

EMPEROR OF OCEAN PARK

"Chapter One"

Written by
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INT. SHEPARD STREET HOUSE - FOYER - DAY

CLOSE ON: a poster-sized version of a NEWSWEEK MAGAZINE COVER hanging on the wall. It's an image of federal JUDGE OLIVER GARLAND, 50s -- strong, stoic, authoritative. The headline reads, "THE EMPEROR OF OCEAN PARK" and the sub-headline asks, "Is this the new face of American conservatism?"

DING DONG! -- the DOORBELL rings. A few beats of silence and, again, DING DONG! More quiet. Outside, KEYS jingle.

The lock turns, the door opens, and a CLEANING LADY pokes her head in. She calls out...

CLEANING LADY
Mr. Judge! I here!

No response. She enters, carrying a BUCKET full of CLEANING SUPPLIES. She wipes her feet, walks further into the house.

CLEANING LADY (CONT'D)
Mr. Judge?

She stops, noticing something, regards it curiously.

KITCHEN

A small TV blares FOX NEWS. Nearby, in the toaster, there are two PIECES OF BURNT TOAST.

INT. SHEPARD STREET HOUSE - HALLWAY - DAY

The cleaning lady walks down the hall, looking for any sign of the homeowner. She stops at a door, partially ajar. She pushes it open and enters.

STUDY

On the floor, is the body of a man in his 70s, sprawled out next to his toppled desk chair. Mouth open and eyes closed, this is OLIVER, the judge, dead as a doornail.

The cleaning lady screams, dropping her bucket and spilling her supplies everywhere.

EXT. WASHINGTON, D.C. - DAY

The US CAPITOL looms over a long, snow-covered street. The road is nearly empty; it's early still. Steam rises from manholes and the post-dawn sun blasts the untrodden snow. A bleak and bitter morning in our nation's seat of power.

SUPER: "2007"

A small motorcade consisting of a single stretch LIMOUSINE and two black SUVs turns onto the street.

I/E. LIMOUSINE - DAY (2007)

Inside the limo, the judge sits next to his wife, CLAIRE. The judge exudes solemnity, power, Black excellence. Claire too -- there isn't a misplaced hair on her head or a wrinkle on her navy Carolina Herrera dress.

Across from them are their adult children, TALCOTT, aka "TAL", 26, MARIAH, 28, and ADDISON, 30.

Tal flips through a pocket JAPANESE DICTIONARY, silently mouthing the words to himself. Addison (male-model handsome), smirks at him. Embarrassed, Tal puts the book away.

Elsewhere, MALLORY "UNCLE MAL" CORCORAN, early 60s, uh-huhs on his CELLPHONE. He has a full head of slicked-back silver hair and he speaks with an easy Southern drawl.

MAL

(into the phone)

Uh-huh... uh-huh... And there's nothing we can do? I don't believe that... uh-huh... uh-huh...

Besides Mal's intermittent grunting, it's quiet. The mood is staid. When Uncle Mal finally hangs up, he announces...

MAL (CONT'D)

Apparently there's a gaggle of protestors blocking the entrance.

THE JUDGE

Protestors? This late in the process?

MAL

Senator Edelman probably bussed them in from Newark.

(a beat)

Sounds like a very small to-do, but it's probably prudent to pull over and wait until they're cleared out.

THE JUDGE

Nonsense.

MAL

Come again?

THE JUDGE

I'm not running from a few hippies.
We are going to walk in there, as
planned, with our heads held high.
That's the way men do it, Mallory.
That's the way Garlands do it.

Tal and Addison share a furtive eye roll.

MAL

Now judge, let's think about this
for one minute. We don't really--

THE JUDGE

As planned. Heads held high.

The judge is stern. Mal takes the hint and cedes the moment.
They resume silence as the limo drives on.

EXT. DIRKSEN SENATE OFFICE BUILDING - DAY (2007)

The judge, his family, and Uncle Mal step out of the limo. A
small contingent of SECURITY GUARDS and AIDES exit the SUVs.
They all take in the scene....

At least a hundred PROTESTORS are gathered near the entrance
to the building, barely held at bay by a few POLICE OFFICERS
and a ROPE AND STANCHION. Their shouts are cacophonous.

CLAIRE

A small to-do?

MAL

Not too late to turn back.

The judge doesn't say a word, just marches forward. The rest
of the family follows, struggling to keep pace.

The protestors are aggressive, fanatical. Some hold SIGNS --
"Fascist", "My body, my choice!", "Sellout."

As they make their way towards the building, Tal notices a
SHADY GUY making his way towards the rope line.

The shady guy heads straight for the judge... and he's got
something in his hand. A gun? A knife? Whatever it is, he
raises his hand to use it on the judge--

TAL

Dad!

Tal pushes his dad out of the way just as...

The shady guy tosses RED PAINT. It flies through the air.

But it misses its intended target, the judge, completely. Instead it splatters all over Tal's suit.

The cops descend on the shady guy and drag him away...

SHADY GUY
Murderer! Murderer!

Tal et al are hustled into the building.

I/E. CAR/NEWHALL & VANN PARKING LOT - DAY

TALCOTT "TAL" GARLAND -- now 40, fit, handsome but bookish, a little salt-and-pepper on his temples -- sits alone in his Honda Accord. Aggressive 90's HIP HOP plays on the stereo.

SUPER: "Present Day"

Tal studies the long-and-low, brick-and-glass office building across the lot, steeling himself for something. Finally, having worked up the nerve, Tal cuts the engine and exits.

Tal marches towards the building. Just as he is about to make it to the front door...

MAN (O.S.)
Tal? Tal Garland?

Tal turns to see MARC HADLEY, 50s, tall and slim, walking towards him.

MARC
Fancy seeing you outside of school.

TAL
Yeah... small world.
(a beat)
Good running into you, Marc.

Tal turns to the door but--

MARC
How's the semester going for the student body's favorite professor?

TAL
Pretty status quo.

MARC
My advanced federal appeals seminar is already kicking my ass. It's like every third-year ballbuster decided to enroll en masse.

TAL
Well... good luck with that.

Again, Tal heads for the door, and again, Marc stops him...

MARC
I was just in there, helping a friend with a brief. Everyone suddenly wants my advice since these nomination rumors started up, you know? I'm sure Kimmer is dealing with the same thing.
(a beat)
I tried to drop in on her, but...

TAL
She's on a business trip.

MARC
So what are you doing here then?

A beat -- this stumps Tal; he doesn't have a good answer.

TAL
Guess you caught me.

Marc forces a smile, chuckles, and slaps Tal on his shoulder.

MARC
Look, I know this selection process can be brutal. But we've been colleagues for a long time. And Kimmer, I love Kimmer. So all the usual backbiting and mudslinging, there's no need for it, is there? It's in the president's hands now.

TAL
It always has been.

MARC
Exactly. So let's just keep it civil, yeah?

A beat -- Tal considers how to respond. Then...

TAL
I really should go.

Tal enters the building, leaving Marc alone.

INT. NEWHALL & VANN - DAY (PRESENT)

Inside, Tal approaches the RECEPTIONIST. She smiles at him.

RECEPTIONIST

Hey, Tal. You know Kimmer's not here, right? She's still--

TAL

On a business trip... with Jerry Nathanson. How could I forget?

(a beat)

She actually asked me to come here and get a few papers from her desk.

RECEPTIONIST

Oh, well, we're not really supposed to let anyone--

TAL

It'll just take a minute.

Before she can protest, he disappears deeper into the office.

INT. NEWHALL & VANN - KIMMER'S OFFICE - DAY (PRESENT)

Tal enters. He surveys the empty room. It's spacious and modern. Several DEGREES, AWARDS, and PHOTOS line the walls.

The pictures are all of Tal's lovely wife KIMBERLY "KIMMER" MADISON-GARLAND standing alongside legal and political superstars -- Kimmer with RBG. Kimmer standing between THE CLINTONS. Kimmer with ERIC HOLDER.

Tal sits at the desk. He hesitates as he notices...

A framed PICTURE of Tal, Kimmer, and their son, BENTLEY, 4.

Tal roots through the desk drawer -- nothing. He moves on to the DESKTOP COMPUTER -- password protected.

He pushes away from the desk, frustrated. He sits there, thinking, slowly a new idea forms. He rushes out of the room.

INT. NEWHALL & VANN - HALLWAY - DAY (PRESENT)

Tal walks down the bustling hall unnoticed by the preoccupied PARALEGALS and LAWYERS. Tal discreetly checks the name plates of each office he passes. Finally stopping at one reading...

"Gerald Nathanson."

INT. NEWHALL & VANN - JERRY'S OFFICE - DAY (PRESENT)

At Jerry's desk, Tal looks at the computer -- no password. He navigates Jerry's TEXTING APP to the thread with KIMMER.

The first thing he sees -- a picture of his wife. Or more specifically, Kimmer's ample cleavage in a low-cut dress. Kimmer's accompanying message: "Think this dress is too much for the meeting? LOL." JERRY: "Ha! Fine by me."

An INTERN enters, stops. He eyes Tal, suspicious. Tal doesn't waver. The intern flashes a sorry-to-bother smile and exits.

Tal turns back to the screen and scrolls through the thread.

JERRY: "Got reservations!" KIMMER: "Perfect." JERRY: "See you at 8" Then, later -- JERRY: "Thanks for being such a great dinner date. Nightcap?" KIMMER: "'Nightcap?' You're not that old Jerry. You sound like a grandpa." And then, KIMMER: "But yes. I'll be right down." JERRY: "Can't wait. Room 1204."

