FINGER ON THE BUTTON

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Reading copy. Script pages unchanged.

EXTREME CLOSE UP

A mouth EXPLODES with laughter.

INT. BLACK ESCALADE - DAY

The blast is coming from a distinguished, salt-and-pepper man, RICHARD. Next to him, UTAH, clean cut with parted hair, smirks uncomfortably. Surrounding them are FOUR SECRET SERVICEMEN in suits, dark glasses, and earbuds -- also laughing.

Both Richard and Utah wear starched polo shirts, visors, and linen pants. But on Utah's lap is a TITANIUM BRIEFCASE.

Richard cracks a beer.

RICHARD
Anyone else?

Everyone politely declines.

RICHARD (CONT'D)
Well they're yours when you want 'em.

SS #1
On with the story!

"Yes!" from all around.

UTAH
Don't encourage him.

RICHARD
So...!
(on with his story)
The General Secretary starts right into bitching about the South China Sea. I just got off a choppy ten-hour flight and have an old leather coin purse for a bladder. My eyes are settin' sail on the Yellow Sea and I'm waiting for any opening to excuse myself, just nodding along, but his ching-chong is sounding like the wah wahs from Charlie Brown.

The men shake their heads and snigger.

RICHARD (CONT'D)
He's talking about oil and I have a cartoon image of the Keystone Pipeline sprayin' across the continent. I'm about to have an international incident in my pants.

They laugh.

SS #2
What did you do?

RICHARD
What anyone would. I grab my cell phone and glance down like there's a phone call of utmost national security.

SS #2
You did the doctor-on-call bit to the head of China?

RICHARD
"'Scuse me, I have to take this."

The men laugh.

SS #3
Did you make it?

RICHARD
Did I make it? You think this is a story of the leader of the free world pissin' his pants?

UTAH
Mr. President, I think they may have heard enough.

RICHARD
And I think they want to hear how Utah here has to come with me.

SERVICEMEN
Oh?!

UTAH
(defensive)
Well, it <u>is</u> my job.

RICHARD
Utah and I <u>run</u> into the bathroom, OK, and it is a hole. I do not mean that metaphorically.
(MORE)

RICHARD (CONT'D)
I mean there is no toilet; there is a hole in the tiled floor. So: I drop my britches and I'm singing "Old Man River." Only, as I'm petering out, I realize I'm a little loose in the hindquarters.

The men lose it.

RICHARD (CONT'D)
Now remember it's a hole, all right, and I am sixty-seven years old. I don't squat. So Utah lets me hold his shoulder, I bend as best I can, I'm swingin' and swayin', and that hole, it turns out, is a very specific target and I'm doing more of a carpet bombing than Operation: Desert Strike.

SERVICEMEN
OHH!

RICHARD
And Utah here's not even looking!

UTAH
I'm holding my breath. The man should not eat cheese.

Laughter. Tears.

RICHARD
Then, I lose my balance -- and Utah thinks I'm done and getting up. So he lets go! SPLAT! Onto the floor! I'm flailing in my own shit.

SS #2
Oh my God. What did you do?

RICHARD
Utah?

Beat.

UTAH
I traded pants with him.

Richard can't hold it anymore. He can barely breathe.

The men cackle and cheer and jostle Utah.

RICHARD
Three hours of negotiations wearing my shitty pants.

SS #2
That’s why you wear the same pants!

RICHARD
(crying)
To this day! If you take anything from your time with me, gentlemen, it should be this: the free world is only one pair of clean pants away from Doomsday.

CLOSE ON UTAH

The titanium briefcase is handcuffed to his wrist.

EXT. GOLF COURSE - NEAR THE CLUBHOUSE - LATER THAT DAY

Richard hands his iron to Utah, unhappy with his pitch. He takes the putter and lines up his putt.

RICHARD
Easy, a Chicago dog is, uh, mustard, relish...

UTAH
Right, a pickle...

RICHARD
--Sport peppers, poppyseed bun...

UTAH
--Tomatoes--

RICHARD
--You want me to prove it or what? White onions and uh...

UTAH
(re: putt)
You’re underestimating the break. Another inch to the left.

RICHARD
No one asked you. Stop screwing me up.

