

FIFTEEN MEN IN A SMOKE-FILLED ROOM

PLACE: The Florentine Room of the Congress Hotel.

TIME: About 8 o'clock at night.

LIGHTS - Rise generally.

SOUND - The SINGING of THE REPUBLICAN GLEE CLUB OF COLUMBUS drifts into the room from the streets below and through the Balcony Door.

A lingering pause.

Suddenly, the Hall Door opens. HARRY DAUGHERTY brusquely enters like a charging elephant with tusks gleaming. Very much a man on a mission, HE rushes over to the phone, puts the receiver to HIS ear, walks with the phone to the couch, plops HIMSELF down, and waits for the operator to answer.

After such a flurry of movement, we are finally able to catch a brief glimpse of this determined breeze before HE becomes a moving blur again: HARRY DAUGHERTY is a moderately overweight man aged about 60 with a bloated face that seems to have been barely squeezed through his collar. HIS hair is white and receding with desperate traces of gray trying to make their case heard amid the winter of age. HIS dress is business-like and unimaginative: the one bit of color on HIS person is a round pin reading "Harding for President." As the Harding campaign manager, DAUGHERTY is quite simply the purest paragon of that brilliant and unscrupulous kingmaker who so often becomes the stuff of political legend. HE is not an ill-meaning man, per se, but one so cursed with tunnel vision that

HE is unable to register anything but the immediately political. The fact that human lives may be twisted and torn during the political process is not something his limited antennae are able to process or otherwise detect.

Meanwhile, the operator has answered the phone:

DAUGHERTY

Hello, operator? Get me the Congress Hotel.

DAUGHERTY waits.

SOUND - The GLEE CLUB reigns in the silence of the moment.

Distracted, DAUGHERTY turns toward the direction of the sound with annoyance before faintly hearing a voice on the phone:

DAUGHERTY

Yes, is this the concierge? Is there a man standing by your desk wearing a "Harding for President" button?... Well, put him on, would you?

DAUGHERTY holds.

SOUND - The GLEE CLUB again reigns.

Fed up, DAUGHERTY puts the phone down on the coffee table, stomps over to the Balcony Door, shuts it in frustration, and freezes. HE evidently spies something outside on the busy Chicago streets that disagrees with HIM.

DAUGHERTY

(A mere mumble.)
Son of a...

SOUND - A FAINT VOICE calling from somewhere.

Hearing this, DAUGHERTY turns and discovers that this faint voice is coming from the mouthpiece of the phone. HE rushes over to the

couch, sits, picks up the receiver, and:

DAUGHERTY

Hey, Malcolm. Sorry about the delay. I just told the Lowden people that it's time to pay up. I demanded my delegates back and they burst into tears. You never saw such wailing and flailing in all your life. I could have sworn I was at a shaker's convention. They tried to pull the patriotic line on me and they even mentioned something about God - whoever He is. Debtors will try anything when the bank calls in the loan. Now how's it going down there? Any problems? You keeping on your toes?

(Leadingly.)

Good. I'm glad to hear it. Now do me a favor. Look outside the front of the hotel. Tell me what you see.

A pause: DAUGHERTY looks out on Chicago.

DAUGHERTY

Can't quite get a glimpse, huh? Well, then, listen.

DAUGHERTY opens the Balcony Door.

SOUND - SOUSA-STYLE BAND MUSIC blares into the room. Under it tiptoes the faint and pathetic SINGING of the GLEE CLUB.

As if wielding a sword, DAUGHERTY thrusts the phone out into the hot Chicago air so that the music comes in loud and clear on the other line. HE pauses a moment and then brings the receiver back inside the room and resumes the conversation:

DAUGHERTY

(Shouting, above the music.)

What do you think of that, Malcolm? No, no - scratch that. I don't really care what you think. I'll start by telling you what I know. I know it's not our band playing out there. I know we don't even have a goddamn band. Explain that to me, Malcolm - I'm listening.

DAUGHERTY closes the Balcony Door.

SOUND - An immediate lowering of volume. The SOUSA MUSIC continues very softly for a little bit underneath the following.

