

DEATH BY LIGHTNING

"Destiny of the Republic" (Ep. 104)

Written by

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Based on

Destiny of the Republic
by Candice Millard

CONKLING (V.O.)
*America is faced with a peril like never before. It's time for the true patriots to reveal themselves. Take action. Today we bring a **reckoning**.*

1 EXT. CITY HALL - NEW YORK CITY - DAY 1

On CONKLING, presiding over a gaggle of reporters from the steps of City Hall. Flanked on either side by his cronies.

CONKLING
I can no longer stay quiet about the dire state of affairs in Washington.

2 INT. DELMONICO'S - NEW YORK CITY - DAY 2

On CHESTER, speaking in a quiet corner with a journalist from the *Herald*. He leans forward. Tokes from a cigar, pensive.

CHESTER
As vice president, having sworn an oath to safeguard our republic, I can't sit back and-- and allow--

3 EXT. CITY HALL - NEW YORK CITY - DAY 3

CONKLING
--a tyrant. A corrupted autocrat in sheep's clothes, hell bent on mining power from the states to stoke his own radical agenda.

Reporters write diligently. Bombard him with questions.

4 INT. DELMONICO'S - NEW YORK CITY - DAY 4

CHESTER
Tough to admit. But Garfield hasn't been square with those who got him where he is today. Not a shred of loyalty. Merely broken promises.

5 EXT. CITY HALL - NEW YORK CITY - DAY 5

CONKLING
Have you seen him lately? Has any of you? The president now dodges the American people altogether.
(MORE)

CONKLING (CONT'D)

Issuing blanket decrees from the
closed doors of his big White House.

A clamor rises among the working men in the crowd. Fueled on
by a few of Conkling's own, shrewdly embedded throughout.

Conkling absorbs the hell he's wrought. He smiles quietly.

CONKLING (CONT'D)

I call on every honest, god-fearing
citizen to make their voices heard.
To march up to Pennsylvania Ave--

6 INT. TRAIN CAR - DAY

6

Conkling stalwarts occupy one whole train car. Each man with
a batch of papers they hand out to passengers, one by one.

Today's edition of the New York *Herald*, fresh off the press.

CONKLING (V.O.)

*--and demand that their so-called
president honor his commitments.*

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

7

The lackeys distribute free copies to passersby in the park.

CONKLING (V.O.)

Send him a message. Loud and clear.

A man in a rumpled suit coasts past. Takes a paper. Reads the
headline, blared across the page: **WHERE IS JAMES GARFIELD?**

We pan up to reveal CHARLIE. His eyes firm with resolve.

CONKLING (V.O.)

The people will not be ignored.

8 INT. DELMONICO'S - NEW YORK CITY - DAY

8

Chester douses his cigar. He smacks his lips once, twice.

CHESTER

Attribute me directly. Fuck it.

He takes a deep breath. Chuckles. Waves over more cognac.

CHESTER (CONT'D)

Can you imagine, for a few months I
actually got to be vice president?

Raises his glass to eye level. Studies the swirling liquid.

CHESTER (CONT'D)

I'll miss that view, most of all...

9

INT. LIBRARY - WHITE HOUSE - DAY

9

JIM and BLAINE field a crush of senators and congressmen from their party. Making a full court appeal for conciliation.

LEVI MORTON speaks first. The congressman we last saw usurped by Conkling's men in the dead of night, taken to his morgue:

LEVI

It's just about the ports. Let New York keep its damned collector and Conkling will call off his dogs.

Jim and Blaine exchange a look.

LEVI (CONT'D)

He's too powerful an enemy. He'll grind regular government to a halt until you rescind the nomination.

BLAINE

For fuck's sake. You're some of the most important men in Congress! But the second Conkling casts a look at any of you, all of a sudden you're Little Billie in the Ballad...

LEVI

All with eyes can see, there's only one puppet master at work here.

Blaine's jaw tightens.

BLAINE

What's that supposed to mean, Levi?

LEVI

You've been pulling the president's strings from day one. Fomenting the discord, tearing our party apart on account of your small vendetta--

BLAINE

I will knock those teeth clean out of your mouth, you lying wretch--

The room erupts. Jim steps in at once, inserting himself:

JIM

Men. Check yourselves this instant
or mark my words, I'll expel you
from this White House for good.

(to Blaine)

That means you too, Mr. Secretary.

Blaine cools down. Jim pivots his focus to the rest.

JIM (CONT'D)

And for those that do not yet know
me, take heed: I am my *own* man. The
only debt any of us owes is to the
people, not political operatives.

He meets each of their gazes.

JIM (CONT'D)

I made a vow to end the rot in our
system. Spoils, patronage. Call it
what you want. But it's wrong. Do-
nothings, siphoning taxpayer money
for jobs that don't exist. Elected
officials brazenly peddling their
influence at auction. This is not
how a democracy endures. This is
wrong. And all of you know it.

The politicians are quiet now.

JIM (CONT'D)

This is our fight. One day, years
from now, each of us will be judged
for what we did in this moment. How
will they talk about us, I wonder?

He chews at his lip. Turns to Blaine.

JIM (CONT'D)

Suspend all other points of order
in the Senate, till Judge Robertson
is heard for the collector post.

This sparks an uproar among the men.

LEVI

Is-- he allowed to do that, even?

JIM

My mind's made. It won't change. I
have to see to my wife. Good day.

He walks out. On Blaine, stunned as any of the others:

BLAINE

...just for the record. I would
not have advised him to do that.

CONKLING (V.O.)

*Weren't you imbeciles supposed to
be a Committee of Conciliation?*

10

INT. DEN - CONKLING'S APARTMENT - DAY

10

Levi and his committee bring the bad news to Conkling.

LEVI

The tide yawed a different way.

CONKLING

Gee, did it? Then allow me to yaw
it back for you. Any senator that
votes to proceed with Garfield's
man-- that vote'll be his *last*.

LEVI

Roscoe. Have you considered the
body might perhaps be swayed by
compassion rather than threats--

CONKLING

Oh, get the fuck out already. That
voice makes me want to hang myself.

Levi and his committee are promptly shown the door.

Conkling pinches at his brow. KATE appears beside him.

CONKLING (CONT'D)

They couldn't conciliate their way
out of a paper bag. Fool's work.

KATE

The seams are starting to show.

CONKLING

What do you feel? You have more
horse sense than any of them.

KATE

Can a collectorship really be so
important? Is it worth expending
all your capital on one front?

CONKLING

It's the ports. It's patronage. I
have no legacy, save for this.

KATE

No. You are *loved*. Don't you know you're the most popular man in all of New York, patronage or no? Street vendors on every corner tumble over themselves just to shake your hand. Parents name their children after you, purely out of admiration...

CONKLING

It could go away in a heartbeat.

KATE

You've got too low an opinion of other people. What moves them. A good leader knows when to fight wars and when to bring peace.

CONKLING

So what? You'd have me roll over, let Garfield take my collector?

KATE

On the contrary. He can't take a thing from you if you *give it to him* first. By the light of day.

Conkling laughs. But Kate's serious.

KATE (CONT'D)

You'll live without this collector. Be seen as the bigger man, that set aside his own interests to heal the party. You could be their unifier.

They share a look. Conkling softens, processing her gaze. A much more tender shade of him, we hadn't seen till now...

CONKLING

You know, Mrs. Sprague, I might really be lost without you.

KATE

I do. Which is why I ended things with the governor earlier today.

Conkling's eyes widen.

KATE (CONT'D)

I'm ready. I don't want to live my whole life in the shadows. It can be like we always talked about...

She beams. He doesn't reciprocate.

CONKLING

Sprague will blame me for this. He will come for me in the press. At a time I need every bit of support.

KATE

Is that all you can think about?

CONKLING

Kate. I have a family back home in Albany. Julia, and our daughter--

Kate deflates. This wasn't what she was expecting.

KATE

We've hardly been shy. The entirety of D.C. already knows about us.

CONKLING

Sure. But it won't play in Albany.

He tenses. Leaving Kate in the lurch.

CONKLING (CONT'D)

...and as it happens, I'm going to need Albany for what comes next.

11 INT. THE CAULFIELD - NEW YORK CITY - NIGHT

11

On TOM PLATT, 40s, junior senator from New York. Background crony up to this point. Dragged now into center stage.

At present, he's stunned stupid. Color sapped from his face.

PLATT

You want me to give up my Senate seat? But I... I just got...

CONKLING

It's the only way. Both of us must resign on behalf of New York.

Reverse on Conkling, with a plate of freshly killed lobsters.

They're at a luxe dinner theatre. Showgirls dancing on stage.

PLATT

I like being a senator, though.

CONKLING

Relax, Tom. It's temporary. A show of protest, to cuckold the fucker at the other end of the avenue.

Tearing off a CLAW. Snapping it in TWO. Sucking out MARROW.

PLATT

But with our two seats vacant, the rival party would have a majority in the Senate. We'd lose control.

CONKLING

For a few weeks, sure. During which chaos reigns the day-- Robertson's out the window, Garfield sees his whole agenda sacked and pillaged.

He discards the empty shell. Moves on to the next one.

CONKLING (CONT'D)

That is, until our friends in New York elect us right back to our old seats by a unanimous vote. Then we return to the Senate, triumphant--

THWACK! As he BRINGS the HAMMER DOWN on the poor crustacean.

CONKLING (CONT'D)

--voila. With a potent new mandate and a feckless fucking president, flinging himself at our feet.

The skit ends on stage. Conkling applauds. Smiles at Platt.

CONKLING (CONT'D)

Remind Garfield he can't so much as shit without New York's say-so.

Off Platt, now perhaps coming around on the idea...

12

INT. PRESIDENT'S SUITE - WHITE HOUSE - DAY

12

Jim sits at Crete's bedside. The color's slowly returned to her face. A plate of strawberry remains on the night stand.

CRETE

Feels very foolish, you know. That you're all making such a fuss over my keeping down a few strawberries.

JIM

Edson, maybe. I could care less. I'd planned to enjoy them myself, if you want to know the truth. So this all comes as sort of a disappointment.

Crete laughs, with a snort. It hurts.

CRETE

On second thought? Get me a bucket.

13 EXT. VERMONT AVE CHRISTIAN CHURCH - DAY

13

Jim attends Sunday mass with Blanche BRUCE, his nominee for Treasury Register. Still awaiting his Senate confirmation.

BRUCE

Conkling and Platt's resignations have thrown the whole Senate into turmoil. All regular proceedings of government ground to a halt.

JIM

For now.

BRUCE

We put our faith in you, sir. Went against New York by accepting roles in your administration. Now you've left your men hanging out to dry.

JIM

The collector's a federal job. It's my own to fill, not New York's...

BRUCE

I won't be bartered, Mr. President.

He glares Jim in the eyes.

BRUCE (CONT'D)

Treasury Register means every new dollar bill printed in America will have a Black man's signature across it. I hope you know what that is.

Jim studies him quietly.

BRUCE (CONT'D)

Conkling's made assurances. He'll confirm the rest of the nominees if you'll just concede on collector.