Richard adjusts his line anyway. Utah smiles.

RICHARD (CONT'D)
Celery salt!

Richard takes his swing and sinks it.

RICHARD (CONT'D)
Pay up.

UTAH
Don't you think me helping with your putt makes us even?

RICHARD
No, me letting you keep your job, that makes us even. Your attempt to slander my hot dog knowledge, that is going take a contribution to my re-election fund.

Utah grudgingly hands him a single dollar bill.

RICHARD (CONT'D)
Where's that set us for the year?

UTAH
That's five dollars in donations so far.

RICHARD
Don't think this buys you any favors in my next term.

SS #1
Sir.

RICHARD
What is it?

SS #1 speaks closely to the president. Utah cannot hear.

Richard pales, and starts toward the clubhouse. Utah tries to follow.

RICHARD (CONT'D)
Stay.

Utah sits as Richard walks to the clubhouse.

Utah stares at the golf course. Far away, a FATHER teaches his SON how to drive. The kid swings and the ball arcs through the air in SLOW-MOTION in Utah's mind, whistling like a missile.

SS #1 has suddenly returned:

SS #1
The President needs you to join him. Now.

UTAH
Is everything OK?

SS #1
Now, sir.

INT. CLUBHOUSE - BACK ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Richard slouches forward, the phone dangling between his legs. SS #1 and Utah look on, ill at ease.

RICHARD
(to SS #1)
Leave us.

SS #1
But sir--

RICHARD
Leave.

The serviceman nods and leaves.

For a moment nothing is said.

RICHARD (CONT'D)
How long you been wearing that case?

UTAH
The first guy was two years, so, five.

RICHARD
The other guy was a twat.

Utah snickers. Richard doesn't.

RICHARD (CONT'D)
You miss your wife?

UTAH
We Skype. I saw my daughter's dance recital through her iPhone.

RICHARD
A new age.

UTAH
Yeah.

Beat.

RICHARD
It’s North Korea.

UTAH
Sir?

RICHARD
Full-scale nuclear strike, five major cities. The intelligence is decent.

UTAH
How decent?

RICHARD
75% certainty.

UTAH
Jesus Christ.

RICHARD
What should I do?

UTAH
Excuse me?

RICHARD
If you were me.

UTAH
I’m not an advisor, sir.

RICHARD
As a friend, Utah. What would you say to a friend?

UTAH
I’d say that the only mistake here would be indecision.

Richard straightens up, stands.

He walks over, removing a key from around his neck. Utah fishes out his own key.

Both insert their keys into the nuclear “football.”

The president sets the case on a table, opens it.

Surprise, and then fear, wash over him.

RICHARD
Where’re the codes?

He looks to Utah, then to the case.

Out of the case, he lifts up a KNIFE and a BONE SAW.

RICHARD (CONT’D)
What are these?

UTAH
Additional fail-safes, created by Congress.

RICHARD
Where are the codes, Utah?

Utah stiffly, almost robotic, points to his left breast.

RICHARD (CONT’D)
(unbelieving)
Where are the codes?!

Utah again points to his chest.

RICHARD (CONT’D)
No.

UTAH
Yes.

RICHARD
Under your skin?

UTAH
Beneath my heart.

RICHARD
Fuck off.

UTAH
Secret oversight committee. The Dems wanted the president "to feel the full gravity of his decision."

RICHARD
Fucking leftist lunatics.

UTAH
How much time do we have?

RICHARD
You knew? This whole time? You've been poised for slaughter?

UTAH
I did, sir.

RICHARD
Don't "sir" me. Not now. You call me Rick, goddamn it.

The president's hands are shaking. Utah sees it.

UTAH
OK, Rick. First names. Rick, Charles.

RICHARD
I know your goddamn name. I call you Utah cause we're... It's like that group of guys I used to play varsity with--all the stupid names.

CHARLES
Yeah? Well, I don't relate to it.

Richard cracks a smile.

RICHARD
My name was Crisco, because of a failed attempt at losing my virginity. What was her name? She--

CHARLES
Rick.

RICHARD
I can't, Charles.

Charles gets on his knees.

CHARLES
I knew what I signed up for.

