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Great emergencies

Sean David DeMers
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GREAT EMERGENCIES

by

Sean David DeMers

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the Master of Fine Arts
degree in Theatre Arts in the
Graduate College of
The University of Iowa

May 2016

Thesis Supervisor: Associate Professor Art Borreca

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Graduate College
The University of Iowa
Iowa City, Iowa

CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

MASTER'S THESIS

This is to certify that the Master's thesis of

Sean David DeMers

has been approved by the Examining Committee for
the thesis requirement for the Master of Fine Arts degree
in Theatre Arts at the May 2016 graduation.

Thesis Committee:

Art Borreca, Thesis Supervisor

Dare Clubb

Lisa Schlesinger

To the unheard voices of history; may we hear and listen as well as speak.

Oh may I join the choir invisible
Of those immortal dead who live again
In minds made better by their presence: live
In pulses stirred to generosity,
In deeds of daring rectitude, in scorn
For miserable aims that end with self,
In thoughts sublime that pierce the night like stars,
And with their mild persistence urge man's search
To vaster issues.
So to live is heaven!

*-George Eliot
Oh may I join the choir invisible*

It seems a very long time since I saw you last summer. I feel about ten years older—I have had so much care and sorrow. I thought then that I had suffered all I could suffer—but I was mistaken. Now I believe we do not reach that point until we are dead.

*-Julia I. Sand
Final letter to Chester A. Arthur Sept. 15, 1883*

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This draft would not be what it is without the help of Nina Morrison and Sam Collier, director and dramaturg respectively; but also the peripheral help of Ariel Francoeur who gamely undertook the role in its first reading.

Finally, I would like to acknowledge the inspirational support of the books *Assassination Vacation* by Sarah Vowell, and *Destiny of the Republic* by Candice Millard. The latter of which first set me on a path to learn more about Julia.

PUBLIC ABSTRACT

In 1881 an assassin's bullet changes the course of American history. Could it be that Julia Sand was the only one to foresee the destiny of the country? Familiar with now President Arthur's exclusionary politics, Julia writes and urges the President to reform his ways and unite the Republican Party. *Great Emergencies* is a stage play about the lavish dangers of The Gilded Age, but ultimately a cautionary tale about those of us whose voices are doomed to be forgotten because of the ephemeral and apathetic nature of human history.

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PREFACE

I can't recall if anyone pointed me in the direction of Candice Millard's book *Destiny of the Republic* or if I randomly plucked it off of the library shelf—I have been known to look at the new arrival sections in libraries and choose a new book at random, sometimes based on the cover. I also have a fascination for assassins in general, set in motion by Steven Sondheim's musical, but also because I find that kind of political extremism fascinating and so beyond my realm of comprehension that I can't resist an investigation. In any case, I ended up with the book and devoured it. The death of President Garfield is such an amazing story and the book is so brilliantly written that it is irresistible. The confluence of events surrounding the assassination are sometimes so amazing that at times the book feels like a work of fiction. There are a number of great themes for a playwright, but one chapter stood out to me in particular. There is an examination of the state of Vice-President Chester Arthur which is captivating, and in particular the letters he received from a woman named Julia Sand. In the book the story is a brief diversion, but in my imagination—and specifically my playwright's imagination—could not let the story go.

Before sitting down to work on the play, I decided that more research was necessary. I picked up two biographies of Arthur, *Gentleman Boss* by Thomas C. Reeves, and *Chester A. Arthur, a quarter century of machine politics* by George F. Howe. The latter work was invaluable as it was written before the Sand letters were discovered and contained a more straightforward account of Arthur's presidency without the knowledge of Julia's advice. The former created a sketch of Arthur that was able to take into account the letters and their place in history. The following details started formulating *Great*

Emergencies: 1) Arthur burned all of his personal papers, but made sure that Julia's twenty-three letters survived. 2) Julia lived the rest of her life not knowing her papers survived as she died before they were recovered. 3) Arthur's presidency—and for that matter, the presidency in general from the death of Abraham Lincoln up to the term of Teddy Roosevelt (also the result of an assassination)—was lost to the era now known as The Gilded Age and that loss has become a historical black hole. We are still digging out from the ramifications of the late 19th Century.

This research made me feel that instead of glazing over of this time period in high school history classes it should be embraced and focused upon, for there is vitality to the era and an importance beyond the end of Reconstruction and its ramifications. Julia's story seemed its exact microcosm. Here was a woman who had not only written to the President of the United States and offered policy and governing advice, but also was visited by the President further vindicating her efforts—she seemed to have actually gotten through to him as a confidante. There was a definite difference in her letters after he visited her as she felt she did not present herself accurately or professionally while speaking to President Arthur, but the real tragedy is that up until her death in 1933, she believed her letters and her voice were lost to history. It was not until 1938 that the letters were found and delivered to the Library of Congress by Arthur's grandson. It was previously believed that Arthur had burned all of his correspondence, so why did he make sure these letters survived? Is this a further vindication of Julia's voice among his advisors? This is one of the central themes of *Great Emergencies*, the power of communication and—to quote another presidential play in *Hamilton*—Who lives, who dies, who tells your story? No one has told Julia's story.

Julia Sand is the country. She is a silent voice from the era of big business and the rise of media conglomerates, and she is silent only because the ashes of the post-Reconstruction era are not sifted through nearly enough. She is the daughter of immigrants who succeeded in an age of widespread abuses of power. The Gilded Age was an era which defined the upper class in the United States, for a country that has no royalty and depends on the free enterprise system must create its royalty in the form of financial success. As the country mined its resources and brought the east and west coasts closer together through trains and telegraph lines, the opportunities became greater for seekers of wealth and power. Julia's own father was President of the Metropolitan Gas Light Company until his death in 1867, so she was a beneficiary of the industrial revolution. Her family also benefitted, which is how I knew that they were integral to the story I wanted to tell about the gilded age—a story of power and memory, a play which illustrates the hubris of wealth and power leading to obfuscation and a willingness to selfishly forget the present, stacking the charred logs of knowledge onto the fires of history to proliferate the ignorance of the lower classes of humanity.

After reading the Arthur biographies and the historical novels, I took to reading plays and stories that were popular in the late 19th Century to focus on the style of the story I wanted to tell. I started with Henry James' novel *Democracy* and then moved on to the complete major plays of Chekhov and many of Ibsen's later plays which led to a first draft of *Great Emergencies* that was four acts long. I was interested in how each act could bring the story to four separate climaxes, each building higher than the previous. This is the draft of the play I read in playwright's workshop in Spring of 2015, and while I was pleased with the accomplishment, the four act structure did not quite fit the feel of the

play. However, I decided to wait on the next revision of the script for after I had done more research.

In the summer of 2015, I used a University of Iowa Summer Funding Grant to travel to Washington, D.C. and research the hand written letters of Julia Sand. I also toured around the city to various landmarks and museums to round out my knowledge of the era. There is surprisingly little by way of President Arthur artifacts still on display, but the Sand letters were the real prize. The Library of Congress lets you save files to a USB, which I did, however the process is tedious as you must advance the microfiche page by page and save manually. The letters gave me much more insight into the life of Julia, but not as much as I had hoped. I decided to transcribe the handwritten letters before jumping into another draft of the play. The result of those transcriptions follows the play text in this thesis.

While I dove into a second draft of the play, starting with making four acts into two, I decided to search the University of Iowa library for any ancestry they could furnish and—lo and behold—we have a membership with Ancestry.com. I was thrilled and immediately looked for traces of Julia and what I found finally gave me a premise for my play. According to census reports, Julia ended her days at the Long Island Home, a rooming house for invalids and the elderly—in fact, she was there from at least 1910 to 1933. Another link from Ancestry took me to her family’s burial plot where I was shocked to discover she had no grave marker. Not only had her letters been lost to history, but any marking of her existence was gone and she was forever lost. It was Chester Arthur III’s ‘discovery’ of the 23 letters in a family vault that introduced Julia to the world, but for all she knew at the time of her death, her voice was gone to the ages.

Once I knew *Great Emergencies* was to be my entry into the New Play Festival in Spring of 2016, I used the feedback of Bryan Delaney and Raphael Martin—visitors to the program as part of our Guest Seminar class—as well as my director Nina Morrison, dramaturg Sam Collier, and advisor Dare Clubb—to revise my thesis draft. The main goals that came from feedback were to strengthen the metaphor of the building of the Brooklyn Bridge, emphasizing one piece of legislation that defined the presidency of Chester Arthur, and crafting more fully the weave of the Arthur and Sand worlds. I hope what follows accomplishes these goals, and while the evolution of this play will continue past this draft I am satisfied with its present state.

DEVELOPMENT HISTORY

Great Emergencies received a production as part of the 2016 Iowa New Play Festival on May 6, 2016. It was directed by Nina Morrison and Sean David DeMers. Sam Collier was the dramaturg. The scenic designer was Nic Wilson, the lighting designer was Angie Esposito, the costume designer was Hayley Ryan, and the sound designer was Jacob Sikorski. Tallis Strub was the choreographer. Katy McGlaughlin was the stage manager, assisted by Sophie Katz and Jordan Arnold. The cast was as follows:

JULIA	Rubina Vidal
CHESTER	Ben Alley
ALEC	Randryck Lewis
ROSCOE	R. Mathias Blake
ISABELLA	Bre Anna McNeill
PAULINE	Caitlin Rose Edwards
HENRIETTA	Jessica Wade
MARY	Haley Courter
ROBERT	Rob Petrie
JAMES	Andrew Berger
THEODORE	Danny Petersen
DOCTOR	Julia-Kaye Rohlf
EMILY	Katy Karas
WASHINGTON	Matt Schutz
ENSEMBLE	Jordan Arnold, Emma Genesen, Max Borchardt, Helena Magalhaes

LIST OF CHARACTERS

JULIA I. Sand	Our hero
CHESTER Alan Arthur	A reluctant president
ALEC Powell	His valet; African-American
ROSCOE Conkling	Arthur's friend and mentor; Senator from NY
ISABELLA Sand	Julia's mother
PAULINE Sand	Julia's sister
HENRIETTA Sand	Julia's other sister
ROBERT Todd Lincoln	Son of Abraham Lincoln, Secretary of War for Arthur
MARY Arthur McElroy	Arthur's sister and surrogate First Lady
JAMES Garfield	20 th President of the US, 2 nd Assassinated
THEODORE Sand	A boisterous gentleman; Julia's uncle
DOCTOR Herndon	Arthur's uncle by marriage; an elderly gent
FREDERICK Frelinghuysen	Arthur's Secretary of State
GROVER Cleveland	22 nd President, NY Governor
WASHINGTON Roebling	Chief of construction for Brooklyn Bridge
Emily ROEBLING	Supervisor of construction for Brooklyn Bridge
Cabinet Members, Friends of Arthur, Orderlies, Charles Guiteau, etc ...	doubling encouraged ...

SETTING AND TIME

SETTING

New York City: Julia's apartment, Chester's apartment, The Brooklyn Bridge, Madison Square Park.

Washington, D.C.: The house of Senator Jones, Senator Kirkwood, The White House

TIME

1880-1933

SYMBOLS

(/, //, *) - The next character's line starts and overlaps after these symbols as noted

STAGING

The peripheral characters of the orderlies should be utilized more than noted in the text; specifically whenever Julia Sand steps into the world of Chester Arthur, but other times might be shown to be appropriate during rehearsals. Use best judgment.

GREAT EMERGENCIES

ACT ONE

New York City in The Gilded Age, 1881.

At rise, there is a party. Most of the cast—sans JULIA—waltz around the room in couples, or stand to the side and keep rhythm. Within the dancers are orderlies dressed in white, representing JULIA's later life in a retirement/invalid home.

JULIA enters and watches from the side, leaning on a cane. After some time, she raises the cane high and brings it to the floor.

Everything freezes. She speaks to the dancers.

JULIA

April 4th, 1848
To whom it may concern:
I was born normal.

The dance resumes.

JULIA

I was the last of six children, a normal baby with normal needs; or so they tell me—I don't remember. I was sickly at a young age, which I also don't remember. For the entirety of my life I've been forced to compete with a healthy former self that lives only in the memory of other people—most of those people are now dead. Since the time my memories *do* begin I live with difficulty.

She walks among the party goers as they leave stage. By the end, only the orderlies remain. They pause to the end of her speech and then leave stage.

When I walk among people I have nothing to say, even to warn them that the idea of being normal is the most dangerous among a lifetime of dangerous ideas. You are being misled into a false sense of security! See? There's nothing I can say that will staunch their gilded lives. They will not listen; because their lives have already been lived and are sealed in the historical crypt. So I write. I write to the papers, I write to the elected, and I write to myself. Eventually someone must listen.

She sits awkwardly at a writing desk.

July 2nd, 1881.
President James A. Garfield,

She pauses as two men enter Stage Left and wait for a train. Train sounds. They are in slight shadow.

ISABELLA (off)
Julia!

JULIA
Mother!

ISABELLA (off)
Julia, I need you, did you hear me?

JULIA
I'm working, Mother!

ISABELLA (entering)
Working. You are not working, you're dreaming. I swear you'll be the death of me. I need your help, your sisters are coming.

JULIA
I would prefer a quiet day so I can write.

ISABELLA
I would prefer an obedient daughter.

JULIA
How much help could I possibly be in the kitchen?

ISABELLA
More help than you'll be out here.

JULIA
I'm trying to take control of my life; like you've said.

ISABELLA
Again, you hear what you want. My intention was for you to find a husband.

JULIA
Is there one in the kitchen?

ISABELLA
You'll sooner find one there than you will at the end of that letter. I need more hands, Julia. The letter will be there when you return. Think of your sisters.

JULIA
Why can't they come another day?

ISABELLA

Because they're coming today. They can't set an apartment in Brooklyn and expect to ignore us. Once the new bridge is finished, I'll expect them daily.

JULIA

We should let them alone, they have forsaken us.

ISABELLA

They are in search of their own lives, which is more than I can say for you.

JULIA

Should I find my own apartment then?

ISABELLA

Don't be ridiculous, you know what I mean.

JULIA

I can't imagine what you mean.

ISABELLA

Your imagination is precisely the problem—you imagine too much! Reality is just as fine Julia. You live with your head in the clouds.

A train whistle. JULIA reacts.

ISABELLA

Julia?!

JULIA

Hm?

ISABELLA

Ah! See? Head in the clouds! Your father would not have approved. Now come and help—in whatever way you can.

She turns and leaves.

JULIA

But, I—
Very well.

JULIA grabs her cane and begins to exit. She makes her way to the kitchen, but with an eye on the two men as though she might miss something.

After she exits GUILTEAU enters behind the two men and shoots one of them in the back, this is PRESIDENT JAMES Garfield who falls to the ground. As GUILTEAU runs off:

GUILTEAU

I am a stalwart of stalwarts! And Arthur will be President!

A crowd surrounds JAMES.

JULIA re-enters and sees what has happened.

As the men carry JAMES off, CHESTER enters heavily and sits in a comfortable chair.

JULIA returns to her writing with determination.

JULIA

August 27th, 1881.

Mr. Chester Alan Arthur
Vice President of the United States
123 Lexington Avenue
New York City
To the Honorable Chester A. Arthur:

*Pause as she doesn't know where to begin.
CHESTER puts his head in his hands as his valet,
ALEC enters with a glass of whiskey.*

JULIA (*cont.*)

(*To CHESTER*)

I am like you.

(*Writing.*)

The hours of Garfield's life are numbered—before this meets your eye, you may be President.

Lights shift to CHESTER, but JULIA remains onstage.

ALEC

I brought you a drink, sir.

CHESTER

Have you brought news?

