

RESPECTFULLY YOURS,

JULIA SAND

A Drama

by

Colin Speer Crowley

© "Respectfully Yours, Julia Sand"
Colin Speer Crowley
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CAST OF CHARACTERS
(6+ in total - 5+ women, 1 man)

Chester Alan Arthur - 50's - President of the United States - a gentlemanly, good-natured man with a towering presence and a moral compass that is present, if misdirected

Julia Sand - 30's - played by the actress playing Hannah Rickory¹ - an opinionated, intelligent, literary young woman with a strong desire to see good done everywhere she looks

Hannah Rickory - 30's - played by the actress playing Julia Sand - the matron of a group of young women who serves as a guide and commentator during the play

Young Women (as few as 4) - 20-30's - who will play many roles:

- Silas Burt - a former friend of Arthur's
- Roscoe Conkling - Senator from New York
- Ellen Arthur - Arthur's wife
- James A. Garfield - President of the United States
- Morrison Waite - Chief Justice of the Supreme Court
- James G. Blaine - Senator from Maine
- Charles J. Guiteau - a mentally deluded office-seeker
- Chester Alan Arthur II - Arthur's son
- Theodore V. Sand - brother of Julia Sand
- Isabella Sand - mother of Julia Sand
- Philip Sheridan - Lieutenant General in the U.S. Army
- Dr. Brodie Herndon - Arthur's physician and cousin
- Dr. Seldon Talcott - Superintendent of Middletown State Hospital
- Members of the Cabinet
- Republican Party activists
- Reporters
- Congressmen
- A train announcer
- A policeman
- A messenger
- A Democratic Party official
- A Congressional usher
- A White House secretary

TIME

A late afternoon in the summer of 1886 -
and looking back, late 1880 through 1885.

PLACE

An English garden in Middletown, New York
northwest of New York City.

¹ If desired, a separate actress could play both characters.

A NOTE ON THE SET

"Respectfully Yours, Julia Sand" takes place in an English garden - or more accurately, an English country garden - in a location that we will understand later.

There are the normal attributes in this garden, such as hedges, manicured paths, trellises, elegant iron fencing, statues and/or a fountain - all that typically touches the mind.

During the course of the play, the garden will transform into many different places in the mind of Chester Alan Arthur - most frequently Arthur's home in New York City, the Sand household in New York City, and the White House. Making sense of these locational changes for the audience requires deft use of lighting to light up this and that area of the garden. A creative use may be made of the garden concept to create small areas onstage that work well for intimate asides and special scenic needs.

Most prominent on the set is a larger open space center stage where different paths from the garden converge in a central area. This area is where most of the play will take place. There is a bench in the center of this open space at the beginning of the play. There will also be the need for activity to take place on a raised area towards the back of the stage and occasional needs for entrances and exits through a door, which could be an actual garden gate or a hedge entrance. (I will simply presume there is a garden gate that serves as a door and refer to this gate during the play.)

A NOTE ON CASTING

"Respectfully Yours, Julia Sand" is a memory play as relived by Chester Alan Arthur in the summer of 1886. He relives his past while accompanied by a troupe of young women, whose identities we will understand at the end of the play. As a result, aside from the role of Arthur himself and Julia Sand/Hannah Rickory, all the characters in the play are performed by these young women - male and female - younger and older. The young women can and should be of all races to reflect the integrated and progressive nature of the institution in which they are located. The play can be performed with as few as four of these young women, but many more may be used, as desired.

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 VOICE²

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.

² 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 pitiabile 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!³

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

³ 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. GUILTEAU. 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. GUILTEAU 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. GUILTEAU takes a few steps forward and fires again - BAM! GARFIELD cries out and crumbles to the ground. GUILTEAU 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 GUILTEAU.

POLICEMAN

Stop right there! You are under arrest!

GUILTEAU

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.⁴

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

⁴ 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.

CHESTER

I looked into this address, Father - 46 East 74th Street. It is registered under a Mr. Theodore V. Sand, a banker with Sand, Hamilton & Co. He, like you, is a member of the Union League Club.

ARTHUR

What about the person who wrote the letter - Julia?

CHESTER

I'm not sure, Father - but I gather she must be some relation of Mr. Sand.

ARTHUR reaches into HIS coat pocket and removes a small piece of paper. HE takes a fountain pen - perhaps from HIS pocket or from the liquor cart - and starts to scribble on the paper.

ARTHUR

I would like you to take this note to Miss Sand.

CHESTER

Yes, Father.

ARTHUR

Don't tell anyone who you are or who the note is from.

CHESTER

No, Father.

ARTHUR

Just tell anyone else in the household that the note is for Julia Sand's eyes alone.

CHESTER

And if it cannot be for her eyes alone?

ARTHUR

Then bring it back and do not deliver it.

ARTHUR hands the note to CHESTER, who exits.

MISS RICKORY

What happened then?

The LIGHTS shift and rise on another area of the stage, as ARTHUR moves off to the side. A YOUNG WOMAN enters as a proper-looking, well-dressed banker - THEODORE V. SAND. A VOICE sounds from offstage, which we will learn belongs to ISABELLA SAND.

Are you leaving, dear? MRS. SAND'S VOICE

Yes, Mother. THEODORE

Have a good day, dear. MRS. SAND'S VOICE

Thank you, Mother. THEODORE

Another YOUNG WOMAN enters as ISABELLA SAND (MRS. SAND), the elderly mother of THEODORE. SHE walks with a cane and looks rather enfeebled. THEODORE talks to HER rather loudly, as if SHE has trouble hearing.

Is Julia up? THEODORE

No, she had another bad night. MRS. SAND

A LOUD VOICE sounds from the darkness of the stage.

Still, she is up all the same. JULIA'S VOICE

THEODORE sighs, partly amused, partly exasperated.

I am off to work, Julia. THEODORE

Don't forget to bring a copy of the evening *Herald*. JULIA'S VOICE

I won't, Julia. THEODORE

You forgot yesterday. JULIA'S VOICE

I know, Julia. THEODORE

I shall always remind you now. JULIA'S VOICE

THEODORE

Cannot news wait until the morning?

JULIA'S VOICE

Not with a President near death it can't!

THEODORE

I will be sure to bring you a copy of the *Herald*, Julia.

JULIA'S VOICE

Thank you - because, after all - "We are not living in eternity. We have only this moment, sparkling like a star in our hand and melting like a snowflake."

THEODORE

Shakespeare?

JULIA'S VOICE

Francis Bacon.

THEODORE gives MRS. SAND a look.

MRS. SAND

She is too much interested in politics.

THEODORE

I don't see that it does her any harm.

MRS. SAND

It just adds to her depression, as the news is never good.

THEODORE

I grant you that... Arthur as President.

MRS. SAND

Have you seen him at the club?

THEODORE

No, he has vanished completely, without a single sighting these past months. Not that I was on speaking terms with the man, but he was always a presence. He used to appear every evening, like those Gods you read about in Ancient Greece who occasionally plop on down from the heavens, make some mischief, and then spirit themselves up again. He is probably too ashamed to be seen by anyone.

MRS. SAND

As well he should be.

KNOCK, KNOCK, KNOCK!

MRS. SAND

Who could that be at this early hour?

THEODORE goes to a garden gate off to one side of the garden and opens it. CHESTER stands in the gateway, dressed in a coat and carrying a note.

CHESTER

Good morning, sir.

MRS. SAND

(Pointedly.)
Early morning, sir.

CHESTER

I do apologize, madam.

THEODORE

What is it you want?

CHESTER

Are you Mr. Sand, sir?

THEODORE

I am, yes - the only Mr. Sand here.

CHESTER

Does Miss Julia Sand live on the premises?

THEODORE

Yes - she's my sister.

CHESTER

I have a note for her.

THEODORE

A note - from who?

