The Fallout

by Rocky2e

Summary

Sequel to "The Interview." Frank, Claire and Emily deal with the ramifications of the CNN interview as well as their rise to the Oval Office. Contains minor spoilers for seasons 2,3 and 4.
A/N: Thanks to your lovely reviews, I have decided to write a sequel to The Interview. This story follows the original and not the rough draft I posted recently. I recommend you read that before reading this. Sometimes this story will follow the show, and sometimes it will drift off into something of my own creation. I hope you enjoy.

Disclaimer: I don’t own House of Cards nor the characters they have produced. I’m only borrowing Frank and Co. for my own amusement as is everyone else on this site.

Chapter One

A stuffed lilac rabbit arcs over the bed, pelting Claire Underwood in the face. Next, an elbow digs into her outstretched arm. Claire’s eyes flicker open, trying to discern who the tiny appendage belongs to. She sees a hand grip the sheets into a ball and the top her daughter’s head become more visible.

“Emily?” Claire asks, sleep clinging to her voice. Her two-year-old has managed to shimmy herself onto the bed. Emily’s cerulean eyes are wide with fear. The rabbit has found its way back to its owner who is holding it close to her body. “What’s wrong?”

“Bad dweam, mommy,” Emily whispers as a fat tear cascades down her cheek. Claire bites back a sigh. This has been a recurring theme these past few months with their daughter, Emily has a nightmare and then wakes one of her parents up in the middle of the night crying. Of course, Claire and Frank do their best to comfort their daughter, but they are trying to teach her how to self-soothe. Claire reaches past her daughter to turn on the light. This captures the attention of Frank, who rolls over to find his daughter trembling next to his wife.

“Another nightmare?” Frank asks, his Southern drawl filling the room. Claire nods and watches Emily move towards her father. “We have to break her of this habit.”

“I agree. Emily, what was your dream about?”

The Underwood’s have learned it helps Emily calm down faster if she is able to articulate her fears. Emily’s bottom lip trembles when she remembers what sent her running into her parent’s bedroom. “Daddy in twoble, you,” Emily points at Claire, “are mad wif daddy and not wanna see him. I wanna see daddy.” Claire nods, most of Emily’s nightmares relate to her and Frank in some fashion. “Mommy’s mad at me? She is never mad at me,” Frank tells his daughter, brushing the pad of his thumb over her cheek. Emily sniffs and uses the back of her hand to wipe her eyes.

Claire and Frank rarely disagree, but when they do, they try their best to have their arguments away from Emily. The only one she has seen was a brief disagreement after the interview she gave two months ago. Even then, it was minimal and they made up in front of their daughter.

“Emily, daddy and I love each other. There is no reason for you to worry.” Claire finds it odd she has to reassure her two-year-old that her marriage isn’t on the verge of collapsing. She blames herself and the press for putting ideas into her daughter’s head. Frank leans over so his head is resting on Claire’s shoulder to prove to their daughter her nightmare has no basis in fact. Emily looks convinced, her tears have ebbed.

“Okay, I sweep wif you tonight?”

“No. You need to sleep in your own bed,” Claire tells Emily in a firm voice. Emily looks to her father to refute her mother, but he merely nods in agreement.

“We will see you in the morning,” Frank says and picks Emily up, setting her on the hardwood below. Emily internally debates whether she wants to throw a tantrum over being relegated to her bedroom, but decides against it. She clutches the stuffed animal in her hand and pads back to her own bed.

“You can’t hold yourself accountable,” Frank reminds his wife as he does every time their daughter comes to them crying. Claire turns off the lamp and sinks down into the pillows. As much as she appreciates Frank saying that to her, she does take responsibility for her daughter’s discomfort. If it
wasn’t for her agreeing to do the interview with Ashleigh Banfield, none of what ensued afterward would’ve happened.

“Goodnight Francis.”

“Goodnight.”

Frank resumes his original position with his back turned to her. Claire scoots closer to him, swiping one of his pillows in the process. Sleep evades her as her mind mulls over the inciting incident that triggered Emily’s nightmares.

The original plan involved both Claire and Frank bringing Emily to the park. It’s been two days since Claire gave the interview and the press has been hovering ever since. Claire told Frank the three of them should be photographed out together in the days following the broadcast and he agreed. Now, Frank has been pulled into an emergency cabinet meeting, leaving Claire with no choice but to take Emily by herself.

“Mommy, where’s daddy?” Emily asks as Claire is buttoning her pea coat.

“Daddy had to go to work, but I thought I would still take you to the park.” Claire and Frank are rarely home during the day, which makes today a rare occasion for the toddler.

Emily clasps onto Claire’s hand tightly as they leave the townhouse. Reporters shout questions at the pair, all of which Claire ignores. Between the camera flashes and the shouting, Emily suctions herself to her mother. Reporters clamor to get a shot of the toddler, who has evaded the public eye since birth.

When they get to the park, Claire lets Emily sprint towards the equipment while she makes herself comfortable on a bench. The toddler often shouts to Claire, encouraging her mother to watch her every move. Claire focuses her attention on a book she brought, occasionally glancing up to make sure her daughter is still playing. Meechum hovers nearby, sweeping the area for any press looking to bother Claire and Emily.

Claire watches her daughter approach a boy about her age. The two exchange words Claire can’t decipher. Suddenly, the boy runs away from Emily and she makes a bee-line for Claire.

“M-m-mommy,” Emily chokes out, her little shoulders shaking with sobs.

Claire scoops up her daughter, wondering what she could be so upset about. Even though her daughter is two, she hardly ever cries unless she is hurt. She does a thorough inspection of Emily, checking for any bruises or cuts. Finding none, Claire is now led to believe that Emily’s problem could be emotional instead of physical.

“What’s wrong, Em?”

“Dat boy won’t pway wif me.”

“Why not?”

“He tell me daddy is mean and dat he killded someone,” Emily says.

Claire almost drops her daughter after hearing what she has to say. She can only assume this boy is regurgitating something he heard from his parents, whomever they may be.

“That is not true, your daddy would never hurt anyone,” Claire knows she is lying, but her daughter doesn’t need to know the truth. It’s her job to protect Emily, even if it’s from Frank.

“He say dat daddy is b-bad man, mommy.”

“Emily, you can’t believe what other people think and say about us. You know that your daddy is a good person and that’s all that matters.”

As Claire is saying this to Emily, she realizes her daughter might be too young to grasp what is being relayed to her. The fact is, Emily is going to grow up and seek answers about her parents regardless of what Frank and Claire tell her. It’s up to Emily to decide how she is going to process the information she discovers.

Emily nods and her sobs diminish into barely audible whimpers. Claire holds her daughter as she scans the playground for any indication as to who the boy’s parents are. She would like to have a word with them about what their son tells her daughter.

“I want you to go by Edward and ask him to push you on the swings,” Claire tells Emily, knowing it will cheer her up. The toddler is fond of the Secret Service agent, like her parents.
“Okay mommy, I tell Meechy!” Emily jumps off of Claire’s lap and runs towards Meechum, beckoning the agent to bend over so she can whisper in his ear. Claire makes sure her daughter is distracted before walking over to the boy’s mother.

It takes her a moment, but Claire recognizes the woman. She is Tracy Ellis; the wife of a Republican Congressman Frank has sparred with during his term as whip.

“Hello, may I speak with you for a moment?” Claire asks, although she won’t take no for an answer. Tracey puts her magazine down and gestures for Claire to continue. “It seems as if your son is not letting my daughter play with her and he is telling her some pretty awful things about my husband that are simply not true. I just wanted to clear the air.”

Tracey stands up, putting her a few inches shy of Claire.

“I think you and I both know what your husband did to Peter Russo. I don’t want my son becoming friends with your daughter. You and your husband shouldn’t even be allowed to have a child.”

Claire turns her head, checking to make sure nobody is within listening distance of them. She will not allow anyone to talk about Emily or Frank this way.

“Isn’t your husband trying to secure funding for an endowment to a hospital in his district?”

Tracey doesn’t affirm Claire’s question, she merely crosses her arms over her chest.

“I would hate to see Francis give the money to your husband’s opponent. That’s 13 million dollars and over 3,000 jobs lost in your husband’s district. Your husband wouldn’t stand a chance next election cycle, his constituents would turn their backs on him.”

“Your husband doesn’t have the authority to do that.”

“He’s the vice president, Tracey. Plus, he served in Congress for 22 years, he still has a lot of influence there. I want you to tell your son that you were lying about my husband and to let him play with my daughter and the money will go where it should.”

“I’ll go to the press,” Tracey says as a last-ditch effort to put some fear into Claire.

Claire doesn’t bat an eye, she has heard threats like this before. The press doesn’t have the time nor inclination to hunt down every tip they receive.

“Be my guest. And while you’re at it, I’m sure they would love to hear all about how your husband bribed members of Congress last term to push his stimulus package through.”

Tracey shakes her head at Claire, but remains silent. Whether what Claire is saying about her husband is true, the media will believe her anyway.

“You and your husband are a disgrace.”

“Think whatever you want, but leave my daughter out of it.”

Claire pivots on her heels, leaving a shell-shocked Tracey in her wake.

“Emily, five more minutes!” They should leave before any third party gets involved in their playground scuffle. Claire resumes her place on the bench. She can see Tracey call over her son and then the boy walk over to Emily and Meechum, asking if he can be pushed on the swings too. A smile chases across Claire’s lips, but it doesn’t overpower the remorse bubbling in her stomach.

Later that night, after Emily is put to bed, Claire and Frank enjoy a cigarette by the windowsill. Frank passes the cigarette over to Claire, who is staring aimlessly off into the distance.

“Do you want it?” Frank asks.

“What? Oh…” Claire accepts the cigarette and takes a drag.

“Something on your mind?”

“Emily and I were at the park today and Tracey Ellis was there with her son. Apparently, her son told our daughter that you killed someone and you were a bad man.”

Frank is appropriately taken aback. He accepts the cigarette but lets it linger in his hand.

“Is Emily alright?”

“Yes, I told her that it wasn’t true and she shouldn’t believe everything she hears about us.”

“What did you say to Tracey?” Frank asks and takes a healthy drag of the cigarette.

“I threatened to cut off funding for the hospital in her husband’s district. And if she ever goes to the press, we would leak the bribing of the stimulus package.”

Frank laughs, God, he loves his wife. He can only imagine the look on Tracey Ellis’ face when
Claire calmly explained how they were going to potentially end her husband’s career.
“How did she take it?”
“Ethan Ellis is coming over for a playdate this weekend.”
“And what about you?”
“What about me?” Claire’s fingers brush over his as the cigarette is passed back.
“How are you handling all of this?”
Frank knows his wife better than he knows himself at times. She never wanted to do the interview
because she saw the potential backlash that would result. Now they are living it, and it has spilled
over into their daughter’s life as well. However, Claire is never one to say, ‘I told you so,’ she
accepts fault as much as he does.
“It was a decision we made together, there is no use in dwelling on it. But, I will not allow our
daughter to be bullied because of us, Francis.”
“We will protect her and each other, as we always have done.” Frank reaches over, skimming his
hand over her cheek. Claire puts out the cigarette and follows him into their bedroom.

“How?” Frank asks, breaking her reverie.
“What?” Claire watches Frank reach under her and snatch his pillow back. She senses a grin tug at
her lips while scooting closer to her husband.

The next morning, Frank and Claire slip effortlessly into their routine, maneuvering around each
other in the kitchen while their daughter sits in her highchair.
“Daddy, look at dis,” Emily shows him the picture she is sketching while Claire gets breakfast ready
for them. Frank sets down his suitcase and leans over, hoping he doesn’t have to guess what the
blobs his daughter is drawing represent.
“Very nice,” He says while dissecting an apple.
“Dis for you and mommy,” Emily passes over the piece of paper as Claire is setting cereal in front of
the toddler. Claire glances down at the picture and slaps it into Frank’s briefcase.
“I have to go, my meeting with Katherine starts in an hour,” Frank says as he bites into his apple.
“Do you think she is going to go behind Walker’s back and support you with China?”
“I told her if she doesn’t like how the table is set…”
“Den she turn over da table,” Emily finishes for him offhandedly, surprising both of her parents.
“She really is your daughter,” Claire says and brushes a kiss to Frank’s cheek. Frank waves goodbye
to Emily and knocks on the counter twice.
Once Frank leaves, Claire nurses a cup of coffee while Emily finishes her breakfast. She drops Emily
off at school and heads to the Capitol.

“How did your meeting with Kathy go?” Claire asks Frank while they are having lunch together
later that day.
“She agreed to my course of action, but I’m still skeptical.”
“Can we trust her to do the right thing, Francis?”
The couple has always seen the Secretary of State as an ally, but lately she has wavered in her
allegiance. Claire worries Kathy will turn her back on them and side with Walker simply because he
is the president.
“I’m not sure yet, we might have to move on without her.”
“I’ve noticed she has been treating me different ever since I did that interview.”
“Different, how?” Frank asks with a furrowed brow.
“I don’t know, softer, I guess. She seems to believe that because I’m a mother, I won’t involve
myself as much with what you are doing. It’s almost like she thinks I’m taking a backseat.”
“Do you want me to talk to her?” Claire shakes her head and takes a bite of her salad.
“No, I don’t think that’s necessary. I’ll talk to her myself if I see it getting out of hand.”
Frank sympathizes with Claire. It makes it harder to do their job now that people know about Emily.
For whatever reason, people think Frank isn’t the ruthless pragmatist he always was just because he
had a child. If anything, Emily encourages him even more to achieve his goal of occupying the Oval Office. He encountered the same skepticism with Raymond Tusk while trying to negotiate a deal during the energy crisis.

Frank is at his wits end trying to play peacemaker between Walker and Raymond Tusk. The two used to be each other’s biggest confidants, but that has deteriorated ever since Tusk entangled them with China. Now, Raymond Tusk has initiated a city-wide blackout only to instigate the White House. Walker is refusing to negotiate with Tusk, instead, he is leaving Frank to do it. “I don’t care how you do it Frank, I can’t leave an entire city in the dark,” Walker says. Frank sighs, he almost preferred when Walker and Tusk were friends. It made persuading the president to do what he wants harder, but at least he didn’t have to deal directly with Tusk. He tells Seth and Doug to set up a meeting with Tusk so they can hammer out the details. Tusk insisted on coming to the Underwood townhouse.

“Don’t let stubbornness cost you your twenty-plus years’ friendship with Walker,” Frank says. “You don’t care about my friendship with Garrett,” Tusk counters. “You are absolutely right, I don’t. However, he is still the president and he could still pursue a FERC investigation until you go bankrupt. I am trying to prevent that.”

“I’m not afraid of an investigation, but the fact that you think I am only proves you’ve gotten softer since becoming a father,” Tusk says just to get under Frank’s skin. Frank frowns and opens his mouth to retaliate.

Just then, Claire and Emily come through the front door with Meechum on their tail. Emily sees her father talking to a stranger and huddles close to her mother. Claire picks her up and walks into the kitchen, not noticing Frank talking to Tusk.

“Oh, hello,” Claire says politely and instinctively tightens her grip on Emily. “Raymond, you remember my wife Claire, and my daughter Emily.” Frank regrets letting Tusk meet him at the townhouse. He thought Emily and Claire were going to be out for the entirety of their meeting. The less people know about his personal life, the better. Especially, Raymond Tusk, who will use whatever he can find against Frank.

“Hello, it’s nice to meet you, Emily,” Tusk says to the little girl. Emily nods and doesn’t wave back. “I apologize, she is still wary of strangers,” Claire says and brushes past Frank to dig in the fridge. “No problem, I’m sure she will come around, just like her father will. Goodnight.” Frank offers a fake smile and shows Tusk the door. When Frank returns to the kitchen, Emily is sipping on a glass of water in her high chair with Claire sitting next to her.

“Daddy, I not like him,” Emily informs her father and steals a carrot from Claire’s plate. “I don’t either, Em,” Frank agrees.

By the time Frank gets home from the Capitol that night, Claire is sitting on the couch with her legs outstretched, reading on her iPad. Emily is sitting on the floor, in her pajamas. Her dark, wet tendrils are bouncing on her shoulders as she giggles at whatever is splashed across the screen of her iPad. Frank sets down his briefcase and keys by the door before picking up Claire’s legs to sit next to on her on the couch. Emily ambushes him, already climbing on his lap, ignoring her mom’s legs already claiming the space.

“Hi daddy,” Emily says. “Hey,” Frank mumbles. He leans back into the couch cushions, trying to listen to Emily animatedly chat about her day at school. Claire glances up from her iPad and observes how exhausted her husband looks. His shoulders are slumped over, deep bags reside under his eyes. She makes a mental note to check in with him once their daughter is done talking. “Emily, it’s time for bed. Give your father a kiss goodnight and I will meet you upstairs.” Claire gives her husband a much-needed reprieve. “It’s my night,” Frank reminds his wife. “I know, but you look like you are about to fall over. Let me have tonight.” Emily wraps her arms around her father’s neck for a hug and then jumps into her mother’s awaiting arms.
“Night daddy, I see you ‘morrow,” Emily says over Claire’s shoulder.
“Goodnight Em.”
When Claire comes downstairs a half an hour later, Frank has his head cradled in his hands, his eyes closed. Claire splays her hand over his in an effort to wake him up.
“Go to bed, Francis.”
“I suppose I…” his sentence is cut off by both his and Claire’s cell-phone ringing. They reach for their phones, wondering what could possibly disrupt their night.
“Seth, slow down. Okay…yup…thank you,” Claire says and hangs up her phone, reaching for her iPad.
“What? When? Well, I want you and Seth to meet me over at the residence. We have to start doing damage control,” Frank hangs up with Doug. Claire pulls up the article appropriately titled “Mrs. Underwood, Under the Sheets?” with a picture of her sleeping. A picture of her that Adam Galloway took when she was at his Manhattan apartment.
Frank lets out an aggravated sigh, this is the last thing he needs to deal with tonight.
“Tusk,” Frank spits out. Claire merely nods and looks up, to where their daughter is sleeping, blissfully unaware of the bedlam that’s about to ensue.

A/N 2: I’m only just getting started. I hope you like the first chapter enough to leave me your thoughts. A new chapter should be up soon. Hope you enjoy season 5!
Chapter Two

A/N: Thank you for your reviews, I always love getting them. For the purpose of this story, Claire never went to see Adam in New York during season one. I hope you enjoy this better than I enjoyed season 5.

Claire pulls up the article appropriately titled “Mrs. Underwood, Under the Sheets?” with a picture of her sleeping. A picture of her that Adam Galloway took when she was at his Manhattan apartment. Frank lets out an aggravated sigh, this is the last thing he needs to deal with tonight.

“Tusk,” Frank spits out. Claire merely nods and looks up, to where their daughter is sleeping, blissfully unaware of the bedlam that’s about to ensue.

This has been her second mistake in a short amount of time. It’s so unlike her, she is usually so careful about what the public sees. As Frank once said, “we are more or less than what we choose to reveal.” Now, it’s no longer a choice. The American people know about her affair with Adam Galloway. This couldn’t have come at a worse time. During the interview a few months ago, Ashleigh Banfield blindsided Claire with an article claiming Frank cheated on her when she was pregnant with Emily. Of course, Claire denied the allegation despite it being true. She didn’t see an alternative. With Raymond Tusk leaking her transgressions with Adam, it’s unlikely the public is going to believe the same thing twice.

Their marriage is under scrutiny, again. They are going to have to find a way that exonerates them from any wrong doing without involving Emily. Claire realizes Frank would use Emily to gain positive media attention if it came down to it. She is going to do everything in her power to prevent that from happening. Her daughter does not need to be aware of the intricacies of her parent’s marriage. Emily’s nightmares are already bad enough, there’s no need to make them worse.

Frank glances over at his wife, who is a million miles away. He doesn’t blame her if she is upset with him about people now knowing about Adam. Raymond and Remy were his problems to deal with and he should’ve before anything like this happened. Claire will want assurances from him that Emily will be kept in the dark about the circus that’s about to ensue, but he won’t be able to give it to her. He will do whatever he can to prevent that from happening. If they are backed into a corner with no way out, he will consider putting his daughter in the limelight. And Claire will just have to deal with it.

“We need to keep her out of school tomorrow,” Claire says, being the first one to break the silence.
“Agreed.”

Sending Emily to school where they won’t have control over whether the press has access to her is unwise. Their daughter is only two, but that won’t stop the media from asking her questions.
“I’m going to check on her, let me know when Seth and Doug get here.”

Frank watches Claire retreat upstairs, but doubts she is actually going to do what she said. His wife has a tendency to process things silently and on her own before collaborating with him. Especially now, when she perceives this as her fault and her mess to clean up. Reminding her that they are at equal fault for what has transpired won’t alleviate any of the remorse she feels.

Claire opens the door to Emily’s room, watching the moonlight illuminate her daughter’s cognac hair. The toddler has her favorite rabbit balled in a tight fist and is sleeping soundly. Claire crosses the room to close the blinds, preventing any prying eyes from grabbing a shot of her daughter.

After she closes the door to Emily’s room, she goes into her own. Her iPhone is charging on her side of the bed, waiting to be used. Claire lightly tosses the device in her palm, her thumb hovering over
Adam’s contact information. He should know what is about to happen, she just doesn’t know if she should be the one to tell him. The last time they saw each other, they agreed that they needed to put a stop to what they were doing.

“Which one?” Claire asks Frank, holding an ink-black boatneck dress to her chest while glancing over at the charcoal wrap dress sitting on the bed. Frank briefly glances up from his paperwork, his eyebrows knitting together. His wife only asks him for wardrobe advice when she is anxious about something.

“What’s the occasion?” He asks while pushing the blanket higher on his legs, sending a few papers falling to the floor.

There’s a moment of hesitation, enough time for Frank to read her silence. They don’t keep secrets from each other, but Claire is not always forthcoming when it comes to certain things…or people.

Claire pauses to switch dresses and spins to face her husband.

“Adam Galloway is coming to town, he is helping me put together photos for the African Children Coalition gala next week. We are having dinner afterwards.”

Frank’s mouth twitches. He never liked Adam because he is aware of how his wife feels about him. It’s not jealousy because Claire is his wife who is expecting his child, but a lingering anxiety. Adam is an uncertainty, regardless of what Claire thinks. He has the ability to reveal his involvement with Claire at any time, which could be cataclysmic for the Underwoods.

“Wear the black one.”

There are two reasons for Frank’s choice. One is he always prefers Claire in black. Two, black is a slimming color. If Claire chooses not to tell Adam about her pregnancy, her outfit won’t give it away.

“That was my favorite too.”

He wants to ask if she is going to let Adam in on their little secret because he doesn’t want to sway her either way. It should be her decision.

“Are you going to tell him?” Frank asks, without realizing he is speaking out loud.

Claire drops the winning dress and turns to face him.

“I don’t know,” She is aware of the weight this choice carries as much as him.

“I trust you to make the call.”

“I know.”

“I’ll just have water, thank you,” Claire says to the waitress. Adam orders a pinot noir and turns his attention to his dinner companion. She can tell Adam is questioning her beverage choice. It’s a tradition between them to share a bottle of wine.

“No wine? I’m surprised,” Adam comments, eyeing her suspiciously. Claire unconsciously sweeps her hand over her burgeoning stomach, smoothing any wrinkles in the ebony fabric.

“Well I…” She is interrupted by their waitress setting down a bread basket between them.

Adam takes the momentary pause in conversation to do a once-over on Claire. Something about her is different. They haven’t seen each other in almost a year, but he can sense a change in her. She seems happier, more content with her life than in meetings past.

Adam is not an idiot, this thing between him and Claire is only temporary and under her control. He is well aware of who she truly belongs to, even if he detests the man. However, that doesn’t stop him from thinking he knows her better than him.

“What Adam?” Claire asks with a coy smile. His eyes are boring a hole into her skin. Adam has always been an observer, similar to her. Frank is an orator, he processes everything out loud. It’s a comfortable change of pace to be sitting with someone who doesn’t feel the need to constantly be talking.

“Something about you is…” He pauses to locate the right word, “…changed.”
“Oh, really?” She takes a long sip of water and contemplates her next move. Adam is a dog with a bone, he won’t drop it until he is clued in on her secret.

“Yeah, you are still Claire, but a different, dare I say, happier version of Claire. Let me guess, Francis is dying?”

Laughter slips through Claire’s lips. It amuses her that Frank and Adam despise each other despite only meeting a handful of times. Although, they do have contrasting personalities, with her being the common denominator.

“Francis is fine,” Claire chooses to ignore the slight frown playing on Adam’s face and switches the subject to his career.

An hour later, they are making out on the couch of Adam’s hotel room. It’s a routine they established when he comes to D.C. Dinner, followed by a night cap at a high-end hotel tucked away in the Beltway. Sometimes Claire stays the night, others she goes home to Frank. It all depends on how she is feeling.

Tonight, guilt has permeated her mindset. It’s foreign to her because she never feels this way about being with Adam. She isn’t sneaking around and lying to her husband, but something about their tryst is gnawing at her.

Adam’s lips are trailing up her neck, stopping periodically to suck on her skin. Claire turns her head and closes her eyes, willing her mind to shut off so she can enjoy this before going home. Without warning, Adam finds her lips and cups her face. She pulls back, shaking her head.

“What?” Adam asks, his voice half concerned and annoyed. He is afraid she is going to disappear again.

“I can’t, I’m…I have to go,” Claire starts to get up, but his hands coil around her wrists, bringing her back down to the couch.

“Claire, what is going on?” He carved time out of his schedule to spend with her and doesn’t appreciate her evasive attitude.

“We need to stop seeing each other for a while, Adam. I shouldn’t have come here, it was a mistake.”

Adam lights a cigarette while Claire searches the hotel room for her purse and jacket.

“What are you rushing out the door? This doesn’t make sense, Claire.”

Claire could easily run away without an explanation, but something is stopping her.

“It’s not fair to Francis, I don’t know why I keep doing this with you.” Adam doesn’t believe her for a second and is angry she is using her husband as an excuse.

“Since when do you give a fuck about what is fair to Francis?”

“Since I’m pregnant with his child!”

Adam looks appropriately shocked by Claire’s admission.

“That was the last thing I thought you were going to say,” Adam mumbles quietly.

“I know…I didn’t mean for you to find out like that,” Claire pauses and swings her jacket over her shoulders. “When I end things, I end them for good. Goodbye, Adam.” She approaches him and lightly kisses his cheek before fleeing the hotel room.

Claire hears Frank yell for her from downstairs. She has told him countless times not to do that in case Emily wakes up. Her cellphone remains on the nightstand, untouched. Seth, Doug and Frank are standing in the kitchen, eagerly waiting her arrival.

“Emily still asleep?” Frank asks. It’s common for their daughter to free herself from her crib and join them in their bed. Also, he wants to see if his wife truly went to check on their daughter like she said she was.
“Yes, let’s get started,” Claire tells him and follows the three men into the living room.

Over the next few hours, Seth, Doug and the Underwood’s come up with a media strategy that includes a formal press conference on their part as well as Adam’s.

“Do you want to include Emily?” Seth asks.

“Absolutely not,” Claire says immediately. Frank is more hesitant. His daughter might be a last-ditch effort to get the public back on their side and his wife must realize that.

“Sir?” Doug asks, noting his boss’ delay in answering. Frank puts his hand on Claire’s knee to capture her attention.

“Claire, Emily could be beneficial for us.” He knows if it comes down to it, his wife would agree with him because she is just as ruthless as he is.

Claire merely nods. They can have this fight later, away from spectators.

“Who is going to tell Adam?” Claire poses to the men.

“Nobody. It would be wise to not have any communication between him and us right now. We don’t want to be accused of collusion,” Seth reminds her.

“We need to control how this story plays out and that includes him,” she argues back, looking to Frank for backup.

“If we feel it’s necessary, we will reach out to him, but for now, we need to keep our distance,” Seth assures her. “Now, we contacted CNN and they have agreed to a press conference outside of the townhouse tomorrow afternoon. We expect Adam to issue a statement before then.”

“Claire, we have to sit down with you and establish a timeline of all public and private encounters with Adam, so we can be prepared if he tries to hit us with evidence of a relationship,” Doug explains to her.

“Can we do that in the morning? I’m rather tired.”

They have been going at this for almost three hours and Claire has to get up with Emily early tomorrow morning.

Frank agrees, sending Doug and Seth away, telling them to return to the residence early the next day so they can continue working.

He comes back into the living room to find his wife staring off into the distance. Frank cups her shoulders, willing her to make eye contact with him.

“I’m sorry that you have to deal with this nonsense,” Claire whispers. “But Francis, please, Emily does not need to be a part of this.”

Frank nods. It means something to him that Claire is apologizing to him for this scandal, even if it’s unnecessary. He owes her immensely for weathering the interview alone. This makes them even in a way.

“I can’t Claire, you know that. Our image is in tatters right now and Emily might be the only way to repair it.”

Everything her husband’s telling her makes sense, but Claire feels this need to protect her daughter because she feels guilty about her and Frank’s occupations. They don’t seek the spotlight in any way, but it comes with the territory. Nevertheless, unless Claire comes up with a different solution, Emily is going to be part of their press conference tomorrow.

“I’m tired, goodnight Francis.”

“Goodnight.”

Frank realizes Claire is upset about using Emily, but he trusts they will play this carefully so it won’t look like they are blatantly exploiting their daughter.

The next morning, Claire blindly reaches over in bed, only to be met with balled-up sheets.

“Francis?” She asks, her voice clouded with sleep. Her ears are alert for any signs that Emily has woken up without her. All she can hear is her husband talking to someone downstairs. Claire slips her robe over her nightie and descends the stairs.

“Mommy!” Emily exclaims, bounding towards Claire with milk smeared all over her face. The
toddler jumps into Claire’s arms.
“Hi,” Claire mumbles as she hoists her daughter onto her hip. She pads into the kitchen, spotting
Frank hunched over the counter, sipping on a coffee while reading the newspaper.
“Daddy say I not go to school today! Why mommy?”
Claire makes eye contact with her husband, silently asking how much he disclosed to their two-year-
old.
“Well…daddy and I thought you should stay home with us, just for today.” Claire hopes that Frank
has no intentions of going to the Capitol, not with the press eagerly hovering outside of the
townhouse waiting to pounce on anyone exiting the residence.
Emily’s eyes widen, she doesn’t ever remember both of her parents not going to work, especially her
dad. Usually, her dad makes a hasty exit during her breakfast and her mom drops her off at school.
“Why?”
Frank and Claire exchange nervous glances, neither of them are particularly keen on explaining to
Emily the truth, but they have to provide the inquisitive little girl with something so she stops asking
so many questions.
“We are keeping you home from school today because…” Frank pauses, he has never been good at
explaining things on a level his daughter can comprehend.
“Emily, remember at the park that one time when that boy said something not true to you about
daddy?” Claire asks, filling in for her husband.
Emily nods while shoving an apple in her mouth.
“Someone is saying something that’s not true about me to everyone and we don’t want anyone at
school to think it’s true and be mean to you.”
“What are dem people sayin’ mommy?”
Claire brushes a piece of hair out of Emily’s eyes and swallows the guilt she feels for lying to her
daughter.
“It doesn’t matter. What matters is that you know it’s not true.”

Frank watches in awe as Claire explains to Emily the complex situation they are in to her in a way
she can understand. He remembers Claire agonizing over whether she would be able to be a good
mother when she was pregnant with Emily. She does a far better job than he can at reassuring their
daughter that her world isn’t going to fall apart because of Adam Galloway. Frank loves Emily more
than anything, but he finds it hard to relate to her sometimes, but Claire can do it effortlessly and he is
grateful to her for that.

Frank and Claire set Emily up with a movie while they scheme with Doug and Seth. Claire lays out a
concrete timeline of her encounters with Adam, not sparing any detail in case it becomes relevant.
Together, they all watch Adam give his statement to the press and work to construct their narrative
around what he says.
“We can’t repeat what he said, it would look too clean,” Seth points out.
Frank and Claire realize this, but Adam isn’t going to like it.
“So, what do we do?” Frank asks after shutting off the TV.
“You go out and lie,” Doug says what they are all thinking.
“And Emily?” Claire inquires.
“It would look better from a PR standpoint if she were involved,” Seth says.

“Claire and I need to talk about this for a second,” Frank tells Doug and Seth. The two men head
upstairs to make some calls while their bosses sort this out.

“I told you Francis, I don’t want her to be on camera,” Claire tells him.
“I know,” Frank rests his hands on her arms. “Sweetheart, listen to me, we need to move past this
and Emily can help with that.”
A part of her acknowledges Frank might be right. Emily softens their image. The public responded
well when Claire discussed their daughter during her interview and each time she’s photographed out
alongside her parents. They are going to have to use everything to their advantage if they want to get through this unscathed. If Claire and Frank can somewhat control how Emily is featured in the press, it might be worthwhile.

“Okay…if you think that’s what best.” Claire is abdicating because she knows Frank will compromise with her if she does.

He smiles at her, thankful she saw it his way.

“I promise she doesn’t have to say anything.”

“And no photo ops or Q&A’s. We say our statement and that’s it.”

Frank agrees and rests his hand on the small of her back, leading her upstairs.

“We are going to get Emily ready, but she doesn’t say anything and we aren’t posing for any photos or answering any questions,” Frank tells Seth and Doug in a firm tone.

“Understood, Sir. You guys should change,” Doug says. He knows his boss is unrelenting when it comes to his daughter. It wouldn’t do well for him to argue when Frank’s mind is made up.

Claire changes into a more conservative ivory gown, Frank changes into a formal suit.

“What should Emily wear?” Claire asks Frank while they are in the bathroom together.

“I don’t know, I’m not really good at this sort of thing. A dress like yours?”

Claire finishes her applying her lipstick and leaves her husband in their bedroom to go into Emily’s room.

“Hey mommy, wanna play with me?” Emily asks.

“Not right now. We have to get you ready. You are going to help mommy and daddy with something, if that’s okay.”

Emily’s azure eyes sparkle and she immediately drops her dolls.

“Okay! I help you and daddy. What do I do?”

“Daddy and I have to say something to the people outside and we need you to come with us, but you have to wear a dress.”

Emily runs to her closet and pulls down her favorite navy dress.

“I wear dis one mommy, okay?”

Claire nods and helps her daughter get changed.

“No Q&A, so don’t even try,” Seth warns the press perched outside the Underwood townhome. He steps away, glancing briefly of the picture of Claire perched on an easel.

“Do you want to hold Emily, or should I?” Claire asks Frank before they step outside to greet the press.

“I think you should hold her.”

Claire scoops Emily off the floor and grabs Frank’s hand. He opens the door, tightening his grip on his wife’s hand as they approach the podium. Emily is frightened by all the attention and buries her head into her mother’s shoulder. Claire regrets her decision of letting Emily be a part of the press conference. This isn’t doing her any good.

Frank and Claire flat out deny the affair and assert Frank not only knew about the photograph, but he commissioned Adam to take it. They finish their statement and retreat back into the townhouse to survey the damage.

“You did good, Em,” Frank tells his daughter. He noticed Emily was scared by how hard she was clinging to Claire during the press conference, but she behaved well. She didn’t cry or speak out of turn. Emily acted far beyond a two-year-old and made her parents proud.

“Thanks daddy, I do it for you and mommy,” Emily admits quietly, mirroring her mother when it comes to displaying her emotions.

“I think it will work,” Claire says with confidence smiling as Frank reaches over and lightly pinches Emily’s cheek.
Claire puts Emily down for a nap and joins Frank in the living room for a cigarette. “She did really good,” Frank says and lets the smoke filter out of his mouth. “Yes, she did,” Claire agrees, reaching over to steal the cigarette from her husband. “But you still regret that we had to put her there in the first place.” It comes out more as an accusation than a question on Frank’s behalf. “I will only regret it if it didn’t work.” Frank reaches across and presses a kiss on Claire’s cheek. Claire puts the cigarette out and glances out the window. “Adam is going to call and he is going to be angry, Francis.” Undoubtedly, Adam saw the Underwood press conference and will be furious about the way he was portrayed. Claire and Frank made it seemed like Adam lied about the photograph and released it for attention, which couldn’t be farther from the truth. They need to quell any uprising on Adam’s part. “I know, I think it’s time we bring him in.”

A/N 2: Alright, that’s all you get for now. I wanted to structure this chapter similar to the actual episode, but not so much that it felt like you were reading a transcript of it. Please leave me some reviews, I would love to know where you guys want this story to go. Thanks for reading!
A/N: Hi, sorry I haven’t updated in a while, I’ve been busy with my other story, State of Play. Thank you for all the lovely reviews you guys left for me, I appreciate them. Admittedly, I have stolen some dialogue from the show for this chapter, which is something I don’t like to do, but I feel it’s necessary here. Don’t sue me, Netflix!

Chapter Three

“Adam is going to call and he is going to be angry, Francis.”

Undoubtedly, Adam saw the Underwood press conference and will be furious about the way he was portrayed. Claire and Frank made it seemed like Adam lied about the photograph and released it for attention, which couldn’t be farther from the truth. They need to quell any uprising on Adam’s part. “I know, I think it’s time we bring him in.”

The last thing Frank wants is Adam to be around Claire and Emily. Unfortunately, he isn’t left much of a choice. Like it or not, they are going to need Adam to fall in line if they want to survive this scandal. They need to control him, and to do that, they need to be in contact with him.

Claire is furious with herself for letting the Adam situation spiral out of their control. She promised Frank she would take care of this, and her ability is waning. There is no guarantee Adam will do as they say. He could easily produce numerous photographs of her he has stashed away that will definitively confirm their affair. If he does that, no amount of press conferences in the world could repair the damage. Frank’s chances of making it to the Oval Office will be over, and they will be has-beens.

“Sir, sorry to interrupt, but you wanted to know how the media is reacting to the press conference.” Seth approaches Frank and Claire holding a tablet.

“And?” Frank asks.

“I think you should see for yourself,” Seth says and hands the tablet over to Frank. Claire inches closer to her husband, wanting to hear what people are saying about Emily so she can regret her decision even more. Frank presses play on the tablet and tilts it so Claire has a better vantage point.

“If you are just now joining us, we are discussing the scandal Second Lady Claire Underwood has found herself in. News broke yesterday Mrs. Underwood is having an affair with New York-based photographer Adam Galloway. The Underwoods’ just held a press conference addressing the allegations outside of their townhouse. We are breaking down their statement.” Anderson Cooper says into the camera. “Joining me on the panel are various reporters as well as political strategists on both sides of the aisle. Michelle, let’s begin with you, how did you react to the press conference?”

“Well, I respect them for facing the cheating rumors head-on. I’m so tired of politicians dancing around the issue and trying to continue like business as usual. I sincerely doubt these allegations are true. They have a strong marriage with a little daughter, I can’t see her stepping out.” Michelle King, a respected New York Times reporter, says.

Frank and Claire glance at each other, smirking slightly. Well-known reporters like Michelle sticking up for them carries a lot of weight.

“Well, I respect them for facing the cheating rumors head-on. I’m so tired of politicians dancing around the issue and trying to continue like business as usual. I sincerely doubt these allegations are true. They have a strong marriage with a little daughter, I can’t see her stepping out.” Michelle King, a respected New York Times reporter, says.