ALEC

No, but there's a room full of your friends that're sure missing you. Maybe you'd like to come in and say hello. It might cheer you up.

CHESTER

Do I need cheering?

ALEC

You need something.

CHESTER

I need news.

ALEC

You should just accept what's coming. Hell, it might well have already come. So act like it. Act like he's already gone.

CHESTER

What sense does it make for him to fight for two months simply to die.

ALEC

What would you do if he was dead?

CHESTER

Don't even begin to entertain that notion. I tell you he's going to pull through. You didn't see him that day at the White house.

Lights crossfade to the recovery room of JAMES Garfield JAMES is in bed. LUCRETIA Garfield sits with him.

ARTHUR pauses at the threshold.

JULIA

Faith in your better nature forces me to write to you—but not to beg you to resign as everyone else does, but to do what is more difficult and more brave. Reform!

CHESTER

Reform ...

CHESTER is unsure whether to join them when LUCRETIA rises.

LUCRETIA

Mr. Arthur.

CHESTER

Mrs. Garfield. I've come to / see—

LUCRETIA

Yes, yes. It's good of you to come. I know it will be a weight off of his mind.

CHESTER

Thank you.

JAMES

Feel free to stand in the hallway forever, Chet.

CHESTER

Mr. President? Shouldn't you be resting?

LUCRETIA

Yes, he should.

JAMES

Lucretia please, it's nonsense. I've taken a turn for the better, thanks to my doctors. Thank you for your visit and your good wishes.

CHESTER

You have no idea how relieved I am to see you recovering. I thought I was here / to—

JIM Blaine, SAMUEL Kirkwood, ROBERT Todd Lincoln, and a fourth cabinet member enter.

JIM

He thought he was here to take over!

SAMUEL

He should be tried for treason!

*ROBERT intervenes, a conversation ensues.
CHESTER is stunned.*

JULIA

It would be much harder for you to forgive [them,] than it is for [them] to forgive you. It is always harder, when we are in the wrong—and probably you see more clearly now, than you did six months ago, what it is for a few men to unite to bully the President into carrying out their views.

JAMES quiets the cabinet.

JAMES

Gentlemen, please! Don't mind them, Chet. These men think you had me shot.

CHESTER

I hope you know that to be false, sir.

JAMES

Of course it's false! I was attacked by some kind of madman seeking favor. I mean, he must have been crazy. None but an insane person could have done such a thing. What could he have wanted to shoot me for? I'm no great man like Robert's father here.

ROBERT

Nonsense, you hold the exact office he did and it's bound to make you a target. Well Chet, I for one am very happy to see you here.

He shakes CHESTER's hand.

CHESTER

Thank you, Robert.

The rest of the cabinet comes forward reluctantly.

JAMES

You see how welcome you are? Please, stay and talk with everyone.

CHESTER

Thank you all. No, no. That's not necessary, but it relieves me to no end seeing you in good spirits! I'll retire. Sorry to disturb you.

JAMES

Ah! Hold on, where are you staying?

CHESTER

I'm at Senator Jones' house.

JIM

Another Stalwart, eh! Drafting plans for the takeover?

SAMUEL

I'm sure he's up for my job.

CHESTER

What are you talking about?

JIM

Take a good look at the man lying in this bed, Mr. Arthur. This is the result of the Stalwart Republican spoils system.

SAMUEL

You might as well have pulled the trigger yourself, you and your pal Conkling.

JULIA

Can you not see the roads where they are revealed? The entire country says: 'With Arthur for President Civil Service Reform is doomed,' prove that you can be its firmest champion.

JAMES

Gentlemen, please! I'm fine. There's not going to be a takeover!

JAMES coughs.

LUCRETIA

James, please lay back down.

ROBERT

(To BLAINE)

We're all Republicans here Jim, don't sink to splitting the party in the President's recovery room.

CHESTER

Mr. Blaine, I'm here out of respect.

JIM

Respecting a storm is easy, but when it subsides true nature returns.

JULIA

It is detestable to have uncongenial people mixed with our daily life; and yet sometimes it may be good for us. It forces us to be very critical of our own conduct.

JAMES

Chet, if I'm up to it, I'll call on you later.

LUCRETIA

James! Your optimism alone will not get you out of this bed.

JAMES

If I say I'll call on him, I'll call on him. If I recover at this rate, I'll be on my feet in a week.

CHESTER

I await your visit.

CHESTER returns to his chair.

LUCRETIA

And now the rest of you can follow him.

JAMES

Crete—

LUCRETIA

I'm serious.

They file out as lights change.

JULIA

The great tidal wave of sorrow which has rolled over the country, has swept you loose from your old mooring and set you on a mountain-top, alone.

Lights crossfade back to ALEC. JULIA returns to her desk.

ALEC

Do you mean to tell me—after all this time—you're still waiting for his visit?

CHESTER

He's due for a rally.

ALEC

Unlikely after two months, but if you say so, sir.

CHESTER

It must be, Alec. You've known me since the custom house, now can you see me being President of this country?

ALEC

I admit it's a challenging notion. But all you've done these past weeks is seclude yourself here and feel sorry for yourself. Personally, I think you'd make a grand President someday.

CHESTER

And if that day was today?

ALEC

I'm certain you'd grow into the position.

CHESTER

I've done nothing but make a mockery of the Vice-President's office.

ALEC

Doubt paints an unflattering picture, sir.

CHESTER

It's true. I've been in Albany helping Roscoe fight the President. But for what, Alec? Was I fighting for the party, or for myself? Who cares if the custom house is now run by a Half-Breed Republican? Roscoe's vanity has driven the Stalwarts to near extinction or at the very least to ridicule. And in our weakest moment, I step into the highest office in the land? You see the position I'm in?

ALEC

You didn't cause the fracture in the Republican Party.

CHESTER

But I also haven't sought to mend it. And now I've alienated both sides of the party and that doesn't even take into consideration the Democrats. As President I would be impeached quicker than Johnson was! James simply must pull through, that's all there is to it. There would be no one on my side, Alec.

ALEC

I'm on your side, sir. And bear in mind that having no one on your side also means being in no one's pocket. There's something to be said for being a political outsider.

CHESTER

You sound like the young lady in the letter I received.

ALEC

Which letter, sir?

JULIA enters the room as ALEC picks up the letter.

JULIA

Ostracism can be quite wonderful! You notice the incongruence and desperation of social and political circles. I've caught many eyes shifting guiltily away from mine. They all stare, but none of them are brave enough to let me see their pity. The mistake everyone makes is that instead of embracing the outsider's view, engaging the pitiful and pathetic, they rail against it. All this does is create an exterior and interior fight with one's soul. Two battles for the cost of one, and I needn't remind you that battles of civility such as this didn't turn out so well for this country in the past.

She speaks directly to CHESTER, who does not acknowledge.

Great emergencies awaken generous traits which have lain dormant half a life. Rise to the emergency. And now your kindest opponents say: 'Arthur will try to do right—' adding gloomily—'He won't succeed though—making a man President cannot change him.' But

making a man President can change him! If there is a spark of true nobility in you, now is the occasion to let it shine. Once in awhile there comes a crisis which renders miracles feasible.

ALEC with the letter.

ALEC

Do you know this girl?

CHESTER

Never met her.

ALEC

She lives over on 74th; maybe you met her at a ball or something.

CHESTER

If you read more, you'll see that she's very much an invalid. I doubt she graces many dances.

ALEC

She obviously has no experience in political circles.

CHESTER

True, but it might be to her credit. You said so yourself, there's something to being the outsider; an ability to reform. Perhaps rise above the partisanship.

ALEC

You know what happens to the man who tries to please everyone?

CHESTER

What is that?

ALEC

He winds up despised by all. Don't confuse being in no one's pocket with being in everyone's.

CHESTER

Oh Alec, maybe you should be president.

ALEC

Yes, and this invalid girl could be my second. Forget impeachment, they'd bring back burning at the stake.

CHESTER

I don't know what to do.

ALEC

How can I help you?

CHESTER

I don't know! Tell me what to do. Tell me who I should be.

ALEC

I couldn't do that.

CHESTER

The weight of it all, Alec! The sheer and unfathomable weight! I never wanted any of this! I will not and cannot be President!

CHESTER sobs. A knocking off.

ALEC

That might just be some news.

He exits.

JULIA

How many nights have I questioned my existence? How many nights have I questioned my resolve? Every night. As I lay down and the aches begin to set in, I question every thought and action that I've ever had. And for fun, I question every action and decision in the history of mankind. The conclusion I keep arriving at is that most of those decisions have been incorrect. It is sad to endure when your motives all are good.

ROSCOE breezes in with ALEC.

ROSCOE

Oh lord, Chet! Look at this sad sack! Here Alec, take my coat.

He throws his coat at ALEC.

ALEC

I'm not the houseboy, sir.

ALEC tosses the coat on a chair.

ALEC

If you'll excuse me I'll attend to the other guests.

ROSCOE

Sounds like something a houseboy would do!

ALEC is gone.

ROSCOE

He never used to be so ornery. You've been soft on him Chet!

CHESTER

Leave him alone, Roscoe. He's my closest friend.

ROSCOE

And what of me?

CHESTER

...

ROSCOE

Oh, it's a damn joke Chet! You need to lighten up. All of this darkness is going to drag everyone down. But think of this, soon we will control the executive mansion!

CHESTER

We?

ROSCOE

You know what I mean. The party! The real party!

CHESTER

I'm not sure what that means anymore.

ROSCOE

Speaking of the real party, I take it everyone's in the study? Maybe I'll join them.

CHESTER

If it's a celebration you want, you'll surely get it there.

ROSCOE

This crisis means as much to me as it does to them. I'm out of my Senate seat and my job Chet, and I must admit that I overestimated my position—

CHESTER

You resigned!

ROSCOE

A foolish ploy yes, but we have the chance to be flush again! We hold all of the cards, even you must see that!

CHESTER

Roscoe I need to ask you something and I'd appreciate a direct and truthful answer.

ROSCOE

Of course, although I'm not sure why you would expect anything less—

CHESTER

My current predicament has forced me to come to terms with my lack of self knowledge. How do you expect me to know anyone else?

ROSCOE

Chet look at me, I'm still the same man you've known these past twenty years. We've built something and I tell you what, we've built it together. I might not have admitted that in the past, but it's true. Who else has been here for you during your time of need? Ask anything of me.

CHESTER

Tell me you had nothing to do with the shooting of the president.

JULIA

The day Garfield was shot, the thought rose in a thousand minds that you might be the instigator of the foul act. Is not that a humiliation which cuts deeper than any bullet can pierce? Disappoint our fears. Force the nation to have faith in you.

ISABELLA (off)

Julia!

JULIA

As I have faith in you.

ROSCOE

Chet, you think I'm some sort of traitor? This shocks me, particularly after all we've been through. Exactly who do you take me for? Everything I've done for you and you accuse me of this?

CHESTER

I haven't accused you of anything. It's simply a question.

ROSCOE

I will not dignify it with a response.

CHESTER

I must know and I must be sure, Ross. Among the other crushing challenges I face is this petty suspicion that follows me wherever I go! Did you help Charlie?

ROSCOE

You know as well as I do that he was off his nut. I hadn't seen him in months. I didn't even think him still in Washington. I presumed he had finally slunk back here to New York.

CHESTER

Obviously he did not.

ROSCOE

For God's sake, I didn't think he was dangerous!

CHESTER

No. He had no courage about him and deeds like this require some kind of bravery.

ROSCOE

Or dementia.

CHESTER

Can you definitively tell me that you had no dealings with him?

ROSCOE

No, none.

Besides, he didn't hound me as much as he hounded you.

CHESTER

I thought letting him speak once at a stump would solve his incessant inquiries to help, but he was a rambling mess. He just slunk away after his pathetic speech. Besides, that was almost a year ago. You really hadn't seen him recently?

ROSCOE

No. Why does this even matter to you?

CHESTER

Any link to the stalwarts is dangerous. His declaration when he was captured put suspicion on us and if there is even a shred of evidence that he talked with either of us or Platt—

ROSCOE

Chet, there is nothing. Charlie Guiteau quit us—if he was ever with us—and started haunting the executive mansion, he became Garfield's problem. Our hands are sparklingly clean.

ISABELLA (off)

Julia!

ROSCOE

Now if you're satisfied with this line of inquiry, I need a drink. Are you coming with me?

CHESTER

No.

ISABELLA (off)

Julia!

ROSCOE

Suit yourself.

He goes. CHESTER wallows in pity.

JULIA

Yes mother!?

ISABELLA (entering)

Could you get the door, for goodness' sake? Someone has been knocking.

JULIA

I'm sorry, mother, I couldn't hear.

ISABELLA

'I can't hear, I can't hear.' Honestly Julia, it's a worse crutch than your cane this hearing. Pay attention.

JULIA

I do try. I do.

ISABELLA exits and during the following, a door is heard off along with a boisterous voice, that of THEODORE.

A brief pantomime of the following story.

JULIA

I am bombarded by family. It all reminds me of a story—possibly you know it—about a mother and son—they were French, distinguished—and the story is rather French too. He was the model of son, so devoted, so deferential, and obedient, as only a French son could be. And she was a model mother, and all the while this good mother kept a detective following her delightful son, and so knew all about him that there was to know. / I forget how the story ends—but don't you think she would have been a very happy mother, if the detective had come back and said to her: 'Madam, you are entirely mistaken. Your son is all that you could wish him to be?' // Now I feel exactly as if I were your mother—which you must own is generous, considering you are old enough to be mine!—and I follow your career with the closest * interest.

THEODORE (off)

/ Isabella! Good evening! What glorious weather we are having, you should both get out!

ISABELLA (off)

// Teddy, you know what an effort that is with Julia. Are the girls with you?

THEODORE (entering)

Of course. They're being helped from the hansom. *Where is the little one? Ah, Julia good afternoon!

JULIA

Good afternoon uncle.

THEODORE

You look so down. Why is she down?

ISABELLA

She's writing letters again.

THEODORE

Letters, eh? Who are you writing to, hm? Anyone I know?

JULIA

I suppose not.

THEODORE

Don't underestimate me, little Julia! I'm an extremely well respected man in this community, as your father was before me. Let's have a look.

He crosses to the desk and picks up the letter.

JULIA

Uncle, please—

THEODORE

Well, well, well! The Vice President! I had no idea you were such a powerful person, little Miss Sand!

ISABELLA

Theodore—

THEODORE

No wonder you're so gloomy. All of this business about the health of the President is depressing. You shouldn't worry your head about such things.

JULIA

Aren't you concerned for the fate of our country?

THEODORE

You make it sound perfectly hopeless. Everything will come out in the end. There's nothing to worry about.

JULIA

There is everything to worry about!

Offstage, the entrance of the SAND sisters is heard.

ISABELLA

That's the girls!

ISABELLA goes to the door.

THEODORE

The country will continue as before.

There are overlapping greetings and laughter from off.

JULIA

You have such a short memory, uncle. What of when Lincoln was shot? This is exactly the same type of sensational misdirection that tends to change a conversation.

THEODORE

You must cease your letter, Julia. Garfield is no Lincoln.

JULIA

And you are not my father.
I'll write to whomever I wish.

THEODORE

Nothing good will come from this, little one. You're unimportant. This missive will find the bottom of a wastebasket and you will be ridiculed. I'm not interested in this family suffering any ridicule, least of all at the hands of its most feeble member.

JULIA

You have no say in how I spend my time.

THEODORE

That may be. And I may not be your father, but I am your relative, and your elder; if I were you I'd be a bit more careful with how you address the man who holds your purse strings, eh?

