House Rules

Pilot
"Freshman Class"

by
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A packed plane. JULIA BRYCE, 32, stands in the second row of coach, searching for her ticket because there is a WOMAN in her seat. The woman’s schmuck husband is in no mood...

SCHMUCK
Ain’t your seat, honey. Trust me.

JULIA
It’s the computer I don’t trust...
Can we just...

She tries to grab a passing FLIGHT ATTENDANT, who gives her the one sec. Then Schmuck’s wife squints as she looks at Julia.

WIFE
Do we know each other?

JULIA
I don’t think so.

WIFE
Are you sure? I feel like we’ve met. St. John’s Episcopal?

Julia shakes her head no. The Wife studies her, searching. Then, a burst of inspiration.

WIFE (CONT’D)
Wait... you’re in my People Magazine! You’re that teacher!

JULIA
Julia Bryce. Very nice to meet...

WIFE
Yes! Julia Bryce! Honey, she’s a congresswoman! Her high school students helped her win!

He’s unimpressed. Meanwhile, the line of PEOPLE behind Julia lose their patience, aggressively squeezing past Julia. The FLIGHT ATTENDANT walks up as Julia FINDS HER TICKET.

JULIA
Yep, same seat.

FLIGHT ATTENDANT
May I see your ticket, Sir?
The attendant frowns and takes the tickets to the front. Shmuck and Julia stare each other down. The wife opens her People Magazine article: “MS. BRYCE GOES TO WASHINGTON!”

WIFE
Hey, shouldn’t they be flying you in First Class?

JULIA
Whoever they are should fly us all in First Class.

SHMUCK
I don’t understand this country. We vote for people who don’t know anything and expect things to get better.

JULIA
Of the People, by the People, right?

The Flight Attendant returns.

FLIGHT ATTENDANT
I’m so sorry, it appears you do have the same seat...

JULIA
I have to be in DC this morning.

FLIGHT ATTENDANT
There’s a man in First who bought two seats for himself. Wanna try?

A THWACK as Julia gets smacked in the head by an annoyed passenger stowing his luggage in the overhead bin.

INT. FIRST CLASS CABIN - SAME

The man on his cell phone. Expensive suit, shiny hair, deliberately loud, your basic asshole. His name is ALAN LEVI. The flight attendant steps up to him. Julia stands a few feet away.

FLIGHT ATTENDANT
Sir? Could I ask you a big favor? We’re overbooked and we have a...

ALAN
Absolutely not!

She’s taken aback. He points to the PHONE – he wasn’t talking to her.
FLIGHT ATTENDANT
We’d issue you a complete refund, of course...

ALAN
We can talk about it at dinner tonight.

FLIGHT ATTENDANT
That’s flattering, but...

ALAN
(points to phone)
Mary, I pay you to get that information before it’s on the street!

FLIGHT ATTENDANT
Sir...

ALAN
I said I can’t help you. I’m not giving up the seat. Can I go back to my call now? Or do you want to take my drink order?

Julia finally SNAPS reaches in and GRABS HIS PHONE.

JULIA (PHONE)
Mary, he’ll call you back.

ALAN
What do you think you’re doing?

JULIA
You don’t want to help me, fine. But apologize to this woman.

FLIGHT ATTENDANT
It’s okay. He doesn’t have to...

JULIA
Yes he does.

ALAN
Why is it that every time I buy myself two seats I have to justify it to someone like you?

JULIA
You don’t. I know why you buy the extra seat. So you have somewhere to fit your massive sense of entitlement. And FYI?

(MORE)
JULIA (CONT'D)
Yes, we hear your phone call. And we're not impressed by the rantings of a soul-less Wall Street slickster with a tooth whitening fetish who yells at his employees for the benefit of his own ego! What will impress us is if you apologize for the way you just treated this nice lady who was only doing me a favor.

Alan sees EVERYONE STARING at him. Julia crosses her arms, waiting for his answer.

ALAN
(to flight attendant)
I apologize.
(takes his stuff off the other seat)
I get the aisle.

INT. PLANE - LATER

Alan sits with his headphones on, laptop on the tray in front of him. Sitting next to him, pleased as punch, is Julia. Out the window she takes in the stellar view of the Mall, the WASHINGTON MONUMENT, the CAPITOL BUILDING...

She turns to Alan, who doesn’t look up, couldn’t care less about the view. She turns back to the window.

EXT. CAPITOL BUILDING - DAY

Julia stands at the foot of the mammoth, white columned icon that houses the legislative branch of the U.S. government. She can’t believe where she is. Nearby, a TOUR GUIDE addresses a TOUR GROUP.

TOUR GUIDE
For the design of the building, a contest was held in 1792. Submissions poured in from the top architects in the world. The winner was the famous architect William Thornton.

The tour guide notices Julia gently shaking her head no.

TOUR GUIDE (CONT’D)
No?
JULIA
He wasn’t actually famous at all.
In fact, Thornton wasn’t even a trained architect. He was an amateur. When the contest ended without a winner, Thornton sent his design in, with the hope it might be considered. George Washington picked it, saying that only in America could a building housing such power have been designed by an ordinary citizen.

TOUR GUIDE
Are you even on this tour?

She smiles sheepishly and slinks away, up the grand steps.

INT. ROTUNDA, CAPITOL BUILDING – DAY

Julia stares at the stunning DOME. She walks up to a SECURITY GUARD.

JULIA
I’m looking for Statuary Hall?

A WOMAN passes by her and overhears. She’s ROBIN CALHOUN, 34, pretty, if a bit buttoned up.

ROBIN
It’s this way.
(starts walking)

JULIA
Oh, uh, Julia Bryce, also a Democrat. New Jersey.

Julia can’t stop staring at the walls, the ceiling, the art work, the throngs of people. It’s overwhelming.

INT. STATUARY HALL – SAME

A magnificent two-story semicircular room surrounded by Corinthian columns and sculptures of famous Americans.

Julia stands with fifty-five other FRESHMEN CONGRESSMEN gathered on the black and white tiled floor beneath the massive chandelier. They’re all wearing NAME TAGS with their state and party affiliation on their chests. Addressing them is a young WOMAN – SCOTTY FISHER, 32 – young, brash, smart as hell, and no bullshit. Ever.
Hello everyone. I'm Scotty Fisher, political aide to the Speaker. I first want to congratulate you. You worked hard and you've achieved something remarkable. With that said, for the next eight weeks you're not yet officially congressmen. You're students of congress. And my job is to help the fifty-five—sorry, fifty-six of you learn enough to be effective on that very first day.

Robin leans over and whispers to Julia.

ROBIN
It's fifty-six because of the recount in Georgia. Rules say that both of them have to come for orientation.

JULIA
That's the Cameron Drummer race, right? I see him up there in front. I was so heartbroken when his mother died.

CAMERON DRUMMER, 36, fidgety and nervous, stands up front.

ROBIN
She was such a hero of mine.

JULIA
So one of them is going to have to go home? Oh God.

SCOTTY
(continuing)
Start with the basics. Fire, Shelter, Food and Water. Fire: that's your staff. Plow through those resumes and start hiring. Shelter: After an election there are a lot of empty apartments. Grab one before they're gone. Food and Water: Feed those big brains that got you here. Take the seminars we've set up and read all the upcoming bills.

Look, a Senator gets six years, you only get two.

(MORE)
That means you have to work three times as fast to get anything done and ten times as hard in order to stick around a while. Otherwise, you’re just the Christmas help.

Julia looks around, they’re as terrified as she is. Someone shifts out of her way and she GETS A CLEAR LOOK AT ALAN, the guy from the plane. He SEES her. Laughs, incredulous.

INT. HALLWAY, CAPITOL BUILDING - DAY

Scotty leads the group down the hallway.

SCOTTY
Stay together, place is a maze!

Alan walks up next to Julia, puts out a hand.

ALAN
Alan Levi, soul-less Wall Street slickster.

JULIA
Julia Bryce. Did I really call you that?

ALAN
Let me buy you a drink and you can make it up to me.

(off her look)
Relax, I’m not asking you out. It wouldn’t work anyway.

(points to his nametag)
I’m a Republican. I’d need you to stay home baking pies and rearing my children while I hunt baby seals and bomb abortion clinics.

JULIA
I hate baby seals.

ALAN
Who doesn’t?

He smiles as another woman sidles up - KATHY MCADAMS, 45 - checking out Julia’s nametag.