CHESTER

My employer asked to keep his identity private, sir - from anyone except Miss Sand.

MRS. SAND

Is that so?

CHESTER

May I see your sister?

THEODORE

Well, I'm not quite sure that...

MRS. SAND

You may not, sir - you may not see her at all, especially at this early hour. It is most concerning that you would come calling as you have. My daughter is not well right now and she

MRS. SAND (CONT)

is not up for company. Even if she were, you bear far too mysterious a nature. We are a close family here and keep no secrets from each other. We will gladly take the note from you and deliver it to Julia later.

MRS. SAND nods at THEODORE, who turns to CHESTER and extends HIS hand.

CHESTER

I'm sorry, madam - my employer expressly communicated that the note is for Miss Sand's eyes alone.

MRS. SAND

In that case, it seems your presence here is without a purpose and that it is best for you to leave.

CHESTER

As you will, madam.

MRS. SAND

As I will, of course.

CHESTER

(To THEODORE.)

Have a good day, Mr. Sand.

CHESTER turns and exits, as THEODORE closes the garden gate.

MRS. SAND

Dare I say - Mr. Semon again.

THEODORE

I don't know why he would play at being so discrete.

MRS. SAND

The young have a tendency to gravitate towards such theatrical scenes of romantic drama. Perhaps Mr. Semon felt the mystery of a private love note delivered by a mysterious messenger would be a poetic way to express his affection. As for me, I feel such flourishes should stay in books of poetry where they belong and where they can do no great harm. Whatever the reason for Mr. Semon's charade, it is a most pathetic attempt at reaching Julia and an even more pathetic attempt at convincing me of the match being suitable. I do hope Julia will soon banish her fascination for the man. I would rather that she read ten evening newspapers than one letter he writes.

THEODORE

Mr. Semon doesn't seem too bad a sort.

MRS. SAND

He is far too young and far too active.

THEODORE

So?

MRS. SAND

So Julia isn't either of those - though she is richer besides.

THEODORE

Perhaps, but then Mr. Semon is not exactly poor, as I recall.

MRS. SAND

No matter how much money a man may possess, he always wants more of it. Do I really have to convince my son the banker of that?

THEODORE

Of course not, Mother.

MRS. SAND

Speaking of which, you should be off to work.

THEODORE

Yes, Mother.

MRS. SAND

I'll see you later, Theodore.

THEODORE

Have a wonderful day, Mother.

MRS. SAND rises and hobbles out.

THEODORE shakes HIS head slightly. HE reaches behind a hedge, grabs a suitcase for work, goes to the garden gate, and opens it to leave, when...

JULIA'S VOICE

It's "whom," Theodore.

THEODORE turns, confused, and addresses the VOICE.

THEODORE

I'm sorry?

JULIA

You should be - and you should know better.

THEODORE

Know better?

JULIA'S VOICE

You should have said "a note - from whom?"

THEODORE

Goodness, Julia... you heard all that, did you?

JULIA'S VOICE

When you don't get out much and have your ears regularly blasted by the cacophony of the world, your hearing does tend to become quite sharp, otherwise life becomes too quiet and too dull. Anyway, I know Mother means well. Ever since Father died, when we were so young - and ever since Henry died in the war - she is far too protective. It is all right. If Mr. Semon wants to contact me, he will. He is that sort of man, so I'm not particularly concerned about it.

THEODORE

For once, Julia, you are the most level-headed of us.

JULIA'S VOICE

I know. Sad, isn't it?

THEODORE smiles and exits, as...

CONKLING

Sad... sad indeed...

The LIGHTS shift and CONKLING strolls in, as we return to ARTHUR's hideaway in New Jersey.

CONKLING

They say the President has gotten worse, even after being transported to New Jersey.

The LIGHTS have now risen in full, revealing ARTHUR sitting off to the side, even more drained of life.

CONKLING

I suppose it's only a matter of time before someone knocks on that door of yours with a dreary little note.

CONKLING turns and looks at ARTHUR, as if expecting HIM to say anything. ARTHUR doesn't feel like saying anything, so CONKLING continues.

CONKLING

Granted, I haven't been the most faithful of Christians during my time on Earth, but there are certain aspects of the Bible that have tended to stick with me. They say, for instance, that God works in mysterious ways. That has always rung true to me. Just look at all the funny little people He's created - created and destroyed. Here's another one for you... "There's a time to sew and a time to reap" - and a time to take. Admittedly, the last bit is a corollary of mine, but a most important one. While the circumstances of your accession may be unfortunate, they are also providential - for us, at any rate - and just because tragedy is the overture of an opera, it doesn't mean we should

CONKLING (CONT)

give up on the rest of it. No, no, we should proceed forth - full set, lush costumes, dazzling stage lights, the best sopranos, the best altos, the best tenors - all singing our tunes as we write them - until the curtain falls, which, in time, it always does. That is the lesson our reforming friends are now just learning. You must use the time you are given before God works His mysterious ways on you.

CONKLING turns expectantly to ARTHUR again - but still, ARTHUR says nothing.

CONKLING

Anyway, I see you're a bit overwhelmed - and that's all right. It's all right to be silent now. Get it out of your system while you can - because when the news comes that Garfield is dead, we won't have any time for silence. We must act quickly, decisively, and, as needed, ruthlessly. I trust you understand that, as you will be our main performer.

ARTHUR remains silent, prompting an annoyed growl from CONKLING.

CONKLING

Arthur?

ARTHUR

Of course... I understand.

CONKLING

You always do - eventually.

A long pause, as it seems ARTHUR isn't much interested in having any further conversations.

CONKLING

Well, I suppose I should leave now, lest your thrilling conversation overwhelms me.

ARTHUR

Thank you for coming, Roscoe.

CONKLING

That's what friends are for, Arthur.

ARTHUR

Old friends - or new friends?

CONKLING

If they're paid well, what does it matter?

CONKLING turns and exits, leaving ARTHUR in silence. MISS RICKORY comes back into view.

MISS RICKORY

Did you try again to reach Julia Sand?

ARTHUR

No - but then nor did I try any further at that point. The situation was too volatile, too difficult. You never know who to trust in this world and I didn't know who this woman was or the company she kept.

MISS RICKORY

Did you ever hear from Miss Sand again?

ARTHUR

Yes - but by then, everything had changed.

The LIGHTS dim, until only an eerie spotlight rests on ARTHUR. The SOUND OF AN APPROACHING CARRIAGE emerges from some distant area of the theater and grows louder and louder, until the HORSE HOOVES stop just outside an unseen door. A moment later we hear loud, pendulous KNOCKS emit from this unseen door as if drum beats of doom. This is followed by the SOUND OF A DOOR OPENING. A SWIFT of LIGHT opens on the figure of ARTHUR, who is now facing front at us, as if HE himself opened the door. The LIGHT is blinding, as if some celestial spotlight has centered on ARTHUR, heralding HIS new position of prominence.

MESSENGER'S VOICE

Mr. Vice-President?

ARTHUR

Yes?

MESSENGER'S VOICE

I have a telegram from Elberon, New Jersey.

ARTHUR

(Dreading the contents.)

Yes?

MESSENGER'S VOICE

President Garfield died at 10:30 pm this evening.

ARTHUR nods slowly, taking this in.

ARTHUR

Thank you, sir - though it is a sad message you bring to me today. Please extend my condolences to Mrs. Garfield. I will be on the train to Washington tomorrow morning.

MESSENGER'S VOICE

God be with you, Mr. President.

ARTHUR

Yes, I sincerely hope He shall be.

ARTHUR nods a goodbye to the unseen messenger. The PIERCING LIGHT remains on HIM, as HE reaches into HIS coat and takes out another letter from JULIA SAND. It is already opened and read. ARTHUR contemplates the letter anew, as JULIA'S VOICE again rises and envelopes the stage.

