

**ZERO SUM**

An original screenplay by  
Keven Hollands

**SUPER: LONDON. JANUARY 2026.**

**INT. WESTMINSTER - PRIVATE MEMBERS' DINING ROOM - NIGHT**  
GRAHAM REDFORD (60s), PARTY CHIEF WHIP, sits across from  
JACK STONE (50s). Two glasses of wine. One touched. One  
not.

REDFORD

You know I agree with you, Jack.

JACK STONE

I know.

REDFORD

I've been saying the same things  
for twenty years. Just more  
carefully.

JACK STONE

Same thing.

Redford looks at him.

REDFORD

This afternoon you named a sitting  
minister. Without clearing it with  
anyone.

JACK STONE

He covered up a safeguarding  
report. I have the documents.

REDFORD

I know. That's not the point. You  
name him publicly, the story  
becomes you. He lawyers up. The  
documents disappear behind an  
argument about your conduct.

JACK STONE

So I wait?

REDFORD

You use the proper channels.

JACK STONE

Name one.

REDFORD

The Standards Committee-

JACK STONE

Run by people the documents  
implicate.

REDFORD

The press-

JACK STONE

Wouldn't touch it without a named  
source. I am the named source.  
I've watched evidence disappear  
into proper channels for years.  
I'm not doing that.

REDFORD

What you're doing is burning every  
relationship in this building.  
Every favour. Every open door.  
You're telling every minister  
you'll do the same to them if you  
decide they've earned it.

JACK STONE

Then they'll be more careful.

REDFORD

They'll come for you, Jack.

JACK STONE

A man coming for me openly is  
easier to deal with than one  
managing me quietly behind my  
back.

REDFORD

You don't understand what happens when serious people decide someone needs to be stopped. By the time you see it coming, the documents don't matter anymore.

JACK STONE

Is that what happened to you?

Redford's two-second silence is the answer.

REDFORD

There are people paying attention to you now. Not keyboard warriors. Not nutters. Serious people. This isn't going to end well. For you. For the party. For-

JACK STONE

For you?

A beat.

REDFORD

I have a family, Jack.

JACK STONE

So did the children they failed.

Silence. Redford places both hands on the table.

REDFORD

I'm pulling the whip. You can keep the seat.

JACK STONE

I've watched you wait for the right moment for twenty years, Graham. The country is still waiting.

A flash of anger.

REDFORD

You think I don't know what it costs?

JACK STONE

I think you know exactly what it costs and decided the cost was too high. That's your privilege.

A beat.

JACK STONE

But it's not mine.

Jack stands and leaves. Redford sits alone with his wine.

**SUPER: FOUR MONTHS LATER. MAY 2026.**

**INT. HOUSE OF COMMONS - CHAMBER - DAY**

PMQs. Raucous. In the PUBLIC GALLERY, DANNY CHEN (late 20s), earnest, alert, sits beside a RETIRED SCHOOLTEACHER (70s).

DANNY

Is it always like this?

RETIRED TEACHER

Always. Some days are worse.

DANNY

Has it ever been better?

RETIRED TEACHER

There was a Tuesday in 1997. I nearly cried.

Danny looks down at the chamber. Amid the chaos, JACK sits alone. Still. Watching.

DANNY

That's Jack Stone.

RETIRED TEACHER

He's trouble. I can smell it.

**EXT. HOUSE OF COMMONS - TERRACE - LATER**

Jack stands at the railing. Danny approaches.

DANNY

Mr Stone. I'm Danny Chen. I've been trying to get a meeting with your office for-

JACK STONE

Six weeks. Fourteen emails. My assistant described you as persistent.

DANNY

She used another word to me.

Jack smirks.

JACK STONE

What do you want?

DANNY

To work for you. You're the only person in that building who looks like he knows what he's doing.

JACK STONE

How would you know that?

DANNY

I've read everything you've published for two years. Including the safeguarding documents. All of them.

Jack looks at him. Surprised.

DANNY

Most people only read the headline. The documents are what the headline was afraid to say.

That gets Jack's attention.

JACK STONE

Why do you say that?

DANNY

Eleven complaints over four years.  
Eleven reviews. Different  
officers. Identical assessment  
language. That's not random  
negligence. That's a system  
producing a consistent outcome.  
Two escalation requests reached  
the minister's office in 2020.  
Both logged. Neither actioned. The  
logging proves the information  
arrived. The non-action is the  
decision.

Jack studies him.

JACK STONE

Where did you get the escalation  
records?

DANNY

FOI disclosure. Appendix C.  
Appendix D's missing. Appendix C  
references an 'additional review'  
but doesn't say by whom. I filed  
another FOI. They're eleven days  
overdue.

JACK STONE

What do you think it says?

DANNY

I don't know. But somebody doesn't  
want me reading it.

Jack turns around from the Thames.

JACK STONE

Can you make coffee?

DANNY

I ran the student union bar. First  
profit in five years.

Jack starts walking.

JACK STONE  
One week's trial. One week.

Danny follows.

DANNY  
Seriously?

JACK STONE  
You're already wasting it.

Danny catches up.

**EXT. CORBY TOWN HALL - DAY**

Jack walks towards the entrance. Danny beside him.

**INT. TOWN HALL - COMMITTEE ROOM - DAY**

JACK and DANNY face COUNCILLOR PATRICIA WELLS (50s), Leader of the Council, and GARY PITTS (40s), Director of Children's Services. A slim folder between them.

JACK STONE  
Eleven complaints. Four years.  
Same address. Same family. Three  
social workers. Every review uses  
the same phrase.

PITTS  
Mr Stone, this case was reviewed-

JACK STONE  
By whom?

PITTS  
Internally, at the time each  
complaint happened.

JACK STONE  
Eleven reviews written by  
different people using identical  
language. That's not review.  
That's copy and paste.

A beat.

JACK STONE

And Amie Carter spent four years  
in that house while this council  
filed paperwork.

Wells places her hands on the table.

WELLS

The file crossed my desk twice. I  
escalated it both times. Legal  
said the statutory threshold  
wasn't met. Safeguarding said  
monitor. I disagreed with both.

JACK STONE

Amie was ten when the first  
complaint came in. Fourteen when  
she was taken into care.

PITTS

There are processes in place-

JACK STONE

Her name is Amie. A-M-I-E. She  
draws horses. She's done it since  
she was seven. She drew them in  
that house while eleven reviews  
said she was being monitored.

Jack slides a document across the table.

JACK STONE

Formal Freedom of Information  
request. Full case file, internal  
communications and everyone who  
signed an assessment. Twenty  
working days.

PITTS

Some of that material will be  
exempt-

JACK STONE

Then I'll be interested to see  
which exemptions you use.

Jack stands. Danny follows.

WELLS

Mr Stone. I escalated it. In writing. I was overruled. Use the law if you want the record. But don't turn me into the thing that failed her because it makes your story cleaner.

Jack looks at her.

JACK STONE

You still haven't said her name.

WELLS

Mr Stone-

JACK STONE

Say her name.

Silence.

WELLS

This meeting is over.

Jack spreads the eleven reviews across the table.

JACK STONE

Eleven reviews. Same phrase eleven times. When you tidy this up, because that's what you do, you'll have to touch every page.

PITTS

I'll be making a formal complaint.

Jack looks at the assessments.

JACK STONE

Good. Make sure somebody reads it.

He leaves.

**EXT. TOWN HALL - CONTINUOUS**

Danny catches up.

DANNY

What happens now?

JACK STONE

The file gives us names. Names  
give us accountability.

DANNY

And if they refuse it?

JACK STONE

We publish the refusal.

DANNY

So either way you get a story.

JACK STONE

Now you're learning.

They reach the car.

DANNY

You take every case this  
personally?

Jack opens the door. Gets in. Danny follows. Jack puts the  
folder in the glove box. A faded photograph: a little girl  
in a football shirt two sizes too big, grinning at the  
camera. Danny notices.

DANNY

Yours?

JACK STONE

A friend's daughter. We served  
together. He didn't come home.

DANNY

Why do you have it?

JACK STONE

Because he can't.

He closes the glove box.

JACK STONE

It's all the same building, Danny.  
Different postcodes.

**INT. JACK STONE'S OFFICE - NIGHT**

10:17 PM. Cold coffee. Printouts. Polling data. Danny reads  
from his laptop. Jack at the window.

DANNY

Wells was telling the truth. She escalated Amie's case twice, in writing. Both escalations went above her.

JACK STONE

Good. Who?

DANNY

That's redacted. And Wells won't speak to us now. You made her the story.

Jack says nothing.

DANNY

You were right about the system.  
You were wrong about her.

A hard knock. HELENA VAUGHN (50s) enters. Expensive suit.

HELENA

Jack Stone. I've been watching you.

JACK STONE

Helena Vaughn. I've been expecting you.

HELENA

(to Danny)

Give us a minute.

Danny looks at Jack. Jack nods. Danny leaves. Helena sits.

HELENA

You're a liability. You're also the most interesting thing to happen to British politics in a decade. The people who should be frightened of you are trying to ignore you or discredit you.

JACK STONE

What do you want, Helena?

HELENA

To make sure when they try  
something else, you're still  
standing. Donors. Media.  
Whitehall. People who know things  
before they're supposed to.

JACK STONE

And what do you get?

HELENA

If this goes nowhere? Nothing.

A beat.

HELENA

If it becomes what I think it  
could, I want a seat at the table.

She stands.

HELENA

I've spent thirty years making  
mediocre men look capable enough  
to survive their own decisions.  
I'm finished with it. I want to  
build something.

JACK STONE

What position?

HELENA

If we're discussing titles, I've  
badly overestimated you.

Almost a smile from Jack.

HELENA

Just get there first.

She buttons her coat.

HELENA

You might be a sociopath. I  
haven't decided yet. But you're  
not mediocre.

JACK STONE

The documents started this.

HELENA

No. Redford pulling the whip  
started it. The documents give  
people a reason.

JACK STONE

Most never read them.

HELENA

They don't need to. They know you  
did. That's not policy. That's  
character.

She leaves.

**INT. HOUSE OF COMMONS - CHAMBER - DAY**

ALISTAIR FINCH (60s), Shadow Justice Minister, at the  
despatch box.

FINCH

...a proportionate framework which  
recognises both the circumstances  
of the offender and the legitimate  
expectations of the victim-

Jack rises from the backbenches.

JACK STONE

Mr Speaker.

Heads turn.

JACK STONE

I've listened to both Front  
Benches this afternoon and you're  
arguing about how to rearrange the  
deckchairs on a ship that's  
already underwater.

Murmurs. Jack lifts the bill.

JACK STONE

Clause four. "The court must  
consider the offender's  
background, including any history  
of deprivation, when determining a  
sentence."

He lowers it.

JACK STONE

Why? Why should a violent man  
receive a discount because he had  
a difficult childhood? His victim  
doesn't receive a discount on the  
trauma they suffer.

A beat.

JACK STONE

This is the disease. Nobody  
responsible for anything.  
Government explaining failure  
instead of stopping it.

Jack doesn't raise his voice.

JACK STONE

We're a nation. A nation protects  
the people who obey its laws  
before making excuses for the  
people who don't.

Mutterings in the benches.

JACK STONE

We can keep managing failure or  
build something that works. There  
isn't a third option.

Jack sits. The chamber erupts. Some jeer. Others applaud. A  
few on both sides remain seated, watching him. Jack watches  
the chaos.

**INT. JACK STONE'S OFFICE - DAY**

Helena at the window. Danny at the desk. Jack at the  
whiteboard.

HELENA

Miriam Cross interview tonight,  
Jack.

Jack leaves.

