

"THE PRESIDENT'S BRAIN IS MISSING"

By

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Based on a story

By:

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&

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EXT. WHITE HOUSE - DAY

A FEMALE REPORTER steps up in front of the White House holding a microphone and speaking directly into the lens.

FEMALE REPORTER

As election fever heats up, President Joseph K. Burton, the Republican candidate, seems to be having some problems . . .

NEWS MONTAGE: In stills, video tape clips, and political commercials we see PRESIDENT JOSEPH K. BURTON, forty-two years old, dark-hair, salt and pepper at the temples, square-jaw, tall, and handsome. Sort of like Dan Quayle, but a little more on the ball. We see the headline: "BURTON WINS LANDSLIDE VICTORY; 2nd Youngest President Since Teddy Roosevelt".

FEMALE REPORTER

(V.O.)

. . . President Burton scrupulously followed the Republican party line, cutting funds to health care, education, and affirmative action. He increased spending on military, jails, and police. In the three and a half years that have elapsed since taking office, crime rates are up, more illegal drugs are being smuggled into the country annually, the jobless rate is up, the homeless rate is up, *but* the prime rate is down. The Republicans are so pleased with Joe Burton's performance that they have vigorously gotten behind him as he makes his bid for reelection.

(continued)

FEMALE REPORTER (cont.)

Then why isn't he doing better at the polls? Quite frankly, President Burton is acting rather, well, odd, I guess is the best way to put it . . .

DISSOLVE:

INT. WHITE HOUSE/ CONFERENCE ROOM - DAY

President Joe Burton's eye twitches. He reaches up and rubs it, but it doesn't stop. He looks up the long, mahogany conference table where there sit two long rows of men, some in suits, some in military uniforms, all facing him and all the men are pretending like they're not looking at his twitching eye, which they are. A big, barrel-chested black man in a general's uniform, GENERAL SEAHOLM, head of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, speaks:

GENERAL SEAHOLM

By only having nineteen stealth bombers, we are limited to merely being able to destroy the world only four-point-four times. Whereas, if we had a *twentieth* stealth bomber, we could effectively destroy the entire world *five* times! That is a huge increase of destructive capability for basically a very small investment.

Joe interjects, his twitching eyebrow raised:

JOE

Ah yes. How much is this very small investment, General?

General Seaholm turns to his aide and exchanges whisper and papers.

GENERAL SEAHOLM

Twenty billion, Mr. President.

JOE

And where, may I ask, is this twenty billion dollars coming from?

The tall, wiry, gray-haired, Secretary of State, HENRY HARRISON, stands up with a document in his hand.

HARRISON

From a very simple cut in unneeded and wasteful health care spending.

JOE

What kind of unneeded and wasteful health care spending, Secretary of State Harrison?

HARRISON

Does it matter?

JOE

I think it does.

HARRISON

Very well then, from over-staffed, under-used, county hospitals and clinics for the poor. It will *never* be missed in *that* morass of wasted money, I assure you. Besides, not only do the poor not vote Republican, they don't vote at all!

This gets a chuckle from the assembly. Joe turns to General Seaholm.

JOE

(nods; considering)

And you say we need this twentieth stealth bomber, General?

GENERAL SEAHOLM

Desperately, Mr. President.

The bill is slid forward and a pen is put into Joe's hand. Joe looks up the long table at the eager, expectant faces all gazing back at him. Joe hesitates, unsure. Secretary of State Harrison leans over Joe's shoulder.

HARRISON

It's the right thing to do, Mr. President. God Bless America.

ASSEMBLY

God bless America.

Joe still hesitates. His eye twitches. Everyone stares at him in unflinching silence.

JOE

(nods)

God bless America.

There is a general sigh of relief from the multitude. Joe looks at the military men crowding around him and smiles. They all smile back. Joe puts the point of the pen to the line marked "President Joseph K. Burton." The pen tip forms the letters one by one that spell Joe's name, "J-O-S-E-P-H K-. B-U-R-T-O-N . . . "

A red rubber stamp slams down on the front page of the document stating, "PASSED."

The document is placed in a copier, the top is slammed down, the light flashes, and collated copies begin firing out of the machine.

Copies of the document are twisted into plastic containers, which are fed into pneumatic pipes and sucked into the various government buildings around Washington, D.C.

The document is taken out of its plastic container and dropped into a bin marked, "IMMEDIATE BUSINESS."

Mighty redwood trees crash to the ground.

Spinning blades rip the wood to pulp.

Bundles of paper come off the conveyor belt and are automatically wrapped.

Copiers of every shape and size create thousands of duplicates.

Fax machines spit the document out in curved ribbons.

Now a copier fires out sheet after sheet of *pink* paper.

White-coated doctors, nurses, and orderlies open envelopes revealing the pink slips—they're all fired.

EXT. AKRON COUNTY HOSPITAL - DAY

The county hospital in Akron, Ohio is a deco, late 1920's building in a bad part of town. A sign in front says, "Akron, Ohio, County Hospital."

INT. HOSPITAL CORRIDOR - DAY

A DOCTOR in a white coat with a stethoscope around his neck walks up the hospital corridor with a pink slip in his hand. He passes the nurses station where all the nurses and orderlies are studying their own pink slips. The Doctor enters a hospital room.

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - DAY

This is a large room for ten, pathetic-looking patients in various states of disrepair. In a corner bed is KEVIN GROVES, forty-two years old, but missing all of his hair. Beside Kevin's bed sits his attractive though sad, thirty-six year old, wife, MOLLY, and his bespectacled, nerd, eight year old son, DELBERT. The Doctor steps up, holds out the pink slip and sadly sighs.

MOLLY

But, doctor, what about my husband?

DOCTOR

You'll have to continue the treatment privately.

MOLLY

But Kevin's been bed-ridden and out of work for two years. We don't have any money. Delbert and I are running the farm ourselves now.

DOCTOR

(honestly sorry)

I'm very sorry, Mrs. Groves, but they're shutting the whole facility down. I'm out of a job, too.

MOLLY

I'm sorry, doctor.

The doctor looks at this sad little family and shakes his head.

DOCTOR

I'm sorry, too, Mrs. Groves.

Kevin looks around in a confused, dying daze.

EXT. FARMHOUSE - NIGHT

A little farmhouse sits on the hilly Ohio ground, bathed in moonlight. Beside the house are a tilled field, a barn, and a broken windmill.

INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT

Molly and Delbert sit in very similar positions around Kevin's sickbed—both are asleep. Kevin opens his eyes, reaches upward and begins to moan. Molly and Delbert both wake up. Molly jumps to her feet. Kevin reaches toward her, his bloodshot eyes wide open.

KEVIN

*We gotta get those seeds in the ground before
the storm comes!*

(he points at Delbert)

You! Put the combine in the barn!

(Points at Molly)

*You! Put the chickens in the coop! We gotta
be ready!!!*

Kevin's hand drops to the bed, his head droops over and he dies. Molly takes hold of her dead husband, drops her head on his chest and cries. Suddenly, Kevin bursts awake, sits up and grabs Delbert's shirt, frightening both he and Molly.

KEVIN

*Is the combine in the barn? Tell me the combine's
in the barn?*

Molly shakes her head yes to Delbert, who nods.

DELBERT

Yeah, sure it is.

KEVIN

(smiles)

Thank God.

Kevin dies again, this time for keeps.

EXT. WHITE HOUSE - DAY

It's a sunny summer day at the White House.

INT. OVAL OFFICE - DAY

Joe Burton and a Presidential AIDE, a sharp young man, finish going over his correspondence.

Joe looks weary.

JOE

Is that it?

The aide holds yet another pile of envelopes.

AIDE

Just this unimportant, personal junk, Mr. President.

The aide sets the mail down and leaves. Joe glances at the top envelope, the return address coming from Akron, Ohio. Joe smiles.

JOE

Akron, that's *my* hometown.

Joe opens the letter—it's an invitation to Kevin Groves' funeral. Joe's eyes widen in horror.

JOE

Kevin was my best friend. He's *dead*?

There is an accompanying note which Joe reads:

JOE

(reading)

" . . . My name's Molly, I was Kevin Grove's wife. I know Kevin was a boyhood friend of yours. Even though you guys haven't seen in each other in twenty-five years, Kevin was always very proud of your friendship. Sadly, Kevin died when they closed the county hospital which had him on a special treatment. We couldn't afford the treatment privately, it would have been thousands of dollars . . . "

Joe glances at the *Washington Post* sitting on his desk, the headline stating: "MILITARY GETS 20TH STEALTH BOMBER." The sub-headline reads: "Massive Cost Overrun; Bomber Costs \$60 Billion!" Joe holds his aching head.

Joe looks up and his eye starts to *really* twitch.

JOE
(still reading)

" . . . Anyway, hope to see you at the funeral, 10:00
A.M., June 9th . . . "

Joe glances at the calendar: June 6th.

JOE
Three days.
(continues reading)
" . . . Love, Molly Groves."

Joe pushes the button on his complicated phone system.

JOE
(into speaker phone)
Get me Secretary of State Harrison, please.

INT. WHITE HOUSE WASHROOM - DAY

A very, very old black man, the white house washroom attendant, SAM WILSON, answers the phone.

SAM
(into the phone)
Washroom.

INT. OVAL OFFICE - DAY

Joe looks at his phone hatefully.

JOE
Damn this thing!

SAM
Mr. President? That you?

JOE
Yes, Sam, it's me.

SAM

Ya know, I been the washroom attendant here at the White House nay unto fifty year now. I started under Harry Truman, then come, uh . . . Uh . . . Who come next?

JOE

Eisenhower, look, Sam, we'll talk later, OK?

SAM

Tha's right, Eisenhower, good ol' Ike. Ya know, he was a General first before he was president. He was the commander of the Axis armies.

JOE

Allies, Sam. I'll talk to you later.

Joe hangs up. He studies the phone closely, then deliberately pushes a button. An OPERATOR comes on the line.

OPERATOR

Yes, Mr. President?

JOE

Get me the Secretary of State, please.

OPERATOR

Yes, sir.

The door to the oval office opens and Henry Harrison enters. Joe looks surprised and hangs up.

JOE

That was quick.

HARRISON

No, actually it was rather slow with all the traffic. . .

JOE

So, Henry, how do my next three days look?

Harrison looks in a date book.

HARRISON

Actually, hellish would be the word I'd choose, although brutal might also be appropriate. If you weren't such a robust young man I don't know how you'd get through an overloaded schedule like this: rallies, meetings, interviews, speeches, and more speeches. Me, well, I haven't got the strength anymore. In fact, lately I've had a sharp pain in my Gluteus Maximus . . .

(Harrison winces; Joe's eye continues to twitch)

Do you feel all right, sir?

Joe sits down and wipes his brow.

JOE

A little light-headed, perhaps.

HARRISON

It's not the appropriate time for a summer cold, sir, you haven't got a minute to spare.

JOE

Thank you, Henry. Could I have a moment, here.

HARRISON

Certainly, sir.

Harrison exits. Joe pulls the funeral invitation out of his pocket

JOE

(sighs sadly)

Sorry, Kev, it doesn't look like I can make it. I guess I never could make it for you, not when you got married, or when your kid was born, or even when you died. I'm sorry, buddy.

Joe's eye keeps right on twitching. Joe picks up the phone and punches the button.

JOE

Get me an outside line, please.

Sam, the washroom attendant, answers.

SAM

. . . Then, after Ike come, uh . . . uh . . .

JOE

(sighs)

Damn this phone!

SAM

. . . Uh . . . *Ford?*

JOE

No, after Ike was Kennedy, Sam.

SAM

Yeah, that's right. Good ol' Jack Kennedy. Ya know, sometimes he'd go see Marilyn Mon-roe, and when he come home he have her lipstick all over his collar—

JOE

(cuts him off)

—I'll talk to you later, Sam.

Joe disconnects. He studies the phone with his twitching eye, then pushes a button. The female operator returns.

OPERATOR

Yes, Mr. President?

JOE

I'd like an outside line, please?

OPERATOR

(pause)

. . . Why?

JOE

Do I have to have a reason?

OPERATOR

But you've never asked for an outside line before. I'm not sure it's wired that way. I might have to get a repairman out to fix it.

JOE
Oh, for goodness sake! Why don't you just try first.

OPERATOR
All right, sir, I'll try.

Joe hears a series of weird electronic noises, culminating in . . .

SAM
. . . Then, after Kennedy come, uh . . . *Ford?*

JOE
(exasperated)
No, not Ford. After Kennedy came Johnson.

SAM
Oh, yeah. LBJ. He was from Texas, ya know. Me and him didn't get on too well. I don't think he like colored folk much.

JOE
I'm sorry to hear that, Sam, I'll get back to you.

Joe disconnects. His eye is *really* twitching now. Joe taps his finger for a second, then pushes the button on his phone. The Operator comes back on.

OPERATOR
Yes, Mr. President?

JOE
That outside line, please.

OPERATOR
Oh, you didn't get it?

JOE
(patiently)
No.

OPERATOR
I'll try again, sir.

Magically, Joe gets a dial tone. He looks at Molly's note, which has a telephone number, and Joe

dials it. It rings several times, then a recording kicks in.