DAUGHERTY

Yes, I know we have the Glee Club - but what's the point of the damn thing if Lowden's brass band is there to blast it into Lake Michigan? The morning papers will have a field day drawing a link between the fate of Harding's singers and the fate of Harding's candidacy. Just see that the Glee Club wrings hearts and votes from inside buildings where no brass band can blow them away.

SOUND - KNOCK, KNOCK, KNOCK.

DAUGHERTY

(Barreling on - not hearing the sound.)

No excuses, Malcolm. I want action. Like those directors in the pictures - action. I haven't been paying you to be a goddamn philosopher. Now have you been watching the Ohio delegation like I told you to? I smell a huge, filthy rat in their ranks...

SOUND - Knock, knock, knock!

DAUGHERTY turns to the Hall Door.

DAUGHERTY

Who is it?

GEORGE HARVEY sticks HIS head in.

HARVEY

Santa Claus.

HARVEY is the middle-aged editor of the *North American Review*.

DAUGHERTY

(Put-on pleasure.)

George! Come in. I was just finishing on the phone.

HARVEY enters.

HARVEY

Oh, don't rush on my account. If it's an emergency...

DAUGHERTY

(Quickly.)

No, no - no emergency. Just annoyances. Make yourself at home. I'll be through in a second.

Knowingly, HARVEY smiles in return. As DAUGHERTY continues on the phone, HARVEY proceeds to examine the room with superficial interest. Throughout the following, HE listens subtly to

every little word DAUGHERTY utters
- and DAUGHERTY knows it.

DAUGHERTY

(Into the phone, speaking with great care.)
Now, Malcolm, about the Ohio delegation... No, no - just
keep an eye on them... No, you don't have to rush or
anything. It's not a big problem at all. Just a teeny
little hiccup. A hangnail. An eyesore. A... a...

HE becomes conscious of the fact
that HARVEY is staring at HIM.

DAUGHERTY

...an annoyance - that's all. I know you'll clear it up for
me. You've done a wonderful job so far. Keep up the good
work. Victory is near. Goodbye.

HE swiftly hangs up and turns to
HARVEY with a smile so wide and
confident that it betrays a
certain lack of confidence. HARVEY
simply smiles back at DAUGHERTY
and says nothing. The two men
continue this glaring showdown for
a moment or two, each waiting for
the other to say something - until
eventually:

DAUGHERTY

(Small talk.)
How are the readers, George?

HARVEY

Reading.

DAUGHERTY

I'm glad to hear it.

HARVEY

(Mocking his small-talk.)
How are the delegates, Harry?

DAUGHERTY

Growing.

HARVEY

I'm glad you think so.

DAUGHERTY

I don't, George. I don't think. In politics, when you have
to think about something, you're in trouble. Victory is
something you should sense like a wolf senses a kill.

HARVEY

So do you, eh... "sense a kill," Harry?

DAUGHERTY

Sense it? I'm already at the dinner table.

HARVEY

I'd say "bon appetit," but from the phone call...

DAUGHERTY

(Not understanding.)

What do you mean - the phone call?

HARVEY

Sounded like you had some problems...

DAUGHERTY

(Quickly - too quickly.)

Oh. No. No. Merely...

HARVEY

Annoyances?

DAUGHERTY

Annoyances.

HARVEY

That's a shame. I chatted with Lowden's campaign manager a little while ago. He's not your biggest fan right now. He had some choice words for you...

DAUGHERTY

Fine. I could choose a few good words for Lowden, too - starting with "loser."

HARVEY

Cute, Harry - but your man Harding doesn't seem to be as confident as you are.

DAUGHERTY

(Carefully - where is he going with this?)

Oh, yes?

HARVEY

The good Senator from Ohio looks a bit like a Negro caught drinking from the wrong water fountain.

DAUGHERTY

Well, George, it's a trying time - for all of us.

HARVEY

All of us, yes - but for only one is the exhaustion worth it. Now who will it be?

DAUGHERTY

You know my opinion.

HARVEY

Some would say your opinion is a fairy tale.

DAUGHERTY scoffs.

HARVEY

Oh? First Ballot - Harding: 65 and a half votes. Fourth Ballot - Harding: 61 and a half votes. Four-hundred ninety-three votes needed for the nomination. Do you believe in elves, as well?

DAUGHERTY smiles stiffly. HARVEY continues to tour the room.