Off Tal, dwelling on that last message--

INT. MARIAH'S HOUSE - DAY (PRESENT)

A mansion -- not a "McMansion" or a "mini-mansion" -- a *mansion*. A whole estate. MARIAH DENTON (née Garland), now 42, whisks through marble corridors. She's trailed by her au pair SZUZA, who has a BABY, the youngest Denton, on her hip. Mariah yells out...

MARIAH

Ten minutes to be dressed and downstairs! No excuses or exceptions!
(to Szuza)
You could also try beets. She loves those. Sucks 'em right down.

MALCOM, 12, peeks his head out of his room, half dressed in his school uniform.

MALCOLM

I can't find my blazer.

MARIAH

If you'd hang it up, instead of throwing it on a chair, we wouldn't be having this conversation.
(a beat)
It's in the downstairs closet. In the West hallway.

Mariah looks into another BEDROOM. She finds 6 year-old twins, MARTIN and MARTINA, playing with LEGOS.

MARIAH (CONT'D)

Please put your shin guards in your backpacks for soccer. Then go eat.

Mariah tuns back to Szuza.

MARIAH (CONT'D)
Oh, but no apples though, okay?
Those make her shit watery.

Malcom exits his room again.

MALCOLM
Can I go to Colton's after school?

MARIAH
No. You have a math test. We're
doing flash cards after school.

Mariah looks around, as if she's just realizing something.

MARIAH (CONT'D)
Where's Marshall?

CUT TO:

INT. MARIAH'S HOUSE - MARSHALL'S ROOM - DAY (PRESENT)

Mariah flips on the LIGHT. MARSHALL, her 10 year-old son, is still in bed.

MARIAH
Marshall! What are you doing?
You're going to make us late.

MARSHALL
I don't wanna go to school.

MARIAH
Why? Are you sick?

Marshall shakes his head no.

MARIAH (CONT'D)
So then...

A beat -- Marshall hesitates; he doesn't want to say.

MARIAH (CONT'D)
Young man, spill it.

OFF Marshall, with no other choice but to tell the truth--

INT. SCHOOL - HALLWAY - DAY (PRESENT)

Mariah marches down the hall of a ritzy private school, pissed-the-eff-off. When she approaches another PARENT, she snaps into a practiced smile.

MARIAH

Sara! Text me about that raffle,
okay? I want to help.

Once the parent passes, she's back to abject fury.

INT. SCHOOL - PRINCIPAL'S OFFICE - DAY (PRESENT)

The PRINCIPAL talks to some TEACHERS...

PRINCIPAL

We need a new smart board vendor so
for now just--

Mariah stomps in, stops in the open doorway. The principal
stops abruptly at the sight of her. To the teachers...

PRINCIPAL (CONT'D)

Give us a minute, please.

The teachers exit. Once they're gone...

PRINCIPAL (CONT'D)

What can I do for you, Mariah?

MARIAH

You can tell me why my son was
forced to sit at another lunch
table while Aiden Corbat called him
"Jim Crow."

PRINCIPAL

God. That's horrible. Please know
it's the first I'm hearing of it.

(a beat)

Maybe it's a misplaced application
of what they've been learning. They
were doing a unit on civil rights.

MARIAH

Clearly, the unit wasn't very
effective. Calling the Black kid
"Jim Crow" doesn't even make sense.

PRINCIPAL

I promise you he will be punished
accordingly.

MARIAH

I don't want "a punishment." I want
expulsion.

PRINCIPAL

Mariah. Expulsion is for chronic offenders. We've only expelled one student in my seventeen years here. And Aiden is otherwise a good kid from a good family.

MARIAH

I have four good kids enrolled here. Plus, I'm on the fundraising committee so I know we're the top givers three years running.

PRINCIPAL

Donations don't buy on-demand punishment.

MARIAH

In this case they will. Or I go to the media. And it won't be Channel 4 Action News at 11 or whatever. It'll be the Post or the Times. I'm still Facebook friends with half this nation's top journalists.

(a beat)

Don't fuck with me, Tom. I want that junior klansman out of my school.

They hold eye contact. Mariah is dead serious. Finally, the principal nods -- expulsion it is. Mariah smiles.

Just then, her PHONE rings. She steps away to answer it.

MARIAH (CONT'D)

(into phone)

Hey Uncle Mal. To what do I owe the pleasure of this call?

As she listens, her expression sinks -- bad news.

I/E. CAR/FACULTY PARKING LOT - DAY (PRESENT)

Tal's Accord pulls into a faculty parking lot situated on a picturesque, verdant New England campus.

Inside the car, a PHONE RINGS -- an outgoing call over Bluetooth. No answer, it goes to voicemail.

KIMMER (V.O.)

You've reached the voicemail of Kimberly Madison-Garland. Please leave a detailed message.

BEEP!

TAL

Kimmer. I've been trying to get you
all morning. We have to talk.

Tal sits there in silence for a moment, collecting himself.

INT. LAW SCHOOL - HALLWAY - DAY (PRESENT)

Tal enters, striding through the arched corridors of the 19th-century building. Some STUDENTS greet him...

STUDENTS

Hey, Professor Garland./Morning./
What's up, prof?

He waves and hurries by; he must be late. From behind...

VOICE (O.S.)

Did you do it?

Tal turns to see...

DANA WORTH, 37, athletic and affable, catches up to him. Looking every bit the cool professor she is, she wears hipster glasses, a loud-printed oxford shirt, and a fitted blazer. They speak in hushed tones...

DANA

Did you get it? Enough to nail her?

TAL

I found some stuff. Now I'm just
waiting for her to call me back.

DANA

So you can end things, I hope. If
Allison ever treated me like that,
I would send her high-femme ass
back to Des Moines in a second.

TAL

I want to talk to her first.

DANA

Tal. She'll just weasel out. You
have no power against that woman
when she starts to speak.

TAL

I'm a husband, Dana. A father. I
have certain... duties. I can't
just flush those down the toilet.

Dana sighs -- there's no getting through to him.

DANA

So you're just gonna wait for the FBI vetting to dig it up? 'Cause you know they will and it won't just sink her shot at the federal bench, it'll sink your marriage too... publicly. Better to get out in front of it, man.

Tal ignores this advice, changes the topic.

TAL

Speaking of vetting, guess who I ran into? Marc Hadley.

DANA

Gross. Was he in his human or reptilian form?

TAL

Said he'd like to adopt a civil attitude towards the nomination, let the whole thing unfold naturally.

DANA

Yeah fucking right. That asshole's probably already lobbying senators.

Tal's PHONE rings. As he pulls it from his pocket, regards the caller I.D. curiously.

DANA (CONT'D)

That her?

TAL

No. My sister.
(into phone)
Hey, Mariah. Can't talk right now.
I'm gonna be late for my class.

He listens a little longer, shock overtaking his face.

TAL (CONT'D)

(into phone)
Wait. Slow down. What?

INT. DIRKSEN OFFICE BUILDING - PRIVATE OFFICE - DAY (2007)

Tal enters. He's no longer covered in paint. Instead, he wears a fresh PASTEL-YELLOW SHIRT and a BOW TIE.

The rest of the family, waiting in the room, turn their attention to Tal. Addison and Mariah stifle laughs.

The judge, poring over notes, looks up at Tal, almost smirks, and continues reading. Claire takes pity.

CLAIRE

You look-- It fits great, honey.

A young SENATE AIDE -- also in a pastel shirt and bow tie -- regards Tal with pride.

AIDE

Darn right, it fits. Looks like it was tailored for you, sir. Lucky I always keep a spare shirt and tie in the office, huh?

TAL

Lucky me.

Tal sits on the couch, between Addison and Mariah. Addison speaks just soft enough so their mother can't hear.

ADDISON

You look like a bitch in that tie. If I saw you on the street, I'd fuck you up just for wearing it.

Mariah gleefully piles on...

MARIAH

Looks like Malcom X.

ADDISON

What? Nah, Malcolm X was cool. He looks like Tucker Carlson.

MARIAH

I like Tucker Carlson.

ADDISON

Oh, you like some stuck up, white, neocon frat boy? Shocking.

MARIAH

Shut up. Like you can talk. What's Becky's name this week? "Becky?"

ADDISON

Operative phrase: this week. 'Cause next week is Lashonda or Ming Li or Maribella. I don't discriminate.

MARIAH

You should try to be more like Tal.

ADDISON

Wear a bow tie?

MARIAH

No. Romantic. Faithful. Find a committed, long-term relationship.

ADDISON

Tal's not in a committed, long-term relationship. Tonya dumped him.

MARIAH

Tonya dumped you?

TAL

No, she didn't. We're doing the long-distance thing.

ADDISON

Okay, there's romantic and there's naive. She bought a one-way ticket to Tokyo, bruh. She leased an apartment, accepted a job there. Read between the lines. It's over.

The siblings notice Claire, eyeing them sharply, finger to her lips -- shush! They wither under the power of a Black mother's glare.

Just then, Mal enters with coterie of SENATORS and STAFFERS.

MAL

Alright. Let's talk some numbers.

INT. DIRKSEN OFFICE BUILDING - PRIVATE OFFICE - DAY (2007)

Talcott and the rest of the family watch on as the judge, Uncle Mal, senators, and staffers talk whip count.

SENATOR 1

Fact is: the days of ninety-nine to one confirmations are long gone, but we've convinced about half of the Democrats to vote for you.