JULIA'S VOICE

So Garfield is really dead and you are President of the United States. Many in the nation shudder at the thought, as they have right to do, based on your debatable record and the even more debatable company you've been keeping - but you now must prove them all wrong. You probably wonder who I am to write you another pestering letter when you have so much on your mind, but sometimes the truth is best heard from a stranger, especially when your friends are so foolish. You might remember that, in the royal courts of old, dwarfs, through their comedy and having little hope for advancement, cared less for propriety and were able to speak more freely to the king than anyone else. You might, then, consider me your "little dwarf." My advice is impersonal and unselfish and, in this regard, you might consider it as clear and free as the air you breathe.

The LIGHTS rise generally on the stage, as ARTHUR puts the letter back in HIS pocket. The YOUNG WOMEN are linked up around ARTHUR as MEMBERS of the CABINET - including BLAINE. A framed picture of Garfield fringed with black curtains is situated in the back.

JULIA'S VOICE

Now it is time for your little dwarf to give you some much-needed advice. Do not make any changes just now. If a doctor could lay his finger on the public pulse, he would prescribe perfect quiet. In this regard, the continuing in office of the present Cabinet, especially with men who have been your enemies in the party, would say much as to your magnanimous intentions and desire for peace - even though your foolish friends will try to fill the spots with their cronies. Above all, you must keep Blaine in the Cabinet - not only because he is the first likely

JULIA'S VOICE (CONT)

to plot against you and undermine you in your moment of greatness, but he because is the symbol of the reformers in the eyes of the country. Do not let him go - not yet. Appeal to his ego and tell him that your unity as men will be especially important for the healing of this country. Men of such conceit as Mr. Blaine can seldom resist chivalric appeals - but then again, that is true of most men, isn't it?

(A beat.)

Respectfully yours... Julia Sand.

During the above, ARTHUR turns and nods to the CABINET MEMBERS. HE proceeds to shake THEIR hands one by one and mutter a greeting to EACH. The atmosphere has a funerary hush about it. BLAINE is at the end of the line. ARTHUR just looks at BLAINE and shakes HIS hand gloomily. By now, JULIA SAND has finished speaking. ARTHUR circles around and addresses the CABINET.

ARTHUR

Today, I know, gentlemen, is a weighty day in all of our lives - my life, your life, and the life of this nation - for reasons both different and the same. While I respected President Garfield, I know that you gentleman, as his Cabinet, worked with him much closer over the past six months. Despite being Vice-President, I have the feeling of being an interloper here - and in President Garfield's shadow, I take it that feeling is just. It is a terrible thing to be here today before you as President under such tragic circumstances. I ask for your heartfelt prayers during this difficult time. There is much to be done, but first and foremost must come the funeral of President Garfield and the healing of a nation. I do not have anything else for you today, other than my appreciation for your time and attention and those prayers of which I'm sure I shall be a generous recipient. Thank you very much.

The CABINET MEMBERS mumble some words of thanks to ARTHUR and begin to disperse with solemn faces - which are likely occasioned as much by Garfield's passing as by the identity of his successor. ARTHUR approaches BLAINE before HE can depart.

ARTHUR

Please stay one moment, Mr. Blaine.

BLAINE stays behind suspiciously, as the other CABINET MEMBERS exit.

ARTHUR

You, Mr. Blaine, of all men in this Cabinet, are the most influential in the party.

BLAINE

I am flattered, Mr. President.

ARTHUR

I do not mean to flatter you, but rather just state a reality of which we both are aware.

BLAINE

I appreciate that, Mr. President.

ARTHUR

By making that reference, I merely mean to emphasize that...

BLAINE

There is no need, Mr. President - for I understand your meaning without any emphasis. We fought each other in the last nominating convention and will likely face each other again in three years' time. I have spoken with the other members of President Garfield's Cabinet and we are all aware that a different age with different gods is dawning. You undoubtedly do not wish us to remain in office and we would not, in good conscience, even consider doing so, considering the differences between us. We will happily submit our resignations to save you the ignominy of dismissing us, as you will have sufficient ignominy to face from more proximate quarters.

BLAINE icily turns on HIS heels and makes to exit, but...

ARTHUR

Mr. Blaine?

BLAINE stops and turns - "yes?"

ARTHUR

I would ask you to remain in your position.

BLAINE

I would certainly not, with my colleagues gone.

ARTHUR

I intend to keep them in their positions, as well.

BLAINE looks queerly at ARTHUR, as if not quite believing HIM.

ARTHUR

If a doctor could lay his finger on the public pulse, Mr. Blaine, he would prescribe perfect quiet. Of course, our paths have historically diverged - and will likely continue to do so -

ARTHUR (CONT)

and in six months' time, the situation may be different... but by then, if we do our jobs well, everything will be different. The country will be calm and peaceful. We would have the nourishment of a long sleep and the luxury of normality. For now, I do not want to dismiss you and so I do not intend to dismiss you - you or anyone. I sincerely hope you will stay - you above all - for our unity as men will be especially important for the healing of this country.

ARTHUR extends HIS hand in BLAINE's direction. BLAINE looks at the hand, as if it were a viper. Slowly, HE reaches out and gives it a shake - albeit a brief, uncertain one. BLAINE nods, turns, and exits. We see some smile of satisfaction come across ARTHUR's face. MISS RICKORY comes back into view from the side of the stage.

MISS RICKORY

Did Mr. Blaine stay?

ARTHUR

Yes - for some six months he did, as did most of the Cabinet.

MISS RICKORY

After which it was back to normal?

ARTHUR

Oh, no - nothing was ever normal again... at least, not for me.

The LIGHTS brighten again - a bit too bright, as if facing a large star. A PEACEFUL WALTZ from a small ORCHESTRA rises in the near distance. The HUM of CONVERSATIONS dances onstage along with it. The YOUNG WOMEN have entered from the back, bringing in Christmas trees, gayly bedecked with tinsel. THEY are dressed now as CONGRESSMEN having come to the White House Christmas Party. The CONGRESSMEN swarm around ARTHUR. One of THEM hands HIM a drink.

CONGRESSMAN

Merry Christmas, Mr. President.

ARTHUR

Merry Christmas, Tom.

CONGRESSMAN

Merry Christmas, Mr. President.

ARTHUR

Merry Christmas, Albert.

CONGRESSMAN

You look well, Mr. President.

ARTHUR

I feel well, gentlemen - and what's more, it is well, after our gloomy year of death, to end it all by the joy of the season and the celebration of eternal life.

CONGRESSMAN

Amen, Mr. President.

CONGRESSMAN

Your sister is a magnificent hostess.

ARTHUR

I am glad you are pleased, for she will be the hostess here for all White House events.

CONGRESSMAN

An admirable substitute for your dear, late wife.

ARTHUR

(Melancholically.)

Yes - Nell would have enjoyed this very much.

In the back, a LIGHT picks up the figure of ELLEN. The CONGRESSMEN disperse as SHE speaks to ARTHUR in HIS mind.

ELLEN

Just look at all those people, Arthur.

ARTHUR

Yes, I know.

ELLEN

I would so very much have loved to be the hostess.

ARTHUR

You would have been the most beautiful one of all.

ELLEN

When I died last January, you were in disgrace - kicked out of your office at the New York Customs House for corruption by the President himself - but now here you are, in the White House. I never would have dreamed it. It seems that some people are coming to like you - even when you don't give them a job. You have done well for yourself. A pity I didn't live long enough to

ELLEN (CONT)

see you make something of yourself. I think that's my tragedy more than it is yours.

(A beat.)

Ah, yes - he interrupts me still, even in your thoughts.

ARTHUR turns and finds a glum-faced CONKLING has approached HIM. HE looks distinctly like a Scrooge this Christmas.