JIM

I understand. And I ask you, please, to trust in me just a moment longer.

14 INT. VERMONT AVE CHRISTIAN CHURCH - DAY

14

Jim and Bruce take their seats in the pews, near the front.

BRUCE

Your aims are righteous, of that I have no doubt. But in politics, you trade tricks. Nobody ever won the game by being a moral purist...

He motions to Christ, in perpetual agony on the crucifix.

JIM

You plan that jibe in advance?

BRUCE

Might've.

They share a smile. REV. POWER, 70s, assumes the podium.

REV. POWER

Corinthians, 15:42. *The body that's sown is perishable. It is raised--*

Jim and Bruce face forward. Listen on quietly, heads bowed.

A figure slinks into place in the row just behind them. We rack focus, to find... oh shit, it's him. It's Charlie.

Settled mere *inches* from the president. No one the wiser.

So close he can see every gray hair on Jim's scalp.

Sweat stains on his collar. This is no god.

He's just a man, like any other.

REV. POWER (CONT'D)

Now I declare to you, brothers and sisters, flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God--

Charlie tempers his breath. His heart is RACING.

He thumbs something, in his coat pocket. Cold and METAL.

REV. POWER (CONT'D)

We will not sleep, but we will be changed-- in a flash, the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet--

Jim's head stays bowed. Eyes closed. Still.

It'd be simple. All he'd need to do is *aim*, and...

REV. POWER (CONT'D)

--for the trumpet will sound. And the dead, they will be raised--

The gun's halfway OUT of his COAT.

A hair away, he stops SHORT. Paralyzed by FEAR.

REV. POWER (CONT'D)
*O grave, where is thy victory? O
 death, where is thy sting--?*

He locks eyes with Christ. With the parish. The children.

Feels them all staring back at him. Judging him.

All except Jim. Praying silently in his pew.

A clang of voices in Charlie's head.

He can't think. Can't--

REV. POWER (CONT'D)
*The sting of death is sin, and in
 the power of sin we find law--*

CHARLIE
 (spewing)
 --what know ye of Christ?!

Abrupt reflex. Loud enough to tamp the voices.

Everything goes dead quiet. Charlie's heart STOPS. *Did he really just...* his hand shoots up to his MOUTH. Too LATE.

Jim's eyes open, his trance broken. He turns. Sees him.

A glimmer of *recognition*, maybe... before he can place the man, Charlie jumps from his seat. Tumbles into the aisle.

Staggers out of the church, as the congregation watches on.

Jim glances ahead once more. Bruce laughs to himself.

BRUCE
 This city gets stranger by the day.

15

EXT. VERMONT AVE CHRISTIAN CHURCH - DAY

15

Charlie collapses on the church steps. Gasping for air.

He takes a beat. Calming down. Breathes in, out...

Feels the weight of the pistol in his coat.

Not here. Not while he's praying.

16

INT. JIM'S OFFICE - WHITE HOUSE - DAY

16

Jim prepares his briefcase. Chester enters, without knocking.

CHESTER

Garfield, I must speak with you. It will not wait a moment longer.

JIM

Certainly. Don't mind if I do a bit of light packing while we chat. I'm running very late, as it stands.

CHESTER

Taking off early? The Fourth isn't for another two weeks at least.

JIM

I'm bringing Crete up to Monmouth to continue her recovery there. Dr. Edson's advised a gentler air...

CHESTER

Mm. Shore's good for that. Brought Nellie there, when she got sick.

Jim looks up at him.

CHESTER (CONT'D)

I guess I know what it's like, to have to put your life on hold.

JIM

I'm sorry, Mr. Arthur. In all this time, I haven't asked about her.

Chester gives a faint smile.

CHESTER

Funny thing. Even among my closest friends, the topic seldom comes up. No matter. It's not why I'm here.

JIM

Please.

He gestures for him to have a seat.

CHESTER

No. If it's all the same, I think I'd prefer to stand for this.

JIM

For what?

CHESTER

Surely you've read the papers. You know that I spoke against you...

JIM

I believe that rings a bell, yes.

CHESTER

Does it? Good. Thusly, I submit my resignation as vice president.

He firms his posture, feigning pride. Sweating bullets.

Jim leans forward in his chair. Absorbs, quietly. Sits up.

JIM

Thank you. I don't accept it.

CHESTER

What?

JIM

I won't take your resignation. Not yet, at least. I'd really like if you'd give the job one more go.

CHESTER

Hang on. No, you must not grasp...
(laughing to himself)
I was openly disloyal. Called you all sorts of names in the press.

JIM

Yes. And I hope you'll come to me first next time, prior to airing your concerns with the public.

Chester squints at him.

CHESTER

I feel it my duty to explain to you that I really ought to be fired. I am a truly bad vice president--!

JIM

Not always. You didn't reject my other nominees on the Senate floor.

CHESTER

I didn't approve them in, either. I didn't even show up at the Capitol.

JIM

Sure. But it's not nothing, is it?

He resumes his packing. Chester pinches at his brow.

CHESTER

Our politics are not the same. I'm aligned with Conkling. In two days' time, I'll go to Albany to ensure his and Platt's re-elections...

JIM

You must do what you feel is right.

CHESTER

(his mind reeling)

I-- I can't see your game in this, for some reason it eludes me--

Jim meets Chester's gaze. He smiles.

JIM

There's no game. You've made your views perfectly known. And as your leader at present, I figure it's incumbent on me to change them.

Chester stares back. Begins to fume.

CHESTER

They'll not change. They will not evolve. They are fixed for good!

With that, he storms off. Jim calls out after him:

JIM

Don't be a stranger, Mr. Arthur. My door's always open to you--

CHESTER (O.S.)

Fuck!!

He nearly collides with Blaine, who stops in right after.

BLAINE

So, you finally canned the prick?

JIM

No. I'm giving him another try.

BLAINE

What on earth for? He must be the worst vice president in history.

JIM

Perhaps. But I feel there may be some good in him, deep down.

He clasps his bag shut. Smirks.

JIM (CONT'D)

That, and he's the only one who knows where the lion's share of our federal revenue is buried.

BLAINE

Oh well, of course. It *would* be very nice to see that again.

17

INT. PRESIDENT'S SUITE - WHITE HOUSE - DAY

17

Mollie and Joe finish packing Crete's belongings. They crack jokes to one another. Laughing, smiling. Strikingly warm.

Jim and Crete watch on, as he helps her out from their bed.

JIM

When did those two get so chummy? Back in Mentor, Mollie never had any use for Joe whatsoever...

Crete gives him a wry look.

JIM (CONT'D)

No. Really?

CRETE

Jim. I've practically been lain in a coma for weeks and even *I* know.

Jim balks. Crete just laughs.

CRETE (CONT'D)

You've been pre-occupied. When was the last time you got any sleep?

JIM

I don't know what I'm meant to do. Conkling is too powerful. He bought every man in Albany his seat. Their vote's nothing but a big charade--

His head stirs. He exhales.

JIM (CONT'D)

He'll be back on the Senate floor within days. Him and Tom Platt. And they'll demand my head on a pike.

CRETE

Probably.

JIM

The system won't change. Blanche Bruce and the rest are right. I've put my nominees-- good *honest* men, in harm's way. I gambled them off. For a fight I can't possibly win.

CRETE

But they'll see there was one man who fought anyway, for what was right. When no one else dared.

JIM

And lost his presidency, at that.

CRETE

Well, then it's a good thing you never wanted to be president.

They exchange a look. Jim not ready to admit it, yet.

CRETE (CONT'D)

Mollie can take me up to Monmouth alone. You stay in Washington. Show them you won't run from the battle.

JIM

If you think I'd abandon my wife...

CRETE

Please, she'll survive a week. Come to me when it's finished. You may go down in flames, sure. But you'll know who you are. That they can't destroy.

Off Jim's gaze, we hear a sudden SHRIEK --

18

INT. ROTUNDA - NEW YORK STATE CAPITOL - DAY

18

-- as a skinny teen WAILS on a huge TUBA, twice his SIZE.

Pull back to reveal a BRASS BAND of local Albany LADS. A huge banner that reads **WELCOME HOME TO ALBANY, ROSCOE CONKLING!**

All the stops pulled out for their native son. Conkling waves kindly, as he shakes hands with a row of eager STATE SENATORS.

He pivots to Chester, out of earshot from the commotion.

CONKLING

Ever seen such a pageant of shit-eating grins? Upstate yokel fucks, they know who butters their bread.

CHESTER

You'd think so, after all those goddamn infrastructure requests we've granted over the years.

(to his Albany pals)

So, have you state senators been making use of the new gymnasium?

SEN. MURTHA

Well Mr. Vice President, you can't put a price on physical fitness!

Conkling checks his watch.

CONKLING

Let's get this vote over with, shall we? Does anyone have eyes on Platt?

The state senators exchange looks. A few stiffling giggles.

Conkling and Chester watch as Platt slinks his way into the statehouse. His tail between his legs, for some odd reason.

CONKLING (CONT'D)

Is it just me, Chester, or is all of Albany laughing itself to tears at my running mate's expense...?

To his surprise, Chester is also suppressing a snicker.

CHESTER

What, you didn't hear about Tom?

SEN. MURTHA

He's all anybody's talking about.

CONKLING

Why? He's duller than a bag of hay.

CHESTER

Word on the street is last night at Delavan House, some of our Half-Breed rivals caught Platt in *flagrante*--

19

INT. PLATT'S HOTEL ROOM - DELAVAN HOUSE - NIGHT

19

On Platt, NAKED as SIN, REAMED by a local HOOKER.

Bound to the BED POSTS. Chafing on a NECK TIE in his MOUTH.

HOOKER

You've been naughty, Thomas. Some gal oughta teach you a lesson...

Platt emits a muffled GROAN. Eyes reeled back in BLISS.

A knock at the WINDOW. Platt cranes his head to find two MEN, perched on a step ladder. Whistling. Howling like HYENAS.

He erupts in a PANIC. Thrashing madly against his BONDS:

PLATT

Mmph! Mmph! *Mmmppph--!*

20

INT. SENATE FLOOR - NEW YORK STATE CAPITOL - DAY

20

Chester smirks. Clearly amused, and a little impressed.

CHESTER

I didn't think Tom had it in him. I guess you never know with some men.

Conkling glares at Platt across the room. He's not laughing.

CONKLING

Cut him.

CHESTER

What?

CONKLING

He couldn't keep his cock in his pants for one night. Now the whole delegation is openly mocking him.

CHESTER

Come on, it's just harmless fun...

CONKLING

He's a clown to them now. A clown and a cheater. Men like that don't get voted back into the Senate. We either cut our ties or the weight of him will drag us all under.

Chester's smile dims. He searches Conkling's gaze.

CHESTER

We've known Tom twenty years. I'm godfather to his kids. He's stood for us, always. He's a friend.

CONKLING

You know better than anyone, there isn't any such thing in politics.

He bites his lip. Thinks.

