

DEATH BY LIGHTNING

"Party Faithful" (Ep. 102)

Written by

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Based on

Destiny of the Republic
by Candice Millard

1 EXT. OHIO RIVER - NIGHT 1

It's dead of night in the Ohio pits.

A lone workboat sits out at anchor, creaking gently in the tide. Its hull reads THE EVENING STAR in decayed cursive.

The crew's fast asleep below deck. Save for a solitary LIGHT, glinting from a tiny PORTHOLE in the ship's BOWELS...

OHIO RIVER
1847

2 INT. CREW QUARTERS - THE EVENING STAR - NIGHT 2

Men piled crudely on bunkbeds, passed out and snoring. Floor strewn with empty liquor bottles and tattered newspaper.

From somewhere, an alarming cough. Probably fatal.

The light's source grows clear, as we descend on the least enviable of bottom bunks. The last gasps of a CANDLE...

A young deckhand, hunched over a book. No more than fifteen or sixteen years old. First hints of facial hair coming in.

Straining to read his Robinson Crusoe amid the dying light.

To block out the primitive sounds of his world.

Poof! As the candle expires, deserting him in the dark.

He takes a breath. Gets up. Slips into a worn pair of boots.

3 EXT. TOP DECK - THE EVENING STAR - NIGHT 3

The teenage sailor plunges his mop into a bucket of water. He swabs the deck, roving the ship with a restless energy.

Humming a private little bop to himself. Buffing the corroded wood as best as he's able, sanding away at splintered planks.

He trims the lamps, one by one. Reads each of their wicks at eye level, planes them even with a straight-edge razor.

Polishes railings. Tightens the lines. Sidesteps the night's appointed watchman, slumped over drunkenly at his perch.

He gets to the ship's bow, taking a moment's rest. Stares up at the impossible array of stars, unpolluted by light...

His eyes flicker as he traces out shapes of mythical beings.

He gnaws at his lip, studying the skies. Steps backward.

Misses the stray COIL of ROPE, snaked at HIS FEET.

The boy TRIPS. Tumbles RIGHT OFF the BOAT.

4

EXT. OHIO RIVER - CONTINUOUS

4

On the young deckhand, THRASHING in the WATER.

Unable to SWIM. He cries for HELP, to DEAF EARS.

The water is BLACK, and COLD. Cold as HELL. He HOWLS...

Gets a lung's worth of BRINE. Weighting him DOWN.

The stars above begin to WARP. The tide, so gentle a moment ago, now SURGES... taking the boy WHOLE. He goes UNDER.

Eyes WIDEN. Pawing up at the surface, in VAIN.

Dragged down. Fighting. Losing air. *Choking.*

He grabs at his throat. Feels it swell.

The color drains from his face.

Light dims from his eyes. Grip goes slack.

Sinks to the depths. We lose all sight of him.

Boy's POV: Vision hazing. Going dark. When...

He sees that goddamn coil of rope he tripped on. Now hanging over him, crested at the water's surface. Taunting him.

His eyes narrow. No. This isn't it. *This isn't how I die.*

He summons his last shred of strength. Reaches upward.

Grasps at the rope and pulls for dear life.

Somehow, the loose rope doesn't give. Instead, it goes TAUT in his GRIP. Allowing him to CLIMB... till he SURFACES.

Hacking the water from his lungs. Gasping for air.

Peering up at the *Evening Star*, he finds the other end of the rope improbably SNAGGED ON one of the deck's SPLINTERS.

The boy can't believe it. He's been saved by *pure chance.*

A flaw in the deck he'd just as soon have sanded away.

He clings tight to the rope, in a delirious stupor. Willing the old thing not to fray any further, or unknot itself.

Just dangles there, shivering under the glow of a thousand stars. Wondering how such a miracle could ever happen.

Not just how. But why. Off that, we...

PRE-LAP: Bang. Bang. BANG.

5 INT. JIM'S ROOM - GRAND PACIFIC HOTEL - DAY 5

Destiny pounds on Jim Garfield's hotel room door.

Men shouting out his name. Crowds swelling on the street.

We're back in Chicago, and he's just won the nomination for president against his will. It's about **33 YEARS LATER**.

Holed up in his room, Jim strains to block out the screams of "Garfield! Garfield!" that reverb throughout the city.

The knocks on his door grow more intense. We stay on him.

Praying for another coil of rope to fall from the sky.

6 INT. CONVENTION HALL - INDUSTRY EXPO CENTER - DAY 6

The convention's still under way at the expo.

James BLAINE, having yielded his own votes to Jim to ensure their side's victory, joins up with the nominee's boosters.

BLAINE

Gentlemen, where is your candidate?

GRIER

He's left for his hotel, Senator.

BLAINE

Who the hell let him do that? You get him back here right now. Which one of you Ohioans is in charge?

The Ohio delegates exchange looks. Blaine sighs, pre-empts:

BLAINE (CONT'D)

Christ. All right, if anybody asks I have a country home in Toledo.

He glances at his pocket watch.

BLAINE (CONT'D)

The delegates are growing restless. If we drag this thing on any longer they're liable to start cutting one another down in the pews. We need to put forth a running mate, *now*.

FOSTER

(a pause)

Well. I, for one, say we ought to nominate Senator James Blaine.

He beams at Blaine, proudly. The other men assent.

BLAINE

Me? That's your brilliant idea?

FOSTER

You're the best man for the job.

BLAINE

Please. It's the vice presidency, best man logic doesn't apply here. Besides, Garfield's coalition and my own are one and the same. I've got no extra support to bring in.

He pinches the bridge of his nose.

BLAINE (CONT'D)

God help me. To have any chance at eking out a win, we need New York.

7

INT. SMOKING ROOM - INDUSTRY EXPO CENTER - DAY

7

On Roscoe CONKLING, king shit of New York, licking his wounds after the defeat. Speaking with CHESTER, his loyal enforcer.

CONKLING

Everybody gets in line, from the sewage workers on up. New York and its purse strings are *closed*.

CHESTER

I'll put the word out, Senator.

CONKLING

Break skulls if you have to. They want to reform the party out from under us, let's oblige them. We'll sit on the sidelines, hands in our pockets, and deliver their sorry ass ticket to kingdom come.

He locks eyes with Chester.

CONKLING (CONT'D)

In four years they'll be begging us for Grant. This whole debacle will die a fucking footnote, if that.

Off Chester, ready to get to work...

8

INT. CONVENTION HALL - INDUSTRY EXPO CENTER - DAY

8

Back to Blaine with Jim's supporters.

BLAINE

New York represents the largest vote share by far. Biggest donor base, control of the papers--

FOSTER

You can't seriously be suggesting we offer the position to Conkling.

GRIER

His politics are the definition of corrupt. A cancer on our party.

BLAINE

I know it well. But we don't need him. We just need his *machine*.

WISCONSIN MAN

Are they not one and the same--?

BLAINE

Maybe. A faction like Conkling's can't simply be knocked down with bludgeons. No, they've got to have their throats cut with a feather.

He thinks a moment.

BLAINE (CONT'D)

Someone deeply embedded, who knows where the bodies are buried and how best to loot them. Who can command the right kind of influence. Who might not be above a shameless appeal to personal glory...

His eyes scan the room. They fall on a familiar face.

Conkling's hulking body man Chester, the Luca Brasi of his time, muscling a host of feckless politicians into line.

Towering over them. Placing his big, meaty hands on their shoulders. The suggestion of a squeeze. Soft, but *firm*.

Till they're putty. Till they agree to everything he says.

BLAINE (CONT'D)

I believe I've found our feather.

With that, we CUT INTO:

9

EXT. PORT OF NEW YORK - DAY

9

A pair of BOOTS. These ones immaculately POLISHED.

Chester, cigar lodged between his teeth, approaches a CRATE newly arrived at the HARBOR. His men hand him a CROWBAR.

BLAINE (V.O.)

Collector for the New York Customs House, through which three quarters of all federal revenue is amassed.

FOSTER (V.O.)

I've heard it's only two thirds.

BLAINE (V.O.)

