

ACT ONE

As the audience enters the theater, they are confronted by a beautiful English garden, well-manicured by hedges, pathways, trellises, and other attributes. It is bathed in a yellow glow as an unseen sun begins its descent below the horizon in what we can only assume is the mid-afternoon of a pleasant and wistful day. The SOUNDS OF NATURE are sprinkled liberally as the audience congregates - the CHIRPING OF BIRDS, an occasional RUSTLE OF WIND, some far-off sound of HORSES AND BUGGIES clobbering along.

As the play begins and the theater lights fall, ANOTHER SOUND rises to compliment the SOUNDS OF NATURE, as if emerging from amidst the CHIRPING OF THE BIRDS. It is a much less pleasant sound - hard to distinguish, at first - but soon we understand it is of A WOMAN SOBBING. HER SOBS grow and grow in vehemence until they overpower everything else on the stage, almost seeming to echo off the well-trimmed hedges, as if the hedges themselves were stone walls in a castle.

WOMAN'S VOICE¹

He's dead...

The SOBBING continues... and continues... and continues...

WOMAN'S VOICE

He's dead... dead...

Again, the SOBBING continues...

WOMAN'S VOICE

They've killed him...

As if on cue, a LARGE MAN enters from the side of the stage - aged in HIS mid-50s - wearing an elegant frockcoat.

¹ The voice is from the actress playing Julia Sand.

HE is holding a cane, WHICH he desperately needs to keep HIMSELF standing properly, as HE walks with an indeterminate infirmity. HE is bewhiskered and, while large, even obese of frame, also looks sufficiently weathered as to make even this giant of flesh appear fragile. We shall know this man soon enough as CHESTER ALAN ARTHUR. Meanwhile, the SOBBING grows more pitiable in its intensity.

WOMAN'S VOICE

He's dead... dead... dead!

As HE enters, we sense that ARTHUR is fleeing the WOMAN'S VOICE - but, as it is coming from everywhere all at once, HIS plan is a futile one. HE hobbles with a desperate eagerness in HIS step that is clearly difficult for HIM to manage, but manage it HE does. ARTHUR is soon out of breath and grabs ahold of something - a statue, a fountain, a trellis - to steady HIS aching frame. HE looks back in the direction of something from which HE just fled, which we can only assume has given birth to the SOBBING.

WOMAN'S VOICE

(One final, hysterical outpouring.)
They killed him... they killed him!

As if a grand finale, the WOMAN SCREAMS hysterically, prompting ARTHUR to cover HIS ears to block out the SOUND - but just then, another SOUND is heard amidst the SCREAMING - a sound of jubilant playfulness. It is the SOUND OF CHILDREN LAUGHING. It seems to come from a few leagues away, but the LAUGHTER immediately overpowers the SCREAMING and absorbs it like a sponge. All at once, the SOUNDS OF NATURE - the BIRDS, the WIND, the HORSES and BUGGIES - now reign supreme again, as THEY did before, complemented further by the LAUGHTER OF CHILDREN.

Bathed in relief, ARTHUR exhales in gratefulness at the new sound. HE pats HIS sweating brow with a handkerchief from HIS coat pocket and, relying more

than ever upon the sturdiness of HIS cane, hobbles over to a bench downstage in an open area of the garden. HE slowly descends HIS massive body and sits on the bench to the undoubted joy of HIS weary legs. The SOUND OF CHILDREN'S LAUGHTER continues and grows ever louder in the moment.

A moment later, the source of the LAUGHTER becomes plain to us as some YOUNG WOMEN come bandying down the center aisle of the theater. We are struck by the fact that, though the LAUGHTER sounds as if it comes from CHILDREN, these are indeed YOUNG WOMEN in their early-to-mid 20s. Despite this, THEY have the energy of children and the manner of the same. THEY are followed in close order by an erect, earnest-looking woman, who has the air of a schoolteacher about HER - HANNAH RICKORY. SHE follows the children down the theater aisle rather belatedly, trying to keep up.

MISS RICKORY

Girls... Girls!

The YOUNG WOMEN bound up the aisle onto the stage and, seeing ARTHUR, an empty hulk of a man, THEY suddenly stop and become silent. This happily allows MISS RICKORY to catch up to THEM.

MISS RICKORY

(To ARTHUR.)
I am, sorry, sir.

As if too weak to speak, ARTHUR nods in acknowledgment.

MISS RICKORY

(To the YOUNG WOMEN.)
Come along, Girls - and quieter, for God's sake... and mine.

Now back in command, MISS RICKORY gestures and leads the YOUNG WOMEN out. THEY follow HER in better order, though we can tell THEY are probably just an inch away from bursting again into mischief. One YOUNG WOMAN, however, does not follow the rest. SHE stops and stares at ARTHUR - why, we don't know.

ARTHUR looks at HER for a moment and smiles kindly.

ARTHUR

Hello, young lady.

The YOUNG WOMAN just stares.

ARTHUR

May I help you?

Still, the YOUNG WOMAN says nothing.

ARTHUR

Tell me - what is your name?

MISS RICKORY'S VOICE

(As if answering ARTHUR.)

Phillipa!

ARTHUR

Phillipa.

MISS RICKORY re-enters, followed by the YOUNG WOMEN.

MISS RICKORY

(To ARTHUR.)

I am sorry again. It is difficult to manage the girls.

ARTHUR

Not at all. We were having a most pleasant stare.

MISS RICKORY

(To the YOUNG WOMAN.)

Come along, Philippa.

MISS RICKORY takes the YOUNG WOMAN by the hand and is about to lead the other YOUNG WOMEN offstage, but then suddenly freezes. It seems a thought has occurred to HER. SHE turns back to ARTHUR and looks at HIM intently.

ARTHUR

You stare just as pleasantly.

MISS RICKORY

Forgive me, but I must ask...

ARTHUR

I will spare you the need.

Slowly, though with difficulty, ARTHUR takes HIS cane and rises. The full figure of the man stands in towering decrepitude. HE puts HIS head back and strikes a vague, official pose. MISS RICKORY's face lights up.

MISS RICKORY

It is you, Mr. President.