KATHY
Julia Bryce! Hi, Kathy McAdams. Republican, Cal-thirtieth. I’ve been dying to meet you.
JULIA
How nice...

KATHY
We have a lot in common. You’re the (air quotes) teacher from New Jersey, I’m the (air quotes) soccer mom from California.

(whispers)
No one takes us seriously.

JULIA
They don’t?

SCOTTY
Here we are!

Scotty at the doors next to NATE TIERNAN, 35, confident and handsome in a grey suit and tie.

SCOTTY (CONT’D)
For those of you who don’t know, this is Nate Tiernan, Chief of Staff to the Speaker. My boss.

NATE
Take a deep breath, folks. This is what you’ve been dreaming about since that first day you woke up and said, “Why not me?”

Nate nods to Scotty and they each OPEN a door, REVEALING...

8

INT. FLOOR OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES – CONTINUOUS 8

A relief portrait of Thomas Jefferson stares down at them from above this room we’ve seen in so many State of the Union addresses, 435 empty chairs in balconies and the main floor.

The wide-eyed freshmen walk down the aisle, staring up at the balconies, the ceilings, Jefferson and the rest of the faces of the lawmakers of old hovering over them.

NATE (O.S.)
Ladies and Gentlemen, Congresswoman Alice Hardy, Speaker of the House.

At the ROSTRUM at the other end of the room – SPEAKER ALICE HARDY, 55, striking in a Pucci scarf and a French blue pantsuit. She speaks with a melodic LOUISIANA DRAWL.
SPEAKER HARDY
Welcome to the hall where history lives and breathes, where the great laws of the land have been written, debated, and passed. The men and women who have occupied this room have fought and united over everything from suffrage to social security, slavery to Civil War.

Julia and Nate make eye contact. He smiles hello.

SPEAKER HARDY (CONT'D)
Abraham Lincoln addressed the nation from this rostrum, and so has every President since. A couple of them have even been impeached in the very same room. And that’s because, more than any other place in the country, this is the House of the People.

ROBIN
(whispers to Julia)
Nate Tiernan is staring at you.

JULIA
Long story.

Alan hears that and takes note. The Speaker concludes.

SPEAKER HARDY
I’ll give you the same advice my friend, Senator Rebecca Drummer, gave me many years ago. Never forget that your job title is your job description.

(pause)
Representative.

Julia swells with excitement, pride, and a little fear.

END TEASER
ACT I

INT. FLOOR OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES - LATER

Everyone gone, Nate and Julia sit in the front row.

JULIA
The flowers were lovely.

NATE
I tried to get the Speaker to come for a photo-op during the campaign but...

JULIA
Nobody thought I’d win? It’s okay, they were right. I shouldn’t have.

NATE
That’s not true.

JULIA
Oh, come on, I wasn’t polling anywhere near Cox. If the bribery thing hadn’t come out, I would have been a footnote.

Beat.

NATE
Why didn’t you ever go back to law school?

JULIA
I’d taken a job as a substitute teacher. Turned out to be a much-needed break from dad’s chemo and everything else. And I realized I loved teaching. Only good thing to come out of that horrible period. And the memory of my one year at Penn faded very quickly.

NATE
Along with me?

JULIA
Unfortunately, you lingered a bit longer.

NATE
I should have come to the funeral.

She shrugs. An awkward beat. He changes the subject.
NATE (CONT’D)
You used to hate politics.

JULIA
I still do! The story in the press is absolutely true. The kids refused to believe that any one of them could run for office, so I took them down to watch me enter my name. Next thing I know, I’m here!

NATE
I want you to use me. I mean it. I can be a big help.

JULIA
Well, now that you offered, how do I get on the Education Committee?

NATE
Gimme a harder one than that. Who wouldn’t put you on Education?

JULIA
I just assumed the school voucher issue might be a problem. I think I’m the only pro-voucher democrat in the House.

The DOUBLE DOORS OPEN and MEN and WOMEN start streaming in.

NATE
House is in session.

JULIA
Right now?

NATE
We’re trying to get an Appropriations bill passed this week. Finally. Been dragging for months while everyone tries to jam their pet projects into it.

At the front of the pack of congressmen entering is REP. JOHN GRANGER, 60, hefty in both physicality and personality.

NATE (CONT’D)
You know who that is?

JULIA
John Granger. He hates me. He campaigned for Cox.
NATE
He hates me more, believe me.

JULIA
Why?

NATE
He had my boss’ job when they had the majority and he wants it back.

Granger approaches them.

NATE (CONT’D)
Congressman, allow me to introduce you to...

JOHN GRANGER
I’m familiar with Ms. Bryce.
(a wry smile)
She stepped over the body of my good friend Leonard Cox in order to be with us.

JULIA
I’m sorry about that...

JOHN GRANGER
Don’t be sorry to your critics, Congresswoman. Prove them wrong and make them sorry.

He grins and keeps walking. As Nate and Julia leave...

NATE
That wasn’t so bad. Just be careful with him. He’s a killer.

INT. CAFETERIA, CAPITOL BUILDING – DAY

Julia tears off phone numbers APARTMENTS ADS at the bulletin board. Scotty passes, followed by a throng of congressmen.

CONGRESSMAN #1
What about offices?

CONGRESSMAN #2
Where can I get copies of the bills coming up for vote?

They shout out questions simultaneously, she keeps walking, ignoring all of them, but they’re relentless. Finally she spins on them, her hands in the air to STOP THEM.
SCOTTY
Congressmen!!! Please!
(they all stop)
Office space is assigned by lottery. You will be notified of empty offices when your name comes up on the list. In the meantime, the cafeteria is yours.
(beat)
Also, stop asking me to pass on messages to the Speaker. You are each scheduled for five minutes of face time with her this week. And now you have a brand new reason to impress her because the President has asked us to choose ten members of the freshmen class to attend a dinner at the White House on Saturday. I suggest you dazzle.

Everyone BUZZES - they ALL want to go to that dinner! As they rush her again, she RAISES HER HANDS, STOPPING THEM.

SCOTTY (CONT’D)
I’m getting an apple now. Alone.
And then I’m leaving.

Julia exhales. So much to do. She hears a voice behind her.

MR. VORNO (O.S.)
Ms. Bryce?

Julia turns to find a Caucasian COUPLE in their 60s – THE VORNOS – and a 4 year old BOY, CADEN.

MR. VORNO (CONT’D)
We called your office in New Jersey. They said we might find you here. I believe you knew our son, Jared Vorno?

JULIA
Yes, of course. We were teachers together. This must be Caden.
(to Caden)
Your dad used to show us pictures of you. You were much smaller then.

MR. VORNO
We thought since you knew Jared, you might help us.
Jared’s wife Maria has been arrested.

JULIA
Why?  What happened?

MRS. VORNO
Jared and Maria got married five years ago.  They filed her residency application but never heard back from immigration.  They called and called but were told that it was “in process.”  After Jared died last year, they told Maria she couldn’t stay in the country because she was no longer married to an American.

JULIA
But that’s crazy.  If she filed the paperwork...

MRS. VORNO
They never got to it, so it wasn’t stamped in time.

MR. VORNO
We’ve been trying for months to get the decision reversed.  But time was running out.  So we came down to the Washington office.

MRS. VORNO
Nobody would see us!  What did they expect?  She’s the mother of my grandson!

JULIA
What did you do?

MR. VORNO
We sat in their lobby and wouldn’t leave until someone saw us.

JULIA
So they called the police?

MRS. VORNO
They’re sending her back to Panama in two weeks.

MRS. VORNO (CONT’D)
Can you do anything?
INT. US CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION SERVICES - DAY

Julia sits in an office talking to an OFFICIAL at USCIS.

OFFICIAL
We have no choice but to enforce the statute, which states that the spouse must be married to an American at the time of processing.

JULIA
But she was married to an American.

OFFICIAL
When she filled out the application, not when the application was processed.

JULIA
But that’s a technicality. Isn’t there room for discretion?

OFFICIAL
As a future lawmaker, I don’t think you want your government agencies using discretion. You write it, we follow it.

Julia is frustrated... but her mind is turning.

INT. NATE TIERNAN’S OFFICE – DAY

Nate. He sits behind his desk, talking with Cameron Drummer.

NATE
You’re not in a runoff, Cameron, you’re in a recount. The votes are in. Until the final count, what do you gain by doing any press?