Two thirds is what they report.

Chester PRIES the crate OPEN, unearthing an enormous shipment of WHISKEY. He examines the label. Puckers his lips tight.

CHESTER

Mm. Terrible shame. Such a fine vintage, to be lost at sea...

Takes a SWIG. Motions for his boys to ROUND UP the HAUL.

BLAINE (V.O.)

Negotiates a complex network of job appointments, his generosity repaid in the form of party contributions.

He's palmed an ENVELOPE. Tucks it in his thick FROCK COAT.

CHESTER

Bless you.

10

EXT. PORT OF NEW YORK - NIGHT

10

Chester delicately peels an apple with a knife. Behind him, his boys have a petrified assemblyman PINNED to the WALL.

BLAINE (V.O.)
*Whatever his moral leanings, he's
 one of the more effective civil
 servants in the whole bureau--*

11 INT. DANCE FLOOR - HARRY HILL'S - NIGHT 11

Chester CONGAS with city BIGWIGS, foreign EMISSARIES and a litany of SHOWGIRLS. Tossing DOLLAR BILLS in the AIR...

BLAINE (V.O.)
--and exceedingly popular, to boot.

He FALLS on HIS ASS, laughing till he's RED in the FACE.

12 INT. CONVENTION HALL - INDUSTRY EXPO CENTER - DAY 12

Reverse on the boosters. Aghast at Blaine's words.

GRIER
 You've just described a common thug.

BLAINE
 Sure. Then again, there's no place in which the powers of mischief are so small as in a vice presidency.

He smirks. Departs, waving to Chester:

BLAINE (CONT'D)
 Arthur. Chester Arthur. Come here, you big old son of a bitch--!

The men turn to one another.

IOWA MAN
 Who'll be the one to tell Garfield?

13 INT. SMOKING ROOM - INDUSTRY EXPO CENTER - DAY 13

Conkling awaits news, enjoying a shave. Chester sidles in.

CONKLING
 Well. Has Ohio made their offer?

On Chester, taken slightly aback:

CHESTER
 They have.

Conkling perks up. He waves off the barber. Towels his face.

CONKLING

Tell me, how much are the bastards willing to trade to get my name on the ticket alongside Garfield's?

Chester's face falls. He doesn't know what to say.

CONKLING (CONT'D)

What? For God's sake Chester, wipe that dumb look off your face and--

CHESTER

--the Ohio men have offered *me* the vice presidency. Sir.

Conkling just stares at him.

Suddenly, he bursts out laughing.

CONKLING

Thanks, Chester. I didn't know how sorely I'd needed a laugh. So out with it, what's the opening bid?

CHESTER

I'm serious. They offered it to me.

Conkling squints. His smile fizzles.

CONKLING

You.

CHESTER

Yes, sir.

CONKLING

They offered the second highest office in the land... to a customs collector for the port of New York.

His mind is reeling.

CONKLING (CONT'D)

This smacks of Blaine. I know it.

Chester opts to stay quiet.

CONKLING (CONT'D)

Well, in that case you ought to drop the damn thing as you would a red hot shoe from the forge.

CHESTER

I sought you to consult, not...

CONKLING

What is there to consult about? The ticket will be defeated, with or without this absurd burlesque.

CHESTER

There is something else to be said.

A beat. Chester's eyes glisten.

CHESTER (CONT'D)

I... I have not been right since my Nellie passed earlier this year.

CONKLING

Jesus Christ.

CHESTER

I feel I have lacked purpose, as if a ship without a rudder. The office of the vice president is a greater honor than I'd ever dreamed of.

Conkling tightens.

CONKLING

Chester, dear friend. If you wish for my favor and my respect, you will contemptuously *decline it*.

Chester forces himself to meet his mentor's gaze.

CHESTER

Senator Conkling, I shall accept the nomination... and what's more, I shall carry with me the majority of the New York delegation.

CONKLING

Oh shall you, you fucking ape?!

He storms off. Abandoning Chester, deeply wounded.

After a moment, the nominee for vice president straightens his coat and shambles away in the opposite direction.

14

EXT. INDUSTRY EXPO CENTER - CHICAGO - DAY

14

Jim fields a blitz of newspeople, politicians and elite well-wishers on his path to the expo steps. He glances at Blaine.

JIM

You said it'd be a light reception.

BLAINE

Did I?

A new figure shoves his way through the doors. Hops out onto the platform. Blaine steps aside to make room for Chester.

Jim's eyes widen at the presentation of his new running mate.

BLAINE (CONT'D)

Jim. Have you met Chester Arthur?

JIM

No, we haven't had the pleasure--

CHESTER

I've heard lots of nice things.

He swoops Jim's hand in his. Faces forward, beaming big and bright for the barrage of cameras. Blaine primps them up:

BLAINE

You'll get along swimmingly, I'm sure. Here's to a winning ticket!

At that moment, he registers Chester's still got a VOTE GRANT pin on his lapel. Snatches it away, as furtively as he can.

Jim notes it with a grimace. Chester shrugs back. *Whoops*.

15

INT. CAFÉ CHILDS - NEW YORK CITY - DAY

15

On a headline: GARFIELD UPSETS GRANT, CLINCHES NOMINATION.

Just then, a splatter of BURGUNDY drenches the print of the day's New York *Post*. A glass of wine, spilt by accident.

VOICE (O.S.)

Shit. Shit.

A HAND dabs at the MESS with a satin NAPKIN, to no avail.

WAITER (O.S.)

Don't trouble with it. We'll bring another glass over straightaway.

VOICE (O.S.)

Thank you, Frederic. I'll take a new copy of the *Post*, as well.

He palms the waiter a few stray coins.

WAITER (O.S.)

I'll see to it myself, Mr. Guiteau.

We pull out to reveal CHARLIE, living well off his sister's funds, posted up at one of New York's premier eateries.

He glances across Fifth Avenue at the party's new campaign headquarters, men on ladders hanging a GARFIELD banner.

His eyes narrow, fingers tapping idly against the table.

16 EXT. JIM'S FARM - DAY 16

Jim returns to his farm in small town Ohio, head kept low.

He's alarmed to find people camped on his lawn by the DOZENS, staking out picnic spots. Eagerly awaiting a glimpse of him.

Feet tramping on his fields. Merchants hawking campaign signs with his name, crops picked from his property as souvenirs.

His simple farmhouse, a Helm's Deep in the eye of the storm.

17 INT. STUDY - JIM'S FARM - DAY 17

On Crete, glancing out at the growing flock on the lawn. She swallows her breath. Tamps at a twitch of anxiety. Of fear.

Hears the footsteps approach from behind. Already knows who they belong to. Wills a quick smile, just as Jim walks in.

Meets him head-on. Wraps him in a hug before he can speak.

CRETE

Thank God. I'm so glad you're safe.

JIM

Crete. It's not something I courted, not even remotely. I swore to you--

CRETE

I know. Of course. It's really quite absurd, isn't it? All this, for us?

She laughs. Jim smiles back at her. A bit surprised.

JIM

You have no idea, what these past few days have entailed. How badly I wished you were there beside me--

CRETE

At least we'll be free of it soon.

Jim stays quiet. Crete's smile fades.

CRETE (CONT'D)

I... I don't know, I assumed. That you'd had a plan to reject it...

JIM

That isn't how it works, exactly.

CRETE

Well. It must be. You can say no, they can't-- can't force you--

Her eyes meet Jim's. She swallows. Heartbroken.

CRETE (CONT'D)

Jim.

He takes her by the hand. She lets it hang limp in his.

JIM

I'm sorry. There wasn't time. The delegates made their choice...

CRETE

You didn't write. I learned you won the vote from the people outside.

Jim chokes on his words.

CRETE (CONT'D)

Now you'd come back here and have me believe, like some fool, that a man just falls upward to a presidency?

She looks to him. Hoping for more. Praying for it.

He knows, already. There's nothing he can say to her.

CRETE (CONT'D)

Please don't cast me in this part, Jim. You looked me in the eyes when you left for Chicago. You swore we were past this, and I let you go--

JIM

I know.