RECORDING

I'm sorry, the number you have dialed has been disconnected. No new number is available. Please hang up and try your call again later. Thank you for using Ohio Bell/Tele/DigiCom Systems, where we're pleased to help you.

Joe forlornly hangs up.

JOE

(to himself)

What have I done?

And his eye keeps right on twitching . . .

DISSOLVE:

INT. WHITE HOUSE/ MASTER BEDROOM - NIGHT

Joe looks like hell as he wearily disrobes beside a big bed. With his pants off, wearing undershorts, a shirt and a tie, Joe opens the bathroom door on the left side of the room, goes in and shuts the door behind him.

The bathroom door on the right side of the room opens and out steps Joe's wife, the First Lady, an attractive, forty-year-old, diminutive, blonde named NORA. She is wearing a white nightgown and rubs cream into her hands. Having too much cream left, Nora goes back into the bathroom on the right.

The bathroom door to the left reopens. Out steps Joe holding a toothbrush, a bent tube of toothpaste, and a ribbon of red toothpaste gel on his white shirt. The bathroom door on the right opens and out steps Nora, now with tissues stuck to the dried cream on her hands. She and Joe confront each other across the bed.

NORA

You?

JOE

Who were you expecting, the Joint Chiefs of Staff?

NORA

Don't start with me, mister. I don't have the where-withal to deal with you now?

JOE

Did you ever?

NORA

Quite frankly, no. You've always bored me.

JOE

Then why did you marry me?

NORA

Because my uncle, the former President, felt it would be a good match; that it might lead to another Presidency. Well, he was right. It did. And who cares, I'd like to know?

JOE

You did at first; so did I.

NORA

Well, the party's over and it's time for all good men to come to the aid of their own lives.

JOE

What does that mean?

NORA

That means, Mr. President, that I want to see some changes in you, and soon, or I'll make so much trouble that you'll never get reelected.

JOE

(sarcastically)

Oh, my heart's breakin', lady. You think this is such a great job and you got ripped-off 'cause you're the wife of the President instead of being the damn President yourself? Well, I'd give it all to you in a second if I could. But I can't. And you couldn't handle it, anyway.

NORA

(laughs)

I couldn't, huh? Not like you? Joe, look at yourself, you're a wreck. You're tip-toeing on the edge of a nervous breakdown. You'll never make it to the elections at the rate you're going.

JOE

Jump in a lake.

NORA

No, you!

JOE

Harridan!

NORA

Weakling!

JOE

Ballbuster!

NORA

Worm!

JOE

(going for it)

Yeah, well . . . you're unattractive!

NORA

(furious)

Oh, yeah??!!

At which point the First Lady begins throwing things at the President. She grabs knock-knacks off a bookshelf and hurls them at Joe. A plaque above the bookshelf reads: "The knick-knacks of Martha Washington, 1777." The little ceramic pieces explode against the wall as Joe ducks and sways in his under-shorts, shirt and tie. Suddenly the President's two Secret Service AGENTS burst out the bathroom door on the left with their pistols drawn. They both take aim at the First Lady.

AGENT #1

Drop it!

AGENT #2

You heard the man, drop it!

Just then, the First Lady's two Secret Service AGENTS burst through the other bathroom door aiming their weapons at the other two agents.

AGENT #3

Aim those weapons away from the First lady, if you please, gentlemen!

AGENT #1

I'm afraid not, Bob. Not until she stops threatening the President of the United States.

AGENT #3

You threaten the First lady, Ted, you're threatening me. You know that.

Nobody moves. It's a stand-off.

INT. WHITE HOUSE CONFERENCE ROOM - DAY

We're back in the White House conference room with it's long Mahogany table. General Seaholm is addressing the assembly, facing the President at the end of the table. We see that not only is Joe's eye twitching, his eyes are also bloodshot, he hasn't shaved, and he keeps rubbing his nose.

GENERAL SEAHOLM

. . . And that's why I feel we need *another* BEEZWACS surveillance jet. With a twenty-fifth BEEZWACS jet, not a creature will stir on this planet that we in the American military won't know about, ready to swoop down and annihilate them at a moment's notice.

Suddenly, Joe shoves his baby finger deeply up his nose and starts to seriously dig around. Everyone at the table acts like they're not seeing what the President is doing. Joe doesn't get anything very good out of his nose, looks at his finger, then goes back at it, vigorously.

JOE

And how much will *this* jet cost, General?

GENERAL SEAHOLM

Well, sir, the BEEZWACS surveillance jets are quite a bargain at only fifteen billion dollars each.

JOE

(nods)

You told me the stealth bomber would cost \$20 billion, but, in fact, it cost *\$60 billion*. That was some bargain, too.

There is a hushed silence. General Seaholm looks embarrassed.

GENERAL SEAHOLM

Where did you hear that, sir?

JOE

It's the headline of the newspaper, General.

Joe holds up the newspaper. Everyone at the table laughs.

GENERAL SEAHOLM

You don't actually believe everything you read in the newspaper, do you, sir?

JOE

Are you trying to tell me that it *didn't* cost \$60 billion?

GENERAL SEAHOLM

Why, that's nothing but an exaggerated smear-job from the lily-hearted liberal press.

JOE

Well, then, how much *did* this stealth bomber cost?

The General checks his notes.

GENERAL SEAHOLM

Well, that is, uh, not quite \$57 billion, sir. And the reason the aircraft doesn't fly has nothing to do with the cost overrun.

JOE
(shocked)

It doesn't *fly*?

GENERAL SEAHOLM

Not as yet, sir. It will soon. And we are going to hold the most diligent hearings ever convened to discover who is responsible for installing one of the engines backwards. I'm telling you, sir, as an eyewitness, it was not a pretty sight when that aircraft started its engines and began spiraling like a pinwheel. It's Goddamn lucky *more* people didn't get killed.

JOE
(aghast)

How many people got killed?

GENERAL SEAHOLM

Just two, sir. Minor in the scheme of things. Luckily, they were only civilians.

JOE
(horrified)

Only civilians!?

Secretary of State Harrison jumps up, interjecting:

HARRISON

Thank you, gentlemen, that will be all for today.

Everyone rises to their feet, collecting their notes. Harrison produces a portable electric shaver from his briefcase, holding out to the President. He flicks it on with a buzz.

HARRISON

Nice, eh? Got it from the Sharper Image Catalog. Works in zero G's. Would you like to use it?

Joe swats the shaver away.

JOE

(angry)

Get that thing out of my face, Harrison! I know what you're up to, don't think I don't. I'm onto your every move!

Joe stomps out of the room, slamming the door. Harrison turns to all the other men at the table, the buzzing shaver in his hand. All the men cough simultaneously, shutting their briefcases.

DISSOLVE:

INT. OVAL OFFICE - DAY

The Presidential Aide looks at a notebook while standing before an unshaven Joe at his desk.

AIDE

It seems that your next meeting has canceled, sir. You have ten clear minutes. I'll leave you to your Presidential thoughts.

The Aide exits.

Joe's weary, blood-shot eyes twitch. He hasn't shaved in several days. Although he's wearing a suit and tie, when he crosses his legs we see that he's wearing brown leather bedroom slippers, which he's flicking on his toe nervously.

JOE

I'm surrounded by imbeciles. What does my average constituent think is important? That's what matters.

(looks around)

Where on Earth is a phone book?

He looks all over and finally spots a phone book on top of a tall bureau. Joe grabs an old chair with a brass plaque which Joe reads:

JOE

(reading)

"From the White House of Andrew Jackson, 1802."
Huh.

Joe steps on the wicker seat of the chair and puts his foot right through it.

JOE
(rolls his eyes)

Of all the . . .

He pulls his foot out of the chair, losing his slipper. Joe grabs another chair, this one has a brass plaque reading:

JOE
(reading)
"From the White House of Abraham Lincoln, 1862."
No kidding?

Joe sets the chair down, then knocks on the seat with his fist—it's solid wood. He puts his foot on the seat and, once again, goes right through.

Joe grabs yet another chair, the brass plaque on this one reading:

JOE
(reading)
"George Washington's favorite chair, 1776."
Wow!

Joe stands on either edge of this chair, grabs the phonebook, then the chair beneath him collapses completely. Joe falls backwards on a table. Joe glances at the brass plaque on the table he's just smashed:

JOE
(reading)
"The actual table where the Declaration of Independence
was signed."
(shrugs)
I'm sure.

Joe takes the phone book to his desk, opens it at random and points. Once again, Joe attempts to make a phone call with his overly complicated telephone.

JOE
Get me an outside line, please.

SAM
Hello, Mr. President. Now where was I? Oh, after
Johnson come, uh . . . uh . . . *Ford?*

JOE

No, Sam, it was Nixon.

SAM

Oh, yeah. Very friendly man, Mr. Nixon. Religious, too. Damn shame about that Whitewatergate business.

JOE

Right. Look, Sam, you're an average guy, wouldn't you say?

SAM

(chortles)

Hell, I'm the only black man I know of been consistently employed for over fifty year at better than minimum wage. That makes me plenty odd right there. I'm ninety-six years old, I've known eleven presidents, and I've spent seventy years in a bathroom, there ain't nothin' average 'bout me. But what'dya wanna know, maybe I can he'p anyway.

JOE

Well, Sam, what'dya think the average person wants out of life?

SAM

Well, I'd have t' say, to be happy, healthy, free o' debt, and not die screamin'. 'Course, most people don' get that much. Ya know, it's like president Henry Ford done said, "A chicken in every pot."

JOE

That was Gerald Ford. I mean, it wasn't Gerald Ford, it was FDR.

SAM

FDR was in a wheelchair, ya know. But that man sure could get around. Whoops, gotta go. Bye.

Sam hangs up. Joe's eye is twitch-twitch-twitching away.

JOE

Happy, healthy, free of debt, and to not die screaming.
All the things you never got, huh, Kev? God bless
America.

Joe begins pounding his head on his desk.

An eye peers through a crack in the door at the forlorn-looking President banging his head.

INT. WHITE HOUSE HALLWAY - DAY

Secretary of State Henry Harrison quietly shuts the door to the oval office. He turns to General Seaholm and the Aide.

HARRISON

He's cracking up.

GENERAL SEAHOLM

It seems so.

HARRISON

We'll have to cancel as many of his meetings as we
can, then plant a cover story.

AIDE

We can't cancel the Republican minority rally again,
he's already canceled five times before.

HARRISON

(waves his hand)

It doesn't matter what he says to *them*, why do you
think they call them minorities? I'm talking about
real meetings, for God's sake.

GENERAL SEAHOLM

We could say he was visiting a military base, mistakenly
stepped on a land mine, and got blown up, then we could
frag him. Ya know, toss a grenade at him when he's not
looking. What do you think?

HARRISON

Good thinking, General, I'll keep it in mind.

Harrison walks quickly away.

DISSOLVE:

INT. AUDITORIUM/ POLITICAL RALLY - DAY

Your typical, big, political rally: silly straw hats; banners stating the states of the union; crowds of people, young and old, wearing suits and ties, etc. . . .

INT. CROWD - DAY

Interestingly, it's a group made up of minority groups: blacks, Latinos, Native Americans, all wearing Republican paraphernalia. Joe Burton, wearing a well-tailored dark suit although still unshaven, his eye twitching, pushes through the crowd. People reach out to shake his hand and touch him. Hands yank at his tie, lapels, and even his nose; Joe doesn't look like he's enjoying all this adulation. In fact, he looks bugged.

INT. STAGE - DAY

Joe makes his way up onto the stage, shakes hands with top-ranking Republicans on the stage, then steps before the podium. Joe straightens his tie, clears his throat, then rubs his nose several times.

JOE

(addressing the crowd)

My fellow Republicans . . .

(Joe's right eye begins to twitch)

. . . The representation, or mascot if you will, of our party is the elephant, which seems somewhat ironic to me. You see, elephants mourn their dead. When an elephant passes the bones of another elephant it stops and cries, throwing dust into the air with it's trunk.

Joe makes elephant crying noises while using his arm to imitate an elephant's trunk

Standing backstage, Secretary of State Harrison turns to General Seaholm.

HARRISON

He's lost it.

GENERAL SEAHOLM

Should we shut him down?

HARRISON

Let him talk, no one's listening anyway.

JOE

(continuing)

The reason I bring this up is that a good friend of mine died the other day. We were best friends when we were kids. We saw the elephants at the circus once and fed them peanuts. They'd take 'em with their trunks. It was pretty cool, really . . .

The crowd pays close attention. What the hell is this guy talking about? And why does he keep picking his nose? A tall, thirty-five year old, Native American man, LUKE, stands watching this odd display with great interest as he busily eats all the free food off of a long table.

Joe, meanwhile, steps out from behind the podium and saunters up to the edge of the stage, a faraway look in his eyes.

JOE

. . . Kevin and I had a great treehouse. We stole the wood off of constructions sites and it took us a whole summer to build, but it was *really* cool . . .

Harrison turns to General Seaholm and sighs.

HARRISON

All right. Enough. Get him off before he starts talking about his comic book collection.

