

= Claire Underwood =

Claire Hale Underwood is a fictional character in *House of Cards*, played by Robin Wright. She is the wife of the show's protagonist Francis J. "Frank" Underwood. She is a lobbyist and runs an environmental nonprofit organization, but in later seasons ascends to the position of Second Lady of the United States, and finally First Lady of the United States and the United States Ambassador to the United Nations. Underwood made her first appearance in the series' pilot episode, "Chapter 1". The character is based on Elizabeth Urquhart, a character from the British miniseries from which the current series is derived. Unlike the original character, however, Claire has her own storylines.

The role has been critically acclaimed. Wright won the Golden Globe Award for Best Actress – Television Series Drama for this role at the 71st Golden Globe Awards, becoming the first actress to win a Golden Globe Award for a web television online @-@ only role in a series. She was nominated for the Primetime Emmy Award for Outstanding Lead Actress in a Drama Series for this role at the 65th, 66th and 67th Primetime Emmy Awards.

= = Character overview = =

Claire Hale Underwood is originally from the exclusive Highland Park enclave of Dallas, Texas. Her late father was a major Texas Republican. While at Radcliffe College in Cambridge, she met a Harvard Law student from South Carolina. That student was Francis J. Underwood. She is of wealthy background and the show characterizes her as a "Dallas Debutante" and "Lily White". She recounts her father taking her to Dealey Plaza, where John F. Kennedy was assassinated, and that she felt "so sad, so angry." She has a difficult relationship with her mother, Elizabeth Hale (Ellen Burstyn), who despises Frank and is disappointed in Claire for marrying him.

Brian Stelter of *The New York Times* described her as Frank Underwood's conniving wife and described the Underwoods as "the scheming husband and wife at the center of 'House of Cards'". She is a woman "who will stop at nothing to conquer everything". Hank Stuever of *The Washington Post* describes her as an "ice @-@ queen wife". *The Independent's* Sarah Hughes echoes this description, saying she is so dedicated to the couple's schemes that it is clear she will execute them herself if Frank wavers. Following season 4, Robin Wright stated that she felt Claire Underwood was the equal of Frank Underwood and demanded equal pay for her performance. Netflix acquiesced.

= = Relationship with Frank = =

While Frank is Machiavellian, Claire presents a woman urging on her husband's assertion of power in the image of Lady Macbeth. She encourages his vices while noting her disapproval of his weaknesses, saying "My husband doesn't apologize ... even to me." This gives a credibility to their symbiosis.

Willimon notes that, "What's extraordinary about Frank and Claire is there is deep love and mutual respect, but the way they achieve this is by operating on a completely different set of rules than the rest of us typically do."

Nancy deWolf Smith of *The Wall Street Journal* describes Claire as "a short @-@ haired blonde who manages to be masculine and demasculinizing at the same time." Smith describes their relationship as pivotal to the show: "Benign though they may seem, and their harmless air is what makes the Underwoods so effective as political plotters, this is a power couple with the same malignant chemistry as pairs of serial killers, where each needs the other in order to become lethal."

Upon viewing a four episode preview of season 2, Tim Goodman of *The Hollywood Reporter* says the series "... sells husband and wife power @-@ at @-@ all @-@ costs couple Frank (Kevin Spacey) and Claire (Robin Wright) Underwood as a little too oily and reptilian for anyone's good." *Los Angeles Times* critic Mary McNamara makes the case that *House of Cards* is a love story on

many levels but most importantly between Frank and Claire .

In season 3 , when the Underwoods are President and First Lady of the United States , Claire 's marriage to Frank begins to falter , and she ultimately decides he is no longer " enough " for her . She leaves him in the season finale , but comes back in the fourth season , treating their marriage as a purely political arrangement to further her own career . When he is shot during a campaign event , Claire privately admits that she feels nothing for him . Throughout the season , she works behind the scenes to undermine Frank 's election campaign , before finally joining forces with him in order to become his vice president . She also has an affair with her speechwriter Tom Yates ( Paul Sparks ) , with Frank 's approval .

= = Fictional character biography = =

= = = Season 1 = = =

Claire is a lobbyist who runs an environmental group while serving as her husband 's primary accomplice . After President Garrett Walker ( Michel Gill ) goes back on his promise to make Frank Secretary of State , Frank enlists Claire to help him get revenge and propel them both to positions of power . She and Frank scheme nightly over a cigarette , and together they maneuver their way into Walker 's inner circle . Frank says of Claire : " I love that woman , I love her more than sharks love blood . "

Claire is aware of Frank 's sexual relationship with reporter Zoe Barnes ( Kate Mara ) , and approves of it as long as it achieves their ends . She herself has an affair with an old boyfriend , Adam Galloway ( Ben Daniels ) .