ARTHUR

(Extending HIS hand for a shake.)

It is nice to meet you, Miss...

MISS RICKORY

(Shaking HIS hand rather lustily.)

Rickory - Hannah Rickory.

ARTHUR

It is nice to meet you, Miss Rickory - you and your...

(Gesturing vaguely, not sure what to call THEM.)

...friends.

MISS RICKORY

(As if trying out the word.)

Friends.

ARTHUR

Charges?

MISS RICKORY

I prefer friends.

ARTHUR

So do I... to a point.

ARTHUR makes to sit again, but finds that rather difficult. MISS RICKORY goes to HIM and helps HIM sit - which ARTHUR does, again slowly.

MISS RICKORY

You have a house near Middletown, Mr. President?

ARTHUR

Unfortunately, no - but it would be a fine idea. The air in this part of the state is good for the lungs. That's the first thing to go in a politician, you know - right after honesty. First it's honesty and then the lungs and eventually the legs, until he can't run anymore - for office or otherwise - and then, like a cat, he gets up one day and he walks out of the house and he is never seen again, except in the pages of history... if he is so lucky to be remembered there.

ARTHUR (CONT)

(A beat.)
I do hope that's not too depressing.

MISS RICKORY

(Taking in HIS sorry state.)
You are not well, I take it.

ARTHUR

Oh, I am tired - that is all - but then, that is enough.

MISS RICKORY

I hope you won't think it flattery if I tell you that my father voted for you - or at least, for Mr. Garfield... but had you run on your own, he would have voted for you, too.

ARTHUR

I must say, that is most reassuring - and considering the fact our conversation couldn't possibly get more pleasant, it is perhaps best we end it here on the highest note possible.

(Extending HIS hand again.)
Goodbye, Miss Rickory.

MISS RICKORY slowly takes HIS hand
again - and then pauses.

MISS RICKORY

(Suddenly, knowing this is HER last chance to ask.)
Why are you here, Mr. President?

ARTHUR

Oh, as I said... my lungs, the air...

MISS RICKORY

No, I mean - why are you here?

ARTHUR

Ah, I see... that is a much longer story.

Suddenly, the LIGHTS fall intimately, indicating a shift in time and place as we reach back into ARTHUR's memory. The SOUND OF FIREWORKS burst onstage, accompanied by FLASHES OF LIGHT. A BRASS BAND thunders in with a robust and celebratory tune. The YOUNG WOMEN erupt into wild applause, turning into REPUBLICAN PARTY ACTIVISTS. A FEW reach behind some hedges in the garden to unveil a large banner with the faces of James A. Garfield ("For President") and Chester Alan Arthur ("For Vice-President") staring out at us. We have been transported back to November of

1880. The YOUNG WOMEN rush to ARTHUR and shake HIS hands, shouting congratulations.

YOUNG WOMEN

You did it, Arthur!
 Congratulations, Mr. Vice-President!
 God be with you, General Arthur!
 We knew you'd beat 'em!
 The Union is saved again!

YOUNG WOMAN

Three cheers for Garfield and Arthur!

YOUNG WOMAN

You mean Arthur and Garfield!

Some LAUGHTER and APPLAUSE from the CROWD.

YOUNG WOMAN

Give us a speech, Mr. Vice-President!

YOUNG WOMAN

Yes, give us a speech!

YOUNG WOMAN

Hail to the speech!

Hearing this, the unseen BAND changes its tune and strikes up "Hail to the Chief." The YOUNG WOMEN cheer madly and stare to chant rhythmically - "Ar-thur! Ar-thur! Ar-thur! Ar-thur!" - clapping THEIR hands with ever greater enthusiasm. ARTHUR feigns modesty, but then theatrically gives into the adoration. HE steps atop the garden bench - a spritelier person than the man we have just met onstage, even though only six years younger - and turns to address the CROWD. We can't help but notice HE is a bit tipsy and has managed to get a big glass of wine shoved in HIS hands.

ARTHUR

I thank you, gentlemen, for your enthusiastic congratulations and applause. I am overcome to see you all here tonight and to see the familiar faces of my friends in this great city of New York, which has been my home for nearly 30 years. I would rather be tonight with none other than you - the tried and faithful soldiers - the "Old Guard" of the Republican Party - the men of

ARTHUR (CONT)

General Grant and of the Union. The honor which has been conferred on me and General Garfield...

Some SNICKERS at Garfield's name arise from the CROWD, but ARTHUR plows on.

ARTHUR

... is a recognition of the faith and trust the American people continue to put in the Republican Party and the hard work of all of you - especially the Republicans of the great state and city of New York! If not for our victory here, there would be no Republicans celebrating tonight. The results were close, but they were decisive - and they were decisive because of you - each and every one of you. It has been my honor to serve as Chairman of our State Election Committee.

More CHEERS from the CROWD.

ARTHUR

Now, I don't think we had better go into the minute secrets of the campaign, because I see the reporters are present in the back and I don't want to make any trouble between now and the inauguration on March 4th.

Some CAGEY LAUGHTER from the CROWD.

ARTHUR

Still, I would be amiss not to thank Thomas Dorsey for his tireless work carrying another pivotal state - the great state of Indiana.

(Pointing to an unseen man.)

Stand up, Tom!

APPLAUSE, as the unseen man stands.

ARTHUR

Now, there are some who considered Indiana a forlorn hope if ever there was one. We were told it was a Democratic state and there was no use budging her - but not for Tom. He knew it could be carried by close and careful organization, discipline, and eh... eh...

YOUNG WOMAN

Soap!²

HAILS of LAUGHTER from the CROWD.

ARTHUR

Now, now, remember the reporters in the back - so I will simply say that everybody showed a great deal of interest in the

² This term will be explained later in the course of the play.

ARTHUR (CONT)

campaign and generously distributed tracts and political documents... among other things.

MORE LAUGHTER and APPLAUSE.

ARTHUR

Again, if not for our friends of the press and the Reverend Beecher, whose Christian sensibilities I have no desire to offend, I would tell the truth - but, either way, the end result would remain the same - and that is victory!

