

DEATH BY LIGHTNING

"Casus Belli" (Ep. 103)

Written by

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Based on

Destiny of the Republic
by Candice Millard

1 EXT. ONEIDA FARM - UPSTATE NEW YORK - DAWN 1

A quiet pastoral tableau at the crack of first light.

Lush, rolling farmland. Blisteringly green. This is as close as it gets to Eden. A chyron puts us in **ONEIDA, NY. 1870.**

Roughly ten years before the election of James Garfield.

We descend on a patch of cornfield. Detect a strange rustling from the stalks. Rhythmic and steady. Workmanlike, almost.

Suddenly, a curious noise rises in our placid soundscape. A string of heavy, animalistic GRUNTS. *Is that...?* No way.

Yes way. Shit's going down on God's Perfect Acre.

PRE-LAP: "All I Want Is You" by Barry Louis Polisar.

2 INT./EXT. VARIOUS - ONEIDA FARM - DAY 2

A seemingly quaint co-op of God-fearing farm folk. Working the land in commune. Chopping wood. Blessing livestock.

And plowing each other's brains out, all the livelong day.

Fucking in cow barns and grain silos. Bent over haystacks and church pews. Out in public, whenever the mood may strike.

Clear-eyed, industrious women and men. Each of them gyrating in concert to a singular and distinctly satisfying pulse.

The swing of shovels and spades and big, hairy cocks.

Just a normal day for the Oneidas, America's first and only free love society. A utopian socialist Christian cult.

All are pleased in this Kingdom of the Lord.

Bright, happy faces. Save for one.

3 EXT. FIELD - ONEIDA FARM - DAY 3

We find CHARLIE on work duty, digging a DITCH. Sweltering in the summer heat. Chafing mightily in his regulation whites.

His mouth twisted in anguish as he plies away at the earth.

No appetite at all for the manual labor required of him.

He glances around. Makes sure he's not being watched. Drops his spade to the ground and walks off to get a lemonade.

4 INT. DORMITORY - ONEIDA FARM - NIGHT

4

Charlie lies awake in the bottom board of his bunk bed.

The whole bed frame creaking, rattling him to and fro. Above him, two of his Oneida brethren are sampling one another.

Many of the other nearby bunks are similarly engaged.

Charlie clamps a pillow over his head, as a voice rings out:

ONEIDA SISTER (O.S.)
Oh Lord. Oh Lord. Oh-oh-oh! Looord.

5 EXT. CLEARING - ONEIDA FARM - DAY

5

The Oneida residents congregate in a healing circle. JOHN NOYES, 60s, founder of the commune, addresses his flock.

NOYES
As is our custom, I'd like to open
up the floor to deliberations.

Everyone's quiet. All eyes cast on one particular member.

Charlie grimaces. So does Noyes. Here we go again.

ONEIDA SISTER
I would like to deliberate on the
topic of our Brother Charles.

ONEIDA BROTHER
Yes, I too would like to speak on
the subject of Brother Charl--

CHARLIE
Must we do this every single week?

NOYES
Charles. Only through the practice
of receiving our peers can we hope
to achieve spiritual perfection.

Charlie leans back in his chair, relenting with a sigh.

NOYES (CONT'D)
Any who wishes may speak freely.

ONEIDA SISTER
It's just. Well. He's *proud*, sir.

ONEIDA BROTHER
He refuses his work in the fields.

CHARLIE

Any old grunt could dig a ditch.

NOYES

Charles.

ONEIDA BROTHER

His behavior has been a matter of grave concern. He will often speak ill of the cooperative. Take more than his fair share at meals...

ONEIDA SISTER

I caught him spying with lust upon Joseph and I in the greenhouse.

CHARLIE

Oh Esther, you fucking *wish--*

NOYES

Charles!

The circle falls silent. Noyes locks eyes with Charlie.

CHARLIE

With deference, Elder Noyes, I won't sit by idly and accept this slander on my name. Not when I've pledged myself as I have to God--

NOYES

When have you last been to prayer?

CHARLIE

My God knows me well. I affirm my devotion in more private ways.

ONEIDA SISTER

With plenty of spare handkerchiefs.

Snickers among the congregants. Charlie's jaw tightens.

NOYES

Do you doubt the principles of our community? This church that's given you a home these past five years?

CHARLIE

I'll admit, I fear the culture of free love has grown... perverse.

ONEIDA BROTHER

He's just upset none of the sisters will share an experience with him.

NOYES

Is that true? Have not one of you had a desire to know this man?

ONEIDA BROTHER

They've devised-- a nickname, sir, with regards to Brother Charles.

NOYES

A nickname? What sort of nickname?

He glances at the closest sister. She stifles a smirk.

ONEIDA SISTER

Charlie *Guit-Out*.

The room breaks out in laughter. Charlie leaps from his seat:

CHARLIE

I'd sooner not be loved by any one of these sinners and harlots--!

This sends them into even greater hysterics. Plainly laughing at his expense. Noyes tries to calm his flock, to no avail.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)

I made a mistake thinking I could ever reach enlightenment at a place like this. I'm already operating on a higher spiritual plane than any person here could ever dream of.

He glares down Noyes and the rest.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)

Menial farm work and casual fucking may satisfy this bunch, but there's a greater destiny out there for me. Mark my words, one day my name will be known all across this country.

His eyes narrow. He bites his lip.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)

Laugh away. Just remember, it's he who laughs last that laughs best.

6

INT. MAIN HALL - SMITHSONIAN NATIONAL MUSEUM - NIGHT

6

POP! As a bottle of champagne is UNCORKED.

The political cream of the crop, collected together in the just-built National Museum. The very first Smithsonian.

Tonight, the space plays host to an inaugural BALL. Standing room only to celebrate the newly minted twentieth president.

Stately portraits of James Garfield and Chester Arthur adorn the hall, buttressed by stars and stripes and a giant eagle.

INAUGURATION NIGHT
MARCH 4, 1881

We find JIM with CRETE, just under the banners. They take in the sight of his portrait. Crete marks a glow in his eye.

CRETE

They made you look like you have a
giant stick wedged up your bum...

They share a smirk.

JIM

We'll only stay an hour. I promise.

CRETE

No, this is your night. Enjoy it.

VOICE (O.S.)

Mr. President.

Jim sees Frederick DOUGLASS, in full Marshal regalia. Joined by BLANCHE BRUCE, 50s. The second Black senator in history.

He turns back to Crete. Sees her swarmed by society wives.

JIM

Marshal.

DOUGLASS

I'd like for you to know Blanche K.
Bruce, senator from Mississippi.

JIM

We met briefly in Chicago, during
the convention. You were for Grant
and Conkling, if memory serves--

BRUCE

I wouldn't dare deny it. I'm sure
you understand, those I represent
can't afford the risk of laying
all our chips on an underdog.

JIM

Were I faced with your stakes, I'd
have made the same bet you did. Let
it now be water under the bridge.

He extends a hand. Bruce takes it.

BRUCE

I admired your strong words during the campaign. Though I hope they'll be paired with even stronger action.

DOUGLASS

The Black man held the line for you in the South, and at his own peril. I needn't remind you just on *whose* tab we owe our champagne tonight.

JIM

I'll not forget, Marshal. And I've prepared to meet the task at hand. This new government of ours is to be staffed solely with those most progressive, qualified of men--

CHESTER (O.S.)

Oh-ho-ho, greetings you bastards!

CHESTER, newly minted vice president, staggers up to them draped in formal garment. He puts an arm around Bruce.

CHESTER (CONT'D)

Were you all aware there's an open bar at this thing? I am *skunked*.

BRUCE

Your drink of choice, Mr. Vi--

CHESTER

Sausages!

He spies a waiter gliding past with *hors d'oeuvres*, wanders off in pursuit without a goodbye. Douglass turns to Jim.

DOUGLASS

You were saying, Mr. President?

7

INT. MAIN HALL - SMITHSONIAN NATIONAL MUSEUM - NIGHT

7

MOLLIE, Jim and Crete's daughter, plays the role of hostess with aplomb. She spots Jim's young secretary, JOE BROWN...