SENATOR 2

And some of them are even doing it without holding their noses.

SENATOR 1

All the Blue Dogs love you, even if they won't admit it on camera.

Laughter. Mal steps up, waves his hands, silences everyone.

MAL

Point is -- any which way you cut it -- Oliver Garland will be the next Supreme Court Justice of the United States of America.

Applause and backslaps from the senators and the staffers.

SENATOR 2

(to staffer)

You got that thing?

The staffer produces a MAGAZINE, hands it to the senator. The senator, in turn, gives it to the judge.

It's a copy of the judge's NEWSWEEK, the latest issue.

SENATOR

Can you sign that for me, judge?
Know what, on second thought, make it out to Senator Edelman.

They all share another hearty laugh.

The judge joins in, but when Tal meets his eye, the judge's jovial veneer fades, his true mood revealing itself.

Tal's the only one who sees it, because a split second later, the judge's mechanical smile returns, continuing the revelry.

INT. LAW SCHOOL - TAL'S OFFICE - DAY (PRESENT)

CLOSE ON: A TELEVISION SCREEN -- a CNN BREAKING NEWS REPORT announcing Judge Oliver Garland's death.

HOST

...Known for his staggering intellect and steadfast fairness while on the D.C. Circuit Court, it was his turn to far-right politics that brought Judge Oliver Garland notoriety in later years. Earning the nickname "Titan of the Tea Party," Garland and his incendiary rhetoric became a fixture of talk radio and the speaking circuit.

Tal and Dana sit in his office, watching in somber silence.

HOST (CONT'D)

Of course, what he will be most remembered for is his failed nomination to the United States Supreme Court.

(MORE)

HOST (CONT'D)

Initially considered a lock for the bench, Garland saw his chances go up in flames when--

Dana, REMOTE in hand, mutes the TV.

DANA

That's about enough of that.

Tal nods thanks. Dana picks up her CELL, reads an e-mail.

DANA (CONT'D)

So a bunch of the faculty are already e-mailing, talking about school-wide memorial for your dad.

TAL

A bunch?

DANA

Theo, at least. Called him "one of our most distinguishes alums."

TAL

I can't even think about that right now. Matter of fact, I need to make some more calls...

DANA

Yeah. Of course.

She stands and puts the remote on his desk.

DANA (CONT'D)

You can let it out, man.

TAL

Think I'm just in shock.

DANA

Yeah, well, don't keep that shit bottled up for too long. It'll eat you from the inside.

Dana exits. Finally alone, Tal picks up his phone and dials -- no answer. He hangs up and thinks about it for a moment. Struck with an idea, he places another call.

TAL

(into the phone)

Jerry. It's Talcott Garland... Yeah, yeah, absolutely, it has been a long time... I've been trying to get a hold of Kimmer.

(MORE)

TAL (CONT'D)

Have you been with her?... Okay,
please yes. Tell her it's an
emergency... Thanks.

Tal hangs up. He unmutes the TV. ON THE SCREEN, SENATOR GABE
EDELMAN, 70s, addresses reporters.

EDELMAN

I know we'll be forever linked in
the minds of some, but it really
isn't my place to comment on Judge
Garland's death. Except to say that
he was a patriot who spent his life
serving and doing what he thought
was best for this country. We
happened to disagree about--

The TV clicks off; for whatever reason, Tal couldn't stand to
watch another second. He sits there in silence for a moment
before his phone buzzes. He quickly picks up...

TAL

(into phone)

Kimmer?... Where have you been?...
I know it's a work trip but--...
Have you seen the news yet?...
Stop. Kimmer. Okay. Just, stop.
(a beat)
My dad died.

Off Tal, as he listens to his wife's reaction--

INT. PRIVATE PLANE - DAY (PRESENT)

A spacious, luxurious jet, mid-flight. The baby sits on
Szuza's lap. Mariah's twins chase each other. The two oldest
kids are on TABLETS with HEADPHONES.

Mariah ignores them, fixated on her LAPTOP screen.

Across the aisle, her husband HOWARD DENTON taps out a
message on his CELL. He's noticeably older than Mariah, maybe
in his late 50s, but he's fit and golf-course tan. He looks
over, observing Mariah for a moment before approaching her.

HOWARD

How you holding up, champ?

MARIAH

Look at this.

Howard puts on his READING GLASSES. She slides the computer
closer to him.

HOWARD
What am I looking at?

MARIAH
My father's medical records.

HOWARD
Why do you have these?

MARIAH
He started e-mailing them years ago. Said that was easier than my health-based interrogations.
(a beat)
And, look! He was healthy! Lipids, blood sugar, weight: all down from where they were five years ago.

Howard scans the screen, scrolls through a few pages.

MARIAH (CONT'D)
What if it wasn't a heart attack?

HOWARD
(confused)
Like a stroke?

MARIAH
No, I mean what if -- whatever it was -- it was made to look like a heart attack.

HOWARD
I'm sorry. I don't understand what you're saying.

MARIAH
The judge had a lot of enemies.

A beat -- Mariah waits with bated breath, wondering if her husband will go down this rabbit hole with her.

He closes the laptop.

HOWARD
I get it. You want to make sense of this whole thing. A sudden death. It's only human to ask, "Why?"

He takes her hand in his.

HOWARD (CONT'D)
When my old man died, I wanted answers too.

(MORE)

HOWARD (CONT'D)

Thought I could find 'em by getting in touch with nature. Remember I bought all that land in Montana?

MARIAH

What's your point, Howard?

HOWARD

There are no easy answers. Maybe there are no answers at all, I don't know. But the one thing I can say for sure is conspiracy theories won't get you anywhere, babe.

He smiles at her as if he's waiting for her to agree. She nods, indicating she's on board. Howard's phone rings.

HOWARD (CONT'D)

I gotta take this.

Howard stands to go back to his seat. Mariah stares out of the window, contemplating the seemingly endless blue void.

I/E. CAR - DAY (PRESENT)

Tal drives. A HIP HOP MIX plays on the stereo. Behind him, BENTLEY is in a car seat.

BENTLEY

Is grandpa gonna be a ghost?

TAL

No, he won't be a ghost, buddy.

BENTLEY

So he won't haunt us? You sure?

TAL

I don't think so.

The song changes -- "CAN'T FORGET ABOUT YOU" by NAS comes on. Tal hesitates, looks at his stereo...

BENTLEY

Is he in heaven?

Tal doesn't respond; he's transfixed by the song.

BENTLEY (CONT'D)

Daddy! Is grandpa in heaven? Does he have wings?

Snapping out of it, Tal skips the song.

TAL
 Uh-- Yes, he's in heaven --
 probably -- but I don't know about
 the wings. Maybe.

Tal looks back to the road, regaining focus.

BENTLEY
 Was he your grandpa, too?

TAL
 No, he was my daddy.

BENTLEY
 Oh... Was he a good daddy?

A beat -- Tal hesitates as he considers the question.

TAL
 Sometimes. He was really smart and
 he taught me a lot of things and
 that was nice. But he could also be
 very strict.

BENTLEY
 What's "strict?"

TAL
 It just means he had a lot of
 rules. He called them "principles."
 And if you didn't follow them, he
 could get angry... especially when
 he was sad, which was a lot of the
 time. We all were sad back then.

BENTLEY
 Oh.

Bentley has lost interest and looks out his window. OFF Tal,
 lost in bittersweet remembrance--

INT. SHEPARD STREET HOUSE - FOYER - DAY (PRESENT)

Tal, carrying SUITCASES, enters with Bentley. It's quiet.

Tal regards a poster-sized version of the judge's magazine
 cover; it's almost as if the image of his father is making
 eye contact with him.

The silence is shattered as Mariah's twins run into view.

MARTIN
 Bentley! Bentley!

MARTINA
 Come play! We got Legos!

Bentley is whisked away by his cousins. Mariah and Howard enter. Howard offers a firm handshake.

HOWARD

Good to see you, buddy. Sorry about your loss.

MARIAH

Took you long enough.

TAL

Not all of us own a jet. Honda's a little slower.

Tal and Mariah hug quickly. Mariah yells into the house...

MARIAH

Addison, hurry up!

(to Tal)

We need to get to Uncle Mal's. If we leave now, we can beat rush hour.

TAL

Oh, you guys didn't bring a helicopter too?

MARIAH

Shut up. I'm serious. I have a ton of other shit to do. I just wanna get it over with.

(yelling)

I'll leave without you!

TAL

Why are we going to Uncle Mal's?

MARIAH

Reading of the will.

TAL

Are you serious? I thought they only did that in movies.

MARIAH

Dad mandated it. Addy, hurry up! We need to--

ADDISON (O.S.)

Relax, I'm here.

ADDISON, now 44, rounds the corner followed by LANA, tall and modelesque. Addison brings Tal in for a big hug.

ADDISON (CONT'D)
Lookin' good, man. Working out?

TAL
Pickup basketball, here and there.

Addison steps back and turns to Lana.

ADDISON
Lana, Tal. Tal, Lana.

MARIAH
Addison's date... to his father's funeral. Because who doesn't bring a date to a funeral? No offense, Lana. You're lovely.

LANA
None taken, Mariah.

ADDISON
Excuse me. You all brought your significant others... assuming Kimmer's on her way.

TAL
First flight tomorrow.

LANA
I'm only here for moral support. And to lend a helping hand.

MARIAH
Speaking of that... Lana, can you get the formal place settings from the basement? They'll need to be washed... by hand.

Lana forces a polite smile.

LANA
Of course. Glad to help.