As JULIA tries to retort, the clamor from off increases and PAULINE, HENRIETTA, and ISABELLA enter. JULIA retreats to her desk.

THEODORE

Pauline! Henrietta! What took so long? Slowed by the ride from the bridge?

PAULINE

We almost forgot the sweetcake.

HENRIETTA

Pauline ran down the driver, you should've seen it!

THEODORE

You should be more careful, girls. Don't be forgetful.

PAULINE

You could've stayed and helped us, uncle!

HENRIETTA

I thought you had the cake.

ISABELLA

I'm glad it was rescued.

PAULINE

Mother, you should see the bridge! It's massive! They've almost finished the roadway.

THEODORE

They should've been done months ago!

HENRIETTA

Yes, it's driving the bankers mad, isn't it Uncle. / Hello Julia.

THEODORE

It's driving this banker mad, anyway.

JULIA

Hello.

PAULINE

Oh Julia, I didn't even see / you there.

THEODORE

I think I / smell a roast ... is there a roast?*

HENRIETTA

(*To PAULINE*)
She's so quiet.

PAULINE

What else is new?

ISABELLA

*Of course there's a roast!

THEODORE

Good! I can tell you all about the bridge over dinner.

ISABELLA

Put that cake in the / kitchen, Pauline.

THEODORE

Did you bake that yourself?

HENRIETTA

(*Leaving.*)
Yes, mother.

HENRIETTA

It's from the bakery, Uncle. Let me help!

She follows HENRIETTA.

ISABELLA

Julia, what is wrong with you? You didn't speak to your sisters.

JULIA

I'm breathless, mother. I have only the stamina for one conversation at a time.

THEODORE

Perhaps you should take a nap before the meal.

ISABELLA

I'm trying to instill a sense of society in Julia.

JULIA

Is that what all of this effort is for? For me?

ISABELLA

Of course, who else?

THEODORE

Ah! Rely on me! I shall bring the stamina for all of us.

JULIA

I don't need / or want any of this.

ISABELLA

Teddy, you're not helping.

THEODORE

I'm exactly the strength this household needs!

JULIA

You're saying we need a man?

ISABELLA

Nonsense.

THEODORE

It's true. I'm a pillar of strength, and I challenge the man who says I'm not. I guarantee you I would have recovered long ago from the same wounds the President fights.

JULIA

Uncle!

THEODORE

It's true! He must lack my vigor, although I admit he's put on a good show!

JULIA

Is that what the fate of the country is to you? A show? A man is dying, uncle—your President.

THEODORE

I didn't vote for him.

ISABELLA

What of you bragging about putting him into office?

THEODORE

Oh, I encouraged others to support him, but I never personally vote.

JULIA

This is really too much to bear!

THEODORE

You've never been in those voting rooms, they're cramped and full of loud, fragrant people ... it's just ghastly.

JULIA

The country is in crisis, don't you think you should use your right to vote to help guide it?

THEODORE

Or maybe I could write personal letters? Ha! I tell you what Julia, I'll dress you up in my clothes next election day and you can be me.

JULIA

If I could vote, I'd do it every time, I'd even show up early!

ISABELLA

You can barely drag yourself up by noon!

JULIA

I would mother! It's a right and a privilege to vote!

She has overexerted herself again and sits.

THEODORE

Now calm down child, I doubt you'll ever have to worry about such a thing.

JULIA

Such a short memory, uncle.

THEODORE

And that short memory has served me well. One must have a short memory in order to better oneself! This comes from idleness, Julia. You should find a preoccupation. Or perhaps a suitor?

ISABELLA

A suitor for a cripple?

JULIA

Mother, please don't encourage him!

ISABELLA

I'm throwing your own words back at you.

THEODORE

I'm sure there's another cripple out there who seeks a wife. Why, look what crawled back from the war! You're telling me there is no one who would have you?

JULIA

What of someone I would have?

THEODORE

I daresay you have no reasons to be picky.

JULIA

And yet I am.

ISABELLA

Stubborn as her father. Come in to the kitchen and I'll make you a toddy.

THEODORE

And some of that cake, eh? Now remember Julia, lower your standards or find a preoccupation, perhaps knitting. The ladies seem to quite enjoy that!

ISABELLA

Leave her be!

They leave.

JULIA

Knitting! I wish I had the needles, anyway. I'd jab them right in his leg. Why must I always be treated like a child? My body does not reveal my mind. It requires about three times as much vitality to run the brain properly as to run all the rest of the body. I consider my body a traitor of the worst sort.

She returns to her letters.

Voices offstage. ALEC enters.

CHESTER

Alec, what is this?

ALEC

Ask Mr. Conkling.

Three men plus ROSCOE enter and surround

CHESTER as he rises to greet them.

JULIA joins them.

Support and handshakes all around.

CHESTER

Roscoe?

ROSCOE

There. You see? I can't hold them back. You have everyone's full support tonight, we're all here to help you in your grief.

CHESTER

Gentlemen, I'm overwhelmed by your generosity.

A knock at the door off. ALEC exits.

JULIA

I wait for news. No one goes out of their way to write me, so I write to them. When you're in my position, you have to take initiative. I suspect that it's because when people think of me they pity me. No one likes to feel pity. And no matter how many times I explain to people that they should abandon pity on my behalf, I still see it in their eyes. I am not proud of talking, when it is to no purpose.

ALEC, at the front door. A reporter awaits.

ALEC

Can I help you?

REPORTER

I'm from the herald, we just got word the President is dead.

ALEC

We are awaiting a more reliable source.

REPORTER

Why would I be here at 11:30? Does Arthur have a statement?

ALEC

I daren't ask him, he is sitting sobbing like a child with his face buried in his hands.

REPORTER

Can I quote that?

ALEC

No.

He shuts the door.

JULIA

I despise pity, in fact I write to be seen through my words and not through my physical shortcomings. I hope when you read my words you will see me more completely than you would were I directly in front of you.

ALEC returns to sitting room.

CHESTER

Well?

ALEC

Just a reporter, sir.

CHESTER

Did you send him away?

ALEC

Yes, but not before he assured me that Mr. Garfield had officially expired. You are the new President.

CHESTER sits.

ROSCOE

Finally. Three cheers all! Hip hip!

ALL

Hooray!

ROSCOE

Hip hip!

ALL

Hooray!

CHESTER

Stop! A man is dead. A man who actually wanted and appreciated the job of President. I can't believe it. I don't believe it. The press lies.

ALEC

He seemed fairly certain of his information.

CHESTER

I await an official notice.

ROSCOE

Now you listen to me, you must rise to the occasion! You should have already seized power. You will be seen as weak and powerless by the congress, they won't let you replace Garfield's cabinet when you take office. And if they do they'll fight you for the next four years mark my words!

CHESTER

I have no plans to choose new cabinet members.

ROSCOE

Excuse me?

CHESTER

Even if I become President I did not earn it. It's still not my Presidency.

ROSCOE

Of course it is, you fool! You can't turn your back on all of us. Look around you!

SUPPORTER 1

Chet, we've stood by you. We expect something in return.

CHESTER

What exactly are you all expecting?

SUPPORTER 2

Money!

General laughter and applause.

SUPPORTER 1

Power!

More laughter and applause.

CHESTER moves downstage. ROSCOE joins him.

CHESTER

Roscoe, they're all mad.

ROSCOE

They're excited. And they're right, they deserve favor and so do I. I've sacrificed everything for this.

CHESTER

A sacrifice was not requested.

ROSCOE

You would destroy the relationship with the only people who actually support you?

CHESTER

If need be.

ROSCOE

Then you're even more foolish than I thought.

Another knock, ALEC exits. CHESTER crosses to the door. ALEC returns with a telegram.

ALEC

It's from Blaine, sir.

CHESTER opens and reads.

CHESTER

Alec, get the judge; and a copy of the oath of Presidential office. James Garfield is dead.

SUPPORTER 1

And then it's off to Washington! Hip hip!

ALL

Hooray!

SUPPORTER 1

Hip hip!

ALL

Hooray!

The men distance themselves from CHESTER, laughing and cheering as CHESTER is left alone. JULIA steps forward to comfort him.

JULIA

You are the 21st man to recite the oath of office, however reluctant the recitation. Your name now is on the annals of history. You cannot slink back into obscurity, if you would. A hundred years hence, school boys will recite your name in the list of Presidents and tell of your administration. For the sake of your country, for your own sake and for the sakes of all who have ever loved you, let it be pure and bright. I can only pray that you will be inspired, for I have been inspired since President Garfield was first attacked. As a 30 year old, forgotten woman, I considered myself dead and buried. Your reticence and predicament inspired me to inspire you, so you see, you have saved me. This moment you rise in history is your opportunity to rise above all faults, parties, and squabbles. You are now in control of your destiny and I implore you to be meticulous, just, and honorable.

At the end of this speech, CHESTER joins his friends in the living room, but with a JUDGE. His hand is on a bible while his other is raised. The judge also holds a piece of paper from which CHESTER reads.

CHESTER

I do solemnly affirm that I will faithfully execute the office of President of the United States, and will to the best of my ability preserve, protect, and defend the Constitution of the United States.

The gathered surround the new, truly solemn President and applaud. The men leave and CHESTER follows, but on a whim returns and fetches JULIA's letter.

JULIA notices and approves. She moves to her desk.

JULIA

October 5th, 1881

Hon. Chester A. Arthur,

Well, you have gone. So much the better. New York is the one spot on the continent where you positively ought not to be this fall.

PAULINE and HENRIETTA enter.

HENRIETTA

Julia, who exactly are you writing to?

PAULINE

You never write to us.

JULIA

If you must know, I'm writing the new President.

HENRIETTA

Oh.

PAULINE

Why?

JULIA

Why not? As you see I have nothing else to do.

HENRIETTA

I thought of sending some condolences to Mrs. Garfield. She must be having an awful time.

JULIA

Yes. That's a good idea, I'll write to her next.

PAULINE

Julia, mother's worried for you. And Uncle is too.

HENRIETTA

They want you to get out more and I think you should ride with us down to the ferry.

PAULINE

You'll get out and get to see the bridge!

JULIA

But I've just started—

PAULINE

The letter will be there when you return.

HENRIETTA

Please say yes.

JULIA

It's hard to say no when you put it that way.

HENRIETTA

Excellent!

PAULINE

On the way you can tell us all about your letters!

HENRIETTA and PAULINE exit.

JULIA remains for a moment.

CHESTER enters.

JULIA

Remember. You are a better and a nobler man than you were a very short time ago. Nothing could be more beautiful than the manner in which you have borne yourself through this long, hard ordeal. There is a great sadness overhanging the whole community—on none it falls more heavily than you. Do not try to shake it off. There are higher things in life than what we call happiness.

JULIA exits.

JIM joins CHESTER.

JIM

They don't trust you.

CHESTER

I know. Do you think they'll stay on?

JIM

I can only speak for myself.

CHESTER

And?

JIM

I'm leaning toward resignation.

CHESTER

Can't we put the past behind us?

JIM

As you said, I don't trust you. And you've done it to yourself.

(LUCRETIA discovered)

Mrs. Garfield.

LUCRETIA

Thank you both for coming.

JIM

We couldn't let you ride with the President's body alone, you've had enough ordeal.

LUCRETIA

Thank you.

JIM

I'll see you on the train, Chet. Take care of yourself—*(sotto voce)* if you get plugged there's no one to replace you.

CHESTER

I've taken precautions on that account.

JIM

I'm sure you have.

JIM leaves.

LUCRETIA

They will grow to respect you.

CHESTER

I doubt that, Mrs. Garfield. In fact, I'll likely lose them all.

LUCRETIA

I'm sorry to hear that.

CHESTER

It's not a surprise. It's good to see you well. When Mrs. Arthur passed I was inconsolable.

LUCRETIA

James' death eventually became a question of when and not a question of why. I grieved months ago.

CHESTER

I suppose that's true.

LUCRETIA

What of a first lady?

CHESTER

It's the furthest thought from my mind.

LUCRETIA

You need a woman.

CHESTER

Lucretia if you wish to remain in residence at the mansion and take care of social duties I'm sure I can arrange it.

LUCRETIA

That's not what I mean. You need a woman's voice—and not just to control the kitchen staff—but I'm not seeking to remain in Washington.

CHESTER

Oh. I see. Thank you for the advice.

LUCRETIA

It's serious advice, Mr. Arthur—Mr. President—think long and hard about who is by your side when you need someone to turn to and in whom you can trust.

CHESTER

I will consider it. Will you accompany me to the train?

LUCRETIA

If nothing else is true Mr. President, you are surely a gentleman.

They exit as HENRIETTA and PAULINE enter, crossing to the ferry landing.

JULIA follows. She sees the Brooklyn Bridge and it stops her.

HENRIETTA

Julia! Keep up.

JULIA

I didn't realize.

HENRIETTA

Oh. I'd forgotten you hadn't seen it for a while.

PAULINE

Isn't it magnificent?

JULIA

It's so much larger than anything. The drawings in the papers don't do it justice, it's massive. Breathtaking.

HENRIETTA

Are you out of breath? We can take it slow.

JULIA

I'm fine Henrietta—but I would like to appreciate the marvel.

HENRIETTA

You can honestly tell us if you're physically exhausted.

PAULINE

We'd prefer you get back to mother undamaged.

JULIA

I'm fine; she thinks I'll break like a twig.

PAULINE

She wants to expand your horizons.

HENRIETTA

And so do we—

PAULINE

We don't think living in a hospital is expanding / your horizons—

HENRIETTA

Pauline—!

JULIA

A hospital?! Has mother told you this?

PAULINE

Julia, calm down.

JULIA

Why would I go to a hospital?!

HENRIETTA

It does no good to get upset over this, it's simply idle talk. But talk is always rooted in reality. Mother is not as young as she once was and she can't care for you like she used to.

JULIA

I don't need anyone to care for me.

HENRIETTA

And yet you still live at home.

JULIA

Has it never occurred to you that it is I who cares for mother and not the other way around?

PAULINE

Julia—

JULIA

Honestly, think about it. You've left home—and not only that, you've left the city. She moved here so that we could all be together after father died and she is repaid with desertion.

PAULINE

Brooklyn is not altogether far.

JULIA

To her it's a thousand miles. She has never visited you under the pretense of age, but what you cannot see is that she avoids you due to disappointment.

HENRIETTA

That's ridiculous. She was the one who droned at us about getting on with our lives.

JULIA

But how difficult would it have been to find apartments close by. There are hundreds of open rooms in our neighborhood alone.

PAULINE

I doubt the truth of that. Besides, it's too stuffy here in the city, too much building and calamity.

HENRIETTA

The captains of industry have claimed this area and we think you and mother should abandon it too.

PAULINE

This bridge is just the beginning. Why do you think we went back to Brooklyn? It's our home, it's where we were born, and it is the future.

HENRIETTA

Why suffer the city when you can dwell in the country?

JULIA

Brooklyn is hardly the country.

HENRIETTA

You're so stubborn! Don't you see we want you to come with us?

JULIA

Come with you? Today?

PAULINE

Not today, but when you do come we want you to come permanently. Julia, come and live with us and we can keep you out of the hospital.

JULIA

What of mother?

HENRIETTA

She can come as well, but she won't of course. You don't have to make your decision based on her. Come with us and you can enjoy life, not be reminded of its passing by.

PAULINE

We can be true sisters to you and take you places, introduce you to people—without tiring you of course, but just think of the freedom.

HENRIETTA

Think of all you could set your mind to if you weren't constantly worrying about what mother and uncle think of everything you do, every move you make? Come and live with us.

PAULINE

We think it best.

JULIA

Best for who?

PAULINE

What do you mean?

JULIA

Who benefits from me leaving mother?