Sees he's grown a small mustache since leaving the farm for Washington. Mollie bursts out in laughter. Joe turns red.

JOE BROWN

What? No, stop. I only thought, as the secretary to a president--

MOLLIE

I like it, Joe. You look dignified.

Joe glances at her. Mollie smiles back.

Nearby, Crete chats with James BLAINE. They're approached by Roscoe CONKLING, with a woman roughly ten years his junior.

We may recall her from Conkling's loft in the last episode.

CONKLING

Senator Blaine. Mrs. Garfield.

BLAINE

Crete, have you met Kate Sprague?

Crete shrinks at the name. Kate doesn't break her gaze.

KATE

Not in the official sense. But I've heard some truly impressive things.

She smiles. Crete doesn't reciprocate.

BLAINE

Mrs. Sprague. Will the governor be joining us in town this evening?

KATE

Oh. He's detained, sadly. Back in Rhode Island. Roscoe's graciously offered to escort me to the ball.

CRETE

Well. That *is* terribly gracious.

A beat. Kate falters.

BLAINE

And I'd be rude not to ask after your wife, Senator Conkling...?

He gives a smirk. Conkling chuckles.

CONKLING

Mm. She's minding the homestead in Albany. The climate this far south has never much agreed with Julia.

Crete spies Jim out of the corner of her eye, across the room. He sees who she's speaking with. Makes for her...

He's blocked by a cadre of well-wishers. Crete tightens.

CRETE

The climate? Funny, I tend to relate.
Excuse me, gentlemen. Mrs. Sprague.

She walks away. Kate chews at her lip.

CONKLING

Good having you out and about again,
Blaine. You've been sorely missed.

BLAINE

Well. A political cockroach like you
or I can only stay in exile so long.
You enjoy the president's speech?

CONKLING

Bleeding heart vaudeville. Crow on
about reforms, fetch good press...

BLAINE

I suspect some of it may be sincere.

CONKLING

Yeah, well I could give a fuck. You
better remind our man Garfield just
who it was that saved his campaign
at the eleventh hour, while he was
off slinging pig shit in Ohio and
you were licking at your wounds.

He gets in close, out of earshot from all except Kate.

CONKLING (CONT'D)

New York doesn't work *pro bono*. He
can grandstand all he wants, but we
expect to be remembered. And well.

Blaine goes tense. Conkling gives him a friendly nudge.

CONKLING (CONT'D)

Lighten up, Blainesy. Our side won.

KATE

Roscoe, I'm ready to start dancing.

She tenders her arm to Conkling. He accepts it, happily.

BLAINE

Give my best to Governor Sprague.

KATE

Ooh! I love when old men are catty.

Conkling smiles. Blaine watches them go, privately fuming.

8

INT. STAIRWELL - SMITHSONIAN NATIONAL MUSEUM - NIGHT

8

Crete gathers herself alone on the stairs.

She reaches for her head. Detects a vague *chill*. Gets out a handkerchief. Drops it on accident. A hand retrieves it...

VOICE (O.S.)

Here you are.

CRETE

Thank you--

Crete glances up at the man, grateful... it's Charlie.

CHARLIE

Of course. Happy to be of service.

They take in each other a beat. Crete looks at the crowd.

CRETE

This city. Still manages to bring out the worst in people, somehow.

CHARLIE

I blame the formal waistcoats. Make it insanely hard to use a toilet.

CRETE

Try on a bustle and then let's talk.

Both of them laugh. Crete's head stirs.

CRETE (CONT'D)

I don't know what I was thinking. I am *not* built for this sort of world.

CHARLIE

Well. As my sister likes to say, the world's what we make of it. No use in giving up before we've begun.

Crete absorbs this. She squints.

CRETE

I'm not sure I caught your name...

CHARLIE

Charles Guiteau, ma'am. Of New York. I'm proud to say I'm one of the men that made your husband president.

Crete deflates. Offers a quick smile.

CRETE

Right. Of course, that makes much more sense. Speaking of my husband, I really ought to hunt him down--

CHARLIE

Wait--

As she turns to go, Charlie's hand shoots out.

Takes her by the ARM. Crete stops. A bit *alarmed*, now.

He realizes himself. Releases, sheepishly. Conjures a smile.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)

I-- I'm not-- I'd love for a moment or two with him, is all. To conduct a post-mortem on the campaign, see how I might be of further help--

CRETE

I'll be glad to let him know. You have a nice evening, Mr. Guiteau.

CHARLIE

Ma'am.

Crete withdraws. Charlie trails her out with his eyes.

At the top of the stairs, Crete folds her handkerchief. Finds it speckled with stray dashes of dark RED. *Could that be...*

Her gaze wanders back down the stairwell. The man is gone.

9

INT. MEZZANINE - SMITHSONIAN NATIONAL MUSEUM - NIGHT

9

On Charlie's bleeding HAND, lodged in his coat pocket.

He roams the new museum. Sees the litany of pieces enshrined behind glass. The American mythos, rendered in artifacts.

Lincoln's top hat. Jefferson's pen. Washington's suit.

He marvels at each of the objects. Their weight in history.

Catches a glimpse of his own self reflected back through the glass. Head seemingly transposed atop Washington's bust...

A pair of heavy footsteps, breaking his trance. Charlie turns.

He finds his advocate Chester Arthur, of all people, dawdling alone tipsily down the very same hall. Paying him no mind.

CHARLIE
Ho, Mr. Vice President Arthur!

He steps squarely in Chester's path. Amazed at his luck.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)
Just the man I've been hoping to see. We really gave those devils a taste of our medicine back in November, eh my old friend...?

Chester giggles. So does Charlie.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)
I can't tell you, sir, the pride I felt that night as the numbers came in for us. To be a force in a great movement, much larger than myself--

CHESTER
Shit.

CHARLIE
Indeed! We have a rare opportunity, don't you think, to effect the kind of mandate that comes along once a generation. I'm ready, Mr. Arthur.

CHESTER
(blinking once, twice)
What's it now?

CHARLIE
Ready to be called up, sir. In an official capacity. I'd like to be a part of this organization.

CHESTER
Hmnn. Yes.

He stumbles, losing his balance. Charlie props him up.

CHARLIE
Splendid, that's splendid news! I had a sense you'd agree. We make an unbeatable pair, you and I.

He walks Chester to a nearby column. Steadies him there.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)
I wonder, where might I be used to the greatest public benefit? Some consulship position, perhaps, to strengthen our ties to Europe--

CHESTER
--will you shut the fuck up?

Charlie's smile falters.

CHARLIE
Sir?

CHESTER
I said, quit your jabbering. I've got such a goddamn headache...

CHARLIE
Maybe we ought to-- mightn't we resume this at a later hour?

CHESTER
No, we might fucking not. Listen.

He pulls Charlie close. Stares him gravely in the eyes.

CHESTER (CONT'D)
I need you to do something for me. Something very, very important.

CHARLIE
Anything.

CHESTER
I need you to find the sausage man and bring him here this instant.

Off Charlie, deeply confused...

GUARD (O.S.)
You there!

They pivot to meet two guards, making their advance.

GUARD (CONT'D)
May we examine your invitation to tonight's event, please?

CHESTER
I'm vice president, you pricks.

GUARD
Apologies, sir. We mean this fellow with you. We found a window broken in the east wing, and have reason to suspect somebody's snuck in--

Just then, they catch Charlie burying his hand in his pocket. They tear it out, finding knuckles CAKED in BLOOD and GLASS.

Nabbing him red-handed. Charlie takes a step back.

CHARLIE

This isn't what it appears. I'm a stalwart of the administration.

GUARD

Sure you are. Let's take it outside.

They seize Charlie by each arm.

CHARLIE

Mr. Arthur, will you please inform these men that I *belong* here--?

He looks to Chester. But his friend's already moseying off.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)

Sir, I beg you. Tell them who I am!

