

Politically Unhoused

Written By

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**INT. BOBBY'S BAR - NIGHT**

A hole-in-the-wall bar. Pool table in back. Two customers nursing beers. One TV.

Behind the bar, BOBBY (40s) wipes a glass - the kind of bartender who's heard worse and won't tell anyone.

Tracy (40s, Black, sharp suit, sharper mouth) nurses a shot. The kind of woman who makes Presidents and regrets it.

Jesse (20s, glasses, a few drinks past sober) is her assistant, her conscience, and the only person allowed to tell her she's wrong.

**ON TV: PRESIDENT WESLEY**

PRESIDENT WESLEY

-and that's why I cannot support the Moderate Price Housing Act I championed in my campaign. I know that's not what-

Bobby turns off the TV. Tracy exhales.

TRACY

What a bitch. Such a disappointment.

BOBBY

Don't beat yourself up too badly, Trace. That's what they pay the talking heads on the news to do.

Bobby picks up the shot glass in front of Tracy and cleans it with a terry cloth.

JESSE

I love this for you. You're much easier to be around when you're wallowing.

TRACY

I can't fire Bobby, but you...

JESSE

You can't fire me either. You don't like people, remember?

Jesse tosses back his drink and puts it on the bar.

TRACY

I like people. At a distance.

Tracy digs a credit card out of her purse and puts it down.

TRACY (CONT'D)

Close me out, Bobby.

JESSE

The DNC stopped short of labeling you persona non grata. You shit on Wesley's administration, just when I was looking for cute plants to put on my fancy West Wing desk. This doesn't look great on my resume when I list accomplishments.

And look at how well Wesley's doing. He'll glide to a second term.

Tracy shakes her head.

TRACY

That's not the guy I plucked from the House. That's not the guy I made the darling of the DNC.

Tracy gets off the barstool and picks her jacket up from the backrest.

JESSE

Maybe you lost it.

TRACY

I'm gonna hit you with my car.

Jesse laughs.

JESSE

You used to see through people's bullshit. Wesley turned moderate. Before that, Governor Hunt married a Republican who moonlights as a dominatrix.

You need to look in the mirror and figure out where you go from here.

Bobby doesn't look up from cleaning.

BOBBY

Kid's not wrong.

TRACY

It's a really big car, Bobby.

Jesse pushes his glasses up his nose.

JESSE

I don't think you can find another winner and make them President.

Bobby laughs.

BOBBY

Doesn't matter anyway. Like you said, Wesley will get his second-

JESSE

Wouldn't it be poetic to challenge him?

-Oooo.

TRACY

I hate when you force suspense. Say it.

JESSE

I bet you can't find a challenger to Wesley's Presidency.

Bobby turns around from his cleaning.

BOBBY

You mean help a Republican win?

Jesse waves his hands.

JESSE

Pffft. No. A democrat.

Why assume his win is fait accompli?

TRACY

That's enough liquid courage for you.

JESSE

You could have been the first black female Chief of Staff.

Tracy rolls her eyes.

TRACY

How cheap is your integrity?

This is obnoxious. I haven't lost a step. I could make Bobby president.

(MORE)

## TRACY (CONT'D)

No offense, Bobby. I can make anyone.

## JESSE

Prove it. Make a homeless guy President. No, wait - I like that. No half-assing it. From declaring their candidacy to the nomination to the general, and swearing them in.

Or don't. Just retire. I can totally see you alone in your house, watching Food Network while you press send on GrubHub.

Tracy starts to brush Jesse to the side.

## JESSE

Then retire. Or prove me wrong.

Tracy taps her finger on the bar. She looks at the TV, then back at Jesse and raises an eyebrow.

## TRACY

This is the dumbest thing I've ever done.

**EXT. ENTRANCE TO BOBBY'S BAR - CONTINUOUS**

Jesse stands outside and pulls his phone from his pocket to make a call.

## JESSE

I'm tipsy. I'm Ubering home. No. Tracy. Come over. We'll watch anime and snack on chocolate syrup from the bottle. We'll get chocolate wasted.

I'll tell you everything. I started some shit tonight. Twenty minutes.

**EXT. TRACY'S HOUSE - LATER**

Single story. Modern. All the lights on.

**INT. TRACY'S BEDROOM - MOMENTS LATER**

Tracy's lying in bed. The light on her nightstand is on and she has a book on her lap.

Tracy picks up a pile of bills beside her.

**CLOSE ON ENVELOPES: STAMPED SECOND NOTICE**

She flips through several, all with increasingly aggressive notices.

She gets up and paces. Her eyes scan the bedroom.

TRACY

Fuck Wesley. Fuck Jesse.

She drops back on the bed and screams into her pillow, then props herself up and tosses her pillow at the wall.

TRACY (CONT'D)

Fuck his dog too. Little rat.

She groans and retrieves the pillow.

TRACY (CONT'D)

Ok. Scorched earth. Tomorrow, we ride.

Tracy reaches over and turns off the light.

**INT. TRACY'S CAR - DAY**

TRACY

Dial Jesse.