By the end of the season , Walker appoints Frank the Vice President of the United States , making Claire the Second Lady of the United States .

= = = Season 2 = = =

Claire 's main storyline in season 2 is her advocacy , as Second Lady , for a sexual assault prevention bill . During her campaign for the bill , a skeleton from her college days emerges : During a nationally televised interview , she admits that she was raped in college , and that her rapist , Dalton McGinnis ( Peter Bradbury ) , is now a high @-@ ranking general . ( She had earlier had an uncomfortable encounter with McGinnis at a White House dinner , during which she had told Frank what the general had done to her . ) She also admits to having aborted a pregnancy that she claims was the result of the rape ; it is later revealed that she in fact aborted Frank 's child , with his consent . She then converts the focus on that issue into political support that becomes critical to the Underwoods ' ascension to the Oval Office .

Claire becomes increasingly ruthless as the season progresses . When Galloway leaks an intimate photo of Claire to appease his jealous fiancée , Claire intimidates him into publicly stating that he fabricated the picture , ruining his reputation . When Gillian Cole ( Sandrine Holt ) , a pregnant former employee , returns to demand health care as part of her severance , Claire says , " I am willing to let your child wither and die inside you , if that ? s what ? s required , ... Am I really the sort of enemy you want to make ? " Claire also manipulates First Lady Patricia Walker ( Joanna Going ) into believing that her husband is having an affair in order to distract President Walker from Frank 's machinations . She shows remorse for her actions only once . When another of McGinnis ' victims , Megan Hennessy ( Libby Woodbridge ) , comes forward , Claire uses her as the poster girl for the sexual assault bill , leaving the fragile young woman open to public scrutiny and reprisals from the bill 's opponents . Before she can testify about her ordeal before Congress , however , Megan suffers a breakdown and attempts suicide . Upon realizing what she has caused Megan to go through , Claire bursts into tears .

In the season finale , she urges Frank to humble himself before President Walker , with whom he has fallen out of favor , in order to complete the plan : " Cut out your heart and put it in his fucking

hands . " The gambit works : Walker keeps Frank as his Vice President , allowing Frank to succeed him when he resigns . Frank is now President of the United States , with Claire as the First Lady of the United States .

According to Drew Grant of The New York Observer , Claire 's season @-@ long storyline was similar to the real life efforts of United States Senator Kirsten Gillibrand 's to legislate an end to military sexual assault . Based upon the 4 @-@ episode preview , Alessandra Stanley of The New York Times says that in season 2 Claire " is still ruthlessly pursuing her own agenda as well as her husband 's . She remains an enigma even as she reveals more and more disturbing secrets from her past . " Claire remains composed and stylish with or without her husband and plays the press with aplomb .

= = = Season 3 = = =

In Season 3 , Claire feels the need to be something more " significant " than the First Lady , and asks Frank to nominate her to a United Nations post . He nominates her , but the Senate rejects her after a rocky hearing . Frank gives her the job anyway in a recess appointment , but her tenure is brief ; she ruins a treaty between the U.S. and Russia by publicly confronting Russian President Viktor Petrov ( Lars Mikkelsen ) about his anti @-@ gay policies , and is forced to resign when Petrov uses her as a bargaining chip during a diplomatic crisis .

During Frank 's election campaign , Claire begins to question whether she still loves him . In the season finale , she and Frank get into an ugly fight in which she says he is not enough for her ; Frank replies that without him , she is nothing . Season three ends with Claire leaving Frank as he prepares to go to the New Hampshire primary .

= = = Season 4 = = =

After leaving Frank , Claire goes back to Texas , where she has a tense reunion with her mother , who is dying of lymphoma . She sets her sights on running for a House of Representatives seat in Texas , with help from political consultant LeAnn Harvey ( Neve Campbell ) . Frank persuades her to resume public appearances with him by promising to support her run . However , he sandbags her prospective candidacy by endorsing a political ally 's daughter , in order to keep Claire focused on his campaign . Claire retaliates on the day the South Carolina primary by covertly leaking a photo of Frank 's father with a Klansman , imperiling Frank 's candidacy . Frank figures out that she was behind the leak and confronts her . Claire calmly admits what she did , and proposes that she join him in the ticket as his vice president . Frank rejects the idea .