CONKLING (CONT'D)

We'll do it quietly. Swap him off the ticket. Replace his name with that of some other party loyal...

CHESTER

Can it really be so simple as that?

Conkling turns to his lackeys in the state Senate.

CONKLING

You, Murtha. Want to move to D.C.?

Murtha's eyes bulge.

SEN. MURTHA

I, uh-- well, the cherry blossoms--

CONKLING

Stupendous. It's settled. Willy my boy, welcome to the big leagues.

(to Chester)

Whatever it takes. That's our law.

They share a look. Conkling walks off, sporting a big smile as he pays his respects to the local assembly in his honor.

Just then, Platt joins him. Sporting a nervous smile.

PLATT

So, what's the big man got to say?

Chester stares emptily past him.

PLATT (CONT'D)

Chester? Is something the matter?

CHESTER

Let's have a walk, Tom. Just us.

21 INT. CONFSSIONAL - CATHOLIC CHURCH - NIGHT

21

Charlie sits in the dark. His eyes fixed straight ahead.

CHARLIE

Evening, Father. It's been-- a long time since my last confession. But I have something to ask the Lord.

PRIEST

He listens, always. Speak freely.

A beat. Charlie's head stirs.

CHARLIE

I've been charged, you see, with a great and terrible task. I know it must be done, and that I'm the man to carry it out. There is no other who will. But I'm scared, Father.

He lowers his gaze.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)

I feel-- an *evil* that pervades our earth. I see it proliferate by the day, and infect the souls of other men. I fear, if unchecked, it will plunge us into a second great war.

His jaw tightens.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)

Worse, I am responsible. I helped kindle this thing, this corruption, in its infancy. I watered the seed. I allowed it to appeal to my pride, and move me. Lord, I have *sinned*--

He chokes on his words.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)

What is one life, weighed against hundreds of thousands that may die if I do not act? If I am too weak? How will I ever meet this moment?

His eyes narrow.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)

There is only one thing to be done here. That I might redeem myself of sin in the eyes of the Lord.

PRIEST

(at a loss)

You seem... well, you certainly do seem a very *driven* young man...

On Charlie, a light bulb:

CHARLIE

It is God who grants me purpose.

Conkling waits intently in a prime box, Chester beside him.

CHESTER

They're taking their sweet time.

CONKLING

I'd milk it too, if I were them.
It's not often a band of po-dunk
state senators get to hold the
nation's fate in their hands.

The last man casts his vote, gives a terse nod to Conkling.

His Half-Breed opponents sit across the aisle, tallying votes
in a frenzy. Shaking their heads. They know they're cooked.

CONKLING (CONT'D)

There. If we leave now, we can be
back in Washington by daybreak.

Just then, the men all hear a crowd of footsteps enter from
above. The state senators glance up en masse, tensely...

To find a coalition of WOMEN, filing into the rafters.

Upon their arrival, the room goes totally silent.

CHESTER

The legislators' wives, I presume?

CONKLING

Albany Women's League. They show
their faces for every big vote.

He leans his head back, extends the ladies a genteel smile.

They all meet his eyes. Not their usual chipper selves.

No. They're decidedly stern. Clear hint of *contempt*.

CONKLING (CONT'D)

Huh.

He shifts his gaze, again, to the state senators. They're all
looking straight at their WIVES. Something's GOING ON...

CHESTER

Is that--

Conkling turns. Spies a new FACE, emerged in the rafters. It's
the CHAIR of the Women's League. Her young DAUGHTER, in tow.

CONKLING

Julia.

His own wife, JULIA. An Albany gal, BORN and BRED.

SEN. MURTHA

We haven't had Mrs. Conkling at our Capitol in some time-- oh, and what a precious little girl you have--!

He waves. So does Chester. Julia doesn't react.

She peers down at her husband. Fucking PISSED.

Another woman appears beside her. It's KATE.

In an instant, Conkling's smile is GONE.

CHESTER

Oh shit.

All the women are in LOCK STEP. A collective GAZE. And their husbands -- not ONE of them will look Conkling IN the EYE.

It DAWNS on HIM. Then and THERE. He HOPS to his FEET --

CONKLING

Stop the vote!

SENATE CHAIR

The vote's already been rendered.

CHESTER

Roscoe.

Conkling pivots to Chester. The two men lock eyes.

For once in Conkling's life, he doesn't have the words.

He staggers back into his seat. Aghast. Stupefied. Like he's just been fucking *shivved* in the gut, Red Wedding style.

On Chester, seeing the whites of his mentor's eyes:

CHESTER (CONT'D)

...Roscoe?

On Julia and the Women's League, watching on from above.

On Kate, departing from the rafters. Her deed done.

On Conkling, helpless to prevent what's coming:

SENATE CHAIR

The final combined tally: thirty-four for Senator Roscoe Conkling, and **fifty** for Chauncey Depew--

Applause. Conkling shuts his eyes tight. Mortally wounded.
The most powerful man in America is now out of a job --

23 INT. JOE'S OFFICE - WHITE HOUSE - DAY 23

Blaine hovers over Joe's telegraph. He can't help but laugh.

BLAINE

Son of a bitch actually did it.

He darts out into the hall, shouting to the nearest aide:

BLAINE (CONT'D)

Put our appointees up for a floor
vote. Every single man. Right now!

24 INT. ROTUNDA - NEW YORK STATE CAPITOL - DAY 24

Conkling motors past the band in his honor, seething madly:

CONKLING

Step the fuck out of my way--!

25 INT. SENATE FLOOR - NEW YORK STATE CAPITOL - DAY 25

As two random old fucks, Chauncey DEPEW and Elbridge LAPHAM,
assume their brand-new seats on the floor of the Senate.

DEPEW

Chauncey Depew, for New York.

LAPHAM

Elbridge Lapham, for New York!

Chester plunks back down in his seat. Rattled to his core.

SEN. MURTHA

Wha-- what happens now, Mr. Arthur?

CHESTER

We just lost our fuckin' collector.

26 INT. SENATE CHAMBER - U.S. CAPITOL - DAY 26

Judge ROBERTSON, 50s, finally submits for Senate approval.

ROBERTSON

William H. Robertson. Chief Customs
Collector for the Port of New York.

27 INT./EXT. PORT OF NEW YORK - DAY 27

Judge Robertson directs a huge OVERHAUL of the PORTS.

Crooked dockworkers EJECTED. Stolen cargo RECLAIMED. Police SMASH OPEN a LOCK BOX. Supervisors fleeing out WINDOWS...

CHESTER (V.O.)
...our entire goddamn way of life.

On the corrupt FOREMEN, paraded OUT of the PORT in CUFFS.

28 EXT. COTTAGE BY THE SEA - MONMOUTH, NJ - DAY 28

A modest retreat. Calm rush of waves on a sprawling shore.

29 INT. PARLOR - COTTAGE BY THE SEA - DAY 29

Crete reads the paper at her bay window in Monmouth, taking in the ocean's breeze. **GARFIELD TRIUMPHS OVER NY MACHINE.**

30 INT. LIBRARY - WHITE HOUSE - DAY 30

On Blanche Bruce, etching his SIGNATURE on a DOLLAR PROOF in ink as Jim watches on. Bruce sits back. He takes a moment.

BRUCE
 I don't like to talk about where I came from. People I left behind.

His eyes don't leave the page.

BRUCE (CONT'D)
 All my life I've had to beg pardon. Shake hands with monsters, hold my tongue. Notch my wins discreetly.

Jim stares back at him.

BRUCE (CONT'D)
 Played the long game, just so my name could be on a piece of paper. One they won't be able to deny.

A beat. He smiles quietly to himself.

BRUCE (CONT'D)
 ...it's not everything. But it *is* something. And one day it'll be more.

He studies his name on the proof.

BRUCE (CONT'D)

Hell. You know, I think I'd like to try it over. Sign a little bigger.

His gaze meets Jim's. They both smirk.

31

INT. JIM'S OFFICE - WHITE HOUSE - DUSK

31

Jim sits at his desk. Joe walks in, sporting a grin.

JOE BROWN

We've been fielding inquiries from every newspaper in America. They want to know how you did it...

JIM

Did what?

JOE BROWN

How you won. How you singlehandedly dismantled the most powerful force in all of politics. You're a hero.

JIM

No. Nothing's been done yet. Three months in office, nearly a hundred days with no laws passed. My focus till now, a petty partisan war...

JOE BROWN

Right, one that will shape the face of our country for generations. If you can outplay Roscoe Conkling--

JIM

There was no play, Joe. I had none. No ace hid up my sleeve. No great gambit. I had only my faith, and even that-- I thought we'd lose.

Joe's smile fades.

JIM (CONT'D)

We got lucky this time. But for so long as America stands, there will always be more Roscoe Conklings.

JOE BROWN

Even still. You've shown the people there's a way. A path to change.

JIM

Joe, you rate all this too high--

JOE BROWN
 --for God's sake, Mr. President,
 give yourself fucking credit!

He stops himself, a moment late.

JOE BROWN (CONT'D)
 I... I'm sorry. But I shouldn't be
 here. Men like me don't ever get to
 be here. Do you know what it is--

JIM
 I do.

He looks Joe in the eyes.

JIM (CONT'D)
 You're where you ought to be, Joe.

Joe swallows, quietly. He nods.

JIM (CONT'D)
 Yeah. Now go enjoy a few days off.
 After that, the real work starts.

JOE BROWN
 I look forward to it. Have a great
 Independence Day, Mr. President.

Joe exits with a smile. Jim takes a beat. He peers out his
 window, watching as the sun sets over Lafayette Park...

And a lone empty bench, facing the White House.

32 INT. EAST HALL - WHITE HOUSE - NIGHT

32

Jim roams the empty halls of the White House, all alone.

No mysterious sounds. No haunting visions or demons lurking
 around corners. It's quiet here tonight. Peaceful, somehow.

Suddenly, we hear a quiet rustle nearby. Jim seizes, briefly.
 But it's just the stray DOG his children took in. A friend.

Jim bends down, scratches its belly. The dog laps it up.

JIM
 Good boy.

33 INT. PRESIDENT'S SUITE - WHITE HOUSE - DAY

33

On ABRAM and IRVIN, fast asleep in their mother's bed.

The door creaks open. Hint of light pouring out. A pair of footsteps, a murky shadow descending upon the children...

Jim BOUNDS IN. Waking them in a FRENZY. Swoops them BOTH IN his ARMS, SWINGING them THROUGH the AIR like RAG DOLLS.

They cackle WILDLY, as Jim BREAKS into a SHOW TUNE:

JIM

*I am the very model of a modern
Major-General! I've information
vegetable, animal and mineral--*

The boys TWIST from his GRASP. Abram does a HEAD FLIP.

ABRAM

You may be president of America
but I know you can't do that!

JIM

Care to make it interesting?

He sinks to his knees. Cracks his neck, with great flourish. Executes a pretty decent HAND STAND, to his boys' utter AWE.

JIM (CONT'D)

As payment, I demand my vittles!

ABRAM

What's that?

