lies on the floor, his face full of surprise as he stares at the far wall. The light flickers from his eyes.

Alexander takes a few steps forward. As he enters the view of Tonya's camera, Brad and his colleagues' eyes grow wide as saucers.

BRAD'S COLLEAGUE

(whispering)

Holy...shit...

Grace looks in horror at Nathan, then up at Alexander. She charges him.

GRACE

You son of a--

Alexander shoots her. One shot, in the chest. She falls and lies still. Alexander watches her a moment to make sure she stays that way.

Everyone is in peak shock, especially Ted and Carson.

TED

Alex? What...what the hell?

Carson shakily stands up.

CARSON

(to Alexander)

Oh, am I glad to see you!

Alexander sneers at them and points his gun in their direction.

ALEXANDER
Shut up! Both of you!

Ted and Carson stare at Alexander in bewilderment. They look like they can't take any more.

TED
Alex...what's...what's...

ALEXANDER
Goddammit, Ted, use your brain for once! Who do you think told Nathan which hotel you were in? Told him your schedule? Your room numbers?
(to Carson)
Told him about the GPS in your arm?
(to Ted)
Told him about your illness?

The captors are just as stunned as the captives. This is apparently news to them, as well.

ALEXANDER (CONT'D)
I funded these yoyos! I built this bunker!

Ted looks like he doesn't want to believe. Carson shakes his head.

CARSON
But why, Alex?

ALEXANDER
Because I'm sick of the lies, Carson. You, Ted, Candice, and everyone else! So goddamned sick of them. I watched you for so many years smile to people's faces, then stab them in the back. I watched you make backroom deals and lie to your followers, even as they adored you. And I helped you!

Brad and his colleagues are spellbound.

ALEXANDER (CONT'D)
(to Carson)
I even held Larry under the water so you could be governor. God help me.

Carson closes his eyes.

ALEXANDER (CONT'D)

I couldn't take it any more. My only mistake was trusting the supreme jackass down there.

(motions to Nathan's body)

TED

So...so you wanted us dead?

ALEXANDER

I wanted you to tell the truth. For once in your pathetic excuse for a life.

CARSON

Who the hell are you to judge? You suddenly find religion or something?

ALEXANDER

I suddenly got cancer. I only have a few months. I wanted to do something good for once. Something right. But I'm so out of practice at doing the right thing, I fucked it up.

With disgust, Alexander tosses his gun onto a table.

ALEXANDER (CONT'D)

It's too late to fix it now. Too late for everything. I called the police five minutes ago.

Everyone looks sick at heart.

DAVID

(desperately)

But...but we did some good, right?

He sounds like he's trying to convince himself.

DAVID (CONT'D)

I mean...we uncovered lies. Things the people needed to know.

TED

(contemptuously)

You mean like my perfectly legitimate boat sale?

DAVID

You admitted that was-

TED

Of course I admitted it! That's because Captain America there (motions to Nathan's body) had a fuckin' gun in my face! Yeah, the picture he showed us was taken after I sold my boat. That's because the man I sold it to threw a party on it and invited me!

The captors looks devastated.

TED (CONT'D)

Not everything I admitted to was wrong. When you're about to be killed, you'll say whatever you need to to stay alive!

CARSON

Exactly. Some of the things I admitted to weren't lies, either. I'm certain it was the same for Candice.

Carson grimaces at the irony of what he's about to say.

CARSON (CONT'D)

Just like the Central Park Five.

His quiet, thoughtful voice is full of realization.

CARSON (CONT'D)

Confessions coerced through torture. And I mocked them because I thought such a thing could never actually happen.

The captors look at each other in further horror as the implications of this sink in. They did all this for nothing.

Ted looks at Nathan's body.

TED

(sadly)

A coerced truth can also be a lie. That's the one thing Nathan never accounted for.

CARSON

And after all that, he turned out to be a liar, himself. Just like I said.

Alexander slumps against a table. He looks completely drained.

A tear slides down Andy's face.

ANDY

(whispering)

We were gonna change the world. We really were.

TED

Overnight? True change happens slowly, over generations. Throughout history, the slow path is the only one that's ever worked.

No one else has anything to say, each person imprisoned within their own thoughts.

The view drifts backward through Tonya's camera and becomes the view on its TINY SCREEN as it films everyone in the bunker.

Captors and captives alike remain still as a flood of police swarms in. None of the captors struggle; they don't have the energy.

Four policemen frantically escort Ted and Carson to safety. More police shove the captors to the floor. Tonya's hands are up. As she is roughly pulled from her desk, one of the policemen bumps her camera, jostling it and turning it off.

Its screen goes dark.