JOE

. . . I used to have a great comic book collection, too. Hundreds of 'em . . .

Harrison rolls his eyes.

General Seaholm steps up beside a STAGEHAND and grabs the curtain rope.

STAGEHAND

(surprised)

Hey! What'cha doin'?

GENERAL SEAHOLM

Lowering the curtain. You got something to say about it, maggots?

The Stagehand shakes his head. General Seaholm lets go off the rope and a metal bar with many lights clamped to it drops down from above the stage, landing directly on President Burton's head—**DOONT!!**—knocking him out cold. The audience gasps in shock. General Seaholm looks horrified as he turns to the Stagehand.

GENERAL SEAHOLM

Why didn't you tell me this wasn't the curtain?

STAGEHAND

You didn't ask.

GENERAL SEAHOLM

Funny man! If you were in the military I'd have you shot!

Secret service agents rush out to Joe's unconscious body.

Luke, the Native American, watches in amazement while scarfing down hotdogs.

Harrison looks at Joe's unconscious body, then turns to General Seaholm.

GENERAL SEAHOLM

Sorry about that.

HARRISON

No, it's perfect. Now that we have our cover story, all we have to find a new candidate.

General Seaholm nods.

SPINNING HEADLINE: "PRESIDENT HIT IN HEAD, IN COMA."

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - NIGHT

Joe awakens in the hospital with a bandage on his head and a strange, faraway look in his eyes. Nevertheless, he now seems all right. He recognizes everyone:

JOE

(pleasantly)

Nora, Secretary of State Harrison, General Seaholm,
good to see you all.

NORA

(suspicious)

He seems all right.

JOE

I'm fine, dear. Don't worry. It's nothing.

(he touches the lump
under the bandage and recoils)

Oww!

Harrison looks at Joe closely.

HARRISON

Your eye isn't twitching anymore, Mr. president.

JOE

Really? Was it ever?

Harrison looks at the General.

HARRISON

Uh, yes it was, wasn't it, General?

GENERAL SEAHOLM

Slightly.

JOE

Well, it's not now. I feel just fine. A little sleepy,
maybe.

Joe closes his eyes. Nora turns to the others.

NORA

Let's let him sleep.

GENERAL SEAHOLM

Yes, the best medicine now is some good old rest.
Ya know, when I was in Granada and shell went off
right near me, well, I—

HARRISON

—That's fine, General, later.

JOE

Goodnight, everyone.

EVERYONE

Goodnight.

Joe really seems OK now. With his eyes closed, breathing evenly, he seems to be sleeping calmly. Everyone looks at each other and sighs, feeling greatly reassured.

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - LATER THAT SAME NIGHT

Joe's eyes snap open as another patient is wheeled into his room. When the gurney stops beside him, Joe sees that it is his very ill, former best friend, Kevin Groves. He looks terrible, his hair fallen out, his lips dry and cracked. Joe is shocked.

JOE

Kevin?

Kevin turns to look at Joe, his lips moving but no sound coming out. He reaches toward Joe, his fingers grasping at the air.

KEVIN

(wheezing)

Help me, Joe. Help me . . .

Masked DOCTORS push their way in between the two patients.

DOCTOR #1

Leave the President alone! For God's sake, will
someone please deal with that poor wretch.

Another Doctor tosses a towel over Kevin's face. We can barely hear him wheeze through the terry-cloth. Kevin's hand slowly lowers.

DOCTOR #1

The President's breathing is uneven, I need an EKG, an EEG, an MRI, and a CAT-SCAN, *stat!* You hear me? I said, *stat!* And I mean, *stat!*

Machines of every shape and size, making every kind of electronic bleeping sound imaginable, are wheeled in and attached to Joe.

Kevin, meanwhile, is expiring.

JOE

(horrified)

But what about him?

The masked doctor leans into Joe's face.

DOCTOR #1

Forget him, he's gone. Besides, he wasn't even a Republican. He voted Libertarian. Now he's dead, which, for all intents and purposes, is the same thing. He's of no importance, Mr. President. Just a poor farmer. Whereas *you*, Mr. President, *you're* important!

Joe watches as Kevin's hand drops limp beside him. A JANITOR comes in, empties a wastebasket on Kevin's face, stubs out his cigarette in the mess, then wheels Kevin and the garbage out.

Joe drops his head back, his eyes wide.

JOE

I'm a murderer!

Joe bolts awake—he was dreaming. It was all a dream. Joe is breathing deeply, his eyes darting all around. His room is quiet; empty. Joe gets up out of bed and stealthily puts on his clothes. He goes to the door and peeks outside.

EXT. HOSPITAL HALLWAY - NIGHT

Both Secret Service agents are zonked out in plastic chairs. Joe steps out of his room, tiptoes past the snoozing Agents, then ducks around a corner.

EXT. HOSPITAL - NIGHT

Joe evades two more inattentive Secret Service Agents. Yanking the bandage off his head and tossing it, Joe runs into the night.

DISSOLVE:

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - NIGHT

Four Secret Service Agents stand around Joe's empty hospital bed looking baffled. The door to the hospital room swings open and there stands CHIEF HANK DONDERO, a bear of a man, and the head of the Secret Service. Agent #1 turns to him.

AGENT #1

Ah, Chief Dondero. As you can see, the President is gone.

CHIEF DONDERO

Excellent deduction. Where do you suppose he is?

AGENT #2

We were thinking an abduction by terrorists.

AGENT #3

Or simply a straight kidnapping for money.

CHIEF DONDERO

(nods; considering)

Is there a ransom note?

The four Agents look at each other in confusion.

AGENT #1

Uh, not that we've located as yet. But we will.

CHIEF DONDERO

(nods again)

You know what I think?

(all four Agents look eager
to hear his speculation)

I think that all four of you lazy bastards were asleep on the job, and none of you has the slightest clue what really happened.

ALL FOUR AGENTS

Well . . . That is . . . I, uh . . .

CHIEF DONDERO

Have any of you eagle-eyed agents noticed anything odd about the President lately?

The four Agents consider this.

AGENT #1

Well, he hasn't been wearing shoes in the last few days.

THREE AGENTS

(agreeing)

Yeah, that's right . . . He hasn't been wearing shoes.

CHIEF DONDERO

And why do you suppose that is?

The four Agents consider this, too.

AGENT #2

(offering)

He hasn't had time to get to a shoe store?

Chief Dondero rolls his eyes, shakes his head and sighs.

CHIEF DONDERO

(serious)

Check all of the bus stations, airports, and car rentals. Now let's move! I want to know where President Burton is, and I want to know soon!

ALL FOUR AGENTS

Yes, sir.

The Agents head out the door at double-time. Chief Dondero looks down at the empty bed, then shakes his head sadly.

CHIEF DONDERO

Poor Joe. You never were much of a president. And now you've lost your marbles, too.

The Chief turns and exits the hospital room.

EXT. BANK - NIGHT

Joe comes running up to a bank with a lighted ATM machine in the wall. Joe steps up to the ATM, pulls out his wallet, removes a credit card and is about to insert it in the machine, then stops.

JOE

Wait a minute. They'll track me down with this.

Joe puts the credit card back in his wallet, then checks his cash situation—two twenties. Putting the two bills in his pants pocket, Joe glances at a photo of his wife, then tosses his wallet in the trashcan. Joe looks down at the gold wedding band on his finger. He pulls it off, thinks about tossing it, but changes his mind and puts it in his pocket. Joe looks around quizzically, rubbing his thickening beard.

INT. GAS STATION BATHROOM - NIGHT

Joe enters a gas station bathroom holding a plastic bag. He takes out a baseball cap bearing the slogan, "WASHINGTON, D.C.—WHERE POLITICIANS DO IT SLOWER," and a green, nylon windbreaker with a picture of the Washington Monument on the back. Joe takes off his sportcoat and tosses it in the trashcan. He puts on the jacket and hat, studying himself in the mirror. After a moment Joe turns the cap around backward, nods, winks, and exits the bathroom.

EXT. DARK CITY STREET - NIGHT

Joe walks down a dark, inner city street in his new outfit. He both looks and feels out of place. There are drug deals going on among shadowy people. Prostitutes beckon him hither.

PROSTITUTE

Hey, Daddy, wanna date?

JOE

No, thank you very much. I quit dating when I got married.

Joe hurries along, his hands in his jacket pockets. He turns a corner.

EXT. OUTSKIRTS OF TOWN - NIGHT

Joe comes upon the vacant edge of town, and spotting the train tracks, decides to follow them. Walking along the train tracks, Joe breathes deeply.

JOE

It's the first time I've been alone in years . . . other than at bedtime. It's nice. Calming.

Joe begins to whistle, *I've Been Working on the Railroad*. Suddenly, there is a scream: possibly human, but very possibly not. Joe stops whistling, looking every which way. There's nothing but darkness. He hurries along the tracks. But as he moves along he remembers something . . .

EXT. RAILROAD TRACKS - DAY (FLASHBACK)

It's now daytime and two nine year old boys walk along the railroad tracks swinging cattails. The dark-haired kid is NINE YEAR OLD JOE, who wears a coonskin cap, the blond kid is NINE YEAR OLD KEVIN.

NINE YEAR OLD JOE

Gosh, I love Davy Crockett.

NINE YEAR OLD KEVIN

Then why don't you marry him.

NINE YEAR OLD JOE

(guffaws)

A.) Davy Crockett's a boy, and B.) he's dead, OK?

NINE YEAR OLD KEVIN

If you could choose how you're gonna die, how would you?

NINE YEAR OLD JOE

That's stupid.

NINE YEAR OLD KEVIN

No it's not. Come on, Joe, choose.

NINE YEAR OLD JOE

(considering)

Well . . . I wanna get hit by a speeding train. Splat!

(they both look back to see
if a train's coming—nope)

How 'bout you?

NINE YEAR OLD KEVIN

Well . . . I wanna die in battle, saving my whole platoon. Be a big hero.

NINE YEAR OLD JOE

Cripes! What are we talkin' about dyin' for, it's Saturday. We don't have to be back in school for two whole days.

Kevin pushes Joe with both hands, then takes off running.

NINE YEAR OLD KEVIN

Tag! You're it!

Joe runs after Kevin, grinning.

NINE YEAR OLD JOE

Oh, no I'm not, you ratfink! You are!

EXT. RAILROAD TRACKS - NIGHT

Full-grown Joe walks along the dark tracks, looking sad.

JOE

Sorry, Kev. You didn't even get to die the way you wanted to.

(shrugs)

'Course you were never in the military, so I'm not sure how you'd ever save your whole platoon anyway?

He hears the blast of an oncoming train. Joe realizes that he's up on an embankment and there's nowhere to go to get away from the train. Joe starts running.

The speeding train bears down on the fleeing Joe, getting closer and closer. Joe dashes along the tracks on the embankment, then finally throws himself off the tracks and rolls down the dirt hill. The train rushes past.

EXT. CAMPSITE BY RAILROAD TRACKS - NIGHT

When Joe stops rolling he sees a fellow sitting on a low lawnchair beside a campfire cooking dinner. Although the fellow doesn't recognize Joe, nor Joe him, it's the Native American man, Luke, from the minority rally.

JOE

(casually)

Hi.

LUKE

Thanks for dropping in. You eaten?

Joe stands, brushing off the dirt.

JOE

No, I haven't.

LUKE

Would you like to?

JOE

As a matter of fact, I would.

Luke indicates another ragged, low, lawnchair next to him.

LUKE

Sit down.

(remembers)

Oh, but be careful . . .

Joe sits in the lawnchair, the back gives out and he drops right over backward with a thump.

LUKE

. . . 'Cause that chair's broken.

Joe sits back up. He puts out his hand.

JOE

Hi, my name's Joe. Joe Bur . . .

(realizes)

. . . *gundy*. Burgundy. Joe Burgundy. It's like mauve.

Luke shakes Joe's hand.

LUKE

(smiles)

Luke Warmwater. It's like cold water, only warmer.
So, what brings you rolling down the hill, Joe?
You forget that trains use those tracks to travel on?

JOE

I guess I did. I guess I've forgotten a lot of things.

LUKE

Well, compadre, I'm *trying* to forget a lot of things.
(he pulls out a pint of
peppermint schnapps)
Firewater?

Joe takes the bottle.

JOE

Doesn't it make you, uh . . . Native Americans, crazy?

Joe inspects the bottle's opening, shrugs, takes a drink, then hands it back.

LUKE

(takes a slug)

It don't make me near crazy enough.

(derisively)

Native Americans, Amerinds, Indiginous Peoples . . .

(chuckles)

It's a good thing Columbus didn't think he was in
Alaska or we'd be called Eskimos. We're Indians,
Joe. It doesn't make any sense, but there you are.
I'm a Huron Indian. They named a lake after us.

Joe takes another slug.

JOE

Which one?

LUKE

(smiles)
 Superior, what else?
 (Joe smiles back; Luke
 looks more closely at Joe)
 Have we met before? Do I know you?

JOE
 (shrugs)
 Maybe. Have you been in Washington, D.C. long?

LUKE
 (shakes his head)
 Uh-uh, just visiting. Not much of a town, if you ask
 me. You been here long, Joe?