IRVIN

Food!

He emits a hungry GROWL. Doing his best GRIZZLY ACT. Irvin and Abram BREAK for IT. Jim PURSUES, on HANDS and KNEES...

Dr. EDSON and Robert LINCOLN, Jim's freshly minted Secretary of War, manifest at the door. They both watch on, stunned.

DR. EDSON

What the devil's gotten into him?

LINCOLN

I may be mistaken, but I believe
he's had a full night's sleep.

34 EXT. BALTIMORE & POTOMAC STATION - WASHINGTON, D.C. - DAY 34

Jim's carriage pulls up outside the station. He gets out with his two eldest sons, HARRY and YOUNG JIM. Their bags packed.

Blaine and Lincoln accompany them, going over action items:

BLAINE

We'll put a rush on civil service,
position voting rights to time with
your tour of the South in August.

JIM

Mm. As If I wasn't already loathed
enough below the Mason-Dixon Line.

A Metro beat cop, KEARNEY, 30s, holds open the door for them.

JIM (CONT'D)

Hi there. How much time have we got
before the train up to Monmouth?

KEARNEY

Ten minutes or so, Mr. President.

Jim nods in thanks. The group disappears into the station.

35 INT. WAITING ROOM - BALTIMORE & POTOMAC STATION - DAY 35

Jim heads for the platform, with his two sons and two aides.

JIM

Blaine. Secretary Lincoln. Do you
have nothing better to do on this
gorgeous holiday than stalk us?

BLAINE

Not me. Sadly, I toasted a bit too
hard to Conkling's demise. Harriet
changed the locks on our door again.

JIM

God help her. Oh Robert, one other
thing as it relates to the sta--

A short POP! pre-empts him, rather rudely.

Jim looks ahead, as a service worker DROPS his KIT. Oops.

Mess of tools SPILLING OUT across the FLOOR. Bolts, NAILS and
whatnot. The worker issues a *mea culpa*, bends to gather...

Stops cold, on seeing the TOOL KIT. There's a BULLET IN IT.

Jim and his party see it too. Confused looks abound.

Harry follows the bullet's TRAIL. Tracking it to--

HARRY

Dad?

Jim peers down at his own right ARM.

Spots a new SLICE in his jacket's FABRIC.

JIM

Huh.

Just then, the hole begins to SWELL with BLOOD.

His eyes go WIDE. One of his sons SHRIEKS.

JIM (CONT'D)

My god, wha... what is this?

He cranes his neck back, abruptly. Sees HIM.

Meets his enemy HEAD ON. Face to FACE.

It's CHARLIE. Come from fucking NOWHERE.

Tight on each of the two men's EYES.

Rack FOCUS to the .44 PISTOL.

On Charlie. Going TENSE.

On Jim. Exhaling:

JIM (CONT'D)

No--

Charlie sees the whites of the president's EYES.

Panics. Fires **AGAIN**. Nailing him **SQUARE IN THE BACK**.

Hitting his MARK. Jim staggers away, weakly. GRUNTS...

Both legs GIVE OUT. He SINKS to his KNEES, and CRUMPLES.

The lobby erupts in CHAOS. People shouting. SCREAMING.

Charlie stares down at the man splayed before him.

His deed DONE. The body twitching. Mostly STILL.

He sheathes his pistol, quietly. Makes for the EXIT. A MOB of onlookers SWARMING the fallen president in his WAKE.

Just behind him, a voice rings out. It's James BLAINE:

BLAINE

Wait. Stop him! Stop that man--

Charlie ignores him. Pushes right past, OUT the DOOR...

36

EXT. BALTIMORE & POTOMAC STATION - CONTINUOUS

36

Cooling his pace. Camouflaging with the rest of the crowd.

A rush of confusion on 6th Street. People out here don't know what's just happened. They only hear the commotion inside.

Men pile forward. Clamoring all at once for the station door. Giving Charlie a window for a clean getaway. Keeping *calm*...

Blaine shoves his way out. As he's trampled in the crush:

BLAINE

--he's just shot Garfield!

Sparking a total fucking UPROAR.

No one knows who exactly he's pointing at.

Till they see only *one man* walking away from the depot.

We land on Kearney, straight ahead of Charlie. The beat cop.

His eyes widen. He advances. Charlie pulls an ABOUT FACE...

Too late. The horde CLOSES IN. Hindering him at every TURN.

Grabbing MADLY at him. Tearing his COAT. Shoving him BACK, INTO Kearney's ARMS. The cop LOCKS HIM in a VICE GRIP.

Blaine led forward. Now face to face with Charlie.

He knows this man. Recognizes him. Mouth DROPS.

Charlie just smiles, chillingly satisfied:

CHARLIE

I've done it. Take me to jail. Now
Chester Arthur will be president.

Prompting cries of *lynch him! kill him! string him up!*

Blaine tries to TEMPER the MOB. But he's again OVERTAKEN.

Kearney DRAGS Charlie AWAY just before the crowd CLOSES IN...

37

INT. WAITING ROOM - BALTIMORE & POTOMAC STATION - DAY

37

The lobby has devolved into an absolute MADHOUSE. Harry and Young Jim, angling desperately to fend off the buzzards:

HARRY

Keep back! Keep them back--!

YOUNG JIM

For god's sake, give him air--!

Beyond them, a grisly SIGHT.

Jim's slumped on the GROUND. Retching in PAIN.

His head in the lap of a teary-eyed ladies' room MATRON.

JIM

(weak)

Water.

Some kind soul slips him a drab of BRANDY. Good enough.

Away from the throng, Robert Todd LINCOLN watches the scene pan out. He slinks to a corner. Stays there, gaze empty.

Utterly haunted. History repeating itself before his eyes.

(A quick factual aside: As if Lincoln's son weren't cursed enough, he'll also be present at McKinley's assassination.

He literally completed a hat trick. Look that shit up.)

Dr. CHARLES PURVIS, late 30s, is the first on site. Notably one of the first prominent Black physicians in America.

DR. PURVIS

I'm a doctor. Charles Purvis. Chief Surgeon at the Freedmen's Hospital--

TICKET AGENT

Go tend to your freedmen. This is president of the United States.

DR. PURVIS

He won't be for much longer if you don't get the hell out of my way.

The ticket agent steps aside. Purvis crouches down to Jim's level. He waves a RAG soaked with AMMONIA under his NOSE.

Proceeds to TEAR OPEN Jim's SHIRT to reveal a gaping WOUND, pluming thick with BLOOD. Mere inches away from his SPINE.

No matching hole in his front side. Which means...

DR. PURVIS (CONT'D)

...the bullet hasn't left his body.

Suddenly, the wound starts to HEMORRHAGE. Gushing BLOOD.

Jim glares up at the matron. Her clothing SPLATTERED.

JIM
I'm sorry. I've ruined your dress.

MATRON
That's all right, Mr. President.

Some men bring over SHEETS. Purvis tears them APART. Begins a proper tourniquet to compress the wound. Stopping the BLOOD.

Jim barely flinches. Braves it admirably, teeth GRIT.

DR. PURVIS
We need to move him this instant.

TICKET AGENT
There's a landing upstairs. Someone pull a mattress from the train car.

Able hands step forward. Jim beckons Blaine, among them:

JIM
Think you'd better telegraph Crete.

38 INT. PADDY WAGON - DAY

38

On Charlie, sitting patiently beside Kearney the beat cop.

CHARLIE
Have them put me in a third story cell with a view of the park, and when this is over I'll have Arthur name you chief of police. Oh, and you'll want this too, no doubt--

Digs into his coat. Removes the GUN. Hands it to Kearney.

Kearney's eyes widen. He'd completely forgotten to frisk him.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)
--isn't it something? That pistol just changed the course of history.

39 INT. LANDING - BALTIMORE & POTOMAC STATION - DAY

39

Dr. Purvis surveys Jim, lain on his side. Shivering COLD. He looks to the matron, her dress still coated in Jim's blood.

DR. PURVIS
Sarah, have one of the men boil us some water from downstairs. To fix in place on the lower extremities.

The matron heeds his word. Purvis inspects the tourniquet.

JIM
Freedmen's Hospital, you said--?

DR. PURVIS
That's right, sir. And before then
at Camp Barker, during the war.

JIM
Mm. I passed through Barker once.

DR. PURVIS
Yes, Mr. President. I remember.

They share a look.

JIM
What are my chances, do you think?

DR. PURVIS
Tough to say. By the looks of her,
I'd put you at one in a hundred.

JIM
Well then. We'll have to take that
chance and make good use of it.

He smiles. Doubles over abruptly, coughing up BILE. Purvis gets to his work, as Blaine and the rest watch quietly...

40 INT. WAITING ROOM - BALTIMORE & POTOMAC STATION - DAY 40

DR. DOCTOR WILLARD BLISS, 50s, marches into the station. He's flanked by Robert Lincoln. The crowd parts like the Red Sea.

Whispers abound. Most know *just* who this dark, enigmatic man is. Bliss is the most renowned doctor in all of Washington.

So renowned, in fact, that his *actual* first name is Doctor.

He briefly marks the blood on the ground. Continues on.

41 INT. LANDING - BALTIMORE & POTOMAC STATION - DAY 41

Upon Bliss's arrival on the second floor, all activity stops.

He locks eyes with Purvis. Purvis steps away from Jim. Ceding his patient at once to the older, higher esteemed physician.

DR. PURVIS
The floor's yours, Dr. Bliss. Sir.

DR. BLISS

Thank you. You've done good work here. It ought to be commended.

He squats down to Jim's level. Cuts away the tourniquet with a razor efficiency. This is a man who knows what he's doing.

Blaine glances at Lincoln. Uncertain.

LINCOLN

Bliss was the surgeon that saw to my father, in his hour of need.

BLAINE

And?

LINCOLN

And I've seen firsthand what he's capable of. If he can't save this president, no man on earth can.

Bliss stands up. He faces the assembly.

DR. BLISS

Gentlemen, I believe it possible. But if he's to have any hope, the offending bullet must be removed.

BLAINE

Then you have the entire services of our nation at your disposal.

DR. BLISS

I require only a probe and scalpel.

42 INT. TRAIN CAR - DAY

42

Crete rides the express train back to Washington with Mollie. Staving off tears. They hear muted whispers. Mollie tightens.

CRETE

No. We would've heard, if so.

MOLLIE

How?

Crete doesn't answer. Just fixes her gaze straight ahead.

43 INT. CONKLING'S CARRIAGE - DAY

43

Conkling and Chester also make their way down south.

Willing themselves to sobriety. Chester with his head between his legs, in the throes of a panic attack. Groaning softly.

CHESTER

They think we're murderers. This whole country. What a nightmare.

Conkling glares at him. Deep in some unknown thought.

CHESTER (CONT'D)

This unknown killer says he did it in my name-- that he's a *friend* of mine. What friend would do such a thing? Who would target Garfield?

CONKLING

Us, evidently. To the layman's eye we possess the strongest motive.

Chester's eyes begin to glisten.