A final cacophony of APPLAUSE and CHEERS sound as ARTHUR descends from the bench and the BAND strikes up another tune. The YOUNG WOMEN crowd around ARTHUR again, shaking HIS hands vigorously. Slowly, the YOUNG WOMEN disappear to this and that corner of the stage. The BAND and the VOICES fade into the background. ARTHUR turns and finds one of the YOUNG WOMEN standing off to the side of the stage. SHE is now dressed in the male attire of someone we will come to know as SILAS BURT - a calm, simple, bookish man of high principles. ARTHUR catches sight of BURT and freezes. BURT slowly approaches ARTHUR, as if afraid - or ashamed? - of getting too close.

BURT

Congratulations, Arthur.

ARTHUR

Thank you, Silas.

BURT

I was unsure whether I should come, but, when I searched my soul and asked God for guidance, I realized that a few old sinews of friendship still have yet to snap - and so, here I am.

ARTHUR

I am glad to see you - truly.

BURT

I am glad to see you, as well.

ARTHUR

I hope you at least voted for us.

BURT

I believe in the secret ballot.

ARTHUR

Oh, so do I - and the more people keep their mouths shut, the better.

(Gesturing offstage to an unseen liquor cabinet.)
Drink?

BURT

It seems you may have had enough for both of us.

ARTHUR

I take it you don't approve of my victory speech.

BURT

No, I don't. The country is nervous enough about the corruption seeping like venom from every pore and yet...

ARTHUR

Why do reformers always have to be poets?

BURT

You know what I mean, Arthur - and you know what you said tonight was not what the people of this country need to hear. It will be in every newspaper tomorrow. It will confirm the worst fears of your enemies and the worst expectations of your friends. That is a lethal combination for anyone who cares about the future of this republic. There are plenty of front-room principles, but even more back-room deals - and the people of this country are being robbed blind in the process. No one believes in anything anymore - not our leaders, not our institutions, not even our principles, which are daily transgressed. Votes are openly bought and paid for and people are appointed to positions who are completely unqualified, save for their ability to get votes. The entire government is nothing but one giant employment agency for frauds and grifters.

ARTHUR

Careful, Silas - some of my best friends are frauds and grifters.

BURT

I wish that were a joke - and if it were, this wouldn't be the time for it.

ARTHUR

It could be worse, you know.

BURT

I'd be curious to see that.

ARTHUR

Caligula made his horse Consul, if I recall.

BURT

Have you seen the latest Chairman of the Railroad Commission?

ARTHUR

Yes, and he gallops beautifully.

BURT

You're a different man from who you used to be.

ARTHUR

I believe the philosophers call it "growing older."

BURT

Is that what they call it?

ARTHUR

Yes, and you should try it. So much idealism in a man well passed 50 makes you look slightly ridiculous, as if you were still wearing short pants.

BURT

I remember back in the day, after the war, when we were both young lawyers in the city. We cared about things back then - sometimes this and sometimes that, as young people often do - but at least there was something we cared about besides ourselves and the next gold dollar. There was that case you took when you were at Culver and Parker - Elizabeth Graham - the Negro woman. You fought the city and they desegregated the train cars because of that case. You believed in something more than the money you were being paid, which wasn't very much for a case like that.

(Peering at ARTHUR, as if wondering the answer himself.)
You wouldn't take a case like that now, would you?

As if struck by this, ARTHUR thinks for a moment - but then continues onward, as if BURT hadn't said anything about this at all.

ARTHUR

You're right - I suppose the speech was a bit bold of me - and I suppose I would have thought better of it, had I not been so generously sampling the night's libations - but then that would require me to think better of myself. I have done too many debatable things in life to start regretting any of them now. That would merely open up a can of worms, as they say - or two - or three - or a hundred - and unless I'm fishing, I prefer my worms canned. Life is too quick to worry about yesterday and barely long enough to enjoy tomorrow. We must take what we can get, and after that - run. There isn't much mental space for regrets with an attitude like that.

BURT

Well, now you are the Vice-President of the United States of America and you will have many more things to think about anyway. What do you plan to do exactly?

ARTHUR

I haven't much thought about that.

BURT

That might be the best we can hope for.

ARTHUR

I suppose I should start by rewarding my friends.

BURT

I think you should start by thanking God.

CONKLING

You're welcome!

A YOUNG WOMAN dressed as a loud, flamboyant, strutting man has entered - reminiscent of a bold peacock - SENATOR ROSCOE CONKLING OF NEW YORK. CONKLING strides over to BURT.

CONKLING

(More like a command.)
Hello, Burt.

BURT

(Icily.)
Senator Conkling.

CONKLING

(Dripping with sarcasm.)
Come here for a cushy job in the State Department, have you?

BURT glares at CONKLING, but, deciding in favor of diplomacy, says nothing and turns to ARTHUR.

BURT

Goodbye, Arthur - and good luck.

BURT starts to leave - but then, thinking of something, HE stops and turns to ARTHUR again.

BURT

I was wrong about you before, Arthur.

ARTHUR looks at HIM - "what?"

BURT

As I see you now, you would still take Elizabeth Holmes's case if it came your way today - provided there was enough money in it for you.

BURT turns and exits.

ARTHUR

(To CONKLING, as if to prove loyalty.)
He just came to congratulate me.

CONKLING

Yes, I have no doubt - which is precisely why I detest him.
If there's anything more untrustworthy than someone who wants
something from you, it's someone who doesn't.

ARTHUR

Silas is harmless.

CONKLING

No man is harmless.

ARTHUR

Perhaps.

CONKLING

"Perhaps?" Perhaps, then, I should congratulate you, like your
dear friend Silas.

ARTHUR

That would be appropriate.