HARVEY

There is also a lot of betting going on. The odds are quite telling. Seven to five for Wood. Eight to five for Lowden. Three to one for Johnson. Four to one for Hoover. Five to one for Hughes. Eight to one for Harding.

(Quickly turning to DAUGHERTY.)

How about goblins?

DAUGHERTY just stares.

HARVEY

Now, Harry, help me out here. Will you help me out? I want you to advise me who to put my money on and why I should put it there.

DAUGHERTY

(Feeling things out.)

And who wants to know this? Just you?

HARVEY

Me and some... friends.

DAUGHERTY

Of yours?

HARVEY

Of us all.

DAUGHERTY

Well, it will be Harding, George.

HARVEY

Will it? With Wood and Lowden and...

DAUGHERTY

Damn it, George - four days. It's been four pointless days and four pointless ballots. Do you know how long that is in political years? Too long. If it takes your own party more

DAUGHERTY (CONT)

than four ballots to nominate you, you're toast - pure and simple. Why should a voter spend a single second of thought on a candidate if his own people have to sit and think for four days before they even nominate him? Wood and Lowden have tapped, twirled, waltzed, and can-canned their way across the convention floor in the hope that one of them will tire out and withdraw their name from the balloting - and where has it gotten us?

HARVEY

What's your point, Harry?

DAUGHERTY

My point, George, is that the convention members are tired, sweaty, and homesick. They're fed up with Wood and Lowden and their pussyfooting filibuster and they're hungry for a compromise candidate to break the tie. That is when Warren G. Harding will prove to you that elves and goblins and whatever else you care to name might just exist after all.

HARVEY

All right, all right. Fair enough, Harry. I know you too well not to take you seriously. With your managing him, Harding is a contender. However, as president...

DAUGHERTY

As president he will examine each situation carefully and act accordingly.

HARVEY

You mean - as others tell him to?

DAUGHERTY

I mean he will examine each situation carefully...

DAUGHERTY, HARVEY

And act accordingly.

HARVEY

You sound very sure of yourself.

DAUGHERTY

Is there any other way to sound in our business?

HARVEY smiles in appreciation of this line.

DAUGHERTY

Listen to me, George - Harding will win. It is fated to happen. He is everyone's friend and no one's enemy. He is too jovial to hate and too obscure to slander. He has voted yea on every winning proposal. He has voted nay on every

DAUGHERTY (CONT)

failing proposal. His whole damn record is spotless. He is, in short...

HARVEY

Yours.

DAUGHERTY

Ours.

HARVEY

I'm glad to hear your mother taught you to share.

DAUGHERTY

My mother also told me to be wary of Greeks bearing gifts.

HARVEY

(Jokingly.)

Oh, now, Harry! I don't speak a word of Greek. I think the Parthenon is a race track. I think Pericles is a condition.

DAUGHERTY considers the sphinx-like HARVEY for a minute. An empty pause follows. Then:

DAUGHERTY

Well... is that it?

HARVEY smiles with patronizing amusement at DAUGHERTY's bluntness.

HARVEY

Almost, Harry. Getting there.

DAUGHERTY

Getting where?

HARVEY

(Simply.)

There.

DAUGHERTY takes a deep breath (no victory yet), sits back, and calmly asks:

DAUGHERTY

What else, then?

HARVEY

Those rumors of marital infidelity...

DAUGHERTY

(Lamely.)
What rumors?

HARVEY

The name Carrie Phillips leaps to mind.

DAUGHERTY

(Jumping in - a readymade response.)
Mrs. Phillips is soon to be sent on an all-expenses-paid trip around the world with her husband. We need him to investigate the complications of the raw silk trade. No doubt he will serve his country bravely.

HARVEY

No doubt. And this will happen how soon?

DAUGHERTY

As soon as the Senator is nominated.

HARVEY

And when they come back - what then?

DAUGHERTY

Nothing other than the occasional checks that pass between friends.

A long pause.

DAUGHERTY

Well, if I have satisfied your curiosity...

HARVEY

Not completely. What about Mrs. Harding?

DAUGHERTY

(Suspiciously.)
What about her?

HARVEY

It is rumored in Washington that she has great influence over the Senator.

DAUGHERTY

Only over the color of the curtains.

HARVEY

Curtains, fine - but what about cabinets?