ARTHUR

Merry Christmas, Roscoe.

CONKLING stares unamusingly at ARTHUR. ARTHUR hands CONKLING the drink in HIS hand, which CONKLING takes.

ARTHUR

You could do with some Christmas punch, I see.

CONKLING

I could do with a little change in the Cabinet.

ARTHUR

I'm afraid that isn't on the menu today.

CONKLING

Then it should be! What the hell are you doing, keeping Blaine on?

ARTHUR

Well, Roscoe...

CONKLING

For a respectful month, I can understand - because even I, in my obstinate crudity, can appreciate some degree of put-on propriety - but three months, four months... How many more months, Arthur? Those are our seats in our Cabinet. Those are our jobs for our men. This is our chance for our benefit. We didn't wait this long to come to power so that we could sit outside in the snow like lame dogs and stare through the window at everyone else enjoying a feast.

ARTHUR

I doubt Mr. Blaine will stay for long anyway, seeing as how he clearly hopes to be the next President.

CONKLING

He has already stayed "for long" anyway - and the fact that he wants to be President is why we should smash him now.

ARTHUR

The country needs unity, Roscoe.

CONKLING

There is no "country," Arthur - there's just money and men, who happen to be in the same place.

ARTHUR

As you say, Roscoe.

CONKLING

Oh, I say that and much more, Arthur - including how you had better make sure Blaine is gone within the next few months. What's more, I trust you don't intend to play this quaint little charade when Congress reconvenes in January. Robertson is still Collector of the Customs House at the Port of New York. The investigation into Dorsey and our friends in the Star Route case is still ongoing. There is a pile of government jobs Garfield still had yet to fill. We can brook no delays in making sure these issues are appropriately resolved. If you do, you may just manage to get a smile out of me at Easter.

ARTHUR

And if I don't?

CONKLING just glares ominously in response - silent and pendulous. The glare seems to last forever. ARTHUR noticeably wilts under it.

CONKLING

This Christmas, Mr. President, my gift to you is the greatest of them all - a reminder of who you are and what you are meant to do in life. To think God would bless me to deliver such a sweet message of purpose.

(Handing the punch back to ARTHUR.)

By the way, your Christmas punch tastes like it was made by a Jew.

(Turning to leave, but then as an afterthought.)

Oh, yes, eh... Merry Christmas.

CONKLING turns and stiffly exits.
ARTHUR looks after HIM for a moment, deep in thought. The LIGHTS dim, as MISS RICKORY comes back into view.

MISS RICKORY

Do you mind if I ask something?

ARTHUR

You, Miss Rickory, may ask whatever you like.

MISS RICKORY

Why were you so afraid of Conkling?

ARTHUR

(As if amused by the question.)
Why was I so afraid of Conkling?

MISS RICKORY

Yes.

ARTHUR

It sounds like such an odd question to ask, since it seems so obvious to me, as if asking why I would be afraid of a tiger on my bed. It would be easier to list what Roscoe couldn't do to you than what he could, for he controlled one entire half of the Republican Party. If you entered a room and he didn't acknowledge you, no one else would either. Roscoe controlled everyone's eyes and everyone's ears, because he controlled everyone's heart - and he controlled everyone's heart because he controlled everyone's wallet. I would have no future without him - no future and no friends - and that is a heady price to pay for a man who so desperately wants to be liked.

Gradually, the voice of JULIA SAND rises, reading from another letter. As SHE reads, the LIGHTS shift to a SPOTLIGHT on the back of the stage. The YOUNG WOMEN meanwhile bring in two American flags on masts and other patriotic showcases, which THEY position on either side of the back of the stage. THEY also bring in a lectern.

JULIA'S VOICE

Well, I hear in the newspapers you are going to take a break and return for a time to New York - but please don't! If your private affairs require attention, let them suffer. You have always been connected with the side which represents the wrong - the machine - the thing which I politely request you to smash. In your own house with your usual surroundings, you may sometimes forget that you are President. You might sit in your library with locked doors all day and it would not prevent every ragamuffin in town from ringing your bell and pretending to be your best friend. The next thing you know, every caller would be his own postmaster and have generous facilities for building a little railroad to be president of when you were no more! Who besides possible postmasters and railroad presidents would have any faith left in you then? No, no - stay in Washington. The Mr. Arthur in Washington is another person entirely.

By now, ARTHUR has exited and circled to the back of the stage, where HE meets the YOUNG WOMEN. The YOUNG WOMEN have turned into CONGRESSMEN. ARTHUR begins chatting with THEM in high spirits. MISS RICKORY watches

everything from the sidelines.
Throughout, JULIA'S VOICE continues to
read from the letter.

JULIA'S VOICE

If you'll forgive me, I will leave behind 1881 and look in my crystal ball to 1882 and tell you what I see. I see many important bills falling on the desk of President Arthur and President Arthur being battered and barraged by his friends to succumb to the worst of his nature. This will be your true test. It's easier to be a somber preacher praying over the body of a fallen general on the battlefield of the nation than to be the general himself leading the charge against the foe - but lead it you must. The Civil Service Reform Bill will be put before you to deal a blow to the free awarding of government offices to cronies, and you must sign it. The Harbor Bill dishing out money to this special interest and that special interest will be shoved in your hands, and you must veto it. The case of fraud in the awarding of Star Routes mail contracts will come up for prosecution, and you must prosecute it. I will be reading your annual message to Congress in the newspaper. Please don't make me burn it in despair, as that would be most unladylike.

(A beat.)

Respectfully yours... Julia Sand.

At this point, ARTHUR has approached the lectern and looks out upon us. We have become the Congress of the United States. A YOUNG WOMAN steps forward - the USHER of CONGRESS. The other YOUNG WOMEN have since exited the stage.

USHER

Senators, Congressmen, Supreme Court Justices, and distinguished guests... I present to you the President of the United States.

The USHER withdraws and exits. ARTHUR removes some papers, which HE puts on the lectern. MISS RICKORY, still watching from the sidelines, can't help but interrupt and ask a question.

MISS RICKORY

So did you?

ARTHUR

Did I what?

MISS RICKORY

Go to New York?

ARTHUR

(After a beat.)

No.

ARTHUR turns back to face Congress and begins to speak.

ARTHUR

Gentlemen, I stand before you today to deliver my first annual message as President to this great Congress. An appalling calamity has befallen the American people since their chosen representatives last met in the halls where you are now assembled. To that mysterious exercise of His will which has taken from us the loved and illustrious citizen who was but lately the head of the nation, we bow in sorrow and submission.

During the above, the YOUNG WOMEN have now re-entered, congregating downstage in another SPOTLIGHT. THEY are another batch of CONGRESSMEN - cronies of CONKLING. CONKLING himself is there among THEM. THEY are now looking up at ARTHUR as HE speaks.

CONKLING

(Disdainfully.)
There he is - our great leader.

The CONGRESSMEN sycophantically murmur in agreement.

ARTHUR

(Continuing.)
We might else recall with unalloyed content the rare prosperity with which throughout the year the nation has been blessed. Its harvests have been plenteous; its varied industries have thriven; the health of its people has been preserved. We have even maintained with foreign governments the undisturbed relations of amity and peace. For these manifestations of His favor we owe to Him who holds our destiny in His hands the tribute of our grateful devotion.

CONKLING

(To the CONGRESSMEN.)
He sounds like he actually believes all this "God" business.

Again, the CONGRESSMEN grunt dismissively, as if on cue.

ARTHUR

(Continuing.)
The announcement of President Garfield's death drew from foreign governments and peoples tributes of sympathy and sorrow which history will record as signal tokens of the kinship of nations and the federation of mankind - and in many aspects, this kinship continues. The feeling of goodwill between our own government and that of Great Britain was never more marked than at present. In recognition of this pleasing fact, I directed

ARTHUR (CONT)

that a salute be given to the British flag on the occasion of the late centennial celebration at Yorktown.