**INT. JACK STONE'S OFFICE - AFTERNOON**

Four MPs around Jack's table. RICHARD COOK (60s), former Cabinet minister. SANDRA OSEI (40s), former Labour. BILL FARRANT (50s), twenty-two years on the backbenches. PRIYA SHAH (30s), the youngest. Helena stands at the window. Danny takes notes.

RICHARD

I resigned from Cabinet because I wouldn't sign something I didn't believe. I'm not joining another machine blind. What is this?

JACK STONE

A grouping. Cross-bench. Independent. Four votes become five. Five become a number people have to account for.

SANDRA

I lost the whip for voting against something I thought was wrong. I'm not losing another one for a talking shop.

BILL

I've spent twenty-two years voting for other people's compromises. I'm running out of next times. What are we?

JACK STONE

The people who noticed. And said so.

PRIYA

My majority is twelve thousand. My association chairman says sitting in this room could cost me half of it.

JACK STONE

But you're here.

PRIYA

That's why I'm here.

A beat.

PRIYA

Do you believe you can win?

JACK STONE

Yes. Because the people who can beat us still think we're a protest.

PRIYA

That's how you win. It isn't how you stay honest.

Jack looks at her.

PRIYA

Who keeps us honest when the public can't read every policy paper?

Jack has no quick answer.

JACK STONE

That's the question. Keep asking it.

Priya nods.

RICHARD

What's it called?

JACK STONE

We'll know when we need to.

PRIYA

One thing. Whatever this becomes, don't call it Jack Stone's anything.

JACK STONE

Agreed.

Danny closes his notebook. Jack looks at the empty chairs.

JACK STONE

Four.

HELENA

For now.

**INT. NEWS STUDIO - GREEN ROOM - NIGHT**

On a monitor, MIRIAM CROSS (50s) interviews MARTIN STRATTON (50s), government minister.

STRATTON

The Government has already ordered  
a full review of the failures  
identified.

MIRIAM

Warnings were recorded for  
eighteen months and nothing  
changed. Who is responsible?

STRATTON

Miriam, there are multiple  
agencies involved.

MIRIAM

Is it you or the Prime Minister?  
Who do we hold accountable?

Stratton has no answer. Jack watches Miriam. Her timing. A  
PRODUCER appears.

PRODUCER

Mr Stone. After the break. Ninety  
seconds.

JACK STONE

What is she after?

PRODUCER

Sorry?

JACK STONE

The question underneath the  
question.

The Producer looks at the monitor.

PRODUCER

She wants everything you have.

JACK STONE

Tell her I might need more than  
ninety seconds.

PRODUCER

That's not how this works.

JACK STONE

Tell her.

Jack heads for the set.

**INT. NEWS STUDIO - SET - CONTINUOUS**

Live. Red light. MIRIAM CROSS behind the desk.

MIRIAM

Joining me now is Jack Stone,  
independent MP. Mr Stone, you  
accused the Government today of  
protecting itself before it  
protected children.

JACK STONE

The documents accuse them. I read  
them aloud.

MIRIAM

You named a minister.

JACK STONE

Because his office received the  
warnings.

MIRIAM

And you believe naming people is  
accountability?

JACK STONE

I believe decisions should belong  
to somebody. We have become very  
good at producing failure nobody  
is responsible for.

MIRIAM

Including you?

JACK STONE

Especially me.

Miriam studies him.

MIRIAM

You've also said the genuinely  
unable should be protected  
completely, but those able to  
contribute should contribute.

JACK STONE

Yes.

MIRIAM

Who decides who's genuinely  
unable?

JACK STONE

I don't have the mechanism yet.

MIRIAM

Then you're asking people to trust  
your judgement before you've built  
the safeguards.

JACK STONE

No. I'm saying any system that  
can't be challenged is dangerous.

MIRIAM

Including yours?

JACK STONE

Especially mine.

A beat. Miriam changes direction.

MIRIAM

Eleanor Vale.

Jack looks at her.

MIRIAM

Deputy Permanent Secretary at the  
time. What are you accusing her  
of?

JACK STONE

Receiving documented warnings about safeguarding failures, knowing they hadn't been acted upon and allowing the existing process to continue.

MIRIAM

You're accusing a senior civil servant of knowingly allowing children to remain at risk.

JACK STONE

I'm saying the documents show what reached her office, when it reached her office and what happened afterwards.

MIRIAM

So you know what Eleanor Vale personally decided?

JACK STONE

Not yet.

MIRIAM

But you've named her on live television.

JACK STONE

Yes.

MIRIAM

What happens if the documents prove she tried to stop it?

JACK STONE

I say so. Publicly. With the same prominence I've just given her name.

MIRIAM

And if you've destroyed her reputation by then?

Jack doesn't answer.

MIRIAM  
Accountability works both ways, Mr  
Stone.

JACK STONE  
Yes.

MIRIAM  
You're asking the country to trust  
a man who has just admitted he may  
have named the wrong person.

JACK STONE  
No. I'm asking them to stop giving  
their trust away.

MIRIAM  
So who should they trust?

JACK STONE  
Evidence. Not me.

MIRIAM  
Then what are you asking for?

JACK STONE  
A system where failure has a name  
attached to it. Where an objection  
can't disappear because it  
embarrasses the people above it.  
Where somebody has to answer for  
what happens.

MIRIAM  
And you can build that?

JACK STONE  
I don't know. But I know what  
happens when nobody tries.

MIRIAM  
Jack Stone. Thank you.

The red light dies.

**EXT. NEWS STUDIO - SIDE STREET - NIGHT**

Jack exits into cold London. His phone rings. HELENA.

HELENA (V.O.)

Don't walk to your car.

JACK STONE

Why?

HELENA (V.O.)

Two threats tonight used your home address. One included a photograph taken this afternoon.

Jack looks along the street.

HELENA (V.O.)

Dark blue Volvo. Thirty yards ahead. Get in.

Jack sees it.

JACK STONE

You hired security?

HELENA (V.O.)

I hired people who know the difference between a threat and somebody showing off.

The line dies. Jack reaches the Volvo. The rear door opens. COLE (40s) gets out. Former SAS. Broad, controlled. The economy of a man who has learned unnecessary movement costs lives. His eyes sweep Jack, the street, the exits.

COLE

Stone.

JACK STONE

You have a name?

COLE

Cole.

He holds the door.

JACK STONE

I'm not in the habit of-

COLE

Until we know who took the  
photograph, get in.

Jack gets in. Cole takes the wheel. In the passenger seat,  
MARSH (30s), Special Reconnaissance Regiment. Leaner than  
Cole. Dry energy. Currently eating crisps.

MARSH

Good interview.

JACK STONE

Thank you.

MARSH

You've made your life considerably  
more complicated.

JACK STONE

I assumed so.

Marsh offers the crisps over his shoulder.

JACK STONE

I'm fine.

MARSH

Suit yourself.

Cole pulls away. Clean. Unhurried.

JACK STONE

How long are you staying?

COLE

Until Helena stops paying us.

MARSH

Or you stop needing us.

Jack looks out at London passing.

**INT. JACK STONE'S OFFICE - LATER THAT NIGHT**

Danny stands completely still in the middle of the room,  
his phone ringing in his hand. Helena at the window. An  
untouched glass of wine beside her.

DANNY

Four million. In forty minutes.

HELENA

I know.

DANNY

The Home Secretary called it inflammatory. Three MPs publicly distanced themselves. One just called privately asking if Jack wants a campaign manager.

Danny stares at her.

DANNY

Are we not worried?

**INT. JACK STONE'S OFFICE - LATER**

Jack enters. Helena at the window. Danny has Wells's objection open on his laptop.

DANNY

We've got another problem. Eleanor Vale.

JACK STONE

What about her?

DANNY

Wells escalated Amie's case twice. Vale didn't overrule her. She backed her.

A beat.

JACK STONE

Who overruled Vale?

DANNY

Redacted.

HELENA

Who else has seen this?

DANNY

Me.

HELENA

If this gets out tonight, tomorrow isn't about institutional failure. It's Jack Stone falsely accusing a senior civil servant on live television.

DANNY

He said he'd correct it. Same prominence. That's what you said.

JACK STONE

We don't know enough yet.

DANNY

We know she didn't do what you said she did.

HELENA

And we don't know who did.

JACK STONE

Not tonight.

Danny stares at him.

DANNY

That's what they did with Amie.

Jack can't answer.

HELENA

He's not burying it.

DANNY

What's the difference?

HELENA

Twenty-four hours.

DANNY

Not to Vale.

Jack looks at the closed laptop. A long beat.

JACK STONE

Draft the correction.

Danny stops.

DANNY

Now?

JACK STONE

Don't release it till tomorrow.  
Six o'clock. By then we either  
have the name above Vale or we  
don't.

DANNY

And if we don't?

JACK STONE

We release it anyway.

DANNY

Same prominence?

Jack looks at Danny.

JACK STONE

Same prominence.

**INT. JACK STONE'S OFFICE - AFTERNOON**

5:12 PM. The correction is open on Danny's laptop. Jack  
reads at the window. A knock. ELEANOR VALE (50s) enters.  
Immaculate. Composed.

VALE

Jack Stone.

Jack turns.

VALE

You have until six o'clock, I  
believe.

Danny looks at Jack.

JACK STONE

Come in.

Vale enters.

VALE

Mr Chen.

Danny wasn't expecting that.

DANNY

Ms Vale.

VALE

Your Freedom of Information  
requests are extremely persistent.

DANNY

They'd be less persistent if  
people answered them.

VALE

Quite.

Jack indicates a chair. Vale remains standing.

JACK STONE

How do you know about six o'clock?

VALE

Patricia Wells called me. She  
thought I should know that the man  
who accused me of abandoning a  
child had discovered I did  
precisely the opposite.

JACK STONE

You could've gone public.

VALE

I still can.

JACK STONE

Why haven't you?

VALE

Because then tomorrow's story is  
you and me. And Amie Carter  
disappears again.

JACK STONE

Who overruled you?

VALE

There it is.

JACK STONE

Who?

VALE

You think because I haven't  
destroyed you, I've come to help  
you.

JACK STONE

Haven't you?

VALE

I've come to find out whether  
Miriam Cross was right.

Jack waits.

VALE

Whether evidence matters to Jack  
Stone when the evidence hurts Jack  
Stone.

Silence.

JACK STONE

The correction goes out at six.

VALE

Regardless of what I tell you?

JACK STONE

Regardless.

Vale looks at Danny.

VALE

Is that true?

Jack doesn't like that. Danny considers.

DANNY

It is now.

Vale looks back at Jack.

VALE

Good.

She sits.

VALE

I couldn't make the decision. By then, safeguarding cases involving what the department called "community sensitivity" had acquired another review layer.

DANNY

What review layer?

VALE

One that officially didn't exist.

VALE

Different system. Same instinct. Add another layer until nobody owns the decision.

JACK STONE

Who ran it?

VALE

Cabinet Office.

JACK STONE

Name?

Vale looks at him.

VALE

You really haven't learned anything.

JACK STONE

I've learned to ask.

VALE

Learn when not to.

A beat.

VALE

I sent Wells's objections upward. Twice. Both times the instruction came back unchanged.

DANNY

From who?

VALE  
First time, an official.

JACK STONE  
Second?

Vale pauses.

VALE  
A minister.

Jack goes still.

JACK STONE  
Which minister?

VALE  
I'm not giving you another name to  
put on television.

JACK STONE  
Then why are you here?

VALE  
Because the name isn't important.

A beat.

VALE  
The instruction survived three  
governments.

Silence.

DANNY  
Different parties?

VALE  
Different parties. Different  
ministers. Same instruction.

Jack understands.

JACK STONE  
So it wasn't a decision.

VALE  
It was policy.

Silence. Jack looks at the correction on Danny's screen.  
Then Vale.