RICHARD
I didn't. Get up. I haven't decided yet.

CHARLES
When you do, it has to happen fast.

Charles pulls off his shirt.

RICHARD
Charles! You're the only one I talk to about Gwen. Her stupid art talk.

CHARLES
I know.

RICHARD
The heads of state we talk shit about. That lisping Prime Minister with the paper cuts on his hands.

Charles laughs.

RICHARD (CONT'D)
You've seen me cry, Charles.

Richard is caving.

RICHARD (CONT'D)
(to the sky)
I AM NOT DESIGNED FOR THIS.

CHARLES
You have to be.

RICHARD
You have a wife and a daughter.

CHARLES
What you choose now might save them.

RICHARD
Or kill them. Or kill us all.

CHARLES
I won't flinch, Rick.

RICHARD
What would you do?

CHARLES
I don't know.

RICHARD
Fuck you, your head's on the block. Have a say in it.

CHARLES
The intelligence is 75%?

RICHARD
Far from perfect.

CHARLES
You'd take those odds in Vegas. If they bomb, I'm a dead man. You kill me and bomb them, I'm a dead man. So--

RICHARD
You're a man, not a math equation.

CHARLES
The needs of the many, Rick.

RICHARD
--Bullshit! Bullshit, Charles! I could kill you and millions more.

Richard crumbles, his face in his hands. His body rocks.

Charles stands, marches over, and puts a stern hand on Richard's shoulder.

CHARLES
We both know what needs to be done, Mr. President.

Richard composes himself. Charles goes back to his kneeling position and closes his eyes.

Numb, Richard seizes the blade and grips it in both hands.

Charles spreads his arms, stoic. Again, he closes his eyes.

CHARLES (CONT'D)
Tell them I love them.

Sweat pours from Richard.

RICHARD
I'm so sorry, Charles.

ON THE BLADE

It flashes and cuts the air.

RICHARD (CONT'D)
Ahh!

But--

THWUNK.

The blade sticks in the floor beside Charles. He's alive.

Richard looks at peace now.

RICHARD (CONT'D)
You're going to have to tell them yourself. I cannot and will not do this. God help us all.

The satellite phone rings. Richard answers.

RICHARD (CONT'D)
Listen up: there will be no preemptive strike. If they launch, we will retaliate, but I will not--

Lightning fast, Charles unsticks the knife from the floor and plunges it into his heart.

RICHARD (CONT'D)
Nooo!

The sat-phone clatters down as he goes to Charles's side.

GENERAL (O.S.)
(in the phone)
Mr. President? Mr. President?

CHARLES
It wasn't a fair decision, sir. So I made it for you.

Richard tries vainly to apply pressure, but blood bubbles out of the wound.

RICHARD
Oh God...No no no...You stupid...

Charles coughs up blood and wheezes and gasps. He's drowning.

RICHARD (CONT'D)
Shh, shh, shhhhh. There you go. Just relax.

Utah's breathing becomes slighter and slighter. Richard looks into the man's eyes as they dull.

RICHARD (CONT'D)
That's right. Shh. I'll tell them, OK? OK?

But Charles is dead. Richard hugs the body, soaked in blood.

Richard stands, suddenly cold inside.

He acts:

- he grips the bone saw

- the saw chews into Charles

- metal GRINDING on his bones

- crushing

- the phone rings

- he saws faster, speckled in red

- the phone rings

- his fingers dig into the gore

- the phone rings

He answers it, impatient.

RICHARD (CONT'D)
I almost have 'em! Jesus. Give me one more minute and I'll...! I'm sorry? Say that one more time. ... Slow the fuck down and explain yourself, please.

We hear what Richard hears in the earpiece:

GENERAL (O.S.)
(in the phone)
It was a malfunction on their end, Mr. President! The silo came online by accident. It was glitch, sir. A problem in the programming, they think. They sincerely apologize.

Richard looks blankly at what was his friend.

He hurls the phone into a million pieces against the wall.

A KNOCK at the door.

SS #1 (O.S.)
Sir? Is everything OK in there? Sir? ...Sir?

Richard drops the saw and numbly wipes his bloody hands on his pants. His eyes shut.

BLACK.