The car infotainment dials Jesse. The phone rings through the speakers.

JESSE (O.S.)

It's not even eight. Ugh, it's not even seven. The sun is out. You should be in your coffin.

TRACY

Nope. Woke up early. I'm heading to the shelter on Sherman.

JESSE (O.S.)

What?

TRACY

Wesley'll think I shit in his cornflakes. I'm not wasting time. Deadline to file is around the corner. I need a compelling homeless guy, and then we're gonna need signatures and a-

JESSE (O.S.)

I need an espresso before this.

TRACY

You dared me. Now you suffer with me. Be ready to pick up when I call with news.

JESSE (O.S.)

Wait. Do you even know-

TRACY

Called a couple pantries and got a lead. Bye bitch.

Tracy reaches for the infotainment screen and pushes a button to end the call.

**INT. THE SHELTER - LATER**

The shelter is off-white inside. Inspirational posters - cats hanging from vines, hands clasped together. A check-in desk runs the length of the room.

Behind it, CINDY (30s, dark hair in a bun) does paperwork.

Tracy walks in with her lips pursed.

TRACY

I need a case manager, director, social worker. Someone competent.

Cindy stands up from behind the desk, flashing a lanyard with a badge on it.

CINDY

Hello, princess.

I can't wait to hear your story.

TRACY

Tempting. I need Mason. I was told by some lovely people at a pantry that he stays here sometimes.

CINDY  
Got a name, princess?

TRACY  
Are you some kind of pea?

CINDY  
Look sweetheart, I'm sure you're important in whatever alternate reality you're from, but here, I'm Queen.

Tracy squints.

TRACY  
Fair enough. Tracy. I was told Mason might be here and I need to have a moment with him.

Cindy smiles.

CINDY  
Ignoring every privacy law on the books, I still can't help you.

A door opens to the side of the desk. JAMES (30s) staggers out – shirt stained, hair uneven, the kind of guy who fucks with people for fun.

JAMES  
Who the hell are you?

TRACY  
Who the hell are you?

He shakes his head, ruffles his hair and tucks it behind his ears.

JAMES  
I'm Mason. I'm not deaf, sugar. I can hear you screeching from the back room.

Tracy tilts her head back. She curls her mouth.

TRACY  
I don't know how many teeth you have left, but you're about to lose them too.

CINDY  
James. Get your ass back in your room. Stop playing.

MASON (O.S.)  
It's ok, Cindy. She doesn't look so tough.

MASON (30s) steps out from a back room – quiet, watchful, the kind of person you don't notice until you do.

MASON  
I'm Mason. I can't possibly afford you, so that's not it.

TRACY  
Damn straight. Let's have a moment someplace private.

Give me a few minutes. If you don't like what I have to say, I'll move on.

MASON  
Social norms suggest I should ask you to grab–

TRACY  
I'm gonna stop you right there. That's not on the agenda. Let's find that quiet spot.

Mason does a mock bow and leads Tracy to an office.

MASON  
They give me a little slack since I help out. So I come in here and nap away from the nice folks who give angry monologues.

Mason closes the door.

Tracy sits on the desk.

TRACY  
You're a little short.

Tracy pinches her fingers together.

TRACY  
Not too, though. I'd like to know what the beard is hiding.

What were you doing before I got here?

MASON  
Now I'm getting mixed signals.

Tracy smiles. She moves her hair behind her.

TRACY

What's your impression of President Wesley?

MASON

Are all your conversations this disjointed?

Tracy snaps her fingers repeatedly.

TRACY

I move quick. Keep up. But seriously, your impression?

Mason folds his arms. He tugs and scratches at his beard.

MASON

He's...fine.

TRACY

This'll go quicker if you don't bullshit me.

MASON

Oh, like that. Honestly, I don't keep up on daily events, but I'd call him disappointing.

TRACY

Why?

MASON

Before I ended up on the street, I followed politics a little. He sounded like he had a Congress that was willing to work with his agenda. Seems like after the midterms he got a little impotent. And I don't get why he always does the—

Mason does an exaggerated walk and an awkward wave.

Tracy laughs.

TRACY

They said you don't come across as uneducated.

MASON

Excuse me?

TRACY

No, I agree. You're not. That's good. Where did you go—

MASON

Not everyone on the street is crazy or stupid. You said you'd be quick.

What's this about?

Tracy hops off the desk and takes her jacket off, putting it on the desk.

TRACY

You're interesting. There's a quality about you. I think I want to make you President.

MASON

I don't get the joke.

TRACY

Wasn't a punchline.

Tracy circles Mason.

MASON

Is this where you unhinge your jaw?

TRACY

I made Wesley. I don't want him defining my career. I need— the country deserves...better. I need someone unexpected and inspirational.

MASON

How do I know you're not just— I don't know, some tornado who escaped a mental health ward? You walk in here, tell me you can take me off the street and make me President...

Tracy half-commits to a response before pulling her phone out. She presses, swipes, and holds it up to Mason.