Chester gives a short shrug. Says, in all sincerity:

CHESTER

Boy. I haven't the faintest idea.

10

INT. EAST HALL - WHITE HOUSE - DAY

10

WHAM! As we're plunged headfirst into absolute MAYHEM.

Irvin and Abram, ripping their new home APART. Flying their bicycles DOWN the HALL. Threatening the precious HARDWOOD...

The poor White House staff, racing after them to no avail.

Jim's eldest sons, HARRY and YOUNG JIM, march in with a STRAY PUP. The tiny black Newfoundland tracking DIRT on the RUG.

HARRY

Have a look at this little scamp we found tearing up the flower beds.

Mollie hoists the dog to eye level. Gives it a smooch.

MOLLIE

Such a good boy. Let us keep him!

Just off-screen, a vase SHATTERS. Probably expensive. Oops.

11

INT. MEETING ROOM - BOARDING-HOUSE - DAY

11

Charlie coarsely shovels down a home-cooked meal at his place of lodging. His fellow boarders glare at him, a bit alarmed.

MRS. LOCKWOOD, 60s, the innkeeper, makes an approach.

CHARLIE

Have you got a new person for eggs?
Today's are-- mm, uniquely rich--

MRS. LOCKWOOD

It's Wednesday again, Mr. Guiteau.

CHARLIE

Yes. And I expect to give your rent,
plus interest, in a matter of days.

He beckons her close. Whispers:

CHARLIE (CONT'D)

It's certain auspices which command
me to Washington, Mrs. Lockwood.
I'm going to have a very lucrative
job... in the *Garfield* contingent.

With that, he takes a big savory bite out of his omelette.

12

INT. DINING ROOM - WHITE HOUSE - DAY

12

On Jim, who partakes of his own breakfast with Blaine.

BLAINE

Conkling wants Secretary of State.

JIM

The most senior role in my Cabinet.

BLAINE

You might not have won without him.
Lord knows I wasn't any help. I owe
you an apology for the way I fouled
things in Maine. A state we should
not have lost. I was too assured--

JIM

Blaine. We prevailed without it.

BLAINE

But on whose bill, do you figure?

Jim sets down his utensils. Slides over a sheet of paper.

JIM

I've already drawn up my own list
of appointees. Here, have a look.

Blaine scans it. His eyes widen.

BLAINE

Me?

JIM

I need a Secretary of State I can trust. I'm dealing with a rogue vice president as it stands.

BLAINE

I'm honored, Jim. Really. But for your sake, I ought to reject it.

JIM

You're the best man for the job.

BLAINE

Of course I am. All the names on your list are, for their positions. And not a one is remotely viable.

He hands back the list. Jim balks.

BLAINE (CONT'D)

These men are progressives. Avowed enemies of the spoils system. They won't even get hearings. Conkling owns a third of this Senate...

JIM

There are some who can be swayed.

BLAINE

They most certainly fucking cannot. All are cronies, bought and paid for by the New York State Customs House.

JIM

When did you grow so damn cynical?

BLAINE

I'm a realist. Look, there's no one alive who hates Roscoe Conkling more than I. He is a cancer. But while he holds three-quarters of our federal revenues hostage, he *is* the party.

JIM

No he's not. The people are. And I swore them an oath when I took this office. It's time to end the age of the power broker, once and for all.

BLAINE

He won't go quietly, you know.

JIM

That's why I'm asking for help.

He tenders a hand to Blaine. Blaine takes it, tentatively. Jim doesn't let go. He stares his friend in the eyes.

JIM (CONT'D)

Accept on one condition. That you will not run for president again. I need my Cabinet focused entirely on the present. It is too important.

Blaine weighs this. He nods.

BLAINE

Okay. If we die, we die together.

13 EXT. LAFAYETTE SQUARE - WASHINGTON, D.C. - DAY 13

Charlie strides up the lawn to the White House, beaming...

14 INT. WAITING PARLOR - WHITE HOUSE - DAY 14

A giant queue of visitors, piled haphazardly into one room.

Charlie finds himself shoved in with the other men, biding time by rehearsing their spiels. Barely able to move.

He flags down the chief usher, a bulldog named LOEFFLER.

CHARLIE

Excuse me. Hey, excuse me! I demand an audience with the president--

LOEFFLER

You'll have to wait your turn, sir.

CHARLIE

No, I don't think you understand. I'm not one of these people-- my name is Charles Guiteau. I was a campaign notable, in New York--

NEXT MAN IN LINE

I was a notable too, from Michigan!

MAN AFTER THAT

The Knights of Peoria raised over four hundred and fifty dollars!

CHARLIE

Wait. Hang on, these men aren't--

Joe Brown appears, shouting above the din of the crowd:

JOE BROWN

The president wants you all to know
he values your time. If you'll just
be patient, keep to single file...

Off that, Charlie makes an abrupt dash for the FRONT.

Others respond in kind, as the whole scene devolves into a
mad PUSH. Office seekers clawing SAVAGELY for their SPOT.

Amid the frenzy, Charlie's SHOVED. Nearly FLUNG to the FLOOR.

Joe watches, stunned silent, as the ushers launch in to help
wrangle the crowd. He retreats back inside, delicately...

15

INT. WEST HALL - WHITE HOUSE - DAY

15

Joe rushes up to Jim, preparing to receive his guests.

JOE BROWN

Sir? As your private secretary, I'd
strongly advise you to reconsider
meeting with constituents today.

JIM

My mind's made up, Joe. An elected
official, no matter the rank, isn't
worth his salary if he can't make
time for the people he serves.

JOE BROWN

Calling hours open to the common
man five days a week, though...

JIM

Oh, I'd much rather spend my lunch
with common men than politicians.

Joe glances at Crete for assistance.

CRETE

Darling. Perhaps we might at least
pay for some protection detail.

JOE BROWN

We haven't vetted any one of these
men, or frisked for weaponry--

JIM

--cut it out. Who on earth would
ever want to shoot a president?

Jim offers a winking smile. Crete and Joe aren't amused.

JIM (CONT'D)

It's a joke. Lincoln was a leader in wartime, with scores of enemies hunting for retribution. I'm very dull by comparison. And besides--

He turns to face the two of them.

JIM (CONT'D)

Push comes to shove, assassination can no more be guarded against than death by lightning. It's best not to worry too much about either.

Offering a smirk, he disappears into his new office.

Crete gives Joe a look. Joe shrugs.

16

INT. JIM'S OFFICE - WHITE HOUSE - DAY

16

Jim settles into place behind his desk, nods to an usher. We watch as he hosts a broad array of visitors, one by one:

SEEKER #1

Mr. President, I come before you today with a special request--

SEEKER #2

I don't beseech you lightly, but on behalf of all god-fearing whites--

SEEKER #3

I'm owed a feckin' job, is what's what. And I mean to collect.

SEEKER #4

I b-b-b-elieve, sir, that I have m-m-m-uch to, offer your a-a-a-ad--

SEEKER #1

District clerk.

SEEKER #5

Minister to Belgium. No, Denmark.

SEEKER #2

The Supreme Court should do fine.

SEEKER #3

Hell. Put me wherever you feckin' please, so long as it's paid.

Reverse on Jim, saddled with résumés. At a loss for words...

17 INT. EAST HALL / WAITING PARLOR - WHITE HOUSE - DAY 17

Jim conveys the stack of résumés to Joe. He looks drained.

JIM

Good Lord. They draw paper on me
like highway-men draw pistols.

JOE BROWN

Shall we put a pin in it for today?

JIM

Are there that many more out there?

Joe urges Jim to take a peek into the waiting parlor. To his horror, they haven't made so much as a dent in this crowd.

And without fail, each of them has a C.V. on hand to offer.

BRUCE

Brazen office seekers. The scourge
of presidents from Washington on...

Blanche Bruce, the senator we met at the ball with Frederick Douglass, ambles up to them. He gives Jim a modest smile.

JIM

Not after we reform civil service.