CHESTER

We're to blame. If not for the venom we sowed, how *far* we let this go...

Within moments, he's BAWLING.

CHESTER (CONT'D)

Horror! Horror and tragedy, all--

CONKLING

Will you shut the fuck up already?

Chester balks. Conkling meets his gaze.

CONKLING (CONT'D)

Look. This tragedy of yours, it was a *fluke*. Some poor jackass from off the street who figured he'd make a name for himself. The inquiry will run its course. We'll be cleared.

CHESTER

Roscoe, our president was shot down today like a stray fucking dog--

CONKLING

Sure. And he'll surely fucking die. He may be dead even *now*, for all we fucking know-- which will, in turn, trigger the process of succession.

CHESTER

What?

CONKLING

Please. Don't tell me you haven't been thinking it the whole time.

His head stirs.

CONKLING (CONT'D)

All this wrangling over a couple of Senate seats, when we've just--

CHESTER

Don't say it.

CONKLING

We can re-build what we had back in New York... on a *national* scale.

CHESTER

No. I'll refuse the job outright.

Conkling laughs. Chester squints at him, perturbed.

CHESTER (CONT'D)

Do you hear yourself? Just one year ago, my chief occupation was towing your dry cleaning back and forth--

CONKLING

The beauty of America, my friend.

CHESTER

I am not fit to be a president!

CONKLING

Who cares? After everything we've been through, are you so dense you can't grasp we've just been gifted the biggest windfall in *history*--

CHESTER

--at the expense of a man's life.

CONKLING

A man who strove to blow apart the very thing we worked so hard for.

CHESTER

Maybe he had a point or two in it.

They lock eyes. Conkling tightens.

CONKLING

You're clearly rattled, Arthur. You have no idea what you're saying--

Chester leans his full weight back. Signals to the driver.

CHESTER
Stop the cab.

44

EXT. RURAL ROAD - SOMEWHERE IN NEW JERSEY - DAY

44

Chester hops out of the carriage. Starts trudging on foot.

The horses keep pace alongside. Conkling calls to him:

CONKLING
What the hell's up your ass today?

CHESTER
To be frank, I'm not totally sure.
But I have a strong compulsion not
to ride with you a moment longer.

CONKLING
So what? Your plan's to hoof it all
the way to Washington instead--?

CHESTER
Sometimes, a man's just gotta walk.

CONKLING
It's nearly a hundred degrees out
there, Arthur. Your heart'll give
out a mile in. Quit being a shit,
get back in the goddamn coach--

Chester pauses, mid-stride. As does Conkling's carriage.

Conkling glares at his old crony. He thaws, slightly.

CONKLING (CONT'D)
You're going to hurt my feelings.

A beat. Chester's lips purse. Recalling, from Albany:

CHESTER
...then it's good there's no such
thing as friends in politics.

With that, he resumes his stubborn plod along the road.

CONKLING
You son of a bitch. Don't turn your
back on me, after all I've done for
you. Hear me? I fucking made you--

Chester tunes him out. Forges ahead, eyes narrowed.

CONKLING (CONT'D)

Arthur.

He *chokes*, watching him go. Motions to the driver, at last. The coach rolls past Chester. Kicking up a wake of DIRT.

Chester coughs through it. Keeps WALKING, doggedly ON.

Sweating BULLETS amid the sun's BLAST of HEAT...

45

INT. LANDING - BALTIMORE & POTOMAC STATION - DAY

45

On a long white PROBE, made from PORCELAIN.

Bliss firms his gaze. He lowers the implement into Garfield's stewing WOUND. Rooting through the president's INSIDES...

As Dr. Purvis, Blaine and company look on. Jim SQUIRMS.

DR. BLISS

It's okay, sir. We'll fix you up.

He digs the probe in, DEEPER. Causing Jim to GASP in PAIN.

Purvis steps in. Administers an ETHER. Calming him.

DR. BLISS (CONT'D)

Hm. It would appear our bullet slid on past the first lumbar vertebra, and has lodged itself further--

Steers it down and back. Ratchets. Down and BACK.

Jim's eyes WATER. He keeps STILL. Grips Blaine's HAND.

DR. BLISS (CONT'D)

Good man. We're close now, I sense.

He pilots the probe, INWARD... CRACK. It's STUCK.

Hooked in PLACE. Caught on BONE, by the LIVER. *Ouch*.

Won't BUDGE. Bliss's jaw TENSES. He DIGS a FINGER IN...

DR. PURVIS

Doctor.

DR. BLISS

Thank you. I need absolute quiet.

Fishing toward the probe. Foraging. Trying to UNHOOK.

Pressing DOWN. On Jim's fractured RIB. Jim FAINTS.

DR. BLISS (CONT'D)
Lacerated tissue or relatively firm
coagula-- probably the latter--

DR. PURVIS
Doctor. End this examination, now.

Bliss halts his probe. Glares back at Purvis, quietly.

As do the rest. One thing's eminently clear. Black doctors,
in this time period, do not speak to higher-ups this way.

A beat. Purvis tempers his tone. Standing his ground:

DR. PURVIS (CONT'D)
Sir. This probe is bringing damage
to the patient. And your equipment
hasn't been properly sanitized--

DR. BLISS
This is a critical moment. We can't
waste time. Every second counts.

DR. PURVIS
Forgive me. But have you not read
the new research out of Europe on
antiseptics? Some physicians there
believe the trauma during surgery
could be helped by attention to--

DR. BLISS
We're not in Europe, Dr. Purvis.
Invisible monsters are a thing of
superstition, not science. And the
methods you question today are the
very same which saved thousands of
lives in the war. They are tested.
They're true. Simply, they work.

With that, he successfully removes the probe. Like a pro.

Wipes his hand on his shirt. Smearing it with BLOOD.

Procures a NEW PROBE. This one made of SILVER.

DR. BLISS (CONT'D)
Now sir, do I have your permit to
continue with my examination?

DR. PURVIS
I don't--

He feels a hand on his shoulder. Robert Lincoln's.

All the men on the floor are staring at him.

Not one of them on his side. He exhales.

DR. PURVIS (CONT'D)
I hope to God you're right and I'm
wrong, Doctor. I sincerely do.

He buttons his coat. Walks out. Removed from history.

Blaine glances at Lincoln. Slightly anxious, now.

DR. BLISS
We ought not fault the man. He only
did what he thought was correct.

As he inserts his second PROBE...

46 EXT. BALTIMORE & POTOMAC STATION - WASHINGTON, D.C. - NIGHT 46

On the steps outside the station, a vigil by candlelight.

Weeping. Murmuring. No one knows if Garfield's alive or dead.

The doors part. The crowd yields, as Jim's hoisted down the
steps by a dozen men. Laid flat on the mattress, still.

He's just lucid enough to smile back at the well-wishers.

They watch as he's slipped into the back of a carriage.

47 INT. VESTIBULE - WHITE HOUSE - NIGHT 47

Joe's deep in the process of transitioning the whole east
wing of the White House into an improvised HOSPITAL...

It's a strange sight. Medical equipment abutting portraits
of great presidents. Candles keeping the hallways aglow.

Crete and Mollie arrive, after a long day of travel. Mollie
rushes into Joe's arms. They cling to one another tight.

48 INT. LIBRARY - WHITE HOUSE - NIGHT 48

Jim lies in repose, encircled by a HALO of cotton SCREENS.

On seeing his loved ones, he does his best to crane upright.

CRETE
Stay down. Don't exert yourself.

JIM

You got here. You... thank god...

Mollie takes him by the hand. He clenches it, weakly.

MOLLIE

How bad? Are you in a lot of pain?

JIM

The upper story is all right. It's only the hull that was damaged.

JOE BROWN

No major organs were hit. And Dr. Bliss says he's nearly isolated the bullet's position. Once it's out--

JIM

Then we'll be in good shape, eh?

CRETE

Mollie. Go see to your brothers.

She does so, followed by Joe. Allowing the couple space.

Crete kneels to Jim's level. Barely containing a smile of relief. Wiping her eyes as she smooths back his hair.

CRETE (CONT'D)

What am I going to do with you? I leave you alone for one week...

She laughs, gently. Jim doesn't. He's somber, now.

Brave face melting away. Revealing the pain he's withheld.

JIM

There isn't time. We need to make arrangements. While-- while I'm--

His eyes glisten. He chokes out:

JIM (CONT'D)

Crete. I can feel it, everywhere.

CRETE

No. No, I don't accept it. I'm here now. I'll bring you back to life.

She wipes away his tears. Jim looks her in the eyes.

CRETE (CONT'D)

Fight. You are going to *fight*. Do not speak to me of death again.

49 EXT. DISTRICT JAIL - WASHINGTON, D.C. - DAY 49

A large MOB gathers outside the JAIL, calling for BLOOD.

Sherman's military DETAIL stands guard at the entrance. Their faces STAUNCH. Betraying no emotion. Bayonets AT the READY.

50 INT. CHARLIE'S CELL - DISTRICT JAIL - DAY 50

Charlie gazes out the sliver of window, from his top floor CELL. He can't make out what they're shouting down there.

But knows they're saying his name. His lips curl in a smile.

In this moment, he's the most famous man in America.

51 INT. JIM'S OFFICE - WHITE HOUSE - DAY 51

Crete debriefs with Blaine. Coping by way of Jim's bourbon.

CRETE

This is a joke. You must be joking.

BLAINE

Oh no, I swear it on my life. His given name is actually Doctor...

CRETE

You're telling me the man charged with saving my husband's life is named Dr. Doctor Willard Bliss.

BLAINE

Maybe his parents were Calvinists. I know nothing more, save that he comes very highly recommended.

CRETE

Hell. How do I process any of it?

She pinches at her brow. Takes a large sip of alcohol.

CRETE (CONT'D)

What would compel this-- this *devil* Guiteau, to go out and buy a gun--

BLAINE

You can't parse a deranged mind.

CRETE

Can he be in league with Conkling?

BLAINE

No. Conkling may well have created the climate for a Charles Guiteau, but he did not facilitate him.

CRETE

I can't help it. I know it's not right, but-- I want every one of them to pay, for what they did.

Blaine smiles sadly at her. Feeling her pain, acutely.

He glances past. Spies something deeply unexpected.

BLAINE

Well, here comes your first victim.

CHESTER staggers in. Huffing, PUFFING. Soaked in SWEAT.

He's lost his frock coat. His hat. An undershirt is all that remains. As if he's walked all the way to Washington on FOOT.

CHESTER

Mrs. Garfield. Lord help me, ma'am.

BLAINE

Arthur! Where have you been? We've had fifty men searching for you--

He gets a whiff of Chester. Gags.

BLAINE (CONT'D)

Good god. You smell like cow dung.

CHESTER

That'd make sense. I hitched a ride to D.C. in the back of a farm cart.

Crete and Blaine exchange a look.

CHESTER (CONT'D)

How's the president? Does he live?

BLAINE

Yes, yes. He's resting upstairs.

CHESTER

Thank Christ. Oh, thank the Lord.