Unable to take anymore, CONKLING turns away in annoyance to the CONGRESSMEN. ARTHUR's voice fades into the background - in and out, considering the circumstances.

CONKLING

(To the CONGRESSMEN.)

I tell you, gentlemen, I should be the one standing up there now, considering my inspiring leadership of the party - the true party, that is. My God, I never thought I'd live to see the day. Chester Alan Arthur as President... incredible. The goddamn fool doesn't even have a last name.

Some equally sycophantic laughter from the CONGRESSMEN. THEY listen a little further to ARTHUR speak.

ARTHUR

(Over the above.)

In other areas of international affairs, our Republic continues to prosper. Our intercourse with Spain has been friendly and an agreement concluded recently fixes a term for the labors of the Spanish and American Claims Commission. The Senate resolutions of condolence on the assassination of Czar Alexander II were appropriately communicated to the Russian government, which in turn has expressed its sympathy for our late national bereavement. The boundary dispute between Guatemala and Mexico has also afforded this government an opportunity to exercise its good offices in preventing a rupture between those two southern republics.

CONKLING

(To the CONGRESSMEN.)

Wait for it, gentleman... wait for it.

ARTHUR

On the domestic front, next year we face significant legislation proposed in the wake of President Garfield's death to reform the civil service and the staffing of government offices.

CONKLING

(To the CONGRESSMEN.)

Here we go.

ARTHUR

First and foremost is the proposal to be sure employment is linked to rigorous competitive examinations and not seemingly political connections. However, it ought to be seriously considered whether the application of the same educational

ARTHUR (CONT)

standard to persons of mature years and to young men fresh from school and college would not be likely to exalt mere intellectual proficiency above other qualities of equal or greater importance.

CONKLING

Aha, good man!

ARTHUR

Another feature of the bill is to ensure promotion from within rather than filling higher roles in the civil service with outside candidates more apt to be appointed to high positions out of supposed political interest. However, would it be wise to adopt a rule so rigid as to permit no other mode of supplying the higher ranks of the civil service? There are many persons who fill subordinate positions with great credit, but lack those qualities which are requisite for higher posts of duty and which require expertise from men of the world. An infusion of new blood from time to time into the civil service might be very beneficial in its results.

CONKLING

(To the CONGRESSMEN.)

I told you our friend would come around!

ARTHUR

Furthermore, I am unwilling, in justice to the present civil servants of the government, to dismiss this subject without declaring my dissent from the severe and almost indiscriminate censure with which they have been recently assailed by certain persons. There are some who claim our government employees, appointed through our current system, are, as a class, indolent, inefficient, and corrupt. That is a statement which has been often made and widely credited - but when the extent, variety, delicacy, and importance of their duties are considered, the great majority of the employees of the government are deserving of high commendation.

CONKLING

(To the CONGRESSMEN.)

Damn right - and that's because we appointed most of them!

ARTHUR

(A distinct change in tone.)

Nevertheless, the subject under discussion is one of grave importance. The evils of unnecessary and harmful political influence on the appointment of officers are real and must be acknowledged. If Congress should deem it advisable at its next session to establish competitive tests for admission to the service, I shall give the measure my earnest support, irrespective of such doubts as have been suggested. Furthermore, I urgently recommend that an appropriation of \$25,000 per year may be made to enforce any such competitive examinations for

ARTHUR (CONT)

civil service appointments. With the aid thus afforded me, I shall strive to execute the provisions of the law according to its letter and spirit.

CONKLING has gone white. APPLAUSE erupts from an unseen crowd. A CONGRESSMAN standing next to CONKLING has started applauding with the rest. CONKLING and the surrounding CONGRESSMEN look at HIM derisively. HE takes the hint and stops applauding.

CONKLING

You fool - he just endorsed reform of the civil service!

CONGRESSMAN

Yes, he did, sir, but... only a little.

CONKLING glares at the CONGRESSMAN and approaches HIM menacingly.

CONKLING

And if I were to take a poisonous asp and press its fangs up against your neck oh so briefly, would you applaud in joy, sir, because he bit you... only a little?!

The CONGRESSMAN collapses under CONKLING's gaze. ARTHUR has continued speaking during the above.⁵ CONKLING and the CONGRESSMAN look up at HIM.

CONKLING

I'm going to kill that son of a bitch.

ARTHUR's voice fades and HE speaks in pantomime as JULIA'S VOICE rises. The LIGHTS fall on HIM slowly. They will have fallen to darkness completely about halfway through what follows.

⁵"In other news, the continuing decline of the merchant marine of the United States is greatly to be deplored. In view of the fact that we furnish so large a proportion of the freights of the commercial world and that our shipments are steadily and rapidly increasing, it is cause of surprise that not only is our navigation interest diminishing, but it is less than when our exports and imports were not half so large as now, either in bulk or value. There must be some peculiar hindrance to the development of this interest, or the enterprise and energy of American mechanics and capitalists would have kept this country at least abreast of our rivals..."

JULIA'S VOICE

What a wonderful speech you gave before Congress! Some time ago, I told you that I had faith in you, but I never mentioned it to anyone else - and as yet, I have not met anybody who believes in you as I do. Perhaps I shall be able to take a little comfort out of the reflection that "I told you so" when there were not so many to say it as there are now - for you threaten to become popular... yes - popular! Will popularity spoil you? I think to myself "no," but cannot be certain yet and hope you will answer to my inclination. You see, there are some things of which your little dwarf does not yet have an opinion. You are a better and a nobler man than you were a very short time ago. Nothing could be more beautiful than the manner in which you have born yourself through this long, hard ordeal.

By now, the LIGHTS have risen downstage again. ARTHUR is dressed in a nightgown, sitting in a chair at a desk, reading one of Julia's letters. More of her letters surround HIM on the table. After a beat, CHESTER enters, also in a nightgown.

CHESTER

Father, it's almost 2 am.

ARTHUR puts HIS forefinger to HIS lips - "shhh" - as if hearing the letter, rather than reading it. Another moment passes and then ARTHUR puts the letter down. HE contemplates it weightily for a moment. CHESTER waits, unsure if it is yet acceptable to say anything.

ARTHUR

She's right - about the Harbor Bill.

CHESTER

Father?

ARTHUR

It's filled with waste and I must veto it.

CHESTER

Father.

ARTHUR

I know, Chester - it's almost 2 am - but then, this is my bedtime reading.

CHESTER

I would think Aesop would be better for that.

ARTHUR

Miss Sand knows her morals better than Aesop.

CHESTER

Father, please...

ARTHUR

(Casually sifting through the letters.)
My God, she does go on - and on and on and on - doesn't she?
This Julia Sand could outargue Roscoe...

(A best, thoughtfully.)
...and in my mind, that's exactly what she's doing.

ARTHUR picks up another letter and
begins to read it.

CHESTER

How many times can you read one letter, Father?

ARTHUR

At this point, I'm still trying to find out - but so far, the answer is "as many times as necessary." I read these letters from Miss Sand and almost inevitably find myself going on a little journey with her. I often start out thinking she's quite wrong about something and then, after a read or two, I come to the conclusion that she's really quite right. It's most extraordinary - and she is most extraordinary... and unusually well-informed.

ARTHUR picks up the letter HE was just reading and hands it to CHESTER.

ARTHUR

In this last letter, she writes a great deal about how happy she is with what I've done, especially my recent speech before Congress. Oddly enough, her happiness is very satisfying to me. I feel I'm starting to look for approval from this Julia Sand as I used to look for approval from my own father. Perhaps it's because hers is the only opinion that is true and chaste. She isn't prejudiced to flatter me and she isn't prejudiced to condemn me - and in a world that seems to have flipped on its head and as a man who has flipped with it so often that he has lost his sense of up, there is something wonderfully comforting in that - like finding a compass to lead you back to the right path of life... or perhaps it's even more than that.