CAMERON
I have to start thinking about what I’m going to do if I lose. Getting my face out there can help...

NATE
This has been your problem from the beginning. You always plan for failure instead of success, and people read that on you. You were a city councilman at twenty-five, you worked for a very popular governor, not to mention, you’re Rebecca Drummer’s son.

(MORE)
And still you don’t know how to act like a winner. That’s why you have to stay away from a TV camera ‘til this is over.

Cameron is uncomfortable. He knows Nate is right but he’s trying to maintain some sense of dignity.

CAMERON
I thought Alice would be in this meeting...

NATE
Alice? You mean The Speaker.

CAMERON
Sorry, I always forget. I mean, she did change my diapers.

NATE
I don’t care if she gave you a reach-around at your college graduation, she’s Madame Speaker.

(beat)
If I let her sit with you, she has to sit with the other guy. When the results are announced, the winner gets a sit and not before.

CAMERON
What about the White House dinner?

Nate’s look – What do you think? Cameron’s frustrated. He gets up, walks to the window, pensive and thoughtful.

CAMERON (CONT’D)
My mother told me to stay out of politics. She got the biggest law firm in Atlanta to fast track partnership just to keep me out of her world. Said I didn’t have the stomach for Washington. What she really meant, of course, was that I didn’t have the brains.

Nate looks at his watch.

CAMERON (CONT’D)
I graduated Yale with honors. You’d think that would have impressed her.
NATE
Do you see the name Dr. Freud on my door? No. Because your mommy issues aren’t my area of expertise. The only thing I care about is your effectiveness if you win. A Congressman Drummer has great value. But you’re no good to anyone if you’re a joke.

CAMERON
I don’t need your permission to do press.

Nate watches quietly as Cameron walks out.

EXT. WASHINGTON MONUMENT - DAY

Robin walks along the reflecting pool approaching a 55 year old man in an army uniform sitting on a park bench - GENERAL GEORGE CALHOUN. He stands - forcing a smile - straight, tall, and rigid.

ROBIN
Hi dad.

Clearly, a complicated relationship.

TIMECUT: They walk along the REFLECTING POOL.

GENERAL CALHOUN
The Speaker has a bill she wants to put up for a vote in the new session. A Stop-Loss bill, limit tours of duty by reservists. She’s going to ask you to co-sponsor it.

ROBIN
That’s ridiculous. I’m a freshman. I have no clout whatsoever.

GENERAL CALHOUN
But if she does reach out, will you consider what I’m asking you?

ROBIN
Exactly what are you asking me?

GENERAL CALHOUN
It’s a bad law. It will restrain the military, which is already stretched to its breaking point.
ROBIN
You want me to say no to her?

GENERAL CALHOUN
We’re talking about your country’s ability to win a war.

ROBIN
We’re talking about sending reservists into a war zone indefinitely. Can’t you guess how I would feel about this?

GENERAL CALHOUN
I don’t have to guess, I just have to read your website.

ROBIN
You know you haven’t even congratulated me?

GENERAL CALHOUN
I was proud when you enlisted, Robin. I was proud when you went to Iraq. But campaigning to end the war with your brother still over there? What do you expect?

ROBIN
I’m not having this fight again. It’s all moot anyway. The Speaker is never going to ask me to sign onto a bill that important to her. She doesn’t even know my name.

GENERAL CALHOUN
It’s not about your name, it’s about my name!
(tries calmer)
I’m asking you to do the right thing for your family.

INT. FOUR SEASONS LOBBY – DAY

Julia enters quickly but stops when she sees Alan with John Granger between her and the elevator. She can’t deal right now. She looks at her watch – SHIT, she’s late.

Granger spots her, leans over and whispers something to Alan. Alan looks across to Julia, nods, says something else. Granger guffaws and leaves. Julia wants to jump out a window. As she walks to the elevator, Alan meets her.
ALAN
I didn’t know you were staying here.

JULIA
Not for long, hopefully.

ALAN
I found a great loft in Adams Morgan. Hoping to close escrow...

JULIA
(keeps walking)
Sounds great.

ALAN
You have time for lunch?

JULIA
No, actually. I have to go get cleaned up and get to my meeting with the Speaker.

ALAN
Look, I know we got off to a bad start, but I’m really not the asshole you think I am.

JULIA
Really? What were you and your buddy Granger just talking about?

ALAN
What do you mean?

JULIA
You saw me and had a good laugh?

ALAN
Are you crazy?

JULIA
Okay... I’m mortified.

ALAN
How do you think Chuck Norris feels?

JULIA
Okay... I’m mortified.

ALAN
How do you think Chuck Norris feels?

(beat)  
(MORE)
Hey, I think that kid over there is waving at you.

Across the lobby, coming toward her, knapsack over his shoulder, is an 18 year old Asian kid named PETER CHIBA.

JULIA
Peter? What the hell...

ALAN
Who’s he?

JULIA
He was my campaign manager.

PETER
Ms. Bryce! So glad I found you!

JULIA
You’re supposed to be in Boston!

PETER
I know...I...I dropped out!

JULIA
You what?!

PETER
It’s a long story, but...
(looks at Alan)
Holy crap, you’re Alan Levi!

JULIA
You know him?

PETER
You kidding? This is Alan Levi! He’s a Master of the Universe!

ALAN
I like this kid already.

JULIA
(looks at her watch)
Oh God, I don’t have time...
(hands Peter her KEY)
Hang out in my room til I get back. We need to talk about this.
(an IDEA)
On second thought, come with me.

PETER
Really?!
See ya around, Pete.

Peter looks back, giddy, as she drags him out.

INT. TAXI - DAY

PETER
Mr. Vorno’s wife? That’s awful.

JULIA
I should be able to do something. I’m in congress! Almost. What committee deals with immigration?

PETER
Judiciary. But John Granger is the ranking member. He rose to power on the immigration issue. Remember he wanted to build that wall between the US and Mexico?

JULIA
I’m not talking about a new law. It’s one word. “Spouse must be married to an American at the time of processing.” It should read “at the time of application.” How do I fix that?

PETER
Maybe Steering and Policy?

JULIA
Steering and Policy? What’s that?

PETER
You should know that. You’re a teacher.

JULIA
And you shouldn’t know it, you’re eighteen. Go figure.

PETER
The Steering and Policy Committee is part of the House Democratic Caucus.

JULIA
(to the driver)
You can’t get around this traffic?
PETER
Basically, the Caucus provides a forum for all Party members in the House to make decisions together...

JULIA
I know what a Caucus is. Get back to Steering and Policy.

PETER
It’s exactly what it sounds like. It steers the caucus toward certain decisions and advises the Speaker on policy.

JULIA
Can’t the Speaker fix this on her own?

PETER
It’s pretty small, so maybe she could just attach it to another bill. People do that all the time.

They pull up in front of the Capitol Building.

JULIA
You’re coming with me.

PETER
In the Capitol! Are you serious?!

INT. NATE’S OFFICE – DAY

Scotty walks in to talk to Nate. He looks at his watch.

NATE
Is she here yet?

SCOTTY
Your girlfriend? No, she’s late. Have you seen this?

She shows him the headline: “MS. BRYCE GOES TO WASHINGTON.”

SCOTTY (CONT’D)
Know what she could help us with?

NATE
Way ahead of you.
Peter is mesmerized by the nameplate outside of the Speaker’s office. He and Julia walk in, right into Scotty.

    JULIA
    Hi. Sorry I’m late.

    PETER
    You’re Scotty Fisher!

    SCOTTY
    No staff in these meetings.

    JULIA
    He’s not staff.

    PETER
    This is awesome!

    SCOTTY
    He’s creeping me out. Follow me.
    (to Peter)
    Not you. Sit over there.

Scotty leads Julia into the office, where Speaker Hardy and Nate stand to greet her. Nate nods to Scotty, who leaves.

    NATE
    Madame Speaker, Congresswoman Julia Bryce.

    JULIA
    Madame Speaker, this is such an honor for me.

    SPEAKER HARDY
    Oh, stop that. Please, sit. I understand you were the one that got away?

Julia doesn’t understand at first. Then...

    JULIA
    Oh, you mean from Nate? Yes, I’m the one that got away. Thanks to a restraining order. Which I believe is still in effect.
    (to Nate)
    You might be sitting too close, actually.
The Speaker looks at Nate and smiles. She likes this girl.

SPEAKER HARDY  
Well, getting elected in your district with no prior experience is an incredible accomplishment.