JACK STONE

Show me.

Vale studies him.

VALE

Not yet.

JACK STONE

Why?

VALE

Because you're still looking for  
someone to blame.

She stands.

VALE

Start looking for what survives  
when the people change.

Vale heads for the door.

JACK STONE

Ms Vale.

She stops.

JACK STONE

I'm sorry.

Vale turns. Jack doesn't soften it.

JACK STONE

I accused you without sufficient  
evidence. I was wrong.

Vale studies him.

VALE

Put that in the correction.

JACK STONE

I will.

She leaves. Danny watches the clock. 5:41 PM.

DANNY

We could still wait.

Jack looks at him.

JACK STONE

No.

DANNY

Six o'clock.

JACK STONE

We know now.

Danny understands. He reaches for the keyboard.

**INT. JACK STONE'S OFFICE - MORNING**

Danny stares at his laptop. Jack enters.

DANNY

We have a problem. You apologised.

JACK STONE

I'm aware.

DANNY

People liked it. A lot.

Jack looks at him. Helena enters.

HELENA

Not everyone.

She drops a note on the desk.

HELENA

Two MPs who were coming in this morning cancelled. One donor walked.

DANNY

National numbers are up six.

Helena looks at Jack.

HELENA

Of course they are.

Danny at the laptop. Jack's correction:  
 I ACCUSED ELEANOR VALE OF FAILING TO ACT ON WARNINGS  
 CONCERNING THE AMIE CARTER CASE. THE EVIDENCE NOW SHOWS  
 THAT WAS WRONG. SHE ESCALATED THE CASE. I APOLOGISE TO HER  
 WITHOUT QUALIFICATION. Numbers climbing beneath it. Jack  
 looks at the screen.

JACK STONE

I was wrong.

HELENA

Exactly.

One of Danny's phones rings. Then another.

DANNY

Third MP this morning.

HELENA

Which side?

DANNY

Government.

JACK STONE

What does he want?

DANNY

To talk.

Helena looks at the ringing phones.

HELENA

Five angry MPs are a curiosity.  
 Ten are a faction.

A beat.

HELENA

Twenty can bring down a  
 government.

Jack's phone vibrates. A message from MICHAEL HARCOURT:  
 PRIVATE DINING ROOM. NINE O'CLOCK. COME ALONE.

Jack reads it once. Pockets the phone.

**EXT. RIDING CENTRE - LATE AFTERNOON**

Rain on corrugated roofs. JACK watches a young woman lead a horse across the yard. AMIE CARTER (19). Work boots. Mud on her coat. Nothing about her asks to be recognised.

She hands the horse to a STABLE HAND and walks over. Jack offers his hand. She looks at it, then at him.

AMIE

You keep saying my name.

JACK STONE

I wanted people to remember there was a person in that file.

AMIE

I wasn't in the file.

A beat.

AMIE

I was in the house.

JACK STONE

You're right.

AMIE

Everyone keeps asking what happened to me.

JACK STONE

What do you tell them?

AMIE

That I was fourteen. Then I was fifteen. Then sixteen.

She looks back towards the stable.

AMIE

Two foster homes. First one lasted five months. Second one lasted long enough.

JACK STONE

And now?

AMIE

Supported flat. Three days here.  
College when I can stand it.

JACK STONE

The horses.

AMIE

They don't ask me to explain  
myself.

Jack absorbs that.

AMIE

I don't mind you telling them what  
they did.

She looks directly at him.

AMIE

Just remember I get to decide what  
happens next.

JACK STONE

Fair.

AMIE

Don't say fair like you've given  
me something.

Jack almost smiles. She doesn't.

JACK STONE

I won't.

A horse calls from inside the stable. Amie turns towards  
it.

AMIE

I've got work.

JACK STONE

Amie.

She stops.

JACK STONE

I'm sorry it took four years.

AMIE

It didn't.

Jack waits.

AMIE

It took eleven reviews.

She walks back into the stable. Jack remains in the rain.

At his car, Jack opens the glove box. The photograph. He looks at it for a moment. Closes it.

**EXT. PRIVATE DINING ROOM - LONDON - NIGHT**

The dark blue Volvo stops outside. Cole at the wheel. Marsh beside him.

JACK STONE

He said come alone.

COLE

You are.

MARSH

We're outside.

Jack gets out.

COLE

If the location changes, call.

Jack nods and goes in.

**INT. PRIVATE DINING ROOM - LONDON - NIGHT**

Jack enters. One table occupied. An old man sits with his back to the door. Jack recognises him before he turns. SIR MICHAEL HARCOURT (late 70s). Former Deputy Prime Minister. Older than the photographs. Still unmistakable. Harcourt pours a second glass of wine.

HARCOURT

You took your time.

Jack doesn't sit.

JACK STONE

Michael Harcourt.

HARCOURT

Sit down, Jack.

Jack does.

JACK STONE

Why now?

HARCOURT

Because you finally became  
expensive enough to meet.

JACK STONE

Expensive to whom?

HARCOURT

Everybody.

He slides a sheet across the table. Tanker movements.  
Insurance rates. Shipping capacity.

JACK STONE

What am I looking at?

HARCOURT

Three insurers stopped  
underwriting Gulf traffic this  
afternoon. Two haven't announced  
it.

JACK STONE

And you know this how?

HARCOURT

Because frightened people call  
other frightened people before  
they call government.

Jack reads.

HARCOURT

Tomorrow morning the freight  
markets know. Tomorrow afternoon  
the Treasury discovers what the  
freight markets knew tonight.

JACK STONE

You think the crash is coming.

HARCOURT

It is.

JACK STONE

This?

HARCOURT

Maybe.

Harcourt takes a drink.

HARCOURT

That's the problem with history.  
You rarely know which gunshot  
started the war until you've  
buried everyone.

Jack studies him.

JACK STONE

Why are you helping me?

A slight smile.

HARCOURT

Finally.

JACK STONE

Finally what?

HARCOURT

The right question. I spent thirty  
years inside government watching  
administrations change while the  
machinery underneath learned how  
to survive every election.

JACK STONE

Vale said something similar.

A tiny reaction. Jack catches it.

JACK STONE

You know Eleanor Vale?

HARCOURT

Of course.

Jack sits back.

JACK STONE

And you want me to change that.

HARCOURT

I want to know whether you can.

JACK STONE

That's not the same thing.

HARCOURT

No.

Harcourt looks at the tanker sheet.

JACK STONE

What happens if the Gulf closes?

HARCOURT

Fuel first. Markets second. Then everything that depends on them.

JACK STONE

How long?

HARCOURT

If I knew that, I'd be far richer than I am now.

Jack looks up.

HARCOURT

When everyone else starts asking what to do, you shouldn't still be asking what happened.

JACK STONE

What should I be asking?

Harcourt looks at him.

HARCOURT

Whether you actually wanted power.

**INT. JACK STONE'S OFFICE - LATER**

Jack returns to the office. A news alert flashes on Danny's screen.

OIL JUMPS 14% IN AFTER-HOURS TRADING. Jack looks at the screen.

HELENA

Second tanker. Shipping suspended.

She looks at Jack.

HELENA  
Who warned you?

JACK STONE  
Harcourt.

Helena takes that in.

HELENA  
Then assume he wants something.

JACK STONE  
He does.

HELENA  
Good. At least you know a price  
exists.

Danny comes out.

HELENA  
How much of our energy policy  
exists?

JACK STONE  
None.

HELENA  
Then you've got twelve hours to  
acquire one.

JACK STONE  
Why me?

Helena looks through the door at the MPs.

HELENA  
Because you've spent six months  
saying the people running the  
country don't know what they're  
doing.

A beat.

HELENA  
Tomorrow somebody asks what you'd  
do instead.

Jack turns to Danny.

JACK STONE  
Emergency oil stocks. Refinery  
capacity. North Sea production.  
LNG terminals. Electricity  
generation. Everything.

DANNY  
Tonight?

JACK STONE  
Now.

Danny moves. Another alert. GOVERNMENT TO HOLD EMERGENCY  
COBRA MEETING. Helena shows Jack.

JACK STONE  
What about the vote?

HELENA  
Forget it.

JACK STONE  
We haven't finished.

HELENA  
Yes, you have.

She looks at the alert.

HELENA  
The country just changed the  
subject.

**INT. DOWNING STREET - COBRA ROOM - NIGHT**

Phones. Papers. Screens. The PRIME MINISTER enters fast.  
HOME SECRETARY MARTIN STRATTON already seated. Officials  
around the table.

PRIME MINISTER  
Martin, coordinate this with  
energy. How bad?

Nobody answers immediately.

A TREASURY OFFICIAL opens a folder.

TREASURY OFFICIAL

If shipping resumes within forty-eight hours, manageable. Beyond that, markets price sustained disruption. Usable reserves are lower than the headline number.

STRATTON

How much lower?

TREASURY OFFICIAL

We don't have a single usable figure.

STRATTON

Then stop giving me the headline one.

The door opens. An aide whispers to Stratton. His face changes.

PRIME MINISTER

What?

STRATTON

Third tanker.

Silence.

PRIME MINISTER

Hit?

STRATTON

Missing.

The room goes still.

**INT. JACK STONE'S OFFICE - EARLY MORNING**

6:43 AM. Danny sits between two laptops. Same clothes as yesterday. Coffee beside him. Jack enters.

JACK STONE

Tell me.

DANNY

Ninety days on paper. Less in usable supply. Diesel and aviation are the weak points.

JACK STONE  
So what's the real number?

DANNY  
Nobody will give me one.

JACK STONE  
Then that's the number we need.

Danny looks exhausted.

DANNY  
You've got television at nine.

JACK STONE  
Cancel it.

DANNY  
Helena booked it.

JACK STONE  
Cancel it.

DANNY  
Why?

Jack turns the laptop towards himself.

JACK STONE  
Because I don't know what I'm  
talking about yet. Find me someone  
who does.

**INT. JACK STONE'S OFFICE - MORNING**

Danny is on speakerphone with TOM MERCER (60s), a former refinery operations director. Jack beside him. Helena listening.

JACK STONE  
Everyone keeps quoting ninety days  
of fuel stocks. How much can  
actually reach the market?

A pause.

MERCER (V.O.)  
Now you're asking the right  
question.

Jack looks at Danny.

MERCER (V.O.)

Crude isn't petrol. Stock isn't supply. It only matters if you can refine it and move it.

JACK STONE

What's vulnerable first?

MERCER (V.O.)

Price. Then diesel. Aviation gets ugly quickly. Petrol gets the headlines because motorists can see it.

JACK STONE

If Gulf shipping stays disrupted?

MERCER (V.O.)

Forty-eight hours? Noise. A week? Pain. Longer than that, government starts deciding who gets what.

JACK STONE

What should they do today?

MERCER (V.O.)

Find out what can physically move, not what's written on a spreadsheet. Get refiners and distributors in the same room. Protect food and essential freight before people panic-buy.

Jack writes.

The call ends.

Helena checks the time.

HELENA

Television in forty minutes.

JACK STONE

Who booked it?

HELENA

Me.

JACK STONE  
Of course.

HELENA  
Ready?

Jack looks at his notes.

JACK STONE  
Now I am.

**INT. TELEVISION STUDIO - MORNING**

8:17 AM. Jack opposite a PRESENTER. Numbers on the screen behind them.

PRESENTER  
The Prime Minister says there is  
no immediate threat to fuel  
supplies. Do you agree?

JACK STONE  
Yes.

The Presenter looks surprised.

JACK STONE  
Not whether Britain runs out  
tomorrow. It won't. What happens  
if Gulf shipping doesn't normalise  
in two days? Five? Ten?

PRESENTER  
What happens?