Frank and Claire glance at each other, smirking slightly. Well-known reporters like Michelle sticking up for them carries a lot of weight.

“See, I could not disagree with you more,” Kenneth Thomas, a Republican strategist, intercedes. “They are playing us for fools, and I for one, am going to say what needs to be said. They are exploiting their child and it makes me absolutely sick to my stomach. They have their child pretending to be afraid of the camera, come on! The Underwoods’ have been pulling the wool over our eyes for years, and it stops now.”
Claire grabs the lip of the windowsill so hard, her knuckles turn white. Frank looks down, seeing his wife’s distress. He knows this is what she feared. This reporter is mocking their daughter on CNN, which is something they won’t tolerate. Frank reaches over and uncoils Claire’s grip, clasping her hand tightly. He wants her to know he stands beside her, no matter what the outcome of this will be.

“Don’t go after their daughter, that’s not fair. She’s two-years-old, it’s not her fault reporters have no sense of decorum.” A Democratic senator from Illinois pipes up. “As a mother, I’m sure Mrs. Underwood debated putting her daughter in front of the camera. We have to respect her decision and not attack her daughter.”

The video clip ends and Frank hands the tablet back to Seth. “I want you and Doug to stay on this. If we need to do a follow-up statement, I want to know right away so we can begin to prepare,” Frank orders and sends his communication director away. Claire hears her phone vibrating and internally winces when Adam’s name pops up. “Francis, it’s Adam.” Claire hops off the windowsill to answer the call.

“Adam, I…” Claire begins, but he cuts her off. “You made me sound like a complete idiot, Claire.” She can tell he is furious, something that doesn’t happen often. “We couldn’t come out with the same story, it would be too clean. Nobody would believe it.” Claire remains calm, undeterred by his vicious tone. “No, you and Francis wanted to control the narrative. I have evidence, photos of you that nobody else has. How do you think the press would react if I released them?”

Frank’s eyebrows lift when he sees Claire’s cerulean eyes darken. Whatever Adam said to her crossed a line. His wife is sure to retaliate with whatever dirt she has gathered on her lover over the years. “I don’t think you should be acting out of line, Adam. Don’t forget, I have information on you too that could easily fall into the wrong hands. Nobody wants that, but I think you should come to the townhouse so we can talk about this privately.” Silence falls over the phone call. Claire waits for Adam to weigh his options, knowing he will choose the safer choice and come to D.C.

“We want to fix things,” Claire adds in, winking at Frank. “Fine. I will make my way to Washington. I should be there in a few hours.” Claire walks back over to her husband, sitting down next to him. “Good. Make sure no one knows you are coming, we don’t want to tip the press off. Leave your cell phone at home.”

“Fine…I have to admit, it’s good to hear your voice, Claire. I’ll see you soon.” Adam and Claire hang up with each other. Claire bites her lip and gives Frank a clipped nod. He’s coming, we have gained the upper hand, she silently communicates to him. Claire reflects on the last time her and Adam spoke while Frank answers a call from the White House.

“Hey, are you two having fun?” Claire asks Frank as she flips her heels off. Frank is preoccupied with feeding a week-old Emily her bottle. Emily isn’t having it and keeps jerking her head away from her father. Claire steps into the master bedroom and leans on the bed, watching her frustrated husband attempt to feed their daughter.

“It’s easier to get a bill through Congress than it is to give a bottle to our child. Here.” Frank practically thrusts the baby at Claire who bites back her grin. Her husband has had a harder time adjusting to parenting than her. It was her first day back to work since giving birth and time got away from her father. Claire steps into the master bedroom and leans on the bed, watching her frustrated husband attempt to feed their daughter.

Emily takes the bottle from Claire immediately, eliciting a groan from Frank. “How was your first day back?” Frank asks while Claire carefully adjusts so she is lying next to him in bed. “Fine. I called Adam…I never got a chance to thank him for the pictures for the gala we had a few
months ago.” Claire mumbles offhandedly, as if calling her ex-lover is nothing. Frank’s eyes shift over to her, wondering if she is going to elaborate or if he has to push her.

“And?” Claire shrugs, which startles Emily. The bottle falls from the baby’s lips and she starts crying. “Here, Emily.” Claire puts the bottle back in, soothing the child. “And nothing. He asked how I was, I told him about Emily and that was it.”

“We won’t have to worry about him?” Frank asks. Claire shakes her head.

“No, I explained to him what would happen if he ever went public. He understood. He wished us well.” Frank quirks an eyebrow. “Okay…he wished me well.”

“Claire? You alright?” Frank asks. His wife has been staring off into the distance for a few minutes. She’s been acting distant since the Galloway scandal broke last night. It doesn’t help that she thinks he railroaded her into including Emily in their press conference.

“I’m fine.” He rests his hand on her cheek. Her being fine isn’t enough for him. If there are any doubts, they need to discuss it.

“I know you are. What we are doing is necessary.” She nods against his hand.

“It’s not that. Are you angry at me about Adam? We haven’t talked about it.” His hand falls away from her cheek, coming to a stop on her thigh instead.

“No. We still have the agreement we always had, even before Emily. I don’t have a right to be angry.”

“That’s not what I asked.” She is well aware of the deal they made shortly after they got married. He sighs, his shoulders falling ever-so-slightly. Sometimes he wishes they weren’t the way they are with each other. So open, so honest. He wouldn’t trade their secret-free marriage for anything, but it doesn’t mean it’s easy.

“I wish it wasn’t Adam, but I’m not mad at you. We both have made sacrifices to get to where we are, this is just another one. I love you, Claire and I know you love me. Everyone else is just a distraction.”

Claire nods, satisfied with his answer.

“I do love you, Francis. Adam won’t be our undoing, I won’t allow it.”

“I know.”

Emily wakes up from her nap just as Adam clears the Secret Service check-in. Claire is feeding Emily a late lunch while Frank gets some work done at the table. He doesn’t want Adam anywhere near Emily, so he is keeping a close watch on his daughter.

“Adam, hello. Come in,” Claire greets him as Emily hijacks the spoon from her. The stubborn toddler is insistent on feeding herself.

Adam stares at the tableau of Claire feeding her infant daughter while Frank hovers close by. If Adam didn’t know any better, the Underwoods’ look like a perfect little family.

“Mommy, I do it.” Emily scolds Claire as she tries to take the spoon back. The toddler hasn’t noticed the visitor yet, she is too preoccupied with making sure her mother doesn’t get to feed her lunch. Claire is accepting of her daughter asserting her independence and surrenders the spoon to Emily. She notices Adam awkwardly standing at the counter, unsure of what to do. Emily shoves a bite of pasta in her mouth and lifts her head up, spotting someone foreign to her in the kitchen.

“Hi, who are you?” Emily asks. She abandons her food and demands her father lets her out of the high chair. Frank obliges and watches Emily run over to Adam. Typically, strangers scare their daughter, but she is receptive to Adam, which annoys him to no end.

Adam bends down so he is eye-level with the toddler. He can see attributes of her mother and father in the little girl. Claire’s eyes and overall facial features, Frank’s hair and nose. Adam waits for an answer from either Frank or Claire, not knowing what to say.

“Emily, this is our friend, Adam.” Claire explains to her daughter. Frank chuckles to himself, he doesn’t consider Adam Galloway his friend, but rather, his enemy. He comprehends what his wife is doing, but doesn’t see the need for it. Adam isn’t going to be a part of their lives after today, Emily
doesn’t need to become attached. However, introducing Adam to their daughter as her mother’s former lover doesn’t seem to be appropriate either.

“Dis my mommy, Cwaire,” Emily tells Adam and points to Claire. “And dis my daddy, Fwancis. He’s the vice pwesident.” The toddler gestures behind her to her father.

Adam laughs despite wanting to dislike Emily. The toddler is adorable and remarkably intelligent. “Emily, why don’t you play in your room for a little while? We have to talk to Adam.” Claire intercedes, not wanting this charade to last any longer. They have a job to do and she doesn’t want her daughter interfering. Emily’s mouth curls into a frown. She’s just getting to know her parents new friend and doesn’t appreciate being sent away.

“We can play later, Emily,” Adam promises her, even though he has no intentions of doing so. Emily glances behind her at her father, who nods.

“Okay, Adam, bye,” Emily scampers upstairs, narrowly avoiding Claire with a wet rag.

Frank, Claire and Adam go into his office and close the door. They don’t want Emily or any Secret Service agents to overhear their conversation. Claire watches Frank and Adam go to opposite sides of the room, with her in the middle.

“What the hell was that press conference?” Adam asks. He doesn’t want to waste time talking to Frank and Claire about the affair. The less time he spends in Washington, the better.

“I told you, we didn’t want to make it seem like we were colluding. The press would’ve seen right through that,” Claire explains.

“Then you should’ve let me know what you were planning to do.” Adam feels duped by the Underwoods. He wants them to offer him a way out and actually keep their word. Frank is already tired of this conversation. If Adam doesn’t want to take their help, then he is on his own.

“Let’s move on, what’s done is done. We need to figure out a way to move forward,” Frank steps in.

“What do you want me to do?” Adam is willing to hear what Frank and Claire have to say. Not that he will agree to do it, but at least he will know what they are planning.

“We need you to lie to the press and say you made the affair up because the price of your art has stagnated,” Claire tells him.

“You want me to take responsibility for the affair? You were the ones who dragged me into this, Claire!” Adam exclaims.

“We are trying to help,” Claire says back.

“That’s a fucking joke, Claire.”

Frank lifts off the wall, he won’t let anyone speak to Claire that way, not in front of him.

“Do not talk to my wife that way.” Adam redirects his anger away from Claire to Frank.

“Oh, your wife? What does that even mean to you?”

“Do not mistake any history you might have shared for the slightest understanding of what our marriage is or how insignificant you are in comparison.” Frank says to Adam. A smirk adorns Claire’s lips. She loves her husband for sticking up for her, and for them. Adam never stood a chance when it came to Frank, and it’s time for him to know that.

Adam looks from Frank to Claire. It’s clear she is on her husband’s side and always will be. He has one more move to make, which he didn’t want to use, but he doesn’t see an alternative.

“How about I tell the press that I am actually Emily’s father? How do you think your daughter would react when she sees that?”

Frank’s eyes darken as he balls his hand into a fist. Adam has no right to speak about Emily. Claire clenches her jaw and tilts her head up, refusing to let Adam’s comment about her daughter get to her. She tried to protect Adam from Frank by acting as an intermediary, but he crossed a line with bringing up Emily.

“If you mention one word about our daughter to the press, I will bury you.” Claire mutters. Adam is putting on a convincing act, but Claire realizes he would never do that to her. He isn’t built like her, like Frank. He couldn’t live with himself knowing he potentially destroyed a child’s life, especially
“You have a choice to make. She has my eyes, don’t you think?” Adam asks Claire, just to antagonize her. Frank takes a step forward, fully intending on decking Adam.

“Francis, go check on Emily,” Claire instructs her husband. Adam doesn’t need to be on camera with a black eye. The press will assume it came from Frank, which will lead to more fallout.

Frank leaves without another word, glaring at Adam the whole way. Claire shuts the door behind her husband, turning to Adam.

“I wouldn’t do that to you, but I would to him.” Adam hates Frank for doing what he couldn’t. Now that Adam has the upper hand on Frank, he will use it to his full advantage. Claire readjusts her dress slightly while she considers her options.

“All you have to do is make a brief statement to the cameras and all will be forgiven. If you even mention Emily in your statement, you will never sell a photograph as long as you live. You may be forced to leave New York.”

Adam has never witnessed this side of Claire before. He knew it existed, underneath all the armor she wears. The woman he loved is gone. All is left is this malicious woman making threats she has every intention of acting on. He hates her for putting him in this position and refusing to take any responsibility for it. She cheated, she lied, and yet, he is the one being punished for their affair.

“I’ve never hated anyone before. Now I know what that feels like.” Adam mumbles after a few moments of silence. A brief flicker of remorse chases across Claire’s features before it’s wiped away.

“It’s a terrible feeling, isn’t it?”

Adam scoffs at her and leaves Frank’s office, slamming the door behind her. Claire watches him leave silently. She has no desire to see him anymore. As long as he does what is asked of him, she has no reason to ruin his life. They can wash their hands of each other, just as Claire has done with countless others in the past.

Claire locates Frank and Emily in the little girl’s bedroom. Frank is sitting on a chair in Emily’s room while the toddler is standing in front of a whiteboard with scribbles on it.

“Mommy, you vote yes or no?” Emily asks when she sees Claire in the doorway. Claire furrows her eyebrows and glances at her husband for an explanation.

“We are playing Congress,” Frank explains with a smile. He is amused by his daughter’s grasp on what he does for a living. Claire shakes her head and leans on the arm of the chair.

“What am I voting for?” Claire asks, playing along. Emily rolls her eyes and points to the scribbles on the board, as if her mother could decipher them.

“Ice cream for dinner,” Emily says, her cherub face emanating innocence.

“I vote no,” Claire states, much to her daughter’s annoyance.

“Daddy say yes, and he vice president, so it’s yes,” Emily informs her mother with a smirk, identical to Claire’s.

“Did Adam leave?” Frank asks Claire.

“Yes. He won’t be a problem.”

“Good.”

Claire and Frank spend the rest of the day keeping Emily company, something they haven’t done together for a long time. Both of them are looking forward to returning to their daily routine tomorrow. They can agree they love their daughter, but they weren’t meant to be stay-at-home parents.

By dinnertime, Adam agreed to do an on-camera about-face. He admitted to lying about the affair, just like Claire thought he would. Emily spots Adam on the TV before Claire and Frank can intervene.

“Hey, mommy, look! Dat’s Adam! What he doin’ on TV?” Emily asks before taking a sip of milk. Frank turns off the TV, not wanting their daughter to see any more coverage.

“He was helping us with something, remember?” Claire reminds Emily without going into much
detail about how that is happening. Emily can be spared the details. The toddler nods and is
distracted by her father stealing some food off her plate.

Later that night, Frank and Claire are relaxing in bed, with Emily sandwiched between them. Frank
is absentmindedly rubbing Emily’s back while working on his laptop. Claire is flipping through
articles on her iPad, wanting to see how Adam’s statement was received.
“How’s it looking?” Frank asks.
“We should be fine. It will die down by tomorrow, as long as nothing else comes up.” Claire shuts
off her iPad and takes off her glasses.
A saturated silence falls onto the couple, each trapped by their own thoughts. Frank closes his laptop
and sets it on the nightstand. Claire reaches over and grabs his hand, squeezing it softly.
“Thank you, Francis.” Frank glances over at his wife, wondering what she is thanking him for.
“For what?”
“For being so protective of me and Emily. I know what Adam said couldn’t’ve been easy for you.”
Frank nods in understanding.
“I never liked or wanted children. I made that very clear to you when we got married. When you got
pregnant, we readjusted. I never thought I would love her as much as I do.”
Claire’s lips curl into a smile. She feels the same way. She never wanted to be a mother, mostly due
to her complicated relationship with her mother. As her pregnancy progressed, she warmed up to the
idea. She became determined to raise her daughter the opposite of how she was raised, regardless of
how Frank felt. Luckily, he was on board with giving their child a loving home with parents who
loved each other, something both of them never had.
“You are a good father,” Frank leans over carefully and presses a kiss to her lips.
“Emily is lucky to have a mother like you,” He says sincerely and pinches her cheek. He watched
Claire doubt herself today because of the scandal, but it didn’t tarnish her willingness to protect
Emily however she can. Claire sheepishly ducks her head and lets her hand fall away from his,
draping it over Emily instead.

The scandal died down relatively quickly after Adam’s admission to falsely making up the affair.
Emily returned to school and Claire and Frank returned to work the next day. They refocused their
attention on making sure Raymond Tusk and Remy Danton suffered for dragging their marriage
through the mud. Some people still believe the allegations are true and remain perched outside the
Underwood townhouse to picket.

“No, you aren’t hearing me, we have to show the Chinese we cannot be messed with,” Frank says to
the room. President Walker called an emergency cabinet meeting to discuss the escalating tension
with China due in large part to Raymond Tusk.
“I see what you are saying Frank, but we need to have options in case the Chinese won’t play ball,”
Walker says back. Frank bites back a sigh. Walker always chooses the safest option when he should
be demonstrating the country’s strength.

Before Frank can object, a Secret Service bursts into the room, heading his way.
“We are in the middle of a meeting,” Frank tells the agent.
“I’m sorry Sir, but I thought you should know we arrested someone outside of your home with an
explosive device. We have moved your wife and daughter to a secure location, but you need to come
with us.”

A/N 2: Next chapter, the Underwoods’ deal with the threat to their lives and Frank gets closer to the
Oval. Reviews make me happy and write faster. Thanks for reading!
A/N: Welcome back and thank you for all the lovely reviews you left me. This chapter starts before the previous one began and goes from there. Also, for the time being, I'm really adhering to the last few episodes of season two, with a couple of minor changes. I hope you like it, enjoy!

Chapter Four
The sound of someone stomping up the stairs is enough to wake up Claire. Her hand blindly navigates over to the other side of the bed, but it’s cold. She assumes whoever is coming up the stairs is Frank, and will scold him for being so loud when he enters their bedroom. To her surprise, Meechum pops his head in, worry marring his usually neutral face. On instinct, Claire pulls the comforter up higher on herself, not wanting their head of security to see her dressed in a nightie.

“Ma’am, you and Emily need to come with us,” Meechum says, his eyes looking anywhere but her. He is as uncomfortable as she is, if not more.

“Why?” Claire is not waking up her sleeping toddler for some minor incident, unless it’s something serious, she is staying put and so is Emily.

“We’ve arrested someone outside your home with an explosive device. We need to get you and your daughter to a secure location, now.” Meechum has witnessed firsthand how stubborn Claire can be. He will forcibly remove her and Emily from their rooms if he has to.

Claire’s hand ghosts over Frank’s side of the bed. He didn’t come home from work and she hasn’t heard from him, which is atypical. Frank always lets her know if he is going to be late.

“Francis?” Claire asks Meechum, biting her lip in anticipation of his response.

“He got pulled into an emergency meeting at the White House. Someone is notifying him now. We really need to get you two downstairs, ma’am.” Claire nods and watches Meechum half-shut her door to give her a modicum of privacy. She climbs out of bed and swings her robe over her shoulders, cinching it tightly around the waist.

Claire crosses the hall to Emily’s room with Meechum a step behind her. She eases open the door of the toddler’s room, being careful not to wake her up. Undoubtedly, the chaos in the basement will cause her daughter to stir, but she wants to prevent that for as long as possible. Claire carefully picks Emily up from her crib and grabs her favorite stuffed animal. She has no idea how long they are going to be sequestered in the basement, but they will figure it out as they go. Emily lays her head on Claire’s shoulder, not rising from her slumber.

“Close the door,” Claire whispers to Meechum and trails behind him downstairs. Once they get down in the basement, Claire gently sets Emily down on the couch and sits beside her.

“No, you aren’t hearing me, we have to show the Chinese we cannot be messed with,” Frank says to the room. President Walker called an emergency cabinet meeting to discuss the escalating tension with China due in large part to Raymond Tusk.

“I see what you are saying Frank, but we need to have options in case the Chinese won’t play ball,” Walker says back. Frank bites back a sigh. Walker always chooses the safest option when he should be demonstrating the country’s strength.

Before Frank can object, a Secret Service bursts into the room, heading his way.

“We are in the middle of a meeting,” Frank tells the agent.

“I’m sorry Sir, but I thought you should know we arrested someone outside of your home with an explosive device. We have moved your wife and daughter to a secure location, but you need to come with us.”

Frank rockets out of his seat and follows the Secret Service agents to an awaiting vehicle. He yanks his phone out of his pocket and dials Claire. His stomach knots up when he receives her voicemail.

“Claire, its me, you need to call me back,” Frank says and hangs up the phone. He contemplates calling her again, but the ride from the White House to their townhouse is only fifteen minutes. His wife hopefully left her cell phone in their bedroom amidst everything happening around her.

Claire glances around at the Secret Service agents hurriedly whispering to each other, occasionally
stopping to look at her and Emily. She forgot her phone upstairs and doubts someone will let her go get it. Sleep will not come until Frank is here with them, there is nothing for her to do except wait for him.

Frank bursts through the townhouse, pounding down the stairs, sighing in relief when he sees the back of Claire’s head. Claire spins around and carefully gets off the couch, so she won’t jostle Emily. She steps into his awaiting arms, hugging him silently. They separate when a Secret Service agent approaches them.

“What’s the latest?” Frank asks. Claire and Frank follow the agent to their main staging area in the townhouse.

“We identified the suspect as former military,” the agent says and tilts the computer screen for the couple to see. “He was carrying a duffel bag full of explosives as well as a vest strapped to his chest. He also claims he sent the letter to the Capitol.”

Frank and Claire glance at each other, each thinking about the interview she was forced to give by herself because of the threat a few months ago.

“It looks like he really wanted to take me out for good.” The agent nervously looks from Frank to Claire.

“Sir, this wasn’t about you. When the agents were interrogating the suspect, he said his wife cheated on him and this was a message for you.” The agent stares directly at Claire. She feels her husband’s hand on her shoulder, skating it down her arm. He is attempting to capture her attention, to reassure her that this isn’t her fault when they know it is.

The interview. Adam. And now this. The mistakes Claire has made, the number of times she has put her family in danger keep adding up. Frank will try to tell her they couldn’t predict a madman would come to their house with explosives, but he wouldn’t have a motive if it wasn’t for her.

He watches remorse ripple across her features and tightens his grip on her arm. His eyes find hers, forcing her to look at him instead of at Emily sleeping in the next room. This is not your fault, he silently communicates to her.

“Oh my God, it was me,” Claire whispers to herself more than Frank.

“Yes, you were in the intended target,” Agent Rockwell reiterates. Frank glares at him for making his wife feel worse. The agent takes the hint and backs off, pretending to be summoned away by someone.

“Claire… Claire…” Frank glides his hands down her arms, coaxing her attention. “I’ll stay.” He doesn’t give a damn if Walker needs him right now. Claire and Emily are more important than some imaginary crisis in China.

Claire shakes her head, she doesn’t want him hovering over her, reassuring her of something that isn’t true. She would rather come to terms with this on her own.

“No, you need to get back.” Hurt flickers across his face for a brief moment and then dissipates. He knows Claire better than anyone. She isn’t shutting him out, she just isn’t ready to share her feelings with him yet. “Francis, I’ll be fine, honestly.”

He gives up his pursuit and leaves her to speak to Agent Rockwell and Meechum.

“I want you to stay with Claire and Emily at all times, do not let them out of your sight,” Frank says directly to Meechum. He is the only agent Frank can trust at a time like this. After arguing with the agent in charge, Frank goes over to Claire. She has migrated to the couch, sitting next to Emily. His hands cup her shoulders, causing Claire to turn her head towards him. He wants to make sure she is truly okay with him leaving.

“I’ll be back as soon as I can,” Frank whispers in her ear. Claire reaches up to pat his hand as his lips press into her cheek.

“Okay,” Claire whispers back. Frank reaches over and gently brushes the back of his hand against Emily’s cheek. The toddler’s eyes flutter open and she sits up slowly, looking at her parents. Claire frowns, she didn’t want their daughter to wake up until it was safe to go upstairs.

“Mommy? Daddy?” Emily asks, her voice thick with sleep. Her blue eyes dance around the room, wondering why she is in the basement.

“Go back to sleep, Em. We just had to come down here to make sure we are safe,” Frank explains to
Emily. The toddler is still too dazed to ask her usual litany of questions. Claire watches Emily climb into her lap, her favorite rabbit clutched in her fist. “Call me when you know something.” Claire nods and accepts another kiss from her husband before he heads upstairs.

By morning, Claire and Emily are cleared to go upstairs. Frank still hasn’t returned home, choosing to sleep at the office instead. Claire makes the executive decision to keep Emily home from school for the day, just as a precaution. Unfortunately, Emily’s nanny isn’t available to watch the two-year-old all day, which puts Claire in a bind. She never wants to bring her daughter into work, but she isn’t left with a choice. Claire has an important meeting she can’t cancel with Jackie Sharp, the congresswoman who took over Frank’s position when he became vice president.

“Emily, we have to get dressed and go see your father,” Claire informs Emily while they are eating breakfast. Emily nods and smiles at the thought of seeing her dad.

Claire gets herself and Emily dressed and informs the Secret Service they are going to the White House. Once they arrive, Claire keeps a firm grip on Emily’s hand, not letting the rambunctious toddler run ahead like she wants to. Everyone they walk past is gawking at Claire and Emily and whispering amongst themselves. Claire didn’t want to bring Emily here for this precise reason. Her and Frank believe strongly in keeping their daughter away from what they do at the White House for as long as possible. The sooner Claire can get done with her meeting and bring Emily home, the better.

Claire makes sure her husband isn’t meeting with anyone before bringing Emily into the office. Frank looks up from his paperwork and raises his eyebrows in surprise at his daughter’s presence in his office. Emily runs over to her father, jumping in his lap.

“Oh honey?” Frank asks. He is a little confused as to why his wife didn’t inform him that she was bringing their daughter to the White House. They don’t keep things like this from each other. She picks up on his irritated tone, but chooses to ignore it for the time being.

“The nanny had an emergency and I have a meeting to get to. It’s only going to be for an hour, Francis,” Claire offers as an explanation.

“Hi Daddy,” Emily says to Frank, pulling on his tie.

“Hi, Em,” Frank mumbles, not breaking eye contact with his wife. Claire isn’t acting like herself at the moment, which is understandable given the last twenty-four hours. She still perceives what happened last night as her fault and will until she convinces herself otherwise. Pushing her will do nothing constructive, he just has to let her fumble through her emotions by herself.

“Emily, I will be back in an hour. Be good for your dad,” Claire informs their daughter and leaves without so much as another glance at her husband. Frank sighs loudly and watches the toddler scribble on his briefing sheet.

“Daddy, I help you be vice president, okay?” Emily asks her father. A grin chases across his face at the seriousness playing out on his daughter’s face.

“Alright Em, let’s get to work,” Frank says.

An hour later, Claire comes back to pick up Emily. She can’t help but be amused by the scene playing out before her. Emily is standing in front of Frank’s voting board while he is sitting at his desk, rattling off names of Congressmen and their stance on the bill so she can place them in the appropriate columns.

“Mommy, I helpin’ Daddy wif dis bill!” Emily says excitedly. Claire can see their daughter bouncing up and down with glee at the thought of assisting Frank with a piece of legislation, even if it’s just for pretend.

“Very nice,” Claire comments and sits in the chair across from her husband. Her hand reaches to find his, squeezing it to thank him for not pushing her earlier. A tendril of anxiety is tightly coiled in her stomach and its going to take her some time for it to settle. “Emily, we have to go. Your father has to get back to work.” Her and Emily have taken up enough of Frank’s morning. Emily is visibly upset about the thought of leaving and shakes her head.

“No mommy, I stay. You go,” The toddler insists and looks to her father for confirmation.

“Em, your mom’s right. I have to meet with the president and you have to take a nap,” Frank steps in for his wife. Claire and Frank have always found it easier to gang up on Emily before the toddler can
start a coup.
“You and Garrett? He’s willing to meet with you?” Claire asks with shock. It’s no secret that Frank and Walker have had a falling-out recently. Walker thinks Frank is trying an end-around to oust him from the Oval Office, which is true.
“For now.” A mischievous smirk tugs on Claire’s lips. She has an idea that will help Frank and destroy Walker at the same time. “What are you thinking?”
“You should tell Garrett that I want to keep Trisha in the loop about my meeting with Jackie Sharp.” Claire intends on using her newfound friendship with Trisha Walker to her advantage. Frank grins and stands up, pinching Claire’s cheek. Claire goes over and scoops up Emily, letting the toddler hug her father goodbye.
Claire brings Emily back to her office, setting her up with a movie on her iPad while she gets some work done. She hopes Trisha Walker received the message and will stop by. Sure enough, twenty minutes later, Claire receives a call from her assistant that the first lady is coming to see her. Having Emily here is the perfect coincidence. Trisha gravitated towards Emily when her and Garrett came over to the Underwood townhouse for dinner a few months back.
“Trisha, hi, I’m surprised Francis’ message actually got to you,” Claire says and stands up to greet the first lady. Trisha and Claire hug and sit across from the couch from one another.
“Garrett told me about what happened at your house last night. I’m glad you guys are okay.” Trisha Walker is a genuinely nice person, Claire almost feels bad about manipulating her.
“Thank you, I appreciate that. Emily, say hi to our guest,” Claire taps her daughter on the shoulder. Emily turns and notices the visitor in her mother’s office. Trisha brightens and waves the toddler over.
“It’s nice to see you, Emily,” Trisha says and picks the toddler up. Emily calmly plays on her iPad while sitting in the first lady’s lap. “You are so lucky to have Frank and Emily.” Claire’s ears pick up on the sadness of Trisha’s tone.
“Things with Garrett still aren’t going well?”
“No. I tried to take your advice, but with everything happening…especially with the investigation, it doesn’t help.” The Justice Department launched a full-scale inquiry into Walker’s administration possible ties to Chinese campaign contributions. Frank and Walker are both at risk, but the Underwoods’ are working to put all the blame on the president so he will be forced to resign. Claire believes Trisha can inadvertently help with that.
“Remember what I told you. Your marriage comes first. Garrett is going to need you now more than ever.”
“How is Frank handling all of this?”
Claire pauses to consider Trisha’s question. She has to play this carefully. If she oversells the strength of her marriage to the first lady, then it won’t be believable. If she pretends that the investigation has put a strain on her marriage as well, then Trisha will be less inclined to listen to her advice.
“He…we…have had some difficult conversations, but he is willing to do what is necessary for Emily and me. I trust he will make the right decision when or if it comes to testifying.”
“I wish I had your marriage, Claire.” Trisha admits softly while looking down at Emily sitting in her lap. This is just too easy, Claire thinks to herself and lightly smiles.
“We talk to each other Trisha, it’s as simple as that. We are a team. You and Garrett will get back there, but it’s going to take some time.”
“I know. We are still going to that therapist you recommended. He really has been helping.” Claire hides her excitement over Trisha’s admission. She cannot wait to dissect this conversation with Frank over a cigarette tonight.
An assistant pops her head in to inform the first lady she has another meeting to get to.
“Thank you, Claire for taking time to talk to me,” Trisha says. Claire nods and extracts Emily out of her lap. “Emily, I loved hanging out with you.” Emily waves goodbye and Trisha shows herself out.
“Mommy, we go home now?” Emily asks.
“Yes. Get your stuff together,” Claire instructs her daughter.
Later that night, after Emily is put to bed, Frank and Claire share a cigarette in his office. Claire is
perched on a windowsill, Frank is sitting across from her with his feet in her lap.
“Thank you for doing this,” Frank says after a few moments of silence. He takes a puff and hands
the cigarette over to his wife.
“All I had to do was get her alone. Emily being in the room with me helped a lot,” Claire says
nonchalantly while rubbing his feet.
“We haven’t talked about our little squabble today in my office,” Frank mentions, turning his head to
face Claire.
“I’d hardly call it a squabble.”
“Claire.” Frank’s noticed over the years of being married to Claire, when something is bothering her,
she gets evasive and dismissive. Claire sighs and chooses to stare out the window instead of looking
directly at him, knowing this is the only way she will be able to express what’s on her mind.
“I’m not a good mother.” It’s not a question and she’s not fishing for a compliment. To her, it’s a
mere statement of fact.
Frank is not shocked by Claire’s admission. He’s just surprised she is doubting herself, something
she has told him countless times never to do. This isn’t the first time she has made this declaration
either.
Frank drops his keys on the kitchen counter and starts combing through a weeks-worth of mail. He’s
shocked he beat Claire and Emily home, and then he remembers his wife mentioning something
about picking up groceries on their way. Twenty minutes later, Claire comes breezing through the
townhouse, clutching Emily tightly in one hand, the other holding groceries.
“Hey,” Frank says over his shoulder. He tilts his head when he hears Claire drop the bag on the
counter and close the gap between them, wordlessly plopping Emily in his arms. She doesn’t say
anything back, and leaves the kitchen, slamming the door to their bedroom upstairs. He glances
down at Emily, wondering what could’ve happened. They didn’t get into a fight that he’s aware of.
In fact, they barely spoke all day except for her texting him that she was going to be late.
“Dada,” Emily mumbles and pats his cheek. Frank sets Emily down on the floor and heads upstairs
to see what’s going on. He opens the door to their bedroom and sees a lit cigarette in Claire’s hand.
She is alternating between pacing and sitting on the bench in front of their bed.
“Claire?” He tentatively asks. She isn’t crying, but he can tell she is close to it. Claire takes a long,
shaky drag of the cigarette before responding.
“I lost her, Francis, in the grocery store.” Claire states and takes another puff. Frank sits down next to
her, taking the cigarette from her.
“She’s fine, Claire. She’s one, she probably thought you were playing a game with her.” Claire
shakes her head and reaches to take the cigarette away from him.
He has never seen Claire this freaked out before. She is trembling against him.
“My mother was right. We had no business having a child. I’m not a good mother, she was right.”
Frank sighs, he had a feeling the conversation Claire had with her mother when she was pregnant
would come up again. For as much as Claire told him she didn’t care, and it didn’t bother her, he
knew she was lying.
His hands reach up to cup both of her cheeks, compelling her to look at him.
“You are, Claire. I will talk about this with you if you want, but if you’re doubting yourself, I can’t
indulge that.” He repeats something she has told him before. They don’t regret decisions they’ve
made, they don’t dwell on the past.
Claire lets out a rattling breath and nods against his hands. He brings her in for a hug, gently rubbing
her back.
“Yes, you are.” He says as she hands the cigarette back to him. She focuses on the foot massage she
is giving him, needing something to distract herself.
“I’m damaged goods. I put Emily’s life in danger, Francis.”
“No, you’re not. We couldn’t have predicted any of this would’ve happened.” Claire shakes her
head and reaches to steal the cigarette back.
“That sounds like an excuse.” They are both well aware of the ramifications that come with being in
the executive level of politics; they can’t expect to go through their life unscathed.
“It’s a reality, Claire. Emily is fine. We are fine. There’s no reason for you to be doing this to yourself.” He brushes a kiss to her cheek and leaves her on the windowsill while he goes to take a shower.

Over the next few weeks, Frank and Claire meticulously plot to bring Walker and Tusk to their knees. Frank has been playing both sides, pretending to be an ally to Walker, all the while stabbing him in the back to further his own agenda. Claire has worked hard to preserve her friendship with Trisha, squeezing her for information to use against her husband. Eventually, Frank is forced to testify, as is Tusk, about their involvement in the Chinese money laundering scandal. Neither Frank nor Tusk gave up any worthwhile information, choosing to backchannel with one another instead. Finally, Frank was able to get Walker into a position where he had no choice but to resign, or be indicted and eventually, impeached.

“Mommy, Daddy, Meechy comin,” Emily says from her position on the couch. Frank and Claire are sharing a cigarette in their usual spot in front of the window. They typically never smoke together while Emily is awake, but with everything that has been happening lately, they haven’t had much time to spend together.

Claire and Frank turn their heads, seeing Meechum appear in the room. Frank hands the cigarette over to his wife and hops off the windowsill, wanting to hear what the agent has to say privately. Meechum whispers something in his ear and then exits the townhouse, waving goodbye to Emily on his way out.

Claire meets Frank in the dining room, stepping into his hug. She doesn’t need him to say the words, his hug is enough. They did it. Everything they have been working for over the past twenty-plus years is coming true.

“Mommy? Daddy?” Emily asks as she toddles into the dining room. Frank pauses to kiss Claire before kneeling down to pick up their daughter. Claire sets her hand on his shoulder blade and grins at Emily. Even though the toddler will have no clue what Frank tells her, it’s important they involve her in this pivotal moment in their lives.

“I am now the president of the United States, Em.” Frank tells his daughter and stamps a kiss to her cheek.

A/N 2: Next chapter is the start of Frank’s presidency and the difficult adjustments the Underwoods’ have to go through. Please leave me some reviews, they would make the best birthday present to me. Thanks for reading and I’ll see you again soon!
Chapter Five

A/N: Hi guys, welcome back! I originally planned on switching back and forth between this and State of Play, (see fanfiction.net) but it didn’t work out too well. While I think a little bit on a sequel, I thought I would update this finally. Before I forget, season 3 wasn’t my favorite, so I won’t be following the show as closely as I have in the past. Anyway, I just want to say thank you for the reviews and I hope you enjoy the latest chapter.

Chapter Five.
“Mommy? Daddy?” Emily asks as she toddles into the dining room. Frank pauses to kiss Claire before kneeling down to pick up their daughter. Claire sets her hand on his shoulder blade and grins at Emily. Even though the toddler will have no clue what Frank tells her, its important they involve her in this pivotal moment in their lives.
“I am now the president of the United States, Em.” Frank tells his daughter and stamps a kiss to her cheek.

“Mrs. Underwood? Mrs. Underwood?” Claire snaps to attention after the lady sitting across from her on the couch calls for her in a more exasperated tone.
“Yes, I’m sorry. Where were we?” Claire laces her fingers together at her knee and pretends to be more interested in this meeting.
“We can do this later if now is a bad time for you.” Claire shakes her head and compels a smile on her lips.

What this lady doesn’t understand is Claire would rather not have this meeting in the first place. She doesn’t care what color roses are in the foyer of the map room, but as the First Lady of the United States it seems this falls under her job description.

It’s only been a month since Frank assumed the Oval Office and Claire is still adjusting to her new role. She didn’t realize being the First Lady would be so boring. Claire would always see Trisha Walker scurrying from meeting to meeting, acting as if she had somewhere important to be. Now that Claire has her job, she realizes Trisha made the position seem much more exciting than it actually is. Claire used to be the CEO of her own company. She had actual things to do that mattered, not discussing floral arrangements in the White House that nobody would ever see.
“The pink roses are fine, they’ll be great for spring,” Claire says and stands up, signaling to her companion that this meeting is over. Luckily, the lady takes the hint and gathers up her supplies. Claire lets out a sigh as her assistant approaches her with the schedule for the day filled with more pointless meetings. The only reason Claire is putting up with this is for her husband. He agreed the night they moved into the White House she wouldn’t be stuck being just the First Lady for very long.
“I can’t believe you are the president now,” Claire whispers to him. Frank pulls the comforter up higher so it’s covering their bodies. His hand caresses her cheek, a smile chases across his lips. They have been working up to this moment for over twenty-five years, it’s surreal that it’s finally happening.
“You are the First Lady of the United States, a title I promised you, you would eventually have when we met.” Frank feels Claire nod in the palm of his hand, but her eyes evade his. “What’s wrong?”
“What if that’s all I’ll ever be?” Claire promised herself she wouldn’t bring her fears up tonight, but he asked, and she knows he won’t let it go until she speaks her mind.
“Are you unsatisfied?” His tone suggests hurt. He made her the most powerful woman in the free world and she is still asking for more from him.
“No. I just don’t want to waste any time we have in the Oval.” Frank smirks, they have spent less than twenty-four hours in their positions and Claire is already looking ahead.
“We will find something for you, I promise. You just have to be patient.” She nods and leans towards him to capture his lips in a quick kiss.
“You did it, Francis,” she whispers and looks up at him. The last few months haven’t been easy, but
it led them to where they wanted to be. "We did it," he corrects her and scoots closer to her in bed.