CRETE

Do you? Do you know what it did to me the last time, when you ran off to Washington in search of glory and all its extracurriculars?

She falters. Jim meets her gaze.

CRETE (CONT'D)

New York's a long ride from Ohio.
We need to get your things sorted.

JIM

I have no plans to go to New York.

CRETE

It's where they base the campaigns.

JIM

I've already told them I intend to
do all my campaigning from home.

Crete squints at him. Confused.

JIM (CONT'D)

I have projects here. I'm building
a very ugly table, for example. And
where better anyway to know a man
than from his own front porch?

He stares her in the eyes. Crete absorbs his gaze.

JIM (CONT'D)

You will always come first. If I'm
to do this, we'll do it together or
not at all. I won't get lost again.

Crete exhales. She nods to herself.

CRETE

Do you know what I see when I look
at you? It's not some big general,
or a congressman. Or a president.

JIM

It's the boy you knew at college,
mopping floors for his tuition?

CRETE

Yes. And sneaking the editor of the
paper all the love poems he'd write
in Latin, just to watch her blush.

They both smile. Crete wipes tears away with her sleeve.

CRETE (CONT'D)

God, you were a piss-poor poet...

She laughs quietly. Allows him to embrace her.

We stay on them a beat. Holding one another tight.

18

INT. LOBBY - FIFTH AVENUE HOTEL - DAY

18

Charlie strides with confidence into the bustling New York campaign headquarters, fitted in his best suit and tie.

He approaches the front desk. Produces a charming smile.

CHARLIE

Good morning, ma'am. I'd like to put in for a word with Garfield.

The geriatric volunteer at the desk stares blankly at him.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)

James Garfield. The candidate? My name's Guiteau, I'm an old friend from Chicago. He'll know who I am.

DESK MATRON

I'm very sorry. He isn't here now.

CHARLIE

That's fine. When do you expect him back in? I've got a couple of other appointments today, but I'm sure I can-- yes, move things around--

DESK MATRON

We don't expect him in, period.

CHARLIE

What?

DESK MATRON

He's in Ohio.

Charlie squints.

CHARLIE

What would he be doing in Ohio when the whole presidential campaign's headquartered out of New York?

DESK MATRON

They said Ohio. But what do I know, nobody tells us volunteers much.

CHARLIE

That's a shame, what kind of an organization-- well, maybe I ought to go upstairs and double check anyway, for both our sakes--

He pushes past her, making a break for the staircase.

DESK MATRON

Hang on. Mr. Cousteau, you aren't allowed up without an appointme--

Charlie ignores her, ramping his pace... till he BUMPS RIGHT into BLAINE, on his way downstairs with a few men in tow.

CHARLIE

Oh, Senator Blaine! Just the fellow I'd been hoping to speak with.

He extends a hand.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)

Charles Guiteau. I've read every word of every speech you've given.

BLAINE

That so?

CHARLIE

Yes. I especially admired how you tore that rascal Conkling apart on the House floor back in '66. The singed cat and the Bengal tiger.

Blaine smiles, reminiscing.

BLAINE

I was quicker in my youth, and far better at making lifelong foes.

CHARLIE

A great oratory should inspire such depth of feeling. It's a lesson I incorporate in my own rhetoric.

He offers Blaine a paper covered in handwritten scrawl.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)

I think you'll enjoy this sermon I've composed on behalf of our man Garfield. You see, I was an early booster of his back in Chicago.

Blaine glances down at the speech.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)

With your endorsement, I'd like to join the fold and start stumping on the roster. Help get the word out.

BLAINE

Have you any sort of following?

CHARLIE

I'd say moderate to considerable, between my essays and the lecture circuit. And I run an independent paper in Illinois, the *Theocrat*.

BLAINE

Guiteau. That's French Huguenot?

CHARLIE

Hah. You've a good ear, *monsieur*. Mine's a proud and ancient line.

BLAINE

L'habit ne fait pas le moine.

CHARLIE

(a pause)

Well, heck. I'll *oui* to that!

Charlie feigns a laugh. Blaine and his men exchange looks.

BLAINE

Indeed. Sad to say our roster's pretty much full at present. But we'll make sure this goes through the proper channels regardless.

He hands off Charlie's speech to one of his underlings.

BLAINE (CONT'D)

Keep up the good work, Guiteau.

He brushes past Charlie, without another thought.

On Charlie, at the top of the stairs. Watching him go.

CHARLIE

Wait.

19

INT. MYRNA'S LOFT - NIGHT

19

Charlie paces the tiny room, relating the scene animatedly. His tie loosed, drenched in sweat from the hot night air.

We don't see the other figure with him, save for a wisp of cigarette smoke that clouds at the edge of the frame.

CHARLIE

I dropped all pretense, right then and there. Truth bubbled out of me like oil spewing from the earth.

(MORE)

CHARLIE (CONT'D)

I've got no followers or birthright to claim. I'm poor a soul as there's ever been. And true, maybe nobody of consequence knows my name...

He faces his unseen friend.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)

But then again, who knew Garfield's either before a few weeks ago?

His eyes light up.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)

I've read everything on the man I can get my hands on. Did you know he was born even poorer than I was? Father dead at two. Widowed mother couldn't afford shoes for him till he was *seven*-- destined to drown, anonymous, in some Ohio ditch--

A smile erupts on his face.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)

Until he stepped up on that stage in Chicago. All he needed was four and a half minutes. Four and a half minutes to secure his place in the annals of history... to rise above his station, from pauper to **king**.

He laughs, almost in disbelief.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)

How the fuck does that happen, if not for an act of God? If not for the soul of America made manifest in this man's heart? I mean, just imagine for a second what someone like that could do in power. How many he could bring up with him.

VOICE (O.S.)

You said all that? That's what you said, right to the guy's face--?

The voice is husky, female. Charlie pivots toward her.

On Charlie, still frozen at the top of the stairs. Watching quietly as Blaine and company coast out the lobby doors...

CHARLIE (V.O.)
Sure. Give or take a couple words.

21 INT. MYRNA'S LOFT - NIGHT

21

MYRNA, 40s, pulls from a cigarette in her wicker chair.

MYRNA
 Huh. I've never seen somebody get so hot and bothered over a politician.

CHARLIE
 He's left-handed, too. We both are. That'd be a presidential first. Lots of great visionaries are lefties...

MYRNA
 Big whoop. I can write with both my hands at once. You think I ought to launch an exploratory committee?

CHARLIE
 I'd punch my ticket for you, Myrna.

He hands her a pamphlet.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)
 Until then, I'm inviting you to the rally in October as my guest. All the party bigwigs will be there.

MYRNA
 They're letting you talk at this?

CHARLIE
 Blaine's got my speech to read for the weekend. I intend to receive a favorable response come Monday.

MYRNA
 (scanning the pamphlet)
 What's Chester Arthur doing there?

CHARLIE
 He's the vice presidential nominee.

Myrna shrugs. Hands it back.

MYRNA
 Huh. I had a regular went by that name once. Can't be the same guy. I'd have a better chance at being vice president than that shit...

CHARLIE

I'm telling you, there's an energy in the air since Garfield came into being. For the first time in years, I feel like we're on the precipice of something desperately *exciting*.

MYRNA

Yeah. Okay, I've got my 8 o'clock.

Charlie digs into his pocket. He palms her a stack of bills.

MYRNA (CONT'D)

This is twice what we agreed on.

CHARLIE

I know. Could I just... sit with you on the bed a minute more?

Myrna sighs. She pushes the extra money back into his hand.

MYRNA

We ain't that kind of operation.

22

EXT. JIM'S FARM - DAY

22

Visitors line up for an audience with Jim on his porch.

Jim's secretary JOE BROWN fields each round of well-wishers, marking their names in a growing ledger. Collecting gifts.

One man bequeathes a small goat. Joe takes it, perplexed.

Up on the porch, Jim and his daughter Mollie break bread with a group of Black war vets. POLLARD, 40s, takes in the scene.

POLLARD

It's strange, to be received this way. On a politician's own porch.

JIM

Is it? Well, I have always rated myself a fairly bad politician.