He begins to weep. His eyes bloodshot.

CRETE

Mr. Arthur?

CHESTER

I don't want it. I didn't want any of it. I let ambition blind me--

BLAINE

Get it together, man. You are vice president of the United States!

CHESTER

Fuck if I am. I quit it all.

Blaine balks. Taken aback.

BLAINE

What are you saying? The American people are afraid. They're looking to us. Looking to *you*, Chester--

On Chester, erupting in TEARS:

CHESTER

Curse me! I can't do it. I am not fit. This president put his faith in me, and I shanked him at every turn. O Lord, strike me down! I'm naught but a lowdown, dirty *pig*--

Just then, Crete marches up. Meeting him HEAD ON.

WHOOSH! She SLAPS HIM. Right ACROSS the FACE.

Startling Chester. Hushing him INSTANTLY.

Crete, maybe *just* as startled, swallows:

CRETE

You read me now, Chester Arthur, and you read me fucking well.

She stares him in the eyes.

CRETE (CONT'D)

Great emergencies can rouse, shall we say, generous and long-dormant traits in men. If there's even a shred of real nobility in you-- now is time to let it *shine*.

Chester glares back, petrified.

CRETE (CONT'D)

What'll you do, Chester? Will you resign like a coward in disgrace or will you step up and reform?

CHESTER

Reform, ma'am. I'll change my ways,
you have my solemn oath I will.

CRETE

Good. Okay. Now if you'll excuse me,
I'm going to go tend to my husband.

She offers a curt nod. Walks out the door. Passing by Mollie,
who's just seen the whole thing. Mollie erupts in a smile.

Chester glances at Blaine. Both men utterly stunned.

CHESTER

That might be the most remarkable
woman I've ever met in my life.

PRE-LAP: An abrupt, violent SPARK!

52 INT. HOLDING ROOM - DISTRICT JAIL - DAY 52

As the cameras SOUND OFF in UNISON. A press pool SWARMING as
Charlie poses, dignified, for his inaugural media PORTRAIT.

CHARLIE

Remember, it's a twenty-five dollar
royalty for all newspaper use. I'll
grant discounts for local outlets.

53 INT. CHARLIE'S CELL - DISTRICT JAIL - DAY 53

Charlie sits for a private interview with a journalist.

CHARLIE

I want to re-affirm, I bear no ill
will toward the president. This was
an unfortunate political necessity.
My aim was to unite the party, once
and for all. To save our Republic.

54 INT. HOLDING ROOM - DISTRICT JAIL - DAY 54

Charlie takes more photos. Working it for the cameras.

CHARLIE (V.O.)

*I shot him, yes. As I would a rebel
pulling down the flag. Hundreds of
thousands were sacrificed over the
course of the war. To what end? To
protect our greatest of nations--*

55 INT. CHARLIE'S CELL - DISTRICT JAIL - DAY

55

CHARLIE

I have sacrificed only *one*, to that same end. I leave my justification to God and the American people.

He sits back. Smiles sagely.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)

For added context, look no further than my diary *The Truth*. Soon to be available wherever books are sold.

56 INT. LIBRARY - WHITE HOUSE - DAY

56

It's been over a MONTH since the station incident. The D.C. humidity is TOO MUCH. The walls are literally SWEATING.

A complicated APPARATUS set up in the room. An electric FAN, forcing AIR through CHEESE CLOTH sopped in ICE WATER...

The very first A.C. UNIT. Designed to keep Garfield cool.

On JIM, sequestered in BED. Crete perched at his side.

She cuts up some food. A strawberry. Jim smirks.

JIM

Well-played. Let's give it a go.

Crete feeds him, gently. Jim does his best to swallow.

His smile fades. Eyes start to pool. He can't keep it down.

CRETE

It's okay. It's okay. It's okay.

She holds out a hand, as Jim COUGHS UP. HACKING...

57 INT. VESTIBULE - WHITE HOUSE - DAY

57

Bliss meets outside the room with Crete and Dr. Edson.

CRETE

He's growing weaker by the day.

DR. BLISS

It's the constant battery of well-wishers. They're placing strain on him. We need the wing locked down, outside of the immediate family.

Crete glances at Edson. Uncertain.

DR. BLISS (CONT'D)

When the president talks, he makes use of his diaphragm. Which will in turn agitate the liver, pushing the bullet-- impelling it deeper *in--*

58 INT. LIBRARY - WHITE HOUSE - DAY

58

On Bliss, standing over Garfield. Operating once again.

Taking a KNIFE to CARVE a thin SLIT in his ABDOMEN. Setting the knife BETWEEN his TEETH as he DIGS IN, BARE-HANDED...

CRETE (V.O.)

But wouldn't breathing cause the diaphragm to move just as well?

DR. BLISS (V.O.)

You are right. But breathing's gentle. Talking is violent.

A steady OOZE of PUS, SIMMERING from the WOUND. Bliss SWABS his bloodied HAND on his SMOCK. Fields a glare from Edson.

DR. BLISS

Healthy stream of pus. Shows his insides are naturally healing.

Bliss studies his patient. Hits on an epiphany, at LAST.

DR. BLISS (CONT'D)

Yes.

He looks up at Joe and Edson.

DR. BLISS (CONT'D)

I believe I know a man who can help.

59 INT. HOLDING ROOM - DISTRICT JAIL - DAY

59

Tight on Charlie's sister FRANNY. Wincing with discomfort as she's frisked for weapons by a pair of guards. Mortified.

CHARLIE (V.O.)

I've been writing to Chester Arthur.

60 INT. CHARLIE'S CELL - DISTRICT JAIL - DAY

60

Charlie meets with Franny in his cell.

CHARLIE

He's not at all like Garfield. He knows who his friends are. And who more stalwart than I, that lifted him from a cypher to president?

FRANNY

Charlie.

CHARLIE

I know what you're thinking. But they called Washington and his rebel army madmen once too. And John Brown, who lit the spark that freed the South. Soon the public will read my book--

FRANNY

Book?

CHARLIE

The Truth. It lays my thinking out, in words that'll move even the most fervent deniers. I've already had a dozen publishers ask for rights. I'm playing them against one another.

FRANNY

I don't understand. You're speaking as though it's some sort of game.

CHARLIE

Yes! That's just what it is. A big game, with winners and losers. And for once, Franny-- for once in my fucking life, I am the *winner*.

Franny glares at him. Horrified.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)

It's gonna be different now. I'll have name recognition to spare, to launch my own syndicate. The *Daily Theocrat*. Finally, a paper that'll treat the common man with a bit of respect. That won't lie to him.

He meets her gaze. Beaming.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)

And I'll have to hold you to that arts column. Wherever I go, we go together. I did it, Fran. For us.

Franny's eyes start to pool.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)

Don't cry. We'll have everything we always dreamed of... Annie, too. I'm gonna find her. Give her the life I promised, all those years ago--

FRANNY

Please. I wish you wouldn't say that poor girl's name to me ever again.

They exchange a look.

FRANNY (CONT'D)

...she showed me what you did, you know. When you were her husband.

Charlie's smile doesn't break.

CHARLIE

I don't think you're hearing me.

He slaps down papers in front of her. A mess of LETTERS.

Scrawled in longhand and mailed, from all over the country.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)

Look at this. Look at these people, writing to me every day. Offering their support. Pledging money.

Franny glances at the letters, one after another. Shocked.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)

All this time, I was so scared I was alone. But they're here, Fran. They were always here-- and now they're coming out in droves. I've given them something to *believe in*--

He reaches out to her. Brushing her hand...

At his touch, Franny recoils. Backs away out the door.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)

Fran?

He shrinks, visibly wounded. Draws after her... as the guard SLAMS the BARS of his CELL SHUT. Shutting him OUT from HER.

Franny peers at Charlie. Overwhelmed by a sisterly guilt.

FRANNY

I... I just can't be here right now.

Charlie watches her go. Not comprehending in the slightest.
 He hears the crowd outside the prison, worked into a fervor.
 A small smile. He gets up on his cot. Angles for a good look.

61 EXT. DISTRICT JAIL - WASHINGTON, D.C. - DAY 61

Charlie's POV: The crowd swarms just outside the gate.

We can't make out their chants from this distance. Sherman's
 military detail stands its ground. Keeping them all at bay.

They mark Charlie in his cell. The chanting grows LOUDER.

62 INT. CHARLIE'S CELL - DISTRICT JAIL - DAY 62

Charlie takes in the scene. Enjoying his public. When...

CRACK! A BULLET SOARS STRAIGHT PAST his EAR. FUCK.

Missing him by an INCH. He TRIPS OFF his COT.

CRASHING to the FLOOR with a THUD.

63 EXT. DISTRICT JAIL - WASHINGTON, D.C. - DAY 63

Outside, the armed sentry TAKE a GUN from ONE of its OWN.

SGT. MASON, 40s. Wild-eyed. Driven. Spewing VITRIOL:

SGT. MASON

The fuckin' mongrel. He isn't sorry
 at all for what he done. Gets a kick
 out of it! He oughta *burn in hell*--

The crowd goes WILD. APPLAUSE. They're CHEERING for HIM.

64 INT. CHARLIE'S CELL - DISTRICT JAIL - DAY 64

As Charlie CURLS on the GROUND, hands CLAMPED to his EARS.

For the first time since his arrest... Charlie looks *scared*.

65 INT. VESTIBULE - WHITE HOUSE - DAY 65

A handsome, impeccably dressed MAN, 30s, walks down the hall.

Flanked by a young male associate. Towing heavy equipment.

At the hall's end, Joe stands ready. Greeting his guest:

JOE BROWN

I'm Joseph Brown, chief secretary.
Thank you for coming on such short
notice, Professor Graham Bell.

Yep. This is *that* motherfucker. But--

BELL

It's just Bell, Mr. Brown. If you'd
please show us to the president. We
may be able to save his life yet.

66

INT. LIBRARY - WHITE HOUSE - DAY

66

Bell and his associate, TAINTER, set up an intricate DEVICE
in the room's center. A complex knot of COILS and WIRING.

BELL

The induction balance. Designed to
detect traces of metal in a system
by means of an electric current.

Or in layman's terms, the first metal detector in history.

A small group watches on. Crete. Joe, Edson. Even Chester
pops his head in, out of curiosity. *What is this thing?*

Jim, half-awake, surveys the scene wearily from his bed. He
looks even worse than we last saw him. Withering away...

There's not a moment to lose. Bell clamps in the last node:

BELL (CONT'D)

Mr. Tainter, cue the power source.

Tainter obliges. Flips down his switch. Prompting a SPARK.

DR. BLISS

We know the bullet's made a home
somewhere in his right side. Mr.
President, if you'd be so kind--

Jim grunts. Rotates, with great pain, onto his LEFT.

Suddenly, he SLIPS. Rolling off the bed. When he's CAUGHT...

By CHESTER, of all people. Reacting the quickest of anyone.

No one's as surprised as him. He and Crete share a look.

Chester exhales. Firms his stance. Props Jim up, capably.

