

DEATH BY LIGHTNING

"The Man from Ohio" (Ep. 101)

Written by

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Based on

Destiny of the Republic
by Candice Millard

A decommissioned government site, on track for demolition.

Rows upon rows of old crates and boxes. Most haven't seen the light of day in generations. Files unclaimed, long forgotten.

Some units tagged for relocation to other facilities, others grist for the incinerator. Hauled out by a crew of workmen.

The year is 1969. A jaunty pop song we know crackles from a worker's portable radio as he absently pilots a forklift.

PROJECT CHIEF

Let's pick up the pace, fellas. We
gotta clear all this crap on outta
here-- yo Rico, *turn that down--*

As the forklift operator paws at his radio knob, he pulls his eyes from the task at hand. A wood CRATE, stacked up HIGH...

Which loses balance. Takes a SPILL off the FORK. Bursts OPEN.

Coating the space with ripe century-old DUST. Medical papers, yellow and water-logged. Reams of rusted bygone implements.

And a glass JAR, rolling across the floor. Landing at a man's BOOT. He reaches down to pick it up. Examines its contents.

Some of the others wander over to him. They stare in unison.

WORKMAN

Is that...

He instantly gags. Another man whispers a silent prayer. This is just what it looks like -- it's a preserved HUMAN BRAIN.

Scalped clean out of some poor soul's head a long time ago.

The project chief pushes his way through. He squints. Finds a label glued to the jar, faded with age. Words barely legible.

He mouths to himself. Glares back up at his subordinates:

PROJECT CHIEF

...who the fuck is Charles Guiteau?

They all exchange perplexed looks. We close in on the ghastly, shriveled MASS suspended inside the jar. Neatly EMBALMED...

PRE-LAP: Gaspd BREATHS. Men SHOUTING.

CONSTABLE (V.O.)

Guiteau!

2 EXT. ALLEYWAY - NEW YORK CITY - DAY 2

On CHARLES GUILTEAU, late 30s. Crouching at a FIRE ESCAPE.

He glances back through the boarding-house window at the COPS, quickly ADVANCING. Peers at the STREET, three floors BELOW.

He shuts his eyes, mutters a quick prayer. HURLS himself OUT the LEDGE, FEET-FIRST... and somehow LANDS on HIS BACK. OOF.

CONSTABLE

Well, that's game. Have at 'im, boys!

A squad of COPS descends, pummeling Charlie with BILLY CLUBS.

Pull out to reveal Manhattan's skyline on the horizon, pocked with SMOKE STACKS. Churning EXHAUST into the morning AIR...

**NEW YORK CITY
89 YEARS EARLIER**

3 INT. CELL BLOCK - THE TOMBS - DAY 3

Prisoners howl and moan in their crowded, filthy cells. Foul sewage leaks into the corridor. No hint of natural light.

This place is hell. A repository for the dregs at odds with society, unlucky cheats and thieves and petty miscreants.

At the very last cell in the row, a lone figure sits on his cot, knees curled to his chest. Eyes fixed straight ahead.

Charlie hasn't washed or shaven in weeks. His face caked in soot. The shadow of a guard floats past the bars. Stops.

4 INT. WORK ROOM - THE TOMBS - DAY 4

WHOOSH! As Charlie's PELTED with a BUCKET of WATER.

He straightens his posture, shaking off the excess dirt from his body. Licking the stray drops of liquid from his beard.

Snip. Snip. Clumps of brown hair pool at the drain below...

VOICE (V.O.)

Guiteau. That's French, isn't it?

5 INT. HEARING ROOM - THE TOMBS - DAY 5

Charlie sits in a chair in the center of the room, flanked by guards. Cleaned up, he looks youthful. Maybe even handsome.

CHARLIE

Only by name, sir. I'm as American as any man. Born in Illinois, then Michigan and Wisconsin. New York.

VOICE (O.S.)

Mm. So you've uprooted often, then.

CHARLIE

I go where the opportunity leads.

He chances a modest smile.

VOICE (O.S.)

You sit before us now, having been found guilty of false pretenses--

CHARLIE

It was a misunderstanding. An honest mix-up between tenant and landlord.

VOICE (O.S.)

--and evading your arrest, as well.

CHARLIE

Huh. That's not how I recollect it.

With that, we SNAP BACK TO:

6 EXT. ALLEYWAY - NEW YORK CITY - DAY 6

Charlie in the MUD. Wailed on by BILLY CLUBS.

7 INT. HEARING ROOM - THE TOMBS - DAY 7

Reverse on a PANEL of ADMINISTRATORS, studying Charlie with customary skepticism. One of the men scrawls a quick note.

The leader of the panel, SPURLOCK, 50s, clears his throat.

SPURLOCK

It says here you practiced law for a time in Chicago. Is that right?

CHARLIE

Yes. Though I always found the law more of a diversion. My main focus lately has been my speaking tour.

SPURLOCK

Speaking... to whom, exactly...?

8 INT. TENT - RURAL TOWN - DAY

8

Charlie perches on a soapbox, lecturing to a crowd:

CHARLIE

*Do not abandon your hope, friends.
I propose that there are prophets
among us today. Men not afraid to
speak truth to power, and aid--*

He freezes, mid-sentence. Glances down at his note cards.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)

*--aid in the skyward climb of the
common man, as our Lord himself and
founding fathers did so intend!*

He raises his closed fist to the sky. Swept up in emotion.
Reverse on a nearly empty crowd of farmers and their wives.
None quite so taken. A man trudges out, his mule in tow.

9 INT. HEARING ROOM - THE TOMBS - DAY

9

CHARLIE

My sermons cater to a select group
of notables. In my work, I've found
an intimate, salon-style approach
proves most... *most* effective...

They're not buying it. He attempts to change course:

CHARLIE (CONT'D)

I've also authored a host of essays
in prominent regional journals--

SPURLOCK

We have a letter from your father.

Charlie stops. Haunted.

CHARLIE

My father. My father knows I'm here?

SPURLOCK

He says you've long been estranged.
That you were occupied upstate with
the... Oneida *free love* colony...?

CHARLIE

Well, he'd be mistaken. I was there
to complete research on a book.

(MORE)

CHARLIE (CONT'D)

I never-- I've never partaken in--
 (laughing, quietly)
 The suggestion alone is ludicrous.

Spurlock, the lead panelist, smirks.

SPURLOCK

Yes. I think we have what we need.
 To speak candidly on behalf of the
 panel, Mr. Guiteau, we fail to see
 how you've served as anything more
 than a drain on good society...

CHARLIE

A drain? A drain on good society?

He pinches at his brow.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)

You sit there and ask me to prove
 my worth. Well, I tell you I sit in
 the same position now as any one of
 our forebears-- are we not a nation
 built wholly from rogues, migrants,
 free thinkers and transients? Isn't
 that the whole point of this thing?

The panelists exchange looks.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)

Those were very poor men. Men who
 were demeaned-- degraded, *laughed*
at for their dissident views. Yet
 now we call them revolutionaries.

He firms his gaze.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)

That's why America is the greatest
 place on earth. Here and only here,
 a man can be anyone. He can amass a
 fortune. He can influence millions,
 through words or action. His name
 destined to ring down through the
 ages. Not a drain but a *credit*.

A beat. He thinks.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)

Hell. Under the right conditions,
 he might even be made president.

Off his perhaps overly zealous smile...

10 EXT. JIM'S FARM - DAY

10

On a man's HAND, SWIPING a PLANE on a BED of WHITE OAK. The beginnings of a long wood TABLE, milled from an old TREE.

Judging by the hints of gray in his beard, he's in his late 40s. His name's JIM. Per our chyron, this is **MENTOR, OHIO**.

Every movement is precise. Patient. Every mortise and tenon carved at for hours to nest seamlessly with its complement.

Jim runs a hand along the surface. Measures a row of planks, marking his gradations with a pencil from behind his ear.

11 EXT. WOODS - JIM'S FARM - DAY

11

Jim walks his graying horse to the edge of his property.

He scouts some recently felled wood for a project. Heaves it in the cart. His daughter MOLLIE, 19, wanders over to him.

JIM

Mollie! How would you feel about a new bedroom, one you didn't have to share with two younger brothers?

MOLLIE

I'd be overjoyed, in theory. But seeing as it's taken you nearly a month to build a picnic table...

She helps him lift a heavy hunk of wood into the cart.

JIM

Hey now, that's not just any table. It's a feat of modern engineering. Someday they'll do studies on it.

MOLLIE

Like your irrigation dam that stank of sewage and flooded Mom's garden?

JIM

Yeah, might've flown too close to the sun on that. Bought me a month sleeping in the barn with Odysseus.

He nods ruefully to his steed.

MOLLIE

He's gentle, at least. For a horse.

They share a good laugh.

12 INT. KITCHEN - JIM'S FARM - DAY

12

Every spare inch of the house teems with piles of well-loved BOOKS. IRVIN, 10, practices his Latin at the dining table.

IRVIN

Faber est... faber est suae...

JIM

Est suae quisque fortunae. Every man, maker of his own fortune.