The men laugh. All except Pollard.

POLLARD

With respect, Congressman, we're used to a lot of talk from men in power. But we didn't put our lives on the line for a Republic that'll deny us our freedom at the polls.

(MORE)

POLLARD (CONT'D)

That will impugn us with tests the proctors themselves can't pass.

JIM

I know words won't mean much. But I swear, this'll be part of my fight.

He looks each of them in the eyes.

JIM (CONT'D)

On my honor. I'd rather be with you and lose than against you and win.

Now, at last, Pollard allows himself a small laugh.

POLLARD

You truly are a bad politician. A pleasure to meet you, Mr. Garfield.

He and his group stand. They shake hands with Jim, part ways. Crete steps outside with a pitcher, as Jim pivots to Joe.

JIM

Who else have I got on the docket?

JOE BROWN

A women's temperance coalition out of Akron. One or two factory union men who have very pointed opinions on the influx of Chinese labor...

Jim and Crete exchange a look.

JIM

Oh dear, I feel a cold coming on.

MOLLIE

You should have seen Dad earlier. He spent an hour talking in German to a tourist group from Stuttgart.

CRETE

Tourists can't vote for you, Jim.

JIM

Still. It was a rare opportunity to brush up on the language...

CRETE

You're terrifying our daughter.

JIM

I can think of a few more ways we ought to be able to terrify her.

He swings Crete into a kiss, much to Mollie's chagrin.

23

INT. LOBBY - FIFTH AVENUE HOTEL - DAY

23

A shriek of DELIGHT, from the old matron at the front desk.

Reverse on a BOX lovingly lined with PASTRIES, so TECHNICOLOR you could THROW UP, slid her way with a big fat BOW on top.

DESK MATRON

Mr. Cousteau, you shouldn't have!

CHARLIE

It's the least I could do, Evelyn. Everybody knows it's you volunteers from the Women's Auxiliary who keep the lights on here. In fact, I was *just* remarking to Senator Blaine last night at the Gaiety Club--

Charlie snaps his fingers, as if remembering a thought:

CHARLIE (CONT'D)

Say. Is that old sourpuss in yet?

24

INT. BULLPEN - FIFTH AVENUE HOTEL - DAY

24

On Senator Blaine, huddling with senior campaign staff.

BLAINE

Hancock's outspending us by a two to one margin. The South is plying him with cold hard Dixie cash, in hopes of turning back the clock.

FOSTER

The way we're hemorrhaging money, we won't last to Election Day.

BLAINE

We need big-ticket New York donors.

He pivots to Chester, feet propped up on his mahogany desk.

CHESTER

What?

BLAINE

For fuck's sake, Arthur. Do you think we put you forth for vice president based on good looks?

CHESTER

I already told you fellas, I've done all I can. In a normal year, with Conkling in charge, patrons are accustomed to incentives.

FOSTER

Is safeguarding the integrity of our Union not incentive enough?

CHESTER

Huh? Oh no, they don't give a shit about any of that in New York. They want promises of political office, ambassadorships. Raffle off some Cabinet post to a Vanderbilt.

This sends the rest into a fit.

BLAINE

Maybe such spoils are how Conkling won his elections in the past. But there is also a reason-- will you get your damn feet off the desk--

He thwacks at Chester's boots.

BLAINE (CONT'D)

--a reason your running mate Jim Garfield won the nomination. People want government they can trust. The old ways are cynical, corrupt...

CHESTER

Yeah, and they're how we've stayed the majority party since the war.

Chester shrugs. Sits up in his seat.

CHESTER (CONT'D)

It's just the way things are done here. No one's gonna cut a check that fat for nothing in return.

FOSTER

Perhaps we could coax Garfield out of Ohio. Have him meet with some of these New York elites in person...

BLAINE

No. His rustic charm won't play to city crowds. He should keep on his farm, out of the public eye. So we can shape him however we need to.

CHESTER

You might have followed his lead,
Senator Blaine. Spent a bit more
quality time in *your* home state.

Blaine casts him a glare.

CHESTER (CONT'D)

The Maine special next month is far
from a sure thing. I've got friends
who say Hancock's camp is gaining
ground steadily in New England...

BLAINE

What friends? Mr. Arthur, I *am* New
England. The Northeast will come in
solid. I'd stake my career on that.
Besides, last I checked the matter
at hand is our game in New York--

CHARLIE (O.S.)

If I may?

All eyes turn at the sound of this new voice.

Standing in the doorway, hat in his hand... CHARLIE.

He smiles, bright and folksy, at the important men assembled.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)

I was just walking by, and couldn't
help but listen in. Have you tried
an appeal to grassroots donors?

They just stare at him. Charlie, unfazed, proceeds on:

CHARLIE (CONT'D)

Garfield's the people's candidate.
He gives voice to the proletariat
class. If every worker in America
felt compelled to chip in a dime,
you'd easily make up the deficit
and empower a new voting bloc--

CHESTER

Who is this man, what is he doing
here and why is he still talking?

On Charlie, matter-of-factly:

CHARLIE

I'm a friend of Senator Blaine's.

He waves to Blaine, who doesn't appear to recognize him.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)

I just happened to be in the area, figured I'd swing by and check in on the status of my speech...

BLAINE

Your what?

CHARLIE

The stump speech I intend to give at the rally in October. You had kindly offered your feedback.

Blaine's mystified. His second, Foster, whispers to him:

FOSTER

Cousteau, sir. The Huguenot.

BLAINE

Oh god. Someone fetch security.

Chester peers at Charlie.

CHESTER

Hold on a minute. Haven't we met?

CHARLIE

Have we? I don't believe so...

CHESTER

Yes. I never forget a face. Was it not your ass I kicked outside of the Standard Club in Chicago?

CHARLIE

Hmm. No, I think I'd remember that. Might we have met in Newport, or--

BLAINE

Perhaps you two summered in the Med together. That sound right, Arthur?

This prompts a few snickers. Chester's not so amused.

CHARLIE

I'm sure it'll come to me later on. But on the topic of my speech--

BLAINE

It's still under consideration.

CHARLIE

By whom?

BLAINE

Him.

He points at Foster, who nearly spits out his coffee cake.

Charlie's kind smile starts to show cracks. He quickly digs into his satchel, produces a fresh stack of speech papers.

CHARLIE

I took the liberty of printing a few extra copies, if any of you fine men would care to peruse.

Blaine flags down a pair of guards.

BLAINE

Oh, that won't be necessary. Now I'm afraid we're all very busy--

CHARLIE

What did I ever do to you, Senator?

His abrupt change in tone captures the room by surprise.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)

You think I'm such a fool I don't feel you mock me? Why treat another person with such contempt, when he only asks to lend a friendly hand?

Blaine tightens. Chester leans forward, sort of intrigued.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)

Do you have any idea how many more there are like me, who never had a taste for politics till now? I came all this way because James Garfield is pushing the most progressive plan that this country's ever seen. I'm here because I believe in change.

He makes eye contact with each of them.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)

All I ask for is a chance to prove my worth. Bring me in, however you see fit. Put me anywhere, and I'll work like a dog for you people. I can... and *will*, make an impact.

His gaze lands, finally, on Blaine. Catching his breath:

CHARLIE (CONT'D)

Jesus. What do you have to lose?

25 INT. LOBBY - FIFTH AVENUE HOTEL - DAY 25

Out goes Charlie, herded down the stairs by Blaine's men.

He straightens his coat, brushing off the slight. Spies the volunteers, all squabbling over the last pastry in the box.

Biting his lip, he marches up to them. Snatches the colorful cream puff out of the box and JAMS it WHOLE in HIS MOUTH.

The women gasp in shock as he exits, chewing defiantly.

26 INT. HALLWAY - BOARDING-HOUSE - NIGHT 26

Charlie ascends the steps to his rented room. He hears voices in the hall. Peers around the corner, keeping out of sight.

Myrna, his neighbor in the loft across the way, speaks with two MEN in BOWLER HATS. We only see their backs for now.