BRUCE

A lofty goal. Rife with peril. But
hey, seeing as I've got you on the
spot. Think one last brazen seeker
can steal a minute of your time?

JIM

Just so long as it entails a drink.

Bruce tips open his coat. He's got a flask at the ready.

BRUCE

A senator always comes prepared.

They share a laugh. Jim leads Bruce to his office. He spots the stray Newfoundland, traipsing randomly down the hall.

JIM

Am I the only one seeing that dog?

JOE BROWN

That'd be the new presidential pet.

BRUCE
Newfoundland. Fella's gonna get *big*.

18 INT. WAITING PARLOR - WHITE HOUSE - DAY 18

Joe surfaces just as Charlie nears the front of the line.

JOE BROWN
Folks, today's calling hours for
the president have come to an end.
But never fear, they will resume
tomorrow and every day hence.

He exits briskly. The ushers show Charlie and the others out.

CHARLIE
Can I at least take a number in
advance, to secure my spot--?

19 INT. CHESTER'S OFFICE - WHITE HOUSE - DAY 19

Chester trudges into his new office, wickedly hungover.

SECRETARY
You were due to meet with the House
Appropriations Committee at 10am.

CHESTER
Welp, *c'est la vie*. Say Martha, how
would you feel about appropriating
me a ham hock and egg sandwich--?

His secretary departs, annoyed. Chester slumps into a comfy
armchair. Kicks his feet up onto the rich mahogany desk.

Gets to work at last, sifting idly through the day's inbox...

Till he sees something that makes him GAG on his COFFEE.

20 EXT. LEVI MORTON'S HOUSE - WASHINGTON, D.C. - NIGHT 20

Sleepy part of town. Lone street lamp, suddenly DOUSED.

Angle on a shadowy BAND of MEN, under COVER of NIGHT, as they
converge outside a modest apartment. Force their way IN...

21 INT. "THE MORGUE" - ??? - NIGHT 21

A man's plunked down in a chair. Burlap HOOD over his HEAD.

VOICE (O.S.)

Hi, Levi.

The hood's ripped off. Reveal LEVI MORTON, 50s, a congressman we've never met. He squints, his vision slowly adjusting...

Finds himself deposited in the dark, damp storehouse. We see panic in Levi's eyes. He knows *exactly* what this place is.

A figure steps into view. CONKLING. He looks pissed.

CONKLING

You know why you've been called to the Morgue this evening, Levi?

LEVI

I... believe me Roscoe, I didn't...

CONKLING

Accept a job from Garfield? Cabinet gig? 'Cause I'm pretty fucking sure that's exactly what you did, Levi.

Levi falters. Conkling nods quietly.

CONKLING (CONT'D)

A good one, too. Secretary of the Navy. I know you love your boats.

LEVI

How... how could you possibly know what was offered, already...

A second man appears at Conkling's side. Huge, intimidating.

Levi knows him by sight. So do we, of course. It's CHESTER.

LEVI (CONT'D)

Mr. Vice President? Sir, what--

CHESTER

I don many a hat, Congressman. My loyalty, once given, is for life.

LEVI

But you-- you'd conspire to torpedo your own president's agenda--?

CONKLING

There *is* no agenda. Just two types of men, with very contrary ideas on government. Whose is the better bet?

Levi lowers his gaze. Conkling sighs.

CONKLING (CONT'D)

Navy isn't the job for you, Levi. I think you ought to stay right where you are, in the House. Wouldn't you concur, Vice President Arthur--?

CHESTER

Mm. House is a much cozier prospect for Mr. Morton, in the long term.

Conkling leans forward. Stares Levi straight in the eyes.

CONKLING

So here's what we're going to do.

22

INT. JIM'S OFFICE - WHITE HOUSE - DAY

22

On Jim and Blaine, absorbing the latest news in disbelief.

BLAINE

That depraved son of a bitch.

Reverse on Levi, seated before them. Sheepishly contrite.

LEVI

I told you, I've made this decision wholly of my own volition, without any outside influences. My family time is very important to me--

BLAINE

Bullshit. What did Conkling say?

JIM

Help me understand, Congressman. Less than twenty-four hours ago you sat in this very spot and accepted the post, gladly...

Levi swallows his breath.

LEVI

I'm sorry. I really must be going now. Good luck with your search.

He hightails out of the room. Jim glances at Blaine.

BLAINE

He's sending a message. He'll kill as many of your appointments as he can until he gets what he wants.

A knock at the door. Joe enters.

JOE BROWN
 Senator Allison, also here to speak
 with you. Also says it's urgent.

BLAINE
 And there goes your Treasury pick.

Jim pinches at his brow.

JIM
 We need to get ahead of this. Now.

BLAINE
 How did Conkling even get a copy of
 your jobs list? They only went out
 to key White House personnel...

It dawns on both of them instantly.

23

INT. WAITING PARLOR - WHITE HOUSE - DAY

23

The parlor's packed with office seekers once more. Charlie
 interrupts Joe, exchanging words with Loeffler the usher.

CHARLIE
 Will calling hours begin on time
 this morning? I'd just like to be
 able to plan my day accordingly--

JOE BROWN
 I'm afraid the president won't be
 taking any other meetings today.

CHARLIE
 I've been here for six hours. You
 said yourself, just yesterday...

His smile twitches.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)
 I'm not one of these dime-a-dozen
 beggars or frauds you've got here
 in droves. I'm a booster from day
 one. I *stumped* for him, non-stop.
 Delivered speeches. I've these
 notes of commendation, look--

He shows the men a host of papers.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)
 James Blaine. Chester Arthur. Ask
 any one of them who was there, and
 they'll tell you about Guiteau.

Joe accepts his résumé, politely.

JOE BROWN

I understand, sir. If you come back next week, I will ensure personally you meet the president. Until then, your application will be placed on special file for consideration.

Charlie perks up at once.

CHARLIE

Great. That's great. Next week, you say? Hm, I ought to be able to make myself available then. Thank you!

He shakes both men's hands. Pushes away through the horde.

LOEFFLER

Special file, huh? That may just be your best one yet, kiddo.

Just then, they spot Charlie blatantly SWIPE a whole STACK of White House STATIONERY on his way out. Off Joe, stunned...

24 INT. CHARLIE'S ROOM - BOARDING-HOUSE - NIGHT 24

Charlie sits by candlelight, composing a letter at his desk.

CHARLIE (V.O.)

Dear Franny, my sweet sister. I'm sorry to have left you last spring without a proper good-bye. But I write you with wonderful news...

We see he's scrawling his note on the stolen letterhead.

CHARLIE (V.O.)

...I've been promised a post in James Garfield's White House!

25 INT. MEETING ROOM - BOARDING-HOUSE - DAY 25

Charlie slips Mrs. Lockwood, his restive innkeeper, a writ of compensation. Composed on White House parchment, of course.

CHARLIE (V.O.)

Can you believe I staked my bet with a winning horse? This president's a man who remembers his friends, and oh, did I ever keep the faith--!

He motions to the signature. None other than that of JAMES A. GARFIELD. Lockwood's eyes widen. Charlie nods at her sagely.

CHARLIE (V.O.)

The probable placement, as far as I can gather, is some sort of foreign consulship. I think I'd lean toward something in Paris, or maybe Vienna.

26 EXT. LAFAYETTE SQUARE - WASHINGTON, D.C. - DAY 26

Charlie sits on a bench, probing through foreign dictionaries.

CHARLIE (V.O.)

I'm so excited, I'm already in the thick of learning German and French!

He mouths the exotic words to himself, taking copious notes.

27 INT. MEETING ROOM - BOARDING-HOUSE - NIGHT 27

Charlie eats dinner by himself, lost in contemplation.

CHARLIE (V.O.)

I often think back to those dark days trapped under Father's roof. That laugh of his haunts me yet.

We glimpse a small, impish smile.

CHARLIE (V.O.)

This will show him and the rest.

28 INT. CHARLIE'S ROOM - BOARDING-HOUSE - LATER 28

On a tintype photo of Franny, George and their children.