DAUGHERTY grimaces, then moves to answer, when...

HARVEY

(Jumping in.)

Not only that, Harry, but it is also rumored that Mrs. Harding has a tendency to sneak out of her Washington home under the cover of night to meet with...

HARVEY catches DAUGHERTY's glower.

HARVEY

People.

DAUGHERTY

It is a natural social custom.

HARVEY

No, I mean... eccentric people.

DAUGHERTY noticeably tenses.

HARVEY

You see, it is generally felt that these certain people have a negative influence on Mrs. Harding. Now her being such an influence on her husband...

DAUGHERTY

Senator Harding will lead according to the dictates of his own conscience.

HARVEY

But who will play the part of Senator Harding's conscience in this torrid political drama? You - as you assume - or Mrs. Harding? My friends and I just want to be assured of what we are getting.

(Quickly correcting himself.)

Of what we might be getting... if elves are real.

DAUGHERTY snorts with derision.

HARVEY

(Suddenly very serious.)

Tell me frankly, Harry. No games, no jokes. If Mrs. Harding becomes first lady, who will control her?

A tense pause.

DAUGHERTY

(Assuredly, looking HARVEY straight in the eyes.)

I will.

An amused smile gradually blossoms on HARVEY's face.

HARVEY

Will you now?

MRS. HARDING'S VOICE

Will he now what, Mr. Harvey?

HARVEY and DAUGHERTY turn to find FLORENCE KLING HARDING standing in the doorframe of the Connecting Door. Aged about 60, MRS. HARDING is a formidable presence indeed - but not in appearance. HER face looks like a dried leaf, HER eyes are lazy and framed by dainty glasses, and HER brown, short, slightly curled hair lies lazily atop HER head like a sleeping fox. Attire-wise, MRS. HARDING does no better: SHE is dressed in outdated dress from the late Nineteenth Century that would be more appropriate for a hot day on the farmer's porch than for a political convention. In HER hands, SHE carries a knitted work-in-progress from which glistening knitting needles stick out visibly like daggers. Indeed, it is this object which more clearly delineates the nature of the woman. Far from grandmotherly, MRS. HARDING is a battlefield general often called either "Boss" or "Ma" or "Duchess" by those close to HER. A constant crier of orders, SHE is known for her annoyingly high-pitched screech and its relatively constant direction towards her henpecked husband - whose name she painfully pronounces 'Wuuuuurren.'

HARVEY

(A sudden salesman's grin.)

Ah, Mrs. Harding!

DAUGHERTY

(Bowing to HER as if to royalty.)

Duchess.

MRS. HARDING

(Looking HIM over coldly and calmly.)

Lawyer.

(To HARVEY.)

And - praise the stars - Mr. George Harvey, Editor of the *North American Review*. Another old buzzard come to circle my husband's campaign?

HARVEY

Hardly, Mrs. Harding. Merely a fan and an admirer.

MRS. HARDING

Here for the nomination party, then? Well, Mr. Harvey, come and join the crowd. I'm afraid this is all we could muster for the occasion. All the other lemmings are in Senator Johnson's suite. It's just you, Mr. Daugherty, myself, and my husband here tonight. Oh, yes, and Governor Lowden's brass band. How could I ever forget? They have kindly offered us a free funeral march.

MRS. HARDING gives a glum look and heads for the couch. HARVEY moves to help HER, but MRS. HARDING noticeably turns away from HIM and continues on HER way.

MRS. HARDING

Do forgive me if I don't bow in your presence, Mr. Harvey. Governor Lowden's band has been busy serenading my rheumatism. I'm afraid my joints are martyrs to this political cacophony. My bones will creak with joy when we are on the train back to Marion.

During what follows, MRS. HARDING sits and begins knitting vociferously. Indeed, one wonders whether SHE is knitting the yarn or killing it. Meanwhile:

HARVEY

Marion, Mrs. Harding? Surely not. Your husband still has a chance.

MRS. HARDING

Well, Mr. Harvey, you can tell him that yourself. I so hate to break a commandment. Wait, just wait, and Wurren will manage to lumber on in. It takes him a while to drag his face behind him.

HARVEY

Stress, no doubt.