JULIA  
Let’s be honest, I got very lucky.

SPEAKER HARDY  
Opportunity is missed by most people because it is dressed in overalls and looks like work.

JULIA  
Thomas Edison.

SPEAKER HARDY  
One of your New Jersey breathren. You were in the right place at the right time because of your hard work and no small amount of talent. So, what do you want to do with this opportunity?

Julia takes a deep breath. She’s nervous.

INT. LOBBY, SPEAKER’S OFFICE – SAME

Peter sits in the lobby, breathlessly watching the busy world around him. Scotty sits at a desk and starts typing an email. She looks up at him. He’s staring at her.

PETER  
You wrote the “Return of Grace” speech.

She squints - what’s going on here?

PETER (CONT’D)  
Best speech of her career, if you ask me.

Scotty tilts her head... maybe this kid isn’t so bad.

INT. SPEAKER HARDY’S OFFICE – SAME

JULIA  
Jared volunteered as a teacher in Panama during summer breaks. That’s where they fell in love. She moved here, they married, had a child...
SPEAKER HARDY
But they’re not deporting the child.

JULIA
They might as well be. She’s not going to leave her son behind.

NATE
Normally, we could make a phone call, but if the Speaker intervenes in an immigration matter these days it’s front page news.

JULIA
What about just fixing the law itself? Changing one word so that the letter of the law and the spirit of the law are the same.

NATE
You can’t change the law for one person.

JULIA
There are many Marias out there. And you have changed the law for one person before. In the Terri Schiavo case. Both houses convened special sessions and changed the law in one afternoon.

The Speaker smiles. She likes the argument.

SPEAKER HARDY
I’m sold. Let’s gather some more info on this and see what we can do.

JULIA
Really? That’s great! Thank you!

SPEAKER HARDY
Julia, do you mind if I change subjects? Time’s a bit short. (beat) We’ve noticed that you’ve spoken very passionately about your support of school vouchers.
JULIA
My parents worked several jobs to keep me out of a dangerous public school. Government assistance would have been a lifesaver.

SPEAKER HARDY
I understand, but our Party’s position has always been clear. Draining money from our public school system to provide vouchers for those who wish to go private will only create more of those dangerous schools your parents wanted to protect you from.

(beat)
The reason I bring this up is that we’re initiating new legislation on this and, because it’s such a hot-button with people, and you’re a respected educator...

JULIA
That’s overstating it a bit.

SPEAKER HARDY
Your opinion matters to people. I was hoping there might be a way you could help us.

JULIA
But I’m pro-voucher...

SPEAKER HARDY
I’m not asking you to change your opinion. I’m just asking you to think about how you might be helpful to your Party. Just think about it. In the meantime, we’ll see what we can do to help you with this immigration law.

Julia is shocked at the obvious horse-trade. Is this really how it’s done? The Speaker deflects with a warm smile and handshake.

INT. LOBBY, SPEAKER’S OFFICE – DAY

SPEAKER’S DOOR OPENS. Nate walks Julia out through the lobby, as they pass Peter, Julia’s hand tells him to wait.
INT. HALLWAY, SPEAKER’S OFFICE – CONTINUOUS

JULIA
Did that just happen? If I don’t change my position on vouchers, she won’t help me with Maria?

NATE
We were going to bring up the voucher issue with you, regardless.

JULIA
But now it’s a quid-pro-quo.

NATE
Nobody is making any demands. You asked her to step up for you, she’s asking you to step back for her. Is that really so outrageous?

Julia thinks about it.

NATE (CONT’D)
You have a moment in the sun right now. Use it to do her a favor and she’ll be happy to return it.

JULIA
Publicly change my position?

NATE
Katie Couric wants you for their “Women on The Hill” series. They can put you on tomorrow.

JULIA
Tomorrow?!

NATE
Scotty can help you prep. And if all goes well, we can talk about your friend Maria on Saturday night at the White House dinner.

Hold on Julia, stunned -- This shit really happens?!

END ACT I
ACT II

INT. ROTUNDA, CAPITOL BUILDING - DAY

Julia and Peter walk through the corridors of the Capitol.

JULIA
I didn’t spend all that time helping you with your college applications to have you drop out of Harvard after one semester!

PETER
I’m good at this and, frankly, you need me, Ms. Bryce!

JULIA
Stop calling me that. I’m not your teacher anymore.

PETER
Gotta meet a guy who’s letting me crash at his dorm. Hasta mañana?

JULIA
Hasta I’m-calling-your-parents.

He grins and heads out. Kathy McAdams runs into her.

KATHY
Julia? Kathy McAdams, remember?

JULIA
The (air quotes) Soccer Mom.

KATHY
That’s what they called me in the California Assembly, too. Suckers! By the way, my son, Ron, is in DC as well. At Georgetown. In fact, I’m hoping we can room together.

JULIA
Huh? Oh, no, I... Peter’s not... Wait, did you say room together?

KATHY
Even with the break we get on school housing - the Dean is a fraternity brother of my husband’s - it’s still expensive as heck. I’m going to float it by Ron tonight.
JULIA
Ah. Good luck with that.

EXT. CAPITOL BUILDING - DAY
24
A TV crew films a nervous Cameron.

INT. CAFETERIA, CAPITOL BUILDING - DAY
25
Julia and Kathy find a bunch of the freshmen, including Robin, gathered around the TV, watching Hardball. Julia sees Robin and sits down with her. Kathy on her other side.

KATHY
How’s the interview going?

ROBIN
Just started.

KATHY
He must be his father’s son. Sure doesn’t have the magic his mom had.

ROBIN
A little unfair, don’t you think?

CAMERON (ON TV)
Right now, the most important thing is that the recount be handled with complete transparency.

CHRIS MATTHEWS (ON TV)
Is it true that your mother - the late Senator from Georgia - wanted you to stay out of politics?

CAMERON (ON TV)
No. Totally untrue.

CHRIS MATTHEWS (ON TV)
I understand she didn’t think you had the stomach for it?

Cameron is flummoxed, not just because it’s awkward but because he knows full well where the questions came from.

INT. NATE’S OFFICE - SAME
26
Nate sips a diet Coke as he watches the interview. Scotty walks in, sits down to watch.
NATE
I know how you feel about this. But if he wins, I have to be able to control him. If he doesn’t win, it won’t matter.

SCOTTY
It’ll matter to him.

CAMERON (ON TV)
My mother always encouraged me to serve my country.

INT. CAFETERIA, CAPITOL BUILDING

CHRIS MATTHEWS (ON TV)
Didn’t she use her influence to procure you an offer at the largest law firm in Atlanta to discourage you from entering politics?

Julia whispers to Robin...

JULIA
And they want me to go on Katie Couric? I’m gonna make Sarah Palin look like Winston Churchill.

KATHY
Did you say Sarah Palin? Oh my God, I’m dying to meet her.

ROBIN
(ignoring Kathy)
Who wants you to go on Katie Couric?

JULIA
Nate and the Speaker.

ROBIN
Wow, tough to be you, huh?

JULIA
What’s that supposed to mean?

ROBIN
Nothing. Never mind.

She gets up and walks away. Julia follows Robin.

JULIA
Did I do something wrong?
ROBIN
No. Forget it.

JULIA
Hey, I know we just met, but if you have something to say...

ROBIN
You’ve gotten more press than anyone and now you’re bitching because your ex-boyfriend is hooking you up with Katie Couric?

JULIA
No, it’s not like that. This isn’t a good thing. Really.

ROBIN
You’re getting something handed to you that the rest of us have to work for. At least have the decency not to complain about it.

Robin walks away, leaving Julia feeling awful.

INT. KINKEAD’S RESTAURANT – NIGHT

Kathy sits across from her sullen son, RON MCADAMS, 18.

KATHY
I’ll be back in California one week a month, so you’ll have the place to yourself when I’m gone. (off his horrified look) You hate the idea.

RON
Of course I hate the idea! I hate that we’re even in the same city!

KATHY
Keep your voice down. Please. Where did you think I was going to be? I ran for Congress.

RON
Yes, but I didn’t know that when I picked Georgetown, did I?

KATHY
Fine, Ron. You don’t want to live with me, that’s fine. But why do you always have to be so cruel? I thought we were closer than this.
RON
You thought we were close? I moved three thousand miles away from you!

KATHY
You moved away from dad. You two were fighting so much.

