

"The Irons File"

by

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FADE IN:

EXT. SMALL AIRPORT RUNWAY - DAY

The presidential cavalcade pulls away from the tarmac. In the b.g., the imposing majesty of Air Force One provides a backdrop to the line of sleek black limos all sporting small American flags.

Preceded by a motorcycle escort, the line of limousines accelerates onto the freeway as traffic is conspicuously blocked by police cars with lights flashing.

Occupants of the leading limo (who we will meet shortly) are ROBERT HICKS (well-scrubbed, thirtyish political aide) and PRESIDENT JACKSON T. BENNETT (coifed gray hair, aging good looks and a practiced smile).

HICKS (V.O)

Beautiful day in store for you, Mr. President.

PRESIDENT BENNETT (V.O.)

Yes it is, Robert. A beautiful day.

Traffic congestion grows as the cavalcade nears the outskirts of downtown. Onlookers begin to be seen lining the route--some waving, others simply staring.

Police cars are increasingly evident at each intersection.

EXT. OPEN OCEAN - DAY

Blue skies and blue water. Sandwiched between, a sleek corporate aircraft cruises effortlessly toward a distant destination.

PILOT'S VOICE (V.O)

Ubantu this is Conflair Flight
Three-Three-Five.

UBANTU VOICE (V.O.)

(soft African accent)

Conflair this is Ubantu Tower, go
ahead please.

INT. FLIGHT 335 - COCKPIT - DAY

A pair of professional pilots shepherd the sleek craft toward its appointment with history.

The senior PILOT glances at his instruments then back out the window.

PILOT
Anticipate entering your air space
in approximately ten minutes, over.

UBANTU VOICE (ON RADIO)
Welcome Conflair Three Three Five.
We have you on radar. An official
fighter escort is in route to
accompany you to the airport.

PILOT
Copy Ubuntu.

UBANTU (ON RADIO)
We are most highly honored to
welcome the First Lady of the
United States.

PILOT
Copy and out.

The CO-PILOT looks over.

CO-PILOT
So much for secrecy.

PILOT
(shaking his head)
You can say that again.

Flight 335 banks slightly and disappears in the distance.

EXT./INT THE CAVALCADE - DAY

The entourage takes a turn onto a broad thoroughfare
destined for institutional-looking structures up ahead.

The crowd lining the sidewalk is far more numerous as red,
white and blue ribbons begin to define the presidential route.

The President and his personal aide access the scene as it
passes.

HICKS
The hometown is really turning out.
Must feel good, sir.

PRESIDENT BENNETT
Never better, Robert. I can
certainly use some friendly faces
for a change.

DRIVER'S VOICE (V.O.)
Three minutes Mr. President.

The cavalcade begins to slow as the vehicles thread their way through the pressing throng.

HICKS

Senator Baker's staff will meet us at the steps. Any questions, sir?

INT. FLIGHT 335 - PASSENGER AREA - SAME TIME

First Lady, ELIZABETH BENNETT (mid-forties, stylishly dressed with intelligent eyes and a generous mouth), gazes causally out the window. In her lap lies an open hardback book.

A crispy-dressed steward (JOHN) bends down with a steaming cup of tea. The First Lady smiles as she accepts the tea and takes a tentative sip. We note the Presidential Seal on the china and napkins.

ELIZABETH BENNETT

Mmm, great. Thank you John.

The steward returns her smile and straightens up to leave.

JOHN

My pleasure madam.

Elizabeth Bennett bookmarks her place and sets the book aside. She gazes out the window at the expanse of ocean below and takes another sip of tea.

Satisfied she's not missing any scenery, she looks over to her press secretary MISSY BLACKMAN. Missy (twenty-something, energetic and attentive) immediately senses she's being looked at.

MISSY

Yes ma'am?

ELIZABETH BENNETT (O.S.)

Shall we take a look at the Day Book now?

Missy immediately grabs the three-ring notebook laying beside her and slips in next to the First Lady. She lays the notebook on the table before them, flipping to the appropriate place.

The First Lady leans in as Missy begins to discuss their itinerary.

EXT./INT THE CAVALCADE - DAY

The line of limos glides to halt in front of a large municipal building where a welcoming committee awaits on the steps.

PRESIDENT BENNETT (V.O)
Here we go Robert.

HICKS (V.O)
Knock 'em dead Mr. President.

INT. AUDITORIUM/STAGE - MINUTES LATER

Local dignitaries line either side of the stage that's been gaily festooned in red, white and blue. Like expectant schoolchildren, they sit self-consciously upright listening to the speaker, SENATOR CALVIN BAKER (mid-fifties, big mouth/big stomach) of Iowa.

SENATOR BAKER
As a fellow Iowan, President Bennett knows he can come home to a warm Midwest welcome from the people who helped put...

As the senator drones on the b.g....

SENATOR BAKER (O.S.)
him there-- you fine folks seated right here today.

we see the American flag and the Great Seal of the United States of America prominently displayed for the benefit of the cameras.

INT. AUDITORIUM/PRESS SECTION - CONTINUOUS

Seated to one side of the auditorium is a small press contingent with tape recorders, notepads and laptops.

Among the reporters are two fresh faces. MAGGIE LONG (boyish haircut and wide smile) and DAVE KEMP, (slight build, wire-rimmed glasses) exchange greetings.

DAVE
You're Maggie Long, right? Metro-Sun?

Maggie nods and smiles.

DAVE
Thought so. Dave Kemp...The VOICE.