Luke dishes out two plates of stew. He hands one to Joe and a spoon. Joe takes it gratefully.

JOE
 Thanks. Twenty years.

LUKE
 Work for the government?
 (Joe nods; mouth full)
 Good health benefits, huh?
 (Joe nods again)
 Why're you out riding the rails, if you don't mind me
 asking?

JOE
 I quit. Didn't like my job. Too much stress. Besides,
 I'm going to my pal's funeral in Akron.

LUKE
 I'm going right past there on my way back to Michigan.

JOE
 Mind if I tag along? I'm not very experienced at travel-
 ing alone.

LUKE
 I saw. Sure, why not? When's the funeral?

JOE

Friday at ten.

LUKE

That's soon. We'll have to hustle. Get an early start.

Joe nods, his eyes closing. He puts out his hand.

JOE

Good to meet you, Luke. Thanks for dinner. I've had kind of a rough day, so . . .

Joe falls over backward in his chair again, this time sound asleep. Luke stands, smiles, shaking his head.

LUKE

Goodnight, Joe. Nice to meet you, too. You sure are a trusting son of a bitch.

Luke steps over to his knapsack, picks it up and dumps it out. Among other things, a .38 Smith & Wesson Police Special pistol falls out. Also a Navajo blanket. Luke takes the blanket and covers Joe.

DISSOLVE:

EXT. CAMPSITE BY RAILROAD TRACKS - DAY

Joe is sleeping, a pleasant grin on his face. The sound of a pot clanging awakens him. Joe opens his eyes, has no idea where he is, whose blanket is covering him, or what's going on. Joe scrambles to his feet, fighting the blanket. Luke watches him, while packing his knapsack.

LUKE

(grinning)

You're covered.

JOE

What? Who? Wait, it's all coming back to me.

(he burps and holds his belly)

Salty stew and you're an Indian. I got it. Where the hell are we?

LUKE

We're still on the outskirts of D.C. If you're gonna make it to Akron by tomorrow at ten, we've gotta blow this taco stand.

Joe folds the blanket and hands it to Luke, who is already on the move.

JOE

Thank you.

LUKE

Not a problem. Come on, we've got a train to catch.

JOE

Uh, Luke, I haven't got any money. Or, not enough for a train ticket, anyway.

LUKE

Me, neither. We're gonna hop the train, Joe. And not pay.

JOE

Is that ethical?

LUKE

What part of the government you work for?

JOE

(lying)

Uh . . . a low part; not high up. Insignificant, really. Uh, the Department of Health.

LUKE

What did you do?

JOE

Uh, I, uh, was a paper-pusher, just like everybody else. Create piles of paper and push 'em along.

LUKE

You figure it's ethical for all of us to pay a third of everything we make so that the government can create piles of paper out of our old forests, so people like you can push 'em around?

JOE

(shrugs)

I haven't even had any coffee yet, and you want me to wrestle with that? No thanks. But since I've got to get to Akron and I don't have enough money, I guess I'll hop the train and put my ethics aside.

LUKE

Good answer. Anytime you agree with me, it's a good answer. By the way, how much money have you got?

JOE

(suspicious)

Why?

LUKE

Don't trust me, eh?

JOE

(guarded)

Well . . .

LUKE

(patiently)

Joe, buddy, if I wanted to rob you I could've done it while you were asleep, then not been there when you woke up.

JOE

(Joe nods, understanding)

Right. Sorry.

LUKE

That's OK. I just was thinking about that cup of coffee you mentioned. Sounds good and I haven't got any money at all.

JOE

(surprised)

Really?

(Luke shrugs)

Doesn't it scare you to walk around without any money?

LUKE

Scare me? No. Annoy me? Yes.

Joe reaches into his pocket and removes a few wadded up bills and some change. He pokes through it.

JOE

I've got over twelve bucks here, buddy. What'dya say I buy you breakfast?

LUKE

Then we'll have to scrounge for lunch. What'dya say we just have a cup of coffee now, and save the rest for later?

JOE

You're a smart guy, Luke. I like the way you think.

LUKE

Well, thanks, Joe. You're all right yourself.

INT. DONUT SHOP - DAY

Joe and Luke step up to the counter of a donut shop. Joe holds up two fingers.

JOE

Two large coffees, please.

LUKE

(interjecting)

Make that smalls, OK?

(Joe looks confused;

Luke explains)

They give free refills, Joe. Why pay for a large?

JOE

(nods)

Good thinking.

LUKE

You see, that's what's wrong with the government in a nutshell. I mean, I think it's great that we have the best military hardware in the world—which they then always name after us Indians: Tomahawks and Apaches and stuff—but why do we need so many of everything? Particularly when the bugs haven't been worked out. Did you read about this stealth bomber that won't fly?

JOE

(nods)

Yeah.

LUKE

It's not enough to have *one* that won't fly, we need *twenty* that won't fly. Republicans talk about cutting government, but the military is the worst-run part of the government. It's stupid, Joe. Even a guy like me could do better.

JOE

No doubt.

Two big, burly, uniformed, STATE COPS step up behind Luke and Joe. Luke and Joe both spot them at the same moment, and both intentionally do not turn around. They get their coffees and exit the shop. The cops never say a word to them.

EXT. DONUT SHOP - DAY

Joe and Luke come out of the donut shop and keep going without looking back. Luke glances at Joe, grinning.

LUKE

What do they want you for?

JOE

(confused)

Who, the cops?

LUKE

No, the donut authorities. Yes, the cops.

JOE
They don't want me for anything.

LUKE
(points)
Then why are you shaking?

The cup of coffee in Joe's hand is jittering. Joe goes to take a sip, but he's shaking too much.

JOE
I just don't like cops. How about you?

LUKE
Me? It's not that I don't like cops, per se, I'm just
happier when they're not around.

Joe gets his shaking cup to his mouth, sips and winces.

JOE
It's too bad we left so fast, I like sugar in my
coffee.

Luke reaches into the pocket of his pack and removes a handful of McDonald's sugar, salt and pepper packets, as well as stirrers.

LUKE
One or two?

JOE
(smiles)
Just one.

Luke hands Joe a sugar and a stirrer.

LUKE
You gotta be prepared in this life, Joe.

Joe dumps the sugar into his coffee, stirs it, then takes a sip and sighs.

EXT. BANK - DAY

Secret Service Chief Dondero drinks a cup of McDonald's coffee while watching two agents dig through the trashcan next to the ATM machine. One of them finds something and calls out:

AGENT #1

Hey, Chief. Get a load of this.

Chief Dondero steps over and the agent hands him a wallet. The Chief flips it open revealing President Joseph Burton both squinting and smiling on his driver's license photo.

EXT. MARYLAND COUNTRYIDE WITH RAILROAD TRACKS - DAY

A long freight train goes past across the thickly foliated Maryland countryside.

INT. FREIGHT CAR - DAY

Luke and Joe sit in a rumbling freight car. As they catch glimpses of the gorgeous countryside going past, Joe's stomach growls loudly.

JOE

Excuse me.

Luke reaches into his pack.

LUKE

When your body talks you gotta listen.

Luke tosses Joe several plastic-wrapped packages of saltine cracks.

JOE

Thanks. What don't you have in there?

Luke retrieves a plastic bottle of water.

LUKE

What ain't in here, I don't need.

JOE

Why're you out on the road, anyway, Luke? What brought you to D.C.?

LUKE

I travel for fun. It's a big country and I've seen most of it. But I'd never been to D.C., so I came. Check out the Smithsonian, see the White House. I actually went to a political rally with some of my buds—Republican minorities supporting the President, if you can believe that?

JOE

Sure I can. Don't you think minorities like the President?

LUKE

(skeptical)

Well . . . Some minority of the minorities do, but most don't.

Joe takes off his baseball cap revealing the lump on his forehead.

JOE

(interested)

Huh? Why do you think that is?

LUKE

'Cause he's a Republican, for God's sake, he ain't lookin' out for the minorities. He's lookin' out for rich people. And they're the ones that don't need lookin' out for. They just need to be watched or they'll take everything.

JOE

What about you? What do you think of the President?

LUKE

(laughs)

Me? Well . . . I feel kinda bad for him, if you want to know the truth.

JOE

Why's that?

LUKE

'Cause I watched him crack up right in front of everybody. Talkin' about his treehouse and his comic book collection. Suddenly, all these lights just dropped outta nowhere and landed right on his head and—.

Luke is looking directly at the lump on Joe's forehead. Luke's eyes narrow.

LUKE

—Hey! That was *you!*
 (his eyes widen)
You're the freaking President!

Joe hushes him.

JOE

For God's sake, quiet down. You don't want everyone to know.

Luke slides away from Joe.

LUKE

Is this some kind of trick? What're you up to?

Luke shoves his hand into his pack.

JOE

(confiding)

I've run away. It was that hit on the head that caused me to see clearly for the very first time in my life. I hate everything I stand for! In fact, I hate me! And I don't like my wife, either. And the best friend I ever had in my life died cause I'm no good at my job. And now I'm going to his funeral.

LUKE

(looks skeptical)

Why didn't you just fly there in Air Force One?

JOE

(angry)

'Cause they wouldn't let me! I was too busy stealing from the poor to help the rich! I'm Robin Hood's evil brother! And I never had a bad intention. I did everything like I really cared about something, except I don't know what!?

LUKE

And what're you gonna do after this funeral?

JOE

(his eyes light up)

Ah-ha! My friend, Kevin—the one that died—and I built a secret treehouse in the woods. You heard me talk about it, but I didn't say where it was. Nobody knows where it is. So I'm gonna go live there and no one will ever find me!

(gets serious; points at Luke)

Unless *you* tell!

Luke throws up his hands.

LUKE

I won't tell. I swear.

Joe calms down.

JOE

Good. I didn't think you would. You can stay there, too, if you'd like. It's pretty big.

Luke now realizes that Joe isn't playing with a full deck.

LUKE

Man, you must've really been hit on the head *hard*.

Joe rubs the lump and nods. They rumble along in silence for a moment. Suddenly, Luke starts to laugh.

LUKE

Joe *Burgundy*? You gotta be kidding.

JOE

(grins)
You bought it.

LUKE
Yeah, but I'm a sucker. The one time in my life I
ride with a President, I do it in a freight car.

JOE
Freight car or no, this is the best time I've had in
years. Thanks, Luke.

Luke tosses another pack of saltines at Joe.

LUKE
Have some crackers.

EXT. THE WEST VIRGINIA COUNTRYSIDE - DAY

The hilly, wooded West Virginia countryside goes by.

DISSOLVE:

EXT. THE OUTSKIRTS OF PITTSBURGH - DAY

Our point of view rolls down the tracks, through the industrial outskirts of Pittsburgh.

INT. FREIGHT CAR - DAY

Joe and Luke stand up. Luke hoists his pack, ready to move.

LUKE
We've got to change trains here in Pittsburgh.

JOE
Although those crackers were good, I'd be perfectly
happy to spend my twelve dollars on lunch now.

LUKE
We can both have lunch for two dollars, and still
have ten left.

JOE

However you wanna do it, let's do it. I'm sort of getting a headache, ya know, from not eating.

LUKE

Want some more crackers?

JOE

No thanks, I'm cool. What did you do, strip some restaurant of all their crackers?

LUKE

No, man, they accumulate. All restaurants take the hit evenly; small but regular. All right, let's go.

They move to the doorway of the freight car.

EXT. PITTSBURGH TRAIN YARD - DAY

As the freight train pulls slowly into the yard, Joe and Luke disembark, dashing low across the tracks. Joe keeps glancing over at a YARD BULL, a burly guy with a stick. Luke goes under a low chain fence. Joe is looking back, doesn't see the chain and catches it right across his stomach, causing him to do a flip and land on his ass. The Yard Bull glances over, but can't see anything. Joe and Luke quietly crawl away.

EXT. DESERTED CITY BLOCK - DAY

Joe and Luke come out on a completely deserted city block—there's not another soul around. They start to feel creepy, throwing glances back over their shoulders, speeding up. Finally, they come upon a single fifteen year old KID trying to steal a hubcap off a car. Joe and Luke chuckle; this is what they were scarred of?

JOE

Hey, kid. You probably shouldn't be doing that.

LUKE

You could get into trouble.

Suddenly, two more KIDS pop up from inside the car, then three more from underneath the car—now there's SIX, dirty, filthy, white kids with tire irons and crowbars confronting them.

KID #1

I could, huh? From who?

LUKE

(backing off)

Well, not from us.

KID #1

Damn right, not from you! Or any other adult!

KIDS #2-6

Yeah!

JOE

Hey, isn't this a school day? Why aren't you in school?

Luke is nudging Joe to knock it off.

KID #1

They closed our school down, OK?

JOE

Why?

The kids all laugh together.

KID #1

No money, why do you think? Good ol' MoTech. All five of us was gonna open up a mechanics shop together, called *Five Guys Named Mo*. Not now though. We was forced out of school and onto the streets.

JOE

(sad)

I'm truly sorry to hear that. Uh, by the way, there are six of you.

Kid #1 looks back to the others and they all exchange sour expressions.