RON
No, you two were fighting so much.

KATHY
What? We don’t fight any more than any other couple...

RON
Then share an apartment with him.

INT. USCIS DETENTION CENTER - DAY
Julia sits with MARIA VORNO, 35, bronze skin, pretty, tired.

MARIA
If they send me back to Panama, how do I take that boy from his grandparents?

JULIA
I’m going to do everything I can, Maria, but I’m not even a congresswoman yet.

MARIA
Caden is all the Vornos have left of their son. And they’re all he has left of his father.

Maria breaks down. Julia is more determined than ever.

EXT. BROWNSTONE - NIGHT
Julia notices the ADDRESS in her hand is not for the beautiful BROWNSTONE, but for the BASEMENT APARTMENT.

INT. BASEMENT APARTMENT - NIGHT
Julia enters the tiny place. The REAL ESTATE AGENT appears.

REAL ESTATE AGENT
Congresswoman Bryce! I hope you don’t mind, I double-booked. Always busy after election day!

The “double-booking” emerges from the bedroom. It’s Robin.
Robin and Julia step up onto the sidewalk.

ROBIN
The brownstone is triple the price of the basement.

JULIA
I can barely afford the basement.

ROBIN
Tell me about it. ... Listen, about before...

JULIA
They’re asking me to sell-out something that’s important to me.

ROBIN
What are they offering in exchange?

JULIA
Something more important to me.

ROBIN
Welcome to Washington. At least you don’t have your father telling you to do it.

JULIA
Who’s your father?

ROBIN
He’s a General. Pentagon.

JULIA
I noticed your ring. Iraq?

ROBIN
Fifth Mechanized. Zubair.

JULIA
So the war is a family issue.

ROBIN
In my family it’s the only issue.

JULIA
He has to respect your opinion. You’re not exactly an outsider.
ROBIN
If I were elected President he’d
still treat me like the teenage
daughter who banged the car up.
What’s truly ironic is that if I
don’t find a place to live soon I’m
going to have to move back in with
them until I do! I might have to
drown myself if that happens.

JULIA
(stops walking)
I just had an idea!

EXT. BROWNSTONE - NIGHT
Julia and Robin walk up as the Agent is locking up.

JULIA
Any chance we can see the upstairs?

INT. BROWNSTONE - NIGHT
Julia and Robin walk through the space. It’s big, beautiful,
and full of character and charm.

ROBIN
You’re serious?

JULIA
We just need a third roommate.

INT. GYM, CAPITOL BUILDING - MORNING
Scotty reads the paper as she power-walks the treadmill, a
pile of discarded PAGES on the floor. Julia walks in, bleary-
eyed, in a track suit.

JULIA
We couldn’t have met over coffee?

SCOTTY
Best I could do.

JULIA
(gets on treadmill)
You don’t like me, do you?

SCOTTY
I don’t know you. But I read all
your press last night. You tell
anyone who’ll listen that you never
planned on this.
(MORE)
SCOTTY (CONT’D)
You’re so insecure about your own abilities that you practically fall over yourself apologizing for winning. If you don’t respect what you’ve accomplished, how do you expect anyone else to?

Nobody’s ever called Julia out like that before. What Scotty said is absolutely true... and Julia knows it.

Scotty drops her newspaper on the floor. Scotty turns the speed up on her treadmill. Julia matches it, defiantly.

SCOTTY (CONT’D)
It’s a ninety second interview. After the fluff, like what you wore on your first day, she’ll ask you about vouchers.

JULIA
How can you be sure?

SCOTTY
She’s smart and that’s where the story is.

JULIA
Because I differ with the speaker on something, that’s a story?

SCOTTY
You’re a woman, a democrat, and a public school teacher who wants to pay parents who send their kids to private school. That’s a story.

JULIA
I see. Will I have time to mention the immigration issue?

SCOTTY
I wouldn’t.

JULIA
Why not?

SCOTTY
If you want the Speaker to support something, you don’t make her hitch herself to it after the fact. You do it together or it doesn’t happen. The first mistake people in this town make is in not recognizing the giant in the room.
JULIA
What’s the second mistake?

SCOTTY
Not knowing what to feed the giant
to keep it from eating you.

JULIA
How do I do this thing without
selling out?

Scotty turns off her treadmill.

SCOTTY
Finally, a smart question.

INT. HALLWAY, CAPITOL BUILDING – DAY

Julia is in the same spot Cameron was in earlier. They’re
putting the mic on, turning on lights, setting the camera.
Scotty is behind the MAKEUP GUY applying powder to Julia.

SCOTTY
Complete sentences, don’t babble,
and if you need time to think, what
do you do?

JULIA
Katie, that’s a very good question,
I’m glad you asked it... Do I call
her Katie or Ms. Couric?

SCOTTY
If you call her Ms. Couric you’re a
teacher from New Jersey. Call her
Katie and you just summered
together in East Hampton.

JULIA
Which is better?

SCOTTY
Katie!

JULIA
I’m kidding. Relax.
(to herself)
You are what you pretend to be.

SCOTTY
What’s that?
JULIA
Vonnegut. If I pretend I belong, I belong.

PRODUCER
Thirty seconds!

Across the corridor, Alan leans against the wall to watch.

INT. NATE’S OFFICE – DAY

Nate turns on CBS EVENING NEWS, cracks a Diet Coke.

KATIE COURIC (ON TV)
This past June, Julia Bryce was a high school history teacher. Now she’s a United States Congresswoman from New Jersey. Hello Congresswoman! Can you hear me?

JULIA (ON TV)
Yes, I can, Katie.

KATIE COURIC (ON TV)
You’re in the U.S. Capitol building! Are you experiencing some culture shock or what?

INT. HALLWAY, CAPITOL BUILDING – SAME

Scotty stands behind the cameras – she shakes her head NO.

JULIA
It’s funny you ask that because I was just saying that this place is a lot like high school.

Scotty gives her the OK SIGN – nice!

INT. CAFETERIA, CAPITOL BUILDING – SAME

A bunch of the FRESHMEN are once again watching the monitors. Cameron Drummer sits by himself, away from the group.

KATIE COURIC (ON TV)
Anyone bring an apple for the teacher?

JULIA (ON TV)
I’m the one bringing the apples these days.

Robin sits down next to Cameron.
ROBIN
How's she doing?

CAMERON
Not bad.

KATIE COURIC (ON TV)
So, Congresswoman, what do you think your experience as a teacher will bring to your new job?

JULIA (ON TV)
It's a great question, Katie. Actually, many of the issues confronting our society right now will affect the youngest among us. Take health care, for example...

INT. NATE’S OFFICE - SAME
Nate sips his Coke, pleased so far.

KATIE COURIC (ON TV)
I was surprised to learn that you are a proponent of school vouchers.

INT. HALLWAY, CAPITOL BUILDING - SAME
Julia is ready with her answer. Scotty encourages her.

JULIA
Speaker Hardy has been very supportive of differing voices...

KATIE COURIC (O.S.)
Are you going to oppose the bill?

JULIA
Haven't read it yet, but if there is one thing I’ve learned from Alice Hardy, it’s to remain open to other points of view. And to be unafraid to be convinced.

INT. NATE’S OFFICE - SAME
Nate’s seems pleased enough. He turns off the TV.

INT. HALLWAY, CAPITOL BUILDING - DAY
The TECHNICIANS remove the earpiece and the mic from Julia as she does a postmortem with Scotty.
SCOTTY
I thought that went well.

JULIA
Long as she helps me with the immigration bill, it was worth it.
(smiles)
And I wouldn’t mind going to that White House dinner, either.

SCOTTY
(uncomfortable)
Listen, I gotta run. Nice job.

Scotty nods, enigmatically, and leaves. Alan, who has been listening to the whole conversation, gives her a THUMBS UP.

ALAN
Wish you were on our side. Raise a lot of money with you.
(beat)
Listen, it’s none of my business, Julia, but Alice Hardy isn’t gonna go anywhere near immigration.

JULIA
Why not?

ALAN
Louisiana has no Latinos, so there’d be nothing for her to gain. And because of the country’s attitude on immigration, she’d be handing a public relations tool to her sworn enemy.

JULIA
John Granger.

Hold on Julia. Surprised, worried... and furious.

END ACT II
ACT III

INT. NATE’S OFFICE - NIGHT

Julia stands in front of Nate’s desk. She’s furious.

JULIA
Is it true or not?