CHARLIE (V.O.)

The downside to being abroad, of course, is I won't be able to visit with your family for Christmas. But I'll be sure to mail my gift. Which reminds me: will George prefer his restitution in cash or check--?

Charlie's gaze wanders to a silver LOCKET, dangling from the tintype. It's the same keepsake he had with him in Chicago.

He unclasps it. Peers at the yellowing portrait of his bride, ANNIE. Something about her image scares him. Beguiles him.

CHARLIE (V.O.)

I'm so close, Franny. I promise I'm going to make it right. To you, and to the others I've let down with my actions. And then I'll be worthy of your pride. I will earn your love.

He snaps the locket SHUT, abruptly. Wraps up his letter:

CHARLIE (V.O.)

Well, until next time. Au revoir and auf wiedersehen! Charlie.

29

INT. CHESTER'S OFFICE - WHITE HOUSE - DAY

29

Chester smokes a cigar in repose, leafing through a magazine.

JIM

Am I interrupting something?

Jim appears at his door. Chester bolts upright, startled.

CHESTER

Mr. President, to what do I owe--

JIM

I believe we've been long overdue for a candid dialogue. May I?

He takes a seat. Unbuttons his coat. Smiles at Chester.

JIM (CONT'D)

Have you enjoyed your duties in the White House thus far, Mr. Arthur?

CHESTER

Duties? I wasn't aware I had any. A vice president's job is ornamental. Attend functions, kiss babies and play Santa at the holiday party.

JIM

Normally, that's true. But have you been down to the Capitol lately?

CHESTER

Oh god, no. I do my best to avoid that fucking shithole at all costs.

JIM

Sure. Except for, are you aware we have a deadlock at present in the Senate? A 37-37 split by support?

He folds his hands on Chester's desk.

JIM (CONT'D)

In a rare situation such as this, the vice president is deputized to act as the tie-breaking vote. And in the case of my appointments...

CHESTER

I'm the difference between their being blocked or going through.

JIM

You have the opportunity now to exhibit genuine leadership.

Chester laughs, suddenly.

CHESTER

I'm no leader. And even if I were, my politics are not your own. Let's not be under any illusions here. I was only ever offered this job as a means of knee-capping Conkling.

Jim nods. All cards on the table, now:

JIM

You're right, Mr. Arthur. It was a stunningly stupid calculus. You're the least qualified man on earth I can think of for the role. If I'd have had my say, I'd have tapped just about anyone else over you.

His candor takes Chester aback.

JIM (CONT'D)

At least, that was my initial view. But I've since had a chance to read up on you some. I was surprised to learn, for instance, that you were at one time a respected lawyer...

He meets Chester's gaze.

JIM (CONT'D)

Prior to Conkling and the Customs House, your clients were poor and weak. Disenfranchised. You fought your battles for the little man. Often for no payment whatever.

Chester softens. It's true.

JIM (CONT'D)

I can't figure why a man like that would pivot to machine politics.

CHESTER

Maybe I was a far better customs collector than I was a lawyer.

He shakes his head.

CHESTER (CONT'D)

One can only punch up and lose so many times. Better to be within the system than perpetually without.

JIM

And, now that you're within? Once he can see the whole summit, what does Chester Arthur stand for?

A beat. Chester falters. He's at a genuine loss.

Just then, the door opens behind Jim. It's Conkling.

JIM (CONT'D)

Senator.

CONKLING

Mr. President. Word around town is you've been having trouble holding onto some of your appointees...

JIM

Yes. What is it, do you think, with men losing their spines lately?

CONKLING

Quite the epidemic. Perhaps you'd have greater success directing your search elsewhere. New York, maybe.

Jim doesn't bite. He just smiles.

JIM

I've got an ace or so up my sleeve yet. Ever a delight, gentlemen--

CONKLING

Oh. Before I forget. Kate Sprague asked to send regards. She tells me you two were once friends?

There it is. He's landed a body blow. Jim goes *tense*.

He casts a last look at Chester. Walks out, past Conkling.

CONKLING (CONT'D)

Poor bastard's grasping at straws.
He has no clue he's already dead.

Off Chester, stewing quietly...

30 EXT. LAFAYETTE SQUARE - WASHINGTON, D.C. - DUSK 30

Charlie's back at his park bench, peering ahead at the White House. Watching as a light flickers in Garfield's window.

Something unknowable going on inside. Charlie's eyes narrow.

31 INT. DINING ROOM - WHITE HOUSE - DUSK 31

Crete roams in to find Jim and Blaine presiding over a mess of paperwork. Crafting their list of back-up candidates.

BLAINE

Right. We want Robert Todd Lincoln for Secretary of War, and Senator Bruce as our Treasury Register...

CRETE

You might try Hunt for the Navy.

Both men look at her. Surprised.

CRETE (CONT'D)

Come on. Hunt. Claims court judge, has the-- er, thing on his chin--

BLAINE

Ah yes, *that* Hunt. The billy goat. Hm. Not the worst idea, actually.

Crete sidles into the chair beside him. Blaine squints.

BLAINE (CONT'D)

Hold on. Isn't the First Lady slated to host wives' club this evening?

CRETE

No, I told them you're taking over. Go strap on a bonnet and hoof it.

BLAINE

For the record, Rutherford Hayes's wife was so much nicer than you.

They exchange a smirk. Blaine slides her over a drink.
Both of them regard Jim, who's staring off absently.

BLAINE (CONT'D)
Somebody needs a bit more coffee.

JIM
I can't seem to drive it from my brain. That smug look he gave me earlier. He's enjoying himself.

CRETE
And making his way through said wives' club, all the while...

She glances at Jim. He meets her gaze.

BLAINE
A wretch like Conkling can only be stamped out if you match him blow for blow. Fight fire with fire.

CRETE
My husband's a famously poor hater.

JIM
It's true. And I deprecate war. But if it's brought to my door... well, the bringer will find me at home.

He smiles wryly. Blaine turns to Crete.

BLAINE
Kind of a subtle dynamo, isn't he?

CRETE
Just wait till you get him drunk.

32

INT. FOYER - BLAINE'S HOUSE - NIGHT

32

A sharp, forceful KNOCKING at Blaine's door. He pads into the foyer, gripping a tiny SIDE ARM. Stows it in his robe's folds.

The knocks persist, ramping in intensity. Blaine unlocks the door, bracing himself for a brawl. Twists the knob, slowly...

BLAINE
Guess I knew it was only a matter of time before Roscoe sent his thugs--

To find CHARLIE, smiling there on the porch. Hat in hand.

CHARLIE

Good evening, Senator Blaine!

Blaine squints, confused. He nudges Charlie aside and glares past him, clearly expecting a greater dispatch of thugs.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)

Is now a bad time? I'd like to chat on the subject of appointments--

BLAINE

Listen. You tell your boss that James Blaine is no Levi Morton or William Allison. I won't be cowed or intimidated. The Secretary of State post is to remain filled.

Charlie balks. Equally bewildered.

CHARLIE

To be candid, sir, I never even assumed Secretary of State was on the table. I had been hoping for a French consulship at *best*.

BLAINE

Consul... what are you saying?

CHARLIE

Charles Guiteau. We worked together in New York City, on the campaign.

He extends a hand. Blaine glances down at it, blankly.

BLAINE

So, let me be clear. You are *not* here to cow or intimidate me?

Charlie laughs. Startling him.

CHARLIE

Intimidate you? Oh God, no! I was just in the area, and thought I'd stop by and say hello. Offer my company for a quick nightcap.

BLAINE

Have you any idea what time it is?

CHARLIE

Gee, I'd estimate about half past.

Blaine just stares at him.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)

Sir. If I could bend your ear for just five minutes, to impress the value a man like me could bring--

BLAINE

I'm too old for nightcaps. Goodbye.

With that, he slams the door on Charlie.

33

INT. LIBRARY - WHITE HOUSE - NIGHT

33

Jim has a drink with ROBERT TODD LINCOLN, 30s. His pick for Secretary of War. The eldest son of Abraham and Mary Todd.