Jim strides into the kitchen. He tousles his son's hair.

CRETE

Didn't hear you come in last night.

His wife LUCRETIA, 40s, makes eyes with him as she fires up the pan to make eggs. We'll soon come to know her as CRETE.

MOLLIE

He was where we left him. Working away like a madman on his table.

JIM

Nullum magnum ingenium sine mixtura dementiae fuit. No great wisdom has been without madness also. Virgil?

CRETE

Seneca, actually. *Nolite gloriari.*

Don't be a show-off. Jim smirks.

MOLLIE

...what did she just say to you?

JIM

Mm. Something very un-Christian.

Crete goes bright red. Swats Jim, as he takes over the pan.

JIM (CONT'D)

Easy, it's hot. Show of hands, who wants her or his eggs poached--?

Mollie's hand flies up. The two eldest sons, HARRY and YOUNG JIM, 18 and 17, seat themselves at the table beside Irvin.

HARRY

We'll take ours soft-boiled, Dad.

A tiny report, seemingly from nowhere in particular:

ABRAM (O.S.)
Pancakes.

Jim peers over the length of the table. Glimpses ABRAM, 8.

JIM
Sure. Let's see if we can't figure
out a way to make a few *pancakes*...

A knock on the door. Mollie opens to receive JOE BROWN, early 20s. Jim's private secretary. He appears a little flustered.

JOE BROWN
Oh. Mollie. I didn't-- I hope I'm
not interrupting a family meal--

Mollie's two elder brothers exchange a knowing smile. Mollie glares daggers at them both. Crete hauls in an extra chair.

CRETE
You know you're welcome here, Joe.

JOE BROWN
Thank you, I already ate in town.
Just stopping by to drop off mail.
A letter for the congressman...

He hands Jim an envelope. Jim opens it.

JIM
It's from Washington. John Sherman.

CRETE
General Sherman's little brother?

JIM
Yes, and treasury secretary. Says
he plans to run for president.

He glances up at Crete.

JIM (CONT'D)
He's asking if I'd be the one to
nominate him in Chicago next week.

13 INT. STUDY - JIM'S FARM - DAY

13

Crete scans the letter with Jim in private. Her eyes narrow.

JIM
Hayes doesn't have the support of
the party. They're putting their
weight behind a new candidate.

CRETE

God help us. Not Grant again.

JIM

Grant's popular. The public still sees the man who won the war. They turn a blind eye to his scandals.

CRETE

New York has its claws in him. They parade him around like some puffed-up old totem at their banquets...

Jim glares at her. Crete laughs.

JIM

It's no way to talk about a hero.

CRETE

There isn't anyone else here, Jim.

They share a look.

CRETE (CONT'D)

So Sherman wants to challenge Grant at the convention as a spoiler? And have you there to give his speech?

JIM

I was low on his list, I'm sure of it. No politician in his right mind would dare go against New York. It's a death sentence within the party--

He glances at the letter. Bites his lip.

JIM (CONT'D)

I was barely alive to begin with. A perfect man to throw to the wolves.

CRETE

So what's that twinkle in your eye?

A beat. He doesn't answer her.

CRETE (CONT'D)

Jim. All these years later, tell me we're past this. The things we lost. The hell we dug our way out of...

JIM

That person is long gone. Trust me.

Crete meets his gaze.

JIM (CONT'D)

Sherman's going to be destroyed at the convention. The least I can do is refuse his advance in person.

14 EXT. CREEK - MENTOR, OH - DAY

14

Jim perches with his two youngest boys, helping string worms on a fishing line. He glances at Crete. They share a smile.

Mollie mills nearby with her two elder brothers and Joe Brown.

MOLLIE

Don't you think it's a bit odd? He said he was through with politics, now he's gonna go give a speech in front of ten thousand people--?

HARRY

Hope they bring sleeping bags. Fifty-fifty odds he does it all in Latin.

YOUNG JIM

If he even makes it up to the stage.

The brothers share a laugh. They join the rest of the family just ahead. Flank Jim on either side. Trying to tackle him.

Jim dodges them, nimbly. Teases them. Gains the upper hand.

Mollie stays behind, taking in the game. She turns to Joe.

MOLLIE

I notice you've been awful quiet.

JOE BROWN

Hey, I'm just hired help here. My opinion doesn't hold much weight.

They exchange a look. Joe shrugs. Wipes at his mouth.

JOE BROWN (CONT'D)

Sherman must've picked your dad for a reason. Who knows? Maybe there's more to him than meets the eye.

Off Mollie, absorbing this...

15 EXT. JIM'S FARM - DAY

15

A carriage idles out front for Jim's trip. His family lined up to bid goodbyes. Jim loads in his bag. It weighs a ton.

CRETE

Snuck in a few light reads from your pile. Can't have you falling behind.

Jim smiles. Crete puts a hand on him.

CRETE (CONT'D)

Please, don't forget. Whatever you do out there. Don't forget *this*.

JIM

You have my word, Crete. I swear.

They lock eyes. She nods.

16 INT. CARRIAGE / EXT. JIM'S FARM - DAY 16

Jim's cab pulls away from the farm. He spies his youngest, Irvin and Abram, darting after the wagon. Waving to him.

They can't keep up with the horses. Jim watches quietly as they recede into miniature specks in the carriage's wake.

He faces forward, somber. Steeling for the road ahead.

17 INT. ENTRANCE TUNNEL - THE TOMBS - DAY 17

The gates creak open. Charlie wanders out into the tunnel, a battered suitcase with all of his earthly belongings in hand.

He glances forward, then behind. Nobody's coming. His smile withers. As he trudges up the tunnel alone, a voice calls:

VOICE (O.S.)

Charlie!

Charlie perks up, at once. Spies the silhouette of a WOMAN, 40s, rushing down to him. His suitcase falls to the dirt.

CHARLIE

Franny.

He embraces his sister, midway in the tunnel. Clings to her.

18 INT. DINING CAR - TRAIN - DAY 18

Charlie picks gingerly at his meal, for Franny's benefit. The train coasts past fields of rolling hills, heading westward.

CHARLIE

Mm. How's my little niece doing?

FRANNY

Not so little anymore. She's nine,
and she's got a baby sister now.

Charlie looks up at her. His face goes red with shame.

FRANNY (CONT'D)

Seven years. I'd tried to write...

CHARLIE

I'm sorry. I've been on the road. I
didn't want you to think-- said I'd
stay away, until I'd distinguished
myself and could send back money--

Franny puts her hand on his.

FRANNY

Forget that. You have no idea how
glad I was to hear you were safe.

Charlie nods. Clears his throat.

CHARLIE

This business is bad for my health,
Franny. I ought to settle down. Put
in the work-- earn my way rightly.
No more liquor. No more habits.

Franny smiles. Beyond relieved.

FRANNY

You have a room at our home for as
long as you need it. Maybe George
can see if he's got a clerkship
open at the patent office...

CHARLIE

Patent law's a business for those
who lack their own ideas. I'm sure
I could never be fulfilled there.

He takes out some crumpled notes from his bag. Shows her.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)

Look. I'm hatching a new concept. A
newspaper format. Something good and
honest, that gives a voice to common
men. The *Daily Theocrat*, I'd call it.

FRANNY

That's a very nice name, Charlie.

She seems upset. Charlie registers it.

CHARLIE

I know. I do, really. But I still have a few friends left in Chicago, men who'd maybe even see the value in such a thing. If I can amass the seed funds-- my sister would need to run the arts page, of course--

FRANNY

Me? Don't be silly. I haven't picked up a brush since I was a teenager.

CHARLIE

And it was your dream, wasn't it?

They share a look. He beams at her.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)

Oh! And once we're properly set up, I'm thinking I'll call on Annie. If she's still working at the library, that is. Bring her some flowers...

FRANNY

She left the city, last I heard. To try her chances out west. Colorado.

CHARLIE

Hm? No, Annie would *hate* Colorado.

His tone draws a few stares. He tempers his voice.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)

It's all dry there. Nothing grows.

Franny lowers her gaze. She swallows.

FRANNY

Even so. Excuse me, just a moment.

She gets up. Charlie's eyes trail her out of the dining car.

The moment she's gone, he shovels down the rest of his food with both hands. Fielding glares from the other patrons.

He smiles impishly at them, wiping his face with a napkin.

19

INT. STAGECOACH / EXT. STATE STREET - CHICAGO - DAY

19

The wagon coasts down a busy metropolitan avenue.

Jim peers out at the mass of wanderers, beggars, migrants. A woman rocking a small, frail child in her lap. Jim tightens.

JIM'S DRIVER

You'll want to stay off the streets
past dark, Congressman. This city,
well, it draws an indigent sort--

JIM

There was a time, not so long ago,
I'd have been counted among them.

He locates his billfold. Procures a handful of dollars.

JIM (CONT'D)

Thank you.

20

INT. PARLOR - FRANNY & GEORGE'S HOUSE - DAY

20

Charlie plays with Franny's CHILDREN, 9 and 6. He stalks them
around the room, hunched on all fours like a grizzly bear.