NATE
Of course it’s not true. She’s not afraid of John Granger.

JULIA
Is she going to help Maria?

NATE
She said she’d look at it...

JULIA
She said she wanted to help.

Nate sits down. It’s time to level with her.

NATE
No one said this would be a First Hundred Days item.

JULIA
First Hundred Days? This can’t even wait ‘til the First Hundred Hours! She’s being deported!

NATE
And I’m sorry about that. She can always reapply for residency if and when things change.

JULIA
That puts her at the back of a very long line! Meanwhile, their lives are torn apart!

NATE
Do you have any idea how glacially slow Congress moves?

JULIA
The Appropriations bill is being voted on this week. You could easily attach this as a rider.
NATE
I can’t jam a last minute item onto the Appropriations bill as a favor to you.

JULIA
I’m the one who did the favor! She steps up if I step back, remember?

NATE
I’m sorry if you feel misled.

She glares, shaking her head at him and at her own naivete.

JULIA
I can’t believe I’m surprised. You haven’t changed one bit.

Disgusted, she turns and walks out.

INT. JULIA’S HOTEL ROOM - DAY

Julia walks in and finds Peter hard at work at the desk. The place is spotless. He’s setting up a rack of FILE FOLDERS.

JULIA
What are you doing in here?

PETER
You gave me your room key, remember?

JULIA
Vaguely.

PETER
I sorted the box of staffer resumes. Policy wonks over there, Press aides here, Chief-of-Staff are here. Those are the ones I’ve been concentrating on.

JULIA
Peter, you don’t work for me.

Peter gets very excited and starts talking VERY FAST.

PETER
Hope you don’t mind, but I threw out all but the most qualified. You just can’t take a flyer on the top job. In fact, I think you should go fifty percent on it.
JULIA
What do you mean, fifty percent?

PETER
I met this guy Dwayne Greene in the lobby. Works for Congressman Solister from the Minnesota Eighth. Really cool guy. His T-shirt said “Staffers Rule!” How awesome is that?

She can’t help but smile. She loves his enthusiasm.

PETER (CONT’D)
Dwayne said everyone gets the same budget but different people spend it differently. Some spread it out and have a big staff and others focus on a select few who are just majorly-tight, know what I mean? That’s what you should do. Compensate for what you lack the most. For you that’s experience. You need a total insider, with sharp elbows and balls of steel. Excuse my language.

JULIA
No problem.

PETER CHIBA
A real mother-effer. But the mother-effers tend to be the guys that cost the most money, ’cause everybody wants them. That’s what Dwayne says.

Peter finally takes a breath.

JULIA
Nice work, Peter.

PETER CHIBA
Cool! So... am I hired?

JULIA
What did your parents say when you told them you were dropping out?

PETER
They’ll get over it.

JULIA
Maybe they shouldn’t get over it.
PETER
I can always go back to school.

JULIA
Yeah, well, I know a little something about that and in some cases that may be true. But not in this case. Peter, you’re going to get so caught up in this world that you’ll never want to leave it.

PETER
Then maybe I’m not supposed to be in school.

JULIA
You have the sharpest mind of anyone I know. But it’s not enough. Trust me. The mother- effers won’t be bringing a knife to the gunfight. And as long as I have something to say about it, neither will you.

(beat)
Here’s the deal. You transfer to a school in DC and you can work for me, part time and over breaks.

PETER
I tried to transfer but all the schools here are full up.

JULIA
Then you come back next year.

Peter doesn’t like that plan at all.

INT. FOUR SEASONS LOBBY - NIGHT

Julia sits with the Vornos. Caden is playing with a toy on another sofa.

MRS. VORNO
You said she was going to help.

JULIA
I know.

MR. VORNO
I don’t understand...

JULIA
It’s just more complicated than I thought.
MRS. VORNO
It’s not complicated at all! We’re Americans and she’s our daughter-in-law!

JULIA
I’m not giving up yet...

MRS. VORNO
What does that mean?

Julia looks at Caden and exhales deeply.

JULIA
I don’t know.

MRS. VORNO
But you said you could help!

JULIA
I said I would try and I am trying.

Mr. Vorno holds his wife’s hand to calm her.

MR. VORNO
We know you are. And we appreciate it.

MRS. VORNO
I’m sorry.

JULIA
No. I’m the one who’s sorry.

Mrs. Vorno gets up and goes over to take Caden. Julia’s heart breaks as she watches them gather to leave.

INT. SPEAKER HARDY’S OFFICE - DAY

Robin sits with The Speaker and Nate - her “face time.”

ROBIN
As you might imagine, I’m very interested in getting on the Armed Services Committee.

SPEAKER HARDY
Your father reports regularly to that committee...

ROBIN
I attended the academy, served two tours in Iraq, spent a year at the Pentagon...
SPEAKER HARDY
Do you think your father’s current assignment would be advantageous or detrimental if you were appointed to the committee?

ROBIN
Advantageous, I would assume.

SPEAKER HARDY
Given his public statements, the fact that you’re a Democrat tells me that you’re not afraid to part company with him on the big issues, which leads me to something I’d like to discuss with you.

Robin braces herself for what’s coming next.

INT. LOBBY, FOUR SEASONS HOTEL - NIGHT
Julia crosses the lobby, exhausted, and sees Alan at a table with a WOMAN in a business suit. They both stand, finishing up. He spots Julia. He waves for her to come over. Last thing she wants to do is talk to anyone. But there’s really no choice now. She begins the long trek to the table. As she arrives, she sees who the woman is. MARY MATALIN.

ALAN
I wanted to introduce you to Mary Matalin. Mary, meet Julia Bryce.

MARY MATALIN
I believe we spoke on the phone.

JULIA
We did?
(realizing – horrified)
You’re not the Mary I hung up on?

MARY MATALIN
Don’t worry about it. You’re not the first, you won’t be the last.
(to Alan)
Great to see you. I’ll get the numbers to you by tomorrow.
(to Julia)
Pleased to meet you, Congresswoman.

Handshakes and she leaves them. He grins playfully.

ALAN
Sorry, couldn’t resist.
JULIA
Kind of a perfect cap on the day.

ALAN
Day’s not over yet. Maybe it’ll get better.

She looks at him. Actually, she considers him.

JULIA
You hungry?

ALAN
I hear they serve a nice baby seal at Gerard.

INT. CALHOUN HOME – NIGHT

Robin sits at dinner with her parents in the house she grew up in. The General is in khaki pants and a pressed plaid shirt. Her mother, ANNE, in jeans and sweater.

ANNE
(enthusiastic)
So, tell me about this White House dinner? Will you meet the President?

ROBIN
If I’m chosen, I guess. They’re only picking ten of us. Everyone’s pretty amped up about it.

GENERAL CALHOUN
I’ve met him plenty. I don’t see what the fuss is about.

ROBIN
You don’t think he’s doing a good job.

GENERAL CALHOUN
Hasn’t saved the world or anything.

ANNE
What else? I want to hear everything.

ROBIN
We have a seminar next week on how a bill becomes a law.
GENERAL CALHOUN
They teach you that after you’re elected? They might want to make that a prerequisite.

Robin puts her silverware down.

ROBIN
Maybe we should do this already.

ANNE
No! You promised me you wouldn’t talk business until after dinner.

GENERAL CALHOUN
What have we been talking about if not business?

ANNE
We’re talking about Robin’s first week.

GENERAL CALHOUN
Did it happen like I said? She asked you to put your name on it?

ROBIN
Yes.

GENERAL CALHOUN
And what did you tell her?

Robin looks at her mother.

ROBIN
Sorry mom.

His FIST POUNDS THE TABLE, but neither woman flinches.

ROBIN (CONT’D)
You’re wrong.

GENERAL CALHOUN
You’re going to tell me what’s right for this army?

ROBIN
I meant, in trying to bully me.

GENERAL CALHOUN
I was trying to reason with you! But apparently that’s not possible.
ROBIN
I’m the one who’s unreasonable?

He drops his napkin on his plate and walks out of the room.

ANNE
You should talk to him.

ROBIN
I just did.

INT. GERARD BISTRO – NIGHT

The soft glow of candlelight, white tablecloths, hushed atmosphere. Julia and Alan are eating. He catches her lost in thought, staring aimlessly at her food.

ALAN
My father was the most unlucky broker you ever met. The year he lost all our money, he’d come home every night, sit at the table and my mother would say the same thing. “If there’s nothing you can do about it for the next hour, you might as well enjoy the meal.”