TRACY

Kept that article cuz it made my mom smile. Happy?

Mason looks at the screen

MASON  
Your hair looks better now.

You wanna explain why you're  
bargain shopping for Presidential  
candidates?

Tracy smiles.

TRACY  
I accepted a dare.

Mason waves Tracy off.

TRACY (CONT'D)  
No. Really. I know it's a shit way  
to pick a president, but I don't  
want another Wesley in my career.

Mason steps back and extends his arms on both sides.

MASON  
Look at me.

He dusts off his shirt.

MASON (CONT'D)  
From homeless to Commander-in-  
Chief? In what world? And maybe I  
like not being scrutinized for  
every facial tic.

TRACY  
You're not hopeless. A bath, shave.  
A Haircut. Clothes and coaching.

MASON  
This is too weird. I don't-  
  
Wait. Wesley is going to run again.

TRACY  
This is a democracy, Mason. People  
have options. I don't believe in  
foregone conclusions.

MASON  
Wow, lady. You've given this way  
more consideration than any sane  
person should.

Tracy nods.

TRACY

I'm serious. You'll see. I have a soft side too.

Yeah, this started as a dare. But now I have a real person in front of me and I'm thinking about everything about my career that's pissing me off.

Maybe you're what Washington deserves.

Mason leans back.

MASON

Let's pretend I'm not insulted for a second.

I'm not saying yes, because this is batshit.

TRACY

Hold that thought. I've been through enough of these to know a candidate with no drive isn't someone people cast a vote for anyway.

So what's your "why"?

Mason pauses.

MASON

The reflex is to tell you I want off the street.

Even the shelter does something to your sense of self-worth.

TRACY

I'm not launching a campaign for the President of the United States to get you your self respect back.

Mason folds his arms and leans forward and back.

MASON

That's not wrong.

He looks at the door, then Tracy. He walks to the desk and wipes his hand over it with care.

MASON (CONT'D)

Gun to my head? People deserve to have someone sitting at that desk who knows struggling to find a safe place to sleep at night isn't America living up to its promise.

I don't know what the solution to that is off the top of my head, but I would surround myself with people who will figure it out.

TRACY

Resolute.

MASON

I can be.

TRACY

No. The desk is called the Resolute Desk.

But I can see people voting for a version of that guy.

MASON

That's still not me agreeing.

TRACY

No. It's not, but it starts a real conversation.

MASON

Then I have terms, or non-negotiables: I don't talk about religion, other than protecting One-A, I get to make housing a part of my platform, and I'm not a prop for yours or anyone else's agenda.

Tracy wags her finger at Mason.

TRACY

I don't hate you. You're not obvious. Or oblivious.

Anything I should know before I make a few calls?

Mason shakes his head quickly, not to say no, but a recalibration.

MASON

I smell awful.

Tracy pulls her phone out of her pocket and dials. Then holds the phone to her ear.

TRACY (CONT'D)

Jesse... Yeah. Mason...No, he's not staying in this place tonight. My rearview will be the last time. Make a reservation at the Fairfield. Call only the need-to-knows at the DNC.

Tracy looks up at Mason.

TRACY (CONT'D)

A really big tub... You'll meet him later. Uh huh. Bye, fool.

She tucks the phone back in her pocket.

MASON

I'm not going to pretend this place doesn't exist. I'm not doing them dirty like that. And if you don't see why, then I'm not your guy.

Tracy's smile curls and widens.

TRACY

Balls.

Good. You're right. In the moment, I just couldn't imagine wanting to look back, but you're absolutely right. Good call.

Let's go get you cleaned up.

**INT. TRACY'S CAR - LATER**

The stereo is low. Mason is riding in the backseat.

MASON

Tell me why you aren't a politician. Wouldn't be surprised if people underestimated you.

Tracy looks at Mason through the rearview.

TRACY

Because of the boobs or being Black?

Mason leans back in his seat and chuckles.

MASON

I didn't notice either, but yeah.

TRACY

You didn't see the girls? Even gay guys notice them, Mason.—

How about you? Where did things go south? You're pretty eloquent for—

MASON

For a bum? I know what you see. Honestly? I'm an autodidact.

TRACY

Gross. There's some sanitizer in the door pocket.

MASON

Ha. No. I started learning on my own after high school. Every high paying job wants a piece of paper declaring how well I vomit facts before I forget them.

TRACY

I got that much. That's pretty amazing, and unfortunate. But something you can lean into on the campaign trail.

MASON

Campaign trail.

Mason taps on the window.

MASON (CONT'D)

This is fucking weird. And what is this strategy you're assuming I fit into? I have so many questions.

The speakers chime and Tracy taps the infotainment screen.

SIRI (V.O.)

Text message from a 202 number. Heard you're running a campaign with a homeless guy. Unhoused. Bullshit stunt. The DNC isn't onboard. Fuck all the way off.

MASON

What the fuck is that about?

The car jolts to a stop. They're parked on the second floor in the structure behind the hotel. Tracy clicks her seatbelt off and turns to Mason.