CONKLING

Well, I won't - because I'm too damn bitter about things, and I
rather enjoy it. Bitterness, like wine, gets better with age,
left to fester in a barrel. I admit I cursed you out - and
continue to do so in my mind - for your even agreeing to be the
running mate of that bastard Garfield after we were defeated at
the convention. I still can't decide if you were just too damn
ambitious or too damn forgiving - or then again, with you, it
always seems to be somewhere, somehow in between. You're an odd
one, damn you - a foggy mixture of sinner and saint. I plot and
I plan and I eat a hearty meal afterward. You plot and you plan
and then you have a good cry. Still, we have a victory - of
sorts - even though God knows we would probably have been better
off if the Democrats had won, so we could raise hell and kick
those reforming do-gooders out of the Republican Party - but
there you have it. Here's where we are and we had better make
the best out of it. I trust, in this, as in everything, I have
your unending commitment.

ARTHUR

As always, yes.

CONKLING

Good. A lack of originality is your best characteristic.

ARTHUR

I prefer to think of it as loyalty.

CONKLING

That's because you like to play dress up.

ARTHUR

(Looking at HIS clothes and HIS growing bulk.)
I fear the frame is getting worse for wear.

CONKLING

Look sharp, then - because the real battle is only just beginning.

ARTHUR

(With some dread.)
Yes, I know.

CONKLING

You can just imagine the office seekers swarming outside Garfield's house tonight. We have to make sure our people are well-represented in the winnings and that Garfield's promises of civil service reform remain just that - promises. "To the victor belong the spoils" - and if not for us, for our men, for money, for our machine, there would be no "President Garfield" tonight - and every day, he has to be reminded of that...

(Getting up in ARTHUR's face, as if talking to a child.)
...and you, Mr. Vice-President, will do the reminding.

ARTHUR slowly nods HIS head and takes an uneasy swig of HIS wine.

ARTHUR

You're a difficult man, Roscoe.

CONKLING

(Not ironically.)
Thank you.

CONKLING takes the wine from ARTHUR, raises it in a salute, and downs the remainder of the drink. HE stalks off like a demi-god trouncing among humans. ARTHUR looks after HIM for a moment. The LIGHTS shift as MISS RICKORY again comes into view.

MISS RICKORY

You and the Senator were close friends.

ARTHUR

Yes, we were close - for many, many years.

MISS RICKORY

My father voted for Senator Conkling, as well.

ARTHUR

I don't blame him, for Roscoe was a larger-than-life figure - if life could ever really be that small. The newspapers called him "The Boss", because Roscoe was the boss - of everything in sight. He looked out upon the world and he made claim to whatever he wanted in it. He planted his flag on this ground and that and he called it all an empire and he crowned himself king of it. He was the boss of New York and the boss of the Senate and the boss of... me. He was the boss of me, as well - to the great success of my political career and to the great detriment of other things.

A sudden SNICKER sounds wistfully from the darkness. The LIGHTS shift again to greater intimacy. ARTHUR turns to find a YOUNG WOMAN - beautiful, if a bit hard around the edges, due to a rather painful, lonely life - off to the side of the stage. It's HIS wife, ELLEN, whom HE calls "Nell."

ELLEN

You're home.

ARTHUR

Good evening, Nell.

ELLEN

To what do I owe the surprising honor of my husband returning home before twilight?

ARTHUR

I was tired.

ELLEN

You were tired.

ARTHUR

Yes.

ELLEN

I thought perhaps the clubs had closed early.

ARTHUR

No, no - I was just...

ELLEN

Tired.

ARTHUR

Tired.

ELLEN

Well, I hope you're not too tired for the Customs House ball tomorrow night.

ARTHUR

Of course not.

ELLEN

Good - because these events are the only time Mrs. Arthur sees Mr. Arthur anymore - and I do mean "sees." There isn't much talking involved - even in the carriage ride. There is a lot of looking and smiling and shaking of hands and drinking of wine - but still, at least Mrs. Arthur is able to be with her husband. She spends more time next to him at these events than at any other place - in the bed or otherwise. She would hate for Mr. Arthur to be too tired that she doesn't see him this Wednesday or else she may have to wait out the remainder of the month in silence, staring at the wall. Perhaps she should invest in more pictures to break up the monotony.

ARTHUR

Mr. Arthur will be at the ball.

ELLEN

Because Mr. Conkling will be there.

ARTHUR

That goes without saying.

ELLEN

Oh, I said it.

ARTHUR

Don't, Nell.

ELLEN

Mrs. Arthur knows the rules of this particular game.

ARTHUR

Stop it, Nell.

ELLEN

Mrs. Arthur has known the rules for some time.

ARTHUR

Nell, please.

ELLEN

"Pretty please," Mr. Arthur... "pretty please."

ARTHUR

I'm going to bed.

ELLEN

By all means - to bed, but not in bed - because that is where Mrs. Arthur will be. It wouldn't seem right to have someone - or something - beside her. She'd never be able to sleep, so odd would be the sensation - and she has a ball tomorrow, so she must be at her best - rested and charming. She trusts Mr. Arthur will understand, as he understands so very much - from other people, that is. It is one of the sacrifices that both the Arthurs have to make, considering the circumstances. There are, after all, so many circumstances.

ARTHUR

I see.

ELLEN turns to leave, but then stops.

ELLEN

You may wonder why Mrs. Arthur talks of herself in the third person. Perhaps it's because, if she realized the life she relayed was her own, she wouldn't be able to stand it.

ELLEN turns again and exits into the darkness. The LIGHTS shift again, revealing MISS RICKORY.

ARTHUR

(To MISS RICKORY, explaining.)

It was never the same after our son William died, over twenty years ago now. He had violent seizures and died when he was three. There was tension before that, especially because Nell had family in Virginia who fought for the Confederacy - but William's death destroyed us both. Nell submerged herself in the shadows of our townhouse and I submerged myself in the shadows of politics. The light was barely bright enough for us to see each other after that.

MISS RICKODY

Did you love her?

ARTHUR

Yes, very much so... but I loved success more.

The LIGHTS rise on the back of the stage. A YOUNG WOMAN stands there as President-Elect JAMES A GARFIELD. Another YOUNG WOMAN playing CHIEF JUSTICE MORRISON WAITE stands next to HIM, extending a bible in GARFIELD's direction, on which GARFIELD has placed HIS hand.

CHIEF JUSTICE WAITE

I, James A. Garfield, do solemnly swear...

GARFIELD
I, James A. Garfield, do solemnly swear...