BOWLER CRISP

He made off with a small fortune
from his sister and her husband in
Chicago, a Mr. and Mrs. Scoville.

BOWLER MUDD

Mr. Scoville is awful concerned
about Charlie's well-being--

MYRNA

I already told you gentlemen, that
creep blew out of here weeks ago.

She makes eye contact with Charlie. Letting nothing on. He nods back, grateful. Steals away, just as the men TURN...

27 INT. CHICKEN BARN - JIM'S FARM - NIGHT 27

Mollie and Joe hang about in Jim's makeshift campaign base, jammed in a tiny barn. Hens peck at the tangle of wires...

Joe prods them away gently. Trying to set up the telegraph.

MOLLIE

You know how to work one of those?

JOE BROWN

Of course. I've spent three years
as your father's private secretary.

MOLLIE

Shoveling up pig shit on his farm.

Joe gives her a look.

JOE BROWN

I've sent a telegram or two also.

Tap. Tap. Tap. As a message begins to broadcast over the wire. Joe scrambles to interpret the code, word by word.

He reads it, pale as a ghost, as Jim appears at the door.

JOE BROWN (CONT'D)

Sir. The results from Maine are in.

28

INT. BULLPEN - FIFTH AVENUE HOTEL - NIGHT

28

Blaine, Chester and the other campaign honchos crowd their own telegraph, absorbing the news from the Maine special.

No one speaks a moment. All eyes avoiding Blaine's.

BLAINE

A margin of two thousand votes to cook us whole. Maine has fallen for the first time in thirty years.

He looks sadly at his compatriots.

BLAINE (CONT'D)

I'm truly sorry I couldn't deliver a better omen for November. Perhaps I've lost my touch, after all...

His gaze meets the floor. He grabs his coat and hat.

BLAINE (CONT'D)

I believe I'd like to die with some dignity. Gentlemen, good evening.

He tips his hat, takes his leave. The rest share a look.

FOSTER

What now?

On Chester, their newly promoted chair:

CHESTER

We get fucking *sloshed*, that's what.

29

EXT. BOWERY - NEW YORK CITY - NIGHT

29

Myrna cranks open her window. She glares down at Charlie, waiting anxiously on the sidewalk six stories below.

CHARLIE

Hurry up!

MYRNA

Yeah, yeah. Calm your loins.

She hoists his SUITCASE, packed TIGHT with the last of his earthly belongings, OUT the WINDOW... Charlie MISSES IT.

The thing EXPLODES on IMPACT. His property DISPERSED.

CHARLIE

That's your best throw?!

BOWLER CRISP

Hey, you!

The BOWLER MEN spot him, give CHASE. Charlie BOLTS for IT...

Tearing DOWN the STREET. Shoving pedestrians FROM HIS PATH.

BOWLER MUDD

Give it up, Guiteau! It's over!

Charlie BARRELS his WAY into an ALLEY. Gasping for BREATH...

He glances back, sees the men advancing. Pistols DRAWN. Looks ahead. There isn't an outlet. Nowhere to run. He's cornered.

Just then, he spies the tiniest sliver of LIGHT, pouring from a side DOOR. Lunges toward it, with all he's got. It's open.

Charlie doesn't think. He just HURLS the FUCK on THROUGH --

30

INT. DANCE FLOOR - HARRY HILL'S - NIGHT

30

-- into Harry Hill's, a den of iniquity in FULL SWING.

One of the city's most infamous, exclusive haunts. Important people gathered in a mode very unbecoming of their stations.

Drinking and shouting. Waving money in the air. At the room's fore, two mighty Hungarian SISTERS. They're DUKING IT OUT.

Engaged in a BOXING MATCH, as the spectators CHEER THEM ON.

Charlie does a double take. Huh. Well, that's new. Fighting his way, precariously, through the HORDE of UNRULY MEN...

The bowlers burst in behind him. They lock eyes with Charlie.

Shit. He tries to lose them in the chaos of the crowd. Pushes deeper in the crowd.. they *push back*. Toss him. Shove him.

He nearly tumbles headlong into the match. Till a meaty hand GRABS HIM. Steadying him in place. The man gels INTO FOCUS.

Face ruddy with sweat, booze, even some lipstick:

CHESTER

Heyyy. Who let your mug in here?

Charlie just stares at him, struck dumb in disbelief.

BOWLER MUDD

There he is. C'mere, Charlie boy.

The sleuths finally catch up, seizing him from Chester.

CHESTER

What's the meaning of this shit?

BOWLER CRISP

This man is wanted in Chicago.

CHARLIE

That's a lie. I'm no such thing.

BOWLER MUDD

Are you not Charles J. Guiteau?

CHESTER

Guiteau? No, you half-wits. This man you have here is *Cousteau*.

He stifles a burp. Charlie glances at him, stunned.

BOWLER CRISP

Sure, pal. Call the guy whatever you want. We're taking him in.

They firm their grip on Charlie.

CHESTER

I'm not your pal. Read a fucking newspaper. I'm Chester Arthur, and will be met with some respect.

BOWLER MUDD

Chester Arthur, Chester Arthur?

BOWLER CRISP

Yeah. If this baboon is Chester Arthur, I'm Queen Victoria.

CHARLIE

(in SOTTO)

Except for he is Chester Arthur.

CHESTER

I am Chester goddamn Arthur, son of William Arthur, chief collector for the port of New York, and next vice president of... you *cocksuckers!*

The match stops. Music cuts out. All eyes on this scene.

Suddenly, the bowlers get very nervous. As far as Harry Hill's goes, Chester's grand *poobah*. Angry faces. Men ready to jump.

As well as two very intimidating Hungarian sisters.

CHESTER (CONT'D)

What's more, this man Cousteau is a friend of the Republican party. You will release him this instant.

The sleuths exchange a look. They let go of Charlie.

CHESTER (CONT'D)

Lay a hand on him again, and I'll personally bring the wrath of New York to bear on both of you. You read me, you profligate fucks?

BOWLER CRISP

Yes sir. We're very sorry, sir.

BOWLER MUDD

Must've had him mixed up, is all.

Chester stares the men down, smiling. He reaches out a hand toward them, plucks the bowler hats from both their heads.

They watch, bald and impotent, as Chester cutely stacks the hats and deposits them, as a PAIR, atop his OWN HEAD...

Posing for the crowd. Charlie offers the sleuths a curtsy:

CHARLIE

'Twas a pleasure, Your Majesty.

Queen Victoria and company are swiftly shown the door.

Chester motions to the band. The music picks back up again, reviving the festivities. Charlie pivots to him, in awe.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)

My god. Mr. Arthur, there are no words. I can't thank you enough--

CHESTER

Mmm. I must repair. Accompany me.

On Charlie, with all the pride of a man who's been *called up*:

CHARLIE

I will.

31 INT. WASHROOM - HARRY HILL'S - NIGHT

31

Chester kneels by the toilet, PUKING his GUTS OUT.

He sits up. Charlie hands him a wash cloth to wipe his mouth.

CHESTER

You're a good egg, Cousteau. Your brash display back at headquarters stuck with me. In it was a quality these limp-dick silver spoons like Blaine will never comprehend...

Charlie looks to him.

CHESTER (CONT'D)

They never once had to suffer in the shit. To work for it. Men like us, we've got to claw our way up.

CHARLIE

You speak a lot of truth, sir.

CHESTER

Damn right I do. I've got loads of worthy ideas to... *offer*...

He feels another round coming, doubles back over the toilet.

CHARLIE

Yes. I'd even go so far as to say you're the party's hidden weapon. I know you'll make for a fine vice--

Chester dry heaves, rather unpleasantly. Charlie holds.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)

--vice president indeed. We need a voice like yours in Washington.

CHESTER

Oh, I won't be vice president. Our ticket is positively fucked.

Charlie falters.

CHARLIE

But you'd just said, moments ago--

CHESTER

Piss and vinegar. I'm first mate to a sinking ship, with a hole in it the approximate size of Maine.

He stares up at the ceiling.

CHESTER (CONT'D)

If my Nellie were alive to see me now. Career in politics snuffed out as quick as it'd begun. Moreover, I successfully alienated the one true friend I had left in this world.