MARIAH
Boys, let's go. Now.

As Mariah pushes Tal and Addison out of the front door, Tal steals a glance at the image of his dad.

INT. DIRKSEN OFFICE BUILDING - HEARING ROOM - DAY (2007)

Not a single open seat in the lavishly wood-paneled room. In a moment steeped in gravitas and formality, the judge sits alone at a long table.

Behind him are Tal (still in hideous pastel), Uncle Mal, and the rest of the family seated in the front row of spectators. The judge finishes an answer...

THE JUDGE

Honor. Duty. Justice. If you look behind me, you'll probably see my kids roll their eyes at the mention of those three words.

A smattering of laughter from the gallery.

THE JUDGE (CONT'D)

That's because, in my household, they usually heard those words when they were in a bit of trouble. Those principles: that's how we decided what they did wrong and how they should be punished.

(a beat)

Honor: did they behave in a way that reflects positively on their family, their god, their country, and themselves? Duty: did they try their hardest to do what was required of them? Justice: did they strive for fairness, especially when holding themselves and others accountable? These are, senator, unsurprisingly, the same standards I hold myself to as a jurist and as a man. Honor, duty, justice.

On the dais, Senator Gabe Edelman (fourteen years younger), the current questioner, is unimpressed...

EDELMAN

That was a very endearing -- dare I say "quaint" -- answer. But I'm looking for something more substantive, Judge Garland. Just last year, in *Alonso vs. Secure-Tech*, you ruled in favor of a company that fired an employee who abandoned his post. But he had reason to believe that his post had a carbon monoxide leak. Should he have stayed there and died? Is that a principle of yours? Death before violating company policy.

THE JUDGE

I believe the matter you referred to is being appealed to the Supreme Court and it wouldn't be prudent for me to comment further on on-going litigation. My dissent covers my opinions on the case which are far more nuanced than how you presented them in your question.

EDELMAN

So you stand by your ruling then? It does represent your principles. Is that what you're saying?

THE JUDGE

I'm saying read the dissent, senator.

The judge smiles. It's both charming and obnoxiously overconfident. He's in total control and he knows it.

EDELMAN

Has anyone in the current administration asked you to--

Just then, an AIDE approaches Edelman from behind, whispers something to him. The hearing grinds to a silent halt. All eyes are on Edelman. The discussion goes on for an uncomfortably long time -- what are they talking about? The aide finally leaves and Edelman turns back to the judge.

THE JUDGE

There he is. Welcome back to the hearing, senator.

More laughter.

EDELMAN

Last question. When's the last time you had in-person contact with--

An interruption from elsewhere on the dais.

CHAIRMAN

The gentleman's time has expired.

EDELMAN

If the chair will indulge me--

CHAIRMAN

The gentleman is no longer recognized.

Edelman shouts over the banging GAVEL.

EDELMAN

When's the last time you had in-person contact with Jack Ziegler?

This lands like a bomb. Time stops. Murmurs from the audience, bursts of CAMERA SHUTTERS.

Tal and the rest of the family watch on, rapt.

The judge hesitates, forces a smile, playing it cool.

Edelman doesn't break eye contact, deadly serious, waiting for an answer. But... the chairman bangs the gavel again.

CHAIRMAN

The gentlewoman from Arkansas is recognized for five minutes.

The judge turns attention to the next questioner. OFF Tal, studying his father from behind--

INT. SHEPARD STREET HOUSE - TAL'S ROOM - NIGHT (2007)

Alone in his childhood room, Tal listens to NAS'S "HIP HOP IS DEAD." He idly searches TRAVEL SITES for FLIGHTS TO JAPAN.

ADDISON (O.S.)

Can I borrow your charger?

Tal sees Addison in the doorway holding his FLIP PHONE. Tal quickly closes the browser window on his laptop. Addison enters and grabs the CHARGER from the outlet.

ADDISON (CONT'D)

(RE: the music)

You still listen to Nas?

TAL

Uh, yeah. He's the GOAT.

ADDISON

You don't got any T.I.? Jeezy?

Tal shakes his head. After a moment...

TAL

Think dad met up with Uncle Jack?

ADDISON

"Uncle Jack?" You're a grown man still calling some old White dude "Uncle." Stop it. It's weird.

TAL

Ok, whatever, Jack. You think dad saw him?

ADDISON

Hell nah. Do you?

TAL

I don't know. I caught a vibe.

ADDISON

A vibe? Jack's a political pariah. The judge is way too savvy to be involved with someone like that.

TAL

College buddies. Roommates. Dad's loyal.

ADDISON

Loyal, yes. Stupid? Nah, son. You do know everything Jack did, right?

TAL

Some of his workers were corrupt.

ADDISON

Some of his workers? You are the least aware person I've ever met in my life. Google "Jack Ziegler, Washington Post."

Tal does as he's told. A WASHINGTON POST profile of ZIEGLER pops up on screen. Addison reads over Tal's shoulder...

ADDISON (CONT'D)

Here. "...but a Post investigation reveals that Jack Ziegler, a former CIA operative, may have personally directed his Zed Security employees to commit these crimes while working as government contractors in Iraq and Afghanistan... illegal arms sales, money laundering, contracted killings." Et cetera, et cetera.

(a beat)

Dude's a real-life Bond villain. C'mon. The judge would never.

A beat -- this is all news to Tal. Addison quickly wraps up the charger cord. As he exits...

ADDISON (CONT'D)

I'll bring this back.

Once Addison is gone, Tal looks back to the screen, reading, engrossed.

INT. SHEPARD STREET HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - DAY (2007)

Tal creeps into the empty room, pulls out his phone, and dials. He waits for an answer, then...

TAL

(into phone)

Hey. It's Talcott. Um, you're probably asleep but I'm still gonna say what I have to say anyway... I know the long-distance thing is hard, but I'm dedicated to you, Tonya. Because I made a promise to you and myself that I would give our relationship my all and I'm not gonna let thousands of miles and a 14-hour time difference make me break that promise... Because I love you, Tonya.

Tal hangs up.

MARIAH (O.S.)

Please tell me that's not the first time you told Tonya you love her.

Tal's surprised to see Mariah working quietly on her LAPTOP in a dark corner. Clearly, she heard the entire call.

MARIAH (CONT'D)

The end of some cringey voicemail.

TAL

It was cringey?

MARIAH

Hate to say it but Addy's right. It's over. If you have to leave a message like that, it's last call. Once the lights come on the bouncer's gonna throw you out. Might as well leave with some dignity.

TAL

The bouncer?

MARIAH

It's a bar analogy, Tal. Point is you don't have to swear a lifetime allegiance to every girl you date.

TAL

What can I say? I like commitment.
(a beat)
What are doing in here, besides
eavesdropping?

MARIAH

Finishing an article and hiding
from mom. It's like as soon as I
set foot in this house, she puts me
in the kitchen. You'd think being
on the team that won a Pulitzer for
investigative journalism would
exempt me, but no, she's grooming
me for a life as a housewife.

Mariah looks back down at her screen.

MARIAH (CONT'D)

I'd rather die at my fucking desk
than become a kept woman.

Tal lingers as Mariah types away. After a moment...

TAL

Do you think all the stuff they say
about Uncle Jack is true?

MARIAH

All? No. At least half of it is
liberal propaganda.

TAL

And the other half?

MARIAH

That's the half we should all be
scared of.

Tal leaves, finally letting Mariah get back to work.

INT. CORCORAN & KLEIN - UNCLE MAL'S OFFICE - DAY (PRESENT)

Uncle Mal sits behind his desk reviewing some PAPERS. Mal
looks great, though he has aged years since the hearings.
Across from him, sitting in the lavish office, are Tal,
Mariah, and Addison.

MAL

Those funds can be used to settle
property taxes or credit card debt,
which is minimal according to his
last bank statement.

(MORE)

MAL (CONT'D)

The remainder will be donated to Abby's memorial scholarship fund, of course.

Mal turns the page.

MAL (CONT'D)

The main event. Real Estate. The Washington, D.C. property on Shepard Street will transfer to Mariah. The Martha's Vineyard summer home goes to Tal. And the--

Mal looks to a PARALEGAL who takes notes nearby.

MAL (CONT'D)

This still says "Redskins." They're not called the "Redskins" anymore, what are they calling them now?

PARALEGAL

The Washington Football Team.

MAL

We'll amend it but for now just know that the Washington Football Team season tickets go to Addy.

ADDISON

What do I need with another house anyway?

Mal produces a large LEGAL ENVELOPE. He hands it to Tal.

MAL

This contains the details for the service and the burial. The funeral home has a copy. The judge has planned everything down to the color of the flowers on the altar.

ADDISON

Ever the control freak, even beyond the grave.

MAL

And that, folks, is all she wrote.

Mal stands as do Tal and Addison.

MARIAH

Wait. Uncle Mal. Is there anything in the will calling for an investigation of the judge's death?

MAL

Come again?

MARIAH

An autopsy. Will there be one?

MAL

Mariah, honey, they only do autopsies when there's suspicion of foul play. Given the judge's age and battle with hypertension, it doesn't take a medical examiner to figure out what happened. I can call the coroner if you want but...

Mariah looks around, notices Tal and Addison regarding her with skepticism and incredulity.

MARIAH

No, you're right. It's fine.

INT. DINER - NIGHT (PRESENT)

Tal, Mariah, and Addison sit in a booth. Mariah goes over a CHECKLIST.

MARIAH

Guest list. Me. Food. Me. Obituary, me of course. Even though they'll probably just print what they want.