LINCOLN

I thank you for your faith in me, sir. It's not often a man with my name is rated on his own merits.

JIM

Mm. I hope we'll be able to confirm you soon, Robert. Once our deadlock in the Senate is finally resolved.

He stares past him. Lost in thought.

LINCOLN

Are you all right, Mr. President?

JIM

I'm sorry. As of late I've had some trouble sleeping through the night.

LINCOLN

Yes. I imagine the old girl still bumps and creaks, same as she did when my father occupied the place.

JIM

I haven't ever asked you about him.

Robert sits back. He nods.

LINCOLN

Well, I suppose I could field an inquiry or two. For a friend.

JIM

I heard a rumor, once. That Lincoln was often plagued by dark dreams.

The younger Lincoln falters. Jim's head stirs, quietly.

JIM (CONT'D)

When I was a boy, I almost drowned on the Ohio River. A coil of rope, snagged on a splinter, saved me.

He laughs to himself.

JIM (CONT'D)

The fever, a week later. Hard and fast. My mother dug a grave in the yard, next to my father's. And yet.

His eyes go hollow.

JIM (CONT'D)

Chickamauga. In your father's war.

LINCOLN

You served at the River of Death...

Jim stays quiet. Swallows his drink.

JIM

Again, I cheated the devil. By the laws of reason and sheer physics, I ought to not be here. God chose me, I understand that. But every night without fail, I die in my dreams.

LINCOLN

And you think it has some meaning.

JIM

I don't know what I think. Lately they have grown-- more *acute*.

LINCOLN

There is one thing that I recall.

He looks to Jim.

LINCOLN (CONT'D)

A dream he spoke of. I'd forgotten about it, till now. Though I don't know it'll do you much good to--

JIM

Please, Robert. If you would.

Lincoln takes a breath.

LINCOLN

He's in these halls, late at night.

34 INT. EAST HALL / VESTIBULE - WHITE HOUSE - NIGHT 34

A tall SHADOW of a MAN, seen only from behind, wanders the White House. Dimly lit corridors, vacant. Purged of life.

LINCOLN (V.O.)
*Every room, empty. Not another soul
 to greet him. When, suddenly...*

Heavy WEEPING. The man pauses. The floor under him's DAMP.

LINCOLN (V.O.)
*He discerns a crying, from the end
 of the corridor. Uncontrolled sobs,
 bouncing off the walls. All around
 him, piercing. He's drawn in...*

At the hall's end, a COFFIN. Guarded by faceless Union MEN.

LINCOLN (V.O.)
*At the center of the room, Northern
 infantry stand vigil over a casket.
 "Who's in there?" he asks of the
 body inside. The men are quiet.*

We take in the soldiers' uniforms. They're all sopping WET.

LINCOLN (V.O.)
*"Who is it?" he asks again, tremor
 in his throat. No answer. "Who--"*

35 INT. LIBRARY - WHITE HOUSE - NIGHT 35

LINCOLN
*"Don't you know?" says the captain,
 now. "The president's been shot."*

36 INT. EAST HALL / VESTIBULE - WHITE HOUSE - NIGHT 36

The soldiers part. The man peers into the open coffin.
 Coming into focus, now. It isn't Lincoln at all. It's JIM.
 And inside the coffin, a MIRROR of his OWN SELF. His BODY,
 lying in REPOSE. A pair of HALF DIMES over his EYES...
 On Jim, looking now upon his DEATH MASK. HAUNTED.

37 INT. LIBRARY - WHITE HOUSE - NIGHT 37

We stay on Jim. His eyes trained on Robert Lincoln.

LINCOLN

He was tormented with guilt, those last years. That he sent so many to die, while he himself lived on...

JIM

It makes you wonder if one doesn't accrue a sort of debt, over time.

Robert looks at him strangely.

JIM (CONT'D)

Forgive me. Thank you, Robert. For staying up so late this evening.

LINCOLN

Sir.

He shows himself out, with trepidation.

Leaves Jim to the strange silence.

38

INT. WAITING PARLOR - WHITE HOUSE - DAY

38

On Charlie, staking out his spot in the line yet again. His gaze squared on the door. Watching as the knob *twists*...

JOE BROWN

Mr. Guiteau? The president will see you now. Please, come in.

Oh fuck. It's really happening. He's going to meet his hero.

Charlie pivots to Loeffler, the usher, in complete awe.

LOEFFLER

What are you waiting for? Go on.

39

INT. WEST HALL - WHITE HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

39

Charlie trails Joe down the corridor to Garfield's office. We can practically hear his heart beating out of its chest.

CHARLIE

Is he so great, in the flesh?

JOE BROWN

He's the most extraordinary man I've ever known in my life.

He opens the office door. Motions for Charlie to enter.

Charlie stares at him, nervously. Takes a breath. Steps in...

40

INT. JIM'S OFFICE - WHITE HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

40

To find Garfield himself, at his desk. Smiling politely.

The door shuts behind Charlie. They're all alone.

CHARLIE

Sir.

Jim stands. He offers his hand. Charlie grabs it.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)

We shook hands, the two of us, one time before. Back in Chicago. I'm sure you wouldn't remember it.

JIM

I apologize. I don't think I do.

CHARLIE

That's okay. We're here, now.

His head stirs. He beams at Jim. Eyes pooling with tears.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)

Forgive me. You have-- no clue how *hard* I've worked to get to you.

JIM

What can I do for you, Mister...

CHARLIE

Guiteau. My name's Guiteau. And all I want, sir, is to be your friend.

He hands him a copy of his speech. Jim briefly scans it.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)

I wrote this for you. A speech I gave at the rally in New York.

JIM

Thank you. It's deeply generous.

CHARLIE

I mean every word of it. You're an inspiration. Your story of ascent, from poverty to the highest office in the land, has kept me going all this time. A flare of hope at the end of a very long, murky tunnel.

He laughs. Jim just stares back. His face unreadable.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)

This might sound peculiar. But I feel, in my core-- that I do *know* you, Mr. Garfield. I'm your man.

We stay on him. Firming his gaze.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)

Help me.

JIM

Sorry?

CHARLIE

Help me to succeed, in the way you did. Let me in. Open the door. I am asking-- I am begging you. Tell me.

He gasps on his words.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)

Tell me how I can be great, too.

A beat. Jim nods, quietly.

JIM

I'm afraid you misinterpret me, Mr. Guiteau. We're all only human. It's God, not I, who grants us purpose.

Charlie deflates. This isn't what he was expecting to hear.

Just then, the door opens. It's Joe. Visibly shaken.

JOE BROWN

Sir, there's been an incident that requires your urgent attention.

Jim reads the look on Joe's face. Gets up, right away.

JIM

It was very nice to meet you, Mr. Guiteau. If you'll excuse me...

A hint of panic in Charlie's eyes. He jolts to his feet.

CHARLIE

And you, likewise! You've given me much to consider, and I hope we can pick up at a later date. Until then, might I submit myself for a post--

JOE BROWN

All decisions will be made shortly.

Jim breezes past Charlie, out the door. It's over.

Abandoning him there. Totally alone. Forgotten, again.

Till he registers he's been left in the executive office.

He contemplates the space quietly. Runs his fingers along the spines of Garfield's bookshelf. Puts a hand on his armchair.

Sidles in, with caution. He's seated at the desk of the most important man in the world. This moment, it belongs to him.

And what's more, the chair under him is still warm. Charlie shuts his eyes. He exhales, his whole body sinking in...

LOEFFLER (O.S.)

What do you think you're doing?

His eyes open. Loeffler's staring at him in the doorway.

They glare at one another. Charlie smiles, simply.

41

INT. PRESIDENT'S SUITE - WHITE HOUSE - DAY

41

Jim rushes into his room, flanked by Joe. He finds Crete in bed, unconscious. She's burning up. Doctors tending to her.

MOLLIE

We were on our ride. She fainted,
out of the blue. I-- I don't--

He gives her a hug. Nods to Joe, who guides Mollie outside.