JACK STONE  
Prices first. Then transport,  
food, aviation. Everything moving  
gets more expensive before  
anything stops.

PRESENTER  
What would you do?

JACK STONE

Today? Get refiners and distributors in one room. Establish what reserve stocks can physically move. Protect essential distribution. And tell the public the truth.

PRESENTER

Which is?

JACK STONE

We're not in a fuel crisis today.

A beat.

JACK STONE

But we could be heading towards one. Pretending otherwise won't move a single tanker.

The Presenter looks at his notes.

PRESENTER

You've spent months accusing government of being unprepared. Were you prepared?

Jack could take the victory. He doesn't.

JACK STONE

No.

PRESENTER

No?

JACK STONE

I started preparing last night.

PRESENTER

Then why would anyone listen to you instead of people who've run the energy system for years?

JACK STONE

They shouldn't. They should listen to whoever has the best answer. If that's the Government, I'll support it. If it isn't, they should change it.

A beat.

JACK STONE

Tankers don't care who's ahead in the polls.

**INT. DOWNING STREET - COBRA ROOM - LATER**

Coffee. Jackets off. Nobody pretending this is temporary. The Prime Minister at the head of the table. Stratton beside him. Shipping routes on a screen.

STRATTON

Prioritise essential distribution now. Quietly. Ambulances. Food logistics. Emergency services. Build the framework before we need it.

TREASURY OFFICIAL

Markets could interpret that as panic.

STRATTON

They'll interpret empty petrol stations as something worse.

The Prime Minister considers.

PRIME MINISTER

Do it.

A CABINET OFFICE OFFICIAL slides a folder towards Stratton.

CABINET OFFICE OFFICIAL

We can activate the existing resilience framework.

Stratton opens it. Stops. On the cover: CONTINUITY AND CONTRIBUTION PROTOCOL.

STRATTON  
This is still active?

CABINET OFFICE OFFICIAL  
Dormant. Not withdrawn.

PRIME MINISTER  
What is it?

Stratton turns pages. Categories. Priority access. Eligibility. Contribution status.

STRATTON  
Old contingency architecture.

He keeps reading. Something changes his expression.

STRATTON  
Who authorised this version?

CABINET OFFICE OFFICIAL  
It predates this administration.

STRATTON  
That wasn't the question.

A beat.

CABINET OFFICE OFFICIAL  
The underlying framework has been maintained since 2011.

Stratton looks up.

STRATTON  
By whom?

CABINET OFFICE OFFICIAL  
Successive administrations. Three Governments. Same instructions.

PRIME MINISTER  
Does it work?

Stratton reads another page. Stops.

STRATTON

Parts of it.

Another page.

STRATTON

And parts of it should never have survived a ministerial desk.

PRIME MINISTER

Can we use it?

STRATTON

For fuel prioritisation, yes.

He closes the folder.

STRATTON

Nothing else.

PRIME MINISTER

Fine. Next.

The meeting moves on. Stratton doesn't. His hand remains on the folder.

**INT. CABINET OFFICE - CORRIDOR - LATER**

Stratton walks fast. An AIDE beside him. The Protocol under his arm.

STRATTON

Everyone who's accessed this in the last five years.

AIDE

Ministerial?

STRATTON

Everyone.

AIDE

What am I looking for?

Stratton stops.

STRATTON

I don't know yet.

He hands her a note.

STRATTON  
And nothing electronic.

AIDE  
Why?

Stratton looks at the Protocol.

STRATTON  
Because apparently nothing dies in  
this building.

He walks.

**INT. JACK STONE'S OFFICE - AFTERNOON**

Television footage of petrol stations. Queues beginning.  
Not panic. Not yet. On one forecourt, an attendant swings a  
NO DIESEL board into place. Danny has three phones. Priya  
stands over a list of names.

DANNY  
Twenty-one MPs.

PRIYA  
Nineteen confirmed.

HELENA  
The two who cancelled after Vale?

DANNY  
Still out.

Danny's phone beeps a text. He checks the screen. Stops.

DANNY  
Chief Whip.

JACK STONE  
Well?

DANNY  
Downing Street. Six o'clock.

HELENA  
Prime Minister?

DANNY  
Stratton.

Something changes in Jack.

JACK STONE  
Why Stratton?

HELENA  
Because the Prime Minister asks  
for support.

A beat.

HELENA  
Stratton finds out what your  
support costs.

**INT. DOWNING STREET - STRATTON'S OFFICE - EVENING**

6:04 PM. Jack enters. Stratton remains behind his desk. No handshake.

STRATTON  
You're late.

JACK STONE  
Security.

STRATTON  
Everyone blames security.

JACK STONE  
Usually because they're holding  
you downstairs.

Stratton indicates a chair. Jack sits.

STRATTON  
Twenty-one MPs.

JACK STONE  
Nineteen. Two haven't committed.

STRATTON  
You could've said twenty-one.

JACK STONE  
Then you'd know I was lying.

Small smile from Stratton.

STRATTON

Government may need emergency  
legislation.

JACK STONE

For what?

STRATTON

Fuel distribution. Strategic  
infrastructure. Temporary powers  
if this deteriorates.

JACK STONE

How temporary?

STRATTON

We haven't drafted it yet.

JACK STONE

Then you don't know.

STRATTON

No.

Jack considers.

JACK STONE

Good answer.

STRATTON

Don't enjoy it.

A beat.

STRATTON

Will your people support us?

JACK STONE

Depends on what you're asking them  
to support.

STRATTON

Keeping food in supermarkets.

JACK STONE

Yes.

STRATTON

Ambulances fuelled.

JACK STONE

Yes.

STRATTON

Protecting essential  
infrastructure.

JACK STONE

Probably. Depends on what you call  
essential.

Stratton studies him.

STRATTON

First time Downing Street's needed  
you.

JACK STONE

First time Downing Street's  
called.

A beat.

STRATTON

What do you want?

JACK STONE

Nothing.

That wasn't expected.

STRATTON

Everybody wants something.

JACK STONE

Then you're talking to the wrong  
everybody.

STRATTON

Twenty politicians don't suddenly  
discover principle at the same  
time.

JACK STONE

Nineteen.

STRATTON

Stop saying nineteen.

JACK STONE  
Stop saying twenty-one.

Silence. Something approaching respect.

STRATTON  
Nineteen. What do they want?

JACK STONE  
To see the legislation before they  
vote for it.

STRATTON  
They will.

JACK STONE  
Before the whips.

STRATTON  
No.

JACK STONE  
Then you don't have nineteen  
votes.

STRATTON  
You'd obstruct emergency  
legislation during a national  
crisis?

JACK STONE  
No.

Jack leans forward.

JACK STONE  
I'd read it.

A beat.

JACK STONE  
Apparently reading it counts as  
obstruction now.

Stratton looks at him.

STRATTON

There may be provisions you won't like. This isn't normal legislation.

JACK STONE

That's normally when the worst legislation gets written.

Something lands differently with Stratton. Jack catches it.

JACK STONE

What?

STRATTON

Nothing.

JACK STONE

That wasn't nothing.

STRATTON

You came here to discuss votes.

A beat.

STRATTON

You'll have the draft.

JACK STONE

When?

STRATTON

Before Cabinet.

Jack stands.

JACK STONE

If it's what you say it is, you'll have our votes.

STRATTON

Just like that?

JACK STONE

If the country needs it.

STRATTON

And if it doesn't?

JACK STONE

Then you don't get to call it an emergency because emergency powers are convenient.

Jack heads for the door.

STRATTON

Stone.

Jack turns. Stratton almost asks something. Doesn't.

STRATTON

Nothing.

Jack studies him. Leaves. Stratton waits. Unlocks his desk. Takes out the CONTINUITY AND CONTRIBUTION PROTOCOL. Looks at it. Then at the door Jack just left through.

**INT. JACK STONE'S OFFICE - NIGHT**

11:38 PM. Jack. Danny. Helena. Priya. A thick document on the table: EMERGENCY NATIONAL RESILIENCE BILL - DRAFT.

Danny turns pages.

DANNY

Fuel prioritisation. Emergency procurement. Temporary control of distribution infrastructure.

PRIYA

Keep going.

Pages turn. Danny stops.

DANNY

Here. Clause seventeen.

Jack reaches for the draft.

DANNY

"Temporary eligibility prioritisation based upon national contribution status."

Silence. Jack reads it.

PRIYA

Contribution.

She looks at Jack. The same word he's been using for months.

HELENA

Define it.

Danny scans.

DANNY

It doesn't.

JACK STONE

What does it apply to?

Danny turns another page. His expression changes.

DANNY

Not just fuel.

A beat.

DANNY

Essential services. Emergency  
accommodation. Transport access.  
Medical prioritisation.

Nobody speaks.

Danny nods.

PRIYA

Who decides contribution status?

Danny searches.

DANNY

Secretary of State by regulation.

PRIYA

So a minister decides who's  
contributed enough.

DANNY

And the system decides what  
they're entitled to.

Priya looks at Jack.

PRIYA

One person.

Jack keeps reading.

PRIYA

You said the genuinely unable  
would be protected.

Jack looks up.

PRIYA

Where are they?

Danny searches. Nothing.

DANNY

They're not.

Silence.

MIRIAM (V.O.)

Who decides who's genuinely  
unable?

Jack looks at Clause Seventeen.

JACK STONE

This isn't emergency fuel  
legislation.

HELENA

No.

JACK STONE

It's a rationing architecture.

PRIYA

For people.

A beat. Jack closes the document.

JACK STONE

Get Stratton.

Danny is already reaching for the phone.

JACK STONE

We support the fuel provisions.

HELENA

And seventeen?

JACK STONE

Gone. Then they can find nineteen votes somewhere else.

Priya looks at him.

PRIYA

Eighteen.

Everyone turns.

JACK STONE

Who?

PRIYA

Henderson.

DANNY

What happened?

PRIYA

Chief Whip offered him  
Parliamentary Under-Secretary at  
Transport. Apparently he's always  
had a passionate interest in  
buses.

A brief laugh.

Jack looks around the table.

JACK STONE

Eighteen.

A beat.

JACK STONE

Anyone else?

Nobody moves.

JACK STONE

Good.

He taps Clause Seventeen.

JACK STONE

We don't oppose emergency powers  
because they're emergency powers.  
We oppose powers they can't  
explain.

A beat.

JACK STONE

They explain this or it goes.

**INT. DOWNING STREET - STRATTON'S OFFICE - NIGHT**

Stratton's phone rings.

STRATTON

Stratton.

JACK STONE (V.O.)

Clause Seventeen.

Stratton closes his eyes for half a second. Jack hears the  
silence.

JACK STONE (V.O.)

You knew.

STRATTON

I knew you'd find it.

JACK STONE (V.O.)

Not what I said.

STRATTON

No.

JACK STONE (V.O.)

What is it?

Stratton looks at the locked drawer.

STRATTON

Something I don't understand well  
enough to explain.

JACK STONE (V.O.)

Then take it out.

STRATTON

I'm trying.

JACK STONE (V.O.)

Trying?

A beat.

STRATTON

Clause Seventeen wasn't in the  
draft I authorised.

Silence. Jack sits forward.

JACK STONE (V.O.)

Who put it in?

STRATTON

That's what I'm trying to find  
out.

JACK STONE (V.O.)

You're the Home Secretary.

STRATTON

Yes.

JACK STONE (V.O.)

And somebody amended emergency  
legislation without you knowing.

STRATTON

That's why I'm concerned.

A beat.

STRATTON

Don't publish it.

JACK STONE (V.O.)

Give me a reason.

Stratton looks at the Protocol.

STRATTON

Because if I'm right, the story  
isn't that somebody put Clause  
Seventeen into a bill.

A beat.

STRATTON

The story is that nobody needed to.