**EXT. FAIRFIELD HOTEL PARKING STRUCTURE ADJACENT TO THE HOTEL SIDE ENTRANCE - CONTINUOUS**

The hotel is old and luxurious. The side entrance is plain – white walls, a green door.

TRACY

Those questions are valid. Sounds like the DNC screwed m-us.

Mason throws his hands up.

TRACY

You think this is the first time mommy and daddy argued? I'll handle it.

Before we do anything substantive, you need to get your head on right. Let's go.

MASON

You're implying I'm a child. Don't.

They both exit the car and Mason looks over the railing.

A gaggle of reporters is camped at the side entrance, clearly visible from the structure.

MASON

What the fuck? Really? Now?

Mason turns to look at Tracy.

MASON (CONT'D)

There's no way. What is going on in your head, Tracy?

TRACY

I don't know anything about it, but... hiding you now makes it look like you're ashamed of your circumstances.

Mason runs his fingers through his hair and grabs a tuft.

MASON

I think you're smart as hell, but this is stupid as fuck.

(MORE)

MASON (CONT'D)

I'm not a joke, Tracy. I'm not your stunt. I look like shit.

He pulls at his shirt.

MASON (CONT'D)

I smell like shit. This whole time I'm wondering why you let me in your car, even with tarp on the seat.

Mason turns back around and walks toward a door with an exit sign above it. Tracy groans and rushes ahead of Mason and throws her hand out to stop him.

She pulls her phone out and swipes and taps and puts the phone to her ear.

TRACY

I see you guys found my entrance at the Fairfield. How the f-

Call your lil Chihuahuas off so we can get-

God damn prick hung up on me!

Tracy puts her phone in her pocket.

MASON

There she is. I appreciate the gesture. Still a bit annoyed, but I'll get over it as long as this is a one off.

TRACY

The pool isn't going anywhere. You're going to have to cut through.

Mason shakes his head.

TRACY

I'm sorry. I don't have another way in besides the front and that's not happening.

Mason flips Tracy off.

TRACY

You could try walking in under the tarp.

Mason rolls his eyes and starts walking to the elevator and Tracy follows.

MASON

If this goes to shit I'm gonna  
scream at the clouds in front of  
these reporters and kiss one.

The elevator doors close.

**EXT. FAIRFIELD HOTEL - SIDE ENTRANCE - MOMENTS LATER**

The pair leave the parking structure and head toward the reporters posted by the metal green door.

PAPARAZZI (O.S.)

-Tracy! Is that the unhoused man?

TRACY

Shit. Just charge through.

Mason lifts his shirt to hide his face and rushes in.

TRACY (CONT'D)

Third floor. Meet me by the  
elevator bank. I'll cover.

Mason runs to the open elevator and hits the button, but not before throwing out his shoes. Flashes from the cameras go off.

TRACY (CONT'D)

Ass.

Tracy turns toward the reporters.

The paparazzi begin to swarm the entrance.

PAPARAZZI

-Tracy! Where's the man headed?

-Why do you think the DNC tipped us  
off?

TRACY

Excuse me? What man?

PAPARAZZI

The magician's assistant thing gets  
old, Tracy.

(MORE)

PAPARAZZI (CONT'D)

We received a tip that you're launching a bid to challenge President Wesley for the nomination with a homeless man.

TRACY

So you think I'm pretty?

Tracy blows a kiss and winks. The crowd soft chuckles.

TRACY (CONT'D)

I don't know where you're hearing-

Scratch that. Yes. You heard correctly. Mason Evers is homeless, and challenging President Wesley for the nomination. That's all I have for the moment. You'll hear more shortly.

PAPARAZZI

-Is this a message to President Wesley? A stunt?

-Where did you find the homeless man?

-What size are the shoes?

Tracy turns around and starts to walk.

Tracy walks briskly to the elevator and pushes the button. The door closes and she looks up.

**INT. ELEVATOR BANK - MOMENTS LATER**

The elevator doors open and Tracy steps out.

Mason walks over to her slowly.

TRACY

That was my own personal hell.

The elevator doors open again.

JESSE

Got the room keys. Made the calls to the usuals, including our DNC contacts. Where's papa POTUS? -Ah. Hello, Mason.

Jesse extends his hand.

JESSE

Jesse.

Mason reaches out.

MASON

Mason. Pleasure.

Jesse recoils slightly.

JESSE

Haggard. The nails. I assume you rake them against asphalt.

And the beard is giving rat nest. Thank God you didn't show up on camera.

Mason turns to Tracy. Tracy turns to Jesse.

TRACY

Give me the card.

Jesse hands Tracy the key card. Tracy turns and heads down the hall.

TRACY (CONT'D)

Number?

JESSE

327.

MASON

Do cows follow willingly, just to get slaughtered?

TRACY

Jesse, if you moo, I'll throw you out the hotel window. Still pissed about the DNC.

Tracy opens the door. The three walk through.