ADDISON

Sorry I can't help more.

MARIAH

I'm sure you are.

ADDISON

It's not my fault the judge wanted me -- his pride and joy, his first born -- to eulogize him. I'll be busy with that.

MARIAH

Tal, I'll need you to double check with the funeral home, make sure they carry out the judges's wishes.

TAL

On it, boss.

The WAITRESS comes with their FOOD. Mariah picks up her FORK.

MARIAH

Can we get some new silverware?
This is actually filthy.

The waitress collects the CUTLERY.

WAITRESS

Sure, I'll be right back.

The waitress exits. Once she's gone...

MARIAH

No tip.

TAL

C'mon, Mariah.

MARIAH

A tip is a financial incentive to provide good service. It's the free market at work. If I tip despite bad service, I'm betraying my economic principles.

TAL

It's almost like the only reason you're a Republican is so you can justify being an asshole. Almost.

Addison laughs, Mariah is indignant.

MARIAH

No. I'm a Republican because I believe in low taxes, life beginning at conception, and the motherfucking right to bear arms.

ADDISON

You can stop trying so hard now.

MARIAH

What's that mean?

ADDISON

Means dad's gone. Who are you trying to impress?

This lands. They're silent for a beat. Just then, a WOMAN approaches Addison.

WOMAN

I hope I'm not interrupting but can I bother you for a selfie?

ADDISON
Yeah, yeah. Of course.

Addison stands next to the woman as she positions her PHONE.

WOMAN
I am such a huge fan. I wish they'd give you your own show already.

ADDISON
From your mouth to God's ears.

Mariah rolls her eyes. The woman takes the picture.

ADDISON (CONT'D)
I'll be on twice next month for Chris Hayes and then guest hosting for Rachel after that.

WOMAN
Thank you. I'll make sure to watch.

The woman exits and Addison takes his seat.

ADDISON
Mariah, why would you ask Uncle Mal about an autopsy?

Mariah shrugs it off...

MARIAH
I was curious. Obviously.

ADDISON
We gotta be careful about what we say out loud. We're a public family. It could have consequences.

Mariah nods, silently agreeing. But Tal studies her; there's more to her inquiry than she's letting on.

INT. FUNERAL HOME - DAY (PRESENT)

Tal stands in the funeral home showroom. He's surrounded by displays of COFFINS and URNS. He notices something... In an adjacent room, a MAN weeps, overwhelmed with grief.

A FUNERAL DIRECTOR approaches Tal.

FUNERAL DIRECTOR
I took a look at what your lawyer provided and it's exactly what we have on file. Rest easy, Mr. Garland. You're in good hands.

TAL

Thank you.

FUNERAL DIRECTOR

It'll be a lovely service; the judge requested some of the same hymns from your mother Claire's and your sister Abby's funerals.

A beat -- Tal is shaken by the mention of Claire and Abby.

TAL

I better get going. Feel free to call my cell if anything comes up.

Tal starts to walk away but...

FUNERAL DIRECTOR

Mr. Garland. Wait. What would you like the inscription on the tombstone to say?

TAL

That should be in the packet.

FUNERAL DIRECTOR

I checked twice. Your father didn't specify an epitaph. He either forgot or meant to leave it up to his loved ones. Here, look.

The director opens a CATALOG and points to a GRAVESTONE.

FUNERAL DIRECTOR (CONT'D)

Top of the line marble. As you can see, there's a rather large space for an epitaph. I made special arrangements to have this done by the burial, but we'll need the inscription as soon as possible.

OFF Tal, saddled with an unexpected burden--

INT. DIRKSEN OFFICE BUILDING - COFFEE CART - DAY (2007)

Tal, HEADPHONES in, NAS blaring, stirs some cream into the COFFEE he just purchased. He looks up to see...

Uncle Mal rushes past, talking frantically with some aides.

With his music so loud, Tal can't hear what they're so worked up about. He watches them go and heads the other direction.

INT. DIRKSEN OFFICE BUILDING - HALLWAY - DAY (2007)

Tal walks towards the men's bathroom. He notices two SECURITY GUARDS standing outside. As Tal approaches, GREG HARAMOTO, 30s, exits the bathroom.

TAL

Hey, man. Greg, right? It's Tal Garland. The judge's son.

Greg just nods. Clearly, he doesn't want to speak to Tal.

GREG

Yeah -- uh -- good seeing you.

Greg shuffles off, flanked by guards. Off Tal, that's weird--

INT. DIRKSEN OFFICE BUILDING - PRIVATE OFFICE - DAY (2007)

Tal enters, joins Mariah and Addison on a couch. In another part of the office, the judge, Uncle Mal, and others engage in an intense, hushed conversation out of earshot.

TAL

Something weird: I ran into Greg, used to clerk for dad...

ADDISON

Did you punch him?

TAL

Why would I do that?

MARIAH

Greg's testifying. Against dad.

OFF Tal, realizing the import of the situation--

INT. DIRKSEN OFFICE BUILDING - HEARING ROOM - DAY (2007)

Greg Haramoto testifies. Edelman questions him.

GREG

I'd like to start by saying, I have the utmost respect for Judge Garland--

EDELMAN

Yes, Mr. Haramoto. I'm sure you hold him in the highest esteem but that wasn't my question. What can you tell me about the current state of Judge Garland's friendships, acquaintances, et cetera?

GREG

I know he is widely admired and loved by family, friends, and professional colleagues alike.

EDELMAN

Due to the restrictive rules adopted by this committee, we don't have time for you play coy, Mr. Haramoto.

(a beat)

Let me ask plainly. To your knowledge, has Judge Garland had any recent contact with Jack Ziegler?

A long beat -- Greg doesn't want to answer.

GREG

Yes. They've been in contact.

Gasps from the gallery. Dozens of CAMERA SHUTTERS snap.

EDELMAN

And how do you know that for sure?

GREG

I answer the judge's phone sometimes and came to recognize Mr. Ziegler's voice. He called often.

EDELMAN

Did you have any other proof that their relationship was ongoing?

Another beat -- Greg remains silent.

EDELMAN (CONT'D)

Shall I repeat the question?

GREG

No, senator. I heard you. I also saw Judge Garland and Jack Ziegler, together, at the courthouse.

EDELMAN

You're telling me that suspected war criminal Jack Ziegler visited a federal judge at his courthouse? Why didn't you come forward with this information when Judge Garland's nomination was announced?

GREG

Uh, because Judge Garland asked me to keep it secret.

EDELMAN

He asked you to lie?

GREG

He asked me not to volunteer it.

EDELMAN

Do you have any proof to support these claims?

GREG

I've provided the committee with the courthouse's visitor logs.

EDELMAN

These logs?

Edelman waves a bound STACK OF COPIES high above his head. Political theater at its finest, FLASHES go off.

INT. SHEPARD STREET HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - SAME (2007)

Tense quiet as the family watches Greg's testimony on CNN. The judge remains stoic, silently fuming without expression.

Tal, Addison, and Mariah share looks -- this is bad.

INT. SHEPARD STREET HOUSE - THE JUDGE'S STUDY - NIGHT (2007)

The judge is alone in his study -- pensive, melancholic. He stares out the window, burden weighing heavy. He looks down.

Nearby is an ornate MARBLE CHESS SET. Pieces, black and white, perfectly placed on their corresponding squares.

The judge puts a finger on a BLACK PAWN. He gently tilts it and just as it is about to tip over, we...

CUT TO:

INT. SHEPARD STREET HOUSE - THE JUDGE'S STUDY - DAY (PRESENT)

Tal searches the study, digging through a FILING CABINET. The walls are lined with AWARDS, DIPLOMAS, and dozens of PHOTOGRAPHS depicting the judge with REPUBLICAN POLITICIANS of yesteryear -- REAGAN, DOLE, GINGRICH, POWELL.

Addison pops in...

ADDISON

Tal, what you doing?

TAL

Looking for any indication of what the judge wanted on his gravestone.

ADDISON

Just slap on a quote from Reagan or Lincoln or something. He loved all that dignified Republican shit.

TAL

Nah. Doesn't sit right. He planned everything; it's our duty to honor his wishes... I just need to figure out what those wishes were.

ADDISON

Alright, but can you hurry up? I need you to help Lana inflate these air mattresses.

TAL

And why can't you help her?

ADDISON

Still perfecting the eulogy. Check in on her when you can, please.

Addison exits. Alone, Tal wanders the room. Taking it all in with a sense of sadness. The judge is gone.

He stops near the chess set by the window. He regards it, all the pieces neatly in place.

He walks to the bookshelf, finds one that seems out of place. Its bright, light-blue binding stands out among the brown leather LEGAL VOLUMES. It's a SCRAPBOOK. He leafs through it.

The first few pages have CLIPPINGS about ABBY GARLAND, containing her formal obituary and follow-up stories -- headlines like, "Abigail Garland, daughter of prominent judge, dies at sixteen," and, "No suspects in hit-and-run."

The next pages are a collection of seemingly random, unconnected hit-and-runs. In the margins the judge has written angry notes like, "Fry the bastard," and, "Better get a good lawyer, pal," and, "At least somebody got justice."

Tal is astounded, saddened, and ultimately confused by what he sees. He puts the book back on the shelf. It's a tight, perfect fit. Just then, there's a faint KNOCK...

Tal looks up to see his wife, KIMBERLY "KIMMER" MADISON-GARLAND, small SUITCASE in hand, standing in the doorway.