Jack goes still.

JACK STONE (V.O.)

Explain.

STRATTON

Not on this phone.

The line dies. Jack remains at his desk. Stratton at his. Two men on opposite sides of Westminster. For the first time, looking at the same thing.

**INT. CABINET OFFICE - BASEMENT ARCHIVE - NIGHT**

No windows. No phones. Rows of grey cabinets under fluorescent light. Jack enters. Stratton is already there. The CONTINUITY AND CONTRIBUTION PROTOCOL lies open on a table.

JACK STONE

You bring all your political opponents to basements?

STRATTON

Only the ones who read legislation.

Jack looks at the Protocol.

JACK STONE

What is it?

STRATTON

That's what we're going to find out.

Stratton opens the Protocol.

STRATTON

Officially? Contingency planning.

JACK STONE

Unofficially?

STRATTON

I don't know yet.

JACK STONE  
You keep saying that.

STRATTON  
Because unlike you, I don't  
announce conclusions while I'm  
collecting evidence.

Jack takes it.

JACK STONE  
Fair.

Stratton wasn't expecting that. He turns pages.

STRATTON  
2011, financial resilience. 2014,  
critical services. 2017,  
residency. 2021, contribution  
verification.

He turns a page. A diagram: CITIZEN. RESIDENT. CONTRIBUTOR.  
DEPENDENT. NON-CONTRIBUTOR. Jack studies it.

JACK STONE  
Who authorised it?

STRATTON  
Nobody I can find.

He produces another document.

STRATTON  
Every amendment was authorised.  
Every committee legitimate.

He taps the Protocol.

STRATTON  
But nobody authorised this.

Jack understands.

JACK STONE  
The whole thing.

STRATTON  
Exactly.

A beat.

STRATTON  
Nobody built it.

JACK STONE  
Everybody built it.

Stratton looks at him.

STRATTON  
Now you're learning.

Jack turns pages. Stops. CRISIS ACTIVATION - CONTRIBUTION  
PRIORITISATION. He reads.

JACK STONE  
"Where national capacity is  
materially constrained, provision  
may be prioritised according to  
verified contribution."

Stratton watches him.

STRATTON  
Sound familiar?

Jack doesn't answer.

STRATTON  
You've been saying versions of  
that for months.

JACK STONE  
I said contribution should matter.

STRATTON  
So does this.

JACK STONE  
I said Parliament decides how.

STRATTON  
So did the first draft.

Jack looks up.

JACK STONE  
What happened?

Stratton turns pages.

STRATTON  
"Subject to parliamentary  
approval" disappeared in 2017.

Silence.

JACK STONE  
Who removed it?

STRATTON  
A review committee.

JACK STONE  
Chaired by?

Stratton looks at him.

STRATTON  
Eleanor Vale.

Jack goes still.

JACK STONE  
No.

STRATTON  
That's what the record says.

JACK STONE  
What does Vale say?

STRATTON  
I haven't asked.

JACK STONE  
Why?

Stratton closes the file.

STRATTON  
Three people accessed this archive  
after I started asking questions.

JACK STONE  
Who?

STRATTON  
Two Cabinet Office officials.

A beat.

STRATTON  
And somebody using credentials  
belonging to a man who's been dead  
six years.

Jack looks around the archive.

JACK STONE  
Somebody knows you're looking.

STRATTON  
I know they do.

JACK STONE  
Then why show me?

STRATTON  
Clause Seventeen appeared in my  
legislation without my authority.

He looks directly at Jack.

STRATTON  
And if something happens to me  
tomorrow, you're sufficiently  
difficult to shut up.

JACK STONE  
Almost flattering.

STRATTON  
Don't get used to it.

Jack looks again at Vale's name.

JACK STONE  
She didn't do this.

STRATTON  
You sound certain.

JACK STONE  
I'm not.

A beat.

JACK STONE  
I've just learned the cost of  
pretending I am.

Stratton takes that in.

STRATTON  
Good.

Jack turns another page. Then something occurs to him.

JACK STONE  
Harcourt knows about this.

A tiny change in Stratton. Jack catches it.

JACK STONE  
You know he does.

STRATTON  
Michael Harcourt chaired the  
National Resilience Committee from  
2009 to 2012.

Silence.

Jack looks at the Protocol differently.

JACK STONE  
He warned me before the Gulf  
closed.

STRATTON  
How long before?

JACK STONE  
Hours.

Stratton stares at him.

Jack looks at the classifications. His face changes.

JACK STONE  
Jesus Christ.

STRATTON  
What?

Jack looks at him.

JACK STONE  
He knew this was coming.

STRATTON  
When?

JACK STONE  
Before I knew it existed.

Silence. Stratton looks at the Protocol. Then at Jack.  
Harcourt is no longer merely a source. He's a question.  
Stratton closes the Protocol.

STRATTON  
I think it's time you stopped  
treating Michael Harcourt as a  
source.

A beat.  
Jack looks at the Protocol.

JACK STONE  
Clause Seventeen comes out.

STRATTON  
Already gone.

JACK STONE  
And this?

Stratton looks at fifteen years of accumulated machinery.

STRATTON  
This doesn't exist.

Jack looks at him.

STRATTON  
Until we know why it exists.

JACK STONE  
You're asking me to keep a  
government secret.

STRATTON

I'm asking you not to publish  
something we don't understand and  
convince half the country there's  
a secret programme deciding who  
deserves food.

JACK STONE

Is there?

Stratton looks at the Protocol.

STRATTON

That's what frightens me.

**INT. JACK STONE'S OFFICE - NIGHT**

Jack alone. His notes from the Protocol in front of him. He  
calls. One ring.

HARCOURT (V.O.)

Jack.

JACK STONE

I need to see you.

HARCOURT (V.O.)

Why?

JACK STONE

Continuity and Contribution.

Silence.

HARCOURT (V.O.)

I'll send an address.

The line dies.

**INT. EDINBURGH TOWNHOUSE - STUDY - NIGHT**

Number Ten photograph. The yellowing front page: DEPUTY PM  
HARCOURT RESIGNS. Harcourt pours whisky. Jack stands  
opposite him.

HARCOURT

You found it.

JACK STONE  
Stratton found it.

That interests Harcourt.

HARCOURT  
Martin Stratton?

JACK STONE  
Don't. I'm not here to help you  
assess people.

A beat. Harcourt sits.

HARCOURT  
Good.

Jack remains standing.

JACK STONE  
Did you build it?

HARCOURT  
No.

JACK STONE  
Did you start it?

HARCOURT  
Yes.

There it is.

JACK STONE  
Why?

HARCOURT  
2008.

JACK STONE  
The crash.

HARCOURT  
Banks failing. Food distribution  
measured in days. We had no  
mechanism for deciding what  
continued if everything couldn't.

Jack looks at the framed resignation headline.

JACK STONE

Why did you resign? The papers  
said Europe.

HARCOURT

The papers were given Europe.

A beat.

JACK STONE

What was it?

Harcourt looks at the photograph of himself outside Number  
Ten.

HARCOURT

The first proposal to make  
emergency classification  
permanent.

Silence.

HARCOURT

Not during a crisis. Afterwards.

JACK STONE

Who proposed it?

HARCOURT

Doesn't matter.

JACK STONE

It matters to me.

HARCOURT

That's your weakness. You still  
think there's a room somewhere  
with six men in it.

JACK STONE

Isn't there?

HARCOURT

No.

A beat.

HARCOURT

There are six hundred rooms with  
one man in each. Treasury solves  
fraud. Home Office solves  
identity. Health solves  
entitlement. Cabinet Office solves  
resilience. Every solution  
rational. Every decision  
defensible.

He looks at Jack.

HARCOURT

Then one day somebody joins the  
databases.

Jack thinks of the Protocol.

JACK STONE

Everybody built it.

HARCOURT

Especially me.

No defence. That stops Jack.

JACK STONE

Then why me?

Harcourt looks at him.

HARCOURT

Because I couldn't destroy it.

JACK STONE

So you decided I could.

HARCOURT

No.

Harcourt stands.

HARCOURT

I decided you might be the first  
politician in twenty years  
dangerous enough to be offered it.

Jack stares at him.

JACK STONE  
Offered what?

HARCOURT  
Power without friction.

A beat.

HARCOURT  
Everything you've argued for.  
Contribution. Eligibility.  
Responsibility. Enforcement. The  
machinery already exists.

Jack doesn't answer immediately.

HARCOURT  
No whips. No committees. No  
compromise before a decision  
reaches the ground.

JACK STONE  
Without Parliament.

HARCOURT  
Exactly.

HARCOURT  
You could make things work.

Jack looks at him.

HARCOURT  
That's the part you're thinking  
about.

JACK STONE  
Yes.

A beat.

JACK STONE  
And you think I'd use it.

HARCOURT  
I don't know.

For the first time, Harcourt looks old.

HARCOURT

That's why I've been watching you.

Jack's anger rises. Controlled.

JACK STONE

The Gulf?

HARCOURT

I didn't cause the Gulf.

JACK STONE

I didn't ask if you caused it. How did you know?

HARCOURT

Insurers. Defence. Oil traders. People stop speaking in hypotheticals when they're frightened.

JACK STONE

You used it. You used a national crisis to position me.

HARCOURT

I prepared you for a national crisis.

JACK STONE

Don't dress it up.

Harcourt looks at him.

HARCOURT

Fine.

A beat.

HARCOURT

I used it.

JACK STONE

You don't contact Danny. Helena. Priya. Anyone around me.

Harcourt studies him.

JACK STONE  
You know who they are.

HARCOURT  
I know who everyone around you is.

JACK STONE  
Not anymore.

A beat.

JACK STONE  
You give me everything you have on  
the Protocol. Every name. Every  
committee. Every version.

HARCOURT  
And then?

JACK STONE  
Then we decide what happens to it.

That catches Harcourt.

HARCOURT  
We?

JACK STONE  
Parliament. People who understand  
it. People affected by it.

A beat.

JACK STONE  
Not you.

Harcourt studies him.

HARCOURT  
And not you?

Jack looks at him.

JACK STONE  
Especially not me.

Silence. Harcourt almost smiles.

JACK STONE

You still don't understand.

Jack looks at the photograph of Harcourt beside the Prime Minister. Then back at him.

JACK STONE

You still think this is about  
choosing me.

Jack walks out. Harcourt remains standing. For the first time since we met him, he doesn't have the last word.

**INT. DOWNING STREET - CABINET ROOM - MORNING**

Ministers around the table. The Prime Minister reads the briefing. Stratton opposite him.

STRATTON

Clause Seventeen stays out.

A Cabinet Office Minister looks up.

CABINET OFFICE MINISTER

On whose authority?

STRATTON

Mine.

CABINET OFFICE MINISTER

It's standard resilience language.

STRATTON

No, it isn't.

CABINET OFFICE MINISTER

It has been available to  
successive administrations for  
precisely this kind of-

STRATTON

Available isn't authorised.

Silence. The Prime Minister looks between them.

PRIME MINISTER

What are we arguing about?

STRATTON

A clause tying access to public  
provision to citizenship,  
residency and contribution status.

CABINET OFFICE MINISTER

Which is what the framework was  
designed for.

Stratton looks at him.

STRATTON

What framework?

A fraction too long. Stratton sees it.

CABINET OFFICE MINISTER

National resilience.

STRATTON

That's not its name.

The room changes. The Prime Minister notices.

PRIME MINISTER

Martin.

STRATTON

Continuity and Contribution  
Protocol.

Silence. The Cabinet Office Minister doesn't move.

PRIME MINISTER

I've never heard of it.

STRATTON

Neither had I.

CABINET OFFICE MINISTER

Because it's contingency  
architecture, not policy.