PAULINE

You do.

JULIA

No. I don't. No one benefits. She needs me and I need her.

HENRIETTA

You don't mean that, you're at each other's throats whenever we visit.

JULIA

That is your perception. I am, in actuality, an invalid.

PAULINE

Julia—

JULIA

It's true and—it hurts my pride to admit, but I know my physical limitations. Do you really think you're saving me by taking care of me? And make no mistake, there are days when I need help and care.

PAULINE

You would let them put you in a hospital?

JULIA

Of course not, but they wouldn't dare. You see, you would know that if you visited more often and in the future I think you should. If you really care for me and want to help me—instead of trying to wrest me from mother's grip—you will visit more often and relieve that part of my burden. We sometimes need a break from each other.

HENRIETTA

I told you this would be hopeless.

PAULINE

Henrietta—

HENRIETTA

She's doomed herself. I for one have no plans to visit more than we already do. I love my home, and I love my freedom. I long wished for my independence and now I have it and I don't want to be tied up with family matters. I need to find my own way.

JULIA

Your family is part of that way.

HENRIETTA

You are mired in the past. It's best to forget.

JULIA

A house cannot simply remove its foundation.

HENRIETTA

I don't want to be a house, metaphorical or otherwise.

She exits.

PAULINE

I still wish you would think on it. We're trying to be the bridge.

PAULINE follows HENRIETTA

THEODORE enters with EMILY Roebing.

THEODORE

Girls! Drat! We've missed them.

EMILY

It's quite alright Mr. Sand, I'm far too busy anyway. But who is this?

THEODORE

Who? Ah! Julia, I didn't see you there!

JULIA

Good afternoon, uncle.

THEODORE

Mrs. Roebing, this is Miss Julia Sand my other niece.

EMILY

A pleasure, Miss Sand.

THEODORE

This is Mrs. Roebing—

EMILY

Call me Emily.

THEODORE

She's courier for her brilliant husband Washington Roebling, builder of the bridge!

JULIA

Yes I know who he is uncle, it's lovely to meet you Emily. How's your husband feeling?

EMILY

Somewhat recovered, but alas he is confined to our apartment.

THEODORE

Which is where Julia usually is; it's good to see you up and about little one.

JULIA

You are both doing truly remarkable work.

EMILY

God willing it'll be done soon. Mr. Sand if we're through I should get back.

THEODORE

Yes of course, and feel free to call on me whenever you need a financial eye.

EMILY

Of course. There's nothing I like more than to take time out of my busy schedule in the service of a banker. Miss Sand.

JULIA

Mrs. Roebling.

EMILY exits.

THEODORE

I'll bet you didn't know how much sway I held in the financial community.

JULIA

Not an inkling, uncle. If it were not for your constant mention of it, this would have been a great shock.

THEODORE

Indeed. I'm a very important man. But you are all alone! Let me run and fetch a carriage for you!

He trots off.

CHESTER is revealed in pantomime, talking with Garfield's Cabinet. As he talks with them they leave one by one until only ROBERT is left.

JULIA

October 27th, 1881.

You Washingtonians have no idea what a dreadful creature the Mr. Arthur who ran 'the machine' in New York was. I saw a picture of him once—and it had horns. You must not let yourself be mistaken for that man for one moment. The Mr. Arthur in Washington is another person—soon you will show what you intend to do. Half measures have no place on your programme—they would make too flat a failure. If you choose one course, you will have all the praise you want, without mine. If you choose the other, I shall know, that, if my first appeal to you was in vain, nothing that I could say to you now would avail.

In the interest of being too personal—although perhaps it is too late for that!—now that you are the most powerful man in the country, what is to become of your household? Without your departed wife by your side, you might find yourself quite literally alone. What of your young daughter? There are limits to human strength. You have been under a great nerve strain for months past. And now we read constantly of you being 'hard at work,' or 'receiving callers,' but if the health is neglected, the breakdown is certain to come—and when it comes, it is not easily mended.

Surely there is someone in which you have absolute trust. My advice is to find that person and give them whatever they want for the sake of your house.

CHESTER and ROBERT exit.

JULIA returns to her writing desk.

The study of Secretary Kirkwood's house in Washington DC.

MARY Arthur McElroy, sits behind the desk jotting down a note. She seems frustrated.

ALEC enters.

ALEC

Ma'am?

MARY

Alec! Well, it's about damn time. Where's Chet?

ALEC

He's not with me, Mary.

MARY

I've been here for an hour Alec and I don't like to be kept waiting. If this is how my help is to be rewarded, I might have to return to my own family in New York.

ALEC

Don't argue with me, he was meeting with Mr. Lincoln and I expect they have a lot to talk about.

MARY

An appointment is an appointment, Mr. Powell.

ALEC

I'll be sure to tell him that when I see him.

MARY

I don't suppose he breaks appointments with others, or with you for instance?

ALEC

I couldn't say one way or the other, as we have a sort of open appointment.

MARY

I see. I thought your people were above that sort of beck and call these days.

ALEC

My people? Mrs. McElroy, my people are from New York City and we were free long before the war. I am Chet's friend and advisor, as well as his personal valet. So whenever you talk of people, born free or newly free, be sure not to pile them into a bale of unidentifiable straws of hay for that is precisely how needles hide.

MARY

For God's sake Alec, I was joking! I thought you had retained some of your sense of humor.

ALEC

My patience and humor have worn thinner the further south we have come.

MARY

This swamp is an invitation to dampen anyone's spirits.

CHESTER enters with ROBERT.

MARY

And here he is!

CHESTER

Molly, thank God you've arrived!

MARY

Chet, you look like hell!

CHESTER

Yes. Thank you for that. Robert, this is Mary McElroy my sister; Molly, Robert Todd Lincoln.

ROBERT

A pleasure, ma'am.

MARY

The pleasure is mine. We continue to grieve for your father.

ROBERT

Kind of you to say ma'am, and I grieve as well, for now I am bereft of two Presidents.

CHESTER

Alec, can you take our coats and arrange for lunch in a half hour.

ALEC

Lunch for three?

CHESTER

Four, yourself included of course.

ALEC exits.

ROBERT

It's thoughtful of you, but I should return home if you want to catch up with your sister.

CHESTER

Thank you Robert, but I meant it when I invited you. Molly, Robert has agreed to remain in my cabinet.

MARY

Wonderful! And don't feel the need to leave on my account.

CHESTER

Yes, I'd like to keep you in my sights so you don't change your mind.

ROBERT

They didn't so much change their minds as have little intention to remain in your cabinet to begin with.

MARY

You can't be serious. Is this true?

CHESTER

I'm sick of all of this damn Stalwart and Half-Breed nonsense, can't we be a united party once and for all? I honestly wanted to keep Garfield's men on the job, it would've saved the trouble of being accused of cronyism. In the end it looks like the only men who'll work with me are the ones I'm trying to avoid.

ROBERT

I tried to convince some to stay on. I think Blaine was close.

CHESTER

Ha! He hates me worse than all the rest!

ROBERT

But he is the one who is most likely to stay for the good of the nation.

MARY

You'll even need a new Secretary of State?

CHESTER

Don't start, Mary.

MARY

You should demand that they remain in their posts. Can't you write an executive order or something?

CHESTER

I'd like to see that letter. In fact, write me a draft personally.

ROBERT

It sounds like something my father would've done.

MARY

How's this? Dear sirs: It has come to my attention that a large wall has come between us. This is your pride. Please do us all a favor and swallow it. Brick by brick.

ROBERT

She just might have a knack for this.

CHESTER

Yes, be sure to include details about the battle lines for the next civil war: Washington, and everywhere else!

ROBERT

Speaking of civil war, could you extend me one request?

CHESTER

Why do I get the feeling that this is what you've been building up to this entire meeting?

ROBERT

Don't appoint Roscoe to Blaine's post.

CHESTER

And why not?

ROBERT

Public sentiment will be seriously against you as it is. Roscoe Conkling is a feared man who held sway over the Senate and the votes of New York for a long time and he didn't let anyone forget the power he held. He made a lot of enemies so when he dug his own grave by resigning, no one felt particularly sad to see him go. I know you tried to help him back to Washington, and he's your friend, but whatever you owe him it cannot be worth the damage of raising him to Secretary of State.

JULIA has joined them.

JULIA

Ugly rumors are started as to what you intend to do, and your associating with the wrong people gives them weight. This suspicion is the natural outgrowth of the politics you and Mr. Conkling have been cultivating. What the nation needs most at present, is rest. When people are very tired, they are apt to be irritable, unreasonable, and ready to quarrel on small provocation.

MARY

I've always thought Mr. Conkling an odious man, I don't know why you've helped him this far.

CHESTER

Don't forget that it is he who helped me this far. Without him, I'm not even involved in politics.

ROBERT

You already have your back against the wall. Any favoritism to Conkling would eliminate anyone who would give you the benefit of the doubt.

CHESTER

Yes, but why does it have to be this way? Roscoe told me that Garfield's cabinet would abandon me, but I didn't believe him. I honestly thought that we could salvage something from this tragedy.

ROBERT

Maybe if you had reached out from the very beginning.

CHESTER

What could I have done when James lay dying? Could I have run in to save the day, or would I have been seen as just another power hungry opportunist?

ROBERT

I'm sorry I brought it up, we can't argue about what's done.

MARY

There must be some way to keep them, Chet.

CHESTER

Well, Robert? What do you think? Should I continue to plead my case?

JULIA

Although the stability of retaining them would be best, the public does not insist that you should keep Garfield's Cabinet.

ROBERT

I don't think it would hurt, but I do think it's fruitless.

CHESTER

Thank you for your candor. Both of you. I have many positions to fill Robert, but it's nice to know that one of the hangers on can already be of service.

ROBERT

Of course. A pleasure to meet you Mrs. McElroy.

MARY

Likewise.

ROBERT exits.

MARY

Where have you been? I've been left here to rot for an hour.

CHESTER

What is this note?

MARY

I was preparing to head back to New York.

CHESTER

I've never seen such salacious words in print.

MARY

Don't look so disappointed, you're about to get an earful of them!

CHESTER

Molly, I've a country to run.

MARY

As far as I can see it's you me and Robert in charge of the executive offices.

CHESTER

Does that mean you'll stay?

MARY

Well, I did come all the way here. Now, what's your offer?

CHESTER

You received my letter.

MARY

I want to hear it from you.

CHESTER

You never make things easy.

MARY

And that's all that you do! Everything is easy for Chester Arthur, as easy as you please. Now I want to hear from your mouth exactly what you would have me here for, because the last time I saw you was at your wife's funeral almost two years ago. I don't recall you swallowing your pride and letting me be a part of your life—and I offered if you'll remember. I'm a bit tired of not being taken seriously, as I've had a lifetime of it. Now I can see that you're going to have your fill of adversity, so unless you want to alienate your last link to humanity—not counting the unctuous Alexander Powell—I suggest that you deal with my trust carefully and be plain about it.

CHESTER

You're right, you're absolutely right. I need you, Mary. That's the simple truth of the matter. I need your help with taking care of Nellie, sprucing up the Executive Mansion, coordinating parties, and generally lightening the mood around here.

MARY

Sounds like a lot of work. I have my own family.

CHESTER

They're grown.

MARY

How old is your little Nellie now?

CHESTER

Ten.

MARY

And you want me to be your First Lady? Is that what I'm hearing?

CHESTER

In a sense.

MARY

How scandalous.

CHESTER

Molly, you're my sister for god's sake.

MARY

I'm still not convinced.

CHESTER

You only need to stay from October to April. I don't know what else to say! Do you want money for God's sake? You'll have all I can give and more, just please stay. Molly—and I swear if you ever repeat I said this to anyone—you're the smartest woman I've ever known. Hell, probably the smartest and savviest person in my life and I'm lucky to have you for a sister. God, Molly, if only you could see the mess I've gotten into. And the Executive Mansion is a nightmare, it needs a complete remodeling. I don't know how long I can stay here with Secretary Kirkwood now that he's resigned and I will not stay in that musty, drafty, eyesore. I swear half of the furniture is still stamped 'James Madison.' Mary, there is quite literally only one person who could take on this task and that person is you. I need you and frankly, whether they know it or not, this country needs you.

MARY

I don't think of myself as having an inflated ego, but still it does help to be courted! I'll take the position!

CHESTER

You won't be sorry!

MARY

And don't you dare forget that you have the power of persuasion if you choose to use it. You are becoming a savvy politician

CHESTER

Remind me of that from time to time. I want you to come with me to the mansion after lunch so we can make plans. I have a call out to Louis Tiffany and I'll need to put him in some sort of direction.

MARY

Well, Mr. Tiffany! I daresay New York City invades the capital.

CHESTER

It's time to move that big, white house from log cabin rustic to big city style. I'm counting on your exquisite taste.

MARY

I admit I wouldn't have come if I wasn't intrigued by walking into history.

CHESTER

So you had every intention of staying?

MARY

Don't presume. Never presume.

A bell rings off.

CHESTER

Ah! That's the signal. Would you walk with me?

MARY

To the dining room?

CHESTER

Yes, and into history.

She takes his arm and they exit.

JULIA at her desk.

JULIA

What a splendid Henry the Fifth you are making! Do you remember what sort of man Lincoln was in '60 and what in '65? He was alive in every fibre—he grew from day to day—if he made a mistake once, he never repeated it. I believe you have some of that power of growth in you. Persons not inclined to admire you, are ready to admit that you have excellent taste and tact.

Lights shift back to study.

ROSCOE sits and waits.

CHESTER and MARY off.

MARY (off)

And that godawful rug! I hope Robert wants it because it is un-sellable!

CHESTER (off)

Put Lincoln's name on it and it'll sell.

MARY (off)

Or General Grant's.

CHESTER (entering)

It was probably Rutherford's!

MARY (entering, laughing)

Well, we could burn it then! Oh! Mr. Conkling.

CHESTER

Roscoe! I didn't expect you.

ROSCOE

Yes. I just arrived from New York. I came straightaway.

CHESTER

Ross, it's late and we were about to retire—

ROSCOE

My apologies, but I just can't sleep on these problems anymore.

MARY

Chet, I can find my way. Mr. Conkling has come all the way here to see you.

CHESTER

If you're sure, Mary.

MARY

Of course.

ROSCOE

I promise not to keep him long, Mrs. McElroy.

MARY

I have no doubt, Mr. Conkling. Goodnight all.

She goes.

CHESTER

She's a remarkable woman, Ross. I'm lucky to have her here.

ROSCOE

Yes, quite remarkable for a woman.

CHESTER

What is it I can do for you?

ROSCOE

Start me with a drink, for one. It's been a long journey and even though I don't expect to be ceremoniously welcomed, I would enjoy some common courtesy.

CHESTER fixes a drink.

CHESTER

Naturally, I don't want you to feel you are not welcome.

ROSCOE

How should I feel? Alec drops me in here, doesn't take my coat, and then turns heel and lets me stew in my juices. And I swear he sneered at me.

CHESTER

He doesn't much like you. I presumed you knew that.

ROSCOE

Well, he doesn't have to be so straightforward about it. False interest and courtesy are just as effective as the same.

CHESTER

Alec doesn't appreciate salaciousness, so I wouldn't expect him to be sensational toward others. He's forthright to a fault and speaks his mind which is precisely what makes him a valuable advisor. You could take the hint. You see, those of us who are on the outside of the whole have a unique perspective on things.

ROSCOE

'Those of us?' You count yourself among the marginalized?

CHESTER

Of course, don't you?

ROSCOE

No.

CHESTER

You've overestimated the capital of the Stalwarts in the Republican Party. Why should I delude myself when others see my ideals as out of date?