ARTHUR is about to say something,
but something makes HIM pause and
contemplate whether HE should speak -
but speak HE does.

ARTHUR

As you know, Chester, my father was a preacher - and yet despite that fact, it may seem ironic to say that I turned away from God

ARTHUR (CONT)

because of him. I figured if my father, as a representative of God on Earth, was so judgmental, then what chance could I ever have of pleasing God Himself? So I stopped trying to please God and I stopped trying to listen for God - and life rolled on quite well, at that. Then one day Garfield is shot and I get a letter from a mysterious woman and, suddenly, after so many years of silence, I hear what sounds like the voice of God speaking to me again. I hear the voice of God speaking to me through this woman who writes me letters - sometimes kindly, sometimes judgmentally - but always clearly... very clearly... and with a command that has such majesty to it that it cannot help but demand my attention.

CHESTER

If you feel that way, maybe you should visit Miss Sand.

ARTHUR

It would be too difficult for me to do it privately.

CHESTER

Is that the only reason?

ARTHUR

Perhaps I'm also worried about facing disappointment.

CHESTERS

You mean hers - or yours?

ARTHUR

That's the problem - I don't know.

By now, the LIGHTS slowly start falling across the stage, submerging ARTHUR, CONKLING, and ALL in blackness. JULIA'S VOICE continues throughout.

JULIA'S VOICE

Now, I hear you are finally coming to New York - though I understand you couldn't put it off forever - and besides, you have staked your flag in the ground now publicly. I confess I thought, before you were here again, I should have left the city - but here we will soon be in the same place, yet 100 miles apart. I had an idea if I could see your face and hear the sound of your voice I should know whether I were right or wrong in believing what I believe of you - that your nobler nature has risen superior to the other part of you and it's going to rule for the rest of your life. Of course, you have 50 things more to do than you have time to do them - but if you chanced to be in this part of the city and happen to have the time and inclination to call, that would be most welcome. If you do come, ask distinctly for Miss Julia Sand. We live quietly and have few visitors, even in the evening.

The LIGHTS have now risen again. We hear the LIGHT FLUTTER OF CUTLERY and DINNER CONVERSATION. The sound appears to come from a nearby room - close, but muffled by a closed door or two. There is a momentary pause on stage, as the DINNER HUM continues, when... KNOCK, KNOCK, KNOCK! The DINNER CONVERSATION putters to a halt. We hear a familiar voice from offstage, which we recognize as that of ISABELLA SAND.

MRS. SAND'S VOICE

(Confused.)

I didn't invite anyone else for dinner.

A VOICE

You run a popular household, Mrs. Sand.

THEODORE'S VOICE

I'll check the door now, Mother.

A moment later, THEODORE SANDS enters. We have been transported back to the Sands household in New York City. THEODORE crosses the stage again to the garden gate and opens it. A bit tepidly, ARTHUR steps through the gate, wearing a fine coat. THEODORE recognizes HIM and freezes in shock.

THEODORE

Mister... Mister President?

ARTHUR

I have come here to see Miss Julia Sand.

The LIGHTS slowly fall, bringing us to the...

END OF ACT ONE.

ACT TWO

As the play resumes, the stage at first stays enveloped in blackness. We hear the voice of JULIA SAND rise. SHE is reading from one of HER letters, written after the meeting we are about to witness.

JULIA'S VOICE

Well, Honorable Chester Alan Arthur - you ended up coming to see me after all! I am afraid you had a - what shall I call it? - rather stiff visit - but then I could have prepared my mood better had we not all been taken by surprise. In all honesty, I felt like putting my family in a carriage and sending them out for a moonlit drive so you and I could have the time to ourselves. As it so happens, you came during one of the few evenings we were entertaining - and I hardly in a state to host you. There I was, having gone into mourning out of respect to the weather, disdaining roast beef and scorning peach pie, and lying in the lounge, thinking you'd never bother to come and see me - and then wondering who that gentle-voiced Episcopalian minister in the parlor might be.

By now, the LIGHTS have slowly risen on the stage, as we left it at the end of Act One. ARTHUR is standing in the garden gate, facing THEODORE SAND. A moment later, MRS. SAND enters.

MRS. SAND

Really, Theodore - why are you taking so...

Seeing ARTHUR, MRS. SAND freezes and can't help but let a little gasp of surprise escape from HER.

MRS. SAND

Mr. President!

ARTHUR

(A bit skeptically.)
Miss Sand?

THEODORE

This is our mother, Mr. President.

ARTHUR

"Our?"

THEODORE

Julia is my sister.

ARTHUR

(To MRS. SAND.)

It is a pleasure to meet you, Mrs. Sand.

For once, MRS. SAND doesn't know what to say, except gulp and nod.

ARTHUR

(To THEODORE.)

I hope you will forgive my intrusion, especially as you are entertaining.

THEODORE

It is indeed our honor, Mr. President

ARTHUR

(To MRS. SAND.)

I have come to see your daughter, Mrs. Sand.

MRS. SAND

(Flabbergasted.)

Julia?

ARTHUR

Yes, that's correct.

MRS. SAND

(Trying one more time.)

Julia?

ARTHUR

She has been writing me letters.

MRS. SAND and THEODORE exchange a puzzled look.

ARTHUR

I see she is as discrete about her correspondence as she claims to be.

(Gesturing into the interior of the house.)

May I?

THEODORE

(Hurriedly stepping aside from ARTHUR to enter.)

Of course, Mr. President.

ARTHUR steps through the gate and into the house. THEODORE peeks outside the gate, as if expecting a retinue to follow ARTHUR inside.

ARTHUR

I did not come with anyone else but my son, who is waiting outside in the carriage. I wanted this visit to be private and was fortunate enough to spirit myself away from a rather crowded event. I'm therefore afraid I don't have much time - and wouldn't dream of taking any longer than I must, so as not to interrupt your evening further. With that, I would be most grateful for a word with Miss Sand.

MRS. SAND

Of course, we'll... we'll get her.

MRS. SAND just stares at ARTHUR for a moment, as if forgetting SHE should depart to fetch Julia - but upon remembering HER duty, SHE exits. THEODORE gestures off to the side of the stage, as the LIGHTS rise on it. The YOUNG WOMEN have brought in a lounge couch, a chair, and a liquor cart, creating an intimate parlor.

THEODORE

You can wait in the parlor, Mr. President.

ARTHUR enters the parlor and nods a "thank you" at THEODORE. THEODORE slowly exits, wondering if this is all really happening. ARTHUR is left alone in the parlor. HE starts to examine walls we cannot see - no doubt looking over some pictures. As HE does so, we hear JULIA'S VOICE reading from HER letter again in the future.

JULIA'S VOICE

If you must know, I sometimes ponder regretfully your visit to me. It was rather my habit to sit in that armchair just where I sat beside you - but now it isn't the same. When I sit there and I glance up at the vacant sofa, would you believe me if I said that I missed you? Well, it's true - I wish you back. I feel that we somehow missed each other in our meeting, despite sitting next to each other all the same. My mother said you stayed for about half an hour, but I do not remember very distinctly anything that you said - other than that you did make me cross. Still, I remember you distinctly - your voice, your manner, the change of your expression as you spoke. I think I liked it best when you looked at me.

At this point, ARTHUR stops perusing the unseen pictures on the unseen wall. HE senses someone is looking at HIM. HE turns and spies a WOMAN standing in the shadows of the stage - JULIA SAND. We

can only see HER silhouette - almost, indeed, as if SHE were a phantom and not a living person.

ARTHUR

Miss Sand?

JULIA

Yes - that's right.