STRATTON

Then why was its language inserted  
into my Bill?

Silence.

CABINET OFFICE MINISTER  
I don't know that it was.

STRATTON  
I do.

The Prime Minister looks at Stratton.

PRIME MINISTER  
Can we have this argument after  
the country has fuel?

STRATTON  
That's how it survives.

A beat.

PRIME MINISTER  
What?

STRATTON  
There's always something more  
urgent.

Nobody answers. The Prime Minister looks at the Bill.

PRIME MINISTER  
Clause Seventeen stays out.

The Cabinet Office Minister looks at him.

PRIME MINISTER  
We ask Parliament for the powers  
we need. Not the powers somebody  
thought we might need fifteen  
years ago.

Stratton nods. Decision made.

**INT. JACK STONE'S OFFICE - AFTERNOON**

The Emergency Bill open across Danny's laptop. Priya reads from a second screen. Jack behind them. Helena on the phone.

DANNY  
Seventeen's gone.

JACK STONE  
Completely?

DANNY  
Citizenship. Residency.  
Contribution status. All gone.

Priya scrolls.

PRIYA  
Nothing equivalent later.

Jack looks at the clock. 2:16 PM.

JACK STONE  
Then we support it.

Helena ends her call.

HELENA  
You may want to wait.

JACK STONE  
Why?

HELENA  
Because half of Westminster has  
just discovered you exist.

PRIYA  
They discovered that weeks ago.

HELENA  
They discovered the television  
version.

She looks at Jack.

HELENA  
Today they've discovered the  
arithmetic.

Danny's phone rings. Then another. Then another. Messages.  
He counts.

DANNY  
Twenty-four.

Danny's laptop pings. A new email. Attachment.

DANNY  
It's a PDF.

On screen: a scanned Cabinet Office document. CONTINUITY AND CONTRIBUTION PROTOCOL. Jack goes still.

HELENA

Where did that come from?

DANNY

Forwarded from a Cabinet Office address. Sender stripped the name. There's a message.

JACK STONE

Read it.

Danny does.

DANNY

"YOU'RE LOOKING AT THE WRONG VERSION."

Silence.

JACK STONE

Date?

Danny scrolls. Stops.

DANNY

2026.

Jack looks at Helena.

HELENA

Stratton showed you 2021.

JACK STONE

He showed me the history through 2021.

DANNY

This was revised four months ago.

Priya moves beside him.

PRIYA

By whom?

Danny scrolls. Redactions. Then: ACTIVATION AUTHORITY.

DANNY

"Upon declaration of a Level One National Resilience Emergency, designated provisions may be activated administratively pending retrospective parliamentary notification."

Priya steps closer.

PRIYA

Retrospective?

DANNY

Parliament gets told afterwards.

PRIYA

He's about to trigger it.

Priya looks at Jack.

PRIYA

The first time any of us says  
'just this once', I walk.

Jack holds her gaze.

JACK STONE

You should.

Jack looks at the television. The Prime Minister entering the Commons. Banner: PM TO DECLARE NATIONAL RESILIENCE EMERGENCY. Jack grabs his jacket.

HELENA

Where are you going?

JACK STONE

Parliament.

HELENA

You're already voting for the Bill.

JACK STONE

This isn't in the Bill.

He points at the television.

JACK STONE

That's the point.

HELENA

Jack.

He turns.

HELENA

You know what frightens me?

You believe half of it.

Jack has no answer.

**INT. HOUSE OF COMMONS - CHAMBER - LATER**

Packed. Every seat. The Prime Minister at the despatch box. Jack sits among his group. Stratton on the Government frontbench. Their eyes meet. Jack holds up one sheet. The 2026 Protocol. Stratton sees the heading. His face changes. He hasn't seen it. That tells Jack everything.

PRIME MINISTER

Mr Speaker, following further disruption to international energy supplies, the Government has today declared a Level One National Resilience Emergency-

Jack looks at the paper. The exact words. Stratton is already moving. He leans towards an aide. Urgent.

PRIME MINISTER

-this declaration allows the Government to coordinate essential fuel distribution, protect critical infrastructure and ensure continuity of essential public services-

The aide leaves at speed. Jack looks towards the officials' gallery. Civil servants. Watching. One empty seat. Someone has just left.

PRIME MINISTER

These measures are temporary, proportionate and subject to the authority of this House-

JACK STONE

Mr Speaker.

Heads turn. The Prime Minister stops.

SPEAKER

Mr Stone, the Prime Minister has not finished.

JACK STONE

Then he needs to know what he's finishing.

Noise erupts.

SPEAKER

Mr Stone.

Stratton stands.

STRATTON

Prime Minister.

The Prime Minister turns. Stratton crosses to him. Whispers. The Prime Minister looks at Jack. Then at the paper in his hand. The chamber senses something.

PRIME MINISTER

Mr Speaker, with your permission, I require five minutes.

Uproar.

SPEAKER

Order. The House is suspended for five minutes.

He steps away from the despatch box. Jack remains standing. Across the chamber, Stratton looks at him. Neither man knows who sent the document. Both now know the same thing. Somebody has just tried to activate the Protocol.

**INT. HOUSE OF COMMONS - GOVERNMENT CORRIDOR - CONTINUOUS**

The chamber doors close behind them. Jack follows Stratton.

They move. Stratton shuts the door. Jack puts the 2026 Protocol on the table.

STRATTON

Where did you get this?

JACK STONE

Anonymous.

Stratton turns pages. Fast.

STRATTON

I've never seen this version.

JACK STONE

I know.

STRATTON

How?

JACK STONE

You stopped reading.

Stratton reaches the activation clause. Stops.

STRATTON

Jesus.

JACK STONE

The Prime Minister just said the words.

STRATTON

Has it activated?

JACK STONE

Find out.

Stratton reaches for his phone.

STRATTON

It's Stratton. Level One. Has administrative activation been certified?

He listens. His face hardens.

STRATTON

By whom?

Another pause.

STRATTON

When?

He looks at Jack.

STRATTON  
Do nothing else. Nothing. I don't  
care what authority you've been  
given. Freeze it.

He hangs up.

JACK STONE  
Well?

STRATTON  
Certified four minutes ago.

JACK STONE  
By?

Stratton looks at him.

STRATTON  
Eleanor Vale.

Silence.

JACK STONE  
Not a chance.

STRATTON  
Her credentials.

JACK STONE  
That's different.

STRATTON  
At the moment it's all we have.

Jack takes the Protocol.

JACK STONE  
What activated?

Stratton turns pages.

STRATTON  
Fuel allocation first.

JACK STONE  
And?

STRATTON  
Data integration.

Jack looks at him.

STRATTON  
HMRC. DWP. Home Office. NHS  
identity records.

JACK STONE  
For fuel?

STRATTON  
No.

A beat.

STRATTON  
For classification.

The word hangs there.

JACK STONE  
Citizen. Resident. Contributor.

STRATTON  
Yes.

JACK STONE  
Non-contributor.

Stratton doesn't answer. Jack looks towards the Commons  
beyond the door.

JACK STONE  
Suspend it.

STRATTON  
I just did.

JACK STONE  
You froze it.

STRATTON  
Until we know what we're dealing  
with.

STRATTON  
Jack-

JACK STONE

You don't need a database deciding whether someone deserves insulin because their National Insurance record has a hole in it.

STRATTON

Nobody is denying anyone insulin.

JACK STONE

Yet.

Stratton looks at him. Jack hears the word himself.

JACK STONE

I keep saying yet.

Stratton looks back at the Protocol.

STRATTON

I can suspend activation. I can't erase the architecture.

JACK STONE

Who can?

STRATTON

Cabinet Office.

JACK STONE

Vale.

STRATTON

If it was Vale.

Jack looks at the activation record. Vale's credentials.

JACK STONE

Find Vale.

Stratton checks his phone. His expression changes.

STRATTON

She's at St Thomas'. Intensive care. Since last night.

Jack and Stratton look at each other.

JACK STONE

Then she didn't certify anything  
four minutes ago.

STRATTON

Someone used her credentials.

The chamber bell sounds outside. Five minutes are up.  
Stratton looks towards the door.

STRATTON

I have to stop the declaration.

JACK STONE

No.

Stratton turns.

JACK STONE

The declaration gives you the fuel  
powers you actually need.

STRATTON

And activates this.

JACK STONE

You've frozen this.

A beat.

JACK STONE

Don't make the country pay because  
somebody buried a weapon inside  
the machinery.

Stratton studies him.

STRATTON

What do you suggest?

Jack looks at the Protocol. Then towards the chamber.

JACK STONE

Tell Parliament the truth.

STRATTON

All of it?

This is the decision.

JACK STONE

All of it.

STRATTON

And if the Prime Minister refuses?

Jack looks towards the chamber.

JACK STONE

Then I stand up and tell them  
myself.

Stratton absorbs that.

STRATTON

That could bring down the  
Government.

JACK STONE

Did the Government do it?

STRATTON

Not that I know.

JACK STONE

Then stop protecting people you  
haven't identified from  
consequences they may deserve.

The bell again. Stratton opens the door.

STRATTON

You realise what happens when this  
gets out.

JACK STONE

Yes.

STRATTON

Every conspiracy site in the  
country goes insane.

JACK STONE

Then give everyone else the facts  
before they invent them.

Stratton looks at him. Nods. They walk.

**INT. HOUSE OF COMMONS - CHAMBER - MOMENTS LATER**

The chamber settles as the Prime Minister returns to the despatch box. Stratton reaches him first. A hurried conversation. The Prime Minister looks at Stratton. Then Jack. Then the Protocol.

PRIME MINISTER

Mr Speaker.

The chamber quiets.

PRIME MINISTER

Before I continue, the Home Secretary has brought to my attention information which materially changes part of the statement I was about to make.

Murmurs. Jack sits. Priya beside him.

PRIYA

What did you do?

Jack watches Stratton.

JACK STONE

Asked them to tell the truth.

Priya looks towards the Government frontbench.

PRIYA

That'll never catch on.

The Prime Minister looks down at the Protocol.

PRIME MINISTER

I have instructed that all administrative powers associated with the Continuity and Contribution Protocol be suspended with immediate effect pending an independent investigation.

The chamber erupts.

SPEAKER

Order!

PRIME MINISTER

Until approximately seven minutes ago, I was unaware that this version of the protocol existed.

The noise doubles. Jack looks towards the officials' gallery. The empty seat remains empty.

PRIME MINISTER

The Home Secretary has informed me that an attempt was made this afternoon to activate elements of that protocol using the credentials of a senior civil servant who is currently in hospital and could not have authorised that action.

Now even MPs stop shouting.

PRIME MINISTER

The police and security services have been informed. The Government will publish what it lawfully can before this House rises tonight.

A beat.

PRIME MINISTER

We will not ask Parliament to trust what Government itself cannot presently explain.

Silence. Then the chamber explodes again. Priya leans towards Jack.

PRIYA

You know what you've just done?

JACK STONE

No.

PRIYA

Good.

She watches the chaos.

PRIYA

Because everyone else is about to  
tell you.

**INT. ST THOMAS' HOSPITAL - CORRIDOR - NIGHT**

Jack approaches the private room. Stratton comes from the  
opposite direction with a SECURITY OFFICER.

Stratton looks through the glass. Eleanor Vale. Pale.  
Oxygen. Monitors.

A DOCTOR steps out of the room.

STRATTON

What happened?

DOCTOR

She collapsed at home.

STRATTON

Anything suspicious?

DOCTOR

No.

**INT. ST THOMAS' HOSPITAL - PRIVATE ROOM - MOMENTS LATER**

Jack enters alone. Vale opens her eyes. Sees him.

VALE

You took your time.

JACK STONE

I'm hearing that a lot lately.