MAGGIE
Right. Right. Saw you on the plane.
(pause)
Your first junket?

DAVE
Yeah.

MAGGIE
Mine too. Exciting Iowa.

Dave smiles, glances around at the Midwest audience of sober, attentive farm families and small business owners.

DAVE
Gotta start somewhere.

MAGGIE
Oh yeah.

DAVE
Well at least the home folks love 'em. According to latest polls I've seen they're about the only ones.

MAGGIE
Come November he may be returning home for good.

DAVE
No kidding, the only thing he's got going for him is his wife.

MAGGIE
Wish I were covering her trip instead.

DAVE
To Africa you mean?

MAGGIE
Yeah, the conference on child hunger. I really admire Elizabeth.

DAVE
Same here.

INT. AUDITORIUM/STAGE - CONTINUOUS

Senator Baker drones on.

SENATOR BAKER

And, so it is with great pride and immense personal satisfaction, that I ask you to welcome Iowa's native son and the President of the United States...JACKSON T. BENNETT.

Cameras FLASH and the crowd rises to its feet in THUNDEROUS APPLAUSE.

President Bennett joins Baker at the podium, greeting him with an enthusiastic handshake and a big show of teeth.

As the senator turns to leave the podium, the President stops him with an arm placed around his shoulders. The senator responds to the crowd with a wave which further energizes the faithful.

Moms, dads and grandparents clap enthusiastically and hold up small children. A scattering of WHISTLES from the back.

INT. FLIGHT 335 - PASSENGER AREA - DAY

Missy runs her finger down the entries in the notebook as the First Lady absorbs the events of the day.

MISSY

We will be met at the airport by
(she intones the name slowly)
Interior Minister ENTOMY ETUBA

The First Lady repeats the name slowly.

ELIZABETH BENNETT

Entomy Atuba.

MISSY

E- tuba.

CLOSE ON THE FIRST LADY

as she carefully re-pronounces the name.

ELIZABETH BENNETT

E- tu...

She is instantly replaced by an immense BALL of FIRE.

INT. AUDITORIUM/STAGE - SAME TIME

The ROAR of the explosion is covered by the ROAR of the crowd.

President Bennett motions for the enthusiastic crowd to take their seats.

Slowly the noise subsides as he surveys the bright, uplifted faces.

PRESIDENT BENNETT
Thank you....Thank you. It's good
to be HOME again.

Instantly the crowd's back on its feet CHEERING wildly.

The President smiles, turning to the dignitaries behind him, now on their feet and CLAPPING.

PRESIDENT BENNETT
My fellow Iowans...my fellow Iowans,
our work in Washington is not done.
Senator Baker...and other like-
minded patriots need your continued
support to push our important
agenda through Congress.

CROWD (V.O.)
FOUR MORE YEARS....FOUR MORE YEARS.

EXT. OPEN OCEAN - DAY

The crowd NOISE continues as flaming pieces of aircraft rain down from a beautiful sunlit sky to disappear in the rolling waters.

INT. AUDITORIUM/STAGE - SAME TIME

PRESIDENT BENNETT
(good-humoredly)
I know I'm preaching to the choir
here, but...

The crowd responds with quiet CHUCKLES.

PRESIDENT BENNETT(CONT'D)
...Cal and I need a decisive
victory in November to keep on
taking the fight right to 'em.

The President pauses dramatically waiting for the momentum to build.

PRESIDENT BENNETT(CONT'D)
And, to make this victory happen we
only need one thing...don't we?

Senator Baker and a cohort on the stage exchange meaningful glances. They know the President has the audience in the palm of his hand.

PRESIDENT BENNETT(O.S.)
 WE NEED YOUR VOTE! CAL...COME ON
 BACK UP HERE.

The crowd is WILD. They are ready to bake pies and kick butts--whatever it takes.

Senator Baker joins the President at the podium. They interlock arms and wave enthusiastically.

EXT. OPEN OCEAN - DAY

Smoke dissipates in the wind, then there is only ocean.

INT. AUDITORIUM/STAGE - SAME TIME

The audience lovefest continues with President Bennett and Senator Baker waving to the cheering crowd.

Robert Hicks steps out from the wings. He walks rapidly toward the President, surprising those dignitaries on stage who follow him with their eyes.

The President is momentarily flummoxed as Hicks speaks into his ear.

The President separates himself from Senator Baker, stepping over to one side where a brief conversation takes place. The President nods and Hicks immediately turns and leaves.

The NOISE from the crowd is rapidly dwindling.

INT. AUDITORIUM/PRESS SECTION - CONTINUOUS

Maggie grabs Dave by the sleeve.

MAGGIE
 What's going on?

DAVE
 I...I don't know.

MAGGIE
 COME ON.

Maggie and Dave slip from the crowd and disappear out the exit.

INT. AUDITORIUM/STAGE -SECONDS LATER

The President appears lost in thought.

Senator Baker turns questioningly to President Bennett who steps forward, putting his arm back around the senator's shoulders.

As the President leans over to speak into his ear, the senator covers the microphone with his hand.

PRESIDENT BENNETT

(over the crowd)

Cal...I...I've...got to go. They
need me back in Washington. Sorry--
you're on your own here.

(hesitates)

Staff will fill you in.

Senator Baker shouts into the microphone.

SENATOR BAKER

THANK YOU MR. PRESIDENT. GOD BLESS
YOU. WE'RE WITH YOU ALL THE WAY
COME NOVEMBER.

With the crowd still YELLING, the President waves with both hands rapidly walking off stage to where security is waiting.