"I want you to cancel my lunch. I have to see my daughter," Claire tells her assistant as she hands back the schedule. She leaves her assistant and heads into the residences. Emily stayed home sick from school today and Claire promised her she would be back to check on her. Claire eases the door open to her daughter’s room, expecting the toddler to be sleeping. She’s surprised to find Frank sitting with Emily in a chair, reading her a book.

"Hi mommy," Emily says to Claire. Claire crosses the room and sits on the footstool, gently nudging her husband’s feet to make room for her to sit.

"I thought you were still meeting with the Republicans." Frank shakes his head. Claire nods in understanding. The meeting must not have gone well otherwise he wouldn’t be seeking out Emily’s company during the workday.

"They still don’t want to listen to the new job proposal despite our revisions. I sent them away, so I could spend time with Em."

Claire eyes her unusually quiet daughter who is curled into Frank, her eyes heavy with sleep.

"You will figure this out." She knows Frank wants this job bill to be the hallmark of his presidency, but the gridlocked government won’t allow him to move forward with it. With his first one hundred days looming overhead, Claire realizes how much pressure he is under to make his mark on history.

Frank reaches across Emily to pinch Claire’s cheek. His wife having confidence in him means a lot. He’s been having doubts about his ability to lead since ousting Walker last month. And now with the Republicans refusing to meet in the middle on his version of the New Deal, he needed to hear Claire’s voice more than ever.

"Daddy, I don’t feel good," Emily mumbles as she wipes her eyes. Frank picks up Emily and checks her temperature.

"She still has a fever," Frank tells Claire. Claire sighs and gets up to grab some medicine from the bathroom. When she returns, Frank is standing with Emily, ready to hand her to Claire.

"I’m running late for a meeting with Cathy, I should be back in time for a late dinner." Frank dusts a kiss to his wife’s cheek and daughter’s forehead.

Several hours later, Frank climbs into bed next to Claire. He didn’t make it to dinner, like she predicted. She didn’t care, but Emily wanted to see her father. It took a lot of bribing on Claire’s part for Emily not to walk into the Oval Office holding a plate of food for Frank.

"Hey, what are you looking at?" Frank asks while he drops his head on Claire’s shoulder. Claire tears her eyes away from her laptop to smile down at her husband.

"Doing some research on the State Department, I think Cathy is looking for a new ambassador soon."

Frank turns the laptop towards him and nods against the fabric of his wife’s pajamas.

"She mentioned something to me about it at our meeting. They are making an official announcement next week."

Claire shuts off her laptop and sets it on the nightstand next to the bed. They sit together in a comfortable silence for a few moments, trapped in their own thoughts.

"Is Emily feeling better?" Frank asks.

"Some. She was disappointed she didn’t get to see you at dinner. I told her there are going to be a lot of nights in the future where we don’t spend as much time together as a family." Frank nods, their daughter might be too young to comprehend everything his new job entails. All she notices is he isn’t around as often as he used to be.

"Does it bother you?"

"No. I expected this, and it doesn’t worry me."

The next night, Claire puts Emily to bed alone again for the second night in a row.

"Mommy, where’s daddy?" Emily asks. The toddler stands up in her crib, clutching her rabbit close to her body. Claire brushes a piece of cognac hair out of Emily’s eyes.

"Daddy is working. You can see him in the morning." As Claire says this to Emily, she realizes he probably won’t be around then either. Emily looks skeptical but accepts her mother’s answer. Claire brushes a kiss to the crown of her daughter’s head and closes the door behind her. She leaves the
residences to go into the Oval Office, stopping momentarily to grab a cigarette to surprise her husband with.

Claire doesn’t bother to knock as she approaches the office, spotting her husband hunched over the desk, carefully scrutinizing some paperwork.

“Hey,” Frank says when he notices his wife approaching him. She hops on the corner of his desk and smiles when he climbs up beside her, resting his hand on her thigh.

“Hey.” She places her hand on top of his, squeezing it before letting go.

“Emily asleep?”

“Yes. She’s been asking for you constantly, Francis. I’ve done all I can to stop her from marching into the Oval demanding your attention.” Claire isn’t saying this to make her husband feel guilty for being absent these past few days, she’s just informing him of the situation. Frank slowly nods and takes his glasses off.

“I know. I think we should bring her to the state dinner tomorrow.”

“Okay. I also brought you something.” Claire reaches into the pocket of her robe and pulls out the cigarette she stole from their secret stash. They gave up on quitting smoking, but only occasionally smoke as a way to spend time together.

Frank brightly smiles and hops off his desk to grab a cup that can double as an ashtray. Claire lights the cigarette and takes a drag before handing it over to her husband. She can see the tension slowly leave his body as he inhales.

“Any progress?” Claire asks after a few passes of the cigarette back and forth.

“Some. Not nearly enough.”

“What can I do?”

“I need to convince the Leadership to back me on this jobs bill. Having Jackie whipping votes will go a long way.”

“I’ll start working on her tomorrow. Goodnight Francis. Come to bed soon.” Claire hands him the cigarette and eases herself off the desk. She stamps a kiss to his lips on her way out.

The next morning, Claire blindly reaches over in bed for her husband, only to find balled up sheets. She opens her eyes and throws her robe over her shoulder, languidly stretching. Her ears perk up at the sound of her daughter’s musical laughter permeating the usually silent residence. Claire follows the noise to the kitchen, smiling softly when she sees Emily and Frank having breakfast together.

“No, Em. We are going to a state dinner, here, at the White House,” Frank corrects her. Emily nods and takes a sip of her milk. Secretly, Claire has her reservations about Emily attending the dinner tonight. State dinners are boring, even for her. The toddler is well-behaved, but there are limits. She can’t imagine Emily getting through the dinner without throwing a tantrum about not being allowed to leave the table. However, if her husband wants to spend more time together as a family, Claire won’t object.

“Alright, I got to go to work, I’ll see you two later.” Frank tells Emily and Claire. He knocks on the table twice and chugs the rest of his coffee before leaving. Claire gets Emily off to school and starts her normal litany of meetings.

Several hours later, Claire can confirm that tonight is not going to go well. Emily is being extremely stubborn and refusing to wear the dress Claire picked out for her.

“No, mommy! I not wear dat!” Emily protests, complete with crossed arms and a pouted lip. Claire doesn’t have time to wrestle with the toddler, she still has to get ready herself.

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“Yes, you are. Arms up.” Emily still won’t budge, repeatedly shaking her head back and forth. Claire bites her lip; her daughter is testing her already limited patience. “Emily, enough!”

Emily looks shocked at her mother’s sharp tone. She hardly gets yelled at by her parents, especially by her mother. The toddler reluctantly complies but gives Claire the stink-eye the whole time. Claire finishes dressing Emily and goes into her own room. Frank is in the process of changing into a
tuxedo.
“Francis, are you sure Emily can handle the dinner tonight?” Claire asks while reaching for her dress hanging in the closet.
“Why? Is she still feeling sick?”
“No, but I just spent a half an hour trying to convince her to wear the dress we chose for her.” Claire says over her shoulder as she changes. Frank comes up behind his wife to zip up her dress, his sigh spilling onto her neck.
“I want her to be there, Claire. This is our first state dinner as a family in the White House.” Claire nods in understanding and swallows her rebuttal. She turns and ties his bowtie. Her hands slide down his chest as he looks her up and down.
“Stunning,” he mumbles. Her sparkly, azure strapless dress accentuates her figure while bringing out the color of her eyes. Claire’s arm loops through his as they walk into the living room. “I’ll get her.” Frank disappears into Emily’s room, coming out with the combatant toddler moments later. Emily has her arms twined around Frank’s neck, her head resting on his shoulder.
“We should get going,” Frank tells Claire. Their hands blindly find each other’s, and they walk down the stairs to the crowd waiting for them below. Emily turns her head away from the camera flashes, choosing to tuck her head into her father’s neck. Claire appeases the photographers momentarily but ignores their requests to coax Emily into taking a picture. If the toddler doesn’t want the attention, she won’t force it. She wants to avoid a toddler meltdown at all costs.
“Alright, that’s enough,” Frank tells the photographers and sets Emily down, so he can greet the guests, including the guest of honor, the president of Egypt. Emily holds onto Claire’s hand tightly, not wanting to stray far from her parents.
When the three of them go to sit down, they realize they aren’t sitting next to each other. Frank is at the head of the table surrounded by the president of Egypt and members of the Leadership. Claire and Emily are at the far end of the table with assorted cabinet members. Claire bites her lip, she can’t comprehend why Frank wanted her and Emily here if they won’t see each other.
“Mommy, I wanna sit by daddy,” Emily informs her mother. Claire’s eyes dart up to Frank, she needs his help explaining to their daughter why that might not be possible. Frank bites his lip and shrugs.
“Alright, Em. You can sit on my lap,” Frank tells his daughter. It’s not ideal, but it will keep Emily’s tears at bay. Emily grabs onto her father’s hand and they walk to his seat. Claire takes her seat, mouthing a quick thank you to her husband for willing to keep the president and their daughter occupied at the same time.
Dinner goes smoothly until desert. Claire can tell Emily is getting antsy in Frank’s lap. Unfortunately, this dinner isn’t close to being over and the toddler can go nuclear at any moment. Frank is having trouble distracting the toddler, who is having none of what is going on around her.
“I wanna go by mommy,” Emily tells Frank and squirms in her seat. Frank is in the middle of an important conversation about middle eastern politics with the Egyptian president and can’t escape.
“You and your wife have a very cute daughter,” the Egyptian president says with a forced smile. Frank politely smiles back just as Emily starts to cry.
“If you would excuse me for a second, I need to make sure she’s okay,” Frank tells the president and stands up, holding Emily. Emily is sobbing into his shoulder as he walks towards Claire.
“Take her upstairs, she’s done.” Frank demands and plops a crying Emily into her lap. He walks away without saying another word, rejoining the Egyptian leader at the other end of the table. Claire is stunned by her husband’s sharp tone and slowly turns her head, glaring at Frank. He has never spoken to her that way before and it doesn’t sit well with her.
She voiced her concerns about Emily attending tonight’s dinner and he ignored her. And exactly what Claire thought was going to happen, happened. Although, Claire won’t say anything tonight. She will merely put Emily to bed as requested and shelve this conversation for a later date.
“Come on, Emily, let’s go,” Claire whispers to her daughter. She excuses herself, scooting back her chair while glancing at her husband. He is still wrapped up in his conversation, not even noticing she and Emily are leaving. Claire approaches Meechum who is standing guard outside the dining room.
“Tell the president Emily and I have gone to bed for the night.”
“I will, ma’am,” Meechum says and playfully tickles Emily under her chin to get her to smile. Claire puts Emily to bed, jumps in the shower, changes into her pajamas and climbs in bed. She will let Frank wonder where she is and why she didn’t come back downstairs.
Frank keeps glancing down the table at Claire’s empty chair. He isn’t sure why she didn’t return to the party after putting Emily to bed. He motions for Meechum to come over.
“Meechum, did the first lady say when she was coming back?”
“Sir, she told me to tell you that she’s gone to bed for the night, along with your daughter.” Frank’s mouth curls into a frown.
“Okay, thank you Meechum.”
A few hours later, after most of the guests have left, Frank retires to the residence with Meechum on his tail. He quietly opens the door to Emily’s bedroom, confirming the toddler is sleeping. Then, he goes into the master bedroom. Claire is still awake, perusing through her iPad. Frank briefly ignores her to change out of his tux and into more comfortable pajamas. Claire watches him silently. She will let him start the conversation they need to have.
“Why didn’t you return to the dinner?” Frank asks as he climbs into bed next to her. Claire slides her glasses off her nose and shuts off her iPad. She notices he doesn’t sound mad, just genuinely curious. And for whatever reason, that irritates her even more. Her teeth skim over her bottom lip as she tries to formulate her response. A huge part of her knows this conversation is only going to lead to an argument, but they don’t keep secrets from each other. If something is bothering her, as per their agreement, she should speak up. Instead, something completely different pops into her head.
“While you were busy with Emily, I spoke to Catherine. She offered me the ambassador position, Francis. And I want it.” Frank shifts in bed so he is looking directly at Claire. He didn’t think she would bring up a job offer.
“That’s great Claire, but if you are shuttling back and forth to New York, how are we going to handle taking care of Emily? I can’t be there as much as you to watch her.”
Claire’s mouth opens in surprise. His response angers her, but it also proves she isn’t overreacting about the new unwanted shift in their dynamic. Now more than ever, all she feels like is just Emily’s mom and Frank’s wife and that isn’t enough for her.
“Sweetheart, I’m not being unreasonable.” Claire slowly shakes her head at him. Yes, you are, she thinks to herself. She understands being president doesn’t make him the most present father, but he has never before expected her to shoulder the majority of parental responsibilities.
“Francis, when we got married we agreed to be partners…in everything. Marriage, raising a child, careers, everything.” Frank furrows his eyebrows, he doesn’t follow what his wife is trying to say.
“And we are, Claire.” A deep sigh tumbles out of Claire’s mouth. It’s clear to her she is going to have to explain to him the reason she is so upset.
“Well, it doesn’t feel like that lately. I don’t feel as if we are equal partners.” Frank’s eyes widen slightly. What his wife is saying is news to him. Although, if he’s being honest, he isn’t sure how to correct their current situation. His hand reaches out to pinch her cheek.
“We will find something for you.” But not this, Claire hears the unspoken end of his sentence. She recoils from his touch; his placation doesn’t interest her.
“I don’t need your blessing to do this, Francis.” Claire states and eases out of their bed. There is no way she’s sleeping next to her husband after their conversation. She needs time to think, as far away from him as possible.
“Claire,” Frank calls out, fully expecting her to ignore him. She momentarily stops at the doorway and turns to face him.
“I will raise a child with you, Francis. I just won’t raise one for you. Goodnight.” Claire doesn’t give him the opportunity to respond and shuts the door behind her.

A/N 2: I’m dying to hear your thoughts about this chapter, especially the argument at the end. I’m not sure what parts of season three you guys want me to touch on, so please let me know. And, I’ve been debating whether to include Tom Yates in my story. I hated the whole Tom/Claire story line
they were pushing, but he was an important part of season three. As usual, thanks for reading and please leave a review on your way out.
Chapter Six

A/N: As always thank you for the reviews, I love getting them and hearing your feedback on all my stories. I just wanted to mention that I will be working off an accelerated timeline of season three because I don’t want to bore you with every single detail of a boring season. Anyway, please enjoy this latest chapter.

Chapter Six.
“We will find something for you.” But not this, Claire hears the unspoken end of his sentence. She recoils from his touch; his placation doesn’t interest her.
“I don’t need your blessing to do this, Francis.” Claire states and eases out of their bed. There is no way she’s sleeping next to her husband after their conversation. She needs time to think, as far away from him as possible.
“Claire,” Frank calls out, fully expecting her to ignore him. She momentarily stops at the doorway and turns to face him.
“I will raise a child with you, Francis. I just won’t raise one for you. Goodnight.” Claire doesn’t give him the opportunity to respond and shuts the door behind her.
Claire crosses the hall, quietly disappearing into the guest bedroom. A small part of her is hoping that Frank would follow her, insist that they need to discuss this issue between them further. However, he knows her better than anyone. Pushing her to talk again will only widen this chasm between them. For now, the best thing they can do for their marriage is to spend the night apart and regroup in the morning.
In the master bedroom, Frank is still sitting in bed, dumbfounded by the argument he just had with Claire. He had no idea she didn’t feel like an equal to him. Her goals are just as, if not more, important to him than his own. He didn’t mean to diminish her excitement, but his more pragmatic side took ahold of him. They don’t want Emily to be raised by a nanny, but if their jobs prevent them from being there, then that’s exactly what will happen. Although, if this is what Claire truly wants, it’s his job to do everything in his power to make sure she gets it. Lord knows she has made plenty of sacrifices for him over their two-decade long marriage.
Sleep evades her. She can’t stop replaying their argument over and over in her mind. Every time she does, the angrier she gets. He had no right to make her feel guilty for wanting to advance her career. Not after the way he treated her tonight. Being the president doesn’t excuse him from being an absent father. If anything, his response only makes her want the ambassadorship even more, just to spite him.
Claire readjusts in bed for the hundredth time and shuts her eyes, forcing herself to sleep.
“Good morning, how’d you sleep?” Frank asks as he brings coffee for the both of them to the dining table. Claire shakes her head and pushes the coffee away. Her morning sickness won’t tolerate the taste of coffee, let alone the smell.
“Fine.”
“I heard you throwing up this morning.”
It’s been three days since Claire told him she’s pregnant. He still hasn’t told her whether he wants to keep the baby or not. She would rather not go through morning sickness if she doesn’t have to.
“We should make a decision, Francis.” The earlier she can get this done, the less chance anyone picks up on her pregnancy. If it were leaked to the media, then they will have no choice but to keep the baby.
“What do you think we should do?” Frank asks because he genuinely wants to know his wife’s opinion. With her first pregnancy, an abortion felt like the smartest and only option at that point in their lives. They were too wrapped up in advancing their careers to even consider having a child. Now, they are older and more well-adjusted in their roles.
“I want this baby, but I don’t want a baby you don’t want. I don’t want the responsibility of raising
this child to fall solely on me.” Claire understands he never wanted children, but she does, and this is their last chance. He nods, taking what she has to say into consideration. His hand leaves the rim of his coffee mug and navigates to hers, squeezing it.

“If this is something you really want, then I will be on board with it. I want you to be happy, Claire.” She is his best friend and biggest supporter. He would be selfish to deny her this one thing.

“Thank you, Francis.” A grin chases across her lips. She would’ve got an abortion if Frank really wanted her to, but she’s thrilled he finally caved.

“Claire?” Frank whispers. The light streaming through the crack in the door is enough to wake her up. She slowly opens her eyes, wondering if she overslept and missed Emily waking up. Her eyes dart over to the clock, which reads a little after three in the morning. She can hear Emily softly crying and motions for Frank to bring their daughter over.

“What’s wrong?” Claire asks Emily, momentarily ignoring her husband for the time being. Their argument isn’t absolved, but their daughter’s distress takes precedent over them. Frank leans on the bed and Emily goes over to Claire, hugging her mother tightly.

“I-I-I f-f-fell mommy,” Emily explains. Occasionally, Emily attempts to escape out of her crib. Sometimes, the toddler miscalculates her landing and ends up hurting herself.

Claire quietly sighs in relief, she thought Emily overheard her brief argument with Frank. Emily sniffs loudly and glances around, realizing she’s never been in this room before. She doesn’t know why her parents aren’t in the same bed like they usually are.

“Did you hurt yourself, Emily?” Claire asks, turning on the lamp to inspect her daughter for any injuries. Emily holds up her arm, which has no visible bruise on it.

“Right here,” Emily informs her parents matter-of-factly. Frank hides his grin with his hand.

“It looks okay to me, but we might have to get rid of your arm just to be sure,” Claire says teasingly. Emily frowns and wiggles her arm out of her mother’s grasp.

“It fine now, it hurted before. Why you in here mommy?”

Frank and Claire’s smiles dissipate at their daughter’s question. They forget sometimes how intelligent and observant the two-year-old can be. Emily doesn’t need to be aware of their argument nor the ramifications of it. It’s their job to keep their toddler blissfully unaware of the tension between her parents. Claire’s eyes nervously dart over to her husband, silently asking him to assist her in lying to their daughter. They wouldn’t be in this predicament if it weren’t for him.

“Your mom wasn’t feeling well, and she thought it would be better to sleep in here, so I wouldn’t get sick.” Frank tells Emily. A grin chases across Claire’s lips. She is grateful Frank didn’t rat her out to Emily.

“Oh! You get betta’, mommy. Daddy, let’s go. Mommy needs sweep.” Emily tugs on her father’s hand, waving to her mom over her shoulder. Frank closes the door behind him and puts Emily back to bed.

The next morning, Frank is gone before Claire wakes up. She isn’t surprised. Whenever they argue, they don’t grovel; they avoid each other. They don’t apologize to each other. One of them, typically Frank, finally confronts the issue and they find a way to correct it and move on.

Claire and Emily do their usual morning routine before the toddler leaves for school.

“How’s your arm Emily?” Claire asks as she takes a sip of her coffee. Emily puts down her sippy cup and looks at her arm.

“It not hurt no more. You feel betta’?”

“I do. Thank you for asking.”

Claire sends Emily off to school with an army of secret service agents and she begins her day. Instead of going to her usual meetings, Claire spends her time studying for her upcoming Senate confirmation hearing. She’s going to have to prove she’s capable of everything the ambassador position entails if she wants the Senate to vote her through.

Later in the day, Frank and Claire run into each other in the kitchen. He’s been keeping tabs on his wife from afar, wondering why she’s been absent around the White House. If they aren’t having lunch together, they typically cross paths which one another at some point in the day. Then again, they aren’t getting along, so she probably went through great lengths to avoid him.
“Hi,” Frank begins while adding peanut butter to his sandwich. Claire briefly glances up, giving him a minute smile of acknowledgement.

“Hi.” They don’t deal with awkwardness well, especially when it stems from their relationship with each other.

“Where’s Em?” Frank is surprised their daughter isn’t a step behind Claire. The toddler likes to be around her parents whenever she can.

“I put her down for a nap.” Her emphasis on “I” doesn’t go overlooked by Frank. He lets out a sigh and stops putting together his lunch.

“Look Claire, what I said to you last night was unfair. I shouldn’t’ve assumed anything when it comes to Emily.” He avoids saying the words “I’m sorry.” Claire finds as little meaning in those words as he does. She meets his eyes for the first time since last night.

It’s important to her that he doesn’t make it seem like he is giving his approval. She doesn’t want it or need it.

“This isn’t something I want on a whim, Francis. I thought long and hard about what being an ambassador would mean for me, for us.”

“And I think Catherine would be lucky to have you. We will figure something out when it comes to Emily, homeschool her if necessary.” Claire rounds the counter to step into his arms. It means something to her that she doesn’t have to fight him any more on her potential new position.

“My senate confirmation hearing is tomorrow already. Catherine didn’t want to waste any time.” Claire mumbles into his neck. They separate after a few moments and go to opposite sides of the counter.

“I have complete confidence in you. If you need help preparing, let me know.”

They are partners in everything, as Claire reminded him last night. It’s not uncommon for them to run speeches or thoughts by each other, valuing one another’s opinion over anyone else’s.

Claire nods and watches him leave with his peanut butter sandwich in tow. She finishes putting her own lunch together and retretes into the guest bedroom where she has her materials spread out.

The next day, Frank brings Emily into the Oval Office while Claire is at her hearing. He has a television brought into the office so Emily can watch her mother.

“Daddy! Look! Mommy’s on here!” Emily exclaims while jumping up and down. She grabs her rabbit and sits on the couch. The toddler has no clue what her mother is talking about, but she’s excited to see her. Frank wraps up his phone call and sits next to Emily.

“Your mom is going to have a new job, Emily. These people are asking her questions to make sure she is able to have the job.” Frank explains in the simplest terms. Emily nods in comprehension and goes back to watching Claire.

“Daddy, you pwsident. You give it to her,” Emily says with a furrow in her brow. Frank laughs at his daughter’s understanding of the way the world works.

“I can’t do that, Em. Other people besides me have to give it to her.”

Frank and Emily watch Claire effortlessly answer question after question the Senate throws at her until Senator Mendoza, a Republican Frank has tussled with before, takes the stand. Claire attempts to answer the question, but stumbles on her response. The senator pounces and Frank winces as his wife tries to recover.

“If you would let me finish instead of grandstanding, Senator!” Claire snaps as the camera flashes intensify.

“What’s wrong, Daddy?” Emily asks. Frank glances down at the toddler. He didn’t think his daughter was even listening to what was going on the screen.

“Nothing, Em. We have to go see your mom.” Frank turns off the television and picks up Emily.

After Claire’s answer there’s no way the Senate is going confirm her ambassadorship. All the hard work his wife put in just got unraveled by that one question. The media is going to rip her apart and it will be his job to support her in any way he can.

By the time Frank and Emily reach Claire, the Senate already voted to deny her the ambassador position.

“Mommy,” Emily runs over to Claire. Frank is a few steps behind their daughter. He can sense how
disappointed she is about the outcome even though she is attempting to conceal it. Claire scoops Emily off the ground and holds her close to her chest, needing to be comforted by her daughter. Frank rubs her shoulder, giving her a one-armed hug.

“We will find something else for you,” He whispers to her. It’s not what she wants to hear, but it’s the only thing he can offer to her at the moment.

“I have to go make a statement,” Claire tells him and sets Emily on the floor.

“Do you want us to come with you?” Frank asks. Claire shakes her head, the sooner she can get through this, the better. Emily is a little perturbed that her mother set her down right away.

“Is mommy mad?” Emily asks. Frank picks the toddler back up again and stands in front of another television outside of the press room to watch his wife give her statement.

“No, Em. She’s sad because she didn’t get the job.” Frank informs his daughter.

“Oh. She get anoder one right?”

“I’m sure she will.” Frank says just as Claire comes out of the room, ignoring the reporters shouting questions at her. She won’t entertain them. Not now, when the rejection is too fresh.

“Hi mommy!” Emily excitedly waves her mother over.

“It’s time for your nap, Emily.” Claire says, resting her hand on her husband’s wrist. She appreciates his support, even if he is secretly happy she didn’t get confirmed to be an ambassador. Her fight isn’t over yet, she is still going to convince him to give her the job regardless of what the Senate thinks. Politically, it won’t be the best move for him, but she doesn’t care. Being the first lady is not what she wants to do for the remainder of time they are in the White House. It won’t be good for her or their marriage if that’s all she will be.

Instead of putting up her usual fight, Emily jumps to the floor and follows Claire to the residences. Emily holds her mom’s hand the entire way there, waving to Meechum on their way past.

“Mommy, don’t be sad. I pfink you are da best,” Emily mumbles to Claire while she is being placed in her crib.

“Thank you, Emily. I love you,” Claire whispers, pressing a kiss to her daughter’s forehead. It means everything to her to hear Emily say that.

“Daddy get you a job, he say so,” Emily informs Claire, her voice heavy with sleep. Claire half-smiles, she wishes she had her daughter’s naivete.

“I’m sure he will. Get some sleep,” Claire closes the door behind her and goes into the guest bedroom, eager to pack up her study materials. She calls a secret service agent into the room to assist her.

“I don’t care where you put them, I just don’t want them in here,” Claire tells the agent. Once the agent leaves with all of the materials packed in boxes, Claire lays down on the bed, wanting to take a nap herself. All the stress of the past few days has gotten to her, and she wants some solid, uninterrupted hours of sleep.

By dinnertime, Claire and Emily wake up from their nap.

“What do you want for dinner, Emily?” Claire asks as she hoists the toddler onto her hip.

“Noodles!” Emily exclaims while clapping her hands. “Daddy, we havin’ noodles!”

Frank comes into the residence, to Claire’s surprise. He almost never makes it to dinner. She is happy to have him here and to see him make more of an effort to spend time together as a family.

“That’s exciting. I’ve been looking for you all day, where’d you go?” Frank asks Claire.

“I took a nap after I put Emily down. I didn’t sleep well last night.” Between Emily’s interruption and the anxiety of the Senate hearing, Claire got a combined four hours of sleep.

Twenty minutes later, Claire, Emily and Frank sit at the dining table. Emily is preoccupied with tearing into her noodles while Frank and Claire chat amongst themselves about their days.

“Do you think the Leadership will believe you when you say you aren’t running for reelection?” Claire asks as she swallows a sip of her wine. Frank shrugs and takes a healthy sip of his own wine.

“I’m not sure. They made it seem like their idea. I think they will be surprised when they figure out it’s all bullshit.”

“Francis.” Claire scolds and gestures at Emily. Even when they think their toddler isn’t listening, she is and will repeat whatever she hears.
“How are you dealing with the Senate hearing?” Claire twirls her food around with her fork. Truthfully, she thought she’d be a shoe-in for the position and now, she isn’t sure what to do. The media isn’t being kind to her at all, calling her everything from a bitch to a terrorist for her comment about the military being irrelevant during her hearing.

“I want the U.N. job, Francis. The Senate goes home in two weeks and I want a recess appointment. I’ve prepared for it and I can do this. And after I’ve done the job I know I can do, I’ll be positioned to do anything I want.”

“Claire…” Frank begins, but she cuts him off.

“Now I’ve checked with the White House counsel, there is precedent for a recess appointment after a rejected nomination, only once, but you wouldn’t be the first. And I know you will take a hit politically and I know people will think I don’t deserve it, they’ll have doubts in me, but what if this is as far as we get? What if it’s all over in eighteen months? I don’t want to wait or settle for something else when I’ve put in all this work into con…”

“Okay. I’ll do it.” Frank says simply, much to Claire’s shock. She had a whole speech planned out because she expected him to say no right away. He sets his hand on top of hers, giving it a gentle squeeze. Frank’s confused as to why Claire thought he needed all that convincing. Even if he was against the ambassadorship from the start, he would still do anything he could to help her get it. He’s not vindictive when it comes to Claire. He loves her and wants her to succeed.

“Thank you, Francis.” Claire says softly. She appreciates he is taking a big risk for her. There is still no guarantee she will acquire the position, this could easily all backfire on them.

“Of course.”

Two weeks later, Claire is at the United Nations building in New York. The Senate decided to confirm her during a recess appointment and this is her first official trip as an ambassador.

“Daddy is going to keep an eye on you while I’m gone today, Emily,” Claire tells her daughter earlier that morning. This is the first time Claire is spending the day away from Emily since she was born. By the time Claire gets back, Emily will hopefully already be in bed, if her husband does his job correctly.

“You come back, right?” Emily asks nervously. She isn’t too keen on the idea of her mother leaving and wishes she could come with. Claire brushes a loose strand of hair out of her daughter’s eyes, “Of course. I will be back tomorrow. You be good for Daddy, okay?” Emily nods and walks over to her backpack set on the couch.

“I come wif you,” Emily declares and smiles at Claire. Claire shakes her head just as Frank is coming out of their bedroom.

“No. You have to stay here and make sure Daddy does his job,” Claire tells her daughter, winking at Frank to play along.

“You can help me be the president for the day while mom is gone, Em.” Frank adds in to sway her daughter. No matter what, Emily is not coming with Claire to New York. This is the first of several trips Claire is going to have to take as part of her new job. The sooner Emily gets used to her mother being gone, the easier it will be for her to leave.

“Fine. I help you, Daddy,” Emily says begrudgingly and gives her mom a hug goodbye. Frank kisses Claire’s cheek before she leaves.

“I’ll be back by tonight.” Claire informs him and takes Emily’s hand. She is going to drop the toddler off at school on her way to the airport.

By the time Claire gets back from New York, Frank is in his study, skimming through a speech. She quickly does a check on Emily, to make sure their daughter is sleeping.

“Hey, how’d it go?” Frank asks when he sees his wife entering his study. She sits in her usual spot on his desk before responding.

“Fine. I think Catherine feels awkward about me being there.”

“Do you think it will be a problem going forward?”

“I don’t know. She believes I only got the position because you gave it to me and it’s going to be hard to convince otherwise for the time being.”

“Well, we knew that was a risk when you got the job.” Claire nods in agreement.
“What did you and Emily do while I was gone?” Frank smiles as he looks back on the day.
“Our daughter was pretending to be the first lady while you were away.”
“Oh no,” Claire says through her laughter. “I bet that was fun for her.”
“She loved it. I let her hang out in the Oval for a while and she gave her opinion on certain things from time to time.” They fall into a comfortable silence, not needing to fill the air with conversation. “How’s the America Works plan coming, Francis?” Claire asks after a few moments of quiet. Frank lets out a distressed sigh and shakes his head.
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“How’s the America Works plan coming, Francis?” Claire asks after a few moments of quiet. Frank lets out a distressed sigh and shakes his head.

“Which is?” Claire asks hesitantly. She thinks she knows the answer but is afraid to hear him say it. “I’m going to officially announce my run for presidency, Claire.”

A/N 2: Next chapter we will see the Underwoods’ on the campaign trail as a new face joins them. I’m dying to know your thoughts, so please leave a review on your way out. Thank you for reading and I should have a new chapter up shortly.
A/N: Hey guys, welcome back! I want to thank you, as I do every chapter, for the lovely reviews I receive. I just want to warn you guys that I will be covering every aspect of season three in this story, even the parts I hated as a Frank/Claire fan. I do skip some of the boring stuff and shift some stuff around, but I will keep most of the show’s plot for continuity purposes. Anyway, I hope you enjoy this latest chapter.

Chapter Seven

“How’s the America Works plan coming, Francis?” Claire asks after a few moments of quiet. Frank lets out a distressed sigh and shakes his head.

“Congress is fighting me every step of the way. I think there’s only one thing I can do to make sure it gets off the ground.”

“Which is?” Claire asks hesitantly. She thinks she knows the answer but is afraid to hear him say it.

“I’m going to officially announce my run for presidency, Claire.”

The tiniest of frowns curls Claire’s lips. She will never admit this to her husband, but she wishes he wouldn’t run. Campaigning is an added strain on their already complicated relationship. Between his presidency, campaigning, her ambassadorship and watching Emily, she’s afraid they are going to spread themselves too thin. It’s no secret he wants to be in the Oval for as long as possible, and her after that, but she doesn’t want to compromise their family for a desk and a title. She just doesn’t know if he could say the same.

Frank is carefully scrutinizing his wife’s face. Claire internalizes her emotions. He has to search for context clues to give some insight into how she’s feeling. A twitch of the mouth, wringing of the hands or even a swish of the bangs could indicate anything short of indifference. He won’t pursue the nomination without speaking with her about it first. Although, his mind is already made up. It would have to take some serious convincing on Claire’s part for him to reverse his plans.

“Okay,” Claire mumbles a few moments later. She maneuvers around him to ransack his desk, searching for his secret stash of cigarettes. If this is going to work, they need to be in constant communication with each other. They work best when they are in sync with one another. They haven’t campaigned together since before Emily was born. It’s going to take a second to get back in that mindset.

“Okay.” Frank says back. He was expecting a little resistance on his wife’s behalf. However, if he thinks about it, as long as she’s not just the First Lady, she would be more open to the idea of him extending his presidency.

“I want Emily’s appearances kept to a minimum.” Claire will not offer their daughter to the press on a silver platter. She comprehends that as part of their family, Emily will have to be there, but they can limit her contact with the press.

“Of course.” Frank lights the cigarette and takes a long drag. His wife sometimes forgets he values privacy as much as she does. The media is going to write about Emily regardless, it comes with the territory, but the Underwoods’ won’t give them material to play with. The last time Emily was put in front of the camera, some journalists accused Frank and Claire of exploitation. The allegation left a sour taste in Claire’s mouth and she won’t let it happen again. They pass the cigarette back and forth between themselves quietly for a couple moments.

“I think I have an idea of how I’m going to get America Works off the ground,” Frank says abruptly. Claire takes a drag of her cigarette and coaxes him to elaborate. “Tom Yates.”

“Who is Tom Yates?” Frank turns on his computer and types until he finds an article. “You know that Monument Valley game I play on my iPad?”

“You mean the game I bought for Emily?” Frank frowns, but nods.

“It’s much too complicated for her. Anyway, I stumbled across this incredible review of Monument Valley and this guy wrote it. I want to hire him to write a book.”
Claire furrows her eyebrows, not following her husband’s line of thinking. “Not about us.” It’s not a question on Claire’s behalf, but a statement. Her husband is out of his mind if he thinks she will allow some outsider to write a tawdry book about their lives. Frank shakes his hand, dismissing the thought immediately. “No, of course not. I want him to capture the idea behind America Works, to sell it and me to people.”

Claire’s eyes skim the article, thinking about Frank’s proposal. She isn’t sold on the idea. Letting somebody else into their circle is dangerous, especially now that they have Emily to consider. Tom Yates, whoever he is, could easily betray them and torpedo Frank’s campaign. “You should meet with him first, Francis. See if he’s even up to the task.”

“I already have a meeting set up for tomorrow.” Then why are we having this conversation? Claire thinks to herself but knows better than to say it. Frank continues to make decisions without consulting her and it upsets her. It undermines their relationship. She just doesn’t know how to articulate that to him without starting another argument. “I’m turning in. Goodnight, Francis.” He lightly pinches her cheek and stamps out the cigarette. “Goodnight.”

Their relationship has taken a turn since moving into the White House and Frank isn’t sure if it’s for the better. There has been a lot of beneath-the-surface tension between him and Claire they’ve both noticed but haven’t commented on. He could tell she wasn’t thrilled about him running for president. Instead of telling him how she actually feels, like she used to do, she’s pretending, which is something he doesn’t want or need her to do. If she has any objections, he would want and expect her to speak up.

“Tom, hello,” Frank says as he steps into the Oval Office. He’s running late, as per usual, to his meetings. Tom Yates is waiting in the office, staring out the window. “Mr. President, it’s an honor to meet you,” Tom says while the pair shake hands. The writer thought it was unusual when Remy Danton, Frank’s chief of staff, approached him at a book signing, but he wasn’t about to turn down a meeting with the president.

They sit on opposite sides of the couch and awkwardly fumble through a way to begin the meeting. “To be honest, Sir, I’m not really sure why I’m here. Do you want an autographed copy of Scorpio or something?” Frank laughs and shakes his head. He told Remy to keep the reason for requesting a meeting with Tom intentionally vague. Frank wanted Tom to decide for himself if he wanted to travel to the White House.

“No. I read your review for Monument Valley and I couldn’t stop thinking about it. I want you to do something for me Tom.” Tom doesn’t say anything and gestures for Frank to continue. “I want you to write a book about a new jobs program I’m trying to get off the ground.”

They are interrupted by Claire striding in and sitting next to Frank. She learned from Doug when her husband and Tom planned on meeting. Tom is frazzled by the arrival of the first lady and offers his hand to shake. “Tom Yates. It’s so nice to meet you, Mrs. Underwood.” Claire shakes his hand and merely nods in response. “We were just about to discuss the parameters for the book,” Frank informs Claire. “Good. I came in at the perfect time.” Claire doesn’t exactly understand what Frank is asking for, so she would like to hear it explained to Tom to see if he gets what is asked of him.

Tom is staring intensely at Claire. So much so, that even Frank feels uncomfortable. He isn’t the possessive and jealous guy when it comes to his wife, but he’s protective of her. Claire observes Tom staring at her and subconsciously scoots closer to Frank. She has no idea who this person is or what they are capable of. If they are going to let him into their lives, they need to set some ground rules first. “Francis…could you explain to Thomas what is expected of him?” Claire asks her husband. “Of course. Like I said, Tom, I am about to announce my candidacy for presidency and I want people to believe in the new jobs program I created, America Works. I want you to write a book that
sells that idea.”

Tom breaks his staring contest with Claire to look at Frank. He slowly nods.

“I haven’t finished anything in under a year,” Tom says. “I’m not trying to deter you. I just want to let you know how I write.”