Something close to a smile. It hurts.

VALE

Michael?

Jack stops.

JACK STONE

Harcourt?

Vale closes her eyes.

VALE

Of course.

Jack moves closer.

JACK STONE

You know him.

VALE

Everybody knew Michael.

Jack pulls a chair closer.

JACK STONE

Your credentials were used this  
afternoon.

Vale's expression changes.

VALE

For what?

JACK STONE

Continuity and Contribution.

The monitor keeps its rhythm. Vale looks towards the door.

VALE

Who knows?

JACK STONE

Parliament.

She looks back at him.

VALE

You published it?

JACK STONE

The Prime Minister did.

Vale absorbs that.

VALE

Good.

Jack wasn't expecting that.

JACK STONE

You chaired the 2017 review.

VALE

No.

JACK STONE  
The record says you did.

VALE  
I chaired the objection.

A beat.

JACK STONE  
Explain.

Vale struggles slightly for breath.

VALE  
There was a review. Cabinet  
Office. Treasury. Home Office.  
Contribution architecture.

JACK STONE  
Removing parliamentary approval.

VALE  
Yes.

JACK STONE  
You signed it.

VALE  
I signed my objection to it.

Jack goes still.

JACK STONE  
The document says approval.

VALE  
Then the document lies.

A beat.

JACK STONE  
Who changed it?

VALE  
I don't know.

JACK STONE  
Who wanted the change?

VALE  
Everybody and nobody.

Jack looks at her.

VALE  
Conspiracies are comforting. They  
give you someone to arrest.

Jack processes that.

JACK STONE  
Then who are we looking for?

Vale shifts. Pain.

VALE  
You're still looking for a person.

JACK STONE  
Someone used your credentials  
today.

VALE  
Yes. Find that person.

A beat.

VALE  
But don't confuse the person who  
turned the key with the people who  
spent fifteen years building the  
lock.

Jack looks at her.

JACK STONE  
The 2026 version.

Vale goes still.

VALE  
I've never seen it.

Jack sees it immediately.

JACK STONE  
You knew there was one.

VALE  
I knew they were revising it.

JACK STONE  
What changed?

VALE  
Administrative activation.  
Retrospective parliamentary  
notification. Integrated  
classification.

Vale closes her eyes. Not surprise. Dread.

VALE  
They finished it.

JACK STONE  
Who?

VALE  
I don't know.

JACK STONE  
Eleanor.

VALE  
I don't know.

She looks at him.

VALE  
That's what you need to  
understand.

A beat.

VALE  
Nobody needed permission anymore.

Jack says nothing.

A beat.

VALE  
Michael saw where it could go  
before most of us.

JACK STONE  
And still left it behind.

VALE  
So did I.

No defence.

VALE  
That's what people like us do, Mr  
Stone. We object. We minute the  
objection. We put it in the file.

She looks at him.

VALE  
Then we go home.

Jack thinks of Amie.

JACK STONE  
Wells didn't.

Vale looks at him sharply.

VALE  
You found her objection?

JACK STONE  
Yes.

VALE  
My bag.

Jack opens it. Finds a brass key with a numbered tag.

JACK STONE  
The documents?

VALE  
Private vault. Victoria. Box 317.  
Everything I kept out of the  
official file.

Jack looks at her.

VALE  
Eventually even civil servants  
learn.

Jack pockets the key.

JACK STONE  
Why didn't you give this to  
Stratton?

VALE  
Because Stratton is the Home  
Secretary.

JACK STONE  
He's trying to stop it.

VALE  
Today, yes.

Jack looks at her.

VALE  
Governments change their minds  
when frightened. So do good men.

Jack understands.

JACK STONE  
Including me.

Vale looks directly at him.

VALE  
Especially you.

Silence.

VALE  
Because part of you agrees with  
it.

That hits. Jack doesn't defend himself. Vale's eyes begin  
to close.

JACK STONE  
Eleanor.

She forces them open.

JACK STONE  
Who should I trust?

Vale almost smiles.

VALE  
That's not a serious question.

A beat.

VALE  
Trust evidence.

A NURSE enters.

NURSE  
That's enough.

Jack stands. Vale catches his wrist. Weak.

VALE  
Mr Stone.

Jack looks down.

VALE  
Don't destroy the machinery  
because you're frightened of what  
it can do.

A beat.

VALE  
And don't use it because you're  
frightened of what happens if you  
don't.

**INT. ST THOMAS' HOSPITAL - CORRIDOR - CONTINUOUS**  
Stratton waits. Jack approaches.

STRATTON  
Well?

Jack looks at him.

JACK STONE  
Your records are wrong. Vale  
didn't approve the 2017 change.  
She objected to it.

Stratton absorbs that.

STRATTON  
Anything else?

Jack could keep what Vale told him to himself. Her words return:

VALE (V.O.)  
Trust evidence.

Jack shows Stratton the key.

JACK STONE  
The documents.

Stratton looks at the key. Then Jack.

JACK STONE  
Let's read them.  
Stratton's phone rings before they move. He answers.  
Listens.

STRATTON  
How long?  
He listens again.

STRATTON  
Keep them on standby.  
He hangs up.

**INT. ST THOMAS' HOSPITAL - PLANT ROOM - SAME**

A digital panel: BACKUP DIESEL - 5 HRS 40 MIN. A HOSPITAL OPERATIONS MANAGER watches it with an ESTATES ENGINEER.

ESTATES ENGINEER  
If the next delivery doesn't come?

HOSPITAL OPERATIONS MANAGER  
We start deciding what stays on.

**INT. ST THOMAS' HOSPITAL - CORRIDOR - CONTINUOUS**

JACK STONE  
What?

STRATTON

Freezing Continuity froze the automated fuel routing with it. Three hospital networks are below six hours. Manual allocation takes four.

JACK STONE

Options?

STRATTON

Restore the allocation engine for one hour. Or wait.

JACK STONE

Fuel only.

STRATTON

They can't separate it cleanly. The routing model still reads the integrated dependency data.

Vale's warning is still in the room with him.

VALE (V.O.)

Don't use it because you're frightened of what happens if you don't.

STRATTON

This is the part where you tell me to wait for Parliament.

JACK STONE

And the hospitals?

STRATTON

Wait with us.

Jack looks through the glass at Vale. Then at Stratton.

JACK STONE

One hour. Hospitals first. Nothing else.

Stratton studies him. Jack knows exactly what he has just said.

STRATTON

On my authority.  
He makes the call.

STRATTON

Restore automated fuel allocation  
for sixty minutes. No benefit  
decisions. No individual service  
denial.

A SECURITY OFFICER hands Stratton a tablet. Routes redraw.  
Three hospital markers turn green. A regional ambulance  
network drops from green to amber.  
Jack watches the numbers settle. Relief first. Then  
something more dangerous: satisfaction.

STRATTON

It worked.  
Jack hands the tablet back.

JACK STONE

Start the clock.

**INT. PRIVATE ROOM - PARLIAMENTARY ESTATE - LATER**

No windows. No phones. The document case open on the table.  
Jack. Stratton. Danny.  
Danny looks at Jack.

DANNY

What happened?

JACK STONE

I used it.

DANNY

The Protocol?

JACK STONE

Fuel allocation. One hour.

A beat.

JACK STONE

When we're out, tell Priya.

DANNY

She'll walk.

JACK STONE

I know.

Stratton places a separate Cabinet Office file beside them.

STRATTON

2026.

Silence. He opens it. PROJECT CONTINUITY - IMPLEMENTATION  
REVIEW. JANUARY 2026.

DANNY

Four months before the Gulf.

STRATTON

So this wasn't built for the  
current emergency.

He turns the page. Names. Departments. STEPHEN WARD -  
DIRECTOR, GOVERNMENT DIGITAL RESILIENCE.

STRATTON

He briefed COBRA yesterday.

JACK STONE

Was he in the room when the  
Protocol came up?

STRATTON

No. He should have been.

Danny turns pages.

DANNY

Here's Vale.

A printed email. Dated 2025. Her objection.

DANNY

"Project Continuity has moved  
beyond resilience planning into  
automatic determination of  
individual eligibility. I cannot  
support activation architecture  
that removes contemporaneous  
ministerial and parliamentary  
authority."

Jack looks at Stratton. Proof. Danny turns the page.

DANNY

Reply from Ward.

He reads.

DANNY

"Ministerial authority remains  
embedded at declaration level.  
Operational execution is  
necessarily administrative."

Stratton takes the page.

Danny finds Vale's response.

DANNY

She replied.

He reads.

DANNY

"A minister cannot consent to a  
consequence he has not been told  
exists."

Silence. Jack thinks of the Prime Minister at the despatch  
box.

Danny turns another page. Stops.

DANNY

Wait.

Danny pulls the earlier archive access log towards him.

DANNY

The dead man. The credentials used  
after Stratton started asking  
questions.

STRATTON

What about them?

DANNY

Vale reported her Cabinet Office  
credentials compromised in  
February. Remote authentication  
from Whitehall while she was in  
Brussels.

JACK STONE

And the archive access?

Danny compares the authentication records. Stops.

DANNY

Same signature.

STRATTON

Who closed Vale's security report?

Danny turns the page.

DANNY

Stephen Ward. The credentials were never revoked. His own access could maintain the system. Vale's could certify activation.

Danny looks at the dead man's access log again. Then at Ward's name.

DANNY

That wasn't a ghost user. Ward was borrowing identities.

STRATTON

Ward.

A beat.

STRATTON

Find him.

Stratton reaches for his phone.

He makes the call. Jack and Danny continue through the files.

JACK STONE

This still doesn't explain  
Harcourt.

STRATTON

Keep looking.

They do. Pages. Years. Danny stops at a handwritten note.

DANNY

Jack.

He slides it across. Vale's handwriting: MICHAEL HARCOURT - 14 FEB. Beneath it: WARNED HIM. SAYS STONE MAY BE ONLY WAY TO FORCE THIS INTO DAYLIGHT. SAYS HE'LL GET CURRENT VERSION TO STONE. REFUSES FORMAL STATEMENT. Jack reads it twice.

STRATTON

He knew in February.

JACK STONE

Before he warned me.

Danny looks at Jack.

DANNY

He wasn't warning you about the Gulf. He was pointing you here.

Silence. The first meeting rearranges itself.

JACK STONE

He knew somebody would activate it.

STRATTON

Or believed they would.

JACK STONE

And instead of going public-

DANNY

He built you.

Jack looks at him. Danny knows that landed hard.

DANNY

Sorry.

JACK STONE

No. You're right.

Stratton takes the note.

Stratton's phone vibrates. He answers. Listens.

STRATTON

Government Digital Resilience  
Centre. Westminster.

He listens.

Jack stands.

JACK STONE  
I want to speak to him.

STRATTON  
Absolutely not.

JACK STONE  
He used Vale's credentials to  
activate something built around  
half the things I've been arguing  
for.

STRATTON  
Which is precisely why you don't  
go near him.

JACK STONE  
Why?

STRATTON  
Because this isn't your  
investigation.

Jack looks at Vale's files.

JACK STONE  
No. It's my argument.

Stratton watches him.

JACK STONE  
I want to hear what it sounds like  
when somebody takes it to the end.

STRATTON  
Police first.

JACK STONE  
Agreed.

That surprises Stratton.

JACK STONE  
I'm not arresting anybody.

**INT. PARLIAMENTARY ESTATE - CORRIDOR - NIGHT**

Priya waits. Jack emerges with Stratton and Danny. Stratton and Danny stop a few paces away.

PRIYA

Danny told me.

Jack stops.

JACK STONE

I know.

PRIYA

One hour.

JACK STONE

Yes.

PRIYA

Hospitals.

JACK STONE

Yes.