Julia smiles, finally. Gratefully.

JULIA
Why would you ever want to work on Wall Street after what it did to your father?

ALAN
Win, sin, or kin. Another gem from mom. She said men do things for one of three reasons – ambition, sex, or family. Win, sin, or kin.

JULIA
Which was it for you?

ALAN
All of the above.

JULIA
Well, you definitely won. I googled you. You’re loaded.

ALAN
Is that why we’re having dinner?
JULIA
No, but it’s why I’m gonna sleep with you later.

He practically spits out his wine.

JULIA (CONT’D)
Seriously, why Congress? You could do anything with that kind of money, start a foundation...

ALAN
Did that.

JULIA
You could run for President!

ALAN
Not qualified. Yet.

JULIA
That didn’t stop Bush.

ALAN
Sure it did.

She likes that answer. She likes him.

They hear some laughter behind them as the door opens and a few men walk in. One of those men is Nate. Shit.

JULIA
What’s with this town? No escape.

ALAN
Say the word and we’re outta here.

JULIA
No way.

Nate excuses himself from his group and crosses toward them. He offers a hand to Alan.

NATE
Alan. Good to see you.

ALAN
Nate.

NATE
(to Julia)
Can I borrow you for a second?
JULIA
I don’t think so.

NATE
Please.

She looks at Alan – be right back. Reluctantly, she stands.

INT. REST ROOM HALLWAY – SAME

Julia and Nate walk away from the main dining room.

NATE
That man is an opportunist, Julia. He’ll use you.

JULIA
Like you did?

NATE
You can continue saying that, but it doesn’t make it true.

JULIA
You can continue to deny it, but it doesn’t make it any less true!

NATE
You haven’t changed either, you know. You’re as stubborn as ever.

JULIA
And you’re as self-centered, self-important, self-righteous, as ever!

NATE
This isn’t about today at all, is it? You’ve never forgiven me.

JULIA
It sounds like you’ve never forgiven yourself. Get over it. I have.

NATE
I didn’t end things with us because your father got sick. Things just happened. I never promised you anything.

JULIA
That’s a theme with you, isn’t it?
NATE
Think hard before you make an enemy out of me, Julia. Trust me, you don’t want to end up in bed with the Alan Levis of the world.

JULIA
I’ll get in bed with Alan Levi or anyone else I damn-well please!

ALAN (O.S.)
Guys? Maybe you should take this outside.

Julia turns sharply and finds Alan standing there. OMFG!

END ACT III
Robin walks through the lobby and sees Julia sitting alone at the bar. She sits down next to her. Neither of them needs to speak. They’ve both had a shitty day.

Robin gets the BARTENDER’S attention, points to Julia’s drink, signalling she wants the same.

JULIA
It’s a vodka tonic.

ROBIN
Whatever.

They watch as the drink is poured. Robin holds up the glass to Julia, they clink, and drink.

ROBIN (CONT’D)
We need to find a roommate.

JULIA
Yup. Any ideas?

ROBIN
No Republicans.

JULIA
Why not?

ROBIN
Cause I don’t want to fight in my own house. Let’s make that a house rule. Democrats only.

JULIA
I haven’t met any other Democrats I’d live with.

CAMERON (O.S.)
I’ll be your roommate.

They turn around. Cameron is sitting in a booth by himself.

CAMERON (CONT’D)
If I win.

Julia and Robin look at each other. Nope.

JULIA
Sorry Cameron. House rule...
Julia and Robin stumble, drunk, into the elevator. They’re laughing as they try to hit the buttons for their floors.

The doors close and open on the SECOND FLOOR, revealing KATHY and a MAN locked in a ROMANTIC EMBRACE. Julia and Robin share a look. Kathy and the man are startled.

Kathy gives a slight wave to Robin and Julia as she and the man get in the elevator. They wave back. It’s weird.

JULIA
Hi. You must be Mr. McAdams. I’m Julia...

MAN
Uh... no, actually, I’m... Dave.

Kathy looks down. Awkward. Dave hits the button on the next floor. The ELEVATOR STUDPS. Dave looks at Kathy but she shakes her head NO. He gets out, the doors close. Kathy continues to stare at the floor as Robin and Julia share a look of shock. Then Julia sees that KATHY IS CRYING.

JULIA
Kathy? You okay?

Kathy is hysterical, mascara running, crying her eyes out. Julia and Robin clean her up, trying to calm her down.

ROBIN
You just won your election. How bad could it be?

KATHY MCADAMS
Are you serious?! It couldn’t be any worse!! I have nowhere to live, my son hates me, I’m not speaking to my husband, and I’m having sex with a....
(sobbing)
With a....
(more sobs)
With a....

JULIA
With a what?!
KATHY MCADAMS
WITH A LOBBYIST!!

She breaks into heaving sobs. Robin and Julia share a look. Robin knows what she’s thinking...

JULIA
We can solve one of those problems.

KATHY MCADAMS
Which one?

ROBIN
(re relenting)
We have a place for you to live.

Julia looks at Robin - nice.

INT. CORRIDOR, CAPITOL BUILDING - DAY

Julia walks down a corridor and suddenly STOPS because her eye caught something. She backs up - the office nameplate reads “LEONARD COX, NEW JERSEY 6TH.”

INT. LEONARD COX OFFICE - SAME

Julia walks in and finds nobody at the reception desk. She can HEAR somebody in the inner office. She walks in, peeks her head inside, and there he is.

LEONARD COX, her former opponent. He’s in his 60s, gray hair, balding, his suit jacket draped over a chair, his white sleeves rolled up. He takes some photos off the wall and drops them in a box. Julia knocks lightly. He turns.

JULIA
I hope I’m not disturbing you.

LEONARD
And yet here you are, in someone’s office, uninvited.

Julia withdraws, but he keeps talking, holding her there.

LEONARD (CONT’D)  
My staff has gone on to other jobs.  
Rats leaving a sinking ship.

JULIA
Congressman...I feel terrible about the way this happened.
LEONARD
Ms. Bryce, the only thing worse than losing is having to endure the pity of those who’ve defeated you.

JULIA
I don’t pity you.

LEONARD
Yes, you do. But if you’re going to stay and have a drink with me, you’ll have to find a way to conceal your agreeable nature.

JULIA
I’d like to stay, but I can’t have that drink. In fact, I don’t think I can have another drink as long as I live.

LEONARD
You’ll get used to those nights.

She pauses, watches him pour himself a scotch.

JULIA
Can I ask your advice on something?

LEONARD
Why not...

JULIA
I need to get something done very quickly. It’ll change the lives of people who mean a great deal to me. I promised them I’d...

LEONARD
You’re gonna promise a lot of things to a lot of people. Most of the time you won’t be lying. But most of the time you are lying.

He’s drowning in self-pity but he snaps back.

LEONARD (CONT’D)
Look, there are nine ways to skin a cat - outside the beltway. Inside, there are only two. Partnership and Compromise.

JULIA
I already compromised. Didn’t work.
LEONARD
Then you look for partnership.

JULIA
How do I do that?

LEONARD
You find someone that shares the same agenda. They may not know they share it, in which case you educate them on why it’s in their interest. Here’s the best part... Your shared agenda doesn’t even have to be about the issue itself.

JULIA
What else would it be?

LEONARD
Politics.

He takes a sip, lets that sink in. And it does.

INT. HALLWAY, CAPITOL BUILDING — DAY

Julia stands in a corridor with Alan.

JULIA
After last night, I don’t have a right to ask you for a favor.

ALAN
So you’re a little unhinged. I kinda like that about you.

JULIA
Thank you for doing this.

ALAN
I made a phone call. Hard part’s yours.

They walk in, past a nameplate that says REP. JOHN GRANGER.

INT. JOHN GRANGER’S OFFICE — DAY

Alan and Julia sit across from John Granger.

JOHN GRANGER
You are aware of my record on immigration policy?

JULIA
This one’s different.
JOHN GRANGER
They all are.

JULIA
This one isn’t about opening our borders, it isn’t about security, and it isn’t about jobs.

JOHN GRANGER
Then what’s it about?

JULIA
Family.

JOHN GRANGER
(likes her spunk)
The lady knows how to bait a hook.