“We wouldn’t want you to write anything you are uncomfortable with,” Frank says for him and Claire.

“If you are comfortable with me observing and talking to you and letting me write it the way I want to write it, then I think we can come to some sort of arrangement.” Claire glances at her husband. This is what he wanted, she is going to let him make the decision.

“I think we can agree to that. You just need to understand that we are very private people, as well as our daughter, and we don’t want a story about us. If we wanted that, I would’ve contacted some hack at Us Weekly.” Frank wants to make it very clear to Tom that he is to be writing about America Works and not the innerworkings of his relationship with Claire. They don’t want the American public to get an inside look on how their marriage operates.

“I understand. When do we begin?” Tom asks. He isn’t going to turn down a chance to work with the president to write a book he wants to write. If it happens to dabble into the president’s personal life at times, well that’s just artistic license.

“I will have my scheduler contact you to set up some meetings where we can talk. You will be traveling with my press corps at times as well.”

“I look forward to it Mr. President. Mrs. Underwood,” Tom shakes both of their hands again and shows himself out. Frank migrates over to his desk, with Claire following behind him.

“I’m wary of him, Francis,” Claire states. She didn’t like the way he was looking at her, like he could see through her. It made her incredibly uneasy.

“I am too. I think we should give him a trial run and see what he comes up with. If we don’t like it, then we can cut ties with him.” Claire nods in agreement. She is letting her husband dictate what he wants to do with Tom. There should be no reason as to why she needs to speak with him. After all, the book should be about America Works, which is Frank’s creation, not hers.

“How’s it coming with Cathy?”

After Claire admitted to him last night about the initial awkwardness between her and Catherine, he’s been trying to keep tabs on the situation. He will only step in if Claire asks him to, which she likely never will.

“It’s not so much Catherine that’s bothering me as it is this peacekeeping resolution we are trying to work out.”

“What can I do?” A smile flutters across Claire’s face. She loves it when they ask each other that question. It shows that they are still working together as a team to solve a problem.

“We might need Russia to commit to peacekeeping troops, but I will keep you updated.” Claire gets up from the chair across from his desk and walks out of the Oval.

Later that night, Claire, Frank and Emily are seated at the table eating a late dinner. Claire is impressed her husband is shifting around his schedule, so he can be in the residence for at least one meal.

“Daddy, I colwered you a picture today, but I gived it to mommy,” Emily informs her father and wolfs down a bite of her chicken.

“You did? I’ll have to get it from her.”

“You put it in your office,” Emily tells her father with a confident smile.

“I’ll do that. Emily, your mom and I have some news we wanted to talk to you about.” Emily picks up on the seriousness of her father’s tone and sets her fork down. “I am going to run for president.” The toddler frowns her eyebrows and takes a sip of her milk.

“Daddy, you are pwesident,” Emily says so matter-of-factly it makes Frank and Claire laugh.

“I know, Em, but to stay president you have to run. You have to get people to vote for you.” He’s afraid this will all go over the two-year-old’s head. Emily nods as if she understands the electoral system completely.

“Okay. I vote for you, Daddy. Mommy too,” Emily tells him. “Oh! And my fwiends do too.” The
two-year old begins counting on her fingers, showing her dad how many people have his vote. “We will win Washington for sure,” Frank says and winks at Claire. Their daughter is far more intelligent than they could’ve hoped for.

“You and I have to go to some events with Daddy and tell the people to vote for him,” Claire informs Emily. Hopefully, they can keep the events Emily attends to as few as possible. The toddler has already missed enough preschool to warrant a phone call from the principal. Also, Claire wants to keep Emily’s media exposure to a minimum, so their daughter can have a relatively normal life.

“I tell dem, Daddy.” Emily declares with a serious face. Frank pinches his daughter’s cheek. “I appreciate that, Emily. I know you and your mom will do a great job for me.”

“When we go, Daddy?” Emily asks. She is ready to convince the American people to vote for her father right away.

“Our first event is in a few weeks. We have some time, Em.” Frank has even begun to think about his stump speeches yet. He is hoping his speech writers will work on something for him. Not that he is worried, he loves campaigning. Feeding off the energy from the crowd is enough to fire him up.

Two weeks later, Frank, Claire and Emily are arriving at their first campaign stop outside of D.C. They wanted to set up an event as a trial run of sorts before they go to Iowa for the primaries in a few months.

“Mommy, look at dem,” Emily says with her eyes wide. She is backstage with her parents, watching her father run through his speech. Claire pokes her head out to see what Emily sees.

“They are all here for your daddy, Emily.” Claire tells her and picks her up, so the toddler can get a better vantage point. Frank approaches them, placing his head on Claire’s shoulder. She turns, grinning slightly at him. He’s excited, she can tell. Politics is something he was born to do. Her, on the other hand, would rather sit back and watch him work the crowd.

“Ready?” Frank asks her, slipping his hand through hers. Claire nods and readjusts Emily higher on her hip. The three of them walk out together, waving to the screaming crowd.

“Hi!” Emily yells to everyone, bouncing in her mother’s arms. Frank grazes a kiss to Claire’s cheek and she approaches the microphone. Emily takes the opportunity to play with Claire’s necklace while her mother talks.

“We want to thank everyone for coming out today!” Claire says into the microphone. Over the years of campaigning with her husband, she’s learned the drill. She provides the introduction while Frank gives the speech. “We would love to introduce your president, Frank Underwood.” Frank approaches the podium and delivers his well-rehearsed stump speech. Predictably, the crowd goes wild and begins chanting “Underwood.” Frank turns around and grabs Claire’s hand, swathing his arm around her waist. Claire and Frank wave to the crowd with their arms wrapped around each other.

After they leave the stage, the three of them go over to the crowd to shake hands. Emily insists on being put on the ground. Claire obliges since she’s been holding Emily for the past hour. Meechum, along with other Secret Service agents, hover close by, ready to act if something happens.

“Thank you for coming,” Frank repeats for the hundredth time as he shakes an older woman’s hand. He can see Claire doing the same farther ahead of him and Emily high-fiving some people a little beyond his wife.

Emily scampers ahead after hearing someone call her name. She glances back at her parents who are far too preoccupied with the crowd to see what she is doing. The toddler approaches the man who is holding her favorite lollipop.

“Hi,” the man says as Emily walks up to the edge of the barricade. “Hi, I Emily Underwood,” Emily mumbles. “Do you want this?” The man asks her, holding out the lollipop. Emily nods and stands on her tiptoes to reach it, but she can’t.

Claire glances around her immediate area, wondering why she can’t hear Emily talking. She turns her head and sees her daughter reaching for a lollipop in a stranger’s hand. The man is smiling and reaching down to touch Emily. Claire is curious as to where the Secret Service is when all of this is happening.
“Francis!” Claire exclaims and briskly strides over to where Emily is. Frank immediately stops what he is doing and rushes over to Claire. In over twenty years of being married to Claire, he has never heard her scream like that before. Claire doesn’t want to cause a scene, but she needs Emily to get away from this person. Frank is right behind her. They both are trying to avoid scaring Emily and causing a melee in the crowd. “Get away from our daughter,” Frank warns the man while Claire picks up Emily discreetly. Meechum comes over with two other agents, guns drawn. Emily starts crying and grips Claire tighter. The toddler isn’t sure what is happening, but she thinks she is in trouble. “Mr. President, Mrs. Underwood, great to meet you. I was just giving Emily here a treat.” The man says. Frank shakes his head and gestures to the Secret Service to arrest him. He doesn’t know how this situation escalated to the point of Emily almost being kidnapped. Agents are supposed to be protecting them at all times. “Francis, we need to go,” Claire says to him quietly. He nods and turns to look at his wife. She looks terrified and is doing a terrible job of trying to conceal it. He places his hand on her shoulder and waves to the crowd. “Thank you all for being here. My family and I need to get back to the White House,” Frank announces to the crowd and the family are quickly shepherded into a waiting car. Emily hasn’t stopped crying since leaving the event. “I sorry Mommy and Daddy,” Emily says through her tears. She grips the edge of Claire’s coat from her car seat. “Em, you didn’t do anything wrong. We were just trying to keep you safe,” Frank tells their daughter. Emily nods and sniffs loudly. Claire is noticeably silent but is sitting as close to Emily’s car seat as possible. Frank reaches over and laces his fingers through hers. When they arrive back at the White House, Claire tells him she’s going to put Emily down for her nap. Frank doesn’t go into the Oval right away. He wants to see what his wife is going to do after she puts Emily to sleep. “I love you, Emily.” Claire tells her daughter as she is putting her in the crib. “I wuv you too, Mommy,” Emily whispers. Claire stays in Emily’s room longer than she typically does, watching her daughter sleep. When she closes the door to Emily’s room a little while later, she notices her husband skimming through some papers on the couch in the living room. She doesn’t acknowledge him, and instead, goes into the bedroom. Frank hears Claire close both doors and he throws down his paperwork, following her into the bedroom. She is sitting on the pre-made bed, staring off into the distance. Frank approaches her, shoving his hands in his pockets. He gets directly in her line of sight, so she has no choice but to address him. “The Secret Service agents should’ve been there,” Claire whispers. “I know.” He sits down on the bed next to her, wrapping his arm around her shoulder. Claire leans toward him, placing her hand on his chest. She sniffs softly and feels him tighten his grip on her. “She’s our little girl, Francis.” “She’s okay, Claire.” He knew the whole situation rattled his wife more than she was willing to admit. It scared him too, to know someone came so close to Emily without their knowledge. If Claire didn’t see someone reaching for their daughter, she could’ve been gone. Claire pulls back, wiping the corner of her eyes. Her husband is right. Emily is safe, there’s no reason to be so emotional. The outcome could’ve been a lot worse. “We almost got our daughter kidnapped. My opponent will have a field day with that,” Frank comments. Despite the situation, Claire smiles. Of course, her husband would jump to the political ramifications of it all. “I’m sure Mother saw what happened on CNN and will tell me what a horrible mother I’m turning out to be.” “Should we bring her to the Fourth of July fireworks celebration tomorrow?” Frank asks. It would be good for them to be out together as a family, but after today, he wants to proceed with caution.
“We shouldn’t let fear get in our way.”
“Good.” He figured his wife would see it that way. “I have to get back to work.” Frank gets off the bed and Claire stands up as well.
“Francis, we are going to need to issue an Executive Order to commit troops in Israel,” Claire tells him out-of-the-blue. It’s been weighing on her mind all day. She meant to tell him sooner, but with what happened with Emily, she didn’t get the chance.
“Congress won’t be happy, but I already spat in one eye, might as well spit in the other. Consider it done,” he says and leaves her in the bedroom.
The next night, Emily, Claire and Frank are in the limo heading to the Fourth of July celebration on the White House lawn. Emily is playing on her iPad while Frank talks to the Russian President Viktor Petrov.
“Viktor, we’d be honored to accept the invitation…yes, I agree there’s much to discuss. I’ll have my office reach out to the Kremlin, we will find dates that work for both of us.” Frank exchanges pleasantries and then hangs up the phone.
“Hold off on the vote?” Claire asks.
“Until we sit down but keep it in our back pocket.”
“Michael Corrigan?” Claire is referring to the American in prison in Russia for violating their homophobic law.
“They’re going to release him when we visit. You made a miracle happen.”
“We did.” Claire glides her hand across his, grinning when he captures her hand.

A/N 2: Alright, that’s it for now! I am torn about bringing Emily along when her parents go to Moscow. I’m not sure if I want her to witness her parents fight or experience it when they get back. Please help me decide by leaving a review. Thanks for reading!
A/N: Hello everyone, and welcome back! I’m sorry that it’s taken me nearly two months to update this, but sometimes life just gets in the way. Nevertheless, I am trying to manage my time, so I can give you guys more frequent updates. Thank you, as always, for the reviews you’ve left for me. I love them. I do paraphrase some scenes from season three here, but you’ll get the gist of what I’m trying to do. Please enjoy the latest chapter!

Chapter Eight.

“Hold off on the vote?” Claire asks.
“Until we sit down but keep it in our back pocket.”
“Michael Corrigan?” Claire is referring to the American in prison in Russia for violating their homophobic law.
“They’re going to release him when we visit. You made a miracle happen.”
“We did.” Claire glides her hand across his, grinning when he captures her hand.

Michael Corrigan is dead. Michael Corrigan is dead because of Claire. Her main job—her only job since landing in Moscow was to convince him to read a prepared statement from the Kremlin. Sure, the statement was blatantly homophobic and offensive, but if he said it, he would’ve been able to come home with her, Frank and Emily. Frank would’ve gotten the terms of the agreement he spent hours going over with President Petrov. All would’ve been resolved. And then Claire falls asleep. She is exhausted. The three of them arrived in Moscow mere hours earlier. Frank was immediately corralled into a room with Petrov and the nanny they brought along took Emily sightseeing. Claire didn’t want Emily to come at all because she knew they weren’t going to spend much time together, but she didn’t want to leave her daughter at home either.

“And den…boom! BOOM!” Emily is excitedly reenacting the fireworks display on the short ride back to the White House. Frank and Claire let out a miniscule laugh at their daughter’s enthusiasm. Today was a good day. They were able to sort out the conditions for an American prisoner’s release and get one step closer to the peacekeeping mission Claire’s been wrangling with for the past few months. And the best part is, they were able to accomplish it together as a team. No fighting, no tension.

“Daddy, you putted me to bed,” Emily orders when they get back to the White House residences. Lately, Emily has shown favoritism towards her father. Claire doesn’t mind it. The toddler doesn’t get to see Frank very often anymore. It gives Claire a chance to step away from Emily for a little bit without feeling guilty.

“I think I can do that. Give your mother a kiss goodnight,” Frank says while swinging his blazer over his shoulders. Emily steps into Claire’s hug and presses a kiss to her cheek. Claire sets Emily down and watches her scamper ahead, continuously looking back to check if Frank is a step behind her.

A half an hour later, Frank locates Claire in the master bathroom, buried under a barrage of bubbles.

“Emily go down okay?” Claire asks when Frank bends down, leaning on the lip of the tub for leverage.

“A ghost of a smile washes over Claire’s face as she remembers Emily excitedly gripping her hand, completely captivated by her father’s address to the nation. Frank reaches over, capturing Claire’s cheek with the pad of his thumb.

“What should we do about bringing Emily to Moscow?” Claire shrugs. She already has an answer, but appreciates her husband asking instead of making a decision for them.

“I don’t know Francis. I would rather have her with us, but we won’t have a lot of time to spend with her.” Unfortunately for Frank and Claire, they don’t have an extended list of potential babysitters lined up. It’s either them or their nanny who can watch Emily.

“I think we should bring her with. I would hate to leave her here if something were to go wrong. We
are a long plane ride away.” Both of them are still protective of Emily since the campaign incident the day before. If something like that were to happen again, there isn’t much Frank and Claire could do from Russia.

Claire gives him a clipped nod. She agrees with his line of thinking. What happened yesterday scared both of them more than they let on. They would rather have their daughter with them than at home, thousands of miles away with a nanny.

“I’ll be in my study,” He says and stamps a kiss to her cheek.

When Claire wakes up, she sees Michael Corrigan’s lifeless body hanging from a bar on the window. Her scarf, a scarf Emily (Frank) gave her for Christmas is wrapped around his neck. Russian guards immediately surround her, trying to coax her out of the room. All Claire can do is stare at Corrigan and think of the political complications his suicide has caused. It wasn’t supposed to end this way. Michael Corrigan was never meant to be a casualty in the United States’ never-ending conflict with Russia.

Outside the holding cell, Claire leans up against the wall, attempting to swallow the bile rising in her throat. She can’t get the image of Corrigan’s body out of her mind. A Russian guard approaches her, silently asking what she wants to do. She needs Frank and Emily. Although, she isn’t sure how Frank will react to the news of Corrigan’s death. Will he blame her? Is he wrong if he does?

“I need to see my husband,” Claire hears herself say, but doesn’t register the words springing out of her mouth. The guard nods and escorts her back to the Kremlin.

Frank is waiting with Petrov. As soon as he sees her, he rushes over, scooping her up in his arms. She breathes a sigh of relief. Whatever happens, they can figure this out together. They separate, but Frank still has his hand on her shoulder. He is eyeing her closely, wanting to make sure seeing Corrigan’s body didn’t break her.

“Where’s Emily?” Claire asks. She can’t explain this urge to see her daughter. All Claire wants to do is be with Frank and Emily on a plane back to Washington. She wants to forget about ever coming here. Frank glides his hand up and down her arm. Petrov steps back, wanting to give the Underwoods’ some privacy.

“She’s being brought back here as we speak. I promise she’s okay, Claire.” He brings her closer, so her frame is flush against his. Claire is trembling against him; her body is still in shock from seeing Corrigan.

“I will still honor the terms of the agreement.” Petrov speaks up from behind them. Frank glances at him over his shoulder, nodding in appreciation. He is surprised by this, but then realizes by Corrigan taking his own life, Petrov got exactly what he wanted. If Corrigan died any other way while in Russia, the United States would hold this country accountable and retaliate.

“I would like to say a few words, to his family…if that’s alright.” Claire says quietly, addressing Petrov directly.

“Of course, we will prepare a press conference. We can wait until your daughter gets here. Excuse me.” Petrov leaves them in his office. Frank captures Claire’s attention by resting his arms on her shoulders.

“You don’t have to do this. You and Emily can go back to the plane and lie down.” He doesn’t want to subject Claire to any questions about what happened in that prison cell. Frank knows his wife did everything she could to persuade Corrigan to say the statement, but it wasn’t enough.

“No. I want to, Francis.”

“Okay.”

Twenty minutes later, Emily comes bursting into the room, looking for her parents. Claire picks her up and holds her tight to her body. Emily is a little surprised by this sudden display of affection from her mother but drops her head on Claire’s shoulder regardless.

“Emily, something bad happened and we have to go home,” Frank explains to their daughter. Claire eyes him curiously, wondering what he is going to say to Emily. Emily lifts up her head and glances at her father, her azure eyes wide.

“Why Daddy?” Frank shakes his head, he doesn’t want Emily to know the specifics any more than Claire does.
“It doesn’t matter. Your mom and I need to finish up something really quick and then we will see you on the plane.” They would rather Emily not be involved in the press conference.

“Okay Daddy.” Claire sets Emily on the floor and the toddler rejoins her nanny. Frank clasps Claire’s hand and they walk out into a room where the Kremlin set up the press conference. What Frank doesn’t expect Claire to do is publicly shame Petrov in front of the media, blaming the Russian president for Corrigan’s death. He’s never known his wife to react so emotionally. Frank regrets involving Claire in this press conference. Clearly, it’s too soon after Corrigan’s death for her to be thinking rationally.

Any and all attempts to salvage the terms of his and Petrov’s agreement fail. Frank is livid with Claire. The months they spent working on this accord fell through because she wouldn’t listen to his advice and take some time to process everything. Instead, she chose to ignore him and embarrass the Russian president in his own country. Did she really think that was going to bode well for them? They spend the first hour of the plane ride back home arguing with each other. Frank is unwilling to sympathize with Corrigan and blames Claire for not doing her job effectively. Claire is angry at Frank for refusing to see Corrigan’s reasoning for committing suicide. They go back and forth, trading insults with one another until they finally deliver the fatal blow.

“I never should have made you ambassador.” Frank says dismissively. Shock dances across Claire’s features for a mere second before a more apathetic expression locks into place. “I never should have made you president,” Claire shoots back and exits the office, leaving a stunned Frank in her wake. When she steps out, Tom Yates is hovering outside, waiting to speak to Frank. Undoubtedly, Tom must’ve heard their argument. Hell, the whole plane, including Emily, must’ve heard them screaming at each other.

“Hi Mrs. Underwood,” Tom says uncomfortably.

“What are you doing up here? Shouldn’t you be in the back with the other media?” Claire doesn’t want this stranger having a front row seat to her crumbling marriage. Whatever clearance Frank gave Tom doesn’t extend to her and Emily.

“I was waiting to speak to your husband.” Good luck with that, Claire thinks to herself. They are interrupted by the nanny poking her head in.

“I’m very sorry Mrs. Underwood, but Emily won’t stop crying. She wants to talk to you or the president.” Claire bites her lip. She has a terrible feeling Emily overheard her parents fighting and wants to be comforted.

“Oh, I’ll be right there. Thomas, Francis is incredibly busy right now,” and incredibly pissed off. “Of course, sorry to disturb you.” Claire waits until Tom starts moving towards the back of the plane before heading into the private bedroom to be with Emily. She can hear Emily sobbing from the other side of the door. Claire bends herself for the difficult conversation she has to have with the toddler. The nanny excuses herself and Emily scurries over to Claire.

“What’s wrong?” Claire asks, moving a few wayward strands out of her daughter’s cerulean eyes. She’s internally crossing her fingers that Emily saw a bug in the room or anything but hearing her parents argue. Claire can’t promise Emily that everything will be okay between her and Frank. The fight they just had isn’t going to resolve itself quickly like usual. It’s a scab they are going to pick at a few more times before letting it heal. If it will heal at all.

Emily hugs Claire tightly and cries into her shoulder. Claire rubs her daughter’s back soothingly, biting her lip in anticipation.

“Daddy yell, Mommy,” Emily whispers. “Why he mad?” A knot tightens in Claire’s stomach. Hopefully, the toddler doesn’t put the pieces together that her dad was yelling at her mom. Claire wants to keep pretending like everything is normal for as long as possible.

“Remember when Daddy said something went wrong before we left?” Claire asks, waiting for Emily to nod in understanding. “Well, Daddy is mad about that. He shouldn’t be yelling though, but he didn’t mean to scare you, Emily.”

“He be quiet,” Emily says, holding her index finger up to her lips. Try telling him that.
“Yes. He shouldn’t be yelling, but I think he’s okay now. Let’s get some sleep.” Besides the brief nap Claire had in Corrigan’s cell, she hasn’t slept much in the past two days. And really, there’s nothing else for her to do until they land in Washington. Frank won’t speak to her and she can’t get anyone from Russia on the phone to do damage control.

Claire toes her heels off and climbs into bed next to her daughter. Emily snuggles close to Claire, falling back asleep right away. Sleep dodges Claire, she can’t help but think how bad things will be when they get back home. This fight between her and Frank could drag on for a long time.

When the plane lands, Frank, Claire and Emily are shepherded into an awaiting car. They sit as far away from each other as possible, not uttering a word. Emily is absentmindedly playing on her iPad, too distracted to notice the suffocating silence in the car.

Back at the White House, Frank and Claire separate, going into opposite rooms and slamming the door behind them. Emily is standing in the middle of the living room, holding her backpack. She mimics her parents and goes into her room, slamming the door behind her.

Two weeks pass by. Two weeks of Frank and Claire barely seeing or speaking to each other. Emily is sometimes used as a buffer between them when they are forced to be in the same room together. Somewhere along the line, they silently agreed to put their argument on hold when their daughter is around. Except for the night before, when Emily caught them bickering in the kitchen.

“Francis, Cathy and I agree that we need to find someway to communicate with Petrov,” Claire mumbles. Frank stops slathering his sandwich in peanut butter and turns to look at his wife. She hasn’t initiated a conversation between them since their fight on the plane nearly two weeks ago. He appreciates her giving him space to work through the anger he feels towards her.

“Well, we wouldn’t have this problem if it wasn’t for the press conference.” He hears her inhale a sharp breath and stand up from the table, walking over to the other side of the counter he is standing at.

“Can you reach out to Viktor and…”

“And what Claire? You screwed up. It’s over. He’s not going to come to the table again.” Claire balls her hand into a fist. She has to push past her husband’s stubbornness if she wants him to do as she asked.

“You have to make him Francis.” Frank slams his hand down on the counter. Claire barely flinches, she’s used to his explosive temper.

“How? Please Claire, tell me how.” She narrows her eyes at him, not appreciating his patronizing tone in the slightest. He goes back to making his sandwich.

“When did we become this?” Claire asks him a few seconds later. His eyes flicker up to hers.

“Become what?”

“Everyone else.” He knows what she’s implying. They’ve become the old, bickering married couple who can’t stand the sight of each other. They aren’t the team they once were and for the first time in their marriage, Claire isn’t sure they will ever be again. Before he can respond, Claire’s eyes slide over to the doorway where Emily is standing with her rabbit clutched in her hand. She nudges to Frank their daughter has entered the room and he needs to watch what he says.

“Hi Emily, are you hungry?” Claire asks to avoid the toddler asking questions about what she just witnessed. Frank takes the opportunity to leave the room with his sandwich in tow.

Now it’s time for Emily’s nap and Claire can’t locate the toddler anywhere. She is starting to get nervous. Usually, Emily is in the residences or somewhere with the nanny.

“Emily?” Claire calls out in the living room. Her eyes sweep the perimeter, looking for any indication as to where her daughter could be hiding. Meechum is standing behind her, going door to door in the residence. “Edward?”

“The First Daughter is missing. Lock down the White House and start searching every room,” Meechum orders in his walkie. Claire nervously wrings her hands and starts thinking about the man who tried to kidnap Emily a few weeks ago. Maybe he came back and took Emily when nobody was looking.

Meanwhile, Frank is in the Oval trying to get through his afternoon meetings. He got an alert from one of the Secret Service agents about Emily being missing. His mind immediately drifts to Claire,
who must be beside herself right now. He can feel his anger towards her evaporating. Their daughter
takes precedent over whatever is happening between them. Before he can leave, the door to his
office swings open and Frank sees the top of Emily’s head. She is nonchalantly walking towards
him, carrying a book in her hand.
“Hi Daddy,” Emily says and starts climbing into his lap. “Can you read dis to me pwease?” She
hands him the book and leans back into his arms. Frank opens the book but pauses briefly.
“Em, you aren’t supposed to be here. Your mom is looking for you.” Emily glances up at her father,
not comprehending what he is saying.
“Read pwease,” Emily states and points to the book. Frank relents, he’s rarely seen his daughter
since getting back from Moscow. Most of it is his own doing. Emily reminds him so much of Claire,
it’s painful.
Halfway through the book, Claire storms into the Oval, looking frantic. Frank is distracted, making
animal sounds to make Emily laugh.
“Fran…” Claire swallows the rest of her husband’s name, hearing Emily giggle. A smile breaks out
on her face. She can’t be too mad at Emily. Her stubborn daughter just wanted to spend time with
her father. It shouldn’t’ve taken their daughter breaking into the Oval Office to do so, but Claire
holds Frank accountable for that, not Emily.
“Hi mommy!” Emily waves her over, unaware of the massive manhunt going on inside the White
House to track her down. Frank closes the book he was reading to Emily and nudges the toddler off
his lap. “Hey! Daddy, we not done!” Emily is pissed their reading session got cut short by her
mother’s arrival.
“Emily, you can’t just run off without a grown up, you know that,” Claire scolds gently. Emily
solemnly looks down and nods.
“I wanna see Daddy,” Emily mumbles, every ounce of her face emanating innocence. Claire moves
forward to sit down in the chair across from Frank’s desk. Guilt gnaws at her and she can tell Frank
is feeling the same way by the expression on his face.
“I’m sorry Em. I’ll try to be home more,” Frank tells his daughter. Claire stands up and pretends to
be distracted by something happening outside. For whatever reason, she feels like she’s intruding on
her own family.
“Come on Emily, your father has to get back to work,” and I have to get out of here. Emily pouts
and points to the unfinished book.
“We can finish it when I get home,” Frank promises her. Emily eyes him warily but hops down and
stands by her mother. “Claire.”
Claire spins around, shocked he wants to speak with her.
“What Francis?”
“Don’t forget our portrait is today.” Claire tries to not let disappointment overtake her. She thought
they were on the cusp of repairing their relationship, but he isn’t ready.
“Of course.” She clasps Emily’s hand and exits the Oval.
A week later, the ice is beginning to melt between Frank and Claire. They are starting to see each
other more and bicker less. Today, Frank is scheduled to visit the FDR memorial. He extends the
invitation to Claire, but she declines. The work required to repair the relationship between the United
States and Russia is never-ending.
When he gets back, Claire is lying down in her bedroom with Emily. The toddler is asleep, and
Claire is next to her, typing on her laptop. Frank hovers in the doorway, unsure if he should disturb
her or not.
“Hey,” he says and shoves his hands in his pockets. Claire looks up from the screen and takes off her
glasses. She doesn’t want to wake up Emily in case their conversation turns into another argument.
Claire motions with her finger for him to wait and she climbs out of bed, grabbing his hand and
taking him into his bedroom.
A part of initiating contact with him is to see whether he will reciprocate. Another is to show him she
doesn’t recoil from his touch, like he previously accused her of after their disastrous portrait session a
week ago.
Claire sits down on the bench pressed up against Frank’s bed and he remains standing, slowly pacing back and forth.

“Today…at the memorial. You know what struck me the most? Eleanor. She was off by herself. Alone. And so was Franklin. He was alone. And there was a wall between them.”

They can’t end up like them, but they will, if they don’t do something soon. Frank walks over to where she is sitting and kneels down, so he is eye-level with her. Claire turns her head, looking directly at him.

“We have to do something, Claire.” His voice is strained with emotion. He can’t lose her anymore than she can lose him.

“I know.” She whispers back and gently reaches over to clasp his hand. Frank stands up and sits next to her on the bench, never losing contact with her. “What do we do?”

A simple conversation won’t be enough to repair the damage done. They need to do something to prove they still love each other as much as they did when they met.

“We should renew our vows,” Frank says and looks at his wife to get her opinion. She nods in agreement, it would be the Grand Gesture she’s hoping for.

“Where? Here?”

“No. At the church in Gaffney.” Renewing their vows in the church they got married in nearly three decades earlier could be the answer to their marriage problems.

“I like the idea Francis.” She squeezes his hand and rests her head on his shoulder.

That night, Frank and Claire sit down for dinner with Emily between them as if the past few weeks never happened. Emily is happily chewing away at her broccoli, excited to see both of her parents together in the same room.

“Emily, we wanted to talk to you about something,” Claire begins. She’s had several conversations with her daughter that begin this way recently.

“Okay mommy.” Emily drops her fork and turns her attention to her parents.

“We are going to Gaffney, where I’m from, in a few days. Your mom and I are going to renew our vows.” Frank is fully prepared for the look of confusion their daughter is wearing.

“What’s dat mean?”

“Well, Daddy and I are married…and we want to get married again.” Claire picks up the conversation. She is better than her husband at explaining things in a way Emily can understand.

“Why?” Emily asks.

“Because we love each other,” Frank says simply. Emily seems satisfied with his answer.

“I come,” The toddler demands.

“Of course you can,” Claire wouldn’t want to leave Emily out of an important family event.

“Do you renew your commitment to this woman as your lawful wedded wife, to love her, honor her, comfort her, keep her in sickness and in health, forsaking all others, be true to her, as long as you both shall live?” The pastor asks Frank.

Frank and Claire are standing facing each other in the church in Gaffney. Emily is sitting in the front row, clapping her hands excitedly. Ever since they told Emily their plans to renew their vows, the toddler hasn’t stopped talking about it. Claire bought her a dress to match hers as well as explained several times what a vow renewal ceremony entails.

“I do.” Frank says, smiling softly at Claire.

“Do you renew your commitment to this man as your lawful wedded husband, to love him, honor him, comfort him, keep him in sickness and in health, forsaking all others, be true to him, as long as you both shall live?” The pastor asks Claire.

“I do.” Claire says and smiles back at Frank.

“May this renewed commitment deepen your love for each other and strengthen your eternal bond.” The pastor finishes and closes the Bible.

Claire and Frank step towards each other and she rests her hands on his chest as they kiss. Emily cheers from her seat although she has no idea what was just said. Somehow, it ended up with her parents kissing.

Frank and Claire take a few pictures together before bringing Emily in to pose with them.
“Daddy lift me uppy, pwease,” Emily says to Frank who obliges. He wraps his arm around Claire’s back and the three of them smile for a few pictures. Frank sets Emily on the ground so he can open the church doors. He holds his arm out for Claire who loops it through his. Emily scampers ahead to the awaiting car, spotting Meechum in the front seat.

“Hi Meechy!” Emily yells and runs over to stand by the Secret Service agent.

“I’m sorry we can’t stay here in Gaffney with you,” Claire tells him inside the car door. Frank leans up against the car, his hand gripping the doorframe.

“It’s okay. I’ll see you two tomorrow.”

“Come on Emily, get in the car,” Frank tells his daughter. Emily waves goodbye to Meechum and stands next to her father, waiting for him to lift her into her seat. Claire straps the toddler in and waves goodbye to her husband.

Both Frank and Claire realize their vow renewal ceremony might be a band-aid to fix a bullet-hole. They might never be able to be what they were to each other before. Their marriage might not survive despite all attempts to save it.

A/N 2: I gave you guys an extra-long chapter as a token of my gratitude. We are getting close to the end of season three, which I don’t have to tell you what that means. I urge you to leave a review and come back for another update soon. Thanks for reading!
Chapter Nine

A/N: I know it goes without saying, but I have to say it...thank you for the reviews and messages everyone has left me. Without you, there wouldn’t be a story. I can say that I have about five more chapters planned after this one, with the option of an epilogue if you guys are interested. For now, please enjoy the latest chapter.

Chapter Nine.
Both Frank and Claire realize their vow renewal ceremony might be a band-aid to fix a bullet-hole. They might never be able to be what they were to each other before. Their marriage might not survive despite all attempts to save it.
It’s funny, what lengths a couple will go to in order to fix a marriage. For Frank and Claire, they thought the vow renewal ceremony would be enough. And they were right, for a moment. For a moment, there seemed to be hope that they could reestablish the equilibrium that seemed to be off-balance between them. After all, over their three-decade long marriage, they’ve had worse fights than the one they just had. Things were said, feelings were hurt, and they did whatever they could to fix the damage done. So, why is there still this weird chasm between them?
There’s a hurricane coming. That’s the latest crisis to land on Frank’s desk. A disastrous hurricane that will cost this country upwards of a billion dollars in damage. From brief conversations with Frank, Claire has surmised Congress wants to defund his America Works plan to insure funds are being correctly allocated. She can also guess how pissed off pushback from Congress and FEMA has made Frank. He’s tried everything in his power to demonstrate his jobs program is working for the American people, but nobody is listening to him. Tom Yates isn’t proving to be as effective as Frank thought, which doesn’t surprise Claire in the slightest. If anything, whatever Tom is trying to write is causing Frank and Claire more harm than good.

None of that matters to her right now though because Emily’s third birthday is only a few days away. Between another White House crisis, campaigning and her mostly defunct ambassadorship, Claire is determined to give their daughter the birthday she deserves. Its not fair to Emily her parents are too wrapped up in everything going on to acknowledge her birthday. Frank and Claire might not put too much thought into their own birthdays, but their daughter’s is more important.

“Francis?” Claire catches a glimpse of her husband as he is about to exit the residences. He turns, and she approaches him, fixing the knot in his tie. He stands there like a petulant child while she reties it. A smirk adorns her lips. She can always count on his annoyance as she fusses over his suit.

“Emily’s birthday is on Tuesday.”

“I remember.” Their daughter, the child they never thought they would have, is turning three.

“What should we do?” Logistically, there’s not much they can do. Claire learned early on in her tenure as first lady how difficult leaving the White House really is.

Her hands leave his tie, her fingertips skim the lapels of his blazer as he contemplates a response. He won’t tell her it’s her problem to figure out, not when it comes to Emily. They’ve always made decisions together regarding their toddler.

“Dinner somewhere?”

“Where nobody will recognize us?” She asks, faintly remembering his birthday almost two years ago. They had the same exchange back then, when things were a lot different. He was vice president then, they had more leeway. Its doubtful they will be able to sit through a whole meal without something or someone interrupting them.

“We can talk about it at dinner,” Frank assures her, although its unlikely he will be able to attend.

Family dinners are usually the only place where all three of them are in the same room together, and even then, its sporadic. She gives him a clipped nod, knowing he won’t be there. The pad of his thumb skims her cheek, their version of a see-you-later-honey peck on the lips.

Claire sips the rest of her coffee while she ponders what they can do for Emily’s birthday. Part of her
is wondering why she cares so much. Maybe it’s because she feels guilty about what’s been happening between her and Frank and what’s to come. When campaigning inevitably heats up, Emily won’t see her father for days or even weeks at a time. Claire might be forced to go on the road with him depending on how her husband is doing in the polls. Emily won’t be able to participate. “Mommy! Hi!” Emily says hours later, after waking up from her nap. Claire glances up from her laptop and smiles as her daughter jumps in her lap. “Hi, Emily,” Claire scoots her chair back to give the toddler more room. Emily clambers into her lap, one hand gripping her rabbit. “Daddy?” Emily’s eyes flicker around the empty residence. Claire shakes her head and takes her glasses off. With the possibility of the hurricane making landfall, Claire isn’t expecting Frank home anytime soon. “Daddy is busy with work, but I wanted to talk to you about something.” A frown curls on Emily’s lip for the tiniest of seconds. “Okay, Mommy.” “Your birthday is coming up and Daddy and I wanted to know….” Claire stops herself. She forgets sometimes their daughter is only two, despite how intelligent she is. “What’s a birthday?” “It’s a day where we celebrate the day you were born. You are two now, but in a few days, you will be three. And you get presents and a cake.” Emily’s eyes widen with excitement. She claps her hands excitedly at the thought of new toys to play with. Claire regrets bringing up Emily’s birthday to her when it’s still two days away. The toddler chatters on about it until it’s time for her to go to bed. Claire puts Emily to bed and stops by to visit Frank in his office. Earlier in the day, Frank and Claire attended a cabinet meeting to discuss divvying up funds for the hurricane. Now, its come to the point where Frank must decide to sign a bill that essentially bankrupts America Works. “Hey,” Frank says to Claire after he slams the phone down. She approaches him, takes in the sight of his wrinkled clothes and the bags under his eyes. “Hey. Emily’s down.” A sigh emits his lips and Claire knows he feels guilty for not making it to dinner. “I wish I could’ve seen her before she went to bed.” Claire tells her husband’s voice. They know how devastated the toddler will be if her father isn’t there on her birthday. And Claire will be left picking up the pieces. “Of course. I wouldn’t miss it.” Unless the country needs me. His unspoken disclaimer is heard by Claire. “We can celebrate it here, I’ll cook.” Frank nods. They don’t want the prying eyes of the public ruining Emily’s day. Plus, Frank will want to monitor the situation from the White House. Claire walks past him, eying the bill sitting on a table behind his desk. “Is that it? The bill?” Claire scoops it up, skimming it momentarily. “Yes. They delivered it just after the cabinet meeting. Maybe I should just sign the damn thing. The longer I wait, the bigger target I become.” Claire’s ears perk up at the doubt creeping into her husband’s voice. She is aware of how hard he’s worked to be taken seriously by the American people and Congress alike. It would hurt him to see it all taken away in an instant. “Well, the cabinet is working hard. Stick to your guns and give them some time.” Frank tells her his reservations about the seriousness of the hurricane and Claire listens, approaching him from behind and gently nudging him backwards in his chair. They haven’t spent time together like this in a while, not since before the fight in Russia. “Relax for a minute, Francis.” She gently massages his shoulders, kneading the tension out of them.
He’s been huddled over his desk for several hours, attempting to prepare the nation for what could be the most catastrophic hurricane since Katrina.