CHIEF JUSTICE WAITE
...that I will faithfully execute...

GARFIELD
...that I will faithfully execute...

CHIEF JUSTICE WAITE
...the Office of President of the United States...

GARFIELD
...the Office of President of the United States...

CHIEF JUSTICE WAITE
...and will, to the best of my ability...

GARFIELD
...and will, to the best of my ability...

CHIEF JUSTICE WAITE
...preserve, protect, and defend...

GARFIELD
...preserve, protect, and defend...

CHIEF JUSTICE WAITE
...the Constitution of the United States.

GARFIELD
...the Constitution of the United States.

CHIEF JUSTICE WAITE
Congratulations, Mr. President.

GARFIELD nods as CHIEF JUSTICE WAITE exits. GARFIELD turns to an unseen crowd, which erupts in CHEERS. The LIGHTS fall on GARFIELD and rise near ARTHUR. CONKLING thunders into view - HIS peacock feathers rather frilled. HE wields a piece of paper in HIS hands like a bayonet.

CONKLING
Treachery... treachery!

ARTHUR
Good afternoon, Roscoe.

CONKLING
It sure as hell isn't, Arthur.

ARTHUR

The President will be here any minute and it is best that we are calm.

CONKLING

Damn it, I'll be calm when I'm dead - but since I am blessed with still more breaths of fire, I will use the best of them to condemn that traitor in the White House! It's bad enough that Garfield has appointed that inveterate plotter Blaine as Secretary of State and that damn fool Windom as Secretary of the Treasury, but to think that he intends to appoint William Robertson as Collector of the Customs House at the Port of New York... of all men... of all creatures! One of the most important roles in the country, commanding over a thousand government jobs and a payroll of almost \$2 million annually and almost three-fourths of national revenue is being given to a reform man! Those are our jobs - our jobs - and Garfield should keep his damn hands off them! That includes his intent to prosecute Tom Dorsey and others for those Star Routes business contracts!

ARTHUR

Let us hope we can convince Garfield to reconsider.

CONKLING

For God's sake, you had better take your head out of the clouds before an eagle slams into your face! This is a declaration of war by a general who knows the troops he's commanding and knows who he's shooting at. Besides, you would do well to remember who served as Collector of that same Customs House of that same Port of New York for almost ten years, courtesy of Senator Roscoe Conkling. You did very well for yourself there, as I recall, fetching a nice pay of \$50,000 a year, until you were tossed out by the reformers like a rotten carp for me to pick back up off the streets again. This is our time for revenge - a time to put one of us back in charge of the New York Customs House - and it's being ripped from our fingers! Garfield didn't even consult with me, Senator of New York, for an appointment in New York - and so I say damn him in New York!

ARTHUR

(Spying someone off to the side.)
Hello, Mr. President.

GARFIELD has entered off to the side of the stage, alongside another YOUNG WOMAN as JAMES G. BLAINE, Senator from Maine and now Secretary of State.

CONKLING

(To ARTHUR, referencing BLAINE.)
I see the organ grinder has brought his monkey.

GARFIELD and BLAINE approach CONKLING and ARTHUR.

ARTHUR
(Nodding at BLAINE, cordially.)
Mr. Blaine.

BLAINE
(Nodding at ARTHUR, much less cordially.)
Mr. Vice-President.

ARTHUR
(To GARFIELD.)
Thank you for coming, Mr. President.

GARFIELD
Anywhere I can promote harmony, I shall go.

ARTHUR
That is certainly a sentiment shared by us all.

GARFIELD
(To CONKLING, extending HIS hand for a shake.)
Hello, Senator.

CONKLING
(Ignoring the hand.)
I have heard, Mr. President, that you intend on nominating William Robertson as Collector of the Customs House at the Port of New York.

GARFIELD
In that case, you have heard correctly.

CONKLING
Then I must tell you I will do everything within my power to oppose the appointment.

GARFIELD
Well, I wish you would reconsider, as Robertson is extremely qualified for the position.

CONKLING
What the hell does that have to do with it?

ARTHUR
(To GARFIELD, explaining more diplomatically.)
We are concerned about Robertson's reliability in office.

GARFIELD
"We?"

ARTHUR
We.

GARFIELD

Well, I can assure you that I have consulted many prominent men in the party and they have no similar concerns about Mr. Robertson's likely behavior in office. He is a good and honest man and I trust him completely. My intent is - and remains - to nominate him. This decision is not in any way open for discussion.

CONKLING

I wasn't discussing - I was demanding - and I demand a withdrawal or there will be war.

GARFIELD

You may take Robertson out of the Senate head-first or feet-first, I shall never withdraw him.

CONKLING

Mark my words then, Mr. President - if you proceed with this damnable appointment, it is you who will be carried out feet-first.

GARFIELD

On that note, I don't see any further reason for continuing this exchange. I appreciate your time nonetheless. It has been a most informative conversation.

GARFIELD turns to leave with BLAINE, but then turns back.

GARFIELD

(To ARTHUR.)
Are you coming, Arthur?

ARTHUR, unable to look GARFIELD in the eye, says nothing.

GARFIELD

I see.

GARFIELD and BLAINE exit, as the LIGHTS shift again to reveal MISS RICKORY.

MISS RICKORY

You didn't go with them.

ARTHUR

No - though I wish I had.

MISS RICKORY

Those were rough words from Senator Conkling.

ARTHUR

They were, yes... but then, Roscoe had no way of knowing what very soon would happen.

A LOUD TRAIN WHISTLE BLOWS, followed by the VOICE of a TRAIN ANNOUNCER.

TRAIN ANNOUNCER'S VOICE

All aboard... all aboard... The 9:40 am train for Boston is leaving Washington on Track Number Three!

The LIGHTS shift again, lighting up center stage. A YOUNG WOMAN off to the side is dressed shabbily as a wiry, neurotic, fidgety man - CHESTER J. GUITEAU. Another YOUNG WOMAN is dressed as a POLICEMAN. A moment later, GARFIELD and BLAINE enter in long coats from one side of the stage. THEY begin to cross to the other side.