**INT. MASON'S HOTEL ROOM - CONTINUOUS**

TRACY

Jesse. I'm gonna run and get him clothes for dinner and tomorrow. You've got about two hours to get him looking like K street, minimum.

Tracy picks the TV remote up from the dresser. She turns on the TV.

TRACY

Perfect. Bluey. Jesse. Don't get distracted.

Tracy steps out of the room.

MASON

I'm gonna—

Jesse shakes his head to stop Mason. He reaches into his sport coat and pulls out a phone.

JESSE

Here. Until we can set you up with something more serious, I got you this prepay. Catch up on the world around you. Just don't post on TikTok or Twitter.

Now hop in the shower. I'm gonna call a barber while you're in there, maybe catch up on Bluey.

**INT. WHITE HOUSE - PRIVATE RESIDENCE - WEST SITTING HALL - CONTINUOUS**

**ON TV:**

REPORTER

— Tracy Johns, upending the political world with a proposed challenger to President Wesley's assumed reelection bid.

**SFX: TV SHUTS OFF**

President Wesley is in on the couch, legs crossed.

PRESIDENT WESLEY

What the hell is Tracy doing? Is this about housing? Is it leverage?

If I announce now I look like I'm being goaded into a fight by a guy who screams at pigeons.

The media's going to suck the oxygen out of anything I do for the rest of my term because of a panhandler. The healthcare bill is—

The phone rings. President Wesley runs and picks it up.

PRESIDENT WESLEY (CONT'D)

Wesley.

Martinez? The ambush was him? The DNC is on this? Mmmmm. I need more.

Get Burrell. The timetable on my campaign just moved up. The healthcare bill is screwed.

He hangs up, leans over the couch and claps. He picks the phone back up.

PRESIDENT WESLEY (CONT'D)

Helen, clear the rest of my Thursday. Set up lunch with Secretary Ellis. HUD is the play here. We'll see how Tracy responds.

**INT. MASON'S HOTEL ROOM - LATER**

Jesse is on the bed, watching TV while Mason showers.

**SFX: A KNOCK AT THE DOOR**

Jesse hops up and looks into the peephole.

JESSE

Perfect.

He opens the door.

The barber walks in with a black bag.

Mason steps out of the bathroom in a white bathrobe, his hair is wet and matte, his beard is clean, but still disheveled.

JESSE

Sexy Tom Hanks Castaway beats homeless chic. So we're moving in the right direction.

-Sir?

BARBER JOEY

Joey.

JESSE

Joey. I need this man looking like I can put him on TV. Less Naked and Afraid, more Succession.

Joey sets the bag on the desk and unzips it. He pulls out the chair and gestures for Mason to take a seat.

Mason secures his towel and sits down.

MASON

I forgot what this feels like.  
Well, this is actually new, but the  
haircut is really—

JESSE

Yeah, you wanna get me up to speed?  
What are we dealing with here? With  
you.

Mason closes his eyes while Joey starts on his hair.

MASON

I'm not one to talk about myself.  
Much less give myself some mythic  
origin story.

JESSE

You're in a luxury hotel, being  
pampered to look like a credible  
Presidential candidate.

I've heard you. You're smart enough  
to know this has to come out. Make  
me invest in you.

MASON

You're asking me to justify my  
being here when you put me in this  
position.

I know the bet was your idea. You  
thought, what... that it would be  
funny to see a guy pop out of a  
cardboard box at the National  
Convention?

JESSE

You're right, I saw half of an  
equation and—

MASON

I'm not an equation. Jesse. Why is  
that so complicated for you?

Jesse looks Mason up and down.

JESSE

I deserve that. But, I'm trying.

Mason exhales.

MASON

Let's get to the thing you want to hear. I borrowed a lot of money from dad while I floated between jobs.

I wanna be clear about it. I wasn't shitty at my jobs. The timing was. I wasn't considered for anything more than entry level and I kept seeing bills pile up.

Jesse sits on the bed.

JESSE

Why are you feeding me bread crumbs?

MASON

I just got ambushed by a mob of reporters and I'm being sheared like sheep— no offense— and you're asking me to tell you how I fucked my life up... and you want to know why I have a chip on my shoulder—

Jesse stands up and taps Joey to stop. He grabs Mason's shoulder.

JESSE

You've got two options, Mase. You can do this, or you can go back to the shelter. I'm not even threatening you. I'm just giving you the reality.

Mason shifts his weight in the chair.

MASON

"Mase"? Fine. Look, a layoff here. A shuddered business there. Eventually you run out the clock and the empathy of your loved ones.

That's the opportunity I see here. If you work, you deserve the dignity of a roof over your head and food in your belly.

Joey goes back to cutting.

Jesse adjusts his glasses.

JESSE

That's a real life. I don't know if I'm supposed to empathize or strategize in this scenario.

BARBER JOEY

My sister put me through school. I still owe her. Shit, more than money.

Joey walks to Mason's other side and starts shaving his beard.

BARBER JOEY

Any facial hair?

JESSE

None. Not even stubble. Make it smooth as my-

Jesse smiles.