ROSCOE

Unlike you, I don't give up on my principles or hide behind people.

CHESTER

This is proving to be a woeful job interview.

ROSCOE

Don't you realize how much you need me?

CHESTER

Ah! It gets better.

ROSCOE

This congress will eat you alive! Your weakness is that you are weak. I tried to stand by you as Garfield lay dying, but it was a pathetic enterprise. You were a sobbing, jabbering wreck of a man, but I was there for you. And now that you have risen and I have fallen, why are you not there for me? Are we not friends?

CHESTER

That is precisely the problem. I can't be seen as rewarding my best friends! It'll look like I'm taking advantage of the President's death.

ROSCOE

Which you should be doing! I'm your most ardent supporter—before long I'll be your only one. It's not fair and it's not loyal! To hell with the rest of them, we've been together in this from the beginning. What of the Stalwart Republican ideals? If we succumb to the Half-Breeds, our party will be different and we'll be left out. After serious setbacks we now have supreme power, and I'm sorry that the President was shot, but that doesn't mean we turn our backs on each other! We owe it to the people of this country to rule in the way we see fit.

CHESTER

You put me in a difficult position and it's because of your actions last year that I'm in it.

ROSCOE

What else could I have done? I was forced to resign.

CHESTER

You could have accepted defeat.

ROSCOE

It was your custom house once. You ran it, do you mean to tell me that you were fine with Robertson's appointment? He's an idiot!

CHESTER

You resigned from Congress and expected to be re-elected. It was a long shot.

ROSCOE

It was not a long shot! I was betrayed by the New York Legislature! They hung me out to dry and you saw it all, so don't act like you weren't part of it.

CHESTER

I stood with you, but it was your scheme. If re-elected you would have returned here the conquering hero, even as Garfield succeeded in appointing Robertson. But the key point is that you failed. Your enemies in New York were salivating at the chance to knock you from power. In one fell swoop you eliminated your position and made the Stalwarts a laughing stock. Given time it is possible you might have clawed your way back, but you ran out of time. And here we are, in this office at a stalemate and my rewarding you would be rewarding failure.

ROSCOE

I'm starting to see. This is your power play. Okay. I acquiesce. I made a mistake. But Chet, you know me. I'm a gambler; and maybe I bluffed one too many times, but even you must see that now we hold all of the cards. You can correct this miscarriage of justice. Make me Secretary of State. The Stalwarts would not be seen as a laughing stock anymore.

CHESTER

But that's exactly what would happen. No one would trust me—

ROSCOE

No one trusts you now, you can't do this alone.

CHESTER

I don't plan to do it alone—I just plan to do it without you.

Pause.

ROSCOE

Everything we've fought for and you're willing to flush it away.

CHESTER

What if we're wrong?

ROSCOE

How could you even ask that?

CHESTER

You continue to neglect the fact that President Garfield was assassinated! A man is dead because of the Stalwart system! Guiteau was seeking favor, he wanted to be ambassador to Vienna, or Paris! I didn't win this office and I never wanted it. I owe this power to the death of Garfield and that is the wrong outcome for this country.

ROSCOE

You owe it to me! It was my deal that made you Vice-President!

CHESTER

Which I also didn't earn! You used me in your machine, but I will not let you bully me into giving you a victory in the shadow of an assassination!

ROSCOE

You've alienated everyone if you alienate me.

CHESTER

If you were Secretary of State, I suppose you'd advise me to remove Robertson from the Custom House?

ROSCOE

Naturally.

CHESTER

He stays.

ROSCOE

You're out of your mind, you hate him as much as I do and it's your old job!

CHESTER

I'm sure you'd have me kill civil service reform.

ROSCOE

Of course, it would be death to our way of doing business.

CHESTER

I plan to be the champion of that reform.

ROSCOE

Ha! You'd be destroying the very system that made you!

CHESTER

And here I stand in an office I don't deserve. I am not representative of new Stalwart power, I am the death of the Stalwarts.

ROSCOE

I'm not sure what you hope to accomplish by that.

CHESTER

Then I'll make it clear. When you look at me as I assume the office of the President, I would like for you to see James Garfield staring back. I have to rise above parties and allegiances. To reunite the Republicans, the Stalwarts must die.

ROSCOE

Then you've signed my death certificate.

CHESTER

Ross—

ROSCOE

Mine, yours, and thousands of others who have struggled for the party. What am I to do?

CHESTER

Ross, I'll take care of you, but it can't be in Washington. You'd have to do that on your own merits. I won't abandon you, but know that whatever position I find for you will be far from here and wield little to no power.

ROSCOE

You've made your case plain. I'll take my leave, Your Accidenty.

CHESTER

Don't be angry, stay the night and for breakfast. I can extend that to a friend.

ALEC enters.

ROSCOE

I was your last real friend, Chet—Mr. President. Someday you'll realize the mistake you've just made and my door will remain closed when you raise the knocker.

He goes. ALEC watches him until we hear a door slam. CHESTER sits.

ALEC

He's right. A raised knocker does generally indicate a closed door.

CHESTER

Alec, do you need something?

ALEC

I wanted to see how the mighty fall.

CHESTER

I didn't expect him to take rejection well, but he was downright angry.

ALEC

Even he must recognize that his time has come and gone.

CHESTER

Yes, I suppose so.

ALEC

I won't miss him.

CHESTER

If nothing else, he held his head high when he stormed out.

ALEC

True, but what you didn't see was how he spat in the hallway.

CHESTER

Ah.

ALEC

I'll clean it immediately.

CHESTER

No Alec, leave it to dry.

ALEC

But this is Secretary Kirkwood's house.

CHESTER

Ex-secretary. We're not his hired help.

They exit. Lights on JULIA.

JULIA

November 18th, 1881

Are you listening to me? Actually listening? I devour the newspapers for answers. Some time ago I told you that I had faith in you, but I never mentioned it to anyone else. And as yet I have not met anybody who believes in you, as I do. So when I read something in the papers which delights me, I am dumb. Even when you have realized my highest expectations, I shall not have the satisfaction of saying to anyone 'There I told you so!' He listens to me.

Continue to disprove your detractors. This might lead to difficult decisions, but sometimes the toughest choices are the most correct. Unity is not achievable through division or blind agreement, but through compromise.

ISABELLA (off)

Julia?!

JULIA

Why don't you visit? You slip to New York from time to time and if you chanced to be in this part of the city, visiting friends, or any of the public buildings, or driving in the Park—our house is not far from the 72nd street entrance—and happened to have the time and inclination to call ... you would be most welcome. We've started emulating the

dinner parties you and your sister have made famous. It would be a small detail to add you to the festivities. I like to believe that you are receiving these missives, but my only replies from you are Presidential actions. I'm not prompted by egotism. I know that my opinion can have no weight with you. If it has any value, it is because we are strangers, because our paths have never crossed and ... while taking an interest in politics, I have no political ties.

ISABELLA (entering)
Julia!

JULIA
Yes mother?

ISABELLA
Must you constantly ignore me?

JULIA
Were you calling me?

ISABELLA
Yes, and I know you heard me.

JULIA
What do you need?

ISABELLA
I could use some help setting the table. Your uncle and sisters are coming for dinner.

JULIA
Finally, Pauline and Henrietta return! At least we won't have to deal with uncle's wayward friends.

ISABELLA
Wayward friends, Julia? How you talk. They're delightful guests, each and every one.

JULIA
A bunch of drunken bankers; by the end of each evening I feel like we live in a bar room.

ISABELLA
It's important to be social, dear.

JULIA
And it's starting to smell like a bar room.

ISABELLA

Julia, you were the one who regaled me with stories of President Arthur and his dinner parties! It was you who pushed me to emulate the food and pageantry. After dinner drinks and cigars and the like.

JULIA

I simply read you an article.

ISABELLA

And I took it to heart. Julia, I know you're lonely—you secretly revel in these parties.

JULIA

A secret kept so well that I'm not privy to it. The parties wear me out.

ISABELLA

I do keep them to once a week, dear.

JULIA

And even that is too tiring! I'm sick of being sick!

ISABELLA

Julia—

JULIA

No mother, as much as I appreciate your insistence that I'm not as sick as I let on, you're wrong. I can't hear you when you're not in the room! I'm not lazy and you belittling me doesn't inspire me to improve or get healthy. My body fails me. But this is the reality: I'm thirty-two, and I'm never going to be better. I will never marry. I will never have children, and as much as these parties provide me with the opportunity to believe I'm part of society, they are a lie. They are wonderful and terrible at the same time.

ISABELLA

You want me to put a stop to them?

JULIA

No, that's not what I'm saying. I'm telling you that they tire me and to limit your expectations. I'll never get better. And while I don't want to be treated as an invalid, I also don't want to be told that I'm a disappointment.

ISABELLA

I've never said that.

JULIA

But you treat me as inferior in every way. Calling me lazy and selfish only makes me feel worse about myself. It makes me think my infirmities are my fault. You treat me as though a little willpower would heal me, but it's not true. My body is broken.

CHESTER *addresses congress.*

CHESTER

To the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States: For the fourth time in the history of the republic, / its Chief Magistrate has been removed by death.

ISABELLA

Julia. I'm sorry. I love you. When you were five and sick and feverish, I held you in my arms—

CHESTER

All hearts are filled with grief and horror at the hideous crime which has darkened our land.

ISABELLA

—your eyelids were heavy and dark, and your forehead glistened with sweat. I thanked God for the five years we had and laid you next to me. I sang to you as you fell asleep.

CHESTER

The memory of the murdered President—

ISABELLA

The doctors all believed you had only hours of life left.

CHESTER

—his protracted sufferings, his unyielding fortitude, the example and achievements of his life, and the pathos of his death will forever illumine the pages of our history.

ISABELLA

When morning came and you opened your eyes, I knew the doctors were wrong. As difficult as it is for you to accept, your body was strong enough to continue your life. I know you get angry that your body is broken, but once upon a time it was stronger than death!

CHESTER

Men may die, but the fabrics of our free institutions remain unshaken. No higher proof could exist of this fact than that his constitutional successor is peacefully installed without shock or strain except the sorrow which mourns the bereavement.

ISABELLA

I'm harsh because I know that strength, and I dream of the day your body recovers fully. If your body can beat back death, then surely it can repair itself.

CHESTER

The gloom and anxiety which have enshrouded the country must make repose especially welcome now.

JULIA

It can't, and it won't. The scars are permanent.

CHESTER

All the noble aspirations of my lamented predecessor which found expression in his life (and) during his brief Administration have been garnered in the hearts of the people.

ISABELLA

I'll always see you as perfectly healthy. Sometimes, even those things that appear broken forever can be repaired.

CHESTER

It will be my earnest endeavor to profit, and to see that the nation shall profit, by President Garfield's example and experience.

JULIA

You don't mean repaired, you mean changed or adjusted. Maybe even improved like this industrial steam-driven world. But mother, sometimes it's not the broken that need mending, but the unbroken.

CHESTER

Summoned to the high duties and responsibilities of the Presidency, and profoundly conscious of their magnitude and gravity, I assume the trust imposed by the Constitution, relying for aid on divine guidance and the virtue, patriotism, and intelligence of the American people.

Intermission.

ACT TWO

JULIA is in the living room. She is lying on the couch and looks to be in some pain. In the periphery are orderlies as from the opening of Act One.

As she lay on the couch, her family enters carrying a wooden contraption about 6'6 tall, resembling three sturdy tent poles without the canvas. The contraption has a chain hanging from the center.

On another part of the stage, CHESTER is meeting with various petitioners in the executive mansion. When MARY begins her speech this changes to pleasantries, cigars, and drinks with friends.

JULIA

August 24th, 1882.

Mr. Chester A. Arthur. My very bad friend.

Some days I feel compelled to play the invalid more than others and owing to certain unfortunate circumstances, it is not likely that I will take a pleasure trip to Washington, or anywhere else anytime soon. However, invalid as I am, for more than a year I have poured out my best strength in one continuous appeal for you to visit—and what has it availed? The dew might as well fall upon polished marble in the hope of producing a flower.

If only I could overcome my infirmity. Attempts have been made.

This—torture device—is a contraption I received for my birthday one year, to make me like everyone else, or at least so I could appear to be like everyone else—appearances being definitive. What this device does is straighten me out in order to affix a plaster corset to my body. The first time I used it was truly agonizing.

She allows herself to be attached to the rig.

My hands are pulled up to correct my posture, then a plastered cloth is wrapped around my body. And when my hands are finally released:

I slide my dress over the corset, and stand up straight—well, straighter anyway. That first time I started to cry. I cried for the pain. I cried at how I looked. I cried for my mother who was crying. And I cried for my father who had died years before and never was able to see me stand up straight. My father—a self made man of the industrial age. My father who I overheard telling my mother when I was twelve that I was not ‘marriageable.’ It was the first time I heard the word spinster; which is what I am—and have been since the age of 18.

When I was released from the machine it dawned on me that the corset I wear is not for me, but for everyone around me. Nothing about me actually changes when I’m poured

into this uncomfortable constrictor except for my outward appearance. Being normal is the actual detriment, a societal corset. The never ending human artifice known as style.

There are dinner noises from off: plates and glasses clinking, talk and laughter.

MARY addresses a row of White House staff.

MARY

Never underestimate style. The perception of power is of the utmost importance, particularly when you are the leader of a nation. And that perception can be achieved through style. Take Chet for instance: He's never seen inside or outside the mansion without being dressed to the nines. His valet Alec carefully chooses his wardrobe and only purchases the best and costliest garments from New York. For appointments, he displays a gray or white waistcoat and trousers with a black frock coat, scarf or black tie, and a silk hat. For dinner, Chet adorns a tuxedo. He is meticulous. And so shall we all be. We have completely refurnished and redecorated the Executive Mansion that many have called the transformation miraculous. From a tainted dreary castle to a lush, palatial setting, fit for a king. The President and I have even stylized the new form for State Dinners. Nineteen courses catered by the well known French chef Hugo Ziemann, elaborate place settings, flowers everywhere, retiring to the blue or red rooms of the mansion for drinks and cigars, and all timed to the second. You are all the most important part of this perception. This household is as a clock and you are each cogs—and the most important cog in a timepiece?

STAFF MEMBER

The crank?

She glares at the STAFF MEMBER.

MARY

All of them. Without all of you attending to the details of your duties, time will stop. History will pause and even more disastrous, you will be lost. We must execute so that even his enemies cannot help but be impressed. If you need proof of the transformation, look no further than the new carriage; two black stallions pulling a dark green and red lined cab, and the occasional chirp of a bell to note the station of the man inside. Any questions?

She glares again.

Good.

Remember: style and perception. They can never be underestimated.

During the carriage portion of the above speech, we hear the clip-clop of horse hooves and a bell chime. A knock sounds at JULIA's door.

ISABELLA (off)

Julia?!

JULIA does not respond. ISABELLA enters and proceeds to the door. ALEC enters.

ALEC

Good evening ma'am, and please forgive the intrusion.

ISABELLA

We're just finishing dinner. That's quite a carriage out there.

ALEC

Mr. Chester Arthur requests to join you this evening.

ISABELLA

President Arthur?

ALEC

Yes, ma'am.

THEODORE (*entering*)

Who is it, Isabella? Would you like me to set this young man to rights?

ALEC

I invite you to make the attempt, sir.

THEODORE

Oh really?

ISABELLA

Nonsense Teddy, this is Mr ...

ALEC

Alexander Powell, valet to the President.

THEODORE

The President of what?

ISABELLA

Don't be rude! Chester Arthur wants to join us.

THEODORE

President Arthur? Dear God, look at that carriage. Well, what are you waiting for? Invite the man in for some Peach Pie! I'll get the girls!