BLAINE

Right this way, Mr. President - the other cabinet members are already in the train car.

GARFIELD

That is well and good, Mr. Blaine, as I am eager to get away from Washington as it is.

BLAINE

You mean to get away from Conkling.

GARFIELD laughs, as HE and BLAINE continue walking. GUITEAU steps out of the shadows and starts to follow THEM. HE raises a pistol out of HIS pocket and fires at GARFIELD's back - BAM! GARFIELD lurches back. GUITEAU takes a few steps forward and fires again - BAM! GARFIELD cries out and crumbles to the ground. GUITEAU drops the gun and starts to run away. BLAINE points after HIM and shouts to the POLICEMAN.

BLAINE

Stop that man! He's shot the President!

The POLICEMAN grabs GUITEAU.

POLICEMAN

Stop right there! You are under arrest!

GUITEAU

It doesn't matter, sir. I have done what I came to do. Now Arthur will be President!

POLICEMAN

(Dragging HIM out.)
Come on!

GUITEAU

(Shouting in full derangement.)
Arthur will be president!

The POLICEMAN finishes dragging GUITEAU out, as the LIGHT shifts again. ARTHUR and MISS RICKORY are prominently revealed. A CAOCPHONY of overlapping VOICES serenades the lighting change. THEY represent a swirling tempest of emotions - surprise, shock, horror - but absolutely no delight.

VOICES

Arthur will be President!
Arthur will be President?
Arthur... President!
My God, Chester Alan Arthur...
President!
President!
President!

ARTHUR

(To MISS RICKORY.)
I had just come back by steamer from a trip to Albany when a reporter told me the news. I couldn't believe it. In one second of life, everything changed.

The LIGHTS rise slightly, lighting up the area around ARTHUR. The YOUNG WOMEN rush onstage, now dressed as NEWS REPORTERS. THEY crowd around ARTHUR like eager piranha fish. ARTHUR appears overwhelmed and befuddled.

YOUNG WOMEN

Mr. Vice-President!
Over here, Mr. Vice-President!
What are your comments on the news, sir?
Have you spoken with anyone at the White House?

ARTHUR

Only briefly - but I am on my way there now.

YOUNG WOMEN

How is the President, sir?
We have heard he is still alive.
What do the doctors think?
Have you heard anything about his condition?

ARTHUR

I only know, yes, he is alive and the doctors are tending to him at the White House.

YOUNG WOMEN

What about the assailant, sir?

Chester J. Guiteau?

Do you know him at all?

Did you know Mr. Guiteau?

Any relationship with him?

ARTHUR

No, of course not - I've neither known of nor ever seen the man in my life.

YOUNG WOMEN

(Faster and faster and faster.)

Really, sir?

Isn't he a fan of your faction of the party, sir?

He did shout "Arthur will be President!"

Are you sure you don't know Mr. Guiteau?

Why would he shout "Arthur will be President?"

He's a supporter of General Grant and Senator Conkling.

Was he a member of any New York Republican organizations?

It's been reported he was a disgruntled office seeker.

He was angry because he didn't get a job in the civil service.

Are you sure you never met Mr. Guiteau?

ARTHUR

(Trying to break away.)

I told you, I don't know anything about the man!

YOUNG WOMEN

(Hoarding around ARTHUR again.)

Please talk to us, sir!

The American people need to know!

Why did Guiteau shout "Arthur will be President?"

Have you talked with Senator Conkling recently?

Does he feel responsible for the President being shot?

Do you feel responsible for the President being shot?

ARTHUR

Of course not! Now, please - I have to get to Washington!

ARTHUR desperately breaks away from the REPORTERS, who follow HIM in a swarm, barking questions all the way. ARTHUR circles back around some hedges as the CACOPHONY continues. A moment later, ARTHUR re-enters the stage through one of the paths, having escaped the REPORTERS. The LIGHTS dim more intimately. ARTHUR is panting and out

of breath. MISS RICKORY is revealed to us again.

ARTHUR

Nell!

No sound - ARTHUR looks around and cries out desperately into the darkness.

ARTHUR

Nell!

ELLEN materializes again onto the stage, as if a gray mist wafting in from the sea.

ELLEN

(Blandly.)
You're late again.

ARTHUR

The President has been shot!

ELLEN

Yes... I heard.

ARTHUR

My God, I can't believe this is happening.

ELLEN

There are many things all of us must come to believe - and accept.

ARTHUR

I don't know what to do.

ELLEN

I wouldn't worry so much about that.

ARTHUR

I could become President... President.

ELLEN

Yes, you could - but then, what need have you to worry?

ARTHUR

Oh, for God's sake, Nell...

ELLEN

You never have to worry about anything, my dear - because other people will manage things for you, as they always have. You can sit back in your chair at the White House and smile - just smile - like you used to do at the Customs House. You can come into

ELLEN (CONT)

the office at noon, take your lunch at one, and start the happy hour at five. It will be like old times. I'm sure you'll find the Presidency not much different. Senator Conkling will be more than happy to take care of the rest for you. They say God never gives us more than we can handle. In that, you might say the good Senator is like your guardian angel. Odd, isn't it, to imagine a large electric eel with wings?

ARTHUR

Never mind Conkling. What do you think I should do?

ELLEN

It's a bit late for asking my advice - isn't it? After all... I'm dead.

ELLEN fades back into the darkness of the stage. ARTHUR is alone in the silence for a moment. MISS RICKORY approaches HIM tenderly.

MISS RICKORY

If I recall, your wife had died many months before.

ARTHUR

Yes, but her voice lived on in my head long after.

MISS RICKORY

I'm sorry.

ARTHUR

Nell died the January before the convention - before I even dreamt of being Vice-President. It was a sudden attack of scarlet fever. She came down with a cold on January 10th and she was dead by January 12th.

MISS RICKORY

That must have been a terrible shock for you and your son.

ARTHUR

It happened so quickly, I hardly knew what happened - but then, so many things have happened suddenly these past six years. Nell's death was the worst of them. It would have meant a great deal if she had been there when I became President.

MISS RICKORY

You said before that you loved her very much.

ARTHUR

Yes, I did - and I still do, to this very day.