JESSE (CONT'D)

You were plucked out of obscurity on my dare. Your life isn't a tragedy, but the circumstances kinda are. I'm worse at sorries than Tracy, so let me just say your story won't be treated like a stunt. I'll make sure Tracy knows it.

Mason chuckles.

MASON

Oh, I'm obscure now? A second ago I was "Papa POTUS".

JESSE

Sounds gross when you say it.

-Here's what you need to be ready for: You have to get signatures, file. You have to put a committee together and beg for money...ironic... You have to shake babies, kiss hands. And if you can do all that by last Friday, that would be great. Because that's just a taste.

Joey applies cream to Mason's face and neck.

MASON

A homeless guy asking rich people for money to be president. I can already see the SNL sketch. There's still an SNL, right?

JESSE

Don't get ahead of yourself. This isn't the first time we've handled image. We'll get you through the awkwardness.

Joey wraps a towel around Mason's head and starts rubbing it across his face without pulling it down.

BARBER JOEY

Go ahead and rinse off.

Mason heads to the bathroom, then shuts the door.

BARBER JOEY

I don't wanna talk out of turn, but... is he ready for what you're about to put him through? Do you trust bro with the nuclear codes?

JESSE

Not my call. Or my job. But... if you want my honest opinion, I would rather it be that guy than whatever neocon the alternative is.

Joey starts putting away his supplies.

BARBER JOEY

That's not enough. Shitty answer. You better figure out what you're selling. I'm a buyer, but not because you tell me the alternative sucks ass.

Jesse smiles and reaches into his pocket. He pulls out cash.

JESSE

I know you got paid, but you earned this.

I assume you're registered?

Joey laughs.

BARBER JOEY

You have a good one. Thanks for the tip.

JESSE  
Yeah, yours too.

Joey opens the door. Fast steps are heard from the hall.

TRACY (O.S.)  
Hold the door!

Joey props it open with his foot. Tracy rushes through.

TRACY (CONT'D)  
Thanks.

Where's Mason? Shower?

Jesse nods his head at the bathroom door. Tracy hands him a bag of clothes.

JESSE  
Anything for me?

TRACY  
My pretty face. Hand those to  
Mason. I made reservations for  
dinner. Time to move.

Jesse knocks on the bathroom door. And opens it enough to hand off the bag.

JESSE  
Time to level up.

Mason grabs it and shuts the door.

JESSE (CONT'D)  
How you holding up, lady?

Tracy raises an eyebrow.

JESSE (CONT'D)  
Are you sure we're doing the right  
thing here?

TRACY  
You're kidding.

JESSE  
Not at the moment.

Tracy sits on the bed.

TRACY

I thought more about it in the car. If I stayed with Wesley I would have more money. I'd be part of an administration, but it'd be the wrong one.

What has Wesley done? He's a placeholder. My career would have been unfulfilling.

JESSE

So I'm a lowly assistant because you found scruples?

Tracy laughs.

TRACY

That's not what makes you lowly, fool.

Mason steps out. He's clean shaven. His hair is parted to the side and slicked back, like a modern take on the 1940's style. His sport coat is black, unfussy and tapered, just like the pants. He's in dark black loafers and a white collared button down shirt pops.

TRACY

Ok.

You do clean up nice.

She circles him.

MASON

Are you gonna eat me?

TRACY

Jesse. Don't even.

Jesse throws up his hands.

MASON

I'm famished.

TRACY

Let's.

Tracy leads them both out.

**INT. FAIRFIELD HOTEL RESTAURANT - MOMENTS LATER**

The three arrive at the host's podium. Tracy steps up to it.

TRACY  
Reservation for three. Tracy Johns.

HOST  
Yes!

Follow me.

Mason follows behind the others, playing with his pockets and feeling his lapel. He smiles at people eating dinner as he passes.

HOST (CONT'D)  
Here we are.

Mason sits down with everyone else. He pulls a napkin before anyone else and tucks it in his shirt.

Tracy's eyes widen.

She grabs the napkin in a hurry and lays it on his lap.

MASON  
Right.

The server comes to the table and smiles at Mason, then the others.

SERVER  
Hello, I'm Tammy. Can I get you anything to start? Water?

Mason squirms.

TRACY  
Three waters, yes. No bread. No appetizers. I'll have the Cajun pasta. Half plate. A glass of merlot. He'll have a full and a Jack and Coke.

Mason drags his finger across the menu.

MASON  
Embarrassing. Uhm. Meatloaf. That looks good. It's been years. Water is fine for me.

SERVER  
Excellent choices.

She grabs the menus and walks off.

TRACY

Hell of a day, boys.

MASON

I've had worse. Not to tempt fate, but...What happens when I lose? Am I just... a castaway again?

TRACY

I honestly haven't gotten that far in my head. Losing isn't an option for anyone at this table. But, I know that's a real anxiety. I have connections. We'll cross that bridge if we have to. Right now, plan to win.

Jesse leans in.

JESSE

Everyone is going to know your face. This one. Not the mop covered thing from this afternoon.