CHARLIE

My my. What is that awful *stench*?

He takes a big breath. Discharges a mighty GROWL, sending the
girls scattering in laughter. Franny watches on, smiling...

GEORGE (O.S.)

Charles.

The smile leaves Franny's face. All activity ceases at once.

Her husband GEORGE, 50s, steps in. Heads right for his desk,
kneeling down at his safe. Paying Charlie almost no mind.

CHARLIE

A-ha. Well, that certainly explains
it. How's the patent game, George?

George tenses. Franny smirks, out of view of her husband.

21

INT. GUEST ROOM - FRANNY & GEORGE'S HOUSE - NIGHT

21

Charlie toils into the night, dashing off page after page by
candlelight. He reads over his work. Massages his temples.

22

INT. GUEST ROOM - FRANNY & GEORGE'S HOUSE - DAY

22

Charlie uses Franny's sewing kit to stitch together a tear in
the sleeve of his suit coat. He slides carefully into it.

Fastens his tie. Pats on a dab of George's cologne. Glares at
himself in the mirror. Sports his finest salesman's smile.

23

INT. THE STANDARD CLUB - DAY

23

An elite, members-only dining house. From his table, Jim eyes the gaggle of society notables and stiff, uniformed waiters.

He shifts in his seat. Clearly out of place among this lot.

JIM

I felt it important to meet face to face, Mister Secretary. To explain why I can't accept your offer...

SHERMAN

But you made the trip anyway. I'm sure you must've been curious, why I'd ask you to speak on my behalf.

Jim glances across the table at JOHN SHERMAN, 50s. He cuts a decidedly unimpressive frame, despite his lofty pedigree.

SHERMAN (CONT'D)

I saw you once on the House floor, before you left for Ohio. How you talked. How they listened to you.

He flags down a waiter. Beckons him to fill his wine glass.

SHERMAN (CONT'D)

There's a kind of spectacle in it. You inspire. Not many stories like yours anymore, in the old spirit--

JIM

Mr. Sherman, I can assure you I'm no different from any other man.

SHERMAN

Don't be modest. You're a fighter.

He meets Jim's gaze.

SHERMAN (CONT'D)

Chickamauga, wasn't it? My brother talks of how you boldly defied your general's orders, rode head on into rebel fire-- to *glory*. By his read, you kept Tennessee for the Union.

JIM

We were one of many fronts, is all.

SHERMAN

Right. Is it true what they say about Chickamauga? The *River of Death*...

As he speaks, his voice fades away into WHITE NOISE.

Jim's POV: He glances down at his hand on the surface of the table. It's SHAKING -- no, the whole room's a TREMOR --

PRE-LAP: Heavy BREATHING. Bodies TRUDGING in WATER.

24 EXT. CHICKAMAUGA RIVER - DAY 24

On JIM, at youth's prime, ENTRENCHED in a MISTY STREAM.

He's frozen there. Paralyzed. All alone. Till he peers at the RIVER circling his TORSO, SWOLLEN in a FEVERED CRIMSON --

25 INT. THE STANDARD CLUB - DAY 25

Jim BLINKS. He's back in this genteel establishment. Glasses clinking, waiters breezing past. Sherman eying him quietly.

He glares again at his hand on the table. It's STILL now.

JIM

I promise, there was no glory in it. I acted on impulse. And other men paid for it with their lives.

SHERMAN

For a greater good. That's why I invited you here, Jim. You aren't afraid to stand for what's right.

Jim absorbs this.

SHERMAN (CONT'D)

Look, I'm under no illusions about prospects. I'm going to lose. But we might at least be able to push the party toward reform. Lest we yield to the majority view...

He stares past Jim, at a lively table in the room's prime.

Jim peers over his shoulder, spies the swell of activity. The principal figure is a bloated, graying man of ill posture.

He regales a group of political notables. Emits a big laugh.

Right now he's a lock for the party nomination. Again.

SHERMAN (CONT'D)

...that two terms' worth of graft and corruption merits another.

But Jim's not looking at Ulysses Grant. He's got his eyes on another man, 50s, perched right at the president's side.

Trim physique, spit curl. Bright lavender waistcoat. Only a very important man can get away with peacocking this hard.

This is ROSCOE CONKLING, head of the New York machine and the most powerful senator in the country. Grant's in his pocket.

SHERMAN (CONT'D)

Two thirds of all federal revenue flows through the port of New York. Roscoe Conkling controls New York, he's got our party by the balls.

Conkling spots them. He tips his glass with a sly smirk.

SHERMAN (CONT'D)

He'll have Grant selling offices to the highest bidder within a week. A new regime of swindlers. We barely survived the last Black Friday--

JIM

But if his is the popular will?

He watches as Conkling leans over and whispers to one of his underlings, a three-hundred pound GORILLA of a BODY MAN.

They're scheming, and whatever it is... it's *not good*.

26

INT. MANAGER'S OFFICE - FIRST CENTRAL BANK - DAY

26

Charlie waits outside with the other petitioners, whispering a speech to himself. He glares at the clock, ticking away...

He's waved up to the bank manager's desk. Produces a smile.

CHARLIE

Hi. My name is Charles Guiteau, and I'd like to apply for a credit--

BANKER

Oh no. I remember you, sir. It may have been four or five years past, but I remember you clear as day.

Charlie's smile dissolves.

CHARLIE

I think you must have me confused with some other patron. I haven't ever been to this establishment.

BANKER

Yes you certainly have. You're the gentleman who threw the paperweight.

CHARLIE

A paperweight? Hm. No, that doesn't sound right. I'm sure I'd recall...

The manager points. Charlie glances over the man's shoulder, spots a paperweight-sized chunk of the wall missing. Ah.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)

That was clearly a throw performed by a right-handed man. I am a lefty.

A beat. The manager just stares.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)

Anyway, how'd you like to hear about a very exciting business prospect--

27

EXT. FIRST CENTRAL BANK - DAY

27

Charlie marches out of the building, escorted by a guard.

CHARLIE

--this bank wouldn't know a sound investment from a copper penny!

The guard tosses his briefcase after him. Charlie catches it.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)

I feel sorry for you most of all.

He goes ignored. Takes a deep breath. Spies a crowd just down the street, outside the Standard Club. He draws in, curious.

Ulysses Grant staggers out from the bourgeois eatery, flanked by Conkling and crew. He's instantly swarmed for autographs.

Charlie's eyes narrow. Pushing his way into the mass, shoving past an oblivious idler or two. Gets, improbably, to Grant.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)

Mr. President, forgive me but I'm one of your biggest boosters. I've spent my life following your career with great interest, and I'd love--

A woman offers up her newborn, directly in his line of sight. Grant, laughing, gives the infant a smooch on the forehead.

Stepping away from Charlie. He manages to catch Conkling.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)

Senator Conkling, sir. I'm a great admirer of your work in New York.

He offers Conkling a business card. Conkling pockets it.

CONKLING

You don't say. Well, that's kind.

CHARLIE

Yes. I'm eager to punch my ballot for your ticket come November. I'm designing a newspaper, see, and we plan to endorse your whole slate--

CONKLING

(to his body man)

How I detest these fucking crowds.

CHARLIE

What's that? No, tell me about it. The *lengths* to which people go...

A well-wisher cuts in. Charlie takes point on interference.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)

Hey. Could you please be respectful and give the senator his space? I'm serious here, it's an awful pain.

He turns back to Conkling. Sees that his new friend's already wandered off toward his coach. Charlie chases after him.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)

I'm hoping, sir, that you can find time to chat with a party faithful. I know a handsome pub with malts--

CONKLING

Mm. I fear I'm booked up, Mister...

CHARLIE

Guiteau. Charles Guiteau. All I ask for is the opportunity. I've worked out some ideas in my spare time, on how the president might expand his message to regard the common man--

CONKLING

That happens to be a topic my friend Chester is *very* passionate about.

He nods to his BODY MAN, the three hundred pound GORILLA in a thick FROCK COAT. He STEPS IN Charlie's PATH. BLOCKING HIM.

CHESTER

Hit the road, pimp. We ain't buying.

CHARLIE

My, you are a well-covered fellow.

Chester isn't amused. He emits a terse, bestial GRUNT.

(A quick factual aside: By the end of all this, it's Chester who will be President of the United States. Seriously.)

Charlie laughs, gives his new friend a nudge on the arm. He takes a step forward... and Chester SHOVES HIM BACK. Hard.

Before the smile leaves his face, he's SQUARE IN the PAVEMENT.

Watching as Grant, Conkling and crew pack into their coach.

The crowd quickly dissipates. All except Charlie, who stays on the ground. His eyes locked onto the disappearing cab.

He gets up. Straightens himself. Simmers, quietly.

Jim crosses right past as he exits the club. Charlie doesn't register him. Neither man knows who the other is at all.

FRANNY (V.O.)

You won't even give him a chance.

GEORGE (V.O.)

So you deny he made off with those sixty dollars from our drawer the last time he blew through town?

28

INT. PARLOR - FRANNY & GEORGE'S HOUSE - NIGHT

28

We find Franny and George at their home, mid-argument.