MISS RICKORY

Did she... did she know you loved her?

ARTHUR

(After a beat.)
I don't know.

A YOUNG WOMAN dressed as ARTHUR's young son, about 20 - another CHESTER (CHESTER ALAN ARTHUR II) - enters. HE rolls a liquor cart surreptitiously onstage. The bottom portion is stuffed with haphazardly stacked newspapers. ARTHUR goes to the cart and pours himself a nice big drink. HE takes a generous swig of it, clearly very stressed. MISS RICKORY watches HIM sympathetically for a moment.

MISS RICKORY

What about Charles Guiteau?

ARTHUR

Like I said, I had never seen the man before in my life - but Blaine had, loitering around the State Department in the months leading up to Garfield being shot. He lurked around the halls, pestering everyone in sight for a job, following them down corridors and into closets. He was deluded. He fancied himself a great party contributor whose canvassing put the ticket over the top and he wanted to be ambassador to some country in Europe. He was an office seeker - a grifter - like all the others - just with more sickness in his brain. It put the whole business of civil service reform in the public eye. Overnight, everyone became a reformer - except my friends, of course.

ARTHUR is about to take another long swig of HIS drink when... KNOCK, KNOCK, KNOCK! ARTHUR freezes in near-terror as if hearing some terrible scream in the distance. HE waits a moment, hoping perhaps HE is hearing things or that the drink is working a little too well, but then... KNOCK, KNOCK, KNOCK! The sound is very much real.

ARTHUR

(To CHESTER.)
See who that is - will you, Chester?

CHESTER nods and quickly exits. ARTHUR shudders to HIMSELF and finishes off HIS drink in one final swig.

ARTHUR

(To MISS RICKORY, explaining.)
No one is supposed to know I'm here.

CHESTER re-enters.

CHESTER

It's Mr. Burt, Father.

ARTHUR

(Surprised, but relieved.)
Silas?

CHESTER

Yes, Father.

ARTHUR

He may come in.

CHESTER nods again and exits. ARTHUR self-consciously pushes the liquor cart off to the side of the stage, as if a child preparing a living space for a parent and not wanting to be judged. HE barely manages it before BURT enters.

BURT

Hello, Arthur.

ARTHUR

Hello, Silas.

BURT

I see you're in hiding.

ARTHUR

Except from you, it seems. How did you know I was here?

BURT

You forget that long-time friends have long-time memories... even if they're not friends anymore. I remember this little cottage you had on the Jersey Shore. I figured you would come here to get away from everything.

ARTHUR

You know, you could have told the press about it and made yourself a small fortune.

BURT

Yes, I could have - and would have, if I had been a new friend instead of an old one.

ARTHUR

In that case... thank you... for being old.

BURT

How long do you plan to stay here?

ARTHUR

Hopefully, forever - because that would mean Garfield lives and I could just retire from this whole business. At this point in life, I just want to fade away. No one would miss the Vice-President anyway. It was John Adams who said it was the most insignificant office man ever contrived.

BURT

Except when the President is shot.

ARTHUR

Except when the President is shot.

BURT

How is Garfield? We hear reports from the White House, but I trust them very little.

ARTHUR

Garfield goes up and Garfield goes down - but when he goes down, he goes down further and further. He is paralyzed from the waist, propped up in bed and surrounded by doctors probing his wounds to try and find the bullets. They have so far been unsuccessful and so he dies a little more every day. They're taking him here to Elberon here in Jersey next week to see if the sea air will help him. I only breathe now in-between telegrams from his bedside. It has been two months - two long, God-awful months. I don't know how much longer he can manage it.

(A beat.)

I don't know how much longer I can manage it.

CHESTER enters with a large pile of letters tied together.

CHESTER

Excuse me, Father, but Charles just dropped off this bundle of mail from the house.

ARTHUR

I'd normally tell Charles "thank you," but it's probably all invective anyway.

CHESTER smiles gently and exits.

BURT

You have a handsome son, Arthur.

ARTHUR

Chester's a good boy. He came from university to be with me.

BURT

I'm very glad. I can't imagine how you must be feeling.

ARTHUR

In what way, Silas? Socially? Physically? Emotionally?

BURT

You can take your pick.

ARTHUR

Fortunately, I don't need to, because the answer would be the same for all of them. Physically, I'm exhausted - I spend my time pacing the floor and never get any sleep, because sleep only brings nightmares. Emotionally, I'm shot - I'm a nervous wreck wondering what the hell is going to happen next, to Garfield, to me, to the country. As for socially... what can I say? I know you think ill of me, Silas. I don't blame you for that. I understand your feelings more than you think. I used to have them myself, as you know. However, I don't think you understand me as much as you think you do. My whole life, I've just wanted to be liked. I've wanted to be liked by friends, by neighbors, by strangers. I've wanted men to look me in the eye and be glad to see me. I've wanted men to smile at me when I walk into a room. Why it means so much, I don't know - but I just know the feeling is there. It has driven my life to where it is today, because I learned quickly that men like you when you can give them things - a few gold coins, a few good connections, a well-paying job. If he can manage that, a man is truly loved - at least to his face, if not to his back - but then what does the back matter? It doesn't hear anything - and if your delusion is strong enough, you might even convince yourself that nothing is said behind it. I know the love men give me is superficial - but it's love, isn't it? It's love of a kind and I can pretend with the best of them - but now... look at me. Look at this man who gave up so much so he could be loved. Now everybody hates him.

ARTHUR reaches offstage and brings the liquor cart into view. HE takes out the pile of newspapers and begins to read from the headlines.

ARTHUR

(Reading from one paper.)

"Nation trembles at the thought of Arthur as President."

(Tossing the paper aside, reading another.)

"Arthur and cronies to blame for Garfield's death."

(Tossing the paper aside, reading another.)

"Arthur a disgraceful successor to Lincoln and Garfield."

(Tossing the paper aside, reading another.)

"How could America survive an Arthur presidency?"

(Tossing the paper aside, reading another.)

"Only God could save America with Arthur as President."

(Brandishing this last newspaper.)