Jesse leans back. He pops his jacket on his shoulders and tilts his head up.

JESSE (CONT'D)

Own this.

Give me someone to vote for.

Mason straightens his posture and flashes a toothy grin.

TRACY

Not that. Close your mouth. Happy. Not ecstatic.

Mason's eyes widen.

MASON

Jesus.

TRACY

You're gonna hear it til you breathe it. And I'm telling you now. We're doing the briefing tomorrow. So now's the time to get it together.

MASON

Tomorrow?

TRACY

Yeah. If we wait, you're a stunt. I lose every fight I thought I won and-

JESSE

And not another god damn word. We fight our demons whether they're sleep paralysis or a past grievance.

Jesse grabs Tracy's hand, looks at Mason, then Tracy, and squeezes and smiles and releases.

Mason nods.

The server comes back with platters in hand.

Another comes, carrying a platter with drinks. They place Tracy's and Jesse's in front of them. The drinks follow.

SERVER

So sorry, yours will be right up.

MASON

No problem.

- You guys start.

Another server comes quickly with the final plate and puts it in front of Mason and the three servers walk off.

TRACY

They know how to treat me and mine when I come here. Eat up.

Mason grabs a handful of meatloaf and puts it to his mouth.

Jesse goes slack jawed.

Tracy reaches out and smacks Mason's hand.

TRACY

You must be out of your fucking-No. Let me compose myself.

You eat that with a fork.

Mason squints.

He lowers his open hand over his lapel and stops.

He smirks and lowers his hand to his lap and picks up the napkin and rubs his hands off on it.

He looks at Jesse.

JESSE

Here. Please. Take mine.

Jesse grabs the napkin out of Mason's hands and puts it on the table, then hands Mason his.

Mason grabs the fork off the table and starts eating.

Jesse and Tracy give self-amused laughs and Mason joins in.

**INT. WHITE HOUSE - PRIVATE DINING ROOM - LATER**

President Wesley is eating dinner. The TV is on and the news is playing. He's having dinner with his Chief of Staff.

**ON TV:**

REPORTER

Earlier today, rumors became reality as an unhoused man nearly announced his run for president, backed by political kingmaker and DNC's onetime darling strategist, Tracy Johns.

The apparent goal being a direct challenge sitting President Wesley, whom Johns groomed for office herself, before he secures what many assume will be an easy reelection.

Unsurprisingly, more rumors persist that several unnamed DNC officials are quietly distancing themselves from Johns.

The surprise—

President Wesley slams his glass of water on the table.

PRESIDENT WESLEY

Why is she pulling this shit, Hank?  
What's the message?

Hank finishes chewing.

C.O.S. HANK BURRELL

I don't know what that message would be, Mr. President.

(MORE)

C.O.S. HANK BURRELL (CONT'D)

I do know she was pretty pissed with the housing bill. Before that, Jackson for Sec Def. That really lit a fire under her skirt.

President Wesley raises an eyebrow and shakes his head.

PRESIDENT WESLEY

You know better than to talk like that, especially around me.

Now. Who is this guy? Is he really homeless? Personally, I can't see her lying or taking this kind of swing, so I'm six kinds of fucked up over this.

I want answers.

C.O.S. HANK BURRELL

Helen, get Martinez on the line at the DNC.

President Wesley thrusts his hand to the table, squeezes the dinner napkin and scoots his chair back.

PRESIDENT WESLEY

I could take a shit on the rug and I'd be more productive than Martinez.

I know Tracy. This is a bomb waiting to go off and I'm not interested in taking shrapnel. Find out who this guy is. Now. And the shoes. Those bubonic loafers, those - tetanus tennis shoes. I want them on every screen by morning. If he wants to launch a campaign in his socks, we'll help him.

**INT. MASON'S HOTEL ROOM - LATER**

Mason is on the bed, sitting. Jesse is in the chair at the desk. Tracy is standing.

TRACY

Tomorrow is your real declaration. I won't ask if you're ready. Truth-be-told, there's probably a little bit of charm in you not being D.C. coded.

Jesse tilts his chair.

JESSE

Let's not send him out there to fail.

He gets out of the chair pinches Mason's cheek. Then sits next to him and rests his head on Mason's shoulder.

JESSE (CONT'D)

I'm starting to think he's people.

TRACY

Not to fail. I just want him.. balanced.

MASON

Ok. Balance me.

Jesse stands up and grabs Mason by the shoulders.

JESSE

Stand up.

Plant your feet. Don't shuffle.  
Good. Hands out of your pockets.  
You're smiling too wide again.

TRACY

Good. When you talk tomorrow, don't hedge, but don't over-promise. Pick one or two people in the crowd and make eye contact when you talk.

Mason blinks hard.

TRACY

Mason. This machine is real. Telling you now isn't the same as living it. You'll meet great people and assholes. Some of them are voters. Some are operators. There are highs and lows. And the story of who you are? That's going to be hard as hell to keep straight while the media sensationalizes you.

Mason exhales.