FRANNY

That could have been a burglar. The police report was inconclusive, and anyways we should've kept a safe.

GEORGE

How is it you're the smartest woman I know, but when it comes to him...

FRANNY

Charlie's never had it easy. Father was so hard on him. Blamed him, I'm sure, for our mother's illness. And on top of it, he had that *stutter--*

Her jaw tightens.

FRANNY (CONT'D)

Some people are different, George.
Born at odds with the world around
them. Don't they merit our pity?

GEORGE

He joined a sex cult, Frances!

FRANNY

That was purely anthropological, he
said. Research for an aborted book.

GEORGE

Research? We read about the Oneidas
in the paper. They're a commune of
deviants who cavort in the nude and
flail their genitalia and... and...

FRANNY

Not Charles. He wouldn't do that.

She turns away. Bites her lip.

FRANNY (CONT'D)

You can't ask me to cast my brother
out in the street, George. I won't.

GEORGE

Well, I don't plan to just sit idly
by as he breaks your heart again.

We pull back now to reveal Charlie, listening in from around
the corner. Acutely hurt. At last, he wills a big *smile*...

Troops into the parlor, like he hadn't heard a word of it.

CHARLIE

I've had some very good news. The
bank's approved me for a loan!

Franny glances back at George. Heaving a sigh of relief.

FRANNY

For your paper idea? Oh, Charlie.

CHARLIE

I wish you'd been there to see it,
Franny. The way they responded to
my presentation. The bank manager
himself came and shook my hand--

He mimes the gesture for Franny. The two embrace happily.

GEORGE
--which bank was it, exactly?

FRANNY
George.

GEORGE
I'm only joking. Of course we're
all very proud of you, Charlie.

He pours out three glasses from his bar. Hands them over.

GEORGE (CONT'D)
A toast, to the *Daily Theocrat*. May
mention of its name strike fear in
the heart of every *Tribune* editor.

They clink glasses. Franny squeezes Charlie's arm.

FRANNY
We always knew you had it in you.

Charlie beams at her. Ignoring George's tenuous glare.

29 EXT. BACK COURTYARD - FRANNY & GEORGE'S HOUSE - NIGHT 29

George takes a sip from his drink. Charlie steps outside.
They stand together in silence, staring out at the yard.

CHARLIE
I appreciate you hosting me in your
home, George. I've been thinking, I
might be of use here. Longer-term.

He looks to George. Bites his lip.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)
We've had our differences, that's
clear. But it'd mean a lot to her,
I know, if we could be friends--

GEORGE
Charles. There's only one way this
story ever ends for men like you.

His eyes narrow. Charlie falters.

GEORGE (CONT'D)
And we both know there's only one
thing you can do for your sister.

He meets his gaze. A beat.

30 INT./EXT. JIM'S ROOM - GRAND PACIFIC HOTEL - NIGHT 30

Jim sits at his desk, staring at a blank sheet of paper. He begins to write out a speech. Crumples it, just as quick.

His gaze wanders to the stack of books Crete snuck into his bag. A very *dense* stack. He smirks. Setting down his pen.

He starts to pack his things, when he hears a brief REPORT.

The sound of COUGHING. He peers out his window. Finds an old VAGRANT cradled in the alleyway below, caught in the cold.

Hacking profusely. Jim clamps his window shut. Tries to block out the noise, as he keeps packing. Stops. Shuts his eyes.

PRE-LAP: The POURING of BRANDY.

31 INT. JIM'S ROOM - GRAND PACIFIC HOTEL - LATER 31

Jim offers a brandy to his new guest. The vagrant from the alley sits huddled on Jim's bed, warming himself inside.

JIM

You were in the war, Mr. Stockton?

He nods at the man's leg. Or the stump where it should be.

STOCKTON

Aye. Michigan, Seventh Volunteer.

JIM

That was Colonel Hall's unit. The Seventh, you were at Antietam...

STOCKTON

Antietam. Chantilly. Bull Run. It's funny how you just rack 'em off.

He takes a sip. Coughs.

STOCKTON (CONT'D)

Lost my two boys at Cold Harbor.

JIM

I'm sorry. War is awful business.

STOCKTON

We knew what we were signing up for.

JIM

Would you do it over again, knowing everything you'd stand to lose?

His voice is flat. Sober. Stockton glances back at him.

JIM (CONT'D)

We could have done more for you and your sons. This country, it drew up a contract with you. Made terms--

STOCKTON

You think that's what this is about?

He leans forward in his chair.

STOCKTON (CONT'D)

My boys stood on the front lines. They saw what was coming, and they held their ground. They died for an idea-- an idea that was *bigger* than them. Bigger'n any man. Some losing battles are just worth the fight.

Jim absorbs this, quietly.

STOCKTON (CONT'D)

Well. I'd best be going. Thank you friend, for the polite company--

JIM

You ought to use this bed. Just to sun-up, once the brisk settles.

STOCKTON

I wouldn't deny a man his berth.

JIM

(his mind made)

Take it. I have a new task tonight that demands my full engagement.

He sits back at his desk. Inspired.

STOCKTON

I didn't catch your name, mister.

JIM

Sorry, I don't believe I'd given it. It's James. James Garfield.

The name rings a bell. But just that. The old man settles in, as Jim turns anew to his speech. As pen sparks to paper...

Charlie lies in bed wide awake. Eyes fixed on the ceiling.

33

INT. PARLOR - FRANNY & GEORGE'S HOUSE - NIGHT

33

Charlie takes a reluctant pause at George's bar cart. Unstops a decanter. Commits to a SWIG. Savors the sting on his lips.

He turns to find Franny and George's girls, MARY and BERTHA, at the stairs. Sneaking up snacks. They giggle at Charlie.

CHARLIE

You remember we made a pact, last we saw each other. You promised you wouldn't grow any older on me. But that was a long time ago already.

He takes a seat on the sofa. The girls amble up beside him.

MARY

I had a birthday, sixth of April.

CHARLIE

Mm. The sixth. And your sister?

BERTHA

I'm the third of February. No, the second. I get confused sometimes.

CHARLIE

You don't seem confused. You strike me as two very bright young women.

They share a look.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)

When I was your age, you know, they mistook me for stupid. It was how I spoke. I couldn't spit out my words quick enough. I was *d-d-d-delayed*.

Mary and Bertie laugh. Charlie smirks.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)

I got one over on them, though. It wasn't that I was slow. My mind was just moving too fast for my mouth.

A piece of silver dances between his fingers. He offers it up.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)

Go on. Show me how you somersault.

They hop out dutifully from the sofa. Begin their twin show of aerobic acumen, tumbling up and down across the carpet.

Charlie watches on quietly. Mind elsewhere.

34 EXT. INDUSTRY EXPO CENTER - CHICAGO - DAY

34

A large crowd gathers at the base of the building, a gigantic domed tribute to progress and wealth in the Industrial Age.

Vendors hawk cheap Ulysses Grant souvenirs. Journalists shout over one another, competing for the latest morsel of news.

All in the shadow of a dozen American flags perched overhead.

Jim navigates the flood of people in total anonymity, gently nudging his way up and through the double doors inside...

35 INT. CONVENTION HALL - INDUSTRY EXPO CENTER - DAY

35

The hall swarms with Republican delegates, milling about and shouting over one another in relatively close quarters.

Jim wanders in. He looks above him, absorbs the sight of the seemingly thousands of spectators packed into the rafters.

He joins Sherman at the front. Sherman greets him, relieved.

SHERMAN

Thanks, Jim. I'm glad you're here.

Jim forces a smile. He glares past him at Conkling and Grant on the opposite side of the hall, flanked by an entourage.

SHERMAN (CONT'D)

We drew straws. It's Senator Blaine goes first, then Grant, then us.

JIM

Who's speaking for Blaine?

Just then, the chairman BANGS on his GAVEL. The room hushes to a quiet. Eyes cast this way and that, awaiting word...

A sharp cough. An ancient old delegate rises from his chair, tottering up to the podium. Each step a laborious effort.

Conkling leans in to JAMES BLAINE, 50s, senator from Maine and his second opponent. He can barely contain his glee.

CONKLING

For Christ's sake, Blainesy. When's your man due back at the morgue?

Blaine faces forward. He grimaces.

The old delegate, REP. JOY, reaches the podium. He unfolds his speech. Clears the bile in this throat, gratefully:

REP. JOY

Does anyone else perceive a draft?

Crickets. He goes on.

REP. JOY (CONT'D)

I... I will... I will endeavor to conclude the matter on hand in as brief a manner as possible, and without needless pageantry...

It's dry, and boring as hell. The onlookers in the rafters begin to tune out en masse, talking amongst themselves.

Blaine, meanwhile, squirms in his seat. This is a nightmare.

REP. JOY (CONT'D)

I shall propose as candidate, the er... eminent statesman, he who is commonly called James S. Blaine.

BLAINE

(in SOTTO)

James S. Blaine? My middle name is Gillespie, you insipid twat.

Conkling casts a glance at Grant. Grant kicks his feet up.