KID #1

What are you tryin' to say, man? You think we don't know that? Our other friend, Tim, ain't here.

JOE

No, there's six of you here now.

LUKE

(rolls his eyes)
Oh, for God's sake, Joe, will you shut up!

KID #1
It don't make no difference how many of us are here now 'cause we can't never have our shop, Five Guys Named Mo, or Six Guys Named Mo. It's No Mo! And unless you wanna be No Mo, too, you're gonna give us all your money. Un'erstand?

JOE
(aghast)
You're robbing us?

LUKE
(whispering)
Joe, please, will you just shut up!

Kid #1 looks to the others, confers, they all nod, then he looks back to Joe.

KID #1
Yeah, we're robbing you. The question is, are we mugging you, too?

JOE
(explaining)
You see, this is all the money we have left. We were just going to get lunch with it. We haven't eaten today. We need this money for food.

Kid #1 confers with the others, then turns back.

KID #1
Because you won't shut up, we're now going to mug you, too.

The kids all converge on Joe and Luke in a menacing fashion. Suddenly, Luke pulls his hand out of his pack and brandishes his pistol at them.

LUKE

(calmly)
All right, now, let's just back off and no one will
get hurt.

Joe is quite surprised by this turn of events. The kids all stop in mid-step. All of a sudden, every kid whips out a pistol of his own, cocks it and aims in on Luke.

KID #1
Uh-oh, now it's five-to-one.

JOE
Uh, that's six-to-one.

KID #1
(to Joe)
Who asked you?

Luke doesn't like the odds, taking a step backward. Joe looks baffled.

JOE
Where did all of you kids get guns?

KID #1
They're a helluva lot easier to get than an education.
(to Luke)
Now drop it, Tonto, the cowboys is comin'.

Luke drops his pistol. The kids swarm in on Luke and Joe, swinging their pistol butts like clubs.

When the kids are finished beating the crud out of our dynamic duo, leaving them bloody and beaten, one kid dumps Luke's pack on the ground: pots, pans, blankets, nothing of any value. Kid #1 goes through Joe's pocket and takes his money. He counts the money.

KID #1
(angry)
Fourteen bucks? That's it?

Joe looks up from the ground, blood all over his head and face.

JOE
Uh, that's twelve bucks.

Kid #1 gets very angry, pointing at Joe.

KID #1

You think I can't count? Count this!

He kicks Joe in the stomach, doubling him over. One kid picks up Luke's pistol and pops out the cylinder which drops right out and falls to the ground. The kid harumphs, tossing the rest of the pistol to the ground. The kids stroll away splitting up the booty.

KID #1

All right, five shares into fourteen dollars—that's four bucks each.

Joe is about to correct him when Luke's hand clamps over his mouth.

LUKE

(whispering)

Joe, let it go.

Once the kids are gone, Luke and Joe help each other to their feet. They both look like hell, beaten and battered. Joe begins to pick up Luke's pots and pans, while Luke puts his pistol back together.

LUKE

It's the only thing I ever got that belonged to my Dad. I'm not sure it ever worked. He got it at Wounded Knee.

JOE

Did it ever heal?

LUKE

(confused)

Did what heal?

JOE

Your Dad's knee?

LUKE

(exasperated)

Oh, for goodness sake!

Luke takes his pack from Joe and shoves the pistol back inside. Joe touches his aching head and sees that he's bleeding.

JOE

I don't feel so good. Kinda woozy.

Luke grabs Joe to hold him up.

LUKE

Come on, we've got to find us a hospital.

JOE

We haven't got any money.

LUKE

America may seem like a third world country,
but actually they can't turn you away at an emergency
room, no matter who you are.

JOE

(surprised)

Really?

LUKE

Yeah, really.

INT. EMERGENCY ROOM - EVENING

Luke and Joe stand at the admitting desk of an emergency room. The ADMITTING NURSE points toward the exit.

ADMITTING NURSE

Get lost!

LUKE

(astounded)

But you have to help us. We got mugged and we're
bleeding.

ADMITTING NURSE

You two have health insurance?

LUKE

Well, no.

ADMITTING NURSE

Then who's going to pay for your treatment?

JOE

(still woozy)

But this is an emergency.

ADMITTING NURSE

Yeah? Take it outside. And don't get blood all over everything, either.

Joe and Luke turn around and stagger from the hospital.

EXT. PARK - NIGHT

Joe and Luke sit on a park bench cleaning themselves up with old t-shirts of Luke's and drinking the remainder of his peppermint schnapps. Joe chuckles.

JOE

What the heck did you think you were gonna do with that broken gun? Throw it at them?

LUKE

(shrugs)

I wanted to scare 'em, I guess.

JOE

They looked pretty darn scared while they were beating the crap out of us.

LUKE

(snotty)

Oh, excuse me. Maybe I should've joined you in correcting their math. That was helping the situation a lot.

JOE

Yeah, well, four doesn't go into fourteen five times.

LUKE

Joe, what's the difference? Sometimes you just gotta keep your mouth shut.

JOE

You think they wouldn't have beat us up?

LUKE

For fourteen bucks, it's not worth it.

JOE

(correcting)

Twelve bucks.

LUKE

(pointing)

Correct me again and *I'll* beat the crap outta you.

JOE

Uh-oh, big man. I'm not scared of you.

LUKE

Don't push me, Joe, you ain't got no Secret Service guys here to protect your scrawny ass. I might hurt you.

JOE

You talk the talk, but do you walk the walk?

Luke gives Joe a long look, then pushes him.

LUKE

Don't push me, white man.

Joe rises to his feet.

JOE

On your feet, red man. Let's see what you got.

Luke stands up—he's not a little guy.

LUKE

You don't want to see what I got, rich boy. I'll hit you so hard, when you stop rolling your clothes'll be outta style.

Suddenly, Luke and Joe are in a pushing match. They're not kidding, either. Luke grabs Joe in a

headlock.

LUKE

Give it up, dude, it's all over.

Joe struggles and growls, unable to move his jaw.

Suddenly, the two combatants are bathed in white light. They both look up, squinting. Two Pittsburgh COPS, one white, one black, step up with their batons in their hands. Joe and Luke freeze.

COP #1

All right, you two, let's just break up.

Joe and Luke allow themselves to be pulled apart.

COP #2

Look at you two, you're a mess. What's this about?

Luke points at Joe.

LUKE

He thinks he's the friggin' President.

JOE

I *am* the President.

COP #1

Yeah, and I'm J. Edgar Hoover, head of the CIA.

Joe is about to say something, turns and sees Luke looking him. Joe keeps quiet.

Cop #2 picks up Luke's knapsack.

COP#2

Whose is this?

LUKE

Mine.

Cop #2 pulls out the .38 Police Special.

COP #2

Well, well . . . Yours, too?

LUKE

It was my Dad's. It's busted. Doesn't work.

Cop #2 pops out the cylinder and it drops to the ground with a clunk.

COP #2

You tryin' to be funny, Geronimo?

Cop #1 turns to Joe.

COP #1

You wanna press charges, Mr. President?

JOE

For what?

COP #1

You're covered with blood. He beat you up.

JOE

(shakes his head)

He didn't beat me up. Some kids beat us both up a few blocks from here. They weren't in school and they all had guns.

COP #2

And that's when you started thinking you were the President?

JOE

Right. I mean, no. I *am* the President.

COP #2

Right. You said that.

Both Cops turn to Luke.

COP #1

You're goin' downtown, Chief. Possessing a concealed weapon.

LUKE

But it doesn't work.

COP #1

Tell it to the judge.

LUKE

(indignant)

Oh, see. I'm a minority and I get taken in, but just because he's the President he gets off?

COP #2

Diplomatic immunity.

They put Luke in the backseat of their car. Joe and Luke exchange a look through the window. Cop #1 gets in the back with Luke. Cop #2 opens the driver's door, turning to Joe.

COP #2

You look like hell, Mr. President. Get some rest.
Take a bath.

Joe and Cop #2 look directly at each other for a brief second. The Cop gets a strange look on his face as he gets into the car.

COP #2

(in the car; muffled)

That guy does sorta look like the President, ya know.

Joe waves to Luke as the car drives away.

JOE

See ya, pal.

Joe is alone, bloody, battered, and ragged. He sighs, shaking his head.

JOE

I gotta get to Akron. Fast.

He starts walking quickly.

DISSOLVE:

EXT. GAS STATION (WASHINGTON, D.C.) - NIGHT

Chief Dondero leans on the hood of his car smoking a cigarette and drinking coffee in a paper cup. Agent #1 steps out of the men's bathroom holding a brown sportcoat, which he hands to the Chief. Dondero opens the jacket revealing a label on the breast pocket: "Joseph K. Burton."

Agent #2 steps up holding a pimply, eighteen year old GAS JOCKEY by the arm.

AGENT #2

He bought a baseball cap and a windbreaker, Chief.

GAS JOCKEY

(grinning idiotically)

That was the President? Really?

Chief Dondero turns to Agent #2 sharply.

CHIEF DONDERO

Why are you shooting your mouth off?

AGENT #2

(abashed)

Sorry, Chief, it just slipped out.

GAS JOCKEY

He sure didn't look like the President.

CHIEF DONDERO

That's because he wasn't the President.

GAS JOCKEY

(points at Agent #2)

But he said—

CHIEF DONDERO

(flatly)

—He's wrong. He's always wrong. He was born wrong. Understand?

GAS JOCKEY

(disappointed)

OK.

CHIEF DONDERO

Get him outta here. He's losing time; he could be making
wrong change for people as we speak.

(the Chief turns; musing)

Are you in D.C., Joe? Or are you on the road?

(the Chief's eyes light up)

I say he's leaving D.C. and heading northwest.

The Agents all nod.

AGENT #3

Excuse me, Chief, but why northwest?

CHIEF DONDERO

Ohio is northwest of here.

AGENT #3

Right. What's in Ohio?

AGENT #1

The Rock & Roll Hall of Fame is in Ohio.

AGENT #2

They make Jeeps in Ohio, too.

CHIEF DONDERO

(patiently)

The President is from Ohio. I think he's gone home.
To Akron.

(all the agents nod,
good information)

Now let's get this show on the road

DISSOLVE:

INT. FREIGHT CAR - NIGHT

Joe huddles in the corner of a rocking freight car, dead-out asleep.

EXT. TRAIN YARD - NIGHT

The train pulls into a yard and stops to load.

INT. FREIGHT CAR - NIGHT

Joe continues to sleep. An old, grizzled, BUM climbs into the freight car. When he sees Joe his rheumy eyes light up. Very quietly, with great stealth, the Bum steals Joe's shoes. Joe does not notice a thing; he's too busy having a nightmare.

JOE

(moaning)

Kev . . . I'm sorry, buddy. I should've been there for you, but I couldn't 'cause my feet are cold . . . So cold . . .

Joe shivers, pulling his thin windbreaker tightly around him.

EXT. TRAIN YARD - NIGHT

The train finishes loading and pulls out of the yard.

DISSOLVE:

EXT. TRAIN TRACKS - DAY

Our point of view moves toward the outskirts of a city. We see a sign that says, "Welcome to Akron, Ohio."

EXT. ROAD - DAY

Joe walks up the road, with no shoes, just socks, hitch-hiking whenever a car passes by. He goes to look at his watch, but doesn't have one.

JOE

They got my watch, too, whoever *they* were.

Joe encounters a cute, Hawaiian, MAILWOMAN in her truck.

JOE

Excuse me, do you know what time it is?

The Mailwoman looks at her watch.

MAILWOMAN

A couple minutes to ten.

JOE

(disappointed)
Shoot! I'm gonna miss it.

MAILWOMAN
Miss what?

JOE
(sighs)
My best friend's funeral. It starts at ten and it's at
a cemetery on the other side of town.

MAILWOMAN
Where'd you come from?

JOE
Washington, D.C. I've been through hell getting
here.

MAILWOMAN
You look it. Jump in, I'll take you.

JOE
(pleased)
Really? Are you allowed to?

MAILWOMAN
No, but what the heck. A few people'll get their
piles of junk mail a little later. It'll be OK.

Joe gets in the mail truck. There's no seat on the passenger side, so he sits on a crate.

JOE
Thanks a lot.

The mail truck starts with a jerk and Joe flips backward off the crate into a pile of mail.

MAILWOMAN
(grins sheepishly)
Sorry.

EXT. CEMETERY - DAY

Joe gets out of the mail truck in front of a wooded cemetery. The mail truck drives off, leaving Joe all by himself. There are no cars and no sign of a funeral. Joe finally spots a woman and a child alone at a freshly dug grave.

As Joe approaches we see that it is Molly and Delbert, Kevin's wife and son. Molly sees Joe and gasps.

MOLLY

Oh, dear, what happened to you?

JOE

I had some trouble getting here. I missed the funeral, huh?

MOLLY

(nods)

Did you know Kevin?

JOE

(nods)

Yeah. We were really good friends when we were kids. Best friends, actually.

MOLLY

(perks up)

Did you know President Burton? I know Kevin used to go to school with him. That was before I moved to Akron.

JOE

(sighs)

Yeah, I knew him, too.

Molly holds out her hand.