CHARLIE

What do you mean? You have scores of friends. You're one of the most beloved men in all of New York.

CHESTER

They don't like me. They fear me.

CHARLIE

I like you.

Chester glances at him.

CHESTER

You do?

CHARLIE

Yes. In fact, I think you share a lot in common with Garfield. Hard-working, charismatic, an outsider ascending the ranks on merit...

CHESTER

Huh.

CHARLIE

Also, am I to understand you were very recently made a widower?

We mark a sad glint in Chester's eye.

CHESTER

My darling Nell. The best woman I ever knew. Pneumonia took her from me, like, this past January or so.

CHARLIE

Yet you were brave enough, while nursing a broken heart, to answer the call from your countrymen.

CHESTER

Right? I do feel people tend to forget that part. I happen to be shouldering a terrible weight!

He motions for Charlie to help lift him from the floor.

CHARLIE

(straining)

You contain multitudes of depth, sir. You are, without question--

CHESTER

Use your knees, for God's sake.

Charlie pulls, with all his might. Gets Chester up on his feet. Returns to his thought, panting in exasperation:

CHARLIE

--the man to meet this moment in history. I know Nell would agree, were she here with us tonight.

CHESTER

That's a nice thought. Though you didn't know Nell. She was a fairly vocal Confederate sympathizer.

CHARLIE

Fuck.

CHESTER

Indeed.

32

EXT. BOWERY - NEW YORK CITY - NIGHT

32

Chester staggers out of Harry Hill's, Charlie in tow.

CHESTER

You've given me a heck of a lot to chew over this eve, my good man.

CHARLIE

I'm glad I could be of counsel.

CHESTER

Yes. Perhaps if I take the reins, play an ace or two up my sleeve, I may be just be able to deliver us a fighting chance after all...

He summons his carriage. Offers a hand to Charlie.

CHARLIE

While I have your ear, sir. On the topic of the rally next month--

CHESTER

Ahh. You're still angling for a slot. Wily bastard, you are.

CHARLIE

Takes one to know one, Mr. Arthur!

Chester laughs. Charlie does as well, a bit nervous.

CHESTER

Shit, why not. I'm sure we can find a place for you. Consider it done.

He hops into the back of the coach. Charlie's eyes widen.

CHARLIE

You-- do you really mean it--?

CHESTER

Be well. Au revoir, Cousteau!

He flings the bowler hats at him. Rides away in his coach. Charlie stands in the glow of Harry Hill's, astonished.

CHARLIE

... Guiteau.

Suddenly, he breaks into a big fat cathartic *smile*.

Dances away at a mad sprint. The happiest man in New York.

33

INT. FOYER - JIM'S FARM - DAY

33

A knock at the door. Blaine's on the porch, luggage in hand.

JIM

They exiled you to Siberia, huh?

BLAINE

Well, it's not as if I can ever show my face in Maine again. Here.

He hands Jim one of his bags. Jim turns to Crete.

JIM

Have we got any spare rooms left?

CRETE

Just the honeymoon suite, my dear.

34 INT. GARDEN SHED - JIM'S FARM - DAY

34

Jim and Crete escort Blaine to his new quarters, currently occupied by the GOAT we saw bequeathed to Jim earlier.

Blaine and the goat stare one another down. The goat BLEATS.

BLAINE

Oh yay.

35 EXT. PORT OF NEW YORK - DAY

35

We see a figure from behind, milling quietly on the dock.

Chester steps up in his frock coat. Stares out at the water.

CHESTER

Has the trout returned this year?

Conkling doesn't answer. Just keeps walking on, past him.

CHESTER (CONT'D)

We've made lots of memories on this stretch of port, haven't we? Built it up from scraps, practically--

CONKLING

You've made your bed, Chester. Now lie in it and shut the fuck up.

CHESTER

You'd rather sit by and watch your own party lose, to suffer Hancock instead, purely out of spite?

No response. Chester blanches.

CHESTER (CONT'D)

Explain it to me. By god, I can't see the logic in it. The opposition in power would decimate everything we've worked so hard to build...

CONKLING

And Garfield wouldn't do the same? Go buy a dictionary and search the meaning of *reform*. There's only one way to save our party from itself. His ticket must crash and burn.

CHESTER

And me, to burn along with it.

Conkling faces forward. Chester doesn't break his gaze.

CHESTER (CONT'D)

Have you forgot I am your friend?
You were the first to ever believe
in me. You trusted in my abilities,
gave me a shot in this life, and I
went and I fucking *killed* for you--

His jaw tightens.

CHESTER (CONT'D)

--and I can still kill for you.

Conkling glances at him.

CONKLING

Does Blaine know you're here?

CHESTER

Blaine's out. Wiped off the map,
after the beating he took in his
home state. I'm in charge now.

CONKLING

I have a hard time believing that.

CHESTER

It's the truth. You needn't throw
away four years on Hancock. I tell
you, Garfield's pliable. He can be
influenced. Steered, if needed.

They meet eyes.

CHESTER (CONT'D)

Nothing has to change. Not when I'm
inside the White House. When we're
the ones pulling the strings.

CONKLING

Chester A. Arthur, vice president.
My lord, you're a motherfucker.

CHESTER

I'm the motherfucker **you** made.

The double doors to the campaign office fly open.

Conkling marches down the aisle of desks, trailed by a large
entourage. The staffers stop what they're doing at once.

CONKLING

May I have your attention? If you come from Ohio or Maine, kindly show yourselves the fuck out.

His men disperse, swiftly replacing the previous guard like they've sieged the Bastille. Chester appears at his side.

CONKLING (CONT'D)

Round up the donor pool, Chester. We've got a rally to organize. And could someone please go drag that son of a bitch from his farm...?

He glances back at Chester.

CONKLING (CONT'D)

Time for him to meet his public.

37

INT. STUDY - JIM'S FARM - NIGHT

37

Jim packs for his trip to the rally. Mollie walks in.

She sees a stack of letters on his desk. Each one answered.

MOLLIE

You did all this? Not every bored homemaker merits a personal reply.

JIM

Just the ones in swing states. Hate mail from the South goes to Joe.

They share a smirk. Jim beckons for Mollie to take a seat.

MOLLIE

Harry read me a write-up from one of the papers in New York. It had to do with your part in the war.

Jim stops his packing. He looks to her.

MOLLIE (CONT'D)

You always said you spent two years in a tent, copying correspondence.

JIM

And you know better than to believe everything you read in the papers.

MOLLIE

Is it true, though? That you fought at Shiloh and those other places?

A beat. He doesn't answer.

MOLLIE (CONT'D)

You're the one that taught us a lie
by omission is a lie nonetheless.

JIM

No, I think that was your mother.

MOLLIE

Why have you never said anything?

Jim meets her gaze.

JIM

It isn't how the write-ups make it
sound. When you're there, you don't
feel glory. You don't see purpose.

He shifts in his chair.

JIM (CONT'D)

After, you've got a choice to make.
You can let darkness define who you
are. Or you fill up your world with
joyful things. Things to give your
life weight. And one day, you hope
light will overwhelm dark. That a
meaning may come of what you saw.

MOLLIE

Has it... worked, do you think?

Jim smiles softly.

JIM

I will certainly keep you posted.

38

INT. CAFÉ CHILDS - NEW YORK CITY - DAY

38

A GUSH of BLOOD, as Charlie CARVES INTO his RIB-EYE.

He dines alone. Rewriting his speech over and over. Crumpling
discarded drafts on the table. Rehearsing quietly to himself.

As he savors his last drop of wine, the waiter brings a bill.

CHARLIE

Thank you, Frederic. Chef's braised
the meat especially well tonight.

WAITER

I'll let him know, Mr. Guiteau.

The waiter departs. Charlie reaches for his wallet. Opens it. Finds the thing nearly empty, save for a few stray dollars. He glances at the bill. Back at the waiter, disappearing into the kitchen. At the wealthy patrons, enjoying their meals. Not one returns his gaze. Nobody pays him any mind at all. He untucks his napkin, folding it with delicate care back on the table. Takes one final, generous bite of his rib-eye. Gets up and beelines the fuck out of the restaurant.