As far as they're concerned, that's the end of Blaine's run.

The old man concludes, barely audible amidst the chatter and abounding lack of interest he's drummed up in the hall.

REP. JOY

I know... I *think* Blaine would be a very good president, indeed. Hum.

He wanders out, leaving Blaine utterly mortified. Conkling gives him a tap on the shoulder, now getting up himself.

CONKLING

Oof. See you again in four years.

BLAINE

I should've gone into carpentry.

Conkling climbs right up to the podium. STAMPS his BOOT.

Commands his public to silence anew. Takes in the thousands of delegates' gazes drawn to him, awaiting his first word.

He lets the anticipation swell. He knows what he's doing.

Finally he speaks. Clear, practiced and confident:

CONKLING

... when asked whence comes our
candidate, we say from Appomattox.

That's all he needs. The crowd goes wild at the sheer mention
of the Confederate Army's surrender to Ulysses S. Grant.

Grant sits upright as if he's on strings. He puts on the face
befitting of a American hero, waving augustly to his people.

The kind of face that belongs on a coin. He knows it, too.

CONKLING (CONT'D)

New York is for Ulysses S. Grant!
He who has never been defeated, in
peace or war. His services attest
his greatness... and every man in
this nation knows them by heart.

A huge round of applause. Grant signals, somber and proud.

Conkling surveys the room from his prime spot. His gaze falls
on Sherman, who appears positively seasick. Then on to Jim.

CONKLING (CONT'D)

Show me a better man, I dare any of
you. Name one, and I am answered.

Hysterical cheers of "*Grant!*" overtake the room. It's done.

The country's fate all but sealed, in the blink of an eye.

36 INT. GUEST ROOM - FRANNY & GEORGE'S HOUSE - DAY 36

Charlie drains his flask. He procures a silver LOCKET. Stares
at the photo inside. It's a BRIDE, 20s. Modest and youthful.

This is ANNIE. His WIFE. We stay on Charlie's empty gaze...

37 INT. MEN'S WASHROOM - INDUSTRY EXPO CENTER - DAY 37

Jim takes a deep breath. He meets his own gaze in the mirror.

A pull chain flush from the stall behind him. Conkling strides
out. On seeing Jim, he offers a smile. Joins him at the sink.

CONKLING

Appomattox. Appomattox. It's got a
certain ring to it. Thank god Lee
didn't surrender at Foggy Bottom.

He laughs. Jim doesn't.

CONKLING (CONT'D)

We haven't seen you on the floor in some time. Farm keeping you busy?

JIM

A touch of earth every now and again can prove a kind remedy, Senator...

CONKLING

Thanks for your concern. I manage to get down in the dirt often enough.

He rinses his hands. Studies Jim.

CONKLING (CONT'D)

It's good to have you back in the fold, Jim. You had lots of promise once. We like you. Not just me but the President, too. He's *asked*.

Jim glares back at him.

CONKLING (CONT'D)

He says he could see you making a real impact. The Interior, maybe. Land Bureau, that sort of thing--

JIM

I'm hardly qualified for that job.

CONKLING

You own a fucking farm, don't you?

They lock eyes. Jim doesn't budge.

CONKLING (CONT'D)

I'm offering salvation. A winning position, and you'd prefer to fall on your sword-- for who, Sherman? He couldn't shine a presidential privy. He's going to get *buried*. Not just him. All his men, too.

JIM

We need reforms, Senator. We can't keep repeating these mistakes again and again. Now if you would please excuse me, I'm late for my speech.

He walks past him. On Conkling:

CONKLING

--you ought to listen to your wife, Jim. You shouldn't have come back.

Jim turns back to him. Rattled.

CONKLING (CONT'D)

I do my research. A man like you, he doesn't give it all up and run back to Ohio unless he's been very bad.

A beat. The color drains from Jim's face.

CONKLING (CONT'D)

Take it from a guy who's been at it a while. Go home, enjoy your little farm. This isn't the career for you.

His head stirs. He smiles.

CONKLING (CONT'D)

It tears you apart. Draws the blood from your bones. Hell, it's got to. It's the only way we get anything done. Man like you, nah. You'd be dead before you hit the ground.

Jim's eyes trail him out the door. He lingers a moment.

PRE-LAP: Wind WHISTLING. The GRUNT of a HORSE.

38

EXT. CHICKAMAUGA RIVER - DAY

38

We find Jim in his younger form. Clad in Union Army blues.

Crossing the riverbank in the rain, atop his steed. A small volunteer regiment brings up the rear. Teenage farm boys.

Jim, listening close, discerns a faint rustle ahead. He tugs on the reins. Halts. Signals his outfit with a closed fist.

The boys hold. They wait, ears pricked. It's quiet. Tranquil.

He steals a glance behind. Finds the youngest man in his unit, barely fifteen. Visibly panicked. Trying to hold it together.

The private looks at Jim. Feels his sober, steady gaze. His face slowly regains its color. We mark a hint of a *smile*...

A low WHIRR zips through the TREES. Rings into FOCUS.

Shears the boy's JAW clean from its HEAD --

39

INT. CONVENTION HALL - INDUSTRY EXPO CENTER

39

On Jim, as we know him. Summoned to approach the podium.

His heart pulsing out of its chest. He spots Conkling, his posse in tow. His body man Chester, looming to his right.

Blaine, still licking his wounds from earlier. And Sherman, the man he's here to nominate. On the edge of his seat.

Jim walks up to the dais. The chairman gives him a nod, raps his gavel down on the hardwood... it goes mostly unheard.

He grows irritated. Cracks the gavel with twice the force.

We see Jim flinch, almost imperceptibly, at the sharp noise.

It's enough to grind the chatter in the room to a halt.

All eyes on Jim now. Many thousands of them.

Waiting in anticipation. Expectation.

JIM

Mr. President. Friends. These past days I've sat by and borne witness to the shows of many big men. I've borne them all with deep disquiet. This assembly seems... it's struck me as a human ocean, in *tempest*.

The delegates exchange looks.

JIM (CONT'D)

I've seen the sea lashed in a fury. Flung into spray. But it is not the billows, but the calm level of the tide from which we draw its depth.

CONKLING

Are we in oceanography by mistake?

His many friends laugh.

Jim clocks it. He goes on.

JIM

It's not your present temper that marks the pulse of the people. Not here, in this turbulent hall, do we stake the destiny of our republic.

HECKLER

(from the rafters)

Where else would you have it be?

A beat. Jim's lips purse. He folds away his speech.

JIM

Not here, but by the millions of firesides that endowed us on their behalf. Those citizens guided by a love for home and country. History of past. Hope for a future. It's there God prepares His verdict.

The words are coming easier now.

JIM (CONT'D)

Lest we forget ourselves. That not two decades ago, that same republic bore with it chains of bondage...

A surprise fire in his voice.

JIM (CONT'D)

Men's souls paralyzed. The cancer of slavery preying upon the virgin West. It was our party, and a great man who once stood before many of you here today. He stood at this very spot, and kindled a light.

He's got their attention.

JIM (CONT'D)

A light he stoked from embers. That would come to consume every shackle and slave pen in a fire of freedom.

Maybe more than that.

JIM (CONT'D)

After the storm died down, did we whip the foes who lay at our feet, pleading for mercy? No. Here's our sole revenge. That you join us in lifting into the firmament of the Constitution, the immortal pillars of justice and truth-- that every *man* is equal and free. No matter what he is. Or how he got here.

He pauses. Studies the room.

JIM (CONT'D)

How do we keep our pledge? Not by lobbing at each other's throats, I know that much. It falls upon us to hold ground as a party. To show all those firesides, we want a *man*--

40 EXT. BACK COURTYARD - FRANNY & GEORGE'S HOUSE - NIGHT 40

Charlie steps out onto the porch, brimming with resolve. His fingers dance across the railing as he makes his way down...

JIM (V.O.)
*--a man whose life and opinions
 embody all that's right and good
 about this place. We want a man
 who, on a mountain's height--*

He eyes the pile of UNCUT WOOD in Franny's yard. Kneels down at the chopping block. Gently sets a slab of wood atop it.

Retrieves George's nearby AXE. Maps out his swing with care.

JIM (V.O.)
*--traces our victorious footsteps
 in the past, and looks forward--*

He heaves up the BLADE. Brings it DOWN... it's a MISS.

Nicking the wood at an imperfect, pathetic angle.

41 INT. CONVENTION HALL - INDUSTRY EXPO CENTER - NIGHT 41

JIM
*--prepared to meet the dangers to
 come with dignity and courage.*

PRE-LAP: WHACK! As the axe's blade FALLS, AGAIN.

42 EXT. BACK COURTYARD - FRANNY & GEORGE'S HOUSE - NIGHT 42

This swing no more fruitful than the first. Huh.

Charlie gazes down at his task, a little perturbed. Gathering his breath. This was supposed to be simple. His smile fades.

He puts his boot up against the block, wedges the blade out with effort. Gets back on the horse, with a fresh piece...

No luck. He goes again. And again. Growing frustrated.