MOLLY

Hi. I'm Molly, and this is Delbert.

Joe shakes both of their hands. Delbert frowns.

DELBERT

(quietly)
Just Bert is fine.

JOE
Nice to meet you, Molly, Bert . . .
(Delbert smiles)
I'm Joe, Joe . . . Burgundy.

MOLLY
Nice to meet you, Joe. You look like you could
use a shower, and I'll bet your hungry. Did you
come a long way?

JOE
From Washington, D.C.

MOLLY
That *is* a long way. And you came just for Kevin's
funeral?

JOE
(nods)
And I missed it.

MOLLY
(shakes her head)
No you didn't. This is it.
(starts to cry)
Nobody showed up.

JOE
(aghast)
Not even a priest?

MOLLY
We weren't really members of a church. Most of
Kevin's old friends had moved away. And then, he
was in the hospital for so long, well . . . Healthy
people just lose interest in sick people. That's how
it is, I guess. But *you* came. That's what's important.
Come on, I'll make you lunch. And you can change
(continued)

MOLLY (cont.)

into some of Kevin's old clothes. Some of them he hardly wore at all. You take a minute, Mr. Burgundy. We'll meet you back at the truck.

Molly and Delbert start down the hill, away from the grave. Joe looks at the headstone. "Kevin Wylie Groves, Born 1960—Died 2003."

JOE

Well, Kev . . . Remember when we skipped school and spent the whole day walking up a stream? As I think back on it now, that was the best day of my life. I'll see ya soon, pal. Save a good seat for me.

Joe turns and walks away.

DISSOLVE:

INT. PICK-UP TRUCK - DAY

Molly drives a junk, 1965, International Harvester pick-up truck. In the middle is Delbert, then Joe. They ride along in the jalopy in silence.

MOLLY

So, Mr. Burgundy—

JOE

—Just Joe is fine.

He glances at Delbert and they exchange a grin.

MOLLY

All right, Joe. What did Kevin call you?

Joe looks out the window, rolling his eyes.

JOE

(embarrassed)

Jo-Jo the Bloat-Goat.

MOLLY

(stupefied)

Oh, really? Well, we'll just call you Joe. But that sure does sound like Kevin, all right. He called me Good Golly Miss Molly Polly. He just liked the sound of words.

Joe turns to Delbert.

JOE

What did he call you?

DELBERT

Bert. I just like to be called Bert.

JOE

You got it, Bert.

MOLLY

So, Joe, how did you get all covered with blood?

JOE

I got beat up. And my money got stolen. By a gang, I guess you'd call them. In Pittsburgh.

DELBERT

(cautiously)

Maybe they were the Pittsburgh Stealers?

Joe and Molly both burst out laughing. Delbert grins.

JOE

They sure were. That's a good joke, Bert.

MOLLY

(wipes her eyes)

That's the first time I've really laughed in a long time.

JOE

Kevin used to love to laugh. He'd do anything for a laugh.

MOLLY

(nods; sighs)

Yeah. He just didn't have much to laugh about in the past couple of years.

Everybody goes quiet again, but now, at least, it's a more comfortable silence.

DISSOLVE:

EXT. THE GROVES' FARM - DAY

The Groves' farm is nothing to get excited about: a small house, a broken windmill, a few animals, overgrown fields. The pick-up truck pulls up the long dirt driveway and everyone gets out. Joe looks around, squinting.

JOE

(skeptical)

Nice place.

MOLLY

It needs work. As soon as Kevin got sick it started to fall apart, and there just hasn't been anyone around to do it.

They all step up to the front door. Molly opens the screen door, which is just about to fall off its hinges and is hanging by a single loose screw.

MOLLY

(shrugs)

As I say, it needs some work.

They all go inside.

DISSOLVE:

INT. KITCHEN - DAY

Molly is at the counter making tuna sandwiches. Delbert is at the table reading. Joe enters, his hair wet and slicked back, still unshaven, wearing overalls and a red flannel shirt underneath. Molly sees him and smiles.

MOLLY

Well, that's a lot better.

JOE

(nods)

Yeah. I don't think I've been that dirty in my entire adult life.

MOLLY

There's razors and shaving cream up there if you wanna shave.

Joe rubs his scraggily beard.

JOE

No thanks, I think I'll let my beard grow a little longer, see what it looks like.

MOLLY

It looks good. Sit down, Joe. Lunch'll be ready in a minute.

JOE

Have you got a screwdriver? I'd like to take a crack at fixing the screen door.

Molly goes to a closet and removes a toolbox.

MOLLY

Sure. I'll bet you're really handy around the house, huh?

Joe takes the toolbox.

JOE

Well . . . I don't know about that. Actually, I'm not all that coordinated, if you want to know the truth. But, what the heck . . .

(turns to Delbert)

Come on, Bert, gimme a hand, OK?

Delbert jumps to his feet, closing his book.

DELBERT

Sure.

Joe and Delbert exit the kitchen. Molly smiles as she watches them leave.

EXT. FRONT PORCH OF THE FARM - DAY

Joe sits on the porch studying the screen door's hinge. He turns to Delbert.

JOE

What'dya think?

DELBERT

(shrugs)

I'd say it's busted.

JOE

Clever. What'cha reading?

Delbert holds up the book.

DELBERT

A book about Teddy Roosevelt. He was President,
ya know.

JOE

Right after McKinnley.

DELBERT

(grins)

Right.

JOE

Speak softly and carry a big stick.

Meanwhile, Joe is trying to tighten a Phillips head screw with a flathead screwdriver.

DELBERT

Yeah. Uh, Joe?

JOE

Yes, Bert?

DELBERT

That's the wrong kind of screwdriver.
(hands Joe a Phillips
head screwdriver)

Here.

JOE

Thanks. I knew that; I was checking to see if
you did.

Joe puts the tip of the screwdriver into the worn head of the screw, attempts to turn it, slips out and goes right through the screen. Joe's eyes widen with an expression saying, "Ooops!" Joe glances back at Delbert, but he's not paying attention, he's looking at his book. Joe tries again and goes through the screen again.

DELBERT

Ya know, Teddy Roosevelt loved birds, but he
also liked to shoot them with a gun. How could
that be?

JOE

Well, there were a lot more birds back then. There
were a lot more animals of all kinds. We've managed
since Teddy was a kid to kill off most of the animals.
But you can't hold that against somebody back in the
1800's. Now it's a different story; now there's no
good reason to kill animals. Live and let live, I say.

MOLLY

(O.S.; calling out)

Lunch is ready!

Joe stands up.

JOE

OK, let's see how this worked?

Joe swings open the screen door and let's go—the door swings open slowly, then falls off its hinges and lands on the porch. Joe and Delbert look down at it.

JOE

(claps his hands)
 There. Now that there's nothing hindering it,
 and after lunch I'll put it back up.

Joe and Delbert head inside.

DISSOLVE:

TIME MONTAGE: (Three Days Elapse)

Joe helps around the house; eats meals with them in the kitchen; Joe and Molly exchange looks; Joe sleeps in the spare bedroom, Molly is on the other side of the wall, neither are asleep; Joe's beard gets thicker; Joe and Delbert fix the screen door again, and once again it falls off it's hinges; and they eat another meal together and it all feels pretty good . . .

DISSOLVE:

EXT. OLD, DILAPIDATED HOUSE - DAY

Two black, rental Ford Tauruses pull to a halt in front of an old, abandoned, dilapidated house sitting in a field of overgrown weeds. The four Secret Service Agents, as well as Chief Dondero, get out of the cars and inspect the house.

AGENT #1
 This is where President Burton was born?

CHIEF DONDERO
 Yep. Lived here 'til he was eleven. That's when his Dad made a lot of money and moved the family east. Doesn't look like anyone's lived here since then.

AGENT #2
 You figure they'd have a plaque or something. Ya know, the President was born here.

CHIEF DONDERO
 (chuckles)
 What do the Ohioans care? They've had sixteen, seventeen Presidents come from Ohio. It's the President State.

All the Agents nod and mumble, "Huh!" in appreciation.

AGENT #3

Well, hell, it don't seem right. You become President, the house where you're born should be a monument.

CHIEF DONDERO

That's fine. The question is, when's he gonna get here?

Chief Dondero opens a newspaper, *The Cleveland Plain-Dealer*, and the headline reads: "PRESIDENT STILL IN COMA." The sub-headline states: "Burton's popularity skyrockets!"

CHIEF DONDERO

(shakes his head)

He's doing better in a coma than when he was campaigning.

AGENT #3

If he wants to win the election, he oughta stay in a coma.

CHIEF DONDERO

What are you, a political strategist? Go get coffee!

AGENT #3

Yes, sir!

Chief Dondero looks around.

CHIEF DONDERO

Don't worry, he'll be here.

Meanwhile, down at the end of the block, unbeknownst the Secret Service Agents, Joe, Molly, and Delbert drive by in the pick-up truck.

INT. PICK-UP TRUCK - DAY

Joe is driving, Delbert in the middle, then Molly, her hair blowing in the breeze.

JOE

(points)

I was born just over there.

MOLLY

Let's stop and see.

JOE

(waves his hand)

Later. Now, I wanna see the treehouse.

MOLLY

When did you and Kevin build it?

JOE

(thinks)

Well . . . I think we were nine or ten. I'm forty-two, so, thirty-two, thirty-three years ago. Back in the Stone Age.

(to Delbert)

Before video games, and home computers . . .

MOLLY

. . . And microwave ovens, and cellular phones . . .

DELBERT

Did you have Prince Albert in a can?

JOE

(nods)

Yeah, I guess so.

DELBERT

Maybe you should let him out.

Joe and Molly laugh again.

JOE

(impressed)

This kid's a comedian.

MOLLY

He wasn't before.

Delbert shrugs.

JOE

(points)

It's in the vacant lot on the corner of First and Elm.

EXT. THE CORNER OF FIRST AND ELM - DAY

The truck drives up to the corner of First and Elm Streets and they are in front of a mini-mall, with a donut shop, a dry cleaners, a 7-11, and a video store.

INT. TRUCK - DAY

Joe looks very disappointed.

MOLLY

You sure this was the corner?

Joe nods sadly.

JOE

Well, I guess the old times are gone.

MOLLY

Not the good times. Those are still alive.

JOE

(nods; smiles)

Yeah. Uh, I don't have any money, but . . . I'd sure like a donut.

MOLLY

Me, too.

DELBERT

Me, three. I've got money—over two dollars. I could buy us donuts.

JOE

Thank you, Bert.

MOLLY

Thank you, too, *Bert*.

She's never called him this before. Delbert gets out of the truck and dashes over to the donut shop. Joe and Molly look at each other, grin, then look away.

EXT. DONUT SHOP - DAY

As Delbert opens the door, Agent #3 is coming out holding four cups of coffee and a bag of donuts. Delbert holds the door open for the Agent.

AGENT #3

Thanks a lot, kid.

DELBERT

Sure.

The Agent goes out and Delbert goes in.

INT. TRUCK - DAY

Joe and Molly sit in the parked truck. This is the first time they've been alone.

MOLLY

So, it must be disappointing for you not finding your's and Kevin's old treehouse.

JOE

Oh, I don't know. It was probably irrational of me to've thought I could really go live there. What would I have used for plumbing?

MOLLY

(coughs)

So, are you married?

JOE

No. I mean, I was, but now I'm not. We're divorced.

MOLLY

Oh, really? What was the problem?

JOE

Well . . . We don't like each other. I'm not sure we ever did.

MOLLY

Why did you get married?

JOE

Everybody else was doing it at the time.

MOLLY

Kids?

JOE

Yeah, we were.

MOLLY

No, do you have any?

JOE

Uh-uh. But it's better that way. No point in two people that don't like each other having kids. They'd be a total screwed-up mess by now.

MOLLY

But you like kids, I can see that.

JOE

(shrugs)

I like Bert.

MOLLY

(fondly)

Bert. Delbert was his grandfather's name.

JOE

But it's a silly name. Bert's better. He likes Bert better.

MOLLY

Then Bert it is. I like you, Mr. Burgundy, and I don't mind admitting it. Clearly, you loved Kevin. I loved Kevin. Del . . . *Bert* loved Kevin. Why shouldn't we all get along?

JOE

Right. Absolutely.

MOLLY

Do you think I'm attractive, Joe?

JOE

(swallows)
Yes, I do, Molly.

MOLLY
(intense)
I've been a good and faithful wife to Kevin. I loved him to the very end. But he was bed-ridden for nearly two years. I'm still a young woman—thirty-five. Well, thirty-seven, but, still . . .

(covers her eyes)
Were you, uh, thinking of moving along soon, or possibly staying around these parts a while?

JOE
Well, lately—like, since I met you—I've been thinking about staying.

Delbert comes running up holding a box of donuts.

MOLLY
Well, then, Mr. Burgundy, we know where we stand.

Joe starts the truck and winces. Delbert gets in the truck, opens the box and offers the donuts.

DELBERT
I got six, that's two each.

Joe reaches in for one.

JOE
It sure is. Thanks, Bert, your a real sport.

MOLLY
Thank you, dear. I can still call you *dear*, can't I?