“How excited is Em for her birthday?” He needs a distraction and Emily provides the perfect one. A smile grazes his lips at the thought of his daughter.

“Oh, I think that’s all she’s going to be talking about for a couple of days.” Claire ends her massage and sits in front of Frank, leaning on his desk. He moves his work out of the way and searches for a cigarette to light. She smirks at him and opens his desk drawer, taking out a lighter and cigarette. She lets him take the first swig, knowing he needs it more than she does.

“I can’t believe she’s going to be three.” Frank whispers after a few passes back and forth. Claire nods in agreement and inhales. “I still remember her first birthday.”

Frank and Claire aren’t the parents who will make a big deal out of their daughter’s first birthday. Sure, it should be acknowledged and celebrated, but not at the level some people take it. After all, Emily won’t remember it, so it won’t matter what they do regardless.

Claire tried her hardest to come home at a decent hour on Emily’s birthday, but she had a late meeting. The Clean Water Initiative is on the cusp of a flagship project in the Sudan and as the CEO, Claire needs to be overseeing every aspect of it. Hopefully, Emily will still be awake, and she can see her daughter on her birthday.

When she arrives back at the townhouse, there is no trace of Frank. However, as she climbs the stairs, his Southern drawl brings her to the threshold of Emily’s door. Frank is sitting in the ottoman, singing softly to their daughter.

“Hey,” Frank says when he catches her eye. Claire slips her heels off and walks into Emily’s room. She sits on the footrest of the ottoman and smiles when he hands her Emily. “Our girl is one.”

“She is.” Claire still can’t believe they have a child. When she married Frank over twenty years ago, they agreed to never have children. Now, Claire is thrilled they amended their agreement. She couldn’t imagine her life without Emily.

Claire kisses Emily on the forehead and sets her down gently in her crib. Frank comes up behind her, throwing his arm over her chest and brushes his head against hers. Claire rests her hand on top of his and they stand there, watching their now one-year-old daughter drift off to sleep.

“It’s my birfday!” Emily yells as she comes running into Claire’s room, catapulting herself onto her mother’s bed. Frank groans next to Claire and readjusts slightly. Claire lifts her head up, slowly opening each eye to see her rambunctious toddler buzzing between her and Frank. Typically, Frank sleeps in the room across the hall, but he’s been spending more nights in Claire’s room since their makeup after Russia. Last night, Claire convinced him to sleep in her bed since he’s going to be up for days if the hurricane hits. “Daddy! Mommy! Wake up!”

“We’re up, Emily. Happy birthday,” Claire says.

“I’m free,” Emily exclaims and holds up three fingers to show her parents. Frank rolls over in bed, so he is facing his wife and daughter. “Hey Daddy. I’m free now.”

“I heard. What do you want for your birthday?” Frank asks, his voice heavy with sleep.

“I wanna be pwesident, Daddy, like you.” Claire and Frank smile at their daughter.

“You will be someday, Em.”

“Emily let’s let your father sleep some more. I’ll make you a special birthday breakfast before you go off to school,” Claire says. She doesn’t know what time her husband ended up coming to bed last night, but she’s guessing he only got a handful of hours of sleep before Emily woke them up. Emily brightens at the suggestion and hops off the bed, scampering out the door.

“Thank you,” Frank tells Claire sincerely and kisses her cheek.

“I’ll see you tonight, at dinner.” He nods and tugs the covers away from her.

He’s not coming, is all Claire can think to herself while she is preparing dinner. She rarely cooks, only on special occasions. Claire doesn’t see the need to if they aren’t going to be having dinner together as a family. Beside her, Emily is playing with some new toys she got from Claire. Claire has caught Emily glancing at the door a few times, undoubtedly looking for Frank.

Thirty minutes later, dinner is ready and there is still no sign of Frank. Claire turns off the oven and walks their dinner over to the table. Emily is trailing behind her, glancing over her shoulder in case
she missed her father coming in.
“Daddy not comin’?” Emily asks, her cerulean eyes already filling with tears. Claire sets the food on the table and kneels, so she is eye-level with her daughter.
“I don’t think so, Emily. We can bring him cake after dinner.” Just as Claire finishes her sentence, she sees Frank throw off his blazer in the living room.
“Daddy! You here! Come on!” Emily yells and rushes over to her father, pulling on his hand. Claire sighs in relief and starts putting food on everyone’s plate.
“I got you something Em,” Frank says and grabs a bag resting on the couch. Emily bounces on her heels as she tears open the tissue paper, gasping at what she sees. Claire walks over to her husband, wanting to see what he got for their daughter.
“Mommy, look!” Emily puts out a pint-sized, custom-made version of Frank’s Air Force One jacket with “President Emily Underwood” embroidered on the breast of it.
“Wow, Emily that is so cool.” Claire reaches over and squeezes Frank’s hand. Their daughter is practically bursting with excitement thanks to him.
“I pwesident now,” Emily declares as she puts on the jacket.
The three of them sit down for dinner, right when Meechum comes bursting into the residence.
Claire bites back her sigh, they almost had a normal family dinner, but it just couldn’t happen.
“Hi Meechy, look at dis!” Emily says to her favorite Secret Service agent, showing him her new jacket. Meechum smiles at the toddler and hands her a lollipop before addressing Frank and Claire.
“What is it Meechum?” Frank asks, trying to keep the annoyance out of his tone. It’s not the agent’s fault he is about to ruin Emily’s birthday dinner.
“Sir, I’m sorry to bother you, but Remy Danton is on the line. He says it’s urgent.” Frank meets Claire’s eyes, knowing she is thinking the same thing. The hurricane has hit.
“Okay, I’ll get it in the kitchen. Thanks, Meechum.” Frank drops his napkin and goes into the kitchen, determined to make this call as quick as possible. He owes Emily his full attention on her birthday.
“Where did it make landfall?” Frank asks into the phone. There’s a long pause and Frank is already assuming the worst.
“It didn’t.” Remy says and waits for his marching orders from Frank. He is certainly going to try and attempt an end-around to get his money flowing back towards America Works now they know the hurricane is no longer a threat.
“What?” Frank is joined by Claire, wanting to know what is happening.
“It changed trajectories and is headed towards Bermuda, sir.”
“Are you sure?” The National Weather Service has been wrong before, it wouldn’t surprise Frank if they were wrong again.
“Yes. They need you in the situation room as soon as possible.”
“Alright. I’ll be there momentarily.” Frank hangs up the phone and turns to Claire.
“Go, Francis. She will be fine.” He steps towards her, resting his hands on her shoulders. For whatever reason, Frank feels like he owes Claire an apology, but he knows it won’t do any good.
“I’ll go tell her.” Frank leaves Claire in the kitchen and he goes into the dining room where Meechum is playing with Emily. “Em, I have to go.”
Emily frowns, but doesn’t cry. She hops out of her chair and wipes her hands with a napkin.
“It’s okay Daddy, we go.”
There is no way Frank is taking Emily down to the situation room. It took a lot convincing on Frank’s part to even take Claire down there. Besides, the toddler won’t be of any use to him, she will only get in the way.
“No, Em, this is something I have to do alone. I will see you when you get up tomorrow.” Frank feels like he is only seeing his daughter in fragments of time, but it’s what he signed up for when he became president. “Happy birthday, Em.” He leans down and kisses his daughter’s forehead.
Right after the chaos of the hurricane dissipates, Frank and Claire find themselves embroiled in a scandal with Russia concerning the occupation of the Jordan Valley. It seems as if every time Claire makes progress at the UN with her peacekeeping mission, something happens to unravel it again.
Claire can tell Frank is starting to doubt her ability to successfully do her job as an ambassador. He hasn’t said anything to her about it, but she knows her husband. It’s only a matter of time before he gives up on her completely and chooses to do things his way.

They are in Iowa campaigning when Claire receives news about the Russian soldiers killed in the Jordan Valley. Immediately, Frank wraps up his stump speech and they go into crisis mode. Luckily, they chose to keep Emily at home for this litany of events. Claire doesn’t have the time or patience to keep Emily occupied while she tries to come up with a concrete solution for the United Nations. She is determined to show Frank and Congress she can figure out a way to handle this catastrophe in the best interest of the United States while still preserving the peacekeeping mission.

“Francis,” Claire pulls her husband aside a couple hours later. They are both running on empty but haven’t come up with a concrete solution yet.

“What?” Frank follows Claire into an empty bedroom at the house where they set up base camp.

“I think I should go to New York.” Claire believes a more hands-on approach with Russia will be the key to solving the problem. Frank sighs but agrees with Claire’s assessment.

“I agree, take the first plane out. I’ll stay here until we can get Petrov on the phone.”

“What about Emily?” Claire promised their daughter either her or Frank will be home to tuck her into bed tonight.

“What about her?”

“One of us needs to be there for her tonight and it can’t be me.” She doesn’t know how long she needs to be in New York for. If Russia won’t come to the table, it could be days until she’s back in Washington. Frank rubs his face in his hands.

“Look, Claire, we can’t think about her right now. I’m sure the nanny will take care of it.” Claire doesn’t know why she’s shocked every time Frank blatantly puts the presidency over his family. However, the last thing she needs is to be at odds with her husband, again. For now, she will just chalk up his dismissal of their daughter to lack of focus and sleep.

“Fine. I will speak to Emily tonight and explain why we can’t be there. It would help if you can join me on that call.” Claire goes to leave, but Frank puts his hand on her arm to stop her.

“Claire, I have to do my job.” He’s asking for her to justify his behavior, but she won’t.

“And I have to do mine. I’ll see you back in Washington.” He brushes a kiss to her cheek and they both pretend she didn’t stiffen under his touch.

Eventually, Claire gets a chance to speak with Petrov’s right-hand man who confesses Russia killed their own men as a last-ditch effort to kill the peacekeeping mission. Claire immediately goes back to Washington to relay the message to Frank.

Before she can get to her husband, Emily sees her and makes a beeline towards her carrying a bouquet of white tulips. If Claire had to guess, the flowers are from Frank, an apology of sorts for their disagreement in Iowa. Nevertheless, Claire is thrilled to see her daughter. She’s been in New York for the past two-and-a-half days and in Iowa for two days before that.

“Mommy! Look at dese!” Emily says, shoving the flowers in Claire’s face. Claire accepts the tulips and gathers Emily in a hug. “Me and Daddy got you dem.”

“They are lovely, thank you, Emily. Where is your dad?” Emily shrugs, the toddler has barely seen her father since he arrived back without her mom.

“I pfink he workin’. He not home.” Claire is hoping Frank moved his schedule around a little bit while she was gone to accommodate their daughter, but she isn’t sure anymore. Lately, it seems like Frank has only been a present father when it suits him.

“Well, I have to go talk to him and then we can do something, just the two of us.” Claire wants to arrange a special, belated birthday present for Emily outside of the White House. She’s been feeling a little cooped up here lately and she thinks her daughter has too. Emily claps at the idea and informs her mom she’s going to get ready, whatever that means.

Claire locates Frank in the Oval, pouring over documents related to the Jordan Valley.

“Hey,” Claire knocks on the door and enters without waiting for his permission. Frank looks up, a grin tugging at his lips at the sight of his wife.

“Hey. Did Em give you the flowers?” Frank asks as he pats at her usual spot on his desk. Claire
steps towards him but declines his offer to sit on his desk. She chooses to sit in the chair across from him instead. Claire hasn’t fully forgiven him for what he said in Iowa about Emily. She’s afraid to ask him about the time he spent with their daughter while she was away because she already knows the answer.

“She did. Thank you for them, they are lovely.”

“I missed you while you were gone, Emily too.” Frank reaches across his desk to grab her hand. Claire is surprised by the gesture and places her hand over his.

“I missed both of you. I didn’t want to be away for so long.” Frank frowns at Claire’s lack of enthusiasm about her trip.

“It didn’t go well in New York I take it?” Claire recounts what she heard to Frank, who is shocked by her story. He has his doubts about the validity of the Russian’s statement, but he trusts Claire implicitly.

“Alright. I will put a team together and we will assemble in the situation room. I’ll meet you there?” Claire starts to nod, and then thinks of the promise she made Emily. She can’t put this country’s needs over her daughter’s, she isn’t like her husband. However, Frank and his advisers are going to need her assessment of the situation since she was the only one there. The peacekeeping mission could hinge on the intelligence she provides.

“I have to go see Emily first and then I will be there.” It’s going to break her heart to tell her daughter she must postpone their outing, but it’s necessary.

“Okay. She will understand, Claire.” Frank tells her and squeezes her hand before letting go. Claire merely nods and excuses herself to speak to Emily.

When she goes back to the residences, Claire is shocked to see Tom Yates playing with Emily. Claire didn’t think Tom had unprecedented access to the residences. She isn’t entirely comfortable with Tom being around Emily. Tom could include something Emily says about her parents’ relationship in his book.

“How’s the book coming?” Claire asks Tom. Tom is pretending to chase Emily, who is giggling and hiding behind Claire.

“I’ve hit a bit of a roadblock. There’s a big piece missing.”

“What is it?”

“You.” Claire is taken aback by Tom’s admission.

“He hasn’t…mentioned me at all?” Emily takes the opportunity to run past a distracted Tom, sticking her tongue out in the process. Tom fake reaches for her but is more focused on Claire. He hasn’t gotten the opportunity to speak with her one-on-one in this fashion before.

“What has he said?” Emily doesn’t like Tom not paying attention to her and she runs over to him, jumping into his lap. Claire manages a meager smile at the interaction, she doesn’t want her daughter getting close to someone who is so disposable.

“You’re putting me in an awkward position Mrs. Underwood.” Tom picks up Emily and flips her over. Emily’s giggles permeate the residence.

“You don’t want to betray his trust.”

“Him and I have an agreement.”

“I understand. I shouldn’t pry. I’ll leave you be, then.” Claire is hoping Tom gets the message and leave the residence, so she can speak with Emily. Tom doesn’t budge and lets Emily crawl onto his back.

“He said he loves you more than anything. That there wouldn’t be a White House without you. He showed me your first house in Gaffney, where you planted the tulips. And he said he was ashamed.”

“Of what?” Claire glances up at Emily, who has her arms twined around Tom’s neck. She doesn’t want to be having this conversation in front of their daughter. Emily doesn’t need to hear how her father is ashamed to have married her mother.

“That you married him. Because you deserved better. You should really be in this book, Mrs. Underwood.”

Claire needs time to think about Tom’s proposition. Right now, she has to focus on the problem in
front of her, which depending on who’s asking, could be the conflict in Russia or her marriage.
“I will think about it. Emily, your dad and I have to do something today. We will have to reschedule our date.” Fortunately, Emily is too distracted by Tom to care about her mother canceling their plans. “I can hang around for a while, give you and the president time,” Tom offers. Claire is wary of the idea, but she doesn’t have a choice. The nanny is gone for the day and Claire can’t watch Emily at the moment.
“Thank you, Thomas. That would be nice. Emily, we will be back later.” Emily waves goodbye and Claire can hear her daughter giggling at something Tom said to her.

The mission to investigate the blast sight is an epic failure. Frank and Claire listen in horror as the US troops cover is blown by the Russians. Sadly, Frank is left no choice but to meet Petrov in the Jordan Valley, a move Claire strongly disagrees with.

“I have no faith in the UN anymore,” Frank tells her during their argument about his decision. I have no faith in you, Claire hears the silent end of his sentence. He no longer respects her position as ambassador to the UN and that hurts Claire more than anything. Nevertheless, Claire sees him off, with Emily in tow. Frank approaches her, setting his hands on her upper arms while she puts her hands on his chest. Emily waits patiently for her father’s attention.

“Now listen, I know you have reservations about all this.” Frank says.
“You’re doing what you think is best. Please be careful out there.”
“I will.”

“I love you.” Regardless of how frustrated Claire is with her husband right now, she would be devastated if something happened to him while he is in the Jordan Valley.
“I love you too.” They kiss briefly and Frank bends down, so he is eye-level with his daughter.
“I miss you, Daddy.” Emily mumbles sadly. Frank scoops his daughter up into a hug.
“I’ll miss you too, Em. I love you…so much.”
“I wuv you too, Daddy.” Frank gives Emily another hug and sets her down on the floor. Emily grabs Claire’s hand and they watch Frank leave.

“Mommy, I don’t want Daddy to go.” Emily says to Claire.
“Me either, Emily.”

A/N 2: Alright, that’s it for now. I don’t think I have to tell you what is coming next. Reviews would be greatly appreciated. Thanks for reading and I will have something up for you guys soon!
Chapter Ten

A/N: Hi, welcome back and thank you for all the reviews you guys left me. As always, I try to stick within the confines of the original plot and add my own spin on it. Also, I haven’t forgotten about The Long Game, I just want to finish this story first. Please enjoy the latest chapter!

Chapter Ten.

He fired her. Well, to be fair, he asked for her resignation. Apparently, it was one of Petrov’s terms Frank agreed to when he was in the Jordan Valley. Claire is disappointed but not surprised. Her husband has been secretly against her ambassadorship since the beginning and Petrov merely gave him the perfect excuse to let her go. Now, Claire is back to being just the first lady, something she’s been trying to avoid since Frank took the oath. The only reason she is going down without a fight is because she doesn’t have much of a choice. If Petrov found out Claire didn’t actually resign, he could rescind his terms, and all of this would’ve been for nothing.

Claire is forced to refocus her energy to campaigning. She doesn’t get the same pleasure out of it as her husband. However, the Iowa and New Hampshire primaries are coming up and Frank is going to need her to put in the face-time when he can’t. Claire is willing to be a team player for now. If Frank is reelected president, she can attempt to get another position within the Cabinet for his next term. One, hopefully, her husband won’t make her resign from.

“Emily, you have to eat it,” Claire tells her stubborn daughter and pushes the plate of apples back towards Emily. Emily shakes her head and reaches for her sippy cup instead. Frank comes in the kitchen and sees the tableau of Claire’s frown and Emily’s self-satisfied smirk.

“What’s going on?” Frank asks in amusement. He hasn’t seen his wife or daughter since last night, after he essentially fired Claire. Frank slept in the room across the hall. He figured Claire needed some time to herself to process everything.

“Hi Daddy, dis is gwoss,” Emily declares and defiantly shoves her plate on the floor. Claire lets out an exasperated sigh and pushes her chair back.

“Fine. If you want to waste your food, then you won’t get breakfast.” Claire isn’t in the mood to indulge her toddler’s every whim this morning. She’s running late to her briefing about events in New Hampshire she’s expected to attend and doesn’t have time for Emily’s picky eating. Emily juts out her lip and looks to her father for assistance.

“She’s got to eat something, Claire.” Frank says as he’s pouring himself a cup of coffee. His eyes widen at the ferocity of the glare he receives from his wife.

“Then feed her, Francis.” Claire snaps and snatches up her coffee. Her husband isn’t around Emily enough to be dishing out parenting advice. “I’m running late. I leave tomorrow for New Hampshire.”

“Are you bringing Em?” Frank asks, choosing for the time being to brush her avoidance of him to the side. She’s been pulling away from him gradually and he isn’t sure how to correct it. Firing her last night only made things worse between them.

“Yes.” Claire doesn’t elaborate further and walks out of the kitchen. Frank sips his coffee and glances over at Emily, who seems proud of herself for avoiding eating apples. Normally, he knows his wife wouldn’t just give in to their daughter so quickly, but she’s not herself right now.

“Daddy, you comin’ wif us?” Emily asks while Frank is getting her a bowl of cereal.

“I will be there for some events with you and mom, but I do have to work here too.” Frank has a debate coming up he needs to prep for. It’s the first of several before Election Day.

“We get dem people to vote for you, Daddy.”

“I appreciate that, Em. Eat your breakfast.” Frank pinches Emily’s cheek and sets a bowl of cereal down in front of her.

Not only is Claire unexcited about going on the road to campaign for her husband, but she’s learned that Tom Yates is tagging along. Tom is trying to extract answers from Claire for his book, which it’s
obvious to her that he’s not writing about America Works. Although she isn’t privy to Tom’s conversations with her husband, Claire can guess by the personal questions he’s asking her, this book has to do with their marriage instead of Frank’s job program.

“Emily, get in the car,” Claire tells Emily. They just wrapped up a luncheon at a hotel in Concord. Thankfully, there was a jungle gym to keep Emily occupied for the duration of the event. Emily hops in and Tom follows, but Claire steps in front of him and shuts the door.

“Is there something wrong Mrs. Underwood?” Tom asks. He’s been peppering her with questions any moment he can, but she won’t answer any of them. Or, she does what Frank did in the beginning, and give vague responses layered with subtext.

“I appreciate you being so nice to our daughter, but she is not a source. I don’t want you to speak with her about this book you are writing.” Frank might not have been clear with Tom on the boundaries of his job within the Underwood administration, but Claire will be.

“I would never do that Mrs. Underwood.” Tom likes the toddler and wouldn’t dare use her against her own parents. He realizes it would be the quickest way to get fired by the Underwoods. Claire accepts his answer and points him to a separate car. She has had enough socializing for the time being and would just like to get back to her hotel to put Emily down for a nap.

The next event Claire, Tom and Emily attend is a blood drive at the local Red Cross. Claire volunteers to donate blood and the nurse leaves the room momentarily to gather her supplies. Emily isn’t liking what’s going on and stops chatting with Tom to rush over to her mother.

“Mommy what you doin’?” Emily asks with concern marring her face. Claire glances down at her daughter, wondering why she looks so worried. She follows Emily’s eyes to the needle lying on a steel tray.

“The nurse is going to take some blood from me. I’m okay, Emily.” Claire reaches down with the arm not in a tourniquet to brush some hair out of her daughter’s eyes.

“Why Mommy?”

“It’s going to help some sick people.” Emily nods in comprehension and rolls up her sleeve.

“I wanna help too.” Tom and Claire laugh at Emily’s determination.

“No Emily, you are too little, and it doesn’t feel good.” Claire knows from past experiences Emily doesn’t like needles. Emily grabs Claire’s hand, seeing her parents do it to each other several times. “I stay wif you, Mommy. Daddy not here, so I stay,” Emily tells her mother. Claire is appreciative of her daughter’s gesture. Tom watches this scene play out before him from a writer’s perspective. He can’t wait to start asking Claire questions about what he just witnessed.

The nurse comes in to insert the needle into the crook of Claire’s arm and Emily is forced to vacate her post. Claire assures her she will be fine and encourages the toddler to watch a movie. She’s been holding off Tom long enough, and now that Emily’s distracted, they have the chance to talk.

There’s so much Tom wants to ask Claire. From the few months he’s been within the Underwood inner circle, he’s grown more and more fascinated by the way Frank and Claire operate. It’s unlike any marriage he’s seen before. Unfortunately, Tom’s been around enough to know that things between Frank and Claire are not okay. He’s heard it from Frank’s perspective, but now he wants to hear Claire’s.

“Does it bother you that the president isn’t here?” Tom asks, not wanting to waste any time. Claire glances over at Emily, wanting to make sure the toddler is fully engrossed in her movie before responding.

“No. He asked me to campaign on his behalf and I don’t mind.”

“Or maybe you prefer it, his absence.” Tom locks eyes with Claire, wanting to get a genuine emotional reaction out of her. Claire doesn’t engage in Tom’s fishing expedition. Whether she wants Frank here or not doesn’t matter. He can’t be, and she must deal with it. “You hate it don’t you? Campaigning?”

“Everyone hates campaigning. Except for the politicians. They feed off the energy.”

“And their spouses?” Claire sighs, she isn’t liking what Tom is reaching for.

“You think Francis feeds off of me?” Tom and Claire exchange a few lines back and forth until he cuts to the chase.
“Very few people campaign for someone who just fired them.”
“Tell me you that?”
“He said he betrayed you. You resign so you can ‘devote yourself to the campaign.’ I did the math.”
The more they talk, the harder it is for Claire to put sentences together. She starts rambling
incoherently. Claire admits to Tom she reevaluates her marriage to Frank every seven years,
comparing it to a suicide.
“And Emily?” Tom asks, although he shouldn’t. He can tell it’s not much longer before Claire faints
all together. This is the only time he will ever see her so exposed like this.
“What about her?” Claire asks, trying desperately to keep focus.
“Is the president a good father?”
“He loves her but…” Claire drops the orange juice she was holding. Tom watches it splatter on
the ground and then his eyes flicker up to Claire’s. “He’s…never…” She doesn’t get to finish
her sentence. Claire passes out, her head smacking against the hard surface of the lawn chair.
“Mrs. Underwood?” Tom asks, stepping towards Claire. Emily glances up to see Tom hovering over
her mom, who has her eyes closed. “Nurse!”
“Mommy?” Emily asks, her bottom lip quivering. She abandons her movie and runs over to Claire.
Tom is surprised by the force at which Emily pulls him away from Claire, desperate to get to her
mother.
“She’s okay, Emily.” Tom assures her just as a nurse comes into the room. Emily starts crying and
pulls on the fabric of Claire’s skirt. Tom picks her up and steps away, so the nurse can check on
Claire. A moment later, Claire’s eyes flutter open, confused as to what’s happening.
“Mrs. Underwood, you passed out while giving blood. I’m going to take the needle out of your
arm.” The nurse tells her and removes the needle. She bandages up Claire’s arm and gives her some
more orange juice. Claire is instructed to remain seated while her body recovers.
Meanwhile, in Washington, Frank is entertaining some people in the Oval when Remy bursts in.
“Sir, your wife passed out while giving blood,” Remy informs Frank. His smile evaporates, and he
immediately orders everyone out of the room. He calls Claire’s cellphone, surprised when Tom
answers the phone.
“Mr. President, your wife is okay. She’s with the nurse right now.” Tom tells Frank. Frank can hear
Emily talking to Claire in the background. He didn’t know Emily was with them when Claire
fainted.
“Well, let me talk to her.” Frank says. He wants to hear from his wife that she is okay, not someone
else.
“Hold on.” Tom mutes the phone and spins around to face Claire. She shakes her head. Talking to
her husband isn’t something she wants to do. “Mrs. Underwood, I think you should speak to him.
He’s really worried about you.” On the other end, Frank is wondering what is taking so long to get
Claire on the phone. He has a terrible feeling his wife doesn’t want to talk to him.
“Give me the phone,” Claire relents and holds out her hand.
“Sweetheart, how do you feel?” Frank asks when he hears the line reconnect. Claire appreciates his
evident concern for her, but it doesn’t erase her anger.
“I’m fine, Francis.” She wants to keep this conversation as brief as possible. The last thing she needs
is him coddling her out of guilt.
“Alright, I just wanted to make sure you were okay.”
“We will see you when we get back to Washington.” Claire hangs up the phone without waiting for
a response from Frank. Frank shakes his head when he hears the dial tone. He can’t fix whatever is
going on between them from Washington. For this to work, he needs to covertly surprise her at a
campaign stop in New Hampshire. Frank hits another button on the phone and waits to be connected
to his assistant.
“Tell Air Force One and Secret Service I am flying to New Hampshire as soon as possible. Cancel
all meetings and events for the next few days.”
Tom, Claire and Emily wait patiently for the nurse to give Claire the all-clear to leave. Fortunately
for Tom, this means he has more time to ask Claire some questions.
“Why didn’t you want to speak to the president?” Tom asks. Knowing what he knows now, Tom isn’t shocked Claire didn’t want to talk to Frank. He just wants to know what caused this strain between them. It goes deeper than Frank forcing Claire to resign. Something has been brewing in their marriage for a while, and it’s only now brimming to the surface.

Claire sips her orange juice while she tries to think of a response to his question. It’s long-winded and complicated, but the gist of it is: Claire doesn’t think she can be married to Frank anymore. Lately, it seems like all she is doing is giving pieces of herself to him without anything in return. They used to be this team and she doesn’t know if it was him becoming president that changed their dynamic, but she’s no longer okay with it.

“I think I’m okay to leave.” Claire doesn’t want to get into the intricacies of her marriage in front of Emily. She’s been trying her best to keep their daughter away from the problems between her and Frank. Talking about it to Tom in front of her would directly contradict that. Tom frowns and puts his notebook away. It’s clear Claire isn’t going to divulge anything more to him now. Although, it might not matter. Tom has a new direction for his book, one that the Underwoods aren’t going to like.

“A very, hairy, terribly scary tarantula named Tina. I found her in a shoebox in New York City. When I first saw Tina, I shrieked…” Claire is reading to children at a local elementary school in New Hampshire. Thankfully, this is an event Emily can participate in. The toddler is sitting amongst the school children, happily listening as her mother reads to her and the other kids.

“Were you scared?” A kid asks Claire.

“Oh, I was terribly scared.” Claire plays along. Frank walks into the elementary school, trying to keep a low-profile so nobody notices him. He stands next to Tom, who is watching Claire intently.

“I didn’t know you were coming,” Tom whispers to Frank.

“Ssh…she doesn’t either,” Frank whispers back, keeping his focus on his wife.

“So, there I was, not knowing what to believe. Should I leave Tina in the shoebox or set Tina free?” Claire reads from the page, smiling as the children yell different responses at her.

“Oh, my goodness, I don’t know what to do!” Claire says enthusiastically. “I don’t know what to do! Don’t do anything?” She looks up and sees Frank smiling at her. Emily follows Claire’s eyes and gasps when she sees her father.

“Daddy!” Emily stomps over several kids to reach her father, running into his arms. Frank picks her up, listening to the other children whispering about the president being in their classroom. Claire merely half-smiles at him and finishes reading the story to the kids.

“Hi Em, are you having fun?” Frank asks. Claire poses for a few photos with the kids and excuses herself to go over to her husband and daughter. It makes Claire happy to see Emily so happy to see Frank, even if she isn’t.

“Thomas would you give us a minute?” Claire asks Tom. Tom excuses himself but remains within listening distance of Frank and Claire. “I told you I was fine.”

“Well, I wanted to see for myself. And I missed Em,” Frank says.

“We are supposed to be leaving for Iowa.” Frank nods.

“I know. I’m going with you.” Normally, Claire would be glad to have her husband accompany her. After all, she’s campaigning for him. But with this awkward space between them, she would rather be alone. Until she can figure out what she wants to do with her marriage, she doesn’t want to be around him, pretending like everything is okay when it’s clearly not. Claire nods and follows Frank and Emily into an awaiting car. She keeps catching Tom staring at her, and she regrets letting him join her when she was giving blood. The things she said to him were things she was afraid to admit out loud. He could easily include it in his book, and everyone would know the truth about her marriage.

On the plane, Claire sets up her laptop in the main cabin while Frank and Emily disappear into his office. The toddler hasn’t left her father’s side since leaving the elementary school in New Hampshire. After a while, Frank asks her if she can join him in his office. Claire reluctantly agrees and is somewhat amused to see Frank and Emily wearing their matching jackets. They are joined in
Frank’s office by their campaign adviser.

“We were just discussing the upcoming events in Iowa,” Frank informs her.

“What about them?” Claire asks, wondering why she’s being looped into this conversation.

“We think it would be best if you did a rally together, as a family,” The campaign adviser says to Claire.

“You want Emily to be there?” Claire asks. Emily’s ears perk up at the mention of her name and then goes back to her coloring.

“People have responded well to your events in New Hampshire, but you get double the points in the polls when your whole family is involved,” The campaign adviser explains to Claire.

“I thought we agreed we would limit Emily’s events,” Claire is thinking back to the last event Emily attended where she almost was kidnapped.

“We did, but I think we should do just one with her,” Frank knows his wife would be wholeheartedly against involving their daughter, but he thought he could sway her. “It’s for the campaign, Claire.”

It’s become evident to Claire she isn’t going to win this argument, so she might as well agree. Frank has his mind set on Emily being there and there’s nothing she can do or say to change it.

“Then let’s give the people what they want.” Claire pushes back her chair and exits her husband’s makeshift office. Frank frowns and resists the urge to go after his wife. Whatever is bothering her has gone beyond him firing her the other night. She isn’t typically this cold and standoffish towards him. Whatever it is, she won’t talk to him about it until she is ready.

They land in Iowa and are immediately brought to the campaign rally. When they step out of the car, Frank grabs Claire’s hand. Surprisingly, she doesn’t pull away.

“Emily, you have to stay by us,” Claire tells their daughter. She won’t risk almost losing Emily again. Claire and Frank walk hand-in-hand up to the podium, with Emily a step ahead of them.

Frank steps up first, and then turns the microphone over to Claire. He sneaks in a kiss on the lips and is glad she is receptive to it.

Claire delivers her speech while Frank and Emily watch. Emily is loving every minute of being with her parents on the campaign trail, something she’s never experienced before.

“Daddy, dem people gonna vote for you. I know it,” Emily assures Frank as they pull up to the bed-and-breakfast they are staying at in Iowa.

“You think so, Em?” Frank asks and opens the car door for Claire. She ignores his offered hand and instead, pretends to focus on freeing Emily from her car seat. The three of them walk into the bed-and-breakfast together and greet the owner.

“So pleased to have you staying with us again, Mr. President,” the owner says after shaking Frank and Claire’s hands.

“We always love coming here. This is our daughter, Emily,” Frank introduces the toddler to the owner, and they shake hands.

“It’s our favorite house in all of Iowa,” Claire adds in. The Underwoods’ excuse themselves and head upstairs.

“You were wonderful today,” Frank tells Claire as they walk up the stairs. “They just adore you.”

“Goodnight,” Claire says, glossing over the compliment her husband just gave her. She doesn’t need to hear how well she is cheerleading for him, it’s insulting. “Emily, tell your father goodnight.”

“I wanna stay wif you, Daddy,” Emily says and looks up at her father. Frank shakes his head.

“No, Em. I have work to do and you need to go to bed.” He doesn’t want this cold war between him and Claire to extend to their daughter. Emily frowns and protests when Claire picks her up.

“Goodnight.”

They go into their separate rooms and are each surprised to find a rough draft of the first chapter of Tom Yates’ book waiting for them on the bed. After Emily is asleep, Claire takes out the copy and reads every word.

The next morning, Claire walks into Frank’s room while he is getting ready. Emily is busy playing with her toys on Claire’s bed.

“I thought this was supposed to be about you, not about us,” Claire says, holding the book in her
hand. It doesn’t surprise her in the slightest that the book he wrote paints a grim picture of her marriage to Frank instead of the jobs plan he was supposed to write about.

“The whole thing was a mistake.”

“We’ve revealed too much Francis. About us, about Emily.” They can’t have their daughter reading this book later in her life. It would destroy them.

“I never should’ve put you in that position. I’ll put in an end to it.” His wife was right all along about Tom and this book and Frank didn’t listen. Now, it’s his job to clean this up for them and their daughter.

Frank finishes piecing his suit together and he turns, placing his hands on Claire’s arms. “Emily will not see this, I promise you.” Together, they agree Frank needs to go back to Washington to speak with Tom personally. It will prevent him from doing something reckless with the remainder of the book. Claire and Emily are staying in Iowa, going forward with countless campaign events.

For the next several days, Frank and Claire keep missing each other. Either she’s in Iowa and he’s in Washington or vice versa. The strain on their marriage hasn’t gotten any better. And now after reading Tom’s interpretation of them, it’s hard to keep pretending.

“I want you two there tomorrow, Claire. By my side, whether I win or lose,” Frank tells her one night on the phone. She and Emily are currently in D.C. while he is touring all 99 counties of Iowa before the vote tomorrow.

Honestly, Claire isn’t sure she wants to support him. Travelling so much has been stressful for her and Emily. However, if she doesn’t show tomorrow, it will be the end of her marriage. She can’t continue like this for much longer. It’s not fair to either of them to be living this way.

“We’ll be there, Francis. Goodnight.” Claire hangs up the phone in the kitchen and walks into Emily’s room. The toddler is in her pajamas and is waiting for Claire to read her a story. Claire slides into Emily’s new bed next to her and opens the book.

“Daddy on the phone, Mommy?” Emily asks. She’s been missing her dad lately, only seeing him for brief instances on the campaign trail.

“No, it was work,” Claire lies. She doesn’t want to tell Emily they are going to Iowa tomorrow until she’s decided. If the toddler found out, Claire would have no choice but to go.

“Mommy?”

“What Emily?” Claire sets the book down and turns to her daughter, smelling the shampoo still trapped in her dark ringlets.

“I miss Daddy. Do you miss him too?” Claire wishes she knew how to answer that complicated question. In a way, she does miss Frank. She misses what their lives used to be, before inheriting the White House. She misses the relationship she used to have with him. But, she doesn’t miss him now.

“I do. A little bit.” Emily frowns and turns so she is directly facing Claire.

“I pffink you miss him a lot.”

“Oh yeah, why do you say that?”

“You sad, Mommy. Daddy not here, and you sad.” Claire clears her throat, suppressing the emotion rising in her. She refocuses her attention on the book she’s reading Emily.

“We will see him soon, I promise.”

After Emily’s put to bed, Claire asks Tom to come back to the White House without telling her husband. She needs to know what she said to him during her blackout at the Red Cross. He was so perceptive while he was with them. It would help her to know what he sees now that’s he’s not obligated to work within the Underwoods limitations.

“I see someone who’s lost,” Tom tells Claire honestly. “Good luck, Claire.” Something tells Tom it’s not going to be much longer until he hears rumblings of a breakup in the Underwood marriage. Claire ultimately decides not to take Emily to Iowa. It doesn’t make sense for them to go and it would send a clear message to Frank that she’s done. She isn’t playing the political spouse role anymore, not until he gives her something in return. Predictably, Frank isn’t going to be happy when he gets back to Washington, but she doesn’t care. It’s time to end things between them.