CHARLIE
 Come. Come on, you useless fuck.

JIM (V.O.)
*A man who has stood the blaze of
 that fierce light which browbeats
 us all, but whose fiercest ray
 finds no flaw in his armor--*

As he SWINGS, we PUSH in CLOSE on Charlie. On his EYES.
Fiercely determined. As he FAILS. Again and AGAIN.

JIM (V.O.)
--no stain upon his shield.

43 INT. CONVENTION HALL - INDUSTRY EXPO CENTER - NIGHT 43

Jim's eyes meet Sherman's. The speech seems to be having an effect in the room. They might have a chance, after all.

JIM
We want a man. We want a man--

A voice cuts in, sharply:

VOICE (O.S.)
We want **Garfield!**

44 EXT. BACK COURTYARD - FRANNY & GEORGE'S HOUSE - NIGHT 44

Charlie pauses briefly at the block. Gathers his breath.
A HAND taps him on the SHOULDER. Startled, he PIVOTS...

45 INT. CONVENTION HALL - INDUSTRY EXPO CENTER - NIGHT 45

Time's at a standstill. The echo of the plea, ringing out.
We want Garfield. He tries to trace its origin. Was it from the rafters, or one of the delegates? He can't discern...
Neither, seemingly, can anyone else here in the hall.
But it's got a reverb. One they can't ignore.
We want Garfield. Not Sherman. *Garfield.*

46 EXT. CHICKAMAUGA RIVER - DAY 46

Tight on Jim's face. The River of Death.
He's SHAKING. Vision caked in MUD, SWEAT. GOBS of RED...

47 EXT. BACK COURTYARD - FRANNY & GEORGE'S HOUSE - NIGHT 47

We match on CHARLIE. Staring straight ahead. At a BOIL.

Tight on FRANNY, now. In her nightgown. Pale as a ghost.
Trying to *keep calm*. Charlie blinks. Snaps to life...

GEORGE

My god.

On GEORGE. Rushing out onto the porch steps. Terrified.
We see what he sees. Charlie's still holding that AXE.
Gripped mere INCHES from his sister's BROW. Oh FUCK.

48

INT. CONVENTION HALL - INDUSTRY EXPO CENTER - NIGHT

48

Back to Jim. Frozen at his podium. Absorbing the stares.

Conkling's eyes narrow. He feels Grant's gaze. For the first time since we've seen him, the president appears rattled.

Blaine sits up in his chair, glances around. Whispers in the crowd. Confusion. Intrigue. Newsmen putting it all to paper.

Jim's eyes find Sherman's among the delegates. Sherman looks as though he's just been knifed. Jim attempts to recover:

JIM

I speak, of course, of your servant
John Sherman from Ohio. His record
of honor speaks for itself, and I
offer him now for consideration.

He swallows his breath.

JIM (CONT'D)

Thank you, and good night to you.

He exits the stage awkwardly, as quick as he can. The room totally quiet, unsure of what they all just witnessed.

Just then, a lone CHEER from the rafters. Before Conkling and the others can react, it SPARKS a TORRENT of APPLAUSE --

Certainly on a par with Grant's swell. Maybe even *stronger*.

Jim beelines to the door. Averts his colleagues' gazes.

Sherman gets to his feet, produces a smile. Not clear whether this applause is intended for him or someone else entirely.

Conkling, however, knows the score. He breathes out a sigh.

Fastens his coat and glances at Chester, his compatriot:

CONKLING

New York requests that Ohio's *real*
candidate please step forward.

49 EXT. BACK COURTYARD - FRANNY & GEORGE'S HOUSE - NIGHT 49

On Charlie and Franny, frozen in place in the backyard. They lock eyes. Charlie absorbing the reality of the situation.

He DROPS the AXE, at ONCE. Mortified. It lands with a THUD.

CHARLIE

Fran, I...

GEORGE

Frances.

Glaring death at Charlie. Charlie falters. Helpless. Lost.

Franny looks to her husband on the porch. To her brother.

She takes a deep breath. Follows George back inside.

Leaving Charlie out in the yard, all by himself.

Surrounded by badly cut wood and a dull axe.

50 EXT. INDUSTRY EXPO CENTER - CHICAGO - DAY 50

The day of the vote. A horde of spectators waiting eagerly.

51 INT. SMOKING ROOM / HALLWAY - INDUSTRY EXPO CENTER - DAY 51

Conkling folds up the day's paper. He gets into his coat.

CONKLING

Three seventy-nine. That's our
majority. The crystal number.

CHESTER

We can count on New York and the
rest. Illinois will be solid...

The two men step out into the hall, toward the expo floor.

CONKLING

I have no faith in the wisdom of
delegates. They seem to derive a
unique kind of communal joy in
falling prey to human error.

CHESTER

Oh, I've got my brass knuckles.

Conkling smiles at Chester. A rare show of sincere affection.

52

INT. CONVENTION HALL - INDUSTRY EXPO CENTER - DAY

52

The hall is split into factions by state and nominee. Jim's seated with the Ohio delegation, spearheaded by Sherman.

Elsewhere, Conkling and Grant confer with New York. Blaine and his men bring up the Northeast contingent in Maine.

The delegates stand, state by state, to declare their picks for the nomination. Each campaign keeps a running tally.

ALABAMA MAN

Alabama is sixteen for Grant, three for Sherman and one for Blaine!

ARKANSAS MAN

The state of Arkansas bestows all its twelve for Ulysses Grant!

Conkling marks them all down with relish. He glances up at his opponents' factions, already both seemingly imploding.

Sherman slumps down in his chair. Jim clutches his arm.

JIM

It isn't over, sir. Not yet.

They watch as the Illinois delegation tenders its numbers.

ILLINOIS MAN

We from Illinois have resolved, twenty-four votes for Grant...

Suddenly, whispers abound. Conkling's grip tenses on his pen.

CONKLING

Forty-two. We're owed forty-two.

ILLINOIS MAN

...ten for Blaine, and eight for Elihu Washburne of Illinois!

CHESTER

Who the fuck is Elihu Washburne?

CONKLING

He was Grant's secretary of state for nine days. I thought he died.

PLATT

Worse. Moved home to Illinois.

They eye the Illinois faction, shaking hands with an elderly man who appears as befuddled as anyone to hear his name.

INDIANA MAN

Indiana goes two for Grant...

The room erupts in a clamor. Conkling mutters a curse.

INDIANA MAN (CONT'D)

...*twenty-five* for Senator James Blaine, two for John Sherman!

CONKLING

It won't work. We *don't have it*.

He crumples the paper in his hand. Peers up at Chester.

On Ohio's turn, Jim nods to his delegation's leader, FOSTER.

FOSTER

Ohio pledges its thirty-four votes for the Secretary, John Sherman.

Sherman puts his hand on Jim. Pennsylvania goes right after.

PENN MAN

Pennsylvania will go thirty-three for Grant, twenty-two for Blaine, two for Sherman... and one for Congressman James Garfield.

Jim sits up, perturbed. He fields a few curious glares.

SHERMAN

Someone's having a bit of fun.

JIM

I don't find it very funny.

53

EXT. INDUSTRY EXPO CENTER - CHICAGO - DAY

53

A reporter emerges from the convention, paper in hand. The crowd hushes for him. Breathless, he reads the results:

REPORTER

The final count stands at 305 for Grant, 282 for Blaine, 94 Sherman, 31 Washburne, 32 Edmunds, 10 for Windom and 1 for James Garfield!

The news sparks a clamor.

CROWD WOMAN #1
What happened? Has Grant won it?

REPORTER
He's got a plurality, but not a majority. No. They go again.

54 INT. GUEST ROOM - FRANNY & GEORGE'S HOUSE - DAY

54

Charlie's seated on the bed. Franny appears at the door.

CHARLIE
It was a silly mistake, Fran. I was only trying to be of help--

Franny's head stirs.

FRANNY
Do you remember how restless you were as a boy? The little wagers we'd make. Ten cents, was it, if you could just keep your arms and legs still for five minutes...?

CHARLIE
I always lost that bet. But then you'd sneak me a dime anyway, the moment Father's back was turned.

They share a small laugh.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)
My passion can get the better of me.

FRANNY
Well. It's not only yours. I feel it too, at times. When I'm not careful.

Charlie meets her gaze. A beat.

FRANNY (CONT'D)
I'm gonna have guilt till the day I die, for running off to school. For leaving you there alone with him--

CHARLIE
No. I don't want to hear it. You aren't to blame for any of that.

Franny smiles. Lips tight. She takes a deep breath.

FRANNY

George spoke with a physician this morning. The man knew of a place.

CHARLIE

A place?

He studies her. Franny can't look at him.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)

Oh.

FRANNY

It'd just be for a short while. You can still do your paper afterward.

Charlie peers up at her.

CHARLIE

This is what you want from me?

Franny's whole body tenses. She nods.

FRANNY

It's healthy, isn't it? It's right.

CHARLIE

Well. I guess I ought to trust you, if that's what you think is best.

He swallows his breath.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)

I lost all those wagers as a boy on purpose, you know. My arms and legs?