He exits as CHESTER appears.

CHESTER

Good evening, Mrs. Sand. You have a lovely home.

ISABELLA

Mr. President.

CHESTER

Please, call me Chet.

ISABELLA

I couldn't do that, Mr. President.

CHESTER

Mr. Arthur then.

JULIA

Mother?

ISABELLA

Julia? Where are you?

JULIA

On the couch mother, is that the minister?

ISABELLA

Reverend Morris? No dear. She thinks you sound like our priest.

*PAULINE and HENRIETTA enter with
THEODORE.*

PAULINE

Mother, uncle says the President is in your ... foyer—

HENRIETTA

I don't believe it.

THEODORE

See? See, I told you it was him!

CHESTER

I hope I'm not intruding.

ISABELLA

Of course not.

As the family crowds around CHESTER, JULIA rises and sees what's happening. During these general introductions, she sneaks with difficulty and hides herself behind a window curtain. Shoes showing underneath.

Dear God, invite the man in!

THEODORE

And where is young Julia?

CHESTER

You're here to see Julia?

HENRIETTA

Yes, she's quite the letter writer.

CHESTER

So, she really is writing to you?

PAULINE

And you actually read her letters?

HENRIETTA

As hard as it is to believe.

CHESTER

ISABELLA

She's on the couch—that's odd, she was just here calling out ... Julia?! Where are you?

THEODORE

Have a seat Mr. Arthur, you look exhausted.
Can I take your coat?

PAULINE

I'll go get some Peach Pie.

She runs out.

CHESTER

Thank you for the hospitality, Mrs. Sand. Do you know where I can speak with Julia?

THEODORE

We can all talk right here!

ISABELLA

I'll find her and announce your visit, perhaps she escaped to her room.

ALEC

I believe she's behind the curtains, ma'am.

ISABELLA

The curtains?

ALEC

Unless you use your drapery to store your shoes, I believe this pair are attached to the young lady.

THEODORE

If that doesn't beat all! Julia, come on out!

JULIA steps from the curtains.

CHESTER

I certainly didn't expect such shyness after her correspondence.

ISABELLA

What exactly are the contents of these letters?

CHESTER

In them, she tells me how to run the country.

THEODORE

Dear God, Julia! Sir, I guarantee that young Julia here is no threat—why, she's an invalid! She's no danger to anyone! Not like that squirrely fellow they just hung for murder, what was his name?

CHESTER

Guiteau.

THEODORE

That's the one.

ISABELLA

Yes, Mr. Arthur. I apologize for Julia—she's quite harmless.

CHESTER

On the contrary, Mrs. Sand, Julia here is far from harmless.

HENRIETTA

I can't believe this! My sister, the instigator!

ISABELLA

I'm sure that Mr. Arthur would not come all this way in such a handsome carriage personally if he thought she was any danger. Would you?

CHESTER

Very astute, Mrs. Sand. I see where Julia gets her facility for insight.

THEODORE

Insight? Well, now I've heard everything! Little Julia writes the leader of the country and here he stands. She's sure pulled one over on you.

JULIA

What makes you say that uncle?

THEODORE

Well—well, just look at you! Even you must admit that the notion is a bit preposterous.

JULIA

You're a bit preposterous!

CHESTER

And there she is, without a doubt!

PAULINE (*entering*)

Here's the pie! One for Mr. Arthur and one for the black valet.

She distributes the pie and then observes the silence.

Did I miss something?

ISABELLA

Teddy, children, let's retire to the dining room and let these two become personally acquainted. Mr. Powell, would you care to join us?

THEODORE

Now, Isabella—

ISABELLA

There is fresh coffee.

ALEC

Well, now that you mention it I could use a cup. Lead the way.

As they exit, the siblings bombard ALEC with questions. THEODORE stops before JULIA.

THEODORE

I didn't think you had it in you, a touch of your father.

ISABELLA

Let's leave them to it.

THEODORE exits followed by ISABELLA.

CHESTER

Nice family.

JULIA

Why are you here?

CHESTER

You invited me.

JULIA

I never thought you'd actually take me up on the invitation! And without a word. We could do with some advance notice.

CHESTER

I was in the neighborhood picking up my new carriage.

JULIA

Even twenty minutes notice would be expected under the circumstances.

CHESTER

I didn't come here to be castigated, Miss Sand. I rather thought you'd be pleased.

JULIA

I am. In a way. But I over ate spectacularly this evening and I can barely comport myself. I can't believe I tried to hide behind the curtains.

CHESTER

I've tried the same thing during office hours and it never works.

JULIA

Thank you for saying that. You are a gentleman.

CHESTER

There is often a grain of truth in rumors. This pie is fine.

JULIA

My mother tries to emulate your State dinners at least once a week.

CHESTER

Once a week! I can barely stand once a month. Although you don't seem to have invited any Senate members.

JULIA

My uncle more than makes up for it.

CHESTER

He gives off that impression.

Pause.

JULIA

Do you like music?

CHESTER

I like it reasonably well.

JULIA

Oh.

Pause.

CHESTER

I could go and plan a proper time to visit.

JULIA

Oh, no please! Stay—I'd like you to stay. I'm sorry I can't seem to form any coherent thoughts. I prefer pen and paper to straightforward conversation. I must seem such a disappointment to you after the grandeur of Washington.

CHESTER

Miss Sand, you are truly remarkable in your self-deprecation.

JULIA

How so?

CHESTER

Your letters are so completely inspiring. I'm here because of them, which should tell you the enormity of their power.

JULIA

I'm humbled, Mr. Arthur. Your voice is much gentler than I supposed. You are the very picture of dignity and style and I'm afraid it's not what I expected.

CHESTER

Don't be so surprised, I suspect you're used to upending expectations.

JULIA

Quite.

CHESTER

I had your letter in my pocket after I took my original oath here in New York. Even as I rode the train that bore Garfield's body to Washington, I read and re-read your letter to give me strength.

JULIA

It was my intention to inspire you, but you still have to respond to the inspiration.

CHESTER

It was easy to 'turn from the evil' as you put it.

JULIA

Did I say that?

CHESTER

You most certainly did.

JULIA

I didn't mean to say that you used to be evil.

CHESTER

Actually I believe that's exactly what you meant to say!

JULIA

There was no malice in my intentions. I'm sorry you think that, for I believe I owe you a debt of gratitude.

CHESTER

How so?

JULIA

The other day when I was abed with ailments, my family was having a wonderful time downstairs—I heard the laughing voices and the music quite distinctly. After a while someone closed the parlor door and the sounds grew fainter. Then the front door bell rang sharply and a moment later I heard somebody coming up stairs. It was my sister—she came into my room, carrying an exquisite horseshoe of flowers. She held up a card—there was nothing on it but a monogram in purple ink. How lovely those pink rosebuds were—what a spicy fragrance those carnations had—and there was a whole row of rich, velvety pansies—the pansies that I loved when I was a little girl, long before it was fashionable. I was lingering over my flowers with the rapt devotion of a child of nature—

when something startled me. I looked up—my sister was not standing there, holding that card, and there were no flowers beside me—only a glass of ice water and a bottle of camphor.

CHESTER

A dream.

JULIA

But a dream that was most wonderful. And for that I must thank you.

CHESTER

Thank me for flowers I never sent?

JULIA

Yes, for it's not the flowers I treasure—particularly since their nature is ephemeral—but the possibility.

CHESTER

I wish I had sent the flowers after all.

JULIA

My devotion to you and your seemingly miraculous change of heart because of it has given me reason to dream.

CHESTER

Well, calling my change of heart a miracle vilifies my prior principles. You're a true miracle, Miss Sand and it is I who must thank you, for you are my greatest adviser.

JULIA

You cannot mean that.

CHESTER

I can and I do.

JULIA

Then you're a fool. Look at me. I couldn't command the respect of a mouse.

CHESTER

You've commanded my respect, Miss Sand.

JULIA

I don't need your pity.

CHESTER

You have no idea when to take a compliment, do you?

JULIA

It's not a common occurrence.

CHESTER

I'm not being foolish, Miss Sand. I have a cabinet of men I trust, but they act as they're supposed to. They advise me in a way that is tentative and invariably, they tell me what I want to hear. You do not. Your distance and infirmity are your greatest asset.

JULIA

I'm glad I could inspire you.

CHESTER

What inspires you?

JULIA

I'm not sure that's any of your business.

CHESTER

Are you getting cross with me?

JULIA

I'm not entirely sure.

CHESTER

Maybe you feel as if I owe you some debt. Do you want to be involved in politics?

JULIA

I'm starting to feel an air of condescension. Mr. Arthur, I didn't have much feeling toward you or politics one way or another until I read your wife's obituary. She sounded like the consummate wife and mother and I felt sad for little Ellen. I felt a sort of kinship with your daughter as my father died when I was young. I know what it is to experience loss at a young age. I rooted for the entirety of your family. When you were named as Garfield's running mate I was shocked, but proud. As if you were my own brother. But I was again sad when I realized you were still in mourning, and that your wife never saw the day when you assumed not one providential office, but two! I've read that after you remodeled the President's mansion, you had a portrait of your wife prominently placed and fresh flowers regularly furnished. This man who I have read about can only be a boon to this country.

CHESTER

I welcome your support.

JULIA

I'm not a supporter, and you're not the man I read about. I concede that there is a certain amount of imagination that accompanies the written word. And I'm glad that my personal correspondence could ignite yours. But our partnership has only gone in one direction.

CHESTER

I'm sure you understand my schedule.

JULIA

I understand that you throw elaborate parties, host numerous dignitaries, and have had time to take frequent trips to this city from Washington. Such trips have fueled rumors that you are courting one young woman or another and grooming her for your first lady.

CHESTER

I assure you those rumors are false—

JULIA

Who cares if they are or not? Over this past year of me writing you letters, I have not received even so much as a postcard or a form letter. Not one word. And I certainly don't need flowers, but now out of the blue, you show up to my house as if we were old friends?

CHESTER

Miss Sand, I am President of the United States.

JULIA

An elected position you weren't even elected to.

CHESTER rises.

CHESTER

Despite our rousing conversation, it's clear I've caught you on a bad evening. My apologies. Alec!

JULIA

In full retreat as always.

CHESTER

Because of your dedication to this country and to my rehabilitation, I will overlook your insolence, Miss Sand, but peach pie can only go so far.

JULIA

I'm sorry I couldn't meet your expectations, Mr. Arthur. I only hope that your other promises can be met without anyone on your side.

CHESTER

I have the nation on my side. And I will have no difficulty meeting my promises.

JULIA

Then come clean with your illness.

CHESTER

Illness!?! What illness?

ALEC enters, followed by ISABELLA.

JULIA

You've evidently contracted malaria or some such disease in your travels.

ISABELLA

Julia!

CHESTER

Your impertinence is shocking.

ALEC

I take it we're leaving.

CHESTER

Yes, but I want to make this clear: I'm exhausted, Miss Sand. I'm sorry that I couldn't make a priority of responding to your letters, but you have no idea what I must sit through on a daily basis. The petitioners, the congressmen, and sometimes it seems the entirety of Washington walks through my doors. When I can find the time, I enjoy visiting those whom I know I can count on to be a relief to my constant burdens. I'm sorry that however enlightening you can be from the written page, you cannot exude the same confidence in person. I look forward to your future correspondence. Alec?

ALEC

Here's your coat.

ISABELLA

Mr. Arthur, thank you for your visit, and I'm sure Julia meant none of what she said. After meals she is often a terror to deal with.

JULIA

Mother, I don't need your apologies. Mr. Arthur, please don't fault me for my outward and frank conversation. I'm not one to hold my tongue. If I were a man, would you not have laughed and shared a cigar with me as we sat here and talked with each other? As you reflect on our visit, ask yourself if I could have gotten away with some of what I said.

CHESTER

I think you've followed me long enough to know the simple answer to that question is no.

CHESTER and ALEC exit. THEODORE enters.

THEODORE

What did I miss?

ISABELLA

Julia, why must you always confound yourself?

JULIA

Mother?

ISABELLA

I've watched you and protected you for your entire life and I still don't understand why you constantly push people away!

JULIA

I only push people away because they have no regard for me to begin with!

ISABELLA

That was the President of our country you have offended! You are not the Secretary of State! You are nothing! You're less than nothing and now you've brought shame on our family!

THEODORE

Now Isabella I'm sure she's not taken / seriously—

ISABELLA

Don't you dare talk me down from this, Teddy. I've been here for you Julia when there was no one else. And if it were not your father's dying wish you would have been long gone, because I've been suffering through your pitiful life! Everything I do is to ensure your comfort and safety and I don't think I can do it anymore. And why should I bother? You are nothing if not ungrateful ... and burdensome ... I'm sending you to Brooklyn and ... your sisters ...

ISABELLA reaches out to THEODORE as she starts to falter.

JULIA

Mother?!

THEODORE

Isabella!

ISABELLA

I'm fine, I'm fine Teddy. Just get me to the chair. You see what you've done?

PAULINE and HENRIETTA enter.

ISABELLA

You've done this to me.

PAULINE

What happened?

HENRIETTA

Julia, what did you do? Where's Mr. Arthur?

THEODORE

Children, give her some room, give her some room!

HENRIETTA

I'll call on the doctor.

She exits.

ISABELLA

Thank you children. I just need to rest.

JULIA

I'm sorry. I'll be upstairs.

*No one notices her slow, labored exit.
Lights find DOCTOR HERNDON.*

DOCTOR

We are indebted to the work of Dr. Richard Bright. It was his life's work to figure out how our organs, and particularly the kidney, play a part in our general health and well being, but also our deterioration. Human beings are simply not meant to live forever, yes? This is known, but the multitude of reasons that our bodies suffer and decline is not as well known. It takes a very special sort of dedicated researcher, such as our Dr. Bright, to dedicate his life to witness the suffering of the human condition and to explore the workings of the body before and even after death. An exploration that one such as myself is hesitant to undertake, as I'm sure you can imagine, the amount of blood a body can hold is quite extravagant. Even to the point of distasteful and downright rude. I prefer the living. But I am up on my studies and I can tell you that without question it is the work of Dr. Bright that can guarantee your diagnosis.

He crosses the stage and discovers CHESTER.

Identification of illness is the key, for now we can start you on a regimen. As much as we know about Dr. Bright's work, there is still much to be discovered. Several treatments work miracles for some, but not for others and vice versa, you see? Some patients recover and some get worse. We will endeavor to give you a long and healthy life, Mr. Arthur.

CHESTER

But I could die tomorrow?

DOCTOR

Ha, ha! Well? No, I shouldn't think so.

CHESTER

You're not filling me with confidence.

DOCTOR

Ah! But you should have confidence! Look how big and robust you are! Have faith that we will purge this infection from your system, Mr. President.

CHESTER

I want assurances, Doctor. I cannot emphasize enough how troubling it would be for a President who has replaced an assassinated President to die during a term that did not even belong to him. I have no Vice President, so the Head of the Senate Pro Tempore would rise to the highest executive office in this land.

DOCTOR

Very troubling, Mr. Arthur, very troubling.

CHESTER

Yes, but I want you to get my drift completely here, Doctor. Under no circumstances must I be allowed to die before the next election. You will keep me alive at least until then.

DOCTOR

I will do my best.

CHESTER

I want you to do better than that. Find the best doctors in Washington to assist you in diagnosis and treatment.

DOCTOR

Why would you need more than me?

CHESTER

As my wife's uncle, you were instrumental in her care, but she died regardless. It's been my experience that the more counsel one has, the stronger the decisions. Remember and honor the tenets of the country we live in.

DOCTOR

Of course. I will find only the best.