Claire is waiting in the Oval Office, in his chair for her husband’s return. Emily is already fast asleep, something Claire made sure of before he got home. Her and Frank are going to argue, but it’s an
argument that’s been months, or even years, in the making.
“They told me you were down here,” Frank says as he shuts the door. Claire spins around and faces
him, seeing the seething anger radiating from his body.
“I just wanted to come somewhere to think,” Claire says softly, still seated in his chair.
“Well I hope you have. And whatever was clouding your mind is gone. Because I just had to give
my victory speech…alone. Without you, without Emily. And one way or another, I need you two on
that plane with me tomorrow.”
Claire stands up and deeply sighs. No matter what, it’s always going to be about politics with him.
He’s a politician through and through. She doesn’t know why it’s taken her so long to realize that.
Emily doesn’t deserve to have a father who only cares about her when she can help him win votes
anymore than she deserves a husband in the same capacity.
After they fight, Claire leaves his office, heading directly to Emily’s room. She’s made the decision
to leave Frank, tomorrow, with Emily.
In over twenty-eight years of marriage and all the fights Frank and Claire have had, he’s never been
violent with her. The way he grabbed her by the throat and yelled in her face, it terrified her. She can
still hear his voice in her ear as his hands were around her neck. You will get on that plane
tomorrow. You will come to New Hampshire. You will smile and shake hands and kiss babies. And
you will stand with me on that stage. And you will be the First Lady!
The day Emily was born, Claire made a silent promise to her daughter that she would always protect
her, something her mother never did for her. Claire just never thought that one day she would have to
protect her daughter from her own father. She knows Frank would never be violent with Emily, but
she would’ve said the same thing about him with her before tonight.
“I’m so sorry,” Claire whispers in the dark to a sleeping Emily. A tear rolls down Claire’s cheek. She
feels like she failed her daughter, like they failed her. Emily will have to grow up knowing her
parents couldn’t be together anymore. Hopefully, the press won’t get a hold of this for a while. Not
until she can explain to Emily why she did what she did.
Claire quietly slips out of Emily’s room before the toddler can wake up. She goes into her own and
sits on her bed. Tears roll down her cheeks and Claire makes no effort to wipe them away.
How did we become this? Claire asked Frank during their last big argument after Russia. She
thought they were strong enough to make it through the White House. The White House is finite,
your marriage is for life, she told Trisha Walker once when the former president and first lady were
at the Underwood townhouse for dinner. Claire remembers her and Frank mocking the Walkers over
cigarettes. They would laugh at them and promise each other that they would never become them.
She feels like an idiot now for having given Trisha marriage advice. Claire had no idea what it really
meant to be the first couple of the United States. At least the Walkers made it through with their
marriage intact, Claire can no longer say the same.
The next morning, Claire wakes up Emily earlier than usual. She spent the night packing a suitcase
for her and Emily.
“Mommy?” Emily asks, her eyebrows furrowed in confusion. Claire is zipping up Emily’s coat and
handing her a suitcase.
“You and I are going on a special trip,” Claire tells Emily. The toddler’s eyes widen at the thought of
more campaigning with her parents.
“Daddy come too?”
“No. Daddy is going somewhere else. This is just a trip for you and me.” If Frank were coming on
this trip, it would defeat the purpose.
Frank meets Claire and Emily in the living room of the residences. He smiles when he sees Claire
and Emily all bundled up with their suitcases in hand. It looked like his wife listened to him after all.
He has no idea what’s going to happen.
“Francis. We are not going to New Hampshire,” Claire tells him, her tone leaving no room for
argument. His smile deflates, and he glances down at Emily.
“Yes, you are. I’ll see you in the car.” You don’t get it, do you? Claire asks herself as Frank walks
away from them.
“I’m leaving you.” Claire tells him and squeezes Emily’s hand, walking them towards the exit of the residences. She leaves a stunned Frank in her wake.

“Claire,” He calls out after her. Reluctantly, Claire turns around, still holding onto Emily’s hand.

“You can’t prevent me from seeing Emily.”

It sounds like a threat, but Claire knows it’s not. Frank loves Emily, and Claire wouldn’t want it any differently. However, there’s no way Emily is staying here with Frank. Emily deserves to be with the parent who can give her all the attention she deserves.

“I won’t, Francis. Emily, tell your father goodbye.” Claire lets go of Emily’s hand and watches their daughter run over to him. Frank scoops her up and holds her tight to his chest. Claire looks away when she sees Frank’s eyes shine with unshed tears. She shouldn’t feel guilty for doing this. She wouldn’t have to, if it wasn’t for him.

“I’ll see you soon, Em. I promise. I love you. Be good for your mom, okay?” Frank doesn’t know when soon will be. It could be days or weeks from now until him and Claire are in the same room again. If he had to guess, his wife is taking Emily with her to Dallas.

“Bye Daddy, I wuv you too.” Emily is set back on the ground and she begrudgingly goes back over to Claire. Frank and Claire nod at each other and he watches his wife and daughter leave him behind.

A/N 2: I hated writing this, I really did, but it’s necessary to the story. Please don’t give up on this, I promise it’s going to get better soon. I would so appreciate a review from you guys. Thanks for reading!
A/N: As always, thank you guys for leaving reviews for this, I love reading them. We are close to the end, but there are a few more chapters left. For now, please enjoy the latest installment!

Chapter Eleven.

“I’ll see you soon, Em. I promise. I love you. Be good for your mom, okay?” Frank doesn’t know when soon will be. It could be days or weeks from now until him and Claire are in the same room again. If he had to guess, his wife is taking Emily with her to Dallas.

“Bye Daddy, I wuv you too.” Emily is set back on the ground and she begrudgingly goes back over to Claire. Frank and Claire nod at each other and he watches his wife and daughter leave him behind. “Mommy, where we goin’?” Emily asks when they are in the air. Claire hasn’t said much since they left Frank and boarded a plane this morning. She kept it vague on purpose because she doesn’t know what to say. They are going to Dallas for now, but they can’t stay there forever. And they certainly aren’t going back to Washington anytime soon. Although, if she is being honest with herself, she’s going to have to see her husband eventually.

“We are going to Dallas.” Keep it simple. Let her ask questions, but don’t tell her things she doesn’t need to know, Claire says to herself. Predictably, Emily furrows her eyebrows and tilts her head in confusion.

“Why?” Claire bites back a sigh, she should’ve known to expect a follow-up question.

“That’s where my mom, your grandma, is. We are going to her house for a little bit.” Emily’s eyes widen with excitement.

“You have a mommy, too?” Claire nods. She forgets Emily doesn’t know any family besides her and Frank. Claire would’ve preferred to keep it that way, but circumstances have changed. “Mommy is Daddy comin’ to Dallas?”

Claire’s teeth skim across her bottom lip as she ponders how to answer her daughter’s question. Knowing her husband, he knows exactly where she’s going and will drop by announced in a few days. He’ll be gracious enough to give her time to herself, but his determination to fix their marriage will propel him to Dallas.

Nevertheless, the status of her marriage is unknown. Claire doesn’t necessarily want to divorce Frank, but they couldn’t continue how they were. Last night, after their explosive fight, she needed to send a message to him she wouldn’t tolerate his behavior anymore. Claire needs to figure out a way to explain to Emily why she left without involving her in any of the details. In no way does Claire want to alter her daughter’s perception of her father.

“I don’t think we will see him for a few days.” Emily’s cerulean eyes cloud with tears.

“Why Mommy? I wanna see Daddy!” Emily’s tears turn into full-fledged sobbing as her little shoulders shake. Claire takes a deep breath and reminds herself why she is doing this. Its for Emily, its for you.

“Emily…” Claire gets no response. She unbuckles her seatbelt and moves closer to her daughter. “Emily, look at me. We have to talk about something.” Emily sniffs and glances up at her mother.

“What Mommy?” Claire pauses to construct her sentence, choosing every word carefully.

“We are going to Dallas because Mommy and Daddy aren’t getting along. We thought it would be best if we spent a few days apart.” Claire could’ve and should’ve made up some story about him needing a few days to campaign without them, but she wants to be honest with Emily. Emily cries for a few minutes and scoots towards to Claire.

“Is it ’cause I not eat my apples?” Emily asks.

“What?” Claire asks quietly and then nods in comprehension. Emily was in the kitchen last week when she and Frank were arguing about breakfast. Claire ended up storming out and left Frank with Emily. Now their daughter thinks she is the reason her parents aren’t getting along. “No, Emily, it’s not because you didn’t eat your apples. You did nothing wrong.”
“Why you not gettin’ along den?”

Truthfully, Claire isn’t sure how to answer the toddler’s question. It’s as simple as it is complicated. There are just too many intricate nuances to their marriage that go far beyond a three-year-old’s understanding.

“It doesn’t matter. All you need to know is we love you and you will see Daddy soon.” Claire pulls Emily’s iPad out of her daughter’s travel bag and hands it to her, hoping it will be enough to distract the toddler for the time being.

Aboard Air Force One, Frank is trying and failing to rehearse his campaign speech. Ever since Claire left with Emily this morning, Frank hasn’t been able to think of anything else. He misses his wife and daughter. No amount of applause or votes will change the fact Frank is alone. It’s unsettling to him not knowing if his wife intends on divorcing him or not. He knows Claire better than anyone else, and he realizes she’s going to need time to decide what her next step is. Retreating to Dallas with their daughter seems like the most logical thing to do for her. Hopefully, it will take some time for the press to catch onto the marital strife in the Underwood White House. In a few days, Frank will show up in Dallas and they can have a conversation about what they need to do.

Frank glances up from his speech and sees a piece of Emily’s jacket creeping out from underneath a chair. The toddler must’ve forgotten it when she was in his office a few days ago. Frank stands up and walks over to the chair, bending down to scoop up the jacket. He holds it close to his chest, breathing in the unmistakable scent of his daughter. His body collapses back into his desk chair and he grabs the frame resting on his desk. It’s a picture from his inauguration. Claire is holding the Bible his hand is splayed out on, Emily is standing next to his wife, looking admirably at her father as he gives the oath of office.

Suddenly, a blinding rage consumes Frank. He’s angry at his wife for leaving. He’s angry at himself for not seeing the cracks in their marriage she saw. They didn’t have to reach the point they did if Claire would’ve just came to him with her concerns before she already made the decision to leave. Would you really have listened though? Or would you have just written it off because you were too focused on the campaign? Frank asks himself and throws the papers on his desk onto the floor.

The car pulls up to the sprawling Hale mansion. Claire mentally prepares herself for facing her mother. She hasn’t seen Elizabeth Hale in over five years, on purpose. To say their relationship is strained would be putting it mildly. The animosity between the pair started when Claire was a teenager and only intensified when she married Frank, someone her mother openly disapproved of.

“Mommy dis house so big!” Emily exclaims from the driveway. Claire nods and hands Emily her tiny suitcase. Claire accepts her own from the driver and grabs her daughter’s hand. Emily’s going to be disappointed by the cold reception she’s going to receive from Elizabeth. Nothing Claire can do, including having Emily, will ever be right in Elizabeth’s eyes.

Emily and Claire walk into the estate with their suitcases in tow. Most of the furniture is covered and there is an eerie stillness blanketed over the house. Elizabeth is nowhere to be seen, which suits Claire just fine. The less Emily interacts with her grandmother, the better. Claire stops to admire the portrait of her father hanging over the fireplace and feels Emily tug her hand.

“Who’s dat Mommy?”

“That was my Daddy, your grandfather.” It still pains Claire her father isn’t alive to see Emily, knowing he would accept her more than her mother ever would. Emily nods and follows her mother as she strolls from room-to-room.

The real reason Claire came to Dallas is not to see her mother, but to lay the groundwork for her own political campaign. Besides her failed ambassadorship, Frank never fulfilled his promise to assist her in getting her political career off the ground. If Claire wants to pursue her own political ambitions and be something else but the First Lady, she needs to do it herself. Luckily, Dallas has an upcoming Congressional election and Claire is determined to win the nomination without her husband’s help.

“Emily, we have to get ready. I have some things I need to do.” Claire would rather not bring Emily along to her slew of meetings, but she doesn’t have a choice. She won’t leave Emily here with Elizabeth, wherever she may be. And childcare is not an option right now. As far as everyone knows, Claire is still with Frank and she would like to keep it that way for a while.
By the time Claire and Emily arrive back at the Hale mansion, it's well past dinnertime. Claire scrambles to have dinner made for herself and Emily while attempting to do work on her computer. She pulls up her web browser and shakes her head at what she sees. Multiple articles, some true and some false, detailing the fight she had with Frank. Their attempt to fly under-the-radar has been rendered pointless.

The pair are interrupted by the front door closing and the butler slipping off Elizabeth’s jacket. Emily is munching on her chicken and doesn’t notice her grandmother stepping into the dining room.

“I told you when you were five years old not to come into this house without saying hello to me,” Elizabeth Hale scolds Claire. Claire closes her laptop and prepares herself for a conversation with her mother.

“We came by when we arrived, but you were asleep.”

Elizabeth’s eyes dart over to Emily, frowning when she sees the toddler shove chicken into her mouth.

“Aren’t you going to introduce me?” Claire reaches over and wipes Emily’s mouth, ignoring protests from her toddler.

“Mother, this is Emily. Emily, this is your grandmother,” Claire says to her daughter.

“Hi,” Emily says quietly and goes back to eating her dinner.

“She looks like him,” Elizabeth announces, with disgust evident in her tone. Claire rolls her eyes. Of course, her mother would notice the tiniest of flecks of Frank tucked inside their daughter. Despite Emily’s dark hair and nose, she is the spitting image of Claire.

“I don’t think so Mother,” Claire states, just for the sake of arguing with her.

“As long as we’re living under the same roof and besieged by news trucks…”

“I apologize for all that,” Claire interrupts.

“Is it true?” Claire glances over at Emily and then back at her mother. Telling Elizabeth she won’t discuss it in front of their daughter won’t do any good. “Is that why you came down here?”

Claire begins to tell Elizabeth about her political aspirations down here in Dallas and the conversation is steered back to Frank again.

“Has he spoken to you? To discourage me?” Claire asks out of curiosity.

“He hasn’t spoken to me since the day of your Daddy’s funeral, just like you haven’t.”

“That is not true Mother. I called you when I was pregnant with Emily.”

Frank drops his keys on the counter and walks over to Claire. She is preoccupied with dragging a snack out of the fridge. He reaches for her, his hand splashes on her swollen abdomen as he drops a kiss on her cheek.

“Did you talk to the reporter?” Claire asks. After they attended the African Children Coalition gala last night, news of her pregnancy broke. The reporter who Frank is currently sleeping with was the one who wrote the story about her.

“I did. And I fed her something better.” Claire nods in approval and bites into her ranch-dipped carrot. She hands a beer to Frank who smiles in appreciation.

“Have you called your mother?” Frank asks and diverts his eyes to his wife’s stomach.

“Why would I…?”

“You know I hate Elizabeth as much as she hates me, but she deserves to know, Claire.” Claire knows exactly how the conversation will go. Elizabeth will disapprove, tell her she will make a terrible mother and then Claire will question her choice to keep the baby. However, for whatever reason, her husband will be insistent on it, so she might as well get the phone call over with.

“Fine.” Claire reaches for her cell and dials her mother’s number, crossing her fingers Elizabeth doesn’t pick up.

“Claire is that you?” Elizabeth asks.

“Yes, Mother, it’s me.”

“I was wondering when you would call. Is it true?”

“Yes, Mother, it’s true. Francis and I are having a baby.” Claire braces herself for the onslaught of disapproval she knows is coming.

“I thought he didn’t want children.” Frank sees Claire’s body stiffen and he stealthily walks towards
“We agreed we both wanted this child,” Claire wants to make it clear to her mother that Frank doesn’t control her, and they are a team. Whatever decisions they make, they make together.

“You two have no business being parents. Both of you are too selfish to ever raise a child. I can’t believe you would even put yourself in this situation again. You just never learn.” From the sidelines, whatever Elizabeth just said to his wife, makes her start to tremble. Her fingers coil around her phone as fire ignites Claire’s azure eyes. He sets his hand on her shoulder, which she gently shrugs off.

“Well Mother, I hope you are wrong about us.” Claire hangs up the phone without another word. She won’t give Elizabeth the satisfaction of being angry. Frank sees how upset Claire is and wraps his arm around her, bringing her in for a hug.

“We will be better than they were,” Frank whispers to her. He’s not only talking about Elizabeth and Claire’s father, but his parents too. Claire and Frank both had parents who treated them like nuisances instead of children. They are determined not to let history repeat itself with their child.

“That was over three years ago.”

“Mommy, I done,” Emily informs Claire, unaware she is interrupting a tense moment between her mother and grandmother.

“Claire, I don’t want her running around in here, making noise,” Elizabeth states as Claire lifts Emily into her lap. It bothers Claire that not only will Elizabeth not address Emily directly, she won’t even say her name.

“If you don’t want us here, I can make other arrangements.” Claire would be more than happy to pack her and Emily up and go to a hotel for the duration of their stay in Dallas.

“Oh, don’t be ridiculous. This house is as much yours as it is mine.” Elizabeth leaves Claire and Emily in the dining room. Claire inhales deeply, reminding herself not to let any of her mother’s comments get to her.

“Mommy?” Emily asks as she’s being tucked into bed. Claire sits down on the bed and hands Emily her favorite rabbit.

“What Emily?”

“Does gamma not like me?”

Claire is taken aback by Emily’s question and doesn’t know how to answer it. Honestly, Claire can’t even say if Elizabeth likes anyone, including the two of them. All Claire has ever been to her mother is a disappointment and wouldn’t be shocked if she sees Emily as the same.

“Your grandmother is not a nice person, Emily.” Claire decides to go with brutal honesty, something that has always worked for her as a mother in the past. Emily nods in understanding and holds the rabbit close to her body.

“I wanna go home,” Emily admits softly. The toddler misses her father and Meechum and her friends at school. To be abruptly pulled away from her familiar surroundings and flown halfway across the country without much of an explanation is hard on anyone, especially a toddler. Claire is proud of Emily for being so brave and patient while she tries to figure out the next steps for them.

“I know Em. We will get there soon.” Claire scolds herself for using her husband’s special nickname for their daughter. It will only make the toddler miss him more. She stamps a kiss to Emily’s forehead and softly closes the door behind her.

The next afternoon, the estate is invaded by a caravan of secret service and armored vehicles. Frank meets Doug at the steps of the Hale mansion, ready to be briefed on any details of his wife and daughter’s whereabouts since arriving in Dallas the day before.

Frank sends Doug off to gather more intel and he steps into the house, momentarily glancing at the portrait of Claire’s father hanging ominously on the wall. He hears footsteps approaching and turns to face his smug mother-in-law.

“Are you two going to make a habit of showing up here without even the courtesy of asking?” Elizabeth asks Frank while she descends the stairs.

“I wish I didn’t have to be here, but your daughters made it necessary.” The last person Frank wants to be in the company of is Elizabeth Hale, someone who despises him more than anything. And if it wasn’t for Claire, he wouldn’t have to be.
“You know, when she got married, I was sure she would wake up in a year or two. I had no idea it was going to take her 30.”

“Claire is the First Lady of the United States, and you still think she made the wrong choice.”

“Reduced to tabloid gossip? She might as well be living in that trailer park you come from.”

“Well, it was a peach farm, but you’re right, I am still white trash. I just happen to be white trash that lives in the White House.”

“Not even being president could give you any class.” Elizabeth shoots back.

Just then, Claire, Emily and LeAnn Harvey, Claire’s unofficial campaign adviser, walk in from outside. Emily spots her father and runs over to him, jumping into his arms. Elizabeth doesn’t hide the disdain at the scene playing out in front of her. Claire is less than thrilled to see her husband but knew he would find his way down here eventually. She just thought she had more time.

“I have your jacket for you, Em.” Frank made sure he swiped his daughter’s jacket from Air Force One. Emily claps her hands and reaches for the bundled-up piece of clothing tucked in her father’s arm. Despite the Texas heat, Emily puts the jacket on and grins widely at her dad.

“You just wait until your older little girl and you won’t be so enamored with your Daddy,” Elizabeth comments. Claire glares at Elizabeth and is grateful Emily wasn’t listening to a word she said. The toddler is much too preoccupied with telling Frank about the horses she saw on the estate. Elizabeth retreats upstairs and slams the door to her bedroom.

“…And Daddy, dem horsies were dis big!” Emily says to her father, holding her arms out as far as they can go. Frank is enjoying being in his daughter’s company, something he is taking advantage of now that him and Claire are separated. With the way things are going, he isn’t sure when he’s going to see his daughter again.

Doug joins them at the house a few moments later, carrying the file Frank sent him out to find. Claire, LeAnn and Emily trail behind Frank and Doug in a separate room, with Emily joining them. The toddler abandons her parents and runs over to Meechum, not having seen the secret service agent since their time in Iowa.

Once Emily is preoccupied, Claire’s demeanor turns colder towards her husband, the same icy exterior she’s been giving him the past few weeks. She doesn’t want to see him. She’s still processing everything resulting in the dissolution of their marriage.

“I’d like to talk to my wife alone, please.” Frank address LeAnn. He doesn’t trust her and would rather not have Claire be around her.

“She stays. Tell me what you need to tell me.” Claire would like to get this song-and-dance over with as quick as possible. She doesn’t mind him being here to see Emily but would like to limit their interaction without the toddler present.

“Doug.” Frank says and watches his chief of staff hand Claire a file. Claire peruses it and is shocked to find herself looking at her mother’s medical records. She’s not even going to bother asking what nefarious things Doug had to do to acquire this file.

“She’s been sick for three years. Radiation, chemotherapy, the works.” Frank addresses Claire. “But you didn’t know, did you?” Three years, right around the time Emily was born. Claire was so irritated at the way her mother reacted when she told her she was pregnant with Emily, she didn’t bother to inform her of Emily’s birth. Maybe she should’ve, maybe she would’ve known her mother was sick.

“You’re not dragging my mother in front of the cameras.” Elizabeth might be a terrible mother to Claire, but some fragment of her feels the need to protect her mother.

“Just you, and you’re going to say that that’s why you’re down here.” Frank and Claire both glance over at Emily who is laughing at Meechum holding her upside down. They silently agree to leave their daughter out of this press conference.

“This is a family matter, Francis.” Claire says, although it won’t make a difference. If they want the press to stop speculating and leave them alone, this is what they will have to do. It will make Elizabeth hate them more than she does, but it doesn’t matter to them.

“I need to know you won’t meddle with my campaign,” Claire says, using the only ammo she has. She wants her husband to stay away and leave her to do things her way for the first time in thirty...
years. “The State of the Union is in a week. You show up for that, then I’ll leave you alone.” Frank promises her. “There is another matter I need to speak with you about. And this time, I do want to speak with you alone.” Claire nods, knowing he wants to discuss what to do with Emily. LeAnn looks at her suspiciously, but Claire shoos her away. Doug and LeAnn both exit the room, going to work on separate campaign strategies for their candidates.

“She’s going to be a wreck when you leave,” Claire mumbles to him, the first conversation she’s had with just him since she left him in Washington. Frank follows his wife’s eyes to Emily, giggling at Meechum.

“I could take her for a few days. Let you work here, alone,” Frank suggests. He’s never watched Emily alone for more than a day, but he’s willing to make it work so Claire doesn’t feel like a single parent.

Claire’s lips twitch, giving the indication of a smile. She appreciates her husband trying, which is more than she could say when they were living under the same roof. There’s just no way his proposal is feasible. Being president doesn’t allow him to take care of Emily on his own, even for a short amount of time.

“No, Emily is fine here with me. Mother won’t like it, but she never likes anything I do anyway. She said Emily looks like you.” Frank crosses his arms and shakes his head. He can only imagine how irritated Claire is by the way her mother is treating Emily.

“Claire, I…” He pauses, swallowing his apology, “It’s unfortunate that Elizabeth is sick.” Regardless of how he feels about his mother-in-law, she is still Claire’s mother. He loves and cares about Claire deeply, despite their current situation.

Claire gives a clipped nod in appreciation and then seems to remember the real reason why he is here. Her body goes rigid again and she steps away from him.

“Let’s get this over with,” Claire says and disappears upstairs, so she can get changed. Frank regains Emily’s attention and picks her up.

“Hi Daddy,” Emily says and momentarily drops her head on Frank’s shoulder.

“Hi Em. Listen, when I go, I need you to do something for me.” Frank knows he must leave after the press conference without Emily. Their daughter has already seen her father come and go, but it upsets her every time.

“Okay, I’m wistenin’” Emily says seriously.

“I need you to be good for your mom, okay? She’s been working so hard to make sure you are happy.” “Okay Daddy, I be good.” Frank pinches Emily’s cheek, and secretly wishes he could do it to Claire too. They are going to have to figure out a way to be normal with each other around Emily.

Claire comes downstairs and sees the two of them speaking to each other in hushed tones. Whatever Frank is telling Emily, their daughter is taking incredibly seriously.

“Francis?” Claire asks, interrupting their conversation. Frank glances over his shoulder at his wife and winks at Emily. The toddler runs past her mother, scurrying over to Meechum. Claire furrows her eyebrows but doesn’t question it. She meets her husband at the threshold of the door, and he steps back, letting her go first.

They step outside into the cameras together, giving a prepared statement to feed the press their version of events. Claire is here, in Dallas, to take care of her sick mother. They are still a loving married couple, with a toddler. There was no argument between them, they are fine. Everything is fine.

When the statement is over, Frank and Claire retreat into the mansion to oversee the press’ reaction. It’s a stopgap, but it will do for the time being. At least they have an excuse for when Claire is in Dallas and he isn’t by her side.

The tips of Frank’s fingers skim Claire’s back as he tries to capture her attention.

“Claire, I’m heading back to Washington unless…” Frank cuts himself off because he doesn’t know
how to complete his sentence. Unless she wants to come back with him and forget the past few days, or months, ever happened? No, a Line of Demarcation exists in their marriage now. Things won’t be the same until they are both on board with repairing their marriage. He is, but she isn’t ready yet and won’t be for a long time.

“It’s fine. Go.” I don’t want or need you here, Claire thinks to herself. She turns to see Emily brush past her and attach herself to Frank’s leg.

“Bye Daddy,” Emily says as her eyes well up with tears. Frank bends down and extracts his daughter from his calf.

“Bye Em. Remember what I said.” Emily nods and her tears ebb immediately. She accepts a hug and kiss from her father before going to stand by her mother. Claire is surprised, she was expecting a tantrum from her daughter when Frank left. Frank gets to his feet and holds his hand out for Claire.

“Bye.” Claire accepts his hand, shaking it quickly before pulling away.

“Bye Francis.” Frank closes the door behind him, leaving his wife and daughter once more. Inside, Claire looks down at Emily, seeing the top of her daughter’s brunette head, the exact same hue as her father’s.

“Emily, what did Daddy tell you?” Claire knows she shouldn’t be asking but can’t help it.

“He say I be good for you.”

Claire nods, her lips stretching into a barely-there smile. Her husband didn’t have to say those things to their daughter, but he knew if he did, she would listen. Emily adores her father and would do anything he asks of her.

“You are being so good, thank you.”

A week later, Claire and Emily are back on a plane, headed to Washington, D.C. It’s the first time going back since Claire walked out on Frank over a week ago. The toddler couldn’t be more excited to return home to her father and possessions. What the three-year-old doesn’t realize is they aren’t staying. If Claire has it her way, they will be in town for a day.

“Mommy, we goin’ home!” Emily exclaims, clapping her hands together. Claire compels a smile on her face for the sake of her daughter. “We see Daddy and Meechy and my toys!”

“Yes, Emily, we are.”

A/N 2: I hope you guys liked this chapter! I originally had a completely different version of the chapter, but I deleted it and wrote this one. Next chapter, Claire, Frank and Emily are in Washington for the SOTU, which doesn’t go as planned. I encourage everyone to leave their thoughts! Thank you for reading and I will have something up for you soon.
Chapter Twelve

A/N: I wouldn’t be me if I didn’t thank everyone for taking the time to read and review this. I appreciate it so much. I encourage everyone to keep reading and sharing their thoughts as The Fallout comes to a close. For now, please enjoy the latest chapter.

Chapter Twelve.

A week later, Claire and Emily are back on a plane, headed to Washington, D.C. It’s the first time going back since Claire walked out on Frank over a week ago. The toddler couldn’t be more excited to return home to her father and possessions. What the three-year-old doesn’t realize is they aren’t staying. If Claire has it her way, they will be in town for a day.

“Mommy, we goin’ home!” Emily exclaims, clapping her hands together. Claire compels a smile on her face for the sake of her daughter. “We see Daddy and Meechy and my toys!”

“Yes, Emily, we are.”

The residences never felt like home to Claire. It’s something she never told Frank because it’s what they’ve been working towards since they met. She thought it just took some time adjusting to living in the White House, but the feeling didn’t go away. Their townhouse, their first house in Washington, is where she considers to be home. Now that she is back at the residences, the feeling is stronger than ever.

She doesn’t want to be here, and she doesn’t want to see her husband. However, she made a promise to Frank that she would be attending the State of the Union in exchange for his permission of sorts to forge ahead with her campaign. It doesn’t help that Emily hasn’t stopped smiling since they landed in Washington an hour ago. The toddler is ecstatic to be home and to be able to spend some time with her father.

“Go ahead Emily,” Claire tells her daughter and watches her charge towards her room. Emily has been the perfect child for the past week-and-a-half while Claire tries to sort their lives out. The least she could do is let her daughter enjoy her time in Washington.

“This place is amazing,” LeAnn comments from behind Claire.

“Don’t get too comfortable. We won’t be staying long.”

The two women are interrupted by Emily emerging from her room, holding her rabbit.

“Mommy, can I go see Daddy?” Emily asks, bouncing on her heels.

Normally, Claire and Frank don’t allow Emily near the Oval Office, or any other part of the White House besides the residences. Though, with the limited time they are spending in Washington, Emily is barely going to see her father. And Claire promised herself she wouldn’t do anything to hinder Emily’s time together with Frank.

“Yes, but Meechum is coming with you. And if Daddy is busy…” Claire doesn’t get the chance to finish her sentence. Emily’s already claimed Meechum’s hand and is scampering out of the residences.

“Your daughter really loves the president,” LeAnn says to Claire.

“Yes, she does,” Claire can hear Emily scolding Meechum to hurry up and keep pace with her.

LeAnn sets up her office in the dining room of the residences while Claire goes to her old room. It hasn’t been touched since she left, but there is a box resting on her pillow. Claire opens the box, surprised to see Frank’s mother’s diamond earrings and a handwritten note from her husband. She puts the earrings in her purse and throws away the note. Claire will placate Frank and wear the earrings, but they don’t have to mean anything.

“Meechy I miss you and Daddy,” Emily mumbles quietly as they walk towards the Oval Office. Meechum stops walking and kneels to be eye-level with the youngest Underwood. Admittedly, Meechum’s missed the toddler and the lightheartedness she brings to the White House. He’s also noticed the toll it’s taken on the president since his wife and daughter left over a week ago.

“I’ve missed you too.” Meechum stands up and knocks on the door to the Oval.
“Come,” Frank says from the other side of the door. Meechum lets Emily open the door and it swings open.

“Hi Daddy!” Emily says excitedly and rushes over to her father, climbing into his lap. Meechum closes the door behind him, wanting the pair to have some time alone.

“Hey Em.” Frank assumes since his daughter is here, his wife is also. He is shocked Claire let Emily come see him in the Oval.

“Mommy say I come see hi wif Meechy,” Emily informs him while playing with his tie.

“I’m glad you’re here. Should we go see Mommy?” Emily shakes her head, she’s seen enough of her mother in the past week. She would rather spend time with her father alone.

“No Daddy, we stay here. I help you be pwesident!” One of Emily’s favorite things to do is pretend she is the commander in chief alongside her father.

“Okay, for a little while.” Frank lets Emily scribble on a piece of paper while he works at his computer.

Twenty minutes later, Frank picks Emily up and walks out of the Oval, ignoring the looks he gets from staffers. Whether his wife wants to see him or not doesn’t matter, they have to discuss what to do for the State of the Union. Plus, Frank has to figure out what his wife is up to regarding her campaign, in order to outmaneuver her. Claire venturing out on her own won’t bode well for voters and Frank can’t have her distracting them from his own campaign.

Emily and Frank find Claire and LeAnn set up in the dining room of the residences. LeAnn spots the pair first and stops talking, gesturing for Claire to turn around. A frown curls on Claire’s lips when she sees her husband carrying their daughter. Emily is elated and whispering something in her father’s ear.

“Hi Mommy, I got Daddy for ya!” Emily exclaims and points to her father. LeAnn chuckles to herself, but Claire isn’t amused. She hopes her husband isn’t using their daughter as an excuse to be in the same room with her. Emily is aware of her parents not getting along, and besides the breakfast snafu, she hasn’t seen them argue firsthand. Claire and Frank would like to keep it that way. There’s no reason their daughter needs to be entwined in their conflict.

“I see that,” Claire says to Emily and stands up, walking towards the pair. LeAnn stays quiet and pretends to work while watching the president and First Lady speak. “What do you want Francis?” Frank glances down at Emily and then locks eyes with her, silently asking her if they should have this discussion in front of their daughter. Frank nudges towards the living room of the residences. He doesn’t want LeAnn Harvey to be privy to this conversation.

Frank attempts to put Emily down, but the three-year-old protests. Claire is going to have the hardest time coercing the toddler back on the plane tonight. Emily isn’t going to want to leave her father in Washington. She’s told Claire several times since landing in Dallas how bored she is and how she wishes she were at home with her friends and toys. Claire’s tried every end around she can think of to keep the toddler entertained, but her ability to do so is waning. Depending on how the campaign turns out, Claire might have to find her and Emily a permanent home that isn’t the White House. It may not even be in Washington.

“We need to discuss the State of the Union tonight,” Frank’s eyes fall to the top of Emily’s head, hoping he doesn’t have to spell it out for his wife in front of their daughter.

“Shes’s not coming.” Claire says simply, leaving no room for argument. She was lenient about letting Emily participate in campaign events before because she didn’t want to spend more time in a room discussing it with her husband than necessary. Now that she has the upper hand in their marriage, she’s using it to her full advantage. It would be silly of her not to. Frank will give her whatever she wants because he knows she can go public with their marital strife at any time. It would reflect poorly on her politically, but it would be catastrophic to his campaign if people found out the truth.

“Mommy, I wanna go,” Emily pipes up, shocking both Frank and Claire. Based on the state dinner disaster of a few months ago, the toddler is not equipped to sit quietly for the whole State of the Union address. Claire does not have the patience to handle a moody toddler while her husband delivers his speech. She will be there as per their agreement, but their daughter doesn’t have to be.

“Claire,” Frank says in his infamous “be reasonable” voice. Prior to their separation, she would’ve
considered it, but not anymore.
“She’s not coming, Francis.” Claire repeats herself in a more forceful tone this time. They are inching dangerously close to arguing in front of Emily, something they don’t want to do. However, their stubborn nature doesn’t allow Frank or Claire to concede.
“Fine.” One word, and Frank surrenders. He’s not in the position to be asking favors of Claire. If she’s this insistent on not wanting Emily there, then she can be the one to explain to their daughter why. “How’s Elizabeth?”
Claire scrutinizes his face carefully, looking for any indication of manipulation from her husband. She finds none and decides to take the question at face value.
“She’s doing alright considering. She’s not thrilled that I’m here or I’m there.” Frank smiles and nods.
“I meant what I said during the press conference…about you…taking care of your mother.” He reaches out to pinch her cheek, surprised when she doesn’t pull away. Claire appreciates the sentiment, but it doesn’t make a difference to her right now. Her feelings about their separation haven’t changed. She’s here because it’s beneficial for her and so their daughter can see him, nothing more.
“I should get back to it. I’ll see you tonight.”
Claire and Frank separate in the living room, with him going back to the Oval and her putting Emily down for a nap before returning to her own work.
Predictably, Frank figures out a way to torpedo Claire’s campaign during the State of the Union. He broke his promise to her about leaving her alone. Claire is disappointed, but not surprised. She’s just frustrated with herself she didn’t see the play coming. Her line of thinking used to be in sync with Frank’s, so much so that she used to be able to anticipate his moves before he even thought of them. By publicly endorsing another candidate, Claire’s hopes of winning the Dallas Congressional seat are now diminished.
When Claire arrives back to the residences, Emily is fast asleep on the couch. Frank is standing behind a chair across from the sleeping toddler.
“Is she sleeping?” Claire asks her husband before they are given the opportunity to say what they want to each other.
“Yes. We had a deal.”
“I showed up. We showed up.”
“And used that opportunity to undermine the campaign. Why didn’t you just ask me?” Claire walks further into the room and takes a breath before responding her husband. They need to keep their voices down in case their daughter wakes up. “If you needed the clinic to convince Doris…”
“You don’t want me to run, Francis.”
“That’s right, I don’t. But we’d reached an understanding.” Claire walks around one of the chairs, wanting to see for herself that their daughter is sleeping soundly, undisturbed by her parents’ disagreement.
“I think you said what you wanted me to hear.”
“Well, then you misread me.”
“I am looking out for myself. Just like you are.”
“What about Emily? Do you think it would serve her well to have her parents running in two different states?” Claire shakes her head ever-so-slightly. He has no right to bring up their daughter when the reason she had to do all of this is because of him. He sighs and extends his arms over the lip of the chair. “That wasn’t fair.”
“No, it wasn’t.” She’s giving him the opportunity to backtrack and amend his prior statement. Their fight has nothing to do with their daughter and everything to do with their marriage.
“We need to be looking out for our family. Me, you and Emily.”
“I’m not giving up.”
“You lied to me. Now, I can’t force you to see reason, but I will not allow you to become dangerous.” Frank says and walks over to the bar setup in the living room, pouring himself a whiskey. Claire hears him and turns around, watching him carefully.
“I’ll take one.” Frank doesn’t pour another drink and instead hands her his. She sits down on the couch, mindful of Emily’s feet.

“Claire, look. When I win the general, then we can concentrate on a Senate seat for you in Texas.” Claire half-listens to her husband ramble on about how what a mistake she’s making and decides to pacify him.

“Maybe it’s too soon. Maybe you’re right. But I need to think.”

“Fair enough.”

“I can’t do that here.”

“Back in Texas?”

“I’m not sure how long I’ll need.”

“And Emily?” Frank hates going long stretches without seeing his daughter. Claire sighs, and reminds herself of the promise she made.

“We will meet you in South Carolina.” Frank accepts her offer. His family campaigning with him in his home state will garner a lot of good press and votes. Claire hands him back the whiskey and he notices she never took a single drink.

Frank watches his wife kneel and gingerly scoop up Emily off the couch, being extra mindful not to wake her. Claire lets Emily’s head fall onto her shoulder, wrapping an arm around her torso.

“Bye,” Frank says to Claire, not making any attempt to touch her.

“Goodbye, Francis.” Frank drops a kiss on Emily’s head and watches his wife leave. He spins around and notices their daughter’s favorite rabbit poking out from under the couch cushions.

“Claire,” Frank says. Claire turns around and sees her husband holding the precious toy. She sighs in relief. Emily is already going to be cranky about not being able to say goodbye to her father, a missing rabbit would only add to her dismay. Claire grabs the stuffed animal with her free arm and tucks it under her armpit.

“Thank you,” she mumbles and squeezes his wrist. She turns on her heels and leaves her husband alone in Washington, again.

Claire makes sure Emily is passed out in the bed aboard the plane before meeting LeAnn in the main cabin.

“He wants me to hold off for Senate,” Claire informs LeAnn. “I told him I would think about it.”

“So, it’s over?” LeAnn asks, although she is doubtful. In the short amount of time she’s been working for the First Lady, Claire’s proven herself a worthy adversary of the president.

“Oh no, it’s not over.”

“He endorsed Celia on national television.”

“Forget the 30th. We need to think bigger. This cycle.” Claire isn’t going to allow herself to be defeated by Frank. Sure, she lost the Congressional seat in Texas, but she didn’t want it anyway. Not really. It was just an attempt to show him she’s been working for the First Lady, Claire’s proven herself a worthy adversary of the president.

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“Mother, my earrings.” Claire leaves Emily and walks upstairs, heading straight into Elizabeth’s
“I did no such thing.” Claire rifles through Elizabeth’s belongings until she finds them tucked in a drawer in her vanity. She reminds herself to thank Emily for knowing who took her jewelry. “Claire?” Claire stops at the threshold of the doorway, spinning around to face her mother. “When you leave today, I don’t want you and Emily coming back. I don’t want you two here anymore.” It’s one thing for Elizabeth to not want Claire around, at least that she could understand. However, Emily hasn’t done anything to Elizabeth. It’s just the fact she’s Claire and Frank’s daughter that makes the toddler toxic. Emily will never have a relationship with Elizabeth, her only surviving grandparent and Claire blames her mother for that. “Oh, we’ll come and go as we please, Mother.” Claire states simply and walks downstairs, grabs Emily’s hand and walks out of the mansion. She could care less about whether her mother wants her in Dallas.