DOUGLASS (V.O.)

*I want to tell you about the man
you're all about to hear on this
stage, for the very first time.*

39

EXT. MADISON SQUARE PARK - NEW YORK CITY - DAY

39

The rally's under way. A lavish, star-studded production. Large crowds gathered in the park to meet the candidate.

FREDERICK DOUGLASS, early 60s, owns the stage with aplomb. Conkling, Chester and other notable speakers behind him.

DOUGLASS

I know Garfield. He is right on our questions, you can take my word for it. A typical American, all over.

We find Charlie in the sea of faces. He listens, absorbed.

DOUGLASS (CONT'D)

Garfield's shown how man from the humblest circumstances can grapple with man, rise and win. He's burst up through the incrustations. Come from obscurity to fame... and ohh, we're gonna make him *more* famous.

He smiles, wry and debonair. His audience goes wild for it.

Jim and Crete watch on. Crete squirms, feeling out of place.

CRETE

All those sets of judging eyes. How are you so calm in front of them?

He looks to her. Doesn't answer. Crete's eyes narrow.

They face ahead at the crowd, as Douglass wraps his speech:

DOUGLASS

This man's built the road on which he's traveled. Buffeted billows of adversity. Now he swims in safety, while Hancock is *going down*. It's my pleasure to introduce the man from Ohio, soon to be your 20th president-- James A. Garfield!

Jim steps onto the stage. Douglass gives him a handshake.

DOUGLASS (CONT'D)

Your play.

He clears out. Jim pauses a moment. Steels himself.

JIM

Fellow citizens. We stand, all of us today, at a critical precipice. One hundred years as a Republic. A century fraught with hazards, with peril. The very soul of our Union tested in a high court of war...

His voice projects forth, without aid of amplification.

JIM (CONT'D)

Friends, ideas outlive men. Ideas outlive all things. We fought for immortal ideas, and by their might we emerged victorious. But victory is worth nothing, except for those sacred truths that were under it, in it and above it. The fight of our lives has only just begun.

Crete squints at Jim. A bit stunned, to see her husband like this. He's in his element, strangely. Composed. Confident.

JIM (CONT'D)

...the elevation of the Negro race from slavery to full citizenship is the most important political change we've known since the origin of our Constitution. Their advancement has improved the health of the Republic beyond measure. But there are those among us now who would still refuse the emancipated their basic rights.

Charlie, watching on in the crowd, surveys the audience.

They're all rapt, even as they strain to hear. No politician has spoken in language this stark in a good long while...

JIM (CONT'D)

We must be ready to confront these evils head on. Wage the full power of government to rub out ignorance and fear at state and local levels. To promote a shared wisdom in their stead. Universal education, I mean. So not only some but *all* may rise!

He stamps his fist on the podium. Prompts a deluge of cheers. On Crete, studying the faces in the crowd. Glancing at Jim. She doesn't even begin to know how she's supposed to feel.

JIM (CONT'D)

A new coalition, run by the people, to safeguard America's future. Equal opportunity as the law of the land, let us hold together and keep it!

The crowd erupts. Jim lingers at the dais. Taking it in. A hint of a *smile*. Crete clocks it. So does Conkling. Off Charlie, who claps the most ardently of all...

40

EXT. OVERFLOW AREA - MADISON SQUARE PARK - DAY

40

We're plunged into quiet, as Charlie assumes his own stage.

He stares up at the motley crew of party supporters plunked before him, in the outermost fringes of the week-long rally.

Most are geriatric and deaf. Some immigrants who don't appear to know any English. A woman knitting a very nice sweater.

He was promised a platform. It just wasn't specified *where*.

Charlie unfolds his speech. Bites his lip. Begins, slowly:

CHARLIE

I... I'm...

Takes a deep breath. Shuts his eyes. Tightens his posture.

Steadying his gaze. He projects a smile. Big and bright.

Folds away the speech. He knows this thing by heart.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)

I'd like to share a story with you all today. The story of a *hero*.

41 EXT. JIM'S FARM - DAY

41

Jim and Crete return to Ohio. Blaine and Joe greet them as they step out of their carriage, helping them unload bags.

In the distance, Jim and Crete mark a clamor by the farm.

BLAINE

Welcome home. I bear good news and bad news. What do you like first?

JIM

Let's start with the good, shall we?

BLAINE

We've just about closed the gap in fundraising, thanks to your rally. The donors have started to show.

JIM

A kindness from Roscoe Conkling...

BLAINE

Nothing kind about it. He weighed his options. Judged he'd be better off sticking with us than Hancock.

JIM

Will he?

BLAINE

One bridge at a time, Congressman.

As they near the farm, they descend upon a small MOB.

A group of angry MEN, factory workers by their look, camped out on the lawn. Chanting "BAN CHINA!" Staging a PROTEST.

Their signs bear a nasty brand of jingoist rhetoric. SAY NO TO ALIEN LABOR! BOYCOTT MIGRANT WORKERS. **KEEP CHINA OUT.**

CRETE

What's that? Who are these people?

BLAINE

I did tell you there was bad news.

Off Jim and Crete, taking in the unpleasant scene...

42 INT. PARLOR - JIM'S FARM - DAY

42

All hands on deck. Blinds shuttered. Protests raging outside.

A copy of the *New York Truth*, some period newspaper rag, with its blaring headline: **GARFIELD'S POLITICAL DEATH WARRANT.**

Underneath, an account of a LETTER. Seemingly signed by JIM.

BLAINE

They're asserting you wrote this letter to one H. Morey, a unionist in Massachusetts. "*Individuals and companys have a right to buy labor where they can get it cheapest.*"

JOE BROWN

It says you endorse the importation of laborers from China. Competing for wages with American workers.

Jim studies the letter. He glances at his family, at Blaine.

JIM

It doesn't make sense. I've never even met a Morey in Massachusetts. I didn't write it. It's a fraud.

CRETE

Forged by some political enemy? And rife with misspellings, at that...

BLAINE

We'll issue a strong condemnation. Sue this tabloid paper, the *New York "Truth,"* into extinction.

MOLLIE

That's it? You're not even going to consider the toll on the workers?

BLAINE

Young lady, we take this act in show of *support* to America's workers--

MOLLIE

Not those. The ones out of China.

All eyes on Mollie now.

MOLLIE (CONT'D)

They have just as much a right to be here as anybody else. You and Mom have said so yourselves...

JIM

It's not a stance one can take so freely in this heated a climate.

MOLLIE

I don't even know what that means.

BLAINE

It means you can't get elected to alderman anywhere in America with that view, let alone president.

MOLLIE

But it's wrong. To give in to such evil sentiment, at the expense of a whole race. To scapegoat them...

(to Crete)

Why aren't you saying anything?

She pivots to her mother. Crete stays silent. Guttled.

MOLLIE (CONT'D)

He said he'd help people. Fight for them. I watched him tell a group of Black men he'd just as soon be with them-- and lose, than against them and win. Are these any less human? Do they not matter just as much?

Jim looks her in the eyes.

MOLLIE (CONT'D)

You lied. The truth is, you'd doom an entire people... just to win.

They're quiet. All of them.

JIM

Mollie.

MOLLIE

No. You're a fucking coward.

She storms out. Slamming the door behind her.

Crete meets Jim's gaze. He doesn't know what to say.

CRETE

It's okay. Tend to your campaign.

She pushes past him, to attend to Mollie. Blaine sighs.

BLAINE

You keep in this game long enough--

JIM

Spare me your platitudes for once. Joe, draft a statement of denial.

His head stirs.

JIM (CONT'D)
History's going to mark us for this.

43

EXT. JIM'S FARM - NIGHT

43

The protestors are gone. Crete finds Jim out on the porch.

JIM
I know you may not believe it. But these past years in Ohio, raising our children... they're the first time I've been happy in my life.

He smiles faintly to himself.

JIM (CONT'D)
Sitting with you out here on this stupid porch, as we read our books in peace. It's my favorite thing.