JULIA
The Republican Party is in a rebuilding period right now. What are you rebuilding? Your brand. You are reminding the American people that yours is still the party of family values.
(beat)
This man - this American man - did everything we told him to. He fell in love, he got married, he put down roots, he started a family. Now, tragically, he’s not around to protect his family anymore. But his country can.
(beat)
You guys spend a lot of time talking about the rights of the unborn child. This is a chance to do something for the child already born. And the family that loves him.

Granger looks at Alan. He bobs his head, mulls it.

JULIA (CONT’D)
One more thing. The Speaker had a chance to help these people, but she let politics get in the way.

Granger looks at Alan again. This time with a sneaking grin.

INT. STATUARY HALL - DAY

Back where the week started. Julia paces the floor, waiting. After a few moments, Scotty arrives.
SCOTTY
I only have a minute.

JULIA
I’m giving you a head’s up. I know that a big part of your job is to make sure your boss is aware of things before they happen. Well, something is going to happen.

SCOTTY
Why are you telling me?

JULIA
I need you to be on the Speaker’s good side because I’m definitely going to be on her bad side.

SCOTTY
I don’t understand.

JULIA
I want you to come work for me. I want you to be my chief-of-staff.

SCOTTY
Remember I told you about recognizing the giant in the room? I work for her.

JULIA
No, you work for Nate. But if you work for me, you’ll run the show. Hire the staff, help create the agenda, and make me a player. Not to mention, I think I can probably double your salary.

(beat)
Let me tell you what’s happening...

SCOTTY
Don’t. Information is currency and you won’t get what you paid for. I’m flattered, but I’m going to have to pass.

Julia is disappointed but Scotty is clearly resolute.

INT. CAR – DAY

60

General George Calhoun and Anne sit in the parked car.
ANNE
And you’re really going to sit here sulking on your son’s birthday?

GENERAL CALHOUN
When she leaves, I’ll join you.

ANNE
We both know what this is really about and it’s not that damn bill.

He remains silent. Finally, she opens the car door.

ANNE (CONT’D)
Shame on you, George.

EXT. ARLINGTON CEMETERY – SAME
Anne walks through the field of white stone, to Robin, at the GRAVESTONE of “GEORGE CALHOUN JR., SON and BROTHER.”

JOHN GRANGER (V.O.)
This young lady will be a U.S. Congresswoman in just seven weeks.

EXT. CAPITOL BUILDING – DAY
A PRESS CONFERENCE: Granger, Julia and Alan, along with Mr. and Mrs. Vorno, holding Caden, stand before the camera.

JOHN GRANGER
And I’m proud that her first piece of legislation will bear my name.

INT. NATE’S OFFICE – SAME
Nate and Scotty watch the press conference on his TV.

JOHN GRANGER (ON TV)
This is not a new bill, but a correction to a glaring error in our immigration law, an error that would separate a family struggling to rebuild after an awful tragedy.

NATE
(to Scotty)
What do you think?

SCOTTY
I think she kicked our ass.

SPEAKER HARDY (O.S.)
She sure did.
They turn to find the Speaker standing in the doorway. She stares at the TV screen, clearly impressed by Julia.

SPEAKER HARDY (CONT’D)
Maybe you shouldn’t have let her get away after all.

Nate tries a smile but he’s too embarrassed.

SCOTTY
Madame Speaker, we should get in front of this, see if we can get the woman released before Granger does.

SPEAKER HARDY
Good. And schedule a lunch for Ms. Bryce and I for next week.

The Speaker nods and walks out. Nate turns to Scotty.

NATE
Woulda been good to know about this yesterday.

Scotty smiles to herself as she walks out. She’s impressed.

EXT. CAPITOL BUILDING - SAME

Granger steps from the microphone, inviting Julia to say a few words. She steps up to it nervously.

JULIA (V.O.)
It’s only my first week, but I’d like to tell you what I’ve learned.

EXT. THE MALL - DAY

A FRISBEE skates on the air above us. As we settle down with it, we see the CAPITOL BUILDING in the deep background. A dog snatches the frisbee and darts back to his owner.

JULIA (V.O.)
I learned that the law is very good at drawing lines. This is where you can go, this is where you can’t go.

Running toward the dog is little Caden. He pets the dog and turns back to wave to his grandparents.

JULIA (V.O.) (CONT’D)
But where America is at it’s best, isn’t in our power to draw lines...
Then Caden turns and SEES Julia walking up over the rise. And a moment later, HE SEES HIS MOTHER. He RUNS to her...

    JULIA (V.O.) (CONT’D)
    It’s in our capacity to erase them.

Julia grins as she watches her friend wrap her arms around that little boy and swing him in the air.

EXT. ARLINGTON CEMETERY - DAY

Anne and Robin stand silently, holding hands at the gravestone of Robin’s brother.

Robin turns, startled, as her father steps up beside her. And then she feels his hand take a hold of hers.

INT. BROWNSTONE - DAY

Boxes everywhere. The three women are moving in. The DOORBELL RINGS and Julia comes out to answer it. It’s Peter.

    JULIA
    Great, you got my message. The boxes marked office should be moved to the dining room. You can set up your laptop there for now...

    PETER
    I’m confused. Your message only said meet you here...

Kathy emerges from the kitchen, cup of coffee in her hand.

    JULIA
    Peter, meet Congresswoman McAdams.

    KATHY
    Hi Peter. The Dean at Georgetown asked if you’d be willing to repeat your first semester.

    PETER
    What?

    KATHY
    You didn’t finish your semester at Harvard, so there are no credits to transfer...

    PETER
    I don’t understand...

He looks at Julia as she smiles warmly.
JULIA
Congratulations. You join the freshman class on January Third.
Same as us.
(she hands him a phone)
Your parents are expecting your call.

He throws his arms around her - almost knocking her down.

PETER
Thank you, Ms. Bryce! Thank you so much! I won’t disappoint you!

JULIA
I know.

Robin walks in and it’s clear that something’s up.

ROBIN
The White House dinner list is up.

JULIA
Are you on it?

ROBIN
Yes!

KATHY
Oh my Goodness, Robin! That’s so exciting!!

ROBIN
I’m sorry, Kathy, you’re not on it.

KATHY
That’s okay. Didn’t expect to be.

JULIA
We’ll go to a movie that night.

ROBIN
No you won’t.

EXT. THE WHITE HOUSE - NIGHT

Julia and Robin get out of a taxi, each in a stunning gown. They look up at the White House, glowing and enchanting in the warm evening.
INT. WHITE HOUSE BALLROOM – NIGHT

Julia and Robin enter. Julia’s nervous as she looks around the room. All the TUXEDOS and GOWNS and SERVANTS and MARINES in full dress uniform. It’s a fairy tale.

Alan steps up next to them.

ALAN
How about some champagne to go with those beautiful gowns?

He already has a WAITER next to him with a tray. He hands a glass to each of them.

ALAN (CONT’D)
You and I could have come together, you know.

JULIA
That’s what I need, everyone talking about you and me.

ALAN
After our first dance, that’s all they’ll be talking about.

Robin turns and finds Cameron next to her.

ROBIN
Cameron? You weren’t on the list.

CAMERON
Not ‘til today. I won!

Wow! Alan hands him a last glass of champagne. CLINK!

The Speaker, Nate and Scotty are making their rounds. They approach the group.

SPEAKER HARDY
Ladies, you look gorgeous.

ROBIN
So do you, Madame Speaker.

The Speaker steps up to Julia.

JULIA
Thank you for inviting me. I know I probably wasn’t your favorite person this week.
SPEAKER HARDY
Julia, every now and then we really
do leave politics at the door.
Enjoy yourself tonight. You’ve
earned it.

The Speaker continues on, chatting with Alan. Scotty talks
with Robin. And Nate and Julia are left together.

JULIA
Are you the reason I’m here?

NATE
Nope. She is.

Scotty. He moves on as she walks up and puts out her hand.

SCOTTY
I need you to be a player. Because
I’m taking the job.

Julia smiles as she shakes Scotty’s hand.

JULIA
I don’t want to be a player. I
want to be the giant in the room.

They both grin as A HUSH SUDDENLY FILLS THE ROOM...

ANNOUNCER
Ladies and Gentlemen! The
President of the United States!

CAMERA FOLLOWS THE BACK OF A TUXEDO AS HE ENTERS THE ROOM.
The crowd erupts in APPLAUSE. THE PRESIDENT’S HAND raises up
to wave to the crowd.

Julia catches her breath...

FADE OUT.

END