DELBERT
Oh, mom. Have a donut.

Molly takes one, and so does Delbert. They drive away chomping on donuts.

DISSOLVE:

EXT. HOSPITAL (WASHINGTON, D.C.) - EVENING

REPORTERS and CAMERAMEN gather around the steps leading into a hospital. Secretary of State Harrison and General Seaholm come down the steps, stop and give a statement.

HARRISON

The President is doing just fine.

REPORTER #1

What's his blood pressure?

HARRISON

(caught)

Excuse me? Oh, well . . . It's fine, too. If he weren't in a coma, he'd be in great shape.

REPORTER #2

So, then, there's no telling when he'll come out of this, is there?

GENERAL SEAHOLM

Your guess is as good as ours.

REPORTER #2

How's the President's EKG?

GENERAL SEAHOLM

(no idea)

Uh, it's sufficient at this time. Next question.

REPORTER #1

What will the Republicans do for a candidate if the President doesn't come out of this coma?

HARRISON

All contingencies will be handled as necessary. Right now, we simply wish President Burton a speedy recovery. That's all, thank you very much.

Harrison and General Seaholm exchange a look, then walk quickly away.

DISSOLVE:

EXT. GROVES' FARM - NIGHT

The little farm is bathed in bright moonlight. Joe and Molly sit on the porch swing, rocking slowly. The crickets chirp, a cow moos, a fly buzzes past, a slight wind blows by.

JOE

(inhales)

Smells good.

MOLLY

Would you like to take a walk?

JOE

Sure.

Joe stands, putting out his hand for Molly. Taking Joe's hand, Molly rises, and leads the way.

MOLLY

This used to be a pretty farm. When we moved in twelve years ago it was like out of a storybook. We made a good living, too. Had a lot of fresh food. Me and Kevin had a lot of good years together. I don't want to grow old alone, Joe.

JOE

Me, neither. And we won't, neither one of us, or Bert.

MOLLY

Who? Oh, him.

They've arrived at the barn. It's full of straw.

JOE

I ran away from my life. I couldn't take it anymore, all the clutter and clatter. I got hit in the head and suddenly I could see.

MOLLY

What could you see, Joe?

JOE

Well . . . I could see that my head *really* hurt.
And, as I assessed my life, I could now clearly
see that every part of my life hurt. There wasn't
anything I liked or enjoyed about any of it. So I
ran away. And I came here. What I'm saying is,
I didn't just come here for Kevin's funeral; I came
here to try and find out who I really am?

MOLLY

So, who are you, Joe?

JOE

(shakes his head)

A guy that wants to make love to his best friend's
widow. Sounds romantic, huh?

MOLLY

It does to me. It's all how you look at things.

Molly and Joe awkwardly put their arms around each other, then even more awkwardly kiss.
When their lips part, Molly rubs Joe's beard.

MOLLY

I like your beard.

JOE

(smiles)

Really? I've never had one before.

MOLLY

I say, go for it.

They kiss again, and this time they go for it.

We see the house, the moon, the barn, and the two embracing silhouettes.

DISSOLVE:

EXT. GROVES' FARM - MORNING

The sun rises over the farm. The cock crows.

INT. KITCHEN - MORNING

Delbert enters the kitchen wearing an oversized Camel cigarette t-shirt, bleary-eyed and half awake.

DELBERT

Mom? Where are you?
(looks around)
This is weird.

A second later the backdoor opens and in steps Molly grinning widely.

MOLLY

Good morning, my son.

She kisses Delbert on the cheek. As she leans forward we see that her back is covered with straw. When Molly turns to make breakfast, Delbert sees it, too.

DELBERT

Mom, you've got straw on your back.

Molly, unable to see her own back though she tries, reaches around and brushes the straw off.

MOLLY

Well, what do you know about that.

Just then Joe enters, also smiling broadly.

JOE

Good morning, Bert. Good morning, Molly.

MOLLY

Good morning, Joe.

Delbert sees that Joe, too, has straw on his back.

DELBERT

Hey, what's with all this straw all over everybody?

Joe reaches back and finds straw.

JOE

What do you know about that?

Molly helps brush off Joe's back, then gets motherly to change the subject.

MOLLY

So, what do we want for breakfast here? This isn't a restaurant, ya know.

DELBERT

What do you want, Joe?

JOE

Well, Bert, I'll tell ya; I like pancakes. How about you?

DELBERT

(confidentially)

I like 'em, too, but she never makes 'em.

MOLLY

"She" is not good at making pancakes, OK? That's why "she" doesn't make them.

Joe stands up.

JOE

I, however, make great pancakes. In fact, I can't cook anything *but* pancakes.

MOLLY

Well, be my guest.

Joe steps up to the stove.

JOE

Stand back, spectators could get injured.

Molly sits down. She and Delbert exchange a skeptical look.

INT. KITCHEN - LATER THAT SAME MORNING

Everybody has part of a huge stack of pancakes left on their plate. They all look slightly nauseated.

MOLLY

They were good, though. Next time you don't have to make so many.

JOE

No. Now I feel like Jo-Jo the Bloat Goat.

MOLLY

(smiles sadly)

Good Golly Miss Molly Polly.

DELBERT

Hey! I never got one. That's not fair.

JOE

OK. How about, "Bert, Bert, the Little Squirt?"

DELBERT

(frowns)

I don't like that one.

JOE

I never liked Jo-Jo the Bloat Goat. I don't think you're supposed to like your nickname.

MOLLY

Yeah, I didn't really love Good Golly Miss Molly Polly, for goodness sake. You take what you get.

DELBERT

So we all end up with nicknames we don't like? That's stupid.

Delbert stands up and leaves. Joe and Molly look at each other and shrug. They see that Delbert's gone, then kiss. They speak with their noses touching, grinning at each other.

JOE

Morning.

MOLLY

Morning. What are you going to do today?

JOE

Well, although I don't know much about it, I thought I might take a look at the tractor and see if I can get it running.

MOLLY

Good luck.

JOE

What about you?

MOLLY

I have a million things to do. But we have a date tonight, right?

JOE

Absolutely.

They kiss again.

MOLLY

Take Delbert with you.

JOE

Bert.

MOLLY

Whatever his name is. See you at lunch.

They kiss yet again.

EXT. GROVES' FARM - DAY

Joe comes out the front door.

JOE

Come on, Bert. Give me a hand.

DELBERT

(O.S.)

OK.

A moment later Delbert comes out the front door. He and Joe walk off together.

JOE

Bert, Bert the Little Squirt.

DELBERT
(annoyed, but amused)

Don't say that!

JOE

Or what?

DELBERT

Or I'll get mad.

JOE

Uh-oh. Now I'm in trouble. Look out. Bert, Bert the Little Squirt.

DELBERT

You're asking for it.

JOE

Asking for what?

INT. LAUNDRY ROOM - DAY

Molly sorts the laundry, unfolding balled up socks, going through pockets. She picks up Joe's brown, dirty and bloody pants and smiles. Reaching into the pocket, Molly comes out with Joe's gold wedding band. Molly becomes so sad and depressed looking at the ring that she sits down on the floor and cries.

EXT. GROVE'S' FARM - DAY

Joe and Delbert come walking up to the front of the house, covered with grease and grinning. Inexplicably, they find the front door locked. Suddenly, the door opens and Molly grabs Delbert's arm, yanking him inside.

MOLLY

Delbert! Get in here!

DELBERT

My name's Bert.

MOLLY

Your name is whatever I tell you it is! Now get in here!

She slams the door. Joe is befuddled.

JOE

What's going on?

The door reopens and Molly throws Joe's clothes in his face.

MOLLY

Wait a minute, don't forget this!

She throws his wedding ring at his chest. Joe recognizes it as it hits the porch. Molly slams the door as Joe picks up the ring.

JOE

What a minute, Molly, I can explain.

MOLLY

(through the window
in the door)

Oh, yeah? Go ahead.

JOE

(stuck)

Well . . . Uh . . .

MOLLY

Good explanation. Answer me this, are you at least separated?

JOE

Well, no . . . Not actually, but spiritually.

MOLLY

Asshole! You took advantage of me—your best friend's widow! You're the lowest form of pond scum!

JOE

Everything I said is true. My wife and I can't stand each other. *We should* be divorced.

MOLLY

I should be happily married, but I'm not! Now get lost! And leave Kevin's clothes there, you're not worthy of them!

Molly grabs Delbert's arm and the two of them walk out of sight. Joe hangs his head. He then unbuckles the overalls and lets them drop around his ankles. Joe steps out of the overalls, then glances back at the wedding ring in his hand. What to do?

At that very moment a police helicopter appears over head, followed by two police cars with their flashers going, then three unmarked cars filled with Chief Dondero and the Agents. They are coming from everywhere.

CHIEF DONDERO

(pointing)

There he is.

Joe looks all around in a panic, then suddenly bolts. He runs out into the overgrown field.

Everyone gives chase: helicopter, police cars, and unmarked cars, all go out into the field after Joe.

Joe hauls ass in his skivvies and a shirt. He runs with all his might, like a hunted animal.

Molly and Delbert open the front door. With incredulous expressions they watch the chase.

Joe gets across the field, enters a wooded area, still sprinting he looks back and doesn't notice a thick, low-hanging branch coming up at head level—**WHACK!!**—Joe knocks himself senseless. The whole world goes white . . .

DISSOLVE:

EXT. FARM HOUSE - DAY/ A LITTLE LATER

Chief Dondero and the four Agents step up to Molly and Delbert at the front of the house.

CHIEF DONDERO

Mrs. Groves?

MOLLY

Yes. Who're you?

The Chief pulls out his badge.

CHIEF DONDERO

We're Secret Service, Ma'am. We guard the President.

MOLLY

You also stop counterfeiting, too, don't you?

CHIEF DONDERO

Yes, Ma'am, we do. We're a division of the Treasury Department.

MOLLY

Is Joe a counterfeiter?

CHIEF DONDERO

No, he's the President.

Molly and Delbert look at each other and speak simultaneously.

MOLLY & DELBERT

Joe's the *President*?

They both burst out laughing.

MOLLY

That's the silliest thing I've ever heard. He wasn't even wearing shoes when he came to the funeral.

CHIEF DONDERO

He'd stopped wearing shoes several weeks ago. He's been under a lot of stress lately.

Joe's unconscious body is strapped to a gurney and loaded into the back of an ambulance. The Chief and the Agents start to leave.

CHIEF DONDERO

You'll be debriefed, Mrs. Groves. Otherwise, we apologize for the inconvenience.

Molly grabs the Chief's sleeve.

MOLLY
One thing . . . ?

CHIEF DONDERO
Yes?

MOLLY
What's his relationship with the First lady like?

CHIEF DONDERO
(looks around)
Between you, me, and the lamppost, theirs is the marriage from hell. They don't even like each other. Never have. It's all a front for the media. It's sad, really. Joe's a first-rate guy. I'm not enjoying watching him go through the hell he's presently going through. Goodbye, Mrs. Groves. I'm sorry about your husband.

MOLLY
Thank you.

The Chief leaves. Molly and Delbert watch him go, then turn and go inside.

DISSOLVE:

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM (WASHINGTON, D.C.) - DAY

Joe lies asleep in a hospital bed, his head bandaged, his beard thicker every time we see him. Both of Joe's hands are balled into fists. Sitting around the room reading magazines are: Henry Harrison, General Seaholm, Chief Dondero, and Nora, the First Lady.

Suddenly, Joe gasps loudly and snaps his eyes open.

Everybody in the room is startled and jumps. They all turn, look at Joe, then crowd in around his bed. The first one to speak is Chief Dondero.

CHIEF DONDERO
Hey, Joe. How ya doin'?

JOE

(blinks)
OK, Chief, how're you?

CHIEF DONDERO
Better now. We were a little scared for a while there.

HARRISON
Are you sure you're all right, Mr. President?

JOE
I'm fine, Secretary of State Harrison. My head hurts a bit.

(to General Seaholm)
General Seaholm. Keeping the country safe?

GENERAL SEAHOLM
(salutes)
Yes, sir.

JOE
(to Nora)
Nora, you look tired.

NORA
I am tired, Joe, but I'll sleep better now that I know where you are. What's in your hand?

They all glance down at Joe's balled fist. Joe opens his hand revealing his wedding ring. Everybody smiles. Nora takes the ring out of Joe's hand and replaces it on his finger.

NORA
There. Now you won't lose it.

JOE
I didn't lose it.

NORA
Well, now you won't.

JOE
(sighs)
So, what's on the agenda?

HARRISON

The agenda right now, Mr. President, is for you to get better.

Joe sits up.

JOE

I *am* better. What do you think this was all about?

HARRISON

But you should rest.

JOE

I'm rested. Really. How are the popularity polls doing?

GENERAL SEAHOLM

(smiles)

Outstanding, sir. The highest they've been this entire campaign.

JOE

If they start to drop again, just smack me in the head with the nearest heavy object.

Everybody laughs; he *is* better. Joe starts to take the bandage off his head.

HARRISON

Maybe you shouldn't do that.

JOE

Do I have any stitches or anything?

HARRISON

(shakes his head)

No.