ARTHUR

I take it you know who I am.

JULIA

(Coily, but not impudently.)
Yes. You're the man who reads my letters.

ARTHUR

(A bit amused.)
Am I now?

JULIA

Yes, you are - now. You've just been upgraded.

ARTHUR

Upgraded?

JULIA

Until this moment, I just knew you as the man to whom I sent letters. Now I know you also read them. That is the greatest compliment to anyone who writes anything.

ARTHUR

It is indeed - and I assure you, I wouldn't miss your letters for the world.

JULIA

That's very good, then, because you know what I think about your world.

ARTHUR

Yes, I do - frequently.

JULIA

It is... very good to see you.

ARTHUR

I would say the same to you, Miss Sand - but I can't see much of you at all in that light.

Somehow, we can sense JULIA is not much interested in being seen - but being so prompted, SHE slowly makes HER way into the LIGHT. By "making her way," SHE

limps - and as the LIGHT touches HER, we see SHE grasps a cane, HER back slightly bent and HER head cocked slightly to one side. SHE is disabled and clearly stands with great difficulty. ARTHUR looks at HER for a moment nondescriptly. SHE stares back at HIM, looking for some expression.

JULIA

(Not meanly or bitterly - just matter-of-factly.)
You were expecting Minerva, gorgeously robed and with owl feeding out of her hand.

ARTHUR

You are unwell?

JULIA

You might say that - but now I shall answer what you are silently wondering and confirm that my ailments are not temporary or circumstantial. I didn't recently stumble on my way down the stairs or trip over a poodle in the park. I am an invalid - the youngest one of her family, who, if she lives to be fifty, will always be treated like a child. I have not been in society for years. I never pay calls and I rarely go out of the house. For the last ten days, I have spent most of my time on the sofa with my eyes closed. I appreciate your giving me a reason to open them again.

ARTHUR

I'm... I'm sorry.

JULIA

You should be - for saying you're sorry - because I am not sorry. I don't mean to be dramatic, but it is true I have few comforts in life and would have hardly any at all if I didn't have some fine books to read and if I couldn't occasionally encourage or scold the President of the United States. You see, I am a bit of a little dwarf, aren't I - in more ways than one? Still, despite deafness, lameness, and other disadvantages, you must admit that I am very often right about things. For many other people, their handicap is being wrong - and frankly, I'd rather have my handicap than theirs.

ARTHUR

You are often very right - so far.

JULIA

Ah - hedging bets, I see. You should run for office.

Seeing JULIA has difficulty standing, ARTHUR reaches out to help HER. SHE hesitates, as if hating to betray any need, but eventually takes HIS hand.

ARTHUR helps JULIA limp over to the sofa and sit down. ARTHUR sits in the chair nearby. JULIA leans forward and cocks HER head in HIS direction.

JULIA

I heard you say before that you cannot stay too long.

ARTHUR

I confess I slipped away from a ball rather disgracefully.

JULIA

Well... as long as that is the only thing you do disgracefully.

ARTHUR

That is my intent - knowing, if I ever were to branch out, you'd be the first to let me know of it.

JULIA smiles, but then notices ARTHUR looking at HER cocked head.

JULIA

Again, to save you from dying of curiosity or asking an impertinent question, I have deafness in one ear. In order to hear you, I have to cock my head to the left. Since I rather like to hear, I have made a habit of holding my head this way all the time. If you ever see me cock my head to the right, you'll know I am done with you.

ARTHUR

I hope never to see that, then.

JULIA

So do I - because, as I have said, I have high hopes in you.

ARTHUR

Yes, I know you do, and it is quite a responsibility to bear.

JULIA

Not greater than the responsibility of writing back, surely.

ARTHUR

Is that a "responsibility?"

JULIA

It is a courtesy - but, out of excellent taste, I tend to elevate those to responsibilities. I have been writing you for many, many months now, and nary a reply in sight. I kept ogling the poor postman for months, you know. He probably thought I was angling for matrimony.

ARTHUR

I hope you understand the situation I'm in, as someone who is in the public spotlight. Anyone with whom I correspond would be a

ARTHUR (CONT)

very sensitive matter. I don't know what people would think if news leaked that I was receiving letters - and indeed advice - from Miss Julia Sand of New York.

JULIA

Oh, what nonsense! As I described to you in one of my letters, we could arrange all that. You could just write a cryptic note on a card and send it to me here. I would know enough to know you had read my letters. I hadn't the faintest idea - and yet here I was, writing them all the same. You're lucky I am an invalid and have too much free time on my hands, otherwise I might have given up on you long ago.

ARTHUR

I'm glad you didn't - but all that besides, you know as well as I do that the post office is staffed with political appointees who would easily notice and question a note from a widower in the White House being addressed to a woman in a brownstone.

JULIA

And who's fault are those appointments, exactly?

ARTHUR

Many people's.

JULIA

Your people's.

ARTHUR

(Let's move on.)
Regardless, I'm here now.

JULIA

Are you?

JULIA cheekily touches ARTHUR's sleeve.

JULIA

Oh, yes, you are - good.

ARTHUR

I promise you I'm not a mirage.

JULIA

Has Mother offered you something to drink?

ARTHUR

She has offered me the comfort of your home.

JULIA

Oh, dear - then I imagine she must be quite overcome by the fact that you're here. Mother would usually be the first person to pivot to the liquor cart.

JULIA (CONT)

(Indicating the liquor cart.)
Would you like some sherry?

ARTHUR

That would be lovely.

ARTHUR moves to pour HIMSELF a drink,
but JULIA stops HIM.

JULIA

Thank you, but, despite the rest of me, my hands do work, you know.

JULIA starts to pour ARTHUR a drink.

JULIA

We only have claret glasses, I'm afraid - so please don't think us barbarians.

JULIA hands the glass to ARTHUR.

JULIA

I must say, it's quite embarrassing not to be better prepared for you. You could have given some sort of warning, I'm sure. I would have gladly killed the fatted cat - the only animal at present we possess - and cooked it myself if necessary. Then again, our cat is rather painfully thin as it stands, so the result would likely not have been very satisfying even if I had rallied the energy to make it to the kitchen.

(A beat, suddenly.)

You are going to veto it, aren't you?

ARTHUR

Veto what?

JULIA

The Harbor Bill.

ARTHUR

I see you jump right into the fray.

JULIA

Well, if I only have you for an hour...

ARTHUR

For obvious reasons, it wouldn't be proper to tell you what I would or would not do before I have done it. They say discretion is the better part of valor.

JULIA

I can only assume that phrase was coined by someone who was very ashamed of their actions indeed. Besides, I don't think I am just "anyone" for you to share information with.

ARTHUR

No, you certainly are not - but I must be discrete all the same.

JULIA

For that, I could decide never to write you again - but then you might enjoy that, so I'll leave it be.

ARTHUR

No, no, I wish you would keep writing - though perhaps it would be nice to diverge occasionally from mere politics.

JULIA

"Mere" politics? That sounds like quite a concession.

ARTHUR

Tell me about your family.

JULIA

In all honesty, there isn't much to say - other than that I live with my brother and my mother. My father died almost ten years ago and my other brother was killed during the war. My sister is married and living elsewhere - except, that is, when she comes to visit, as she did this evening - of all the evenings you choose to show yourself.

ARTHUR

Is there, then, no young gentleman suitor?

JULIA

Oh, now, you are becoming far too personal.

ARTHUR

You allow yourself to be personal with me.

JULIA

I do, yes, - but then you're public property, remember. I may not be able to vote, but I am a citizen of this country all the same and I own a millimeter of you - and believe me when I say I intend to poke it for all its worth.

ARTHUR

(Referencing HER avoidance.)

I take it there must indeed be some young man, then.