FRANNY

You saw how it made me laugh. It was reliable. You put on a good show...

Her eyes start to glisten.

CHARLIE

I wanted you to be happy with me.

FRANNY

You have made me so very happy.

She places her hand atop his. Charlie smiles quietly.

Chester corners rogue delegates one at a time, using a host of physical intimidations that'd make Luca Brasi proud.

Conkling opts for sweet-talking and jokes to pointed effect.

Blaine convenes separately with Sherman, out of earshot.

BLAINE

You don't want Grant on the ticket any more than I do. John, the two of us can put an end to this.

SHERMAN

My men won't support you. And even if they did, you'd still need the votes from Washburne, Edmunds...

BLAINE

And I'll fight for every one, if the result is I get to wipe that smile out from Conkling's face.

SHERMAN

Blaine. It's just not tenable.

BLAINE

You would prefer to damn us all.

SHERMAN

Listen to yourself. Do you think you'd be any better than Grant?

Blaine glares at him. He tightens.

56

INT. CONVENTION HALL - INDUSTRY EXPO CENTER - DAY

56

Jim beelines for the Pennsylvania assembly. He locates W.A. GRIER, late 20s, a freshman delegate. Confronting him.

JIM

What was that, some kind of joke?

GRIER

I listened to every speech. My task, as I understood it, was to vote for the man most capable. I believe that to be you, sir.

JIM

You mistake me. And you do your district a great disservice to simply throw away your vote.

GRIER

My district trusts that I'll vote
with my conscience, Congressman.

Jim gets in his face. He's *pissed*.

JIM

No. Mark me boy, for I will not
engage. My support is to Sherman.
Vote for him or whoever else, but
you'll dare not use my name again.

He walks away. Grier, in his wake:

GRIER

We're the party of Lincoln. We
ought to live up to it for once.

Jim absorbs this. Keeps moving.

57

EXT. INDUSTRY EXPO CENTER - CHICAGO - DUSK

57

The crowd's only grown in size, awaiting the results.

They watch as the doors creak open. A reporter pokes his head
outside, exhausted. He shakes his head, heaves a big sigh.

REPORTER

The *twelfth* vote's in. Grant holds
and gains one. Blaine drops to 279,
Sherman up two to 97. A deadlock.

Oof. The crowd prepares for a *long* night...

58

INT. CONVENTION HALL - INDUSTRY EXPO CENTER - NIGHT

58

The scene has devolved into an outright ZOO.

Delegates argue across the aisles. Shouting. Throwing papers.

We hear the chairman's gavel bang down, to no effect. Trying
to restore order, or trigger the next vote... or *anything*.

Conkling, Blaine and Sherman stand perched on separate desks,
screaming out oratories largely drowned out by the noise.

In the midst of it all, we find our Jim.

Watching the human tempest rage on.

Regretting ever leaving Ohio.

59

EXT. ALLEY - CHICAGO - NIGHT

59

Charlie ambles down the alley, hands dug in his pockets.

He stares at the poverty all around him. A seemingly endless stream of men begging, retching, passed out on pavement.

A sickly child wanders past, barefoot and irregular. Charlie reaches into his pocket for spare change. Finds it empty.

He glares down at his boots. They're badly frayed, the soles worn down to oblivion. The tears in his coat, multiplying.

The moon above him blotted out by a thick haze of SMOG. He can't make it out for the life of him. His gaze falls...

On a gigantic banner, hanging proudly. **GRANT FOR AMERICA.**

Flanked by ceremonial stars and stripes. Presiding high over the grim scene, over this mess of rogues and transients.

All of them degraded, demeaned. Ignored. Doomed to nothing.

When we find Charlie again, he's laughing. *Busting a gut.*

He can't help himself, standing there in the street. It's a reflex beyond his control. He can't put a muzzle on it.

The emotion just pours out at once, like a tidal wave.

He laughs as his eyes pool sadly at the edges.

Laughs till his lungs give out on him.

60

INT. CONVENTION HALL - INDUSTRY EXPO CENTER - NIGHT

60

It's long past midnight, and all are exhausted.

Many delegates dozing in their seats. Rep. Joy looks dead.

Only a few still have their wits about them. Blaine glances across the aisle at Conkling, charming some new delegate.

BLAINE

Christ, he won't quit. By now he's promised more ambassadorships than there are nations on earth...

He rubs his eyes. Consults JENKINS, his aide.

BLAINE (CONT'D)

I've lost count. What number vote are we at? Twenty, twenty-one?

JENKINS

Erm. It's thirty-four, Senator.

Blaine stares up at the ceiling.

JENKINS (CONT'D)

Senator?

BLAINE

Oh no Jenkins, don't mind me. I'm merely staking out my rafter...

Sherman keeps track of the vote. Jim over his shoulder.

SHERMAN

Virginia goes 16, 3 and 3. Watch.

VIRGINIA MAN

We from Virginia pledge sixteen votes for Grant, three for Blaine, and what was it again... oh...

The chairman sighs. He holds up three fingers to Sherman.

The delegate assents with an eye roll. Plops back down.

SHERMAN

Ha! Jim, you owe me a penny. Double or nothing on West Virginia--?

Jim ignores him. His gaze wanders to the Wisconsin delegates, who appear to be engaged in some type of heated debate.

Conkling sees it too. He beckons Chester to investigate.

Before he can get to them, they launch up as a unit.

WISCONSIN MAN

Wisconsin will give two votes for Grant, one vote for Blaine...

The room wakes up at once. Something's going on here.

BLAINE

Shit.

CONKLING

Shit.

On Sherman, preening. This is it. The tide has turned --

WISCONSIN MAN

...and sixteen votes for the man from Ohio, James Garfield!

A new burst of life in the hall. No one saw this coming. Not Sherman or his Ohio camp. Not Blaine. Not Conkling, even.

Certainly not Jim himself, who shoots to his feet:

JIM

Mr. Chairman sir, Ohio rises to submit a question of order--!

He looks appalled. Chairman HOAR, 70s, however, is amused.

CHAIRMAN HOAR

Mm, yes. I'd imagined you might.

JIM

I challenge the correctness here. No man has the right to announce a person's name without his consent. Such consent I have *not* given.

CHAIRMAN HOAR

The gentleman from Ohio does not state a question of order.

JIM

Mr. Chairman, I'm not asking--

CHAIRMAN HOAR

--sit down, Congressman. No person having secured a majority, another ballot will be taken. Thank you.

He hits the gavel. Jim assumes his seat, visibly shaken.

Sherman casts a glare at him. A smidge paranoid, now.

CHESTER

Did James Garfield, of all people, really just win sixteen votes--?

CONKLING

Seventeen, actually. Can't forget the little shit from Pennsylvania who's thrown in for him the past thirty-three cycles straight.

Indeed, that young delegate Grier now sports a shit-eating grin that he shares with sixteen rogue Wisconsinites.

CONKLING (CONT'D)

Get them back in line, Chester. We are not bleeding *one more vote*.

We land on Blaine, studying all with a careful eye...

61 INT. REAR HALLWAY - INDUSTRY EXPO CENTER - NIGHT

61

Jim fields glances from his peers, dismissing them. He sees Sherman pacing alone back and forth, smoking from a pipe.

SHERMAN

There he is. If it isn't the great man from Ohio, James Garfield! I've never been so fucking humiliated--

JIM

I will not accept any votes. I'll yield every one of them to you.

SHERMAN

It doesn't work that way, Jim.

JIM

Understand when I pledge my loyalty, Mister Secretary, I do not waver.

SHERMAN

Loyalty. Do you want to know what my brother really told me about you?

The two men lock eyes.

SHERMAN (CONT'D)

He said you didn't win a damn thing. That all you ever did was knife your general in the back, steal his horse out from under him and ride a bunch of his boys into a hail of bullets. But it made for a good story. And God knows Washington loves those.

A beat. Jim doesn't break.

SHERMAN (CONT'D)

That speech you gave, on my behalf? No one gives a speech like that if he doesn't crave it for himself.

He dumps his tobacco out on the ground. Storms away.

Jim stays behind, jolted. He looks up. Spies a contingent of delegates staring back at him. Assessing him. Probing...

JIM

What? Do not look to me. Look somewhere else, goddamn you!

He brushes on past them. We detect a fear in his eyes.

62

INT. INDUSTRY EXPO CENTER - CHICAGO - NIGHT

62

The delegates settle back in for the next vote. Jim sneaks in at the rear of the Ohio contingent, opting for anonymity.

The roll call proceeds, as usual. Grant's numbers appear to be inflating, state by state. Going in quick succession:

ALABAMA MAN

Our twenty votes for Grant!

ARKANSAS MAN

All twelve for Ulysses Grant, and let this thing be ended now--!

Chester leans forward, whispers to Conkling. Conkling smirks.

On Connecticut's turn, the entire delegation stands.

CONNECTICUT MAN

We go one vote toward Grant, and another eleven for Jim Garfield.

Jim's eyes widen. So do Conkling's.

CONKLING

What the fuck?

He spots Blaine across the room. Smiling back at him.