She's tall and stately. They regard each other. She drops her suitcase, rushes over, and hugs him. It's tender, sweet.

Off Tal, a flood of mixed emotions--

INT. SHEPARD STREET HOUSE - DINING ROOM - DAY (PRESENT)

Dinner time. Tal, Kimmer, Addison, Mariah, Howard, and all of the kids are crowded around the dining room table. Lana and Suzu serve the family -- PIZZA, SALAD, SODA, WINE, etc.

ADDISON

Mariah, can you please release my girlfriend from indentured servitude?

MARIAH

Excuse me, your girlfriend offered. You offered to help, right Lana?

LANA

I did offer.

MARIAH

See. Plus, I'm mourning so I don't know why you're picking on me.

KIMMER

'Cause under normal circumstances, y'all know how eager Mariah is to do everything for herself.

Kimmer's statement drips with lighthearted sarcasm but it still stings. Lana, Addison, Howard, everyone cracks up. Even Suzu chuckles. While they laugh, Mariah glares at Kimmer.

LANA

It's nice that you guys are in such high spirits. I was a blubbering mess when my grandpa died.

KIMMER

Garlands don't cry. Stick around long enough, you'll learn that. They don't show any emotion, except for maybe indignation.

ADDISON

You forgot entitlement and baseless self-assuredness.

Laughter erupts again. Tal regards his wife -- smiling, radiant -- the life of the party.

INT. SHEPARD STREET HOUSE - TAL'S ROOM - NIGHT (PRESENT)

Kimmer enters, fresh from the shower. Tal's on the bed scribbling on a NOTEPAD.

KIMMER
Where's Bentley?

TAL
I told him he could camp out
downstairs with his cousins.

She LOTIONS her legs.

KIMMER
Spoke to Ruthie. Apparently, my
name is picking up steam for the
nomination. The FBI might even
start vetting me soon. Like talking
to my friends, family, you.

Tal nods without looking up, grunts acknowledgement.

KIMMER (CONT'D)
We should talk about what we're
going to say. Just so we can have a
unified narrative.

She waits for a response. There isn't one. She gets into bed.

KIMMER (CONT'D)
What are you working on?

TAL
Trying to come up with an epitaph.

KIMMER
What do you got?

TAL
"Here lies Oliver Garland, survived
by the deeply rooted complexes he
ingrained in his children."

They share a chuckle, followed by a long, tense silence.

KIMMER
So are we gonna talk about why you
snuck into my office the other day?

TAL
I don't know, Kimmer. Are we ever
gonna talk about you sending your
supervisor a picture of your tits?

A beat. Kimmer studies him -- how'd he know about that?

KIMMER

I know that I haven't always been the wife you expected me to be, Tal. I know, okay? I haven't always been the wife I expected to be either. I failed both of us. A lot. But those *incidents* are in the past. And that's where that behavior stays. In the past.

She scoots closer to him.

KIMMER (CONT'D)

You don't have anything to worry about anymore. Not Jerry Nathanson. Not business trips or pictures meant to be a joke or drinks with a colleague. None of it. I'm yours.

She kisses him -- gentle reassurance at first, but eventually progressing to something more passionate. Tal is reluctant -- he doesn't want to give in. Kimmer straddles him and kisses his neck. He gets into it, his hand sliding down to her hips, her butt. She starts to undo her robe but--

Tal snaps out of it, gets out from under her.

TAL

I can't.

He exits in a hurry.

INT. SHEPARD STREET HOUSE - KITCHEN - NIGHT (PRESENT)

Tal stands at the FRIDGE, collecting himself, drinking a GLASS OF WATER. He opens the door and rummages through the fridge, searching for a midnight snack, finally taking out a JAR OF PICKLES. When closes the door it reveals...

Mariah stands there, holding her LAPTOP. Tal is startled.

TAL

Jesus, Mariah.

MARIAH

I've been trying to get you alone all day.

TAL

Okay. Why?

MARIAH

Because I have something I want to talk to you about that I can't say in front of everyone else. Especially, Kimmer. I don't want to give that bitch any more ammo.

TAL

Why does she have to be a "bitch?"

MARIAH

I don't know, ask her. That's not the point though.

Mariah steps closer, whispers...

MARIAH (CONT'D)

Dad didn't die of natural causes. He was murdered, Tal.

Tal stares at her, dumbfounded for a beat. It's so ridiculous, he starts to laugh. She drops another bomb...

MARIAH (CONT'D)

And Uncle Jack did it.

Mariah puts her laptop on the island. Onscreen, window after window containing GOOGLE SEARCH RESULTS -- "Drugs that cause heart attacks," and, "Heart attack assassinations," and, "CIA Once Developed Heart Attack Gun."

Tal is at a momentary loss for words.

She points to the "heart attack gun" search.

MARIAH (CONT'D)

Here. Before he started Zed, Uncle Jack was in the CIA.

TAL

Yes, at one point. So were a lot of other people. That doesn't make them all capable of murder.

MARIAH

What do you think he was doing down there in Central America? He was assassinating leftist guerrilla leaders, pulling the trigger. Himself. That's public knowledge.

TAL

That's urban legend.

(a beat)

(MORE)

TAL (CONT'D)

Isn't it more likely that the judge -- a Black man in his 70s -- just had a regular-ass heart attack?

MARIAH

Thought you would hear me out.

TAL

I'm hearing you out. I'm also doing you a favor by gently challenging your theory, which is conjecture. Because if you say any of this out loud to anyone else, they're going to be a lot harder on you. I mean, the first thing they're going to ask is "what was Jack's motive?"

MARIAH

I don't know.

TAL

Okay. The next thing they'll ask is "why now?" Jack Ziegler just materializes out of thin air to murder dad, after no one in our family has seen or heard from him in over a decade?

MARIAH

That's not true.

TAL

What's not true?

MARIAH

That no one's seen or heard from him. The judge had dinner with him. Two weeks ago. Dad told me himself.

CUT TO:

INT. UPSCALE RESTAURANT - NIGHT

A BRIEF FLASHBACK -- the judge sits down at a sparsely populated, dimly-lit eatery. He joins an already seated MAN, whose face is not revealed. This is, presumably, ZIEGLER.

BACK TO SCENE

Tal, visibly confused, considers this.

TAL

Why would the judge meet with Jack?

MARIAH

I don't have the answers, Tal. I'm trying to piece it together.

(a beat)

But that's not all. Dad's not the only one who talked to Uncle Jack.

TAL

Who else?

MARIAH

Me.

CUT TO:

EXT. AIRPORT RUNWAY - DAY

ANOTHER BRIEF FLASHBACK -- Mariah stands on the tarmac as her family boards their PRIVATE JET behind her. She has the phone to her ear, struggling to hear over the din of nearby runways.

Their conversation continues in VOICE OVER....

MARIAH (V.O.)

Just called me, out of the blue. A couple days ago.

TAL (V.O.)

What did he want?

MARIAH (V.O.)

To talk about you.

BACK TO SCENE

Tal seems shocked.

TAL

What about me?

MARIAH

He said you're the only one daddy would trust. The only one who would know about the arrangements.

TAL

The funeral arrangements?

MARIAH

No, the *other* arrangements. Tal, what was he talking about?

TAL

No clue.

(off her look)

I'm serious. I have no idea.

She regards him skeptically for a moment. Then...

MARIAH

Howard already thinks I'm suffering from grief-induced delusions and Addy only cares about himself so that leaves us.

TAL

Leaves us for what?

MARIAH

To figure it out. Investigate. Jack shows back up in our family's life right around the time the judge dies. That's weird.

TAL

Weird, sure. Creepy, even. But it's just a coincidence. Dad had a heart attack. Nothing to investigate.

A beat -- she studies him, her disappointment evident.

MARIAH

Fine. Whatever.

She looks down to her computer, resuming her research.

TAL

I gotta go think of an inscription for dad's grave.

MARIAH

Not complicated, just put something that says how you felt about him.

TAL

Not sure how I felt about him.

MARIAH

He's your dad. Figure it out.

Tal exits and leaves Mariah alone, glued to her screen.

INT. DIRKSEN OFFICE BUILDING - HEARING ROOM - DAY (2007)

On the dais, a female SOUTHERN SENATOR makes her remarks...

SOUTHERN SENATOR

...But why does it matter? I don't give a hoot who you associated with. Meeting with folks, talking with folks, that's not a crime nor is it evidence of anything unethical. You know who Jesus hung around with? Prostitutes, beggars, street people. And he was pretty darn ethical. I think that you will make an excellent Supreme Court justice, Judge Garland, and you still have my vote. I yield.

The judge, sitting at the witness table alone, offers a polite smile. Behind him: an absolutely packed house.

CHAIRMAN

Thank you. The Chair now recognizes Senator Edelman of New Jersey for five minutes.

EDELMAN

Thank you, Chairman Birdsell. Judge Garland, I didn't expect to see you before this committee again. It seems that the majority took a pretty big departure from precedent and tradition to recall you.

THE JUDGE

I am glad to be back, senator.

EDELMAN

You should be. As I understand it, your counsel initiated the idea of testifying again. Why?

THE JUDGE

Because I thought that I might be able to clarify some aspects of Mr. Haramoto's testimony.

EDELMAN

Go ahead.

THE JUDGE

Is that a question, senator?

EDELMAN

I'm simply providing you the time to clarify, as you've requested.

A beat -- the judge seems flustered -- a stark contrast from his last appearance. He nervously adjusts his MIC.

