

Respectfully Yours, Julia Sand

SYNOPSIS

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It's the summer of 1886 in an English country garden in an indeterminate location in upstate New York, as we are introduced to the piercing screams of a female voice. A moment later, an aging, decrepit man – Chester Alan Arthur – enters, fleeing from the voice. Finding respite in the peacefulness of the garden, he soon encounters a young female warden with a troupe of flighty young women. The young warden recognizes Arthur as a former President, prompting Arthur to tell her his story, as the young women act out different characters in his memory.

We flip back to 1880 – James Garfield has just been elected President, alongside Arthur as Vice-President. Arthur is a bit of a playboy – someone deeply steeped in the corruption of the New York political machine. The country is in dire straits, riddled with corruption, including the buying of votes and the buying of offices. Arthur, however, is more concerned with living the high life and perfectly content to enjoy the largely ceremonial role of Vice-President – until, that is, Garfield is shot by a disgruntled office seeker.

Suddenly thrust into the limelight, Arthur buckles under the stress and the resentment of many Americans at his corrupt past, especially linked to the very avaricious office-seeking that is blamed for Garfield being shot. Arthur retreats to a private cottage, where, one day, he receives an extraordinary letter from a woman he doesn't know. The woman proclaims that Arthur's hour of greatness is drawing near and that, despite the doubts of everyone else, she has faith he will rise to the challenge and prove everyone wrong.

Before too long, Garfield dies and Arthur, now President, finds himself at loggerheads with his former friends, who demand he use his newfound position to enrich them with offices. Arthur knows the country needs something different – and buoyed up by Julia Sand, who continues to write him letters and exhort him to embrace his better nature, Arthur stares down his former friends. Not only does he not dole out any offices, but he opens up several investigations into his erstwhile allies, determined to do what's right for the country.

Sensing the voice of truth and righteousness in the letters of Julia Sand, Arthur finally pays a clandestine visit to her house and learns that Julia Sand is a 30-year-old invalid – a disabled

woman with spinal trouble and bad hearing. Miss Sand is also, however, very opinionated and her high demands of Arthur prompt an argument between the two, as she pushes Arthur to go after his former friends and feels he is starting to taper down his enthusiasm for doing what is right. Little does Julia Sand know an exhausted Arthur is dying of kidney disease. After their meeting, Arthur retires into himself and waits out the remainder of his term as President - but by then, the letters from Julia Sand have mysteriously stopped. After leaving office, Arthur is determined to find out what happened to the woman who inspired him so much – who believed in him when no one else believed and gave his life a purpose it never had... a road that ends in the terrifying screams we heard at the top of the play.