Joins Crete at her bed. Puts her palm to his cheek. It's HOT to the TOUCH, yet her lips are BLUE. Shivering with COLD.

He looks up at Dr. SUSAN EDSON, 50s, the family's physician.

DR. EDSON

She came to us with a peak fever.
Running hot and cold, at once...

JIM

I know those symptoms. They're the
ones that nearly took me as a boy.
The same that claimed my father.

Edson dabs a damp towel to Crete's brow. Jim stares at his wife, his eyes hollow. He glances at Dr. Edson. Pleading.

DR. EDSON
We're doing everything we can, sir.

42 INT. FOYER - BOARDING-HOUSE - NIGHT

42

Charlie skulks back into the boarding-house, spent from the day's events. Mrs. Lockwood hands him a piece of mail.

MRS. LOCKWOOD
For you, postmarked from Illinois.

On hearing that, Charlie lights up. He knows who it's from.

CHARLIE
Chicago. That's my sister. Fran.

He tears open the envelope. Inspects the letter inside.

A beat. Charlie sobers. Staring forward, absently.

MRS. LOCKWOOD
You look like you've just seen a ghost. Is everything all right?

CHARLIE
(his eyes twinkling)
No. No, not really. She's written to say our father died this past July.

Mrs. Lockwood gasps. She offers Charlie a hug. Holds him.

MRS. LOCKWOOD
Oh, you poor thing. I am so sorry.

Charlie goes limp in the woman's arms. He smiles faintly.

CHARLIE
Right. Let's see. July, I would've been in New York still. Stumping for the president. For James Garfield.

Off Charlie, beginning to *laugh*...

43 INT. PRESIDENT'S SUITE - WHITE HOUSE - NIGHT

43

Jim's posted at Crete's bedside. She's awake, finally.

CRETE
Quit making such a fuss. I'm fine.

She coughs, wincing. Looks to Jim.

CRETE (CONT'D)

If you're just going to sit there and stare with that dumb look all night, at least help distract me. How was the rest of your day?

They both laugh. Jim thinks back.

JIM

Well. This man asked a very odd question of me earlier. How might he achieve greatness, as I did?

CRETE

Hmph. Sounds like he wanted a job. And how did you reply to the man?

JIM

I said he'd come to me by mistake.

CRETE

Oh, Jim. You couldn't even give the poor guy something to go off of?

JIM

You know better than anyone I'm the furthest thing from a great man.

He meets Crete's gaze.

JIM (CONT'D)

I realize my dragging us back into this world has taken a toll. That it's resurrected the old wounds.

CRETE

You can't give me so little credit, that you think I fear Kate Sprague all these years later? We've lived whole lives since. And mind you, I could snap that lady like a twig.

They both smirk. Crete's head stirs.

CRETE (CONT'D)

You aren't perfect. But it's about more than just you, isn't it? That man from today, and many more like him-- *look up* to you now. You're something they can believe in--

JIM

They ought to find some other altar to worship at. I'm not their savior.

CRETE

No. You're their leader. Your job's to inspire hope. Make them believe.

She smiles. Jim looks at her. He chokes.

JIM

I... I don't know how I'm supposed to do any of this without you...

CRETE

I'm not going anywhere. I promise.

Jim nods. Crete grips him by the hand, as tight as she can.

CRETE (CONT'D)

You're a good man, Jim. Now go and show those bastards who we are.

44

INT. JIM'S OFFICE - WHITE HOUSE - NIGHT

44

Jim dashes off a new letter. Blaine reads it, quietly.

BLAINE

Are you sure you want to do this?

JIM

It's the last option we have to get our men through. Back down now and my government's his for plunder.

Blaine pinches at his brow. Uneasy.

BLAINE

This is extreme, Jim. It's akin to setting off a bomb in his backyard. Conkling will come at you. Use all he has in his power to destroy you.

Jim firms his gaze.

JIM

I expect it. But there's a method in quashing any hydra. You first cut the thing off, at its head--

He seals the note in an envelope, with BOILING WAX.

JIM (CONT'D)

--and cauterize the wound, before it's had a chance to re-grow.

Off Blaine, chewing on this...

45

INT. DEN - CONKLING'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

45

SMASH! As Conkling FLINGS his whole TEA SET into a WALL.

CONKLING

Fuck!!

KATE

I bought you that set as a gift.

CONKLING

He has *no* right. That cocksucker!

Their door bursts open. It's CHESTER, gasping for air:

CHESTER

Have you fucking heard already?

CONKLING

It's all over town. He's gutting the New York Customs House, right out from under us. Son of a--

Chester slumps on Conkling's sofa, kneading his forehead.

CHESTER

We built that goddamn institution from the ground up. You and me.

CONKLING

No president's ever nominated his own collector. That job's *ours*. Do we even know this, whatshisname--

CHESTER

Robertson. Moralizer. Fucking twat.

Kate squints at them both. Unmoved.

KATE

This seems a fairly minor concern.

CONKLING

The collector controls our ports. By which seventy-five percent of all federal revenue is earned.

KATE

And who was the last collector?

CHESTER

You're fuckin' *looking at him--!*

He's drunk. Kate winces at his breath.

CONKLING
If we lose Customs, we're cooked.

CHESTER
Not cooked. Crippled. Gimped. New York becomes just another state in the Union, absent of any power--

CONKLING
Prone to the whims of a tyrant.

The two men lock eyes.

KATE
Can't you just jam this Robertson in the Senate, same as you've done with all the other appointees--?

CONKLING
No, Garfield was clever this time. Any coward in that chamber with an axe to grind against New York will smell blood in the water. They'll confirm the man just to fuck me.

He peers up at Chester.

CONKLING (CONT'D)
It's a shot across our bow. No, this is Fort fucking Sumter. *Casus belli*.

CHESTER
Damn right. *Casus* fucking *belli*.

Chester offers his hand.

CHESTER (CONT'D)
No more pussyfooting from me. I'm with you on this-- to the end.

Conkling considers him. He accepts.

CONKLING
Give word to all. We go to **war**.

46 EXT. LAFAYETTE SQUARE - WASHINGTON, D.C. - DAY 46

Charlie marches up to the White House, fiercely determined.

47 INT. WAITING PARLOR - WHITE HOUSE - DAY 47

Charlie pushes his way into the room. He finds it EMPTY.

CHARLIE

It's 7:30. Where is everyone?

LOEFFLER

The president has suspended his calling hours indefinitely.

CHARLIE

No. He can't do that. He made a promise during the campaign, that he would meet with his public...

LOEFFLER

You had your audience already, pal. Go home and bother someone else.

CHARLIE

I'm not your pal. And I need to see him, this instant. We've pressing matters to discuss. Step aside.

He gazes past Loeffler, at the door. Loeffler doesn't budge.

LOEFFLER

Don't you even think about it.

Too late. Charlie JUKES HIM. Makes a BREAK for the DOOR.

It's LOCKED. Fuck. He starts BANGING. Again and AGAIN.

CHARLIE

Mr. President! Mr. President--!

Suddenly, Loeffler LUNGES for HIM. Charlie DODGES, quick -- Loeffler MISSES by a NOSE. Nearly CRASHES into an END TABLE. He spots Charlie pawing MADLY at a NEW STACK of STATIONERY.

LOEFFLER

Put those down, you devil!

CHARLIE

You eat shit. I am a taxpayer!

He shirks Loeffler. Tears straight OUT of the PARLOR.

Pages of stationery flying freely in his wake.

DR. EDSON

She took a bad turn overnight, I'm afraid. Her body's weakening by the hour. Thus far, it hasn't responded to our efforts to quell the fever.

Jim glances past her. Sees Crete in bed. Deathly PALE.

JIM

No. No, you aren't making sense. She's fine. Just yesterday, after you left, we were-- we laughed--

Dr. Edson and Blaine share a look.

DR. EDSON

I'm very sorry, sir. But you may want to prepare your children.

JIM

What the hell do you mean by that?

BLAINE

Jim.