CHESTER

I have every faith in you.

DOCTOR

Might I recommend a vacation, maybe a trip?

CHESTER

I'm scheduled to tour the south including Florida in a couple of weeks. Will that suffice?

DOCTOR

Grandly! The tropical air can only be a boon.

CHESTER

Thank you, Doctor, that'll be all.

DOCTOR exits.

The cabinet are assembled including JULIA and are waiting for CHESTER. They begin to bang on the table in rhythm. ROBERT begins to 'DUM DA DA DUM' to the tune of 'HAIL TO THE CHIEF.' CHESTER enters glumly.

JULIA

September 13th, 1882.

ALL

Hail to the Chief we have chosen for the nation
Hail to the Chief we salute him one and all.
Hail to the Chief as we pledge cooperation
In proud fulfillment of a great, noble call

CHESTER

Don't ever sing that song again.

ROBERT

It's your song.

CHESTER

Not anymore it isn't. I've contacted John Sousa to work on another.

FREDERICK

What's wrong with it?

CHESTER

No one chose me for the nation.

ROBERT

If I remember correctly, there were two names on the Presidential ballot so please, enough pretending you are a pretender. Besides, this is a celebration!

CHESTER

Of what?

FREDERICK

Why, you've held office for a year!

CHESTER

Lovely, two and a half more to go. Have you talked with Senator Pendleton yet?

FREDERICK

He'll sponsor the bill as long as it can be the one Eaton wrote.

CHESTER

I don't see a problem with that.

ROBERT

You really are ready to wash your hands of the Stalwarts.

CHESTER

They've washed their hands of me as well and maybe letting them go and using Eaton on this one can give us some currency in the future.

FREDERICK

After this bill, we can put so much into motion. Improve the Navy, build a canal in Central America, bring Alaska and the Sandwich Islands into the union—

JULIA

This bill and the good will that follows are important, but remember: actions only will count. If they are honorable, energetic and for the good of the country, depend upon it that they will be fully appreciated.

ROBERT

We could be the most aggressive administration since my father!

CHESTER

Intentions are not results. When could he introduce the bill?

FREDERICK

It'll be the first bill when the new session starts in a month.

CHESTER

Good. And we must get the votes in order, no more veto overrides. We can't suffer another Chinese Exclusion Act debacle.

FREDERICK

Just another instance of Congress looking foolish.

CHESTER

I'm not so sure of that. In the end I signed the damn thing.

JULIA

True. But they drafted it and those ignorant school boys will not only look bad because it is behind the age, but behind several ages ... opposed to the spirit of America, [and] opposed to the spirit of civilization all the world over. Sure you bent, but only because they had the votes.

CHESTER

History only looks at signatures. Find the votes, Freddy.

ROBERT

The public is demanding reform of the Civil Service, the Congress can't say no.

CHESTER

Small consolation, I'd still like to be sure.

FREDERICK

Of course, I'll work with Senator Pendleton closely.

CHESTER

I'm sorry if I seem out of spirits today. I do appreciate the celebratory mood, but it's not the pageantry that moves me. What I find most invigorating is looking around this table and knowing we've finally settled into the role of office. I'm proud of all of our efforts. Join me at the White House tonight and we'll celebrate properly.

General hurrahs at this declaration. ALEC enters.

ALEC

Mrs. McElroy to see you Mr. Arthur.

CHESTER

Thank you Alec, show her in. That'll be all.

The men file out as MARY enters.

ROBERT

We'll see you tonight.

ROBERT exits. JULIA remains.

MARY

Tonight? I've heard nothing of tonight! Chet, have you promised another dinner party?

CHESTER

Yes, sorry there isn't more notice.

MARY

Don't you think you should rest? You've been awfully tired lately.

CHESTER

We'll figure it out. The men reminded me that it is the anniversary of my oath of office. And Garfield's death. We should pay homage to both.

MARY

Oh Chet—

CHESTER

We can keep it subdued if you'd like.

ALEC tries to leave.

CHESTER

Alec. I'd like you to stay.

ALEC

Of course.

CHESTER

As you are my closest advisers, at least personally, I need to let you in on something. I've been examined by Doctor Herndon and even though I'm not relying solely on his evaluation, I think it's important. And now I must insist that no one beyond this room become aware of what I'm about to tell you, not your spouses, not the rest of the cabinet, and definitely not the press.

ALEC

You can count on us, Chet.

CHESTER

And I do. I count on you to be my tight lipped counselors. And Mary, not a word to little Nell—I'll take care of that.

MARY

Get on with it, why we are here?

CHESTER

Well—to put it bluntly—I'm going to die.

JULIA moves to her writing desk.

JULIA

December 29th, 1882

Dear Mr. Arthur. It has taken all of my energy to pick up the pen again. After you left, my mother fell ill and is currently recuperating—with my uncle moving in to help. You might very well be shocked at my behavior during your visit, but I'm not inclined to apologize. I admit that what threw me off balance was your non-committal rebuke of music. That you are reasonably fond of music is an unreasonable answer. If you had said irrationally fond, I would have commanded my entire family to sing; and I must admit it was my plan, so when you changed the script I became flustered. I do hope you'll find the time to visit again—but with notice this time! I promise you I would kill the proverbial fatted calf when you visit. I must admit that the only livestock we have is a fatted cat, but just say the word and she's a goner.

I try to keep the mood light in this letter, but I want you to know that I still aspire to be your secret adviser—your little dwarf—as King's had medievally, and pledge to not neglect my unofficial capacity.

ISABELLA enters slowly and with a cane. She is seriously worse for the wear since we last saw her.

ISABELLA

Julia!

JULIA

Mother, what are you doing up and around?

ISABELLA

Someone has to get the damn door!

JULIA

No one is knocking. I promise I've been paying attention.

ISABELLA

You never pay attention.

JULIA

You're right, mother. Uncle, where are you?

THEODORE enters from the kitchen.

THEODORE

I'm here—just having a bit of a snack! Why is she up?

JULIA

I'm not sure, I didn't think she had the strength.

ISABELLA deposits herself in a chair.

THEODORE
Isabella!

ISABELLA
Hm?

THEODORE
What brings you out of bed?

ISABELLA
I'm waiting for all of the guests!

JULIA
There's no party tonight.

ISABELLA
Don't be ridiculous, Julia! Of course there's a party! Just like your friend the President. A grand dinner party to rival the best in the city. But why am I so tired? I've just had a nap.

JULIA
The last party we had was so long ago.

ISABELLA
Did the President come? Was he there?

JULIA
Yes, mother he came to your party.

THEODORE
And his valet, too. Don't you remember the carriage?

ISABELLA
Yes, now I remember it! A grand procession with horses and footmen. Like a king! I hope he visits regularly.

JULIA
I don't think he'll be back mother.

ISABELLA
We will ask him back. He must come and see us again.

THEODORE
He's a very busy man.

JULIA
I've been asking him to return.

ISABELLA

Good. But no political talk this time! Assure him of that! Politics are unimportant, we will strive to make a personal connection, a lasting connection, because I'm having a difficult time actually remembering his visit. You're absolutely sure he was here?

She rises unsteadily.

JULIA

Yes.

ISABELLA

Good. I'm glad of it. It feels as though his visit is being swallowed into a gaping hole. I can barely remember him being here. I'd like to see him again before I die.

JULIA

You mustn't talk like that Mother.

ISABELLA begins to move to the front door.

THEODORE

Bella, where are you going?

ISABELLA

I'm going to invite the neighbors to meet the President. This is an event not to be missed.

THEODORE

The neighbors are in bed by now! Come, you must retire as well.

ISABELLA

But how will they know? How will anyone know?

THEODORE

We'll tell them later.

ISABELLA

Later! Later! It's always later with you—remove your hand from me Teddy! You will not guide my silence. Your brother would never have treated me in this manner. He was not my keeper, he was my partner and he was the partner to all who worked for the Gas Company. What exactly is it you do?

JULIA

Mother—

THEODORE

I'm a banker, Isabella. You remember.

ISABELLA

An important banker?

THEODORE

Of course. We're helping with the bridge, it's nearing completion!

ISABELLA

Important banker, then why did you not find work for Henrietta and Pauline. If they had jobs here they would not have left me.

THEODORE

They are not cut out for that type of work, it's dirty and hard—I mean, the fumes / alone—

ISABELLA

The fumes of a bank?

THEODORE

No, at the bridge.

ISABELLA

Don't change the subject!

JULIA

Mother, it's not worth the argument.

ISABELLA

Are your sisters not worth the argument? Is the future of our family not worth the argument? What will happen to all of us when your uncle here wants only to line his pockets and take advantage of everyone as he does it?

THEODORE

You go too far!

ISABELLA

I don't go far enough! How many times have I told you that I don't need you around to babysit us and yet here you are! Are we to always be your prisoners?

THEODORE

This is unfair!

ISABELLA

Yes, I agree! It's completely unfair. When the President gets here, I'll have him put you to rights. We'll have a nice long talk the two of us and I'll give him some peach pie and we'll maybe have music this time. What do you think of that Julia?

JULIA

Yes, we'll have a much better plan this time.

ISABELLA

Oh, I wish he would come. But I'm so tired. Perhaps its better he doesn't come tonight.

She heads toward the bedroom.

THEODORE

Where are you off to now?

ISABELLA

It's past my bed time, Teddy! You told me yourself!

THEODORE

Yes, I did—slipped my mind. Let me escort you.

ISABELLA

You're such a gentleman! When will you be married?

THEODORE

Ha, ha! I guarantee you'll be in the front row of the church when it happens!

ISABELLA

Yes—yes, the front. I'll be up front.

They have moved toward the bedroom and are almost off.

JULIA

The front is where the important people sit.

THEODORE and ISABELLA turn and regard JULIA sadly before moving off.

JULIA

December 29th, 1882.

How much faith do you expect me to have in you? The sorrowful old year is drawing to a close and I don't hold out hope for another visit. The saddest disappointments in life are the disappointments in human nature. I believe that we all have such grand plans for our lives that the reality can never compensate for the desire. I learned French because I read about a surgeon in Paris who was operating on patients with spine curvature and having success. In my fantasy I board a ship to France and travel to Paris by train in the greatest of opulence. The country side is verdant and populated by families and playing children under the bluest skies ever conjured. The surgery is painless and effective. I toss my cane away and make my way—running—into the streets of Paris, the grandest city in the

world! Immediately there is music! I dance into the arms of men, so many men that want to marry me.

*Music has swelled as JULIA dances with one man after another. The orderlies have returned to the periphery to watch.
The final man to dance with JULIA is CHESTER.
She realizes him as the music fades.*

CHESTER has moved to his desk and is surrounded by his cabinet and Senators. JULIA remains.

CHESTER

Let it be said that on this date—January 18th 1883—the government of the United States took its first steps in providing public posts based on merit and not on money or political affiliation. No longer will the evils of the spoils system infringe upon our country. President Garfield has not died in vain. My thanks to Senator Pendleton who first introduced the Civil Service Bill which will hereafter be known as the Pendleton Act to honor his proposal. Mr. Frelinghuysen?

FREDERICK

(handing him a pen)

Here you are sir.

*ARTHUR signs the bill to applause.
He rises and shakes hands.*

JULIA

I am awash in so many fantasies I'm not certain where they end and reality begins. Are dreams superficial? In these fantasies my mother is always alive. She never dies. She outlives me, and Uncle Teddy, and even outlives father time. My mother is always there—she always will be.

*JULIA puts her hands over her eyes.
HENRIETTA and PAULINE enter with the writing desk.*

JULIA

Can I open them?

PAULINE

No!

HENRIETTA

Just a moment.

They finish placing the table.

HENRIETTA

Open them!

JULIA

My desk.

PAULINE

Of course! You must've known, what else would it be?

JULIA

I don't know what to say.

PAULINE

Say you'll write to the president from Brooklyn as much as you did from the old house.

HENRIETTA

We thought you should have a piece of the past.

JULIA

It's so thoughtful of you.

PAULINE

It was no trouble. Here, sit and write!

HENRIETTA

Yes!

*JULIA sits.
She doesn't write.*

HENRIETTA

Can we get you something?

PAULINE

Do you need anything else?

JULIA

I would like—

PAULINE

Yes?

JULIA

I would like to feel I haven't failed before I've begun. I feel about ten years older—I have had so much care and sorrow.

HENRIETTA

You're with us now Julia, and everything is going to work out for the best.

JULIA

But what of when you both find husbands, or find an occupation and forget about me, or tire of being my caretakers? Who will take on my burdens?

PAULINE

You have to believe that we are here for you, put faith in that.

JULIA

Thank you both. There is one thing you can give to me and that is privacy to write.

HENRIETTA

Of course.

PAULINE

We don't mean to hover. It's so good you're here.

They leave.

CHESTER, ALEC, and MARY at the opening of the Brooklyn Bridge. JULIA has remained.

JULIA

Sometimes—does this strike you as very comical?—when I feel exceedingly gloomy, I have an idea I would like you to come and talk to me.
May 24th, 1883

ALEC

Is this bridge safe?

CHESTER

Fourteen years and twenty dead, I'd say it better be.

MARY

Are we going across?

CHESTER

Not first, I can tell you that.

ALEC

I'm not even going second.

WASHINGTON Roebing, in a wheelchair, his wife EMILY, and Governor GROVER Cleveland enter.

CHESTER

Ah! Mr. Cleveland, it seems the entire city has turned out.

GROVER

The people love something to do.

WASHINGTON

Plus, we've promised fireworks. Washington Roebing, Mr. President.

CHESTER

Yes, I think we might have met before, years ago, or perhaps it was your father.

WASHINGTON

I'm certain it was my father you met sir, and this is my wife Emily.

GROVER

She'll be the first across.

MARY

What an honor!

EMILY

An honor reserved for a captain who will go down with the ship if it falters.

CHESTER

Pleased to meet you both, this is my sister Mary McElroy and my valet Alexander Powell.

MARY

Congratulations on the completion, Mr. Roebing.

WASHINGTON

Congratulations are in order, but they belong to Emily here. She was me in corporeal form during my incapacitation.

MARY

Oh? How exceptional!

EMILY

Washington overstates the matter, but there are hearty helpings of my sweat and toil along this magnificent bridge. I can't easily remember what life was like before his accident.

CHESTER

Quite an undertaking.

EMILY

And now I'll miss the work. I'm not sure what to do with myself now.

WASHINGTON

Why, take care of me of course! The Caisson's disease, you know. It got a number of the men. You wouldn't believe the trouble we went through to get those caissons to the bottom of this river.

EMILY

He's lucky to be alive. But look at the results. His father was the genius and Washington the planner.

MARY

What does that make you?

EMILY

The muscle, of course.

They laugh.

THEODORE (off)

Mrs. Roebling, the rooster's here!

MARY

The rooster?

EMILY

Yes, for good luck. Come and meet him!

All but CHESTER, ALEC, and GROVER exit.

CHESTER

She's quite a symbol.

GROVER

The bridge or the wife?

CHESTER

Both, I suppose.

GROVER

Rather like your Presidency. A divisive span from the last President to the next.

CHESTER

And the next president would be you?

GROVER

I think you and I both know that the Democrats are due for a win, plus after last year's mid-term losses I don't see your party being able to keep out of its own way. I mean, you've put up a good show, but what have you really accomplished?

CHESTER

Now that the Stalwarts are a memory, you might find the Republicans more unified than you expect. I look forward to your campaign.

GROVER

And I to yours.

CHESTER

Oh, I won't be the nominee.

GROVER

Taking your hat from the ring so soon? We're a year away!

CHESTER

In any case, time will tell.

A marching band starts offstage.

CHESTER

I think they're about to walk across.