Supporting the full weight of Jim's body. Jim's head buried against Chester's shoulder. Hands girded over his neck.

CHESTER

I've got you. Don't you worry, sir.

Bliss nods to Bell. Bell floats a disc-like PROBE over Jim's back. Linked to a telephone RECEIVER, pressed to his ear.

Listening intently. The room's dead quiet. All holding their breaths. Save for Jim, panting softly at Chester's side.

Bliss directs the probe. Advancing it over Jim's LIVER...

Just then, Bell detects a sound. Some sort of strange PULSE. This is it. My god, they've located it. Bliss's eyes widen.

DR. BLISS

Yes.

Bell looks to him. Probes deeper. The pulse builds steadily, amplifying in Bell's ear drums to a deafening SPUTTER...

DR. BLISS (CONT'D)

What's happening? What do you hear?

BELL

Something's not right. In success, it's meant to tick. This isn't--

Bliss grabs the receiver from Bell. Absorbing the sound.

DR. BLISS

It's gone haywire with excitement. The bullet is *here*, as we always knew it to be. By the liver...

He usurps the probe, too. Pushing it INTO Jim's SPINE.

On Jim, squirming in Chester's grip. Chester keeps him still.

BELL

Doctor.

DR. BLISS

I hear it. I can hear it perfectly.

He hands the receiver to Crete. Retrieves his SCALPEL.

CRETE

I... I don't know. Is it supposed to sound like a sputtering...?

Bliss ignores her. Makes a quick CUT. Piercing a PUS CAVITY.

Drawing a HEAP of BLOOD. Jim's eyes WATER. The pain is BRUTAL.

BELL
Tainter. Switch the power off.

DR. BLISS
I'm nearly there. I just-- need--

He cuts DEEPER. Carving IN. Causing Jim to THRASH.

CHESTER
I don't think he can take much more.

DR. BLISS
I'm not going to lose another one.

DR. EDSON
Dr. Bliss. Stop this, right now.

BELL
Doctor!

Bliss ignores them. Prepares to make a new INCISION -- when a hand JOLTS OUT and GRABS a HOLD of HIM. Clutching FIRM.

It's JIM. Gripping Bliss's ARM with all his STRENGTH.

JIM
No.

A beat. They stare at one another. Bliss yanks his hand away. Firms his grip on the SCALPEL. Glancing at the others.

DR. BLISS
Will someone hold the patient still?

Everyone just glares back at him. Bliss grits his teeth.

DR. BLISS (CONT'D)
I am the ranking physician here...

CHESTER
You drop that scalpel or I'll drive it through your fuckin' eyehole.

He steps between Jim and Bliss. Ending the conversation.

Tainter kills the power. Bell's apparatus dies down. Bell looks upon Jim, being tended to by Crete and Dr. Edson.

BELL
I'm sorry, Mr. President. We gave the device our very best shot.

Jim meets his gaze. He nods, spent. Lays his head back.

67

INT. LIBRARY - WHITE HOUSE - DUSK

67

Mollie sees after her father. Wiping the sweat from his brow.

She takes a look at his mattress. Made from horse hair. Just underneath, a second support bedding. She gets a thought...

Rips a small slit open. Sees it's composed of STEEL WIRE.

MOLLIE

It's metal. This bed's made of steel, it might've interfered--

JIM

The bullet isn't the problem.

Mollie glares at him.

JIM (CONT'D)

Maybe it never was. But there's something else in me now. And I think-- no, I think it might--

He glances back up at her.

JIM (CONT'D)

I hope you know how proud you've made us. Me and your mother, too.

MOLLIE

Don't say these things. I'll walk away from you, I swear I will--

JIM

Joe's not too bad a boy, either.

MOLLIE

No. Are you... how did you...?

JIM

Give me a little credit, won't you? A father can always tell.

He smirks. Mollie laughs. Brushing away her tears.

MOLLIE

I honestly don't know what I'm supposed to do without you...

JIM

You don't need me. You never have.

Mollie meets his gaze.

JIM (CONT'D)

Mark my words. You, my brilliant daughter, are going to be great.

68

INT. JIM'S OFFICE - WHITE HOUSE - DAY

68

Crete packs Jim's belongings for good. Bliss enters, vexed.

DR. BLISS

What's this about the president leaving Washington later today?

CRETE

He's asked to be by the ocean. To resume his trip up to Monmouth.

DR. BLISS

As his surgeon, I refuse it. We are days away from finding the bullet--

CRETE

I'd advise you to choose your next words very carefully, Dr. Bliss.

She stares him down. Firm as an oak.

CRETE (CONT'D)

I've watched my husband preyed on, picked apart. I will not stand it for a moment longer. I am done.

A beat. Bliss yields.

CRETE (CONT'D)

Thank you. That'll be all, Doctor.

69

INT. JOE'S OFFICE - WHITE HOUSE - DAY

69

Joe gathers stray papers, visibly shaken. Mollie wanders in.

MOLLIE

Hey Joe? Before we go, there's one last thing I meant to say to you.

JOE BROWN

Wha--

Before he can react, she soldiers ahead. Grabs him in a KISS.

Joe's eyes widen. Stunned. Mollie draws back, smiling wryly.

MOLLIE

Mm.

She gives a nod. Marches out the door, satisfied.

70 INT. EAST HALL - WHITE HOUSE - DAY

70

On Jim, very frail, carried down the hallway on a stretcher.

White House staff lined on both sides. Whispering prayers. He smiles softly at each of them. Beckons goodbye with a wave.

He singles out Blaine. They shake hands. Tender and fleeting. Blaine watches him go, choking up. Fighting back tears...

Chester stands at the end of the hall. Swallows his breath.

CHESTER

I can't. I'm not cut out for it. I don't even know where to begin--

JIM

You will. I believe that for you. When you see it-- you'll know.

He nods warmly to him, as he's spirited out to his carriage.

Chester steps back. Takes in the gravity of his words.

Blaine puts his hand on him. Steeling them both.

71 INT. JIM'S CARRIAGE / EXT. WHITE HOUSE - DAY

71

Jim's coach lurches forward. He tilts up, weakly. Watching as his great big White House shrinks to a blip in their wake...

72 INT. CUSTOM TRAIN CAR - NIGHT

72

The creak of fortified bed springs. Absorbing the jolts and bumps of Jim's train, bounding up the coast to New Jersey.

Jim rests in his specially outfitted cabin. The walls packed tight with MOUNDS of ICE, keeping the air COOL for him...

He glances out the window. Sees the big CROWDS standing VIGIL at every depot, abutting the railways. All haloed by CANDLES.

Waving hats. Whistling to him. Paying tribute, in their way.

Jim looks on, with great emotion. Crete grasps his hand.

73 EXT. COTTAGE BY THE SEA - MONMOUTH, NJ - DUSK 73

A light glows from the parlor of the Monmouth retreat.

74 INT. PARLOR - COTTAGE BY THE SEA - DUSK 74

Jim cranes his head out the window. Feels the cool beach air.

JIM

Ever since I was a boy growing up in Ohio, I've dreamt of the ocean. Imagining myself sailing to parts unknown as some sort of Crusoe.

CRETE

An awfully ambitious dream, for a boy that never learned to swim.

JIM

Yes, well. My head has always been a little big for my station...

He smirks. So does Crete.

They share a look. Jim softens.

JIM (CONT'D)

Why did I have to go to Chicago and give that silly goddamn speech?

CRETE

Because what you had in your heart couldn't be contained to Ohio. No matter how desperately I tried.

JIM

I knew what I was doing. When I got up on that podium, before all those big men. I wanted them to *know* me.

A beat. He exhales.

JIM (CONT'D)

I saw a chance for glory. A chance to matter. And God help me, I took it. But if I knew-- if I could've ever known, what would come--

CRETE

I'm glad you gave the speech. I'm glad for all of it. That the world got to see you how I always have.

JIM

There was so much more to be done.
If only we'd just had more time.

CRETE

No. You showed them something, and
that's worth it. It's got to be.

She smiles. Jim meets her gaze.

JIM

I've been a lucky man, haven't I?

CRETE

Mm. Save for a few choice mishaps.

JIM

I can't imagine which you mean.

They laugh. Jim winces from the pain.

JIM (CONT'D)

Do you think my name might have
some place in human history?

A beat. Crete swallows. She nods.

CRETE

Yes. A grand one. But a grander
place still, in human hearts.

He absorbs this. She kisses him, gently.

The hour's nearly at hand. They both know it.

Jim's eyes glisten. It's too much. He starts to cry.

Crete just beams down at him. Exuding love and strength.

CRETE (CONT'D)

...it's all right, Jim. I'll be
here with you all night long.

We stay on them. Crete stroking Jim's hair, quietly.

Jim can't help but smile, gazing up at his wife.

A strange and wholly welcome sense of peace.

Chester's asleep on his couch. He hears footsteps.

Finds Blaine standing at the door. Eyes red with tears.

76 INT. JIM'S OFFICE - WHITE HOUSE - NIGHT 76

Chester solemnly takes the oath of office, amid a vigil.
Succeeding Garfield as our twenty-first president.

77 INT. PARLOR - COTTAGE BY THE SEA - NIGHT 77

On Crete, staying by Jim's side long after he's expired.
Clasping his hand in hers. Head pressed atop his quiet chest.

78 INT. CHARLIE'S CELL - DISTRICT JAIL - NIGHT 78

Charlie gets on his knees. Whispering a prayer to himself.

CHARLIE

...may the Lord carry him home.

79 INT. PARLOR - COTTAGE BY THE SEA - DAY 79

The following day. The president's right where we left him.

Dr. LAMB, 40s, an army pathologist, conducts an autopsy with his team of physicians. Bliss watches on, flanked by Joe.

The doctors CUT into Jim's BELLY. Drawing a thick bead of BLOOD. Determining, finally, the PATH of the BULLET...

DR. LAMB

Note that the shot migrated *left*.

Left. Not right, the side Bliss had foraged in all along.

Bliss tightens. Joe glances at him. He doesn't reciprocate.

The doctors keep searching. There it is. The BULLET.

Dr. Lamb fishes it out, at last. Examines it.

DR. LAMB (CONT'D)

Tucked neatly behind the pancreas.
It would seem the shot interrupted
not one of the president's organs.
That the wound healed on its own.

JOE BROWN

What could have killed him, then?

DR. LAMB

Septic poisoning. Evidenced by the abscesses throughout the body...

He stares grimly at his patient.

DR. LAMB (CONT'D)

Infection. Continuous infection.

Caused by germs. Invisible monsters.

Bliss goes pale white in the face.

JOE BROWN

I don't understand. Do you mean to say he'd have recovered naturally, if the bullet had been left alone? But surely, that... that'd mean...

He did it. He fucking *killed him*.

All eyes on Bliss, who merely chokes:

DR. BLISS

I think we may have made a mistake.

80

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

80

Conkling sits alone on Charlie's favorite bench, in the shadow of the White House. His suit wrinkled. Hasn't washed in days.

He pulls out a flask. Contemplates it, briefly. Takes a swig.