Like he *knows* something.

ILLINOIS MAN

Twenty-four votes for Grant, six for Blaine and seven Garfield.

Sherman glares daggers at Jim.

Jim's whole body tenses.

IOWA MAN

The delegates from Iowa give our twenty-two votes to Garfield!

Oh shit. The whole room *explodes*.

Conkling flies up from his seat. Appeals to the chairman:

CONKLING

This is a bad faith vote! I demand a hold on these proceedings--!

IOWA MAN

We are all of sound mind, Senator.

CONKLING

Are you? You can kiss the Deputy
Treasury goodbye, motherfucker.

Before the chairman can issue a ruling, Blaine pre-empts him.

Launching to his feet, with his full home state delegation.

BLAINE

Maine will move her sixteen votes
from Blaine to James Garfield.

He raps his fists on the table, as the convention ignites:

BLAINE (CONT'D)

Make the same appeal in my name to
Maryland and Michigan, and every
delegate who has voted for me!

JIM

No...

BLAINE

It's yours, Congressman. Do with it
what you will, and good fortune.
(to Conkling)
See you in four years, Roscoe.

Conkling looks like he's just been shivved in the gut.

Chester bolts for the other delegates, in a desperate attempt
to tamp out the flames. But the fervor keeps on *growing*...

MARYLAND

Six for Grant, ten for Garfield!

MASSACHUSETTS

Four Grant, *twenty-two* Garfield!

The dam's breaking in front of our eyes. Shattered.

In the history of American politics, nothing like this has
happened before. Or will, again. It's fucking madness.

A New York delegate stands, usurping Conkling's role:

NEW YORK

Fifty Grant, twenty Garfield!

Conkling LUNGES for the MAN.

CONKLING

Twenty votes from New York?! Are
you people out of your skulls?

The chairman just sits there, chuckling gladly to himself.
 Tippling from a hidden flask. He finds this very amusing.
 Jim's on his feet, pleading to the other delegates:

JIM

Stop this. Stop it now, damn you! I
 have made it clear, I will *not*--

His gaze falls on his fellow Ohioans. It's their turn.

JIM (CONT'D)

Oh no.

FOSTER

Our forty-four votes to Garfield!

Jim grabs the leader of his delegation by the lapel.

JIM

Take it back. You take it back.

FOSTER

It's already done, Congressman.

JIM

No. Cast my vote for Sherman! You
 have not registered my vote--!

He looks for Sherman. Sees his seat empty.

Finds him striding for the door, amid the clamor.

JIM (CONT'D)

John.

Sherman doesn't acknowledge him.

He exits, sans fanfare. Gone from history.

As the votes just keep ringing out in Jim's favor.

63

EXT. INDUSTRY EXPO CENTER - CHICAGO - NIGHT

63

Charlie, wandering late at night, marks a nearby commotion.

He takes heed of the crowd. They're growing in ranks by the
 moment. Cheering and howling. Gripped with excitement...

CHARLIE

Hey you. What's going on here?

CROWD WOMAN #2
It's Garfield. He's making a dash
for it from under Grant's nose!

CHARLIE
...who the hell is Garfield?

But the woman's already rejoined the throng of spectators.

And, after a moment, so does Charlie.

UTAH (V.O.)
All our two for James Garfield.

WYOMING (V.O.)
And ours, as well. Thank you.

64

INT. CONVENTION HALL - INDUSTRY EXPO CENTER - NIGHT

64

There's a crowd of eager delegates around Jim now, yelling loud *hurrahs*. The chairman receives the final vote tally.

CHAIRMAN HOAR
Three votes for John Sherman.
Forty-two for Senator Blaine.
Three hundred and six for the
President Ulysses Grant. Three
hundred ninety-nine for James
Garfield, the man from Ohio.

A hail of potent, sustained applause fills the room. Men reach for Jim's hand, his shoulder, whatever they can.

CHAIRMAN HOAR (CONT'D)
So, what say you all? Shall the
nomination be made unanimous?

Conkling stands first, to audible gasps. Says, hoarsely:

CONKLING
James A. Garfield of Ohio, having
received a majority of all votes...

They wait for it. The objection.

Jim maybe even *hopes* for it.

Conkling swallows.

CONKLING (CONT'D)
...I arise to move that the man be
presented unanimously tonight as
the nominee of this convention.

He and Jim share a look.

Punctuated by a sharp BURST.

65 EXT. INDUSTRY EXPO CENTER - CHICAGO - NIGHT 65

A BATTERY of FIREWORKS, RINGING in the SKY.

The crowd goes WILD. Abandons itself to HYSTERIA.

We find Charlie caught in the euphoric tide, half-dazed and just as bewildered, swept viciously back and forth...

66 INT. CONVENTION HALL - INDUSTRY EXPO CENTER - NIGHT 66

Delegates swarm Jim, screaming his name. Waving hats. Grier, his very first voter, is now the first to shake his hand.

GRIER

Hurrah to James Garfield, the *next*
President of the United States!

Jim glares back. The violent ring of fireworks still echoing in his head, again and again... as he meets Blaine head on.

JIM

You didn't ask if I wanted it.

BLAINE

Oh, please. *Everyone* wants it.

Jim gives him a look. He doesn't.

The one man in all of fucking America.

BLAINE (CONT'D)

--it had to be done, Jim. It was
the only way we could beat them.

Jim tightens. He pushes on past Blaine, attempts to fight his way through the adoring mass of people to the exit.

Conkling watches, unmoved, from his now neglected post.

CHESTER

What's our next move, Senator?

CONKLING

What else? We gut the bastard.

Off Chester, relishing a fight...

67 EXT. INDUSTRY EXPO CENTER - CHICAGO - NIGHT

67

Jim rushes through the double doors, his eyes bleary, to the swell of hundreds of voices singing "*hurrah, boys, hurrah!*"

Upon seeing him, they BREAK into an OUTPOUR of CHEERS.

He spies the nearest carriage, a few yards off. Starts to navigate a path toward it, shaking hands as he goes...

Till he hits an immovable object in the mob. *Charlie.*

He gapes back at the nominee, stunned silent.

A beat. He extends his hand to Jim.

CHARLIE

Sir. We expect great things.

Jim accepts, absently:

JIM

And I, from you. Excuse me.

He moves right past him. Continues to the carriage.

We linger on Charlie, staring down at his hand.

Processing what this man's just said to him.

He expects great things from me, too.

68 INT. CARRIAGE / EXT. INDUSTRY EXPO CENTER - CONTINUOUS

68

Jim locks himself in the cab. He catches his breath.

JIM

Grand Pacific Hotel, please.

Through the window, out of focus, we can discern Charlie.

Still in the thick of the crowd, processing his quick brush with Garfield. Playing it over and over again in his head.

Something flickers in his eyes. A flash of inspiration.

Suddenly, he raises his fists and begins screaming madly at the top of the lungs. *Garfield! Garfield! Garfield--!*

Just one more voice, subsumed in the mad sea of partiers.

We stay on Jim in profile, as the coach departs.

He retreats inward, if only for a moment.

Waiting to snap back awake.

Or something.

69

EXT. JIM'S FARM - DAWN

69

Crete wanders out at daybreak with a bucket to collect cow's milk. She finds nearly two dozen visitors on her front lawn.

Her eyes widen. Upon seeing her, the crowd advances excitedly for her. Joe Brown steps into their path, holding them back.

JOE BROWN

People, please. This is a private home. Give the family a moment--

CRETE

Joe. What are they all doing here?

Joe pivots to her. Unsure what to say.

JOE BROWN

Ma'am. Mr. Garfield's just won the party's nomination for president.

He can't help but smile. Crete just stares at him.

This is news to her. All of it. Impossible to understand.

Crete begins to flare up, as Mollie appears out on the porch:

MOLLIE

Mom?

She looks to her mother, bewildered. *Who are these people?*

More and more showing up by the minute. Staking spots.

Off Crete, willing herself to fight back tears...

70

INT. PARLOR - FRANNY & GEORGE'S HOUSE - DAY

70

Franny rushes downstairs, a look of concern on her face.

FRANNY

His things are all cleared out.

George, a doctor and two orderlies are in the parlor. They're facing the family safe, hanging open. Emptied of valuables.

Franny sits down, quietly. Places a hand over her mouth.

GEORGE
How could he know our combination?

FRANNY
George. The children's birthdays.

They share a look. On George, FLYING into a RAGE:

GEORGE
That dirty, no-good *son of a bi--*

71 INT. TRAIN CAR - DAY

71

Charlie sits comfortably in first class, sipping a drink.

The waiter presents a lavish three-course meal. Charlie tips him generously, with a bank note from his brand new coat.

One of many padding the pockets. Keeping him good and warm.

He spies a charming woman looking his way. Beams at her.

WOMAN
What line of work are you in?

CHARLIE
Politics. I'm going to help get a man elected to the presidency.

There's something playing behind his eyes. Something *mad*.

He reclines. Kicks his feet up. Gazes out the window.

On his lapel, a **VOTE FOR GARFIELD** pin.

ROLL CREDITS.