GROVER

See you on the other side!

GROVER exits and CHESTER turns to ALEC.

CHESTER

Alec, did you ever find Miss Sand?

ALEC

I made general inquiries. She's gone to live with her sisters in Brooklyn.

CHESTER

A shame about her mother. She was a nice woman.

ALEC

Perhaps when we get to the other side of the river, she'll be waiting.

CHESTER

Now that would be an excellent surprise! I can't for the life of me figure out why she stopped writing.

ALEC

Maybe she finally realized that it did absolutely no good.

CHESTER

Alec—

ALEC

You should've just put the Stalwarts in charge.

CHESTER

I can't do anything about the Supreme Court, Alec!

ALEC

But you could uphold the Constitution like you said you would!

CHESTER

I've tried, but you know my hands are tied.

ALEC

Do you think the Civil Rights Act was unconstitutional?

CHESTER

Of course not, but the private rights argument is strong.

ALEC

The private rights of businesses? In a democracy we must share equality. There's no such thing as a private business, they need other people to function which makes them public. Why even have the 13th and 14th amendments if we're just going to legislate supremacy anyway. It starts with separating the races and it ends with controlling them which is the opposite of what Lincoln intended! I'm telling you this is political—it's just the beginning.

CHESTER

I can only do so much.

ALEC

This is the real battle, Chet. Why, just look at this bridge! This is the height of humanity, a wonder of the world, and it took everyone. Yet personally and politically we don't build bridges to cross, only walls to exclude.

CHESTER

It's a vision of the future, the promise of compromise.

ALEC

But look at how many cables are required to hold up the damn thing. Do you really think the balance of power can exist in this country when so many separate strings are required for stabilization?

CHESTER

I've heard a number of these cables are actually inferior—from some scoundrel who duped Mr. Roebling, but it still stands. In fact, it'll stand for hundreds of years.

ALEC

And it took so long to build. How much time will it take before the inferior of this country are able to support it with as much surety?

CHESTER

Shall we cross?

ALEC

Are you sure I should be by your side?

CHESTER

I would have no one else.

The men exit.

Fireworks.

JULIA enters from the opposite side of the stage and sits on a bench. She has a book.

JULIA

The day and night of the bridge dedication was breathtaking—the cannons, the fireworks, and the seemingly never ending flow of traffic. It was when I saw you from afar, crossing the bridge in the grand procession when I knew I could not write to you anymore. You belong to the ages and I could see—even from very distant—the toll the Presidency was taking on your health. But mostly you were becoming that very bad friend who does not deserve that I should care where he goes, or what becomes of him! I begin to fear that I'm completely wrapped up in my imagination—who's to say that I wrote you at all? September 15th, 1883.

I have an idea I would like you to come and talk to me. It is absurd, I know—but I can't help it—I like the sound of your voice.

She reads.

ARTHUR enters.

CHESTER

June 6th, 1885. It's a gorgeous view this bridge.

JULIA

Yes. I'm not sure why, but it's soothing.

CHESTER

What are you reading?

JULIA

Fenelon. *Telemaque*.

CHESTER

Ah.

JULIA

Do you know it?

He sits and looks at the book.

CHESTER

It's in French?

JULIA

Yes, I'm trying to brush up. I plan to go to Paris soon.

CHESTER

That sounds lovely.

JULIA

Have you been?

CHESTER

No.

JULIA

I've not been before. Now that you're no longer president, perhaps you could join me?

CHESTER

I'm sorry to say I will not be making any more trips. My health has deteriorated to the point that Mary is my caretaker. I barely leave my house.

JULIA

You never recovered from the malaria?

CHESTER

It's much worse than you suspected all those years ago, Miss Sand. I have Bright's disease, but you'll be happy to know that I did get malaria on top of it when I was in Florida. It's because of you that I saw a doctor in the first place—probably contributed to keeping me alive through the term, so I suppose thanks are in order. How did you know?

JULIA

Your eyes were similar to my father's when he was first ill.

CHESTER

Ah!

JULIA

So that's why you didn't seek the nomination.

CHESTER

Of course I sought it!

JULIA

Maybe on the surface, but I smelled mischief from the beginning. I was just afraid you thought you'd lose.

CHESTER

I probably would have, Blaine got trounced by Cleveland.

JULIA

Blaine dug his grave when he left the Secretary of State's office. You would've had much more support than he did.

CHESTER

That's kind of you to say, but Cleveland would've carried New York and that's where the difference was made.

Enough politics. Tell me of your book.

JULIA

I don't want to give anything away in case you read it later.

CHESTER

I will not be reading it.

JULIA

Then I'm happy to be of service. The story is taken from the Odyssey about Telemachus searching for his father Ulysses.

A pantomime of JULIA's story takes place upstage.

CHESTER

Grant?

JULIA

Don't pretend naiveté.

CHESTER

My critics claim that there is no pretense on that score.

JULIA

Even still. Ulysses is Odysseus, hence *The Odyssey*.

CHESTER

I begin to recall. Please continue.

JULIA

Telemachus is looking for his father, but he's shipwrecked with his tutor Mentor. Now Mentor becomes a very integral part of the story as he guides the young son of Greece on his adventures throughout the Mediterranean Sea. In fact, as I re-read, it seems truly to be the story of the brilliance of Mentor. You see, it's from this novel and characterization where we get that word to mean the same as a personal and exceptional tutor.

CHESTER

I'm sorry I've never read it.

JULIA

In the middle of the book, Mentor faces down the stern king Idomenee by telling the king that he was too much accustomed to flattery [and] it was necessary that he should hear things called by their right names.

CHESTER

And how did the king respond to that?

JULIA

He was shocked, but did not act in the domineering fashion that a king was expected to. In most stories it would be likely that Mentor would soon part with his head. But instead, Idomenee wept and embraced Mentor ... [and] exclaimed that in all his life he never,

never, never had met anybody who loved him so much, as to be willing to offend him for the sake of letting him know the truth!

CHESTER

How truly exceptional!

JULIA

But that's not the most interesting part! You see, at the end of the book Mentor reveals himself to actually be a woman—the goddess Athena—disguised so that he would take her seriously.

CHESTER

So the entire time it was really the advice of a woman—but what difference does it make?

JULIA

It makes a great difference. For a man will forgive a woman for telling a lie, even if it breaks his heart, but he will never forgive her for telling the truth.

CHESTER

I did take your advice, but nothing actually came from it.

JULIA

You pushed through the Civil Service reform!

CHESTER

Ha! One thing.

JULIA

The defeat of cronyism is too important to chalk up to 'one thing.' It will change the way our country does business—the end of corruption.

CHESTER

Now who's the naïve one?

JULIA

Surely you wouldn't take the counsel of a small invalid, Mr. President. It's all well and good to have a little dwarf, but more so for the entertainment of others. Wouldn't you agree?

CHESTER

Wholeheartedly. In the end, it feels like I was president to keep the chair warm for the next guy.

JULIA

I'm sorry you didn't win more battles, but aren't you content that you stood on principle?

CHESTER

I cost my party the midterm elections and the president's chair.

JULIA

When the dear old Republican party is dead or changed, perhaps they'll praise you for it.

CHESTER

Change is inevitable.
It's nice to get out once in a while.

JULIA

I like to watch the ships float under the bridge. The way they move through the water reminds me that we're all at the mercy of the elements. Sometimes the wind moves the water and the ripples are felt miles away.

CHESTER removes a large envelope from under his jacket.

CHESTER

Once in awhile there comes a crisis which renders miracles feasible, but you forgot to mention that often the miracle is disguised as commonplace. I've come to this spot often these past months hoping to see you and now that I have—

JULIA

I'm not one for sentimentality. Can (you) remember a time when you were very unhappy, and I tried to say things to comfort you, and you did care for my sympathy?

CHESTER

I can, but now it'll all be over soon.

He rises.

JULIA

How soon?

CHESTER

They give me weeks, months, who knows? This might be my last trip outside. My body will be off to Albany soon. Would you visit my grave when I'm gone from time to time? Maybe lay some flowers down for an old friend?

JULIA

Your grave? Why, I'll lay them at your statue!

CHESTER

A statue of me? What a ridiculous waste of money.

JULIA

I will personally see to it, and then I will give the speech.

CHESTER

You'd have to fight off my sister.

JULIA

I would distract her. And then I would read from my letters.

CHESTER

You sent them to me. They're my letters.

JULIA

You could will them to me, I would like to see them again.

CHESTER

Would you?

I've made plans to have all of my personal papers burned.

JULIA

You'd burn my letters?

CHESTER

It is the custom of ex-presidents.

JULIA

It's a foolish custom! And you're a foolish old man with no foresight.

He replaces the envelope under his jacket.

CHESTER

Perhaps you're right.
November 17th, 1886.

JULIA

Wait.

Please wait, I'm sorry I said you were foolish. We need not travel so quickly through time. We can pause for a bit, can't we?

CHESTER

We can pause for as long or as little as you wish, Julia.

JULIA

I'm just frustrated that you would obfuscate your record.

CHESTER

I've been surrounded by selfishness my entire life. At least by destroying my words, no one will re-write my legacy.

JULIA

Or write it at all! What of the selfishness of *your* actions?

CHESTER

And yours?

JULIA

Of course my aims are selfish—but, you see, I admit the fact—I do not pretend to be anything else.

CHESTER

And what of this conversation? Look around you. You are only pretending.

JULIA

Pretense is all I have left.

CHESTER

June 19, 1899.

JULIA

No! You're long dead. Stop it!

MARY and ALEC enter.

CHESTER

Why should I let death keep me from the dedication of my statue? I thought you wanted to give the speech.

MARY

Alec, how did you ensure that Chet was wearing one of the suits you bought him?

ALEC

I still have my contacts here in the city.

MARY

You always dressed him so well. He still looks good.

CHESTER

Madison Square Park, to keep an eye on Republican headquarters I suppose.

JULIA

A lot of good it does, they tear the building down.

ALEC (*Noticing JULIA*)

Well, look who it is.

JULIA

They also put up a statue of Mr. Conkling over there.

MARY

Who?

CHESTER

Roscoe? Where? Oh. Destined to face each other for eternity.

ALEC

It's Chet's greatest adviser.

MARY

Next to the crippled woman?

ALEC

Mary, that crippled woman is the one and only Miss Julia Sand.

JULIA

Yes. I'm not sure how he managed his own statue.

CHESTER

He likely cast it himself.

JULIA

He would.

MARY

Do you think she's aware that she's talking to herself?

ALEC

Undoubtedly.

JULIA

Oh! Hello, I must apologize for being rude. You gave a wonderful speech Mrs. McElroy. It's the perfect dedication.

MARY

Thank you, Miss Sand.

JULIA

You know me?

MARY

Your reputation precedes you. You are Chet's little dwarf! Pardon the expression, but I had no idea how accurate the depiction would be.

JULIA

It was my insistence to be called as such.

MARY

He spoke of you often, and fondly.

JULIA

You don't need to say that.

MARY

I wouldn't say it if it wasn't true.

ALEC

He took your advice to heart and for the life of me I'll never know why. I read that first letter and it fell on the condescending side of advice.

JULIA

Is it true he destroyed all of his papers?

ALEC

He just threw everything into rubbish cans and had it burned.

MARY

I did try to stop him.

JULIA

Nothing remains?

MARY

Some papers we found when we cleaned his rooms, but they have travelled with Chet Jr. to Colorado.

JULIA

I see. You don't suppose—that he—was so ashamed of taking my advice that he wanted to destroy all of the evidence? Would he do that just to spite me?

MARY

Miss Sand, put that out of your head. I guarantee he had nothing but the utmost respect for you, isn't that right Alec?

ALEC

If respect can be interpreted as being constantly angry with you—

JULIA

Which is my greatest fear.

MARY

Oh Alec, you know he valued those letters.

ALEC

And I'll never know why. As much as I hate to acknowledge it, he did treasure those letters Miss Sand. I suspect they confirmed his deepest fears.

JULIA

Thank you both. It's good to hear that. If I could think that I had influenced [him] in the smallest degree ... I should feel that I had not lived in vain.

MARY

But Miss Sand, life is not a vanity. It is a privilege. I hope you'll come and visit me sometime.

JULIA

Of course. Thanks again for the speech Mrs. McElroy, I will remember it whenever I come to see the statue.

ALEC

You'll keep an eye on it for us?

JULIA

I'll be his guardian.

ALEC and MARY exit.

CHESTER

It sounds like they'll never come back to see me.

JULIA

Well, it's not a gravestone! And what are these glasses?

CHESTER

These are my reading glasses.

JULIA

I've never seen you wear them!

CHESTER

They symbolize my great intellect.

JULIA

Ha! Look at these. I bet they come right off the statue.

She takes them from him.

CHESTER

Hey!

JULIA

I'll keep these—payment for burning my letters!

CHESTER

You are desecrating public property!

JULIA

Funny, there was just a dedication here and everyone's gone already. I don't think anyone will notice and besides when they do I'm sure you'll be fashioned a new set.

She puts them on.

JULIA

How do I look?

CHESTER

Older.

JULIA

August 1, 1933.

CHESTER

You'll need them more than I at that age.

The stage starts to become populated with the entire cast as in the first scene. This is not a dance, but a crowd—a group symbolic of the bustle of New York City.

The orderlies hover in the periphery.

JULIA

I need them to view this city. See how they all disregard your statue?

CHESTER

Some stop and look.

JULIA

But it's sad. It's dreadfully sad for anyone to look back and feel that the best strength of their manhood has all been wasted on unworthy ends. For your own sake and for the sake of those who love you, don't fill your life with actions which afterwards bring you only regret. And bear in mind that, in a free country, the only bulwark of power worth trusting, is the affection of the people.

CHESTER takes a position upstage as a statue.

THEODORE, PAULINE, and HENRIETTA enter with the wooden adjuster from the top of the Act.

PAULINE

Look what we found!

HENRIETTA

Should we try it out for old times' sake?

THEODORE

You won't get that one back into this thing!

JULIA

They probably have any number of them at the hospital.

HENRIETTA

Julia, we've talked about this, it's not a hospital, it's a home.

JULIA

Of invalids.

THEODORE

You need special care, little one.

PAULINE

And the grounds are amazing, it's so beautiful. And you'll have your own room and privacy to write!

JULIA

I want this thing dismantled. I want it pulled apart and erased from existence.

THEODORE

And then what?

JULIA

I don't care. Firewood, table legs, toss it off the Brooklyn Bridge for all I care, but take it apart.

They take it apart.

Take the pieces individually and have them dipped in gold and hoisted from the flagpoles! Cut it to pieces and stuff them into cannonballs and fire them into the enemy, or whittle them down to bullet size and spray the pieces into the waves of history. Or better still, stockpile the pieces of gilded treasure and sit on it, don't divulge the whereabouts and accumulate the shameful secrets for the ages to come. There shall be hidden power—hidden like the corset I now wear—they'll never know the secrets and only I will benefit. Maybe all of these people are right, nothing can be done, Chet. We have as little agency as you did. We have no control. I must keep my secrets and be content and burn the letters and cry quietly to myself as those who really hold power tell us what to do. Yes! I admit it! I am weak! I have no power! I live out my final days in a home for invalids and then buried in the family plot; interred without a marker; nameless for all time. Chet, what does it feel like to be lost to the pages of history? Tell me what to do—

CHESTER leaves as the stage empties of everyone but the orderlies.

JULIA is left with the pile of wood.

Come back! You must know better than anyone. Please, tell me what to do ... tell me what I should do now! Someone tell me what to do!

She regards the book, still in her hand.

The orderlies surround her.

I never did make it to France.

Lights fade.

End of Play