JESSE

Good news is, we're pissed off at the state of politics and crazy enough to challenge the status quo.

MASON

Before you guys leave me with my thoughts, Tracy, you never really told me what happens to you if this goes belly up.

Tracy rotates her ankle.

TRACY

If this turns to shit? My years of building a career might as well never have happened. I'll be radioactive to the DNC. And there's a real question about income.

But a win looks like you being sworn in and we go to work changing Washington, lighting a fire under the ass of every incumbent that thinks their seat is safe just because they're in it. If my legacy is getting 20 Mr. Smiths in office, that's something I can live with.

A beat of silence.

MASON

Are you assuming I want you in an Evers administration?

Jesse smacks Mason's shoulder.

TRACY

Time to call it. Early start tomorrow.

Jesse grabs his coat.

MASON

Thank you both. For everything.

TRACY

You have a good night.

Tracy and Jesse step out and let the door close behind them.

Mason takes off his shirt and slacks. He studies himself in the closet door mirror.

MASON

I barely remember you.

He runs his fingers through his hair.

MASON (CONT'D)

President. Do I say that with a question mark or a period?

Dad wouldn't think this belongs to me. He'd be filling my head with doubt. Not even here and he's doing it now.

Mason steps back. He plants his feet.

MASON (CONT'D)

Better be a period by morning.

He grabs the phone Jesse gave him.

**CLOSE ON: PHONE SCREEN**

An article about the housing bill failure is on.

MASON (CONT'D)

This is bullshit. This is where he's vulnerable.

Mason puts the phone down and goes to the bed and turns off the light.

**BLACK SCREEN**

**SUPER: MORNING**

**SFX: PHONE RINGS**

MASON

H-hello.

**INT. MASON'S HOTEL ROOM - DAY**

TRACY

Hey. Today's the day. Just wanted to wish you luck.

MASON

I'll see you there, won't I?

TRACY

Of course. I just thought— You deserve to know— Wesley did disappoint me. You know that, but I'm partly to blame. I thought he was someone different. And he wasn't the first.

(MORE)

TRACY (CONT'D)

And I put these failures on pedestals they didn't deserve.

I don't think you're a failure. You're not calculating or ambitious... at least not that I've seen. And so I'm coping with hope, if that makes sense.

MASON

That's a lot to put on anyone's shoulders.

TRACY

Yeah, sorry. That's the game.

MASON

Not mine. Yours. I'm here because I wanna be. Turns out you're like the Hannibal to my Clarice.

Tracy waits.

TRACY

More accurate: you're the tiger to my Siegfried.

MASON

Roy was the partner.

TRACY

Knock them dead today.

**EXT. FAIRFIELD HOTEL ENTRANCE - LATER**

Tracy, Jesse, and Mason are on the side of a raised stage, tucked behind the stairs leading up to it. The crowd of reporters is slightly smaller than yesterday. There's a moderate amount of onlookers.

TRACY

Smaller crowd. I'm sure they didn't appreciate yesterday. Still my mistake. That doesn't matter now.

Your job is simple here. Introduce yourself. Let them know you're running and give a not quite vague answer why.

Most importantly, don't end my career. You're gonna do great.

Tracy nods towards the stairs.

Mason rubs his hands together.

Tracy shakes her head. Mason laughs.

He stiffens, then relaxes and steps up the stairs. He walks to the podium and adjusts the mic.

MASON

Good morning. I know everyone here is curious about me. Let's get it out of the way. Ah. My name is Mason Evers. If any of you saw 8 Mile, Eminem disarms the other guy in the rap battle... I'm getting the speed it up gesture. He disarms his opponent by saying the obvious thing against him out loud.

I'm homeless.

I don't want to be anyone's victim. That's not why I'm here.

I'm here because high paying jobs should be accessible to more people. I'm fed up with excuses from politicians who talk about the cost of living and expect people to just show up for the lip service. It's exhausting and disappointing.

My story isn't unique. I've watched my stuff go out on the curb because a landlord wanted the unit for someone who can pay rent the first of every month. I've watched a boss roll up in a new car the same week they "regretted to inform" half the staff they were "like family" but no longer employed.

You don't need me to explain that. A lot of you have lived the cleaner versions of it.

Politicians are so self righteous that they think incumbency makes their next term a forgone conclusion. That doesn't work for me. A smart woman reminded me that politics is about choice.

(MORE)

**MASON (CONT'D)**

The parties think the choice belongs to them. Let's remind them it's up to the voters.

My name is Mason Evers. Today, I'm announcing my candidacy for the Presidency of the United States.

**CLOSE ON: TRACY'S FACE**

Tracy gives a controlled hint of a smirk.

**INT. WHITE HOUSE - THE EAST ROOM - LATER**

Reporters are gathered around the podium for President Wesley's announcement.

**PRESIDENT WESLEY**

-which is why I've directed Secretary Ellis to draft a proposal that will build hundreds of thousands of homes, lowering housing costs and boosting the economy with new good paying jobs without the need for an expensive degree.

Questions?

**THE END**