MRS. HARDING

Age, no doubt, Mr. Harvey. I trust you remember age. Age evidently remembers you. It's damn near obsessed with me and my Wurren. And as for Mr. Daugherty, he doesn't age, he distills.

HARVEY laughs.

DAUGHERTY

(A weak smile.)
The Duchess knows me well, George.

MRS. HARDING

(To no one in particular.)
I know everyone and everything and don't you forget it, Mr. Daugherty. I keep my ear to the ground and I feel every rumble in the Earth.

(To HARVEY.)
Do you know I can see the future, Mr. Harvey?

HARVEY

The future, Mrs. Harding?

MRS. HARDING

Yes, you know - the thing that occurs after the present.

HARVEY

Ah, yes; Mr. Daugherty has been telling me all about it.

MRS. HARDING

Oh, now, don't listen to him, Mr. Harvey. Mr. Daugherty has been in politics so long he believes his own press releases. I only came along on this trip because I knew he'd be so sad without me.

DAUGHERTY laughs nervously.

MRS. HARDING

(To DAUGHERTY.)
Am I making you nervous, Lawyer?
(To HARVEY, not waiting for a response.)
Mr. Daugherty is an expert, Mr. Harvey. He's a plotter and a planner and a conjurer extraordinaire. He has a Midas touch on him like you've never seen. The problem is that he also has a poisoned finger. The only time he slips up is when he uses the one for the other.

DAUGHERTY

(Sotto voice, indicating HARVEY.)
Please, Duchess... Remember Mr. Harvey...

MRS. HARDING turns with
exaggerated surprise.

MRS. HARDING

Oh, Mr. Harvey! Am I keeping you? Surely you have other campaigns to visit. I suggest you go see General Wood. I'm sure his company will be much merrier than ours.

HARVEY

Perhaps not for long, Mrs. Harding.

HARVEY makes to exit.

MRS. HARDING

Oh and one more thing, Mr. Harvey...

HARVEY

(Turning.)

Mrs. Harding?

MRS. HARDING

On your way out, would you be so kind as to give this to Governor Lowden's band?

SHE throws HARVEY a coin.

MRS. HARDING

Ask them if they know a good dirge.

SHE gives HARVEY a wry look. HE grins back at HER. An unhappy DAUGHERTY breaks the moment by quickly taking HARVEY by the arm and rushing HIM to the Hall Door.

DAUGHERTY

Come along now, George.

HARVEY

(Calling back to MRS. HARDING.)

Goodbye, Mrs. Harding.

MRS. HARDING

Good riddance, Mr. Harvey.

MRS. HARDING serenely returns to her knitting, while:

DAUGHERTY

(Secretively to HARVEY.)

I'm sorry about all that, George.

HARVEY

You control her masterfully.

DAUGHERTY

What will you tell your "friends?" You won't...

HARVEY

I will consider the situation carefully and act accordingly.

DAUGHERTY

Oh, that's all right, then.

DAUGHERTY opens the Hall Door.

HARVEY

By the way, it might help if you to stop by. My friends always like surprise company... especially if they expect it.

DAUGHERTY

(Mighty pleased.)

Yes, well, I might just do that, George.

HARVEY

The Hotel Blackstone, Suite Four-oh-Four.

HARVEY moves to walk out the Hall Door, but just before DAUGHERTY closes it...

HARVEY'S VOICE

Oh, Mrs. Harding?

MRS. HARDING looks up. HARVEY tosses the coin back to HER through the Hall Door. SHE catches it like a baseball pro.

HARVEY'S VOICE

I don't think we'll need any dirge tonight. Give my regards to your husband.

HARVEY exits. DAUGHERTY closes the Hall Door. After a question-mark pause, MRS. HARDING sharply turns to DAUGHERTY:

MRS. HARDING

Well? Was that what I think it was?

DAUGHERTY

Yes. Yes, it was, Duchess.

MRS. HARDING

And? Did you sell him the goods?

DAUGHERTY

I don't know. I think so.

MRS. HARDING

You think as well, do you?

DAUGHERTY

I just can't believe they sent Harvey. What about Brandegee? What about Watson?