CRETE
Then why? Why go to Chicago, stand up and give that damned speech--

JIM
Because nobody else was saying what needed to be said. Not one of them. I waited and waited-- and *hoped*. If one other man in that hall would've just said it first, I swear to god Crete, I'd have kept my mouth shut.

They share a look.

JIM (CONT'D)
What if there's a way we could fix all the things that terrify us most about our country? What if you and I can actually make a difference?

Crete nods. Swallows her breath.

CRETE
I am proud of you. I hope you know that. And if this is what you need, Jim, I'm gonna be there. Standing right beside you. Because I love you with every bit of my soul.

She puts a hand on Jim's. Stares down at it. Blinks.

CRETE (CONT'D)

...but I'm going to need you to do some things for *me*, also. Starting with you going up those stairs and having a talk with your daughter.

JIM

Yes.

He meets her gaze. A wry smile.

JIM (CONT'D)

And as for the next thing you need?

CRETE

They seriously ought to lock you up someplace and throw away the key.

JIM

What? I'm trying to do my part! I can't help you've a sick mind--

Crete whacks at him, playfully. Jim tries to dodge.

They laugh together on their stupid porch.

44 EXT. CITY HALL - NEW YORK CITY - DAY

44

Today's the big day. Crowds surging to cast their ballots. Reporters hail Conkling on his way to the polls. He waves.

REPORTER

Who are you voting for, Senator?

CONKLING

A write-in. David, remind me the spelling of your mother's name--?

He and the press, old chums, share a good-natured laugh.

45 INT. VOTING BOOTH - POLLING PLACE - DAY

45

Whoosh! As Charlie punches his card for James Garfield. He studies the ballot. Smiles to himself. Walks out.

46 INT. BULLPEN - FIFTH AVENUE HOTEL - NIGHT

46

The telegraph men work into the night, fielding numbers.

47 INT. CHICKEN BARN - JIM'S FARM - NIGHT 47

Matched by the mad frenzy of the campaign staff dispatched to Ohio. Drawing maps. Parsing data from one meager telegraph.

Joe and Blaine stand over it as the results tap out slowly...

48 INT. PARLOR - JIM'S FARM - NIGHT 48

On Jim's leg, also tapping. Restless and deeply on edge, as he sits by the fire with his family. Awaiting news from outside.

A hand sets itself atop his thigh. Steadying him. Crete's.

Jim looks to her, unsure. Crete just nods back at him. Offers her smile, replete with love. Giving him a chance to exhale.

She's with him. No matter what. Jim grips her hand tight, just as ABRAM, the youngest son, sprints in to relay the latest:

ABRAM

Maryland and Virginia for Hancock,
and Pennsylvania for Garfield--!

JIM

We were owed Maryland, I think.

49 INT. LOBBY - FIFTH AVENUE HOTEL - NIGHT 49

Charlie waits in the lobby of the campaign HQ, one in a swarm of party faithfuls. All eyes on the second floor landing.

PLATT

New York comes in safe for J.G., by
a margin of twenty thousand--!

A hearty round of applause. On Charlie with a scrap of paper and pencil nub, factoring in the results state by state:

CHARLIE

Thirty-four... no, that's thirty-
five more electoral votes...

Others begin to crowd him, glued to Charlie's running tally.

His own blood pumping faster than it ever has before.

50 INT. BULLPEN - FIFTH AVENUE HOTEL - NIGHT 50

Chester paces the room, as a new round of data comes in.

PLATT
Hancock's just taken New Jersey.

CHESTER
That's a mistake. Check it again.

Platt averts his gaze. Chester doubles down:

CHESTER (CONT'D)
I said check *again*, you bastard--!

51 INT. CONKLING'S APARTMENT - NIGHT 51

Conkling marks the tally in solitude. An unfamiliar woman, early 40s, in a ROBE, appears at his side. This is KATE.

KATE
Can we win without Delaware?

CONKLING
I don't know.

He looks to her, more softly than we've seen from him.

52 INT. CHICKEN BARN - JIM'S FARM - NIGHT 52

Joe gets another number. He glances up at Blaine.

JOE BROWN
Indiana.

53 EXT. JIM'S FARM - NIGHT 53

Abram races down the path to the main house, panting...

54 INT. LOBBY - FIFTH AVENUE HOTEL - NIGHT 54

Chester and Platt manifest on the landing, before the packed crowd. Everybody falls silent. The anticipation palpable.

Charlie stares at him. Willing it with every fiber.

55 INT. PARLOR - JIM'S FARM - NIGHT 55

Jim, Crete and family get to their feet as Abram flies through the door, heaving for breath. Straining to summon the words.

CRETE
Abram?

Blaine and Joe appear at the door, too. Both very somber.
 There's been news. Crete's gaze darts to her husband.
 On Jim's hand, dropping out suddenly from hers...

56 INT. LOBBY - FIFTH AVENUE HOTEL - NIGHT 56

POP! As Chester SPRAYS the CROWD in CHAMPAGNE. It's OVER.
 We find Charlie in the sea of faces below, soaking wet and
 succumbed to shock. Campaigners around him going WILD.
 Jostling him. Shaking his hand. Putting arms over him. The
 elderly desk matron, Evelyn, grabs him in a big fat KISS.

CHARLIE
 (wiping his mouth)
 We did it. My God, we've done it...

57 EXT. OVERFLOW AREA - MADISON SQUARE PARK - DAY 57

Back to Charlie on the outskirts of the big rally, moments
 after he's finished delivering his stump speech for Garfield.
 We still haven't heard a word of it. What we do see, now, are
 the faces of his audience. The bored, tired overflow crowd.
 Except they aren't so bored. Not anymore. Now they're all rapt.
 Something he's said having just moved them to their very core.
 His passion for his cause. For Garfield. He's swayed them.
 They propel to their feet, all at once. Cheering him on.
 Push in on Charlie. Absorbing the effect of his words.
 For the first time in his life... it really worked.

58 INT. LOBBY - FIFTH AVENUE HOTEL - NIGHT 58

A glow in Charlie's eyes. He smiles quietly to himself.

CHARLIE
 We've got him elected to president.

59 INT. DEN - CONKLING'S APARTMENT - NIGHT 59

Bright fireworks pock the sky. Heraldng Garfield's WIN.

Conkling gazes on from his perch, Kate at his side. His face inscrutable. For him, the real battle's just fucking begun.

60 INT. PARLOR - JIM'S FARM - NIGHT 60

A small victory party at home in Mentor. On Blaine, drunk:

BLAINE

He swept the whole of the Midwest.
Maybe there was a method to your
husband's madness, after all...

He swoops Crete in a playful twirl. She can't help but laugh.

Harry sneaks Abram a sip from his flask. The boy erupts in a little jig, flailing merrily across the living room floor.

Joe shares a look with Mollie. Mollie smiles, just a tad.

All are present here. All save for the man of the hour.

Crete's first to notice. She glances up the stairs.

A concern in her eyes. This isn't over. Not yet.

61 INT. WASHROOM - JIM'S FARM - NIGHT 61

Steam oozes from a newly drawn basin of water, as the echoes of celebration permeate through the floorboards underneath.

Jim enters frame, unfastening his shirt. We glimpse, for the first time, the nasty wartime scars that streak his chest.

He looks strangely frail, in retreat from the public eye.

His hand grips the ledge of the tub. He sidles in, with some effort. Dips under the water. Submerges his whole body...

Opens his eyes. Gazed fixed on the ceiling. Unblinking. Firm.

The air escapes his lungs, at a steady stream. Bubbling up.

More fitful, now. Quiet desperation creeping in his eyes.

He holds still. Doesn't yield. Stays UNDER.

62 EXT. OHIO RIVER - NIGHT 62

Match with the young deckhand, thrashing in the water.

Plummeting, helpless, into the murky ABYSS...

63 INT. WASHROOM - JIM'S FARM - NIGHT

63

Jim jolts to the surface. Gasping for AIR.

We keep on him, heart pounding.

Suddenly very cold.

ROLL CREDITS.