He reaches a hand out. Jim snaps away from him, abruptly.

JIM

I... I need some time with my wife.

He walks into the bedroom. Shuts the door behind him.

BLAINE

Please, Doctor. We can't afford to have him fall apart right now. You must keep her with us at all costs.

DR. EDSON

That's up to her, at this point.

49

EXT. LAFAYETTE SQUARE - WASHINGTON, D.C. - DAY

49

Blaine ambles through the park in silence, all but depleted.

CHARLIE (O.S.)

Mr. Secretary!

Charlie putters over to him. Blaine doesn't even look up.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)

My luck, to run into you here! I have, in my possession, a note of friendship from the president.

He exhibits a newly forged document, on stolen stationery.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)

It's my understanding that you, as the presumptive Secretary of State, are responsible for filling open posts within your department--

BLAINE

For God's sake, man. Not right now.

CHARLIE

Look. Just *look*. This letter is a vote of confidence, a full-throated endorsement from Garfield himself, to put me at the French consul--

Blaine takes the letter. Shreds it IN HALF. Flings it BACK.

BLAINE

You just don't know when to quit, do you? Let me put an end to it, then. The consul job's *filled*.

Charlie goes red in the face.

CHARLIE

No. No, that can't be right. I've been made certain assurances--

BLAINE

You have not. Forging documents is a crime. You're lucky I don't march you straight to the authorities.

CHARLIE

I've forged nothing. I can't figure why you would talk to me this way, when all I want to do is help...

He picks his words carefully.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)

I am tenacious, yes. But I persist only because I am devoted to this president with my whole heart. He is a friend to the common man--

BLAINE

Sir, he does not *know* you. Nor you him. No, you persist because you're a seeker. An opportunist. A pest.

Charlie meets his gaze.

BLAINE (CONT'D)

And you have no prospect of a job
in this White House whatsoever.

Finally, the truth. And it cuts Charlie to his fucking core.

Blaine strides off, fastening his coat. He skirts the scraps
of letter in the dirt. Withdrawing deeper into the park...

Charlie watches him go. The words ringing, again and again.

Any last hint of warmth drains from his eyes. They're vacant.

Just then, he cranes down. Whisks something off the ground.
Takes a step forward. Sprints. Catching back up to Blaine.

Blaine turns, glimpses him HEAD ON. Still *pissed*-- **THWACK!**

A beat. Charlie lets his hand fall. He exhales, softly.

Blaine, stunned STUPID, pats at his BROW. His fingers' TIPS,
CAPPED in BLOOD. His eyes go WIDE, suddenly very ALARMED...

He glares at Charlie. At the ROCK he grips TIGHT in HIS HAND.

Draws back. Tumbles to the ground. At Charlie's FEET, NOW.

BLAINE (CONT'D)

No. Please. Whatever you want...

Sees Charlie's eyes. Militant. FIRM.

His lips and mouth TWIST in a chilling GRIMACE.

THWACK! As he BRINGS the ROCK DOWN. Again. AGAIN. AGAIN --

50 EXT. LAFAYETTE SQUARE - WASHINGTON, D.C. - DAY 50

On Charlie, same as before. Watching Blaine walk away.

He stares after him a long while. Not blinking.

Birds chirp and caw quietly overhead.

CHARLIE (V.O.)

*Mr. President. I write you tonight
as a citizen, deeply troubled.*

51 INT. CHARLIE'S ROOM - BOARDING-HOUSE - NIGHT 51

Charlie churns out word after word by candlelight.

CHARLIE (V.O.)

*As you are well aware, I'm a day
one stalwart of yours. And I have
been trying to be your friend. But
I do not think you appreciate it.*

52 INT. JOE'S OFFICE - WHITE HOUSE - NIGHT 52

Joe files away all of Charlie's letters, none of them opened, in a box. One of many he condemns to a cluttered cabinet.

The ballyhooed special file.

CHARLIE (V.O.)

*Instead you've chosen to surround
yourself with wicked, vindictive
men. Cold-hearted men, who would
sooner spit on those under them
than offer any sort of leg up.*

53 INT. DEN - CONKLING'S APARTMENT - NIGHT 53

Conkling rallies his band of faithfuls. Chester by his side.

CHARLIE (V.O.)

*Was this your great vision? More
of the same -- at the expense of
those poor, hardworking souls who
trusted you with their vote? Has
it been so long, that you do not
know you were once one of them?*

54 INT. CHARLIE'S ROOM - BOARDING-HOUSE - NIGHT 54

Charlie's hand darts madly across the page. Bleeding ink.

CHARLIE (V.O.)

*You were supposed to be the one who
finally changed things. A president
for the people. I shouted your name
in the streets for months, until my
voice ran hoarse. I fought for you,
desperately. But you **lied** to us.*

55 INT. PRESIDENT'S SUITE - WHITE HOUSE - NIGHT 55

Mollie and the other children gather at Crete's bedside.

Jim sits in a corner, watching on. Eyes weary. Hasn't slept.

CHARLIE (V.O.)

You were elected on a fallacy. Your words, meaningless deceptions. All you've done is reinforce the gates. And what's more, the blame lies in part with me. I helped sell you.

56 INT. LOBBY - FIFTH AVENUE HOTEL - NIGHT 56

We snap back to New York on election night. Garfield's just won. Charlie revels with the other campaigners, euphoric.

Eyes glowing with tears. His greatest night of all.

CHARLIE (V.O.)

The worst mistake I ever made in my life was believing in you.

57 INT. MEZZANINE - SMITHSONIAN NATIONAL MUSEUM - DAY 57

Charlie tours the museum, once again. He walks past each of the artifacts. The important symbols in American lore...

CHARLIE (V.O.)

It's as you said in your speech. We stand now at a critical precipice.

His gaze falls on an empty case. Ripe for a new display.

CHARLIE (V.O.)

I know history will remember us for what we do in this moment.

58 INT. CHARLIE'S ROOM - BOARDING-HOUSE - NIGHT 58

Abruptly, Charlie hits on a thought. One that chills him.

CHARLIE (V.O.)

And I see now that God has granted me a special purpose, all along. A destiny, waiting to be fulfilled.

59 INT. O'MEARA & SONS - WASHINGTON, D.C. - DAY 59

A sporting goods store. Charlie crosses past in the window.

CHARLIE (V.O.)

Our nation cries out for help. If its president refuses to heed the call-- if he will not fix us--

He pauses. Something in the display case catches his eye.

60 INT. JIM'S OFFICE - WHITE HOUSE - DAY 60

Jim glares out the window at the pouring rain. Unmoored. Lost.

CHARLIE (V.O.)
*--then perhaps it's the **president**
himself who needs fixing most.*

61 INT. O'MEARA & SONS - WASHINGTON, D.C. - DAY 61

Charlie sets down the wad of crumpled bills on the counter.

CHARLIE
 Does it have a good force to it?

O'MEARA
 Boy. This here's a self-cocking .44
 caliber British bulldog. One of the
 strongest ever put into market.

He hands Charlie back a GUN. Yes. A fucking GUN.

Charlie tests its weight. Six and a half inches of STEEL.

It feels right. More than that. It feels powerful.

O'MEARA (CONT'D)
 We carry the handle in ivory too,
 if you want. But that'll run you
 a dollar more than the wood...

He offers the ivory option. Charlie studies it, intently.

By comparison, the wood handle he's holding looks cheap.

CHARLIE
 The ivory.

He palms the man his last dollar. No hesitation.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)
 It's *museum* quality.

62 EXT. POTOMAC RIVER - WASHINGTON, D.C. - DAY 62

Charlie's at the edge of the riverbank, away from view.

He raises his new pistol. Points it at a nearby tree. FIRES.

A piece of bark SHATTERS. Birds fly away, cawing WILDLY.

Charlie absorbs the recoil. Feels his blood COURSE.

He curls the trigger. Inhales. Fires AGAIN.

Marching forward. Popping off rounds.

Again. Again. AGAIN --

ROLL CREDITS.