When they arrive in Gaffney, Claire sends LeAnn on an errand, while she and Emily head to the house. “Go ahead,” Claire coaxes Emily as they arrive at the front door. The toddler swings the door open and visibly brightens when she sees her father waiting for her in the living room. Claire hangs back, letting Emily and Frank have their time together. She hopes reunions like this one become less frequent but can’t guarantee it. The campaign is far from over. Although, Claire won’t be chasing her husband from state-to-state. This is the last time she is involving herself in his campaign, particularly if he doesn’t go for what she is going to propose to him. “It’s good to see you.” Frank says to his wife, smiling at her ever-so-slightly. Emily is already suctioned to his leg, unwilling to let go. “You too, Francis. I see you have your shadow back.” Claire grins at their daughter. She’s happy Emily’s affection for her father hasn’t wavered since the separation began. Since Emily spends most of her time with her mother, Claire figured she would get tired of only seeing her father in short instances.

Awkwardness fills the space between them. They aren’t used to small talk, especially with each other. They developed a shorthand of communication between them over thirty years of marriage. Now, it’s almost like they are strangers again with the only connection they have is Emily. They aren’t divorced, but they really aren’t married anymore, not in the traditional sense. Frank is aware in the back of his wife’s mind, divorce is still on the table. When and if it serves her politically. “You and Emily can have the guest bedroom.” “That’s very thoughtful. You have an event now. We’d like to join you. Unless, you don’t want us there.” Frank glances at his wife’s profile, wondering why she is being so generous. She’s made it clear she hates campaign events, particularly when they involve their daughter. Something tells him she has a plan in motion, but he can’t say what it is any longer. “No, I’d love for the two of you to be there. What do you say Em?” Emily claps her hands excitedly and giggles when Frank picks her up. Claire allows herself for just a moment to remember what it was like when they were a family. Before his presidency, before Russia, and before the fight in the Oval. She misses it but doesn’t delude herself into thinking this could be their reality currently. It’s going to take a long time before things are resolved between them. Now more than ever she must think about what’s best for herself and her daughter, even if those plans don’t include her husband. At the event, Claire steps flawlessly into her role of the political spouse, something she was desperately trying to run away from a few months ago. Frank’s suspicions rise, but he reminds himself this is what he wanted since she left. They are acting as a unit again, even if it’s for a brief time. Frank’s ecstatic when Emily runs on stage during the handoff between him and Claire. They couldn’t’ve timed that better if they tried. Frank wraps his arm around his wife’s back and hoists Emily into the air with the other hand. The crowd goes wild and Frank is confident he’s going to win his home state by a landslide.
Back at the house, Claire lets Frank put Emily to bed. It’s something he hasn’t done in a long time and the toddler wouldn’t let her mother do it. Claire changes into her pajamas and keeps an eye out for her husband. She thinks she tipped Frank off at the event when they were all on stage together, so she backed off. Claire insisted on taking separate cars home, despite the fact they were going to the same place. Creating some distance between her and her husband allowed her some leverage.

While Frank is on the phone with Cathy, Claire sneaks into the main bedroom, stopping in the guest to make sure her daughter is asleep. When Frank switches the light on, he’s shocked to find his wife already laying in the bed.

“Oh, I’m sorry. I thought you were with Em in the other room.” Claire sits up and shakes her head.

“She’s spread-eagle on the bed, hogging the whole thing.”

“I’ll sleep in there then, with her.”

“Sleep in here.”

Frank hesitates for the slightest instance, but if his wife is okay with it, he’d like to. He sets his water down on the bedside table and slides into bed next to Claire.

While his back is turned, a serene smile washes over Claire’s face.

“We had the mattress on the floor.”

“What?”

“That first year, the mattress and those lumpy pillows.” Claire pushes the memory to the surface, hoping he will play along.

“Which you used to steal from me in the middle of the night.”

“Well, because you would hog all the covers.”

“God, we were living like heathens. I’m glad Emily came along after we got out of this place.”

“She took her first steps here, in Gaffney.” Frank smiles at her and nods.

“I remember.”

Ever since Emily was born, Frank’s been itching to return to Gaffney. He wants to show his daughter where he grew up, even if she won’t remember. Finally, a few weeks after Emily’s first birthday, Frank is able to convince Claire they should take a trip as a family. Also, Frank needs to put in some more facetime if he hopes to keep his constituents happy.

“This is our first house Emily,” Frank tells his one-year-old daughter as they walk into the Gaffney house. Claire hangs back, letting her husband show their daughter where they first got their political career off the ground. It pales in comparison to their townhouse in Washington, but it’s still a special place to them. Frank sets Emily down and watches her crawl around the living room. Claire captures her husband’s attention by setting her hand on his arm. She can tell how excited he is to have Emily here, although he won’t admit it. He hasn’t stopped grinning since they landed in South Carolina an hour ago.

“Francis, I’m going to make sure they set up the crib.” In anticipation for their arrival, Claire bought a crib and had it assembled in the guest bedroom by the time they got there.

“Okay.” Frank mumbles, half-listening to his wife. Claire grins and walks into the guest bedroom, pleased to see everything was done to her specifications. She crosses the hallway and walks into the master, wanting to change before they head out to a rally in a nearby town. “Claire! Come here!” Claire quickly throws her top on and rushes into the living room. She assumes Emily fell, but she didn’t hear the infant cry. Frank points at their daughter, who somehow managed to stand up. Claire stands next to her husband, watching their daughter intently. Emily hesitantly lifts her foot in the air and looks up at her parents for approval.

“Go ahead,” Frank coaxes their daughter. Emily takes a wobbly step forward and then another, before falling. Claire sets her chin on Frank’s shoulder while they watch their daughter push herself to her feet again, determined to practice her newly acquired skill. Frank brushes a kiss to his wife’s cheek and briefly tilts his head towards hers.

Frank and Claire let the memory fizzle between them. They look at each other and flash each other miniscule half-grins.

“Goodnight, Francis.” Claire mumbles and lays down in bed, her back to him.

“Goodnight.” Frank turns off the lamp on his side of the bed and lays down.
In the middle of the night, Frank rolls over to find his wife facing him, fast asleep. Her arm is outstretched, and her hand is on his pillow. A grin tugs at his lips. When they used to share a bed, Claire would always end up laying as close to his side of the bed as possible with her hand positioned in the same fashion as it is now. He closes his eyes and gently places his hand over hers. By the time he wakes up the next morning, her side of the bed is cold and she is gone.

A/N 2: Alrighty, that’s all you get for now! We are coming up on the last few chapters here, I encourage everyone to leave their thoughts while they still can. Thanks for reading and I will have an update for you shortly!
Chapter Thirteen

A/N: Welcome back guys! Thanks for the reviews and for hanging in there. We are so close to the end. I just want to let you know I slightly altered this chapter, but it's no different from usual. Okay, enjoy this chapter!

Chapter Thirteen
In the middle of the night, Frank rolls over to find his wife facing him, fast asleep. Her arm is outstretched, and her hand is on his pillow. A grin tugs at his lips. When they used to share a bed, Claire would always end up laying as close to his side of the bed as possible with her hand positioned in the same fashion as it is now. He closes his eyes and gently places his hand over hers. By the time he wakes up the next morning, her side of the bed is cold, and she is gone.

The bomb dropped the next morning in the form of a billboard splattered on the main highway in Gaffney. A billboard including Frank’s father shaking hands with a member of the Klu Klux Klan, dressed in the signature white robe. Underneath the picture: Underwood 2016.

Claire is having breakfast with Emily while Frank is still sleeping. She wanted to sneak out of the master bedroom before Frank and Emily woke up. Especially since when she opened her eyes, her hand was clasped in her husband's. They were practically nose-to-nose in bed. Claire chided herself for falling back into old habits. Her plan was to reminisce on the past, not relive it. Besides, they don’t need to be confusing Emily. Their marriage is still up-in-the-air, and they shouldn’t be sending their toddler mixed signals.

“Mommy, where you be?” Emily asks while she lazily walks into the kitchen. Claire sips her coffee and turns to face her daughter. Her daughter must’ve noticed she was alone in the guest bedroom when she woke up. Oh, I was just manipulating your father by inviting him to sleep in the same bed as me. Claire thinks to herself.

“I slept in the other room. What do you want for breakfast?” Claire quickly changes the topic of conversation before her daughter can connect the dots. Emily presses her finger to her lips, deep in thought.

“Pancakes! We make Daddy dem too!” Emily declares. Frank might need more than a few pancakes to cheer him after the news picks up on the billboard.

The smell of batter filters through their tiny house. Frank rolls over in bed, rubbing the sleep out of his eyes. He fumbles into the kitchen, a smile tugging at his lips when he sees Claire and Emily making pancakes.

“Daddy, you want dem?” Emily asks, spotting her father standing at the threshold of the kitchen. Claire chooses to ignore him for the moment, pretending to concentrate on transferring pancakes from the stove to a plate.

“Sure, Em, I’ll have some.” He can’t remember the last time they’ve had breakfast together as a family. Claire hands Frank a plate and fixes one for Emily before sitting down on the other side of her husband.

“Daddy, what we doin’ today?” Emily asks. The toddler loved the campaign event she attended with her parents yesterday. She doesn’t want this time with her parents to end. Going back to Dallas with just her mother doesn’t interest the three-year-old.

“I’m not sure yet, Em. It’s up to your mother.” Claire meets Frank's eyes over their daughter’s head. She wonders if he caught onto her tactics last night, or if he’s genuinely wanting her input.

“I think we should…” Claire begins, but stops when a flurry of people, including Meechum, storm into the house. This is it, the shoe is dropping. Frank furrows his eyebrows and drops his fork. Claire feigns innocence and stays in the dining room with Emily.

“Sir, there’s been a new development in your campaign. I think you should see this,” Meechum says and turns on the TV. Frank is horrified to see a long-buried photo of his father plastered on the biggest billboard in Gaffney.
“The press has surrounded the house. I can’t leave the damn place until I know exactly what I’m going to say,” Frank says as he gets a glimpse of the news trucks lining up on the front lawn. “We need to cancel your events,” one of Frank’s campaign advisors says.

“Of course we need to cancel my events. The expression on my face is a…” Frank is cut off by Claire coming into the living room, holding Emily. “What’s going on?” Claire sets Emily down and follows Frank over to the TV. Sure enough, the press is discussing the photo. Just like Claire wanted. “My God.”

“My father.” Frank whispers. He goes over to Meechum to request a favor while Claire watches more of the coverage. Emily tugs on the bottom of her robe.

“Mommy, what’s wrong?” Emily asks. Admittedly, Claire didn’t think about their daughter when she gave LeAnn this task. She just wanted to get Frank back for everything he’s done to their family in the past few months. Claire glances over at Frank. His expression shatters her for just a minute. She knows better than anyone how embarrassed Frank is about his father’s ties to the KKK. He never wanted their daughter to find out about a dark chapter in the Underwood’s past.

“Someone did something mean to your Daddy, so people won’t vote for him,” Claire explains. She neglects to mention she was the one who did it. Hopefully, Emily doesn’t find out it was her mother who stabbed her father in the back.

“Oh, we gotta help Daddy, right?” Emily asks, her cerulean eyes filled with determination. “We will.”

The Underwoods spend the day locked inside the Gaffney house, doing damage control. Claire makes it seem like she’s doing everything she can to reverse the harm done by the photograph. Eventually, her husband will learn that it was her who did it, but she wants him to discover it at a specific time.

Frank wraps up an unsuccessful call with Doris, a congresswoman from Texas he counted on for support. Claire comes in on the tail-end of the call, having just put Emily down for a nap. “She asleep?” Frank asks when Claire sits across from him on the couch.

“Yes. I had to convince her not to hold a press conference on our front lawn.” Frank smiles at the gesture. His daughter has always been his biggest supporter. It used to be Claire, but things have changed.

“She’s sweet.” Frank mumbles as his smile slowly giving way to a frown. “What if it’s Oren Chase, Francis?” Claire asks. She wants to divert suspicion away from her onto an old political rival of her husband’s. Ever since Oren Chase lost the Congressional seat to Frank, he’s made it his purpose to make his life difficult. It wouldn’t be a stretch to assume Oren was the one behind it. “He could’ve gotten his hands on a copy. There may be more than one.”

“Meechum first, then Clancy.” Frank tells her. He wants his own people investigated first before widening the scope.

So far, Claire’s plan is working flawlessly. Her husband doesn’t suspect her at all and is leaning on her for support. She just must remind herself that he will find out eventually, and he won’t easily forgive her when he does.

Later, Frank and Claire are meeting with Oren Chase and Meechum in the church office. Claire hangs back and lets Frank browbeat Chase into confessing he assisted in putting the billboard up. Claire made sure LeeAnn remained anonymous and it wouldn’t be traced back to her. It would unravel everything if Chase ratted her out to save face.

After Chase leaves, Meechum brings Emily into the office so they can walk out together as a family. Frank decided he wants to come clean about the photograph to the congregation and the American people. Claire and Emily are merely there for support.

“Ready?” Frank asks Claire, resting his hand on her back. Claire holds onto Emily’s hand and walks ahead of him. Emily grips her mother’s hand tightly and shies away from people taking their photograph.

The mayor of Gaffney approaches the podium first, giving a speech in support of Frank. The microphone is passed off and Frank tentatively begins his address. This speech means more to him than any before it. He’s fighting for his life here. The people of Gaffney and South Carolina need to
believe that his father wasn’t acting maliciously. He just went to the Klan for money in desperate times.

Frank catches Emily’s eye as he’s speaking about his family’s KKK ties. Although the toddler doesn’t comprehend what her father is saying, she isn’t fidgeting. She’s sitting quietly next to Claire, listening as everyone else is. He’s sorry his daughter must bear witness to this. If it were up to him, she would’ve had been with a babysitter while he and Claire are here. However, having his wife and daughter in the crowd are good optics. And he needs all the good press he can get right now.

“As many of you know, Claire and I have a daughter. She’s here, in this room, with us.” Frank appeals to family, something people in the South care very much about. “My wife and I have worked hard our entire lives to provide the best life we can for Emily. I never understood what my father did or why he did it until I had a child. The truth is, if I were in that situation and it was the only solution, I would do the same thing for our daughter. I’m not condoning his behavior. I just ask you to empathize with him as a father and as a man.”

Claire stiffens in her seat and looks down at Emily. She believes her husband. A pang of guilt slices through her. Before their daughter, Claire wouldn’t think twice about what she’s done. Maybe this time, she’s gone too far.

No matter how many hands Frank shakes or how many people were moved by his speech, he still loses South Carolina. A devastating blow, given it was supposed to be the only sure thing in his campaign.

Claire is busy making sure Emily is fed while Frank is on a conference call with Doug and Seth. They hear Frank’s raised voice from the other room and Emily shrinks back in her chair a little.

“It’s okay Emily. Daddy’s just mad he lost,” Claire reassures her daughter. Because of me, she fails to say. Emily nods and takes a bite of her food.

“Is he not gonna be presidential now?” Emily asks.

“I don’t know. We will have to wait and see.” Frank losing his home state is not a good sign for primaries to come. Dunbar, his opponent, could easily use the photograph against him in every primary until Election Day.

Emily flinches when Frank slams the phone down on the hook. Claire peeks over her shoulder into the kitchen, shooting a warning glare at her husband to check his temper in front of their daughter.

“Let me talk to Daddy really quick,” Claire tells Emily, winking at her. Emily nods and goes back to eating her dinner.

Claire finds Frank in the kitchen, nursing a glass of whiskey. Exhaustion has creeped into his features over the past few hours.

“What did Doug and Seth say?” Claire asks. Frank sighs and takes a long sip of his drink before responding.

“They want me to concede on national television.” Frank practically spits the words out. After today, the only thing Frank wants to do is retreat until he can come back stronger. Eventually, news of the photograph will wear itself out. When it does, Frank must be ready for an entirely new campaign strategy that will regain his lead over Dunbar.

Claire reaches across his body, gently prying the scotch out of his hand. She sets it down on the counter and grasps his hand. Confusion furrows Frank’s brow. He isn’t sure why she is being so nice to him. There’s no reason for her to be.

“We will figure this out.” We. Frank latches onto the word, forgetting the rest. She didn’t say you, she meant we. As in us. Their hands detach from each other’s when Emily stumbles into the room.

“Mommy, I done,” Emily announces. Claire walks over to scoop up the toddler, running a cold washcloth over her face.

“Say goodnight to Daddy,” Claire tells Emily. She knows Meechum is coming back with the safety deposit box Frank requested him to get at any minute. He’s going to find out she’s the real orchestrator of today’s events. Hopefully, Emily will be asleep by then.

“Night Daddy,” Emily mutters begrudgingly to her father. Frank laughs at the lack of enthusiasm on Emily’s part. He gives her a hug and watches his wife drag their daughter towards the guest bedroom.
When Meechum returns to the house, Frank asks him if he was the one behind the photograph. He doesn’t want to because he knows Meechum would never betray him like that. However, he would be a fool if he didn’t cover all his bases. Meechum denies it and Frank believes him. The secret service agent would have nothing to gain by leaking the photo. Seth was merely speculating.

Frank goes over to the dining room table and opens the safety deposit box. He briefly looks at the photo before setting it aside. Underneath it, is his mother’s earring box. A calling-card of sorts. Claire. His own wife betrayed him in the worst way. Fury courses through his body and he slams the safety deposit box shut.

From the guest bedroom, Claire hears a loud thud and knows its her cue to intervene. She checks to make sure her daughter is fast asleep before meeting up with her husband in the living room. Sure enough, Frank is holding the earring box.

“It’s only a wound. It’s not fatal,” Claire says.

“My home state, Claire.”

“Please, sit down. We need to talk. And keep your voice down, Emily is asleep in the next room.”

Frank slowly turns around, glaring at Claire the entire time. She’s right. Their daughter cannot be woken up by another argument between them. No matter how angry he is at his wife, he must reign it in.

Claire tries to make a case for why Frank should bring her on, not at his wife and First Lady, but as vice president. Initially, Frank is strongly against it.

“You can’t win without me,” Claire says. They know she’s right. Having Claire by his side is his only chance at reelection. He’s just too stubborn and hurt to see it now.

“Your mother was right about you. You let your selfishness destroy this family. Did you even think about Emily when you did this?” Frank asks Claire. Her body goes stiff, but she refuses to abandon her goal.

“I did this for Emily, for us.” Frank scoffs at his wife.

“No, you did this for yourself, just like everything you’ve done in the past six months.” And you haven’t? Claire asks herself, though she decides to keep the comment to herself.

“I can be a part of your campaign or I can end it. I’ll do whatever it takes too. Just like your father,” Claire throws down the gauntlet. She is not letting this go. Either he puts her on the ticket or she will do everything in her power to make sure her husband never holds elected office again.

Claire walks over to the phone in the kitchen, dialing her detail.

“I’m taking Emily back to Dallas with me, tonight.” Claire tells Frank. “I’ll need a car to the Greenville Airport. To Dallas, yes.” She hangs up the phone and looks at him, daring him to challenge her.

“She’s going to be upset you know,” Frank reminds her. A flicker of sadness washes over Claire’s face before it’s snuffed out. They are going to disappoint their daughter, again. And this time, Claire has nobody to blame but herself.

“She’ll get over it.” Frank shakes his head at her, baffled by her selfishness. They are inching dangerously close to tearing each other apart, politically and personally. Their civility towards one another is over. He won’t stop her from taking their daughter back to Texas. Realistically, there’s not much he can do. Frank must forge ahead with his campaign.

Claire goes into the guest bedroom and scoops up the toddler. She’s reminded of when she did this after the State of the Union. Only this time, she’s not coming to Frank’s aid again. Claire is determined to stay in Dallas until her husband capitulates to her demands. Depending on Emily, she might have to fast track the process if she notices her husband stalling.

“Think it over Francis. I’ll be expecting an answer from you soon,” Claire says to him as she’s heading out the door.

“It’s not going to happen Claire.” Claire readjusts Emily on her hip and closes the door behind them. Predictably, Emily starts crying the next morning when she wakes up in Dallas without her father.

“I’m sorry Emily. We had to come back here. Daddy couldn’t come. He’s too busy with work,” Claire explains. She leaves out the part where it was her who decided they should return to the Hale mansion. Emily sobs into her mother’s blazer. Claire hears someone come into the living room and
looks up to see her mother.
“What’s she crying about?” Elizabeth asks Claire. Emily sniffs loudly and turns to face her
grandmother.
“I miss my Daddy,” Emily tells Elizabeth. Besides being introduced, this is the only interaction the
pair have had with each other. Elizabeth lets out a sound that’s a mix between a laugh and a scoff.
“Well that’s too bad darlin’, cause your daddy isn’t coming back,” Elizabeth says and walks past
Claire and Emily. Emily’s eyes fill with tears again and she looks to her mother for confirmation.
“Don’t listen to her Emily,” Claire tells her daughter and picks her up. “Daddy will be back. It’s just
going to take some time.”
What Frank and Claire are doing isn’t fair to Emily. It’s not fair to each other either. Their marriage
has been in limbo long enough, and their daughter is suffering because of it. Claire’s given her
husband some time to mull over her offer, but now she must show she’s serious about it. Claire
writes a note to Frank and asks LeAnn to deliver it to her husband in Washington, personally.
It’s a letter of intent. If Frank doesn’t comply with adding her to his ticket, she will announce her
plans to divorce him on Super Tuesday. It will obliterate his campaign. LeAnn jumps on the first
plane to D.C. and Claire tries in vain to keep Emily occupied.
Frank reads the letter, grimacing at the contents of it. His wife is completely serious, he realizes this.
She would hold a press conference detailing every minute of their blowout in the Oval Office if need
be.
“Tell her she will have her answer by this evening,” Frank tells LeAnn and sends her away.
Back in Texas, Claire is trying to make a few phone calls while Emily is down for a nap. The line
keeps beeping and then goes dead.
“Both the cell and the landline…” Claire tells the Secret Service agent, but he interrupts her.
“We’re on lockdown ma’am. We had to scramble the…”
“Lockdown? What are you talking about?”
“There is a current, highly credible threat to you and your daughter’s lives. I’ve been ordered to keep
the two of you securely in the house.”
Francis. Claire thinks immediately. She’s played her move, now he’s playing his. There’s no real
threat to her and Emily. If there was, Frank would’ve let her know. Unfortunately, her and Emily are
stuck in the mansion until further notice.
An hour later, Claire notices the Secret Service agents outside scrambling. Something’s happened,
Claire thinks to herself just as an agent approaches her on the landing.
“What’s happened?” Claire asks.
“The president’s been shot.”
Claire’s stomach drops as shock wraps around her body. Emily. The toddler is going to unravel at
the news of her dad’s shooting. Claire rushes upstairs to pack their bags while the Secret Service
arranges her detail back to Washington.
“Mommy?” Emily asks when she’s woken up by Claire’s frantic movements around the room. Claire
stops and throws down her half-packed suitcase. She’s been dreading this moment since finding out
about her husband’s condition.
“Emily, something happened to Daddy. Somebody hurt him. We have to see him and make sure he
gets better.” Claire leaves no room for doubt her husband is going to recover. She would rather have
Emily cling to that than fear her father’s going to die.
“Why?” Emily asks after a few moments of silence.
“You mean why did someone hurt Daddy?” Claire asks, and Emily nods. “I don’t know Emily.
Sometimes people do bad things to people we love.” It’s a less-than-satisfactory answer, but Claire
doesn’t want to scare the toddler. Over his political career, Frank’s made a lot of enemies. It was only
a matter of time before one of them did something to him. “Get dressed and I have to talk to your
grandmother for a minute.”
Claire leaves Emily in the guest bedroom and walks into the master. Elizabeth is standing near the
window, watching the commotion outside.
“Francis…” Claire begins.
“Michael told me.” Elizabeth watches Claire curiously, waiting to see what her reaction is.
“I hope he dies.”

“Emily and I have to go back to Washington.”

“Well, what are you waiting for?” There’s a momentary pause and Elizabeth almost laughs in Claire’s face. “Do you expect me to console you? Or tell your daughter everything’s going to be alright?”

“No, I just…goodbye Mother.” It was foolish of Claire to expect sympathy from her mother.

“Claire,” Elizabeth says. Claire turns around, waiting to see what her mother will say. “I hope he dies.”

Claire shakes off her mother’s comment and goes to grab Emily. Hopefully, this is the last time she will set foot in Dallas for a while. After today, she has no desire to ever see her mother again.

Once they land in Washington, a car takes Claire and Emily straight to the airport. They barely avoid the press, who are eager to get a quote from either of them.

Emily holds Claire’s hand while they are directed to a private wing in the hospital.

“Mommy?” Emily asks.

“What Emily?” Claire’s too distracted by looking for the doctor to notice what her daughter does.

“Where’s Meechy?” Claire freezes at her daughter’s question. She forgot to mention to her daughter that the Secret Service agent who was killed was Meechum, the Underwoods favorite. “He’s here wif Daddy.”

“Emily,” Claire kneels to be eye-level with the toddler. She’s going to have to break more bad news to Emily, who’s already been through enough. “Remember when I said someone hurt Daddy?”

“Yeah…”

“Well, someone hurt Edward too. They hurt him more than they hurt Daddy and he…he died. He’s not going to be with us anymore.” Claire feels her eyes welling up with tears. She quickly wipes them away, so Emily doesn’t see her cry.

The toddler throws herself at Claire, hugging her tightly. Claire briefly lets herself fall apart but realizes its more because of Edward than her husband. Right now, she’s confused as to how she feels towards Frank.

“Come on, I have to talk to the doctor who’s fixing Daddy.” Claire doesn’t have time to mourn Meechum. Emily is going to need her to be strong and Donald Blythe is going to need her assistance to run the country.

Emily uncoils herself from Claire and holds her hand again, as if nothing ever happened.

“I want you to sit over there,” Claire tells Emily and hands her the iPad with some headphones.

Emily does as she’s told, and Claire takes the doctor aside, out of earshot from her daughter.

“How is he?”

“I’d like to see him.”

Emily tools herself from Claire and holds her hand again, as if nothing ever happened.

“I want you to sit over there,” Claire tells Emily and hands her the iPad with some headphones.

Emily does as she’s told, and Claire takes the doctor aside, out of earshot from her daughter.

“Mrs. Underwood,” Dr. Saxon says when he sees Claire.

“How is he?”

“They’re still in the OR. Probably a few hours left to go.”

“Is he going to live?” Claire asks directly. She needs to know if she should be preparing her daughter for the worst.

“He took a direct hit to his liver, which is partially shattered. Fortunately, part of the left lobe is mostly intact. Now, we think there’s a decent chance he will survive surgery, but even if he does, that’s when the real fight begins.”

“I’d like to see him.”

“As soon as he’s out, I’ll make sure you know. You first, and then your daughter can come in later.”

Claire isn’t sure if she wants Emily to see Frank in this condition. She doesn’t want Frank lying in the hospital bed to be the last thing Emily remembers of her father. Hopefully, when Frank recovers more, Emily can be brought in. The doctor leaves Claire and she sits down next to Emily.

A few hours later, Frank is being transferred to a private room. He made it through surgery but is still heavily sedated. Claire is granted permission to enter. Emily is fast asleep against her.

“Em, I’m going to see Daddy. This man is going to look after you, okay?” Emily is still sleepy and merely rolls over, using Claire’s jacket as a pillow.

“If she wakes up, come and get me,” Claire tells the agent before going into Frank’s room.

When she first sees him, it startles her. Her husband has a respirator in his mouth, various tubes
snaking in and out of his body and his skin is a pale-yellow color. He looks so weak. Claire parks a chair next to his bed and calls LeAnn briefly to ask how her husband received the letter. Not that it matters anymore. She can’t divorce him, not now. Claire hangs up the phone and stares at her husband, remembering a conversation they had about their mortality.

“The lawsuit?” Frank asks when he gets home one night. Shortly after Peter’s death, a former employee of Claire’s files a lawsuit against her, claiming she was fired because of her pregnancy.

“Among other things,” Claire says.

“What other things?” Frank sets his briefcase, coat and keys down on the table before joining her at the windowsill. He presumes Emily is upstairs sleeping. Claire usually never smokes when she’s awake. “You know, I cannot guarantee you that all of this is gonna succeed.”

“Oh, it’s not that.” Their scheme is the furthest thing from Claire’s mind right now.

“You can tell me, or I could just keep guessing.” Frank accepts the cigarette and takes a drag.

“You’ll roll your eyes at me.”

“Not at you.”

“I was thinking about, when one of us dies whether it’s you first or me…”

“Well if its me, and I’m sure it will be, you won’t be alone for long. And you’ll have Emily.” Claire takes the cigarette back from Frank, flicking a few ashes off.

“No. I mean, what will we leave behind?”

“We’ve accomplished a great deal. And I intend for us to accomplish a lot more.”

“But for whom?”

“For each other. For Emily.” Frank isn’t comprehending the point of this conversation.

“Do you think we should have another baby? Another sibling for Emily?” Frank is so shocked by Claire’s question, he almost falls off the windowsill. His wife has told him countless times she’s only wanted one child. For her to have a sudden change of heart is alarming.

“Sweetheart, we don’t need another child. I’m not going anywhere, and neither are you.” Frank puts the cigarette out in the ashtray and holds out his arm for Claire. She moves closer to him, cocooning herself into his frame.

“Francis can you hear me?” Claire asks her husband. She stands up and inches closer to his hospital bed. “Francis?” She’s waiting for a response that isn’t coming.

A/N 2: This is hot-off-the-press, I hope it’s not riddled with too many errors. Next chapter might be the FINAL one, unless you guys want an epilogue. Please leave a review on your way out and thank you for reading!
Chapter Fourteen

“A/N: I try to find different ways to say this every time, but I can’t, so I’ll just say thank you for reading and reviewing this story. This is probably one of my favorite stories I’ve ever written, and I’m so sad it’s coming to an end. For now, please enjoy the latest chapter.

Chapter Fourteen

“Francis can you hear me?” Claire asks her husband. She stands up and inches closer to his hospital bed. “Francis?” She’s waiting for a response that isn’t coming.

Claire reaches out to touch Frank but is interrupted by a Secret Service agent knocking on the door. She backs away, turning her full attention to the agent.

“I just spoke to Eddie’s parents, ma’am. You said you wanted to call them?” The agent asks her. She has no idea how she’s going to explain what Meechum meant to her family. He became the Underwoods’ most loyal friend since joining Frank’s detail nearly three years ago. Frank is going to be devastated when he wakes up and discovers Meechum was killed. If he wakes up, Claire reminds herself.

“Yes, thank you. Is my daughter still asleep?” Claire asks. She thought she left that agent in charge of watching Emily.

“As far as I know ma’am. I will go check on her.” The agent leaves Claire alone in Frank’s room again. Claire steps outside and grabs her phone, dialing Meechum’s mother.

“He treated my husband, daughter and I with great respect and we will miss him terribly. I’m so sorry for your loss,” Claire says sincerely. She sees Doug approach out of the corner of her eye and holds up a hand to delay him for a moment. Doug steps in front of her when she hangs up the call.

“Lucas Goodwin?” Claire asks Doug. Lucas Goodwin is the identified perpetrator of the shooting. He developed a vendetta against Frank after he was sent to prison for cyberterrorism.

“We didn’t know he was out,” Doug tells her. Claire scoffs at the excuse Doug provides. It’s his job to keep a watch on any threat to their family and he failed. Frank could die because of it.

“How can that happen? He’s released, and you didn’t know…” Claire stops when she sees Emily run towards Frank’s room. “Emily, wait!”

The toddler isn’t listening and ducks into her father’s hospital room. Claire sidesteps Doug and joins her daughter in the room, shutting the door behind them. This is not how she wanted her daughter to see her father. She was hoping she could hold the three-year-old off until Frank’s condition improved.

“When I say wait, you wait. This is not the place for you to be running around.” Claire scolds her daughter. Emily doesn’t register her mother’s admonishment, she’s too busy staring at her father.

“Is Daddy sweepin’?” Emily asks quietly and points to Frank. Claire lets out a sigh as she bends down to Emily’s eye-level.

“Yes. The doctor’s fixed him and we are just waiting for him to wake up.” What Claire is relaying to Emily isn’t exactly true. She is providing her daughter with the best-case-scenario, which is unlikely. Emily takes a cautionary step towards Frank’s bed and looks at her mother for permission to move closer. “You can walk up to his bed, Emily. Just be very careful.”

Emily walks up to the railing with Claire following close behind. The toddler gently puts her hand on her father’s arm.

“I miss you, Daddy,” Emily whispers to her father. Claire picks Emily up, so she can get a better vantage point. “Why is Daddy lellow?” The three-year-old points to Frank’s face, which is a golden hue.

“It’s the medicine the doctor gave him. Come on, let’s let Daddy sleep.” Any attempt to explain the side effects of liver failure will go over Emily’s head. She wants to keep things as simple and as positive as possible. If Frank’s condition changes, then she will prepare Emily for that.

When Claire and Emily step out, Doug is still waiting outside the room. He encourages Claire to
return to the White House, telling her that Donald Blythe, Frank’s vice president, is unfit for the job. The country’s best hope at this point is for Claire to act as an adviser to Donald.

“Fine, we need to get our things. We will meet you there,” Claire tells Doug while holding Emily’s hand.

“Doug, Daddy is sweepin’” Emily informs her father’s chief of staff. Doug doesn’t acknowledge Emily and steps away from Claire.

Back at the White House, Claire feeds herself and Emily dinner before giving her daughter an abbreviated bedtime routine.

“Mommy, are we stayin’ here?” Emily asks as Claire is tucking her into her old bed.

“Yes, Emily, until Daddy gets better, we are staying here.” The toddler smiles and holds her rabbit close to her chest. Claire brushes a kiss to her daughter’s head.

“Mommy?” Claire stops halfway to the door to face her daughter.

“What Emily?” Emily holds her precious rabbit up, so her mother can see.

“I bring Daddy Bunny ‘cause he sick, okay?” Claire smiles at the gesture. Usually, her toddler won’t let the rabbit out of her hands for a moment, especially when something is making her anxious.

“I’m sure your daddy would love to have Bunny. We will give it to him tomorrow. Get some sleep.” Claire leaves the residences and goes into a conference room near the Oval where Donald is waiting for her.

“Claire,” Donald says when he sees her, standing up to give her a hug.

“Hello.” They hug briefly and separate just as Doug joins them.

“How are you? How’s Emily dealing with all of this?”

“She’s fine. We are both exhausted.” Claire would rather brush past all the niceties and get to the point of why she’s here. She welcomes the distraction and it would benefit her politically if she can steer the country through this crisis with Russia while her husband recovers.

After her meeting and joint press conference with Donald is over, Claire retires to the residence, doing a quick check on Emily. Her clothes have been brought back from Dallas and are hanging up in Frank’s room instead of hers. Claire changes into pajamas and slides under the covers of Frank’s bed. She inhales the pillow case, catching the faint smell of aftershave and cigarettes lingering in the fabric.

Just as the reality of her situation hits Claire, she shakes her head, willing the thoughts out of her mind. She can’t allow herself to be the grieving wife because it’s not how she feels. It’s how the country and people within Frank’s administration expect her to feel, but it’s not true.

In the morning, Claire rolls over to find Emily sleeping beside her. The toddler must’ve woken up in the middle of the night and snuck into Frank’s room instead of hers. Claire changes into pajamas and slides under the covers of Frank’s bed. She inhales the pillow case, catching the faint smell of aftershave and cigarettes lingering in the fabric.

Claire is amazed at the calmness her daughter’s exhibiting throughout Frank’s shooting. She can see her husband’s pragmatism in Emily. Frank would be proud of their daughter for acting well beyond her age.
“You are so brave, Em.” Claire pinches her daughter’s cheek, just as she’s seen Frank do to her multiple times.

“Daddy say that Mommy, not you.” Emily reminds Claire and hops off the bed. Claire is taken aback by the coolness in her daughter’s voice.

Later that day, Claire is resting in Frank’s room when she notices a subtle change in her husband’s condition. Although his eyes are closed, he seems to be more alert than he has been since his surgery. He keeps opening and closing his mouth, almost as if he’s gesturing for water. Claire scoops up the water cup and carefully angles it towards Frank’s mouth, watching him take a slow sip. She puts it back on the tray before facing him again. This time, Frank has his eyes open and he’s staring at her. There’s no recognition in his eyes, and they close again.

Donald comes into the kitchen that night while Claire and Emily are having dinner.

“Hi Emily,” Donald says awkwardly and waves to the toddler. He met her briefly at the first state dinner of the Underwood administration a few months ago. Emily was too shy to acknowledge him then.

Claire slides some chicken nuggets over to Emily in her booster seat which the toddler eagerly gobbles up. Donald laughs while Claire puts some salad on a plate for herself.

“Emily, this is Donald. He is the president while Daddy is sleeping,” Claire explains to her daughter and winks at Donald. She hopes he is smart enough to play along without giving away details of Frank’s deteriorating condition. The toddler doesn’t and will not know about the urgency to find her father a new liver.

“Hi,” Emily mutters and goes back to eating her food, not bothering to initiate a conversation with this new person in the room.

“She’s tired.” Donald shrugs it off.

“It’s scary about Frank.” Claire glances over at Emily, wondering if the toddler is listening to their conversation.

“Well, Francis is a fighter.” Donald voices his concerns about a call with Petrov the following morning and Claire offers to assist him from the White House. He agrees and bids the Underwoods’ a goodnight.

At the hospital, Claire is sitting with Emily in Frank’s room when Doug is requesting to speak with her. Emily is preoccupied with coloring her dad a picture and doesn’t notice Claire sneaking out. Predictably, Doug is upset with Donald about the phone call with Petrov. He is unaware that Claire was listening in, coaching the vice president on what to say. Doug isn’t used to Claire being in charge and he doesn’t like it. Claire has always acted as Frank’s most trusted adviser, but she’s shutting Doug out now that she’s working with Donald.

Claire allows Doug to see her husband, ushering Emily out of the room. Emily leaves the picture with Frank and follows her mom. The pair return to the White House so Emily can be put down for a nap.

That night, Claire and Donald meet up in the kitchen of the residences. It seems to be a new nightly routine between them.

“Emily asleep?” Donald asks as he sits down in the chair across from Claire.

“Yes, we spent most of the day at the hospital. She didn’t want to leave.” Donald smiles at the comment while Claire lights up a cigarette. Since her and Frank pretended to quit last year, she only smokes occasionally, mostly when she needs relief.

“What was it like when Marjory died?” Claire asks out-of-the-blue. Her and Donald have become sort-of-friends and he’s the only one she feels she can talk to about losing a spouse. After the briefing with the doctor today, the possibility of losing Frank has been on her mind.

“Oh, well, it was um…” Donald fumbles for words and Claire backtracks.

“I’m sorry. We don’t have to talk about it if you don’t want.”