MAN (O.S.)

Never thought you'd be caught dead drinking out in public again...

It's Blaine, of all people. He invites himself to join.

CONKLING

Don't you know, Blainesy? I *am* dead.

Blaine laughs. Conkling's head stirs.

CONKLING (CONT'D)

I hear Arthur asked you to stay on.

He peers at the White House.

CONKLING (CONT'D)

Christ. Can you imagine, after all those years we spent working for it, the job's handed to *that* fat fuck?

BLAINE

He's come a long ways. In time, he
might even make a good president.

(a pause)

Not sure he can win in '84, though.

Conkling looks to him. Sees that twinkle in his eye.

CONKLING

You know, I heard a rumor Garfield
had you vow you'd never run again.

BLAINE

Hm. Never heard that. But someone's
gotta finish what he started. If my
countrymen see fit to call upon me,
well, I'd be rude to deny them...

CONKLING

You really are one craven bastard.

BLAINE

So you won't join my ticket then?

They laugh. Conkling takes a breath. Swallows, quietly:

CONKLING

You think anyone will remember us?

Blaine meets his gaze.

CONKLING (CONT'D)

Everything we built. The battles we
waged. How *close* we fuckin' got...

BLAINE

...singed cat and a Bengal tiger.

He gives a small smile. Conkling smirks back at him.

Tips the flask. Aims it straight ahead at the White House.

CONKLING

To the son of a bitch that stole my
Customs House and killed my career.

BLAINE

May we see his like one day again.

The eve of the execution. A noose sways gently in the breeze.

82

INT. CORRIDOR / CHARLIE'S CELL - DISTRICT JAIL - NIGHT 82

Charlie's shed considerable weight. Hasn't washed or cut his hair in weeks. His eyes bloodshot, wracked with exhaustion.

A guard unlocks the door to his cell. Charlie hears a pair of footsteps stride into the private wing. He sits upright. Huh.

Wanders out of the cell, to the gate at the end of the wing.

As he approaches, he spies the figure of a woman through the metal bars. Charlie beams, relieved. It's her. His sister.

CHARLIE

Fran? Oh, Fran. I knew you'd come...

She doesn't answer. Charlie's smile fades.

This isn't Franny at all. It's Lucretia Garfield.

CRETE

I lied to my family. Told them I was seeing to affairs in New York.

Charlie glares at her in disbelief.

CRETE (CONT'D)

Nobody knows I'm here, aside from the warden. But I... I couldn't let you go. I had to meet you first.

CHARLIE

We have already met, Mrs. Garfield.

Crete balks at this.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)

You don't remember? We spoke at the ball at your husband's inauguration. You struck me as kind. I prayed for you when you were sick last year. I still pray, for all your family...

CRETE

If you think I welcome prayer from you, you're fiercely mistaken. I'm not here to give you absolution.

She swallows her breath.

CRETE (CONT'D)

You didn't know the man you killed.

Charlie stays quiet. Intrigued.

CRETE (CONT'D)

The public only ever knew him for one thing. There were very few who got to see more. Privately, he had his flaws. Like any other human.

She chokes up a bit.

CRETE (CONT'D)

He was often afraid, my husband. He was troubled by intense demons that kept him up in the night. He could be desperately *selfish*, too...

They share a look.

CRETE (CONT'D)

I think about the last question he ever asked me, the day he died. "*Do you figure my name might have some place in history?*" That's what he was plagued with, of all things.

She laughs to herself.

CRETE (CONT'D)

I will never understand. Why all men are so taken with their own legacies-- making their *mark*--

A beat. She exhales.

CRETE (CONT'D)

I said history would remember him grandly. But it felt strange, out of my mouth. I didn't believe it. My last words to him were a lie.

Her eyes meet the ground.

CRETE (CONT'D)

In reality, I know history won't remember him at all. There'd be no reason for it-- because he didn't matter. He didn't have a *chance*.

She pinches at her brow.

CRETE (CONT'D)

He'd be a minor footnote, at best. A curio from a forgotten era, some idle piece of trivia. Do you recall poor old whatshisname, who was shot three months into his presidency?

Charlie's lips tighten.

CRETE (CONT'D)

They won't ever know about the man he truly was. They won't care about the hero who waged wars, and stared a bit too long at his reflection in the mirror sometimes. Who'd slip me stupid little love poems in made-up Latin, who did headstands and sang show tunes in funny voices just to see his children laugh. No, surely no one will ever know *that* man.

Her head stirs.

CRETE (CONT'D)

America may mourn him today. But as the years pass by, they'll forget. I can feel him waning away, even now. In no time, he'll just be one more face on the wall. Lost to history.

She glares up at Charlie.

CRETE (CONT'D)

...but then again, so will **you**.

At that, her lips curl in a smile.

On Charlie. Suddenly tense.

CRETE (CONT'D)

It's your destiny, also. Except in your case, there won't be portraits. No children will learn your name.

CHARLIE

You don't know what you're saying.

CRETE

I do. In fact, I'm going to see to it myself. I'll make sure that book of yours is never printed, not while anyone who cares still draws breath. You'll have no voice, once you exit from this world. I will *erase* you.

(a pause)

As you did to the man I loved most.

Charlie falters.

CHARLIE

No. You can't... you've no right...

CRETE

I've already done it, Mr. Guiteau.

She locks eyes with him.

CRETE (CONT'D)

I came because I wanted you to know,
when you're on your way up to those
gallows. That they'll forget you.

CHARLIE

Wait--

But Crete's already gone. He's all alone now.

Charles Guiteau's last night on earth.

83

EXT. COURTYARD - DISTRICT JAIL - DAY

83

Clear blue sky. A smattering of chairs lined up before the
scaffold. Charlie's led up to the platform, in chains...

He nearly trips. Delivers a wry smile to the reverend.

CHARLIE

I stubbed my toe on the gallows.

The reverend doesn't react. He helps Charlie step forth.

As a sermon's read from Matthew, Charlie allows the NOOSE to
be draped OVER his NECK. He adjusts his posture slightly.

REV. HICKS

From Matthew 10:28. *"And fear not
them that kill the body, but who
are not able to kill the soul..."*

Charlie scans the crowd. Sees Franny there. Nods, grateful.

The reverend finishes his sermon. Ceding to the prisoner.

CHARLIE

Also out of Matthew. *"Except that
you become as a child, ye cannot
enter the kingdom of Heaven--"*

He purses his lips, rooting into his pocket. Produces a piece
of paper. Clears his throat, mimicking a child's SQUEAK:

CHARLIE (CONT'D)

*I'm going to the Lordy, I'm so glad.
Glory hallelujah! Glory hallelujah!*
(MORE)

CHARLIE (CONT'D)

*I saved my party and saved my land,
Glory hallelujah! Glory hallelujah!
I'm gone to the Lordy. I am so glad.*

Cracking himself up, over the clever little hymn he's written.

He glances at the crowd, smiling wickedly. Expecting laughs.

Instead, he discovers the courtyard silent. No one amused. A sea of sober, vacant gazes. And Franny nowhere to be found.

Her seat's been empty all along. Charlie's smile wanes.

We see it now. The *terror* in his eyes. He's CORNERED.

It hits him, at LAST. Like a dull THUD. The TRUTH.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)

Oh.

Abruptly, the guards FLING a HOOD over HIS HEAD.

Blocking him OUT. Heavy and panicked BREATHS.

He calms. Huffing, INTO the thick FABRIC:

CHARLIE (CONT'D)

--glory, glory, glory.

The hymn drops from his hand.

As it comes to rest, slowly, at his FEET...

The trap's sprung under him. We hear a sharp CRACK.

And then, for a minute, everything's *quiet*. Mercifully so.

CHARLES GUILTEAU WAS NEVER FORMALLY BURIED.

84

INT. JIM'S OFFICE - WHITE HOUSE - DAY

84

Joe Brown strides in. Delivers some papers to his new boss.

President Chester Arthur sits in Jim's old chair. Beginning, against all odds, to appear the *part*. He gives Joe a smile.

Nods at a portrait of Garfield on the wall. Returns to work.

**CHESTER ARTHUR MADE GOOD ON HIS PREDECESSOR'S WISHES,
PASSING LANDMARK CIVIL SERVICE REFORMS THAT
SHAPE OUR GOVERNMENT TO THIS DAY.**

HE RETIRED AFTER A SINGLE TERM AND DIED THE NEXT YEAR.

85 INT. CONVENTION HALL - INDUSTRY EXPO CENTER - DAY 85

Back to where it all began in Chicago. Third time's the charm for Blaine, who at long last wins his party's nomination.

He beams with pride under a BLAINE '84 banner. Sheds a tear.

This is it. The greatest moment of his life. And yet.

JAMES BLAINE LOST TO GROVER CLEVELAND IN 1884.

HE BROKE A 24-YEAR PARTY STREAK STARTED BY LINCOLN.

86 EXT. LAFAYETTE SQUARE - WASHINGTON, D.C. - DAY 86

We find Conkling right where we left him, alone on the bench.

ROSCOE CONKLING DISAPPEARED FROM POLITICS.

HE DIED TRUDGING HOME ON FOOT IN THE GREAT BLIZZARD OF 1888.

87 INT. MORTUARY - DISTRICT JAIL - DAY 87

On Charlie's BODY, splayed out on a SLAB. Pale of COLOR.

A big, empty room. Sterile and cold. The DOCTORS filter in.

One of them dots a LINE over the cranium in PENCIL. Another procures a KNIFE. Carving a HOLE into Charlie's SKULL...

He doesn't so much as stir. Unquiet in life, he's now STILL.

CHARLES GUILTEAU'S BRAIN WAS REMOVED FOR AN AUTOPSY ON HIS MENTAL STATE THAT PROVED INCONCLUSIVE.

IT WAS REMANDED TO STORAGE AND PROMPTLY FORGOTTEN.

NOTHING OF GUILTEAU REMAINS AT THE SMITHSONIAN.

88 EXT. JIM'S FARM - DAY 88

We find Crete, at last, back in Ohio. On her porch.

Her hair's graying. It's been ten years since Jim's death.

A dog rests at her feet. A huge, full-grown Newfoundland. The one we once knew as a puppy, roaming the White House halls.

LUCRETIA GARFIELD SURVIVED HER HUSBAND BY 37 YEARS.

She looks out ahead, into the front yard. Smiles to herself.

Steps off the porch. Where a large group of people awaits her.

Mollie and Joe, linked arm in arm. With three small children.

Harry, Young Jim and their wives finish piling out of two cars parked at the end of the drive. They have kids of their own.

The youngest boys, Irvin and Abram, both now full-fledged men.

Crete joins them all a long, beautifully sculpted table. The same table Jim had just started to build when we met him...

Together, they begin to set it for an afternoon meal.

Catching up. Joking with each other. Happy chaos.

An open seat for the man who built this table.

History might not remember him very fondly.

Will recall him barely at all, in truth.

But his legacy couldn't be clearer.

This was a man that mattered.

ROLL CREDITS.