One man invokes God at the thought of me as President. Well, my father was a Baptist minister with God always on his lips. He would be so ashamed.

ARTHUR tosses the final newspaper aside in despair and sits again.

ARTHUR

When I became Vice-President, I remembered that quote from John Adams and labeled him a fool. This is the perfect job, I thought - at least, for Chester Alan Arthur. All I have to do is show up, look good, shake hands, pat backs, meet dignitaries, go to ceremonies and soirees. Now, here I am on the verge of becoming President - a job I never would have wanted in all my life, where I hold the fate of a wounded people in my hands. God help me, as much as He may need to help America.

BURT

Do you believe in God, Arthur?

ARTHUR

Right now, I believe in death, because it is the only thing that seems real to me.

BURT

As He died and was resurrected again, it seems the scriptures would then be poignant.

ARTHUR

To better frame this moment of history, I would offer up Micah 7, 4-6.

(Reciting.)

Put no trust in a neighbor;
have no confidence in a friend;
guard the doors of your mouth from her who lies in your arms;
for the son treats the father with contempt,
the daughter rises up against her mother,
the daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law;
a man's enemies are the men of his own house.

BURT stares at HIM quizzically.

ARTHUR

I told you - my father was a preacher.

ARTHUR sits, unties the bundle of letters, and absent-mindedly begins to flip through them. One senses HE does this more to distract HIMSELF from HIS thoughts than because HE is interested in any potential content. BURT speaks to ARTHUR as HE does this.

BURT

You know, Arthur, we have been at a crossroads, you and I - and while I have my challenges with the choices you have made, I don't want you to think you can't rely on me as a friend. We may disagree on many things, but I want you to know that I will be here for you - at least during this time. I don't know what the future holds when you become President, as I believe you shall indeed become President. I cannot promise we won't become bitter

BURT (CONT)

enemies with the decisions you make then, for I am not sure how much confidence I would have in you. I will only say that, despite what may happen, I will always wish you well and remember the friendship we once shared. It means a great deal to me, even now - as I think it does to you.

We sense, however, that, despite these heartfelt words, ARTHUR is not much listening. HE has opened a letter in the pile and started to read it. HIS face noticeably changes composure, as HE becomes engrossed - even entranced - by the letter. A long pause follows - clearly showing ARTHUR heard little of what BURT said.

BURT

Arthur?

Still entranced, ARTHUR says nothing.

BURT

Arthur?

Yet again, ARTHUR doesn't respond.

BURT

Arthur, did you hear me?

Only now does ARTHUR emerge from HIS trance - albeit barely.

ARTHUR

(Rather vaguely.)
Yes... yes, I did, Silas. Thank you. Thank you for your friendship.

BURT

(Sensing HIS banal tone.)
I wish I could believe that.

ARTHUR

It is not what you may think.

BURT

I understand, Arthur - you're tired, so I will go.

BURT turns and exits, as ARTHUR remains in HIS trance. HE looks down again at the letter in HIS hands and scans it with fervid interest.

ARTHUR
 (Calling offstage.)
 Chester!

CHESTER enters.

CHESTER
 Yes, Father?

ARTHUR hands CHESTER the opened
 envelope for the letter.

ARTHUR
 We need to find out who lives at this address.

CHESTER
 (Reading the envelope.)
 46 East 74th Street.

ARTHUR
 It doesn't sound familiar to me.

CHESTER
 Neither to me, Father.

ARTHUR
 Well, then... we must change that.

CHESTER nods and exits. ARTHUR turns
 again to the letter in HIS hands. HE
 intently begins to read it - intently,
 that is, for the very first time. We
 sense HE absorbs every word to the core
 of HIS being. The VOICE of a WOMAN -
 who we will soon know as JULIA SAND -
 rises and sounds from everywhere across
 the stage, almost as if coming from
 God.³

JULIA'S VOICE
 The hours of Garfield's life are numbered. Before this letter
 meets your eye, you may be President. The people are bowed in
 grief - but not so much because he is dying, as because you are
 his successor. The day Garfield was shot, the thought rose in a
 thousand minds that you might be the instigator of the foul act.
 Is not that a humiliation that cuts deeper than any bullet can
 pierce? Your kindest opponents say "Arthur will try to do right"
 - adding gloomily "He won't succeed, because making a man
 President cannot change him"... but making a man President can

³ Throughout the play, I have Julia Sand's voice emerge as if from the ether -
 but of course more generous use may be made of the stage, for instance, by
 having a silhouette of her appear in the back or something else that
 similarly suggests mystery.

JULIA'S VOICE (CONT)

change him! Great emergencies awaken generous traits which have lain dormant half a life. If there is a spark of true nobility in you, now is the occasion to let it shine. Faith in your better nature forces me to write to you - but not to beg you to resign. Do what is more difficult and brave... reform!

Slowly, as if buoyed by the words HE is reading, ARTHUR rises from the chair and continues reading.

JULIA'S VOICE

It is not proof of highest goodness never to have done wrong, but it is proof of it to recognize the evil and turn resolutely against it. You must know in your heart you have kept bad company and contributed to it for too long. Once in a while, there comes a crisis that renders miracles feasible. The great tidal wave of sorrow which has rolled over the country can sweep you loose from your old moorings and set you on a mountaintop alone. Disappoint our fears. Force the nation to have faith in you. Show from the first that you have none but the purest of aims. You cannot slink back into obscurity, even if you could. A hundred years hence, schoolboys will recite your name in the list of Presidents and tell of your administration... and what shall posterity say? It is for you to choose.

Frozen into astonishment, ARTHUR looks up from the letter. It then occurs to HIM that HE has one more part still to read. HE looks back at the letter and reads the signature on it.

JULIA'S VOICE

Respectfully yours... Julia Sand.

With that, ARTHUR looks up again - up and around. It's almost as if HE feels someone, somewhere, somehow is watching HIM. MISS RICKORY appears beside HIM in the LIGHT.

MISS RICKORY

You didn't know her at all, then.

ARTHUR

No - nor did I recognize the family name.

MISS RICKORY

What did your son end up finding out about the address?

CHESTER enters from the darkness.