MRS. HARDING

I take it, Mr. Daugherty, you're not one of Mr. Harvey's readers. No, I dare say you've never read any political journal. That would be like God studying the Bible - completely unnecessary. Why what else are you two but a clash of kingmakers? You want to make a president and he already has. Now he's trying desperately to get rid of the monster he created. Is that the way you operate too, Lawyer? When all is said and done, will you turn your back on Wurren and me the same way Harvey turned his back on Wilson?

DAUGHERTY

Now, Duchess, I am very close to the Senator.

MRS. HARDING

You have to be to stab someone in the back.

DAUGHERTY coughs and nods. MRS. HARDING turns.

WARREN G. HARDING has just entered through the Connecting Door. We notice the room seems to clear immediately of its crisp political formality upon HIS entrance. Something in the informal, jovial, everyman manner of HARDING has the ability to turn the serious into the serene. Part of this has to do with HIS relaxed attire: no jacket, a sweat-stained shirt, a loose tie, suspenders, pants, old shoes. To complement this, HIS jowls are lined with stubble, HIS white hair is ruffled, HIS eyes look drawn and weary, and HIS face seems to sag in a very human way. However, despite this most unregal appearance, HARDING's manner and bearing still retain enough of that Roman grandeur to maintain the power of HIS presence. Currently, though, HE seems like an overworked dirt farmer whose best days are behind him and whose future is nothing but years of endless sowing - and HE knows it.

HARDING

(Lifelessly.)
Harry. Ma.

HARDING lazily crosses to the Balcony Door, opens it, takes in the breeze, and looks out upon Chicago.

SOUND - LOWDEN'S BRASS BAND blares in the distance.

MRS. HARDING

(During the above.)

Well, well, well! Look who we have here. The next president comes. Hail to the Chief - Chief Sittin' Still. Just where have you been at, Chief? Don't you know that George Harvey was in here a few minutes ago? He had some business about you and you should have been here to chat him up. But oh, no, you were out wandering from the wigwam.

HARDING

I'm sorry, Ma.

MRS. HARDING

Honest to gracious! You're like an inept salesman who goes around knocking on gopher holes. You won't be able to sell a single suitcase of yourself that way. The other candidates are running for office and you're merely strolling there. It's no wonder you're left whimpering in the dust on all the ballots like the sagging rear of an old horse. The only way you can catch up now is to grab hold of the nearest comet. Oh and - praise the stars - close that door! It's hotter than Hell in here already.

With pathetic weariness, HARDING obeys and closes the Balcony Door.

DAUGHERTY

Now, now, Duchess - calm down.

MRS. HARDING

Why, Mr. Daugherty, I'm just as calm as I can be! I've never been calmer than when standing on these cliffs of calamity. I just can't stand it when my husband tears his flesh in order to give himself wounds to lick.

DAUGHERTY

Please, Duchess - I have an update for you both. It's terribly important.

(To HARDING, indicating the couch.)

Senator, would you please?

A pause: DAUGHERTY and MRS. HARDING look towards a frozen HARDING.

MRS. HARDING

(To DAUGHERTY.)

Told you. You just can't reach him tonight. You just can't...

HARDING

(Suddenly, very slowly.)

You know, Ma, that sound out there makes me think of the Marion's People Band...

MRS. HARDING and DAUGHERTY look at HARDING surprisingly: "He speaks!"

HARDING

Hey, now, those were fun times... Long before there was a "Senator" Harding or a "Lieutenant Governor" Harding or even an "Editor" Harding of the *Marion Star*. No, sir, it was just "Band Manager and B-Coronetist" Harding of the Marion People's Band. I didn't have to give a speech or fill a spotlight or give a damn about anybody but me and the band. I look back on it now from the steps of the Senate Building and it seems like it was so long, long ago...

(On second thought...)

Well, actually, it kind of was long, long ago. It just seems like it should be longer.

HARDING thinks to HIMSELF for a moment, then smiles.

HARDING

Band Manager and B-Coronetist Harding... What a suit! The sash. The hat. The frills. I looked like a Christmas present waiting to be opened. Now I wear gray suits and gray ties and gray... everything.

HARDING shakes HIS head with thoughtful regret.

HARDING

Ah, well, I guess it was all good fun while it lasted - like a lot of things. There's a time to sow, a time to reap, and a time to run - for office. Run, run, run, all the time, like an escaped convict.

HARDING smiles sadly at the analogy.