EDELMAN (CONT'D)

Okay, a question then. No one's asked you this one today, surprisingly. Have you had contact with Jack Ziegler at the federal courthouse where you are currently appointed?

A long beat.

THE JUDGE

Well-- What I would like this committee to know, first all, is that I value friendship.

EDELMAN

Friendship?

THE JUDGE

Yes, senator, friendship. It's one of the essential adhesives that holds society together. And I'm guessing most Americans watching know what it's like to have a long-standing friendship. Jack Ziegler, it's no secret, is one of my oldest friends. We met as college freshmen, long before either of us had anything to do with government. He was a friend first and that relationship predates my service to this country by quite some time.

EDELMAN

Are you implying your friendship with Jack Ziegler is more important than your national service, simply because it came first?

THE JUDGE

No, of course not, I'm only saying that he's a friend.

EDELMAN

Not really an answer so I'll ask again. Has your friend Jack Ziegler visited you at the courthouse where you work? Are the visitor logs provided to this committee correct?

An even longer beat -- decision time.

THE JUDGE

Yes. I've seen Jack Ziegler at the courthouse.

Loud MURMURS from the gallery. The chair bangs the GAVEL. Quiet is restored.

EDELMAN

We obtained two year's worth of visitor logs. You know how often your wife came to see you at the court? Twice. Your adult children? None. Your friend and longtime counsel, Mallory Corcoran? Once. Judge, you know how many times Jack Ziegler darkened your doorstep?

(RE: his silence)

That's a question, judge. You know how many times Mr. Ziegler came to visit you over the same period?

THE JUDGE

No, I do not.

EDELMAN

Thirteen times. All after normal business hours, sometimes as late as ten p.m. That doesn't sound like friendship to me. That sounds like business. And, perhaps, you and Mr. Ziegler are conducting the type of business that can only be done late at night, outside of public view.

THE JUDGE

I have no business with-- Senator, I just want to go on record saying: I resent the implication.

Edelman can't help but smile; momentum is shifting his way.

EDELMAN

You ever ask your friend Jack Ziegler about documented and alleged ties to criminal syndicates in Bosnia, Montenegro, and Albania?

THE JUDGE

No. I don't make it a habit to--

EDELMAN

You ever ask your friend Jack Ziegler why, when he and his company were sued by the Justice Department, he settled instead of proclaiming his innocence in court?

THE JUDGE

As you know, a settlement is not an admission of--

EDELMAN

You ever ask your friend Jack Ziegler why he pled the fifth forty-three times when he testified in front of this body three years ago?

THE JUDGE

It's within his rights to-- If we could just go back to the previous question about--

EDELMAN

You ever ask your friend Jack Ziegler why one of his partners wound up in federal prison and the other two died in a helicopter crash due to what the New York Times called "a highly improbable series of mechanical malfunctions?"

THE JUDGE

Wait-- Are you trying to accuse--

EDELMAN

It seems everywhere Jack Ziegler goes, corruption, crime, and unexplained deaths follow. Except, apparently, when he visits his good friend Judge Oliver Garland at the federal courthouse, thirteen times, in the dead of night. Then, and only then, he's a boy scout.

The judge is rendered silent.

EDELMAN (CONT'D)

Or so says you. I yield my time.

INT. SHEPARD STREET HOUSE - DAY (PRESENT)

The house is abuzz with FAMILY, all in their somber Sunday best. There's lots of quiet crying and hushed conversations.

Tal carries a TRAY OF FOOD. Some people stop him -- hugs and handshakes. He makes his way through the room, placing the tray among an impressive spread of HORS D'OEUVRES and DRINKS.

SALLY, a curvy woman in her early 40s, yanks Tal's arm, ushering him aside. She swills a GLASS OF RED.

SALLY

Who's that with Addy?

Across the room, Addison stands hand-in-hand with Lana.

TAL

That's international supermodel and fashion icon Lana Stanhope.

SALLY

Who now?

TAL

Sally, she has 63 million followers on Instagram. She's the face of Diet Pepsi. You know who she is.

SALLY

Thought she looked familiar. What's Addison see in her? Is it serious?

TAL

I don't think now's the time to do the whole kissing cousins thing.

SALLY

By marriage, it don't count.

TAL

It was gross then and, honestly, it's still gross now. Maybe it's best left in the past, Sally?

Sally sucks her teeth, takes another gulp, and stalks off. Mariah approaches from the other direction...

MARIAH

Just Alma's looking for you.

TAL

Just Alma? She's still alive?

MARIAH

Unless I'm seeing ghosts. She's kookier than ever. Someone needs to put her ass in a home.

(MORE)

MARIAH (CONT'D)
(noticing)
Speak of the devil. Gotta run.

Mariah exits quickly and Tal turns to see...

ALMA, a thin, spry woman in her 70s, coming his way.

TAL
Auntie Alma. How you doing?

ALMA
What's this "auntie" business, boy.
It's Alma, just Alma.

TAL
Sorry, *just Alma*. Of course.

ALMA
Your dad had big plans for you.

TAL
Like what?

ALMA
Not for me to say. He'll let you
know.

TAL
But he's dead, Alma.

ALMA
Boy, you don't think I know that?
Just because he's dead doesn't mean
he won't let you know.

Tal regards her for a beat -- she's as kooky as advertised.

TAL
I gotta go check on something. But
it was good seeing you.

Tal starts to walk away. She grabs him, stopping him.

ALMA
You just wait and see.

TAL
See what?

ALMA
How afraid of your father they were.
You'll see. If they come. Scaredy
cats might not even show up.

TAL

I'm not following, Alma.

ALMA

Jack Ziegler, for example. He likes to act scary. But he was terrified of the judge. Scared shitless!

Tal looks into her eyes -- she's lucid, aware, sharp, and maybe not so crazy after all.

Just then, Mariah makes an announcement...

MARIAH

Everyone, it's time for us all to make our way to the church. Limos are here for immediate family. Everyone else, we'll see you there.

People start to file out. Tal looks back to Just Alma, who is already walking away.

INT. TRINITY AND ST. MICHAEL EPISCOPAL CHURCH - DAY (PRESENT)

Addison eulogizes his father. Behind him is the altar and his dad's closed CASKET -- mahogany, covered in a large FLORAL ARRANGEMENT. The church is cavernous. With its towering stone arches and magnificent stained glass, it would be easy to mistake it for a cathedral.

ADDISON

Now, it's no secret that me and the judge never saw eye-to-eye politically. My first national TV appearance was a full-throated endorsement of Obamacare. He called me up, congratulated me, told me that he was proud but that, ultimately, my ideas were pusillanimous. I had to consult a dictionary to realize that was an insult.

A smattering of laughter from the congregants. Tal and Mariah sit up front, next to each other, flanked by their families.

ADDISON (CONT'D)

And he proceeded to spend the next 146 minutes giving me a law school level lecture about government overreach in healthcare. He cited cases. A lot of cases, y'all. From memory. But that was the judge in a nutshell: proud dad, fierce advocate for his beliefs, constant teacher...

As Addison continues, Tal turns around and scans the church. There are a few NEWS CAMERAS off to the side, shooting the ceremony. In the pews, there are few in attendance -- less than a third of the church's capacity.

Tal spots Uncle Mal, of course. Tal shifts his gaze to the very back of the church, landing on WALLACE WARRENTON WAINWRIGHT, 70s. He's tall, thin, and dignified.

TAL

You see Justice Wainwright's here?

MARIAH

Yeah, in the back like he doesn't want to be seen. Coward. But that's not the headline. Greg Haramoto. Seven o'clock.

Tal turns around again and, sure enough, there's Greg. He locks eyes with Tal, nods subtly.

Just then, applause from the crowd. Addison has finished. The priest, FATHER FREEMAN BROWN, 60s, steps forward and joins Addison in front of the congregation.

FATHER BROWN

Thank you, Addison. I'd like to invite Oliver's other children, Tal and Mariah, to join us for a laying on of hands and a blessing.

Tal and Mariah stand, walk up, backs to the mourners...

MARIAH

We should cry. For the cameras.

TAL

I can't cry on command, Mariah.

MARIAH

Don't you want to prove your wife wrong? At least do one of those single tear things.

Tal ignores her, takes his place alongside Brown and Addison. He puts his hands on their shoulders and bows his head.

INT. LIMOUSINE - DAY (PRESENT)

Tal, Kimmer, and Bentley ride in the back of their own private limo. Tal notices that Kimmer is looking out of the window, trying to conceal the fact that she's crying.

Tal watches her for a beat, unsure what to do or say. Then...

TAL
Are you okay?

She wipes away a tear.

KIMMER
Everyone thinks I'm a heartless bitch, but I can't hold it in like you and your siblings, Tal. Sorry if that makes you uncomfortable.

TAL
Kimmer. No. No, it's fine.

KIMMER
I just really loved your dad. I love your whole family. Even Mariah. But, you know, most of all-- Never mind, I'm just being emotional.

TAL
You can tell me.

KIMMER
Most of all... I love you. And Bentley. Maybe it's just the funeral making me gloomy but I can't even imagine losing you guys.

He takes her hand. They hold eye contact. This is a vulnerable, genuine moment. She lays her head on his shoulder. It's some sort of subtle reconciliation.

EXT. GRAVEYARD - DAY (PRESENT)

Tal, Mariah, and Addison walk through the cemetery. Behind them, Father Brown and the other mourners watch on.

MARIAH
Why are we doing this alone?

ADDISON
Because Father Brown wants us to have some time, as a family, to reflect on dad's passing before the service is over.