“No, it’s fine. We hadn’t had a real conversation in months. Her mind was gone. When she finally died, it felt like a limb had been hacked off. I felt...devastated. But I also felt relieved.”

“That’s what I feel about my mother.”

“It hadn’t even occurred to me. You and Emily have Frank and your mother.”
“When my father died, it destroyed me, but when I think about Mother, I feel nothing.”
“You two aren’t close?”
“No. And I feel the same about Francis. Nothing.”

Claire can see the poorly hidden surprise on Donald’s face, but it’s true. Of course, she doesn’t want Frank to die, but it wouldn’t break her if he did. She’s more concerned about how Emily will handle it. She doesn’t want their daughter to grow up without a father, especially given how close the two are. Emily might never be the same if Frank dies.

Donald doesn’t know the strain on Frank and Claire’s marriage that’s been festering for the past several months. He sees it as Claire’s too rattled that she doesn’t know how to feel, but that’s not the case. The love she had for Frank has diminished. She was ready to divorce him before he got shot. If he survives this, it doesn’t mean their marriage is suddenly fixed.

The next day, after meeting with Remy to put the next phase of their plan in place, Claire must give a press conference to the American people about Frank’s condition. Emily is on hand while Seth is going over the talking points with Claire.

“You don’t want her participating right?” Seth asks Claire as he looks down at Emily.
“No. I don’t want her to watch either.” Claire won’t tout Emily in front of the cameras, so the public can see how devastated their daughter is. She is strongly against Emily being exposed to the media in any way.

“Mommy, what you doin’?” Emily asks and tugs on her mother’s skirt to get her attention.
“I’m telling people about Daddy.”
“Why?”
“We want people to know Daddy is getting better,” Claire lies to Emily. Seth clears his throat but is silenced by Claire’s glare. She won’t have their communications director contradict her statement. Until or if Frank dies, Claire would rather have Emily believe his health is improving. “I’ll be right back, you stay here with Seth and Doug.”

“Good afternoon everyone. I’d like to update you on my husband’s recovery. The president’s medical team gave me a full assessment last night and they have come to the conclusion that the president is in need of a liver transplant if he’s to survive,” Claire says while she reads from a prepared statement. She pauses to let the news sink in to the reporters and people watching. “I’m asking the nation to pray with me that a healthy liver makes it way to Francis soon.” Her voice breaks momentarily, “I’m sorry. A moment.”

From the adjoining room, Seth, Doug, Emily and LeAnn are watching Claire deliver her statement.

“Why is Mommy cryin’?” Emily asks LeAnn. LeAnn glances at Doug, silently asking for assistance on how to answer the toddler.

“She’s just sad about your dad, Emily.” LeAnn tells her. “She’s good, isn’t she?” Doug nods in agreement, knowing as much as LeAnn does how fake Claire’s tears are. Claire passes the microphone over to the agent assigned to brief the press on the documents found in Goodwin’s apartment. She walks back into the connecting room, frowning when she sees Emily watching the press conference alongside LeAnn, Doug and Seth.

“Come on, Emily, let’s go,” Claire holds out her hand for her daughter to grasp. Emily runs over to her mother and they head back to the residences.

“Mommy, if Daddy better, why you cryin’?” Emily asks her mother. Claire pauses briefly and hoists the toddler onto her hip.
“I’m just happy Daddy is getting better, Emily.” She’s always tried to be honest with Emily, but this situation is different. There’s no need to upset the toddler until they have concrete proof Frank won’t make it. Until that happens, Claire isn’t approaching the subject.

“Me too.” Emily says and drops her head on Claire’s shoulder.

Over the next day, Claire conspires with Donald to get Remy Danton and Raymond Tusk on board with a new plan. When Doug finds out, he is furious and storms into the hospital room.

“We’re trying to win an election, and you want to remind everyone that the president pardoned Raymond Tusk?” Doug asks Claire. Emily stops coloring and turns to her mother and Doug.
“It’s okay, Emily.” Claire says and gets up from her chair, walking into the far corner of the room.
“Do not come in here and berate me in front of our daughter, Douglas.”
“Our daughter? You leave him when he needs you most, you threaten him, and now that he’s in here, you undermine him?” You were supposed to be…”
“Stop. That is enough. I will fill you in on everything, but not here. At the White House.” They are interrupted by machines beeping. Emily drops her crayon and runs over to Claire, her eyes wide with fear.
“What’s happening?” Doug asks Claire. Claire picks up Emily, holding her tightly to her body.
“His heart.” Claire takes Emily out of the room, so the doctors can work. Doug follows behind them, keeping his distance while Claire tries to calm Emily down.
“Daddy not better?” Emily asks, her question coming out more as an accusation. Claire’s lie was serving her well until Frank had an arrhythmia in front of their daughter.
“No, Emily, it’s taking longer than we thought to fix Daddy.” Emily sniffs and wipes her eyes with the back of her hand.
“Why?”
“I don’t know.” She wishes she could say something to pacify the three-year-old, but the truth is, Frank is getting worse. He won’t survive much longer without a new liver. Episodes like the one he just had will be more frequent and worse as his body continues to shut down. Claire doesn’t want her daughter to witness that. It’s going to be hard to tear the toddler away from her father. “Let’s go home. We can see Daddy in the morning.”
Emily’s been at the hospital with Claire all day and skipped her usual nap. Both are exhausted and could use some time away from their vigil at Frank’s bedside. The toddler doesn’t put up her typical fight and reaches for Claire, twining her arms around her mother’s neck. Doug elects to stay behind and bids them goodnight.
After Claire puts Emily to bed, she has a brief meeting with Catherine, who is objecting to her plan. Claire has had a long day and is tired of everyone putting in their opinion about her idea. Doug was the one who asked her to help Donald get through the crisis and now he’s turned everyone in the administration against her. After Catherine leaves, Claire picks up the phone, dialing Remy.
“Remy, we need to talk about Jackie.”
“I’m not going to Brandenburg,” Donald announces to Claire the next day while they are visiting Frank.
“No, you have to.” It could unravel all the hard work she’s put in if Donald doesn’t go.
“Cathy will negotiate on my behalf.”
“I don’t trust her on this.”
“That’s a risk I have to take. The risk I won’t take is being overseas if the president…” Donald lowers his voice when Claire gestures to Emily watching a movie in the chaise lounge next to Frank’s bed. “Dies. You shouldn’t be worried about this now Claire. You should be focused on Frank.”
Donald leaves Claire and Emily in the room. Frank starts having a seizure and Claire immediately takes Emily out into the waiting area. Luckily, Emily was too focused on her movie to notice a difference in her father’s condition. LeAnn is waiting for them, but Claire makes sure Emily is adequately distracted before approaching the woman.
“Now is not a good time, LeAnn.”
“This can’t wait.” LeAnn tries to explain Pollyhop to Claire, an algorithm that will threaten their stance in the election. Claire isn’t having any of it.
“LeAnn, my husband just had a seizure. There may not be an election.”
“I’m sorry. Do you want me to take Emily for a minute?” For the first time since finding out about Frank’s shooting, LeAnn notices it’s starting to affect Claire.
“That would be nice. Thank you.”
Between figuring out a plan for Donald and keeping Emily preoccupied, Claire hasn’t had time to process her husband’s declining medical state. LeAnn nods and approaches Emily, offering to take her to the cafeteria for some ice cream.
“Mommy, can I go?” Emily asks Claire, smiling for the first time in days.
“Sure, Emily, but stay by LeAnn.” Emily waves goodbye to her mother and lets LeAnn lead her towards the elevator. Claire sits down at a nearby chair and closes her eyes.

“Thank you for doing this,” Frank tells her one night while they are in their bedroom. They are in the midst of the Justice Department investigation with Walker and things aren’t looking good for them. “All I had to do was get her alone in a hallway.” Claire’s been manipulating Trisha Walker into believing they are close friends and confidants. In reality, she’s been quietly plotting with Frank to destroy the Walker’s marriage and credibility.

“I meant with Jackie.”

“Promise me something,” Claire tells him as he walks closer to where she is sitting on the vanity.

“Anything.”

“Emily and I can’t live in this house without you.” He sets his hands on her shoulders, gently massaging the tension out of them.

“I’m not going anywhere.”

“You say that, but this could all backfire. I can’t risk losing you, Francis. I won’t, not to this.” Frank glides his lips to her skin, watching their reflection in the mirror.

“I promise you, of all the sacrifices you’ve had to make, divorcing a convict will not be one of them.” He firmly kisses her cheek. Claire spins around to face him, grabbing his hand before he walks away.

“I love you.” Frank gently pulls her to her feet, pressing a kiss to her lips.

“I love you too, Claire.”

By the time Claire opens her eyes, she realizes she’s crying. She sniffs and wipes a stray tear with her finger. Fortunately, Emily is still getting ice cream with LeAnn and didn’t see her mother in tears. Until now, Claire didn’t realize how grave Frank’s medical situation is. By tomorrow, he could be dead if they don’t find him a new liver. She can’t wait around here and watch her husband die, she needs to do something productive. Going to Brandenburg on Donald’s behalf seems like the perfect solution.

By the time Emily and LeAnn return, Claire takes her daughter back to the White House. She meets with Jackie to threaten her into submission before announcing to Donald and Catherine she intends on accompanying the Secretary of State to Germany. Not surprisingly, Catherine is against it and Donald tries to play intermediary.

“What about Frank and Emily?” Donald asks, because Catherine won’t.

“In Brandenburg I can be useful. I can’t here. Emily will understand.” Eventually, Donald gives in to Claire, despite how angry that makes Catherine feel.

Over dinner that night, Claire is given the chance to inform Emily of their travel plans.

“Emily, I have to go to Germany to help the new president out. We are leaving early tomorrow morning.” Emily takes a sip of her milk and shakes her head.

“No. We stay wif Daddy.” The toddler’s tone leaves no room for argument, but this isn’t a negotiation.

“This is important, and it will help Daddy. We are going. You can see your dad when we get back,” hopefully. Emily pouts at the notion of being separated from her father. Claire can’t leave Emily behind, she would if she could.

About halfway to Germany, the Secret Service informs Claire they found a new liver for Frank and he’s being rushed into surgery.

“We can turn the plane around right now, ma’am,” the agent tells her. “You’ll be back before he’s out of surgery.” Claire doesn’t respond right away, she’s weighing her options.

“We should do that, Claire. I’ll be late to the summit, but everyone will…” Catherine says, but Claire interrupts.

“No, we’re almost there. We keep going.”

“Honestly, Claire…”

“Inform the captain to stay on course.” Claire isn’t letting Catherine run this operation into the ground because she feels left out.

“Yes ma’am,” the agent says and leaves. Catherine glances down at Emily playing on her iPad and
back at Claire, shaking her head. She can’t comprehend how selfish Claire is being.

“Think about Emily, Claire,” Catherine mutters and retires to another room. Claire kneels and taps Emily on the shoulder to get her attention.

“Emily, your dad is going to be okay,” Claire tells Emily softly. Hopefully, there are no complications from the liver transplant and Frank will still be the same person he was before. “The doctor is fixing him again, for good this time.”

She can tell Emily is having trouble understanding what is being relayed to her. The toddler nods and goes back to playing on her iPad. Claire thinks seeing Frank awake will help soothe the three-year-old.

Germany was a success. Claire was able to convince Petrov collaborating with the Chinese and accepting a bailout is in the best interest of the Russian people. It pissed Catherine off to no end that she got shut out of negotiations but was still able to take credit for everything.

When Claire and Emily arrive back at the White House, they are still setting up a hospital bed. Frank wants to be transferred out of the hospital as quick as possible, choosing to recover at home instead.

“What’s dat Mommy?” Emily asks when she sees people unloading medical equipment in Frank’s room.

“People are setting up for when Daddy comes home.” Claire brings Emily away from her father’s room, so the toddler doesn’t get in the way.

“Daddy’s comin’ home?” Emily asks, her whole face brightening.

“Yes. He should be home when you get up from your nap.” Emily climbs into her bed and Claire sits down next to her. “Emily, your dad is still sick. It’s going to take him some time to get better. We need to help Daddy and be careful around him, okay?”

“Okay, I do that for Daddy,” Emily says seriously. Claire smiles and tucks the toddler in her bed. She goes into her own room to catch up on some much-needed sleep.

A few hours later, Emily is the first one to wake up. The toddler climbs out of her bed and walks into the living room. Her dad is laying in bed, speaking to Doug.

“Daddy! Hi! It’s me, Emily!” Emily runs into her father’s room and then comes to a screeching halt in front of Frank’s bed, remembering what her mother told her about being careful in front of her father. “Escue me Doug.” Doug moves out of the way to allow the toddler closer access to her dad.

“Hi Em,” Frank mutters softly and moves his hand closer to Emily.

“I’ll leave you to it,” Doug says to Frank and exits the room.

“Where’s your mother?” Frank asks Emily.

“She sweepin’ I pfink. I stay wif you, Daddy.” Emily hops in the chair next to Frank’s bed. “You sweep too.” Frank smiles and closes his eyes.

When Claire wakes up, she goes into Frank’s room. Emily is telling Frank her version of what happened while he was in the hospital.

“And den we left, but we come back. Mommy, Daddy here!” Emily exclaims and points to her father.

“I see that. Emily, can you give me and Daddy a few minutes?” Claire isn’t sure if Frank knows about Meechum and would rather not have Emily in the room when she tells him. Emily is reluctant to leave her father and will only go if she has his permission.

“It’s okay, Em. We will be out in a little bit.” Frank tells his daughter. Emily hops off the chair and walks out of the room, holding her rabbit she stole back from her father.

“Are you in a lot of pain?” Claire asks.

“Nothing I can’t handle. Meechum?”

“I spoke to his mother.” Sadness washes over Frank’s features at the thought of never seeing his friend again. Frank grips the IV pole standing next to his bed and tries to push himself up.

“Francis, don’t…”

“Help me up.” Claire rounds the corner of the bed and grips the crook of her husband’s arm with both hands.

“Are you sure?” She doesn’t want to do anything that will set back his recovery even further.

“Yes. It’s good for the recovery. Doctor’s orders.” With Claire’s help, Frank stands up, one hand
holding his wife’s and the other gripping the IV pole. “They want me on my feet at least once a
day.” Slowly, Frank takes a few tentative steps, with Claire a step behind him. “Let’s take a walk.
Now let me see if I can do it.”
“Francis be careful Emily doesn’t see you fall.” Claire reminds him. They’ve already traumatized
their daughter enough lately. Frank nods and begins walking on his own. Claire hovers close,
wondering if he is overestimating his condition at the moment. Sure enough, when Frank reaches the
threshold of the door, his body starts to give out on him. Claire rushes to his side, glancing around
the corner to make sure their daughter is busy playing.
Frank manages to get to an end table down the hall with Claire’s assistance.
“I need a minute,” Frank says, and Claire helps him sit down. Claire sits across from him and they
watch Emily play with her toys. “Did she do okay with all of this?”
“Emily did better than me at times with everything that’s happened.” Frank was worried his daughter
would be scared to go near him after he got home, or her personality would be altered permanently.
Awkward silence passes between them briefly.
“Stay with me,” Frank mutters, glancing over at Claire. “It’s us against them. Always. Otherwise,
what’s the goddamn point?”
“I can’t do it Francis. I can’t come back and be the First Lady.” Claire didn’t do all of this for nothing
to change.
“Not that. Not that.” Frank hopes Claire understands what he’s trying to convey. “I said you were
nothing, in the Oval, without me. It’s the other way around.”
“It would have to be different. I can’t uproot Emily’s life again, Francis.”
“I know. That’s what I’m saying. I want you and Emily back, for good. You two are the only family
I’ve got.” Frank reaches across the table and holds out his hand. Claire is momentarily surprised by
the gesture and meets him halfway, so he doesn’t strain himself. She holds her husband’s hand
tightly, quickly squeezing it before letting go.
“Come on, let’s see if we can get Emily to race you to the end of the hall.”
The End?

A/N 2: Is this it? Or do you guys want an epilogue? Let me know and thank you always for reading
and reviewing!
Chapter Fifteen

A/N: This is it guys, the last chapter. I wish I could personally thank everyone that has read or reviewed The Fallout. Since I can’t, I will just say an all-encompassing thank you! Out of all the chapters, this one doesn’t follow the show as much as the previous ones. Anyway, please enjoy the last chapter!

Chapter Fifteen

“I know. That’s what I’m saying. I want you and Emily back, for good. You two are the only family I’ve got.” Frank reaches across the table and holds out his hand. Claire is momentarily surprised by the gesture and meets him halfway, so he doesn’t strain himself. She holds her husband’s hand tightly, quickly squeezing it before letting go.

“Come on, let’s see if we can get Emily to race you to the end of the hall.”

Since Frank came home from the hospital two weeks ago, the Underwoods have had a hard time transitioning. Emily is excited to have her parents under the same roof again and not having to spend time in Dallas with her grandmother who seems to hate her and her mother. For Frank and Claire, it’s been difficult trying to co-exist under a new normal. They aren’t sure how to act towards one another, Claire especially. Boundaries haven’t been established and the lines are still blurred between them.

“Emily, it’s time for bed,” Claire informs their daughter. Emily is preoccupied with showing Frank a new toy she got earlier in the day and isn’t paying attention to her mother.

“I like it, Em. I think it’s bedtime.” Frank can see a nurse hovering out of the corner of his eye. Every night since he’s been home, a nurse has come up to check his vitals and give him his nighttime medicine. Usually, Claire puts Emily to bed and then gets ready for bed herself.

“You put me to bed, now,” Emily tells her father. Before Dallas, her mom and dad would switch off taking care of the toddler’s bedtime routine. Of course, her mom would do it way more often than her dad, but Emily wants her dad to do it now that they are back in the White House.

“Not tonight. I have to take my medicine.” Emily frowns and crosses her arms. Claire notices the beginning signs of a tantrum and glances at her husband, wondering if she should step in. “Emily, it’s time for bed.”

Emily’s favoritism towards her father has magnified in the past week. She’s at Frank’s side every moment she can. Frank’s been patient with their daughter because he knows how scared the toddler was when he was in the hospital. Tonight, however, his patience is wearing thin and he’s trying to wean his toddler out of this new phase.

Despite protests from Emily, Claire scoops up the toddler and carries her into her bedroom. Frank sits down on the couch for his nightly examination. To his surprise, once Claire is done putting Emily to bed, she comes out into the living room with her iPad.

“Everything is all set, Mr. President,” the nurse says and gives Frank his pills with a cup of water.

“Thank you,” Frank says to the nurse, who immediately leaves. Claire and Frank sit in silence for a few moments. “Is Emily still mad?” Claire turns her iPad off to give her full attention to her husband.

“She’ll be fine. I don’t want her thinking we will give her what she wants just because she throws a tantrum.” Frank nods in agreement.

“We can’t afford to be weird with each other, Claire.” Claire tilts her head, confused by the abrupt subject change.

“ Weird? What do you mean?”

“I saw you in the bathroom this morning, looking at me. It’s not the first time.”

“Sometimes I want to say something. I just don’t know what to say. It’s uncomfortable.”

“Maybe it will always be like that, but we can’t do that to Emily.”

“I agree. I don’t want her to feel awkward around us.” Frank skims his teeth across his bottom lip as he contemplates asking her something he might not like the answer to.
“What’s your plan? Are you going back to Dallas or are you staying at the White House with Em?”

Frank doesn’t want to make his wife to stay just because he asked her to. If she wants to continue with the divorce proceedings she was going to initiate before the shooting, he won’t stop her. He’s expressed to her how she feels and it’s up to her to decide how she wants to move forward.

“I want to stay here, but we can’t force things between us, Francis.”

“Okay.” Claire is right. If they are going to work through things as a couple and political partners, their interactions need to be organic. Their marriage might be forever altered, but it can’t stop them from realizing their plans.

“Goodnight.” Claire picks up her iPad and gets off the couch.

“Goodnight.” Frank watches his wife walk into her bedroom and shut the door.

That night, over dinner, Frank and Claire discuss their separate meetings with each other with Emily between them.

“How did the press conference go?” Frank asks. Claire’s new cause is gun control, fitting due to Frank’s recent shooting and Meechum’s death.

“Well, I think. There was a little commotion when I mentioned the gun that killed…” Claire trails off, regretting bringing up Meechum to Frank in front of Emily. A frown curls Frank’s lips.

“I think I should go his grave tomorrow. Say a few words.” For Frank, the hardest thing about his shooting was losing Meechum.

“That’s a good idea, Francis. I’d like to come with you, if that’s alright.”

“Me too, Daddy,” Emily pipes up, although she isn’t sure what she’s agreeing to.

“If you would rather go alone, that’s fine too.” Claire is trying to practice what she said to Frank about not forcing interactions with each other. She wants to be there for support, but if he wants to be by himself, she’s okay with it.

“I think we should all go and say goodbye to Meechum.”

The next day, Claire, Emily and Frank stand around Meechum’s grave. Emily is quiet and holds her mother’s hand while Frank steps closer to the headstone.

“I took it for granted, how important he was to me, how much I leaned on him.” Frank says. Claire puts her hand on his shoulder.

“I know how much he meant to you, Francis. He meant a lot to this family.” Claire lets her hand fall back to her side.

“Meechy nice. He play wif me and give me lollis,” Emily mumbles quietly. Claire squeezes Emily’s hand, appreciating the little girl’s sentiment.

“Shall we?” Frank asks Claire, to which she nods. They are handed bouquets of flowers as the press circles around them to get their picture. Emily watches as her parents each set down the flowers on Meechum’s grave and step back. Frank reaches for Claire’s hand, momentarily forgetting about their agreement. He lightly smiles when she clasps it. The three of them stand together silently while various news outlets take their picture.

For the first time in a few months, Frank volunteers to put Emily to bed that night. Claire is reluctant at first because she doesn’t want to make it seem like they are giving into the toddler, but her husband is insistent on it. He is feeling better and wants to contribute.

“Daddy, you read me dis, and do your voices.” Emily instructs and hands her father a book he’s read to her multiple times. Frank attempts to kneel, but his incision protests and he stands back up again. Instead, Frank grabs a chair from Emily’s desk and carefully sits. Emily watches as her father closely and grabs onto her rabbit. The toddler giggles as her father entertains her with the various voices he does while reading the book. Frank bids Emily goodnight and goes to find Claire.

“I thought it would take longer for her to get to sleep,” Claire comments when she sees her husband in the doorway. Frank steps further into her office and shrugs.

“She fell asleep pretty quickly after I read her a book.”

“Was it the book where you do the different voices?” Frank nods, causing Claire to smile. “She wouldn’t let me read that book to her. She told me that’s Daddy’s book and he reads it to me.” Frank laughs at the image of their stubborn daughter refusing his wife permission to read her a book.

“What are you working on?” Frank sees the gun Claire used in her press conference yesterday and
picks it up.

“My plan for the meeting tomorrow.” Frank picks up the scribbled-on piece of paper sitting on the desk. He slides his glasses on, so he can read what Claire wrote.

“You want me to help you practice?” They haven’t rehearsed with each other recently, which is something they used to do all the time together. If Frank was stumped on something, he would run it by Claire and vice versa. Somewhere along the line, that changed. They started shutting each other out personally and professionally.

“All right.” Claire is a little nervous about her meeting tomorrow and could use all the help she can get. Especially from Frank, who is a master at swaying people in his direction, by force or otherwise.

“Good morning Mrs. Underwood,” Frank says, getting into character. Claire picks up her copy of her notes and stands up.

“Good morning, Ms. Melman.”

“No, what’s her first name?”

“Julia.”

“Use that.”

“We’ve never met before.”

“Remind her who the First Lady is.”

Frank and Claire easily step back into their routine, bouncing ideas off each other. Her husband helps give Claire the confidence she needs for the meeting tomorrow.

“Yeah, that’s good, but you want to go in for the kill,” Frank reminds her after Claire practices her lines. “We want this woman storming out of that door, foaming at the mouth.”

“All right. Don’t disgrace yourself, Julia. Think about the future…”

“No, tougher,” Frank encourages, knowing his wife will make him proud. “Stronger! Tougher!” Claire pauses for a moment to formulate her thoughts.

“All right. What about…thirty years from now when you’re dying in hospice care, you can look back and be proud of all the lives you saved. Or you can be forgotten, clutching onto the past with your cold, dead hands.”

“That’s exactly the steel goddamn stomach I was talking about,” Frank says proudly. Claire sits a little higher in her chair and smirks. She can’t wait for their plan to be materialized tomorrow.

“Thank you, Francis, for doing this. It helps.”

“You’re welcome. Goodnight.” Frank steps towards her but hesitates and chooses to leave her office without any contact instead. He doesn’t want her to feel uncomfortable. Claire notices the slight reluctance on his part and frowns. She doesn’t want him to feel like he can’t touch her. It’s just something else they are going to have to figure out as they go on.

The next night, Claire and Frank practice for an upcoming meeting with the Leadership tomorrow. Claire hands Frank his glass of whiskey while she sips on her wine. After the success of her meeting today, Claire wanted to rehearse with her husband again.

“You know everyone in this room agrees with the reforms you want, but we’re thinking about the general election, and the NRA is a terrible enemy for us to make,” Claire says, feeding Frank her line.

“You know Whitaker’s going to focus on swing states, fundraising…” Frank begins.

“That’s where I’ll play bad cop. You play the worse cop. Then when we get them off-balance…”

“You come back in as the good cop,” Frank picks up for her.

“Get personal, the way you told me to with Melman.”

“One out of for presidents get shot at. One out of ten dies from a bullet wound.”

“Better than that.”

“I saw Edward Meechum die before my very eyes.” Frank says.

“Daddy?” Emily asks, her voice clouded with sleep. Claire halts her response and glances over at Frank, wondering why they didn’t hear their daughter come out of her room.

“It’s okay, Emily. Mommy and I are just practicing for our meeting tomorrow.” Emily sleepily nods and hops up on the couch. Claire debates telling Emily to go back to bed but knows their daughter won’t go back to sleep. Emily coils her arms around her rabbit and waits for her parents to say
“Good. You were lucky,” Claire says, bringing Frank back into their rehearsal.
“I’m lucky.”

Emily watches in wonder as her parents banter back and forth, working out every avenue of their meeting for tomorrow. Frank’s voice woke her up and she thought her parents were arguing again. Luckily, that doesn’t seem to be the case.
“What did you think, Em?” Frank asks when they are all done. Emily claps excitedly for her parents despite not having a clue about the context of what they were discussing.
“Thank you, Emily. I thought we did a good job,” Claire says. Emily goes back to bed and Frank and Claire finish their drinks together.
“I think I’m going to take Emily to the park after our meeting tomorrow. Just the two of us,” Frank says before taking the last sip of his drink. Claire furrows her eyebrows while taking a swig of her wine.
“Are you sure Francis? If you aren’t feeling up to it…” Claire would hate for Frank to overdo it and take a step back in his recovery.
“I haven’t spent a lot of time alone with Em recently and I want to.”

Over breakfast the next morning, Frank proposes the thought to Emily.
“After the meeting with your mom, I was thinking you and I could go to the park for a little bit,” Frank says to Emily before biting into his apple. Emily’s eyes widen with excitement and she looks at her mother for confirmation.
“Okay! Mommy, you comin’ too?” Claire shakes her head,
“No. I think you and Daddy should go. I have a lot of work to do today.” Claire would rather step back and let Frank have his time alone with Emily. It’s something she’s wanted from him since before she left for Dallas.

True to his word, after Frank and Claire wrap up their meeting with the Leadership, Frank takes Emily to a nearby park. Secret Service clears out anyone lingering around and lets the toddler have free reign over the playground.

“Daddy watch me!” Emily demands as she stands at a slide. Frank looks up from his newspaper to see his daughter race down the slide. He’s glad the toddler didn’t ask him to play with her. There’s no way he’d be able to crawl around the playground like she can.

While Frank is keeping an eye on Emily, his cellphone rings. Doug is calling him about the proposed air strike and meeting he had with the Justice Department. Frank gives his full attention to Doug, not noticing Emily approach the monkey bars.

“I don’t care what you do Doug, just make sure the press doesn’t find out about it. The last thing we need are articles coming out about the administration condoning domestic surveillance.”

All the sudden, Frank hears Emily burst into tears and Secret Service agents swarm the toddler.

“Doug, I have to go,” Frank hangs up the phone and races over to his daughter. Emily is sobbing on the ground, her arm bent at an odd angle. Although he isn’t a doctor, Frank can tell his daughter broke her arm.

Frank attempts to bend down to pick Emily up, but he’s met with a shooting pain in his abdomen.

“Someone call my wife.”

Claire is busy meeting with Tom Yates when an agent pops his head into her office.
“We are busy,” Claire says to the agent. She wants to keep Tom’s meeting as private as possible.
“I’m sorry ma’am. There was an incident at the park. A car is taking the president and your daughter to the hospital.”
“What kind of incident?” Claire asks, her eyes wide with fear. She assumes it’s Frank, injuring himself while playing with Emily.
“I’m not sure of the details ma’am, but it’s not your husband who’s hurt. It’s your daughter.” Tom looks over at Claire, who looks like someone just punched her in the stomach.
“We’ll reschedule, go be with Emily,” Tom tells Claire. From what he witnessed on the campaign trail, Claire is a great mother who cares about Emily deeply. Hopefully, the toddler is okay. Claire doesn’t say a word and follows the agent to a car. She tries to call Frank, but only gets his voicemail.
“How far out are we?” Claire demands, even though they just cleared the White House lawn.
“At least fifteen minutes, ma’am, but we will put our sirens on.”
At the hospital, Frank and Emily are immediately corralled into a private room. Emily is clinging to her father, her entire body shaking with sobs.
“Em, you have to let the doctor look at your arm,” Frank tells Emily. The toddler is unwilling to let go of her father, even for a moment.
“Daddy, it hurts,” Emily says and grips his shirt tighter. After much cajoling, Emily finally allows the doctor to examine her arm.
“It’s a clean break, she doesn’t need surgery. We can get a cast on her and she will be good to go. Excuse me.” The doctor leaves the room to gather the appropriate materials.
Meanwhile, Claire arrives at the hospital and is led to where Emily and Frank are. Nobody has given her details on Emily’s condition, only to say she is being taken care of.
“Sir, your wife is here,” another agent informs Frank. Emily’s been given some medicine by a nurse to calm her down. The toddler is staring straight ahead and isn’t crying anymore.
“Em, I’ll be right back, I just have to go get Mommy.” Frank informs the three-year-old. Emily gives him a half-nod and sniffs.
As soon as Claire sees Frank, she reaches for him. Panic encapsulates her features, and Frank feels awful for what happened.
“Where is she? Is she okay?” Claire asks immediately. He rests his hands on her shoulders, rubbing them slightly. His wife, who is usually calm in these types of situations, is terrified.
“She’s fine, Claire. We were at the park and she missed the bar and broke her arm. They are putting a cast on her and then we can go home. Come on.” Frank grabs her hand and brings her into their daughter’s hospital room.
“Mommy, I hurt my arm,” Emily quietly informs her mother. Frank sits on the chair across from Emily’s bed while Claire sits as close to their daughter as she can.
“I see that. You are being so brave.”
The Underwoods are interrupted by the doctor coming in with the makings of a cast. Emily starts crying again when the doctor touches her arm. The toddler brings the broken appendage close to her body, angling away from the doctor when he reaches for her.
“No, you not touch it!” Emily demands and starts to cry harder. Claire and Frank exchange worried glances. They could be here for hours if Emily doesn’t allow the doctor to put a cast on her arm.
“Emily, do you want Daddy to sing you the beast song?” Claire suggests, hoping their daughter will agree. Emily nods enthusiastically and lets the doctor work.
Frank launches into a rendition of Be Our Guest, Emily’s favorite song. He makes it extra silly to get Emily to laugh. Claire smiles at her husband’s attempt to distract their daughter.
“Alright, Ms. Underwood, you are good to go. Just come back in a few weeks to get your cast off,” the doctor says more to Frank and Claire than to Emily.
“Look!” Emily shows off her bright pink cast to her parents.
“Em, you look good,” Frank says, knowing Emily will appreciate his approval. Claire nods in agreement, happy to see her daughter getting her personality back. When she first arrived, Emily was near catatonic.
The three of them go back to the White House so Emily can rest. Emily’s injury couldn’t have come
at a worse time. Frank’s recovering, Claire is trying to push a controversial gun bill through the Senate and they are attempting to repair their marriage. Luckily, their daughter is going to be fine, just in some pain for a little while.

After Emily’s down for a nap, Claire lingers around the residence to see how her husband is doing. She left the toddler’s room first, but he stayed, presumably to watch her sleep.

Several minutes pass by, and Claire decides to quietly re-enter Emily’s room. Sure enough, her husband is standing over Emily’s bed.

“I just wanted to make sure the pain meds were working,” Frank whispers to Claire, his back still turned to her. Claire nods and glides her hand up his shoulder. If she had to guess, Frank is feeling guilty for letting this happen to Emily under his watch.

“Come on, let her sleep,” Claire mumbles to her husband. Eventually, Frank follows Claire out of their daughter’s room and to the living room.

“I should’ve been watching her more closely,” Frank admits after he pours himself a glass of whiskey.

“Francis, do you remember what you told me after we almost let our daughter get kidnapped?” Frank smiles at the phrasing of Claire’s question. He walks over and joins her on the couch.

“I do. I told you to stop worrying and that she’s fine.”

“Right. And now I’m telling you the same thing. Emily is okay. I know you didn’t mean for this to happen and there’s no reason for you to feel guilty about it either.”

“It’s not that I let her fall, Claire. It’s just…I couldn’t comfort her after she fell. My incision wouldn’t let me.” Claire nods in comprehension. She didn’t realize Frank tried and failed to pick up their daughter at the playground.

“You did everything right afterwards. Don’t doubt yourself, Francis.” Frank reaches to pinch her cheek, his go-to gesture of appreciation. He catches the curve of her smile line. Claire must admit, she’s missed moments like this with her husband. She leans in cautiously and stamps a kiss to his lips.

The last kiss they shared was during the campaign, in front of a screaming crowd. He did it then to rile everyone up and to see how she would react towards him. It means more to him that she’s the one initiating the kiss given she was the one who didn’t want to force things between them.

“I’ll be in the Oval. Let me know when Emily wakes up.”

“Okay.” Claire stops walking out of the residences and turns around as a thought comes to her mind.

“Francis, I don’t want the media bothering Emily. I want this contained.”

Frank nods in agreement. He, as much as Claire, hates when the press reports on their daughter. Putting her in front of the cameras is one thing, but they don’t like when there are ill-informed articles written about their family.

“I’ll have Seth look into it.”

“Thank you.”

Later that night, Frank is searching for Emily around the residence. Claire is running behind on her meetings, after having to take most of the afternoon off to tend to their daughter. He had the chef make them dinner, so it will be ready by the time Claire gets back to the residences.

“Em?” Frank asks as he knocks on the door to her room. Emily is twirling in circles, trying to get her presidential jacket on with one arm. Frank can’t help but laugh at the sight. His daughter looks like a dog chasing her tail.

“Daddy, I not get dis on!” Emily exclaims in frustration and walks towards him for assistance. Frank asks the toddler to stand on her bed, so he doesn’t have to bend down as far.

“There,” Frank carefully puts her jacket on, being mindful of her broken arm. He zips it up and watches Emily hop down off the bed. “How’s your arm feeling, Em?”

Emily walks out of her room, with Frank on her tail.

“It hurt.” Frank and Emily are met by Claire, who is waiting for them at the dining room table.

“We can get you some medicine before you go to bed,” Claire tells Emily. She helps the toddler into her booster chair as Frank slides in his chair across from them.
“How did your meeting with Tom go?” Frank asks his wife.
“We didn’t get to finish it, but I think he will come on board. He understands what we are asking of him.” Claire and Frank heard about Tom trying to release the book he wrote about them and wanted to offer him his position back on the administration in return for burying the book.
“Tom comin’ back?” Emily asks. The toddler bonded with Tom while they were on the campaign trail a couple months ago. He helped keep Emily occupied while Claire did her events.
“I think so. Did you find a good running mate yet?” Frank and Claire have been working to find a fake vice president they can put on the ticket. They want to eventually put Claire on there, but they must be careful about how they present it.
“We could use the senator from Ohio and Julia Melman again.” Claire nods, understanding what her husband is getting at.
“Emily, when the time comes, we will announce that I will be the vice president, like Daddy used to be,” Claire informs their daughter. Emily nods and Frank wonders if she comprehends what is being said to her.
“And one day, you can be the vice president and the president, just like us,” Frank tells Emily. Emily rolls her eyes and points to her jacket with her good arm.
“Daddy, I is now, see?” Claire clears her throat to disguise her laughter. Emily’s eyes widen as she suddenly thinks of something. “Mommy, if you vice presidents, we not stay here?”
“No, Emily, we would stay here. Why would we leave?”
“Daddy not stay here when he vice presidents,” Emily says, as if it’s obvious.
“Oh no, Em, if we are elected, we would stay here. I wasn’t president when we lived in the other house,” Frank says. Emily seems satisfied with her father’s explanation and goes back to eating her spaghetti.
After dinner, Claire gives Emily a bath and sets her up in her bed, instead of the toddler’s. Claire figures sometime in the middle of the night Emily will crawl in her bed anyway. When Claire comes back, Frank is smoking a cigarette in front of the window.
“Francis,” Claire says with exasperation, “you really shouldn’t.” His doctor gave him strict instructions to abstain from cigarettes and alcohol. So far, Frank has ignored both directives.
“Oh, one’s not going to kill me,” Frank says and takes a puff. Claire crosses the living room and sits on the ledge of the window next to him. They haven’t enjoyed a cigarette together since she came back from her first trip as ambassador nearly a year ago.
“I’ve missed this,” Claire comments as Frank passes her the cigarette.
“So have I.” Claire inhales deeply and hands the cigarette back to her husband.
“The kiss we had earlier…” Claire starts, but Frank cuts her off.
“Oh, we don’t have to talk about that.” He would rather not hear about how she regretted kissing him.
“No, I want to. I wanted to do it, Francis. I…I meant to kiss you.” In a sense, even though they are still married, they are going to have to choose each other all over again. Frank smiles at her and takes the last drag of the cigarette before throwing it a cup of water. He starts to stand up, but Claire grabs his hand. “Sit with me for a little while.”
“Alright.” Frank sits back down next to his wife, scooting closer to her than he was before. His thumb glides back and forth over her hand. The two of them sit together, not uttering a word, merely enjoying each other’s company.
THE END (For real this time.)

A/N 2: Well this is the end, everyone! Honestly, I’m torn about writing a sequel and I want to tell you why. The purpose of The Fallout and The Interview was never to fundamentally alter anything that happened on the show. I was trying to give an idea of what it would be like if Frank and Claire had a child within the framework of HOC. That being said, as we inch closer to the end of season four and into season five, I don’t want to write about Tom/Claire, but I feel like I have to because of the concept behind these stories. What are your thoughts on this? I welcome all input. If you want, I
could continue The Long Game, or I could still figure out a way to continue this. Sorry for the long note, I just wanted to share with everyone how I feel. Thank you so much for reading and I look forward to hearing your comments!

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