HARDING

Funny, you know, to think that playing in that band was how I got bitten by politics. We'd be called on to perform for political rallies just as the election season got all hot and humid. I'd look at the politicians up there on their stumps and I'd think "Hey, now, that looks better than

HARDING (CONT)

being a B-coronetist." And so what happened? Now the bands are playing for me. Now Warren G. Harding is up here and the band is down there. Whatever happened to the B-coronetist of the Marion People's Band? Why, now, he went into politics. He became state representative - floor leader - senator. Next, he might even become president. Imagine that... president.

HARDING pauses in thought. MRS. HARDING and DAUGHERTY consider HIM for a moment. Then, abruptly, like a nuclear blast:

MRS. HARDING

That was hardly worth the wait.

DAUGHERTY

(Trying to be jovial.)

Now, now, Duchess. The Senator had better get used to feeling nostalgia for his beloved Marion. He'll be spending full time in the White House soon enough.

HARDING

Now, Harry, you saw the fourth ballot...

DAUGHERTY

I saw the truth beyond the fourth ballot, Senator. Don't search the proximity for your answers. Politics is a game for the far-sighted. It's about realizing that there's always another step to take. The day you win is the day the other side lets the present discourage them so much that they forget to trust in the future.

HARDING

But, my God, I feel as if the sky were falling on me! This whole thing has been like a seesaw. Up, down, up, down, and getting nowhere in the meantime. I think maybe I should show my hand and call it a day.

DAUGHERTY

Call it a blasphemy, Senator. You can't yell "retreat" after you start leading the charge. You have to continue onwards. You have to fight to the death.

HARDING

Where I'll end up wearing a coffin.

DAUGHERTY

Or a chest full of medals.

MRS. HARDING

Or both.

DAUGHERTY

(Ignoring HER.)
Now, now, Senator, to succeed in anything you have to keep your eyes on the positive.

HARDING

And, while I'm ducking the artillery fire, how am I supposed to see the positive?

DAUGHERTY

Because you can, Senator.

HARDING

But how, Harry? How?

DAUGHERTY

(Standing tall, majestically.)
Why, by... by the rocket's red glare!

HARDING

Oh, Harry...

DAUGHERTY

(HIS arm gesturing grandly.)
By the bombs bursting in air!

HARDING

Please, Harry.

DAUGHERTY

They will prove through the night that you're still fighting there.

MRS. HARDING

Play ball!

DAUGHERTY and HARDING regard MRS. HARDING queerly for a moment.

HARDING

Oh, Harry, I just don't think we can make the grade. We're betting all we've got on a pair of deuces. That's a shaky hand and my gut is telling me to fold.

DAUGHERTY

Now, Senator, you've always been a man of caution. Think of when you lost the Ohio governorship. I had to drag you kicking and screaming into the Senate election.

HARDING

(Having heard the pep-talk a million times before.)
I know the story, Harry...

DAUGHERTY

You won with 100,000 votes to spare.

HARDING

I thought it was 80,000.

MRS. HARDING

It gets better with age.

HARDING

But it's different this time, Harry. I'm up against some real tough customers now. Frank Lowden... General Wood...

DAUGHERTY

Neither of whom will win, Senator.

MRS. HARDING

And how do you figure that, Lawyer?

DAUGHERTY

Simple, Duchess - we have fifty more delegates than the balloting shows because we've been instructing those delegates to vote for Lowden instead of your husband. We lent out the extra votes so that Lowden could stay tied with Wood during the early ballots.

MRS. HARDING

I didn't realize Christmas came early this year.

DAUGHERTY

It hasn't, naturally - but we wouldn't want Wood to look like he's winning the fight and be able to convince any uncertain delegates to jump on his bandwagon. So I told the Lowden people that we'd tell half of our delegates to vote for Lowden - but only to a point.

MRS. HARDING

I think I smell a deal coming on...

DAUGHERTY

In return, the Lowden camp promised me that they'd instruct all two-hundred-and-fifty-plus of their delegates to vote for your husband if Lowden isn't able to win the nomination after four ballots - which he isn't.

MRS. HARDING

Enough to put Wurren here over the top?

DAUGHERTY

With the other delegates we have, yes.

MRS. HARDING

So it's all in the bag, then? Along with all the little kittens?