MARIAH
What a load of shit. I'd rather just be done with it.

They stop by an open grave. They look at the other markers. There's one for Claire Garland -- "1952-2011".

There's another for Abigail Garland -- "1986-2003" Finally, their eyes land on the judge's tombstone...

Oliver Garland -- "1949-2021" Under his name is a quote -- "Some things are forever, some things are not. It's the things we remember that gave the world shock."

Mariah and Addison study the quote, perplexed.

MARIAH (CONT'D)

Tal, what the fuck is that quote?

Then, after a moment...

ADDISON

Is that Nas? Did you put a rap lyric on our father's headstone?

TAL

Yes, I did. The judge actually loved that song. And you guys said to put whatever I wanted.

MARIAH

Oh my God, you're such an idiot. We're going to have to redo it.

Addison laughs. Mariah, too. Eventually, Tal as well.

But Mariah's laughter gives way to crying. Addison throws his arm around her, he starts crying too. Tal hugs his sister from the other side, tears rolling down his face. And they stand there -- siblings united -- as they weep together at their father's gravesite.

INT. CORCORAN & KLEIN - CONFERENCE ROOM - DAY (2007)

The room is packed with PRESS. The judge stands behind a bank of MICROPHONES, representing every major news outlet.

Tal, his siblings, and Claire stand nearby, the dutiful family putting on brave faces.

THE JUDGE

Thank you all for coming.

A long beat. He clears his throat.

THE JUDGE (CONT'D)

As you've all heard by now, I have withdrawn as a nominee to serve as an Associate Justice on the Supreme Court of the United States.

(MORE)

THE JUDGE (CONT'D)

I spoke to the president and expressed my concern that the confirmation process has become a burden that is no longer in the best interest of the country. It was the great honor of my life to be considered.

The judge takes a look at his notes, he hesitates, then...

THE JUDGE (CONT'D)

Also, effective immediately, I am resigning as Judge of the United States Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit....

This was clearly a surprise! There's a clamor from the press. They shout indistinct questions as cameras CLICK.

OFF Tal, stoically observing the raucous scene--

INT. SHEPARD STREET HOUSE - TAL'S ROOM - DAY (2007)

Tal packs up his suitcase. MUSIC -- Nas, of course -- plays on the stereo. The judge stops in the doorway.

THE JUDGE

Heading back?

TAL

Yeah. Work.

THE JUDGE

You okay?

TAL

Thought this would be a celebration. Didn't expect us to lose.

THE JUDGE

I'm free. Freedom's a win. Now, I can finally fight for real.

TAL

I think the fight's over, dad.

THE JUDGE

Nonsense. The fight doesn't end when your opponent captures the first pawn. It ends when it ends.

A beat -- Tal doesn't know what to make of his father's cryptic language.

THE JUDGE (CONT'D)

Well. Safe travels. Next time you come, you bring Tonya with you. I'd like to see her again.

TAL

I don't think you're going to be seeing Tonya again anytime soon. I was pretty naive to think it would work out.

THE JUDGE

You're not naive, Talcott. You're good and you desperately want to find the good in others. You think it makes you see less but it makes you see much, much more.

TAL

Another riddle? I don't even know what you're talking about.

THE JUDGE

You're young yet. You'll know. You'll know exactly what I'm talking about, trust me.

The judge listens to the song. It's CAN'T FORGET ABOUT YOU.

THE JUDGE (CONT'D)

Make me a tape of that?

TAL

I can *burn* you a CD.

The judge nods gratitude and, as he exits...

THE JUDGE

Onward.

EXT. GRAVEYARD - DAY (PRESENT)

CLOSE ON: THE JUDGE'S GRAVESTONE and the Nas lyrics.

Tal and Addison look down at the grave marker. The service is over, everyone else heads back to the limousines.

ADDISON

Should've just put "Honor, Duty, Justice" on there.

TAL

Now you tell me.

They share a smile.

ADDISON

I always thought that was supposed to describe us kids. Mariah's obviously "honor" -- always looking for praise and accolades and, quite frankly, daddy's approval. You're "duty" -- reliable, honest, determined. Ol' Dependable Tal.

TAL

So that makes you justice then?

ADDISON

Hell nah. I'm the first born -- a rebel, a trailblazer. I defy easy classifications.

(a beat)

Abby was "justice." Remember how she used to go on about what was fair? Some socialist version of equality and the judge would get so mad. Remember those lectures he'd give her? All that republican, Old Testament, law-and-order bullshit.

Tal nods -- he remembers. They stand there in silence for a beat, regarding their family's graves, considering Addison's theory. Eventually, Addison gestures for them to leave.

TAL

I'll be down in a minute.

Addison exits, leaving Tal alone. Tal notices...

Some distance away, two FIGURES come down the hill towards Tal and the grave. As they come into view, Tal realizes...

TAL (CONT'D)

(sotto)

Uncle Jack?

It's JACK "UNCLE JACK" ZIEGLER. Jack is sickly, frail, in his 70s. He clutches the arm of a tall, muscular VALET -- could be a nurse, could be a bodyguard.

JACK

Hello, Talcott. I'm sorry about your loss. Your father was a formidable man and a good friend.

TAL

What are you doing here?

JACK

I came to pay my respects and talk to you, of course.

TAL

You could've called.

JACK

There could be *others* listening. Best to speak in person.

(a beat)

I've been keeping tabs on your wife and her potential nomination.

TAL

Why?

JACK

Curiosity, I suppose. I know the betting favorite is Marc Hadley. But he has skeletons in his closet. They'll tumble out soon. He won't be competition for long.

TAL

I'm trying not to get too involved. It's really the president's call. We wouldn't want any interference.

JACK

Of course not. This country's best when it's a meritocracy. Yet, it's so often anything but that. If it was, your father would've died a Supreme Court justice.

The rest of the family, recognizing Uncle Jack, watches anxiously from a distance.

JACK (CONT'D)

I must ask you something, Talcott. Something others will ask as well. You must be careful. Some of them are good, some are bad. But none will be who they say they are, and not all of them mean you well. Do you understand?

TAL

Not really. What did you want to ask me?

JACK

I must know about the arrangements.

TAL

Mariah mentioned that. But I don't know about any arrangements.

JACK

Yes, you do. The arrangements your father made, in the event of his untimely demise.

TAL

If I knew, I'd tell you. But I don't.

JACK

I traveled all the way here. Please don't make it a waste, Talcott.

TAL

I don't know how many times I can--

JACK

This is not a time to play!

TAL

I'm not playing, I really don't--

Jack snaps.

JACK

Tell me about the goddamn arrangements! Right now. Tell me!

Tal looks down, realizing that Jack grips his arm.

Addison yells from the distance.

ADDISON

Yo, Tal! You good?

TAL

(yelling)

Yeah, I'm good.

(to Jack)

I'm good, right?

Jack studies Tal for a beat, finally releases his arm.

JACK

Fine, Talcott. You do what you think is best. But when you're ready to discuss the arrangements, come to me first. No one else. I would not want to see you harmed.

Jack nods towards Tal's wife, child, and siblings.

JACK (CONT'D)
 You or your family.

A beat -- that statement has a chilling effect.

TAL
 Are you... Is that a threat?

JACK
 Of course not. I promised your
 father no harm would come to you or
 your siblings, your families.
 (a beat)
 I'm only warning you about the
 others.

Jack leans in, whispers.

JACK (CONT'D)
 You must stay awake.

And just like that, Uncle Jack and his valet exit the way
 they came. Tal, terrified, watches them go.

EXT. GRAVEYARD - ACCESS ROAD - SAME (PRESENT)

Meanwhile, down on the road, near the cars, Mariah watches as
 Jack finally makes it out of sight. Howard stands behind her,
 a few steps closer to the limo.

HOWARD
 They're waiting for us.
 (RE: lack of response)
 Babe, you done?

Mariah finally turns to him.

MARIAH
 No, actually. I think I'm just
 getting started.

Howard seems confused. Mariah smiles, heading to the cars.

INT. SHEPARD STREET HOUSE - THE JUDGE'S STUDY - DAY (PRESENT)

Tal, having returned from the funeral, passes by the study,
 loosening his tie as he goes.

He comes back, stops in the doorway. Something has caught his
 attention. He enters the study and heads straight for the
 chess board by the window.

He traces a finger across the first rank, slowly passing all
 of the BLACK PAWNS. He stops at an empty square.

There's a missing pawn. On the other side of the board there's another empty space where a white pawn should be. Two pawns -- gone.

He looks to the bookshelf. There, where the scrapbook about Abby's death and other hit-and-runs once was, is a conspicuously empty space.

OFF Tal -- WTF?

I/E. CAR - DAY (PRESENT)

MCDERMOTT and FOREMAN sit in a parked SEDAN. Seems as if they've been there for a while, waiting.

McDermott, the older of the two, looks at his watch before nodding to Foreman, indicating that it's time to go. And they are just about to exit when McDermott stops Foreman short--

MCDERMOTT
Forgetting something?

FOREMAN
I don't think we'll need it.

MCDERMOTT
Just in case.

Reluctantly, Foreman reaches into the glovebox, retrieving...

A 9MM HANDGUN.

Foreman exits the car, tucking the gun into the back of his pants, covering it with his suit jacket. As they traverse the street, it's REVEALED that they're parked across from--

THE SHEPARD STREET HOUSE

McDermott and Foreman approach. They ring the doorbell. And just as Tal and Mariah answer the door together, we--

CUT TO BLACK.