Joe takes off the bandage. There's a lump, which Joe touches, then winces.

JOE

It's a good thing I have a hard head.

Everyone chuckles and nods. Henry Harrison coughs.

HARRISON

Uh, Mr. President? You know, there is a huge Republican rally in town tonight. If you made an appearance I'm sure you'd bring down the house.

GENERAL SEAHOLM

You'd be a hero.

HARRISON

Elections are less than five months off, sir.

Joe considers it, then nods.

JOE

That's true. Time's getting short. Yes, I think that's a fine idea.

Everyone smiles brightly. Harrison suddenly looks concerned.

HARRISON

And you'll shave, sir?

Joe reaches up and strokes his beard.

JOE

Yes, I'll shave. I'll wear shoes, too.

Harrison and General Seaholm both sigh happily.

HARRISON

We'll get right on it.

GENERAL SEAHOLM

Yes, sir.

JOE

Outstanding.

Harrison and General Seaholm excitedly exit the room. Chief Dondero appears confused. Nora throws him a look saying, "Please leave." Chief Dondero leaves. Nora turns to Joe.

NORA

Why did you have your wedding ring in your hand?

JOE

I didn't want to lose it.

NORA

(smiles)

That's nice, Joe. Ya know, I've been thinking a lot about us lately. Things haven't gone so well up until now, but maybe they can improve.

JOE

You think so, Nora?

NORA

Sure I do. What do you say we set aside some part of each day to spend together? That way we could talk and get to know each other. After a while, we might even get over this sickening, bitter revulsion we feel for one another. What do you think?

JOE

I think that's a fine idea, Nora. Have your assistant set it up with my assistant, OK?

NORA

(smiles)

Oh, Joe, this'll be a new beginning.

Nora exits, all excited. Chief Dondero reenters, still looking quizzical.

CHIEF DONDERO

Anything you need, Joe?

JOE

Yeah. Some clothes, shaving cream, and a razor.

Joe throws his legs over the side of the bed and stands up, somewhat woozy and wobbling. The Chief is right there to hold him up.

CHIEF DONDERO

Slow down, will ya. What's the rush?

JOE

What's the rush? Chief, life's the rush. It's going by so fast that before you know it it's over. You've got to grab it with both hands and hold on 'cause it's bucking bronco. And if you don't pay attention, you end up on your ass.

CHIEF DONDERO

(looks skeptical)

Joe, are you sure you're all right?

JOE

Never felt better, Chief. How about that razor?

CHIEF DONDERO

Take a shower and it will be here when you're done.

JOE

Outstanding.

Joe walks into the bathroom and shuts the door. The Chief frowns, scratching the side of his head.

DISSOLVE:

INT. LIMOUSINE - NIGHT

Joe rides in the back of a limousine with Harrison, General Seaholm, Chief Dondero, and Nora. Joe is in a suit and tie, shaved, and wearing shoes. He looks perfectly composed.

HARRISON

The news of your appearance tonight, sir, has caused a tremendous sensation. All the TV networks have decided to run it live.

Joe nods, impressed. General Seaholm takes a fat sheaf of papers from his briefcase.

GENERAL SEAHOLM

Now, about that twenty-fifth BEEZWACS surveillance jet, sir. We still need your signature on this appropriation bill.

JOE
(waves it off)

Later, General.

GENERAL SEAHOLM

But—

JOE

—Later.

HARRISON

Now, about your upcoming schedule—

JOE

—We'll talk about that later, too. Have you got my speech for tonight.

Harrison reaches into his briefcase.

HARRISON

Yes, sir.

(hands Joe his speech)

Here. It's undoubtedly a better idea that you go over this speech. These other matters will wait.

Joe reads his speech.

JOE

Yes, that's what I thought.

Nora leans forward.

NORA

My assistant spoke with your assistant and it seems that Tuesdays at eleven are open for both of us, what do you think?

JOE

(glances up; smiles)
 That's fine, dear. I look forward to it.
 (reads his speech; nods)
 Fascinating.

HARRISON
 I wrote it myself, Mr. President.

JOE
 Good job, Simon.

HARRISON
 (smiling)
 Thank you, sir.

Chief Dondero still wears his skeptical expression.

EXT. HUGE AUDITORIUM - NIGHT

An enclosed, football-sized auditorium with an enormous parking lot jammed with cars. A banner outside the auditorium reads, "REPUBLICAN RALLY TONIGHT—FREE NON-ALCOHOLIC BEER."

INT. AUDITORIUM - NIGHT

A huge crowd of silly-hatted Republicans mill around inside the auditorium. American flags fly everywhere. People hold up signs with names of states on them.

INT. STAGE - NIGHT

The Presidential seal adorns the podium. On chairs along the back of the stage are: Harrison, General Seaholm, Chief Dondero, Nora, and other notables. Joe stands in the wings, studying his speech. A TEXAS SENATOR presently addresses to the crowd.

TEXAS SENATOR
 (with a Texas accent)
 . . . America must be strong to be gentle. America
 must be strong to be kind. America must be strong
 to be beneficent. America must be strong because
 it just should, that's all. Not kind of strong, not sort
 of strong, but *really* strong. Strong enough to vanquish
 (continued)

TEXAS SENATOR (cont.)

our enemies, and strike fear into the hearts of our allies. Strong enough to reduce this planet to rubble anytime we want. And not just once, but many times. We need to be able to turn the rubble into smaller rubble. And who is the man to lead us to this goal of strength? Why, none other than our own President of the United States. Ladies and gentlemen, I give you President Joseph K. Burton!

The audience erupts into deafening applause. As Joe steps out on stage the audience goes even wilder. Harrison gives Joe the thumbs-up. Joe nods to him, then steps up to the podium. Joe stands there patiently waiting for the applause and cheers to die down. He takes his speech out of his pocket and sets it on the podium before him.

When the applause and cheering finally fade out, Joe continues to stand there, looking at the audience. After a minute, the silence starts to get uncomfortable. There are several loud coughs from the impatient audience. Joe glances back at Harrison, Seaholm, Dondero, and Nora, all breathless and wide-eyed in anticipation—what's he up to? Joe turns back to the audience.

JOE

Ladies and gentlemen, fellow Republicans. It's good to be able to stand up here tonight and speak to you.

(applause; Joe pauses)

Over the past week I haven't *really* been in a coma. I ran away.

The audience hushes. Harrison and General Seaholm exchange a panicked look. Nora is shocked. Chief Dondero is completely interested.

JOE

That's right, I ran away. And I traveled across a small part of this great country of ours. Up through Maryland, West Virginia, and into Ohio, my home state. I was going home to attend my best friend's funeral. He died in prolonged misery due to lack of proper medical care. And it was *my* fault. And it was *your* fault, too.

Harrison and General Seaholm are furious.

HARRISON

He's completely lost his mind!

GENERAL SEAHOLM

Should I shut him down?

HARRISON

(nods vigorously)

Yes! Shut him down! He's gonna blow the whole thing.

GENERAL SEAHOLM

(snaps to attention and salutes)

Yes, sir.

Joe continues to address the stunned crowd.

JOE

We need to keep our military strong, sure, but let's not be crazy about it. Education is more important than defense, everybody and their little brother should know that. Without decent medical care for everyone we are no better than a third world country. In Calcutta they step over dead bodies; here, we step over the homeless. It's not a big step from one to the other. The point is not how to get the rich to pay less taxes, but how can the general populace, including the poor, live better lives.

People in the audience begin to boo at Joe. The yell things like:

REPUBLICANS

Get lost! Take a hike!! Traitor!!!

General Seaholm steps up to the ENGINEER running the sound and light board.

GENERAL SEAHOLM

Are you controlling the sound and lights?

ENGINEER

Yeah.

GENERAL SEAHOLM

I order you to shut everything down.

The Engineer is taken aback.

ENGINEER

Oh, you do, huh?

GENERAL SEAHOLM

Yes, I do! I'm General Artemus Seaholm, head of the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

ENGINEER

Are you really? Well, I did four years in the Marine Corps, and when I was honorably discharged I vowed to never take another order from an officer again in my entire life. So you can just blow it out your barracks bag, General!

The General is aghast.

Meanwhile, Joe's knocking 'em dead.

JOE

(continues)

The goals that I now see as important are not the goals of the Republican Party. I don't think they're the goals of the Democratic party, either. So, I'm not sure what to do. Be that as it may, I have decided to unquestionably *not* run for President on the Republican ticket.

Chief Dondero is totally impressed.

CHIEF DONDERO

You go, Joe.

However, everybody else in the whole auditorium is both outraged and shocked.

General Seaholm has brought the MANAGER with him up to the Engineer.

MANAGER

Shut it down.

ENGINEER

All of it?

MANAGER

Yes, all of it.

The Engineer shrugs, does as he's told, and shuts off all the lights and sound in the entire auditorium.

Fifty thousand people are plunged into darkness and begin to bump into each other. We see a bright red ash glowing. SOMEONE yelps, exclaiming:

SOMEONE

Hey, bud, watch it with that cigar.

SOMEONE ELSE says:

SOMEONE ELSE

Hey, you moron, you're spillin' beer down the back of my neck.

In the darkness the Manager speaks:

MANAGER

All right, funny man, bring up the house lights.

The Engineer does as he's told; the house lights come up.

The podium is empty—Joe's gone. A piece of confetti floats to the stage.

Harrison steps up to the bemused Chief.

HARRISON

(furious)

Find him! This time I'll have him committed! You hear me? *Find him!*

CHIEF DONDERO

Why? What good will it do you?

HARRISON

I didn't ask your opinion, Chief, just do your job and find him! As Secretary of State I outrank you by so much that it's incalculable. *Now move!*

The Chief nods sadly and starts to leave.

CHIEF DONDERO

Yes, sir.

EXT. AUDITORIUM - NIGHT

Chief Dondero exits the auditorium and steps up to his car.

INT. THE CHIEF'S CAR - NIGHT

The Chief gets into his car and finds a black wallet sitting on his dashboard. The Chief opens the wallet revealing the driver's license of Joseph K. Burton, smiling and squinting at us from the photo. Chief Dondero chuckles, shaking his head.

The four Agents step up to the Chief's car.

AGENT #1

So, where do you want us to start looking now,
Chief?

CHIEF DONDERO

Go home. All of you. Get a good night's sleep.

AGENT #1

But what about finding the President?

CHIEF DONDERO

The President doesn't need to be found. He's not
lost. Goodnight, gentlemen.

As the Chief drives away he tosses Joe's wallet on the empty seat beside him.

The four Agents are left helplessly behind.

DISSOLVE:

EXT. THE GROVES' FARM - MORNING

Molly is hanging the laundry up to dry on the line. With the wind blowing her hair and the clothes, it's like an early American portrait. Delbert hoes the vegetable garden beside the house.

The mail truck pulls up to the mailbox down at the end of the long dirt driveway. Molly and Delbert both glance up, shading their eyes in the morning glare.

The mail truck drives away and there stands Joe, unshaven, smiling, but abashed.

A thankful smile fills Molly's face, causing her eyes to tear up. She looks to Delbert, who smiles back at her. Molly starts walking down the driveway.

Joe starts walking up the driveway. After a few steps they both begin to run. Molly and Joe meet halfway in a tight embrace. Joe takes off his wedding ring, shows it to Molly, then throws it as hard as he can into the field. Joe and Molly kiss.

Delbert watches from the house, leaning on his hoe and smiling.

DISSOLVE:

EXT. OHIO STATE FAIR - DAY

It's a beautiful fall day at the Ohio State Fair. There are crowds, rides, booths, and corrals full of enormous pigs. The same female TV news reporter we saw at the beginning steps into our view.

FEMALE REPORTER

(into camera)

As the elections near there are some very surprising developments. As we all know, the Democratic candidate, Senator Roger Thornhill, is presently in the lead in the polls . . .

A photograph of a mid-forties, gray-templed, good-looking guy is super-imposed on the screen beside the reporter's face.

FEMALE REPORTER

. . . Following a close second is the Republican candidate, General Artemus Seaholm . . .

A photograph of General Seaholm at attention, his chin thrust forward, is super-imposed.

FEMALE REPORTER

. . . However, the most interesting development of recent days has been the homespun support for two unlikely, Independent candidates running for office under the banner of Teddy Roosevelt's long defunct, Bull Moose Party . . .

Delbert looks very uncomfortable in a suit and tie. He stands beside Molly, who looks very

pretty, wearing a dress. Beside her, with his arm around her is Joe, now wearing a full beard. He is dressed in a corduroy sport coat, blue jeans, and a knit tie. Joe gives Molly a kiss, musses up Delbert's freshly-combed hair, smiles, straightens his tie, then walks up the steps onto an outdoor stage.

Joe is met there by Luke Warmwater, also in a suit and tie. The two of them walk out onto the stage, met by loud applause and cheering. Sam, the old White House washroom attendant, is there, too. Joe and Luke smile, waving to the crowd. Behind them is a large poster with both Joe's and Luke's faces on it, which says, "VOTE BURTON/ WARMWATER—THE BULL MOOSE PARTY CANDIDATES." Joe and Luke wave to the crowd and smile.

FADE OUT:

THE END