Shortly thereafter , Frank is shot by Lucas Goodwin in an assassination attempt , and falls into a coma . While Frank is in surgery , Claire helps guide Frank 's vice @-@ president Donald Blythe through diplomatic oil crisis with Russia . While Frank is receiving a liver transplant , she declines going to the hospital in favor of negotiating a treaty with Petrov , and strong @-@ arms him into accepting the U.S. ' terms . When Frank recovers from surgery , he agrees to let Claire be his vice president . He and Claire advocate for a controversial gun control bill for the sole purpose of creating an atmosphere divisive enough to pick off the potential running mates . In the ensuing open convention , they publicly endorse Secretary of State Catherine Durant ( Jayne Atkinson ) for the job , while working behind the scenes to undermine her and ensure that Claire wins enough delegates to be nominated . Meanwhile , she reluctantly honors her mother 's request to help her die . She and Frank then use the public sympathy from Elizabeth 's death to win the nomination ; they are now running mates .

When a group of homegrown ICO terrorists take an American family hostage , Claire negotiates with their imprisoned leader , Yusuf Al Ahmadi ( Farshad Farahat ) , who agrees to tell his followers to release the hostages . Al Ahmadi reneges on the deal , however , and tells them to kill the hostages . At the same time , Tom Hammerschmidt ( Boris McGiver ) publishes an investigative news story detailing Frank 's crimes . Claire gives Frank the idea to declare war on the terrorists and allow the public to see the hostage die in order to distract from the scandal and create an

atmosphere of widespread fear that they can exploit .

= = Reception = =

Wright 's performance is described as " nuanced and compelling " . Claire has " chilly poise " but the " coolly regal doyenne " softens over the course of the first season according to New Republic 's Laura Bennet . Wright plays the role with " an almost terrifying froideur " . As a couple Frank and Claire are said to " reverberate with tension and wit " . Michael Dobbs , who wrote the trilogy of novels upon which the British miniseries is based , compares the compelling nature of the relationship between Frank and Claire favorably to the original characters in House of Cards and likens them to Macbeth and Lady Macbeth . He is not alone . In season 2 , she remains " equally steely " . Despite suggestions to the contrary , Wright insists that the character is not based on Hillary Clinton .

= = = Awards and nominations = = =

On July 18 , 2013 , Netflix earned the first Primetime Emmy Award nominations for original online only web television for the 65th Primetime Emmy Awards . Three of its web series , Arrested Development , Hemlock Grove , and House of Cards , earned nominations . Among those nominations was Wright 's portrayal of Claire Underwood for Outstanding Lead Actress in a Drama Series as well as Kevin Spacey 's portrayal of Frank Underwood for Outstanding Lead Actor in a Drama Series and Jason Bateman 's portrayal of Michael Bluth in Arrested Development for Outstanding Lead Actor in a Comedy Series , making these three roles the first three leading roles to be Primetime Emmy Award @-@ nominated from a web television series . The role has also earned Golden Globe Award for Best Actress ? Television Series Drama award at the 71st Golden Globe Awards on January 12 , 2014 . In so doing she became the first actress to win a Golden Globe Award for an online @-@ only web television series .

For season 2 , Wright earned a Critics ' Choice Television Award for Best Actress in a Drama Series nomination at the 4th Critics ' Choice Television Awards . Wright was again nominated for Primetime Emmy Award for Outstanding Lead Actress in a Drama Series at the 66th Primetime Emmy Awards and Best Actress ? Television Series Drama at the 72nd Golden Globe Awards . She was nominated for both Outstanding Performance by a Female Actor in a Drama Series and Outstanding Performance by an Ensemble in a Drama Series at the 21st Screen Actors Guild Awards .

In season 3 , she was nominated for Primetime Emmy Award for Outstanding Lead Actress in a Drama Series at the 67th Primetime Emmy Awards , Best Actress ? Television Series Drama at the 73rd Golden Globe Awards , as well as both Outstanding Performance by a Female Actor in a Drama Series and Outstanding Performance by an Ensemble in a Drama Series at the 22nd Screen Actors Guild Awards .

The season 4 performance earned a nomination for Primetime Emmy Award for Outstanding Lead Actreaaa in a Drama Series at the 68th Primetime Emmy Awards .