PRIYA

You said I should walk.

JACK STONE

I did.

PRIYA

I'm out.

She walks away. Jack watches her go.

**EXT. PARLIAMENTARY ESTATE - NIGHT**

Jack gets into the dark blue Volvo. Cole at the wheel. Marsh beside him. Stratton's car waits behind.

**INT. VOLVO - MOVING - NIGHT**

London slides past. Marsh watches the mirrors.

MARSH

Something's changed.

JACK STONE

What?

MARSH

Yesterday people wanted to  
frighten you.

Cole checks the mirror.

COLE

Today they're watching who comes  
near you.

Jack looks at him.

JACK STONE

Difference?

COLE

Bigger problem.

Behind them, Stratton's car stays close.

**INT. STRATTON'S CAR - MOVING - NIGHT**

Stratton's phone vibrates. PRIME MINISTER. He answers.

PRIME MINISTER (V.O.)

If you do what I think you're  
about to do, I won't be able to  
save you.

STRATTON

I'm not asking you to.

He ends the call.

**INT. GOVERNMENT DIGITAL RESILIENCE CENTRE - NIGHT**

Quiet. Banks of screens. Almost everybody gone. STEPHEN  
WARD (50s) sits at a workstation. Ordinary. Tie loosened.  
Cup of tea. On his screens: fuel allocation, hospital  
capacity, distribution networks. The country reduced to  
systems.

WARD

You can come in.

TWO MET POLICE OFFICERS and a SECURITY OFFICER stop in the  
doorway. Ward doesn't turn.

Stratton enters with Jack. Ward sees Jack. Something  
approaching satisfaction.

WARD

There you are.

JACK STONE

Do I know you?

WARD

No.

A beat.

WARD

But I know you.

MET OFFICER

Stephen Ward, you're under arrest  
on suspicion of unauthorised  
access to classified government  
systems and fraudulent use of  
security credentials.

Ward looks at Stratton.

WARD

Fraudulent?

He considers the word.

WARD

That's disappointing.

STRATTON

Did you use Eleanor Vale's  
credentials?

WARD

Yes.

No hesitation.

STRATTON

Did you activate the Continuity  
and Contribution Protocol?

WARD

Yes.

STRATTON

Without ministerial authority?

Ward looks genuinely confused.

WARD

The Prime Minister declared Level  
One.

STRATTON

He didn't know what that activated.

WARD

That's not a systems problem.

Jack watches him.

JACK STONE

What is it?

Ward turns to Jack.

WARD

A political one.

JACK STONE

You classified millions of people without Parliament knowing.

WARD

No.

JACK STONE

No?

WARD

The state already classifies everybody. Taxpayer. Patient. Citizen. Resident. Prisoner. Pensioner. Disabled. Employed. Unemployed.

A beat.

WARD

I made the classifications interoperable.

JACK STONE

And attached consequences.

WARD

Government attaches consequences every day.

JACK STONE

Not without telling anyone.

Ward looks at him.

WARD

You really believe that?

Silence. Ward turns a monitor towards Jack. Numbers. Categories.

WARD

Contributors. Protected  
dependants. Pensioners. Temporary  
residents. Foreign nationals.  
Unverified status.

Jack looks at the screen.

WARD

You asked how to make contribution  
matter.

JACK STONE

I asked Parliament to make it  
matter.

For the first time, Ward shows emotion. Disbelief.

WARD

Parliament? The institution that  
spent fifteen years approving  
every component and never once  
understood the machine they'd  
assembled?

JACK STONE

Then you make them understand it.

WARD

We did.

STRATTON

No, you didn't.

Ward looks at him.

WARD

Papers. Impact assessments.  
Ministerial submissions. Risk  
analyses. Every page signed. Every  
budget approved.

JACK STONE  
And when Vale objected?

WARD  
She was frightened.

JACK STONE  
She was right.

Ward studies Jack.

WARD  
That's not what you've been  
telling the country.

There it is.

WARD  
Contribution in. Benefit out.

Jack says nothing.

WARD  
Your words.

JACK STONE  
Yes.

WARD  
Contribution before entitlement.

JACK STONE  
Yes.

WARD  
Responsibility before dependency.

JACK STONE  
Where possible.

WARD  
Then what exactly are we  
disagreeing about?

A long beat. Jack looks at the screens. The mechanism  
working.

JACK STONE  
Who decides.

Ward waits.

JACK STONE  
That's the whole bloody argument.

JACK STONE  
Eleven reviews said Amie Carter  
was being monitored. The system  
worked. She was still in the  
house.

WARD  
You used it.  
Jack says nothing.

WARD  
One hour. Hospital fuel.  
Integrated dependency data.  
Ward looks at Stratton.

WARD  
He made the decision. You  
authorised it.

STRATTON  
Yes.  
Ward turns back to Jack.

WARD  
And it worked.

JACK STONE  
Yes.

WARD  
So stop pretending the argument is  
whether the machine works.

JACK STONE  
The argument is who gets to decide  
what "working" means.

WARD  
When the alternative is collapse,  
principles become luxuries.  
Jack looks at him.

JACK STONE

They're only principles when  
they're expensive.

Ward stares at him. Jack turns to Stratton.

JACK STONE

Shut it down.

WARD

I can't.

Jack turns.

WARD

Not without consequences.

STRATTON

What consequences?

Ward indicates the screens.

WARD

Fuel allocation is already running  
through it.

Silence.

WARD

Switch off Continuity now and you  
switch off prioritised  
distribution with it.

Stratton looks at Jack. Ward sees the dilemma arrive.

Jack looks at the screens. Ambulances. Food. Fuel. And  
underneath them, the machinery he wants stopped.

JACK STONE

How long would distribution go  
down?

WARD

Best case? Hours.

STRATTON

Worst?

WARD

Tomorrow.

STRATTON

Not acceptable.

WARD

No.

Ward looks at Jack.

WARD

Which is why you won't do it.

Jack walks towards the screens.

JACK STONE

Show me what actually depends on  
individual classification.

WARD

All of it.

JACK STONE

No. Show me.

Ward doesn't move.

JACK STONE

Fuel going to an ambulance depot  
doesn't need to know whether  
somebody paid National Insurance  
last year.

WARD

The system isn't structured that  
way.

JACK STONE

Then restructure it.

Ward almost laughs.

WARD

Tonight?

JACK STONE

Yes.

WARD

You have absolutely no idea what  
you're asking.

JACK STONE

Correct.

That stops Ward.

JACK STONE

You do.

A beat.

JACK STONE

So tell me what's possible.

Ward looks at Stratton.

WARD

He's not the Government.

STRATTON

I am.

A beat.

STRATTON

Answer him.

Ward turns back to the screens.

WARD

We could isolate institutional  
allocation.

JACK STONE

Meaning?

WARD

Hospitals. Ambulance trusts. Food  
distribution hubs. Emergency  
services. Critical infrastructure.  
Technically, without individual  
classification.

JACK STONE

How long?

Ward thinks.

WARD

Six hours.

STRATTON

You said shutting it down could  
take hours.

WARD

This is different. Because you  
want me to remove the part that  
makes it efficient while keeping  
the part that keeps the country  
moving.

JACK STONE

Yes.

WARD

That's insane.

JACK STONE

Can you do it?

Ward looks at him.

WARD

Yes.

JACK STONE

Then do it.

WARD

And tomorrow? Petrol stations.  
Domestic heating priority.  
Individual access if shortages  
deepen.

JACK STONE

Parliament decides.

WARD

Parliament won't decide in time.

JACK STONE

Then Parliament sits until it  
does.

WARD

You think six hundred MPs can  
allocate fuel?

Jack looks at him.

JACK STONE

No. I think six hundred MPs can  
decide the rules by which fuel is  
allocated.

WARD

And while they argue?

JACK STONE

You distribute on need.

WARD

Define need.

JACK STONE

Hospitals. Food. Emergency  
services. Infrastructure.

WARD

And after that?

Jack looks at Stratton.

JACK STONE

That's your job.

Ward steps closer.

WARD

You could do in eighteen months  
what governments haven't done in  
thirty years.

A beat.

WARD

You know that.

Jack does. Ward sees it.

WARD

There it is.

JACK STONE

What?

WARD

You're not frightened of the  
system.

A beat.

WARD

You already know what it feels  
like when it obeys.

Jack looks at the live routes.

WARD

You didn't just use it. You liked  
it.

Silence. Stratton looks at Jack. Jack doesn't hide.

JACK STONE

Yes.

Ward wasn't expecting the admission.

JACK STONE

It would make everything easier.

A beat.

JACK STONE

That's why it has to go.

Ward stares at him.

WARD

You think publishing it kills it?

Jack says nothing.

WARD

The next crisis builds it again.

WARD

People will suffer because of  
this.

JACK STONE

Probably.

WARD

People may die.

Jack absorbs it.

JACK STONE

Then Parliament answers for it.

A beat.

JACK STONE

That's what it's there for.

Ward turns to Stratton.

WARD

And you're going along with this?

Stratton looks at the machinery.

STRATTON

No.

A beat.

STRATTON

I'm ordering it.

Ward looks at the screens.

STRATTON

Mr Ward remains here under  
supervision until new individual  
classification is disabled.

WARD

You need me.

STRATTON

Apparently we do.

WARD

Then I'm not under arrest.

STRATTON

You can be useful and under arrest  
simultaneously.

Ward turns to his workstation.

WARD

You can't cut classification out.  
Allocation reads the same  
architecture.

STRATTON

Then separate it.

WARD

I can stop new individual  
classifications tonight. Clean  
separation takes weeks.

STRATTON

Then start.

Jack looks at him.

STRATTON

What happens to the Protocol when  
this is finally separated?

JACK STONE

Published.

Ward stops typing.

STRATTON

All of it?

JACK STONE

Every lawful page.

STRATTON

Security implications.

JACK STONE

Redact operations. Not decisions.

Danny starts marking names for redaction.

JACK STONE

Names stay in.

DANNY

Not the operational staff.

JACK STONE

Danny...

DANNY

They maintained it. They didn't  
authorise it.

Danny redacts the names.

Jack watches him. Lets it stand.

Stratton considers.

JACK STONE

And Vale's objection. Wells's  
objection.

DANNY

And the hour.

Jack looks at him.

JACK STONE

And the one-hour allocation.  
Stratton looks at him.

JACK STONE

My decision. Your authority. Both  
names.

STRATTON

That will hurt you.

JACK STONE

It should.

STRATTON

Who's Wells?

Jack looks at the disappearing classifications.

JACK STONE

Someone who put the truth in a  
file and assumed that was enough.

A beat.

JACK STONE

It wasn't.

Ward works. One by one, the classification windows lock.  
CITIZEN. RESIDENT. CONTRIBUTOR. DEPENDENT. NON-CONTRIBUTOR.  
Greyed out, not gone. The fuel map remains. Stratton  
watches beside Jack.

STRATTON

You realise they'll blame you if  
distribution fails.

JACK STONE

They'll blame you first.

STRATTON

That's comforting.

JACK STONE

I'm here to help.

Stratton looks at him.

STRATTON

You're going to be unbearable if  
you ever get into government.

Jack watches the map.

JACK STONE

If?

Stratton almost smiles.

**EXT. WESTMINSTER - DAY**

Jack exits Parliament. Cole and Marsh wait beyond the cameras beside  
the dark blue Volvo. Helena stands with them.

She catches Jack's eye. A single nod. Jack returns it.

Reporters surge.

REPORTER

Mr Stone! Are you forming a new  
party?

REPORTER 2

Mr Stone! You used the system  
you're condemning. Why should  
anyone trust you?

Jack stops. Looks towards the gates. Beyond them, the  
country. He doesn't answer. He starts walking.

CUT TO BLACK.