JULIA

Oh, very well - there is a gentleman a few years younger than I am who does come calling. He is a fine fellow and he feels it rather a good idea that we should be married - though I can't for the life of me imagine why.

JULIA removes a locket from HER blouse and shows it to ARTHUR.

ARTHUR

What's the gentleman's name?

JULIA

As long as you promise not to give him a job on my account, his name is Howard Semon.

ARTHUR

He is a good-looking young man.

JULIA

Yes, that is what worries me.

ARTHUR

Why do you say that?

JULIA

Why, whatever could he want with me and my rotten spine?

ARTHUR

(Considering HER admiringly.)
I think I have an idea.

JULIA

(Touched, but covering it up rather well.)
Well, keep it to yourself and write me about it later - if you choose to write at all.

ARTHUR

I see we're back at that again.

JULIA

I warn you, I don't let things go.

ARTHUR

Yes, I've noticed that.

JULIA

(Suddenly, as if uncomfortable with the topic.)
There is another thing - that I enjoy painting, which I have enjoyed more recently, as my constitution has rallied. I know your time now is short, but perhaps you would be willing to sit for your portrait sometime - just a little sketch in watercolors. I sometimes go to Saratoga Springs to rest my back and recently thought I might open a studio there.

ARTHUR

(Gesturing to the pictures HE was admiring on the wall.)
These were painted by you?

JULIA

Yes, they were - and aside from the fact that I enjoy the art, I really must do some kind of work. Then again, after so many years of enforced idleness, there's a part of me that dreads

JULIA (CONT)

contact with the wider world. I suppose, when you are as lame as I am, the vastness and noise of the world seem much more frightening than they do inspiring.

ARTHUR

You said before you never go out?

JULIA

No - although I will confess I was thinking of going to that ball from which you so stealthily fled. To think, it mainly would have been to see you - the first time I ever dreamt of going anywhere to meet a gentleman. Besides that, I thought of the pleasure of my mother seeing her little girl in a ball dress again and of my own delight at catching such a concentrated glimpse of the world after having lived in the moon so long. Then I thought of the trouble it would be for my brother to find tickets and of the flurry of procuring a dress. My last ball was at Annapolis in 1874 and I have nothing suitable to wear, save something from the time of Queen Anne. Then, too, I thought of five years of unbroken suffering, the desperate efforts to build up what little health I have, the absolute necessity of adding to my strength rather than wasting it - and suddenly I shut the ball out of my thoughts all together.

ARTHUR

Next time, you must come.

JULIA

Life provides fewer and fewer "next times," Mr. President.

ARTHUR looks at HER meaningfully for a moment - then suddenly:

ARTHUR

(As if dying to ask and taking the plunge.)
Why did you write to me, Miss Sand?

JULIA

(Surprised by the question, despite its clarity.)
Why did I write to you, Mr. President?

ARTHUR

Yes.

JULIA

Well, obviously, to give you advice, like I said - as I gather you get very little of it objectively - and anyway...

ARTHUR

No. Why did you write to me initially?

JULIA

Well, I... I thought...

ARTHUR

Yes?

JULIA

(As if hesitant to say this.)

I thought you must be so terribly lonely.

ARTHUR just stares back at HER for a moment, perhaps expecting more, but also perhaps touched by the simplicity of this statement. JULIA becomes conscious that HER reply was perhaps inadequate. SHE laughs slightly and turns away from ARTHUR, as if HIS gaze were distracting HER.

JULIA

I'm sorry, but I'm afraid I don't have a better or more eloquent explanation to give you. Things come easier to me when I write them down and I have time to think about them. I'm not as good in-person and can be either too curt or too elaborate in hectic succession - but I assure you, what I said is absolutely true. I knew you were alone after Garfield was shot and I felt so very bad for you. Of course, I've never walked in your shoes - nor you in mine - and in some respects, we couldn't be more different - but even though we don't walk in someone else's shoes, we may still walk a similar path and notice someone else's footprints in the sand beside us. What can I say, other than that I know what it's like to be lonely? - but then I have my family. You didn't have anyone. I imagined you there, the world bearing down on you, your wife recently dead - just the January before, I believe - and only some fool friends for comfort, who are not really friends at all and would sacrifice you at a moment's notice if they could. I decided then that I should write to you and believe in you - in that order, as if the one compelled the other. Why I've believed in you, I'm not quite sure - but I have an intuition about things. It comes from having little to do in life other than sit and think.

(A beat.)

I suppose that does sound rather silly, doesn't it?

ARTHUR

(Rather moved.)

No. Not at all, Miss Sand. Thank you for writing me.

JULIA

Thank you for reading me.

ARTHUR

It was the least I could do.

JULIA

Yes, it was - which is why you should write back!

ARTHUR

You are quite forward, Miss Sand.

JULIA

Better forward than back, Mr. President.

ARTHUR

Mostly.

JULIA

So now let me ask you - why did you even read my letters out of the hundreds you must have been receiving?

ARTHUR

I can only say there was something about your letters that touched me a great deal - and still do. I've kept every single one of them. You spoke truth to me when it was hard for me to know what the truth really was.

JULIA

Well, I am glad to be of service, because you have done very well for yourself and the country. I can't imagine you have ever worked harder in your life than you have over the months since Garfield's death. When Vice-President, you had no dignity to keep or to lose. Forgive me for saying anything so hateful, but it is true. Now look at you. Opponents have been forced to admire you and you have done better than friends or foe expected. It is all to your honor that it is so and you should celebrate that - as do I - and in fact...

JULIA abruptly stops, as if feeling SHE is entering too personal a territory.

ARTHUR

Yes, Miss Sand?

JULIA

(Quite shyly, as if not wanting to be this vulnerable.)
To be frank, I really should be thanking you even more than you thank me. You see, you've done me personally a great deal of good - more than you might think. As I've written to you and see you do well, it has given me a sense of purpose and hope, when I'd otherwise be lying here alone in this terrible parlor, whiling my life away from headache to headache and backache to backache. With every right thing you do, I feel a little bit better and a little bit stronger. I hope you don't think me mad for saying this, but I rather feel you are responsible for the improvement in my constitution. That's the only reason I decided to get back into painting - that and perhaps because I now see something fit about the world to paint.

ARTHUR

Well, I'm very glad to repay you, even in some way.

JULIA

(Glad to have gotten that out and now gushing forth again.) Oh, you do - many, many fold - and, in fact, your endorsement of civil service reform sent me over the moon and back. That very night, I had returned from a long evening out with my mother and brother - one of my few. For a person who has been dead and buried for five years, it's glad to get out, even if to listen to a longwinded professor - but my spinal column had not agreed to stand for that length of time, so, when the excitement was over and I got back to my little parlor, I collapsed. If I had taken a glass of wine, I would have fallen asleep in half an hour - but I didn't have any to take and there was no one there to do anything for me - so I lay on the sofa for about three hours, more dead than alive, enjoying a few nervous chills and finally falling asleep between three and four o'clock in the morning. Can you imagine my mood when I woke? Where would your cheerfulness be if you had a headache extending to the tips of your fingers and the soles of your feet? I thought that this was the weakest world that I ever lived in - that everybody in it was an unmitigated worm and they all were squirming down to perdition as fast as they could go. When I came up after breakfast, I punished all my flowers - geraniums, primroses, and pansies - by pulling down the shades and not letting them have one gleam of sunlight. Then, suddenly, my brother threw the morning edition of the *Herald* at my feet - but before I could fling it into the fire, I condescended to glance at it and there I saw a paragraph saying you had endorsed civil service reform. The next thing I knew - and again, please don't laugh at me - I couldn't see anything more of the world, for there were two big tears in my eyes and half a dozen others rolling around generally... and what's more, my headache vanished and I even sensed my hearing improve.

ARTHUR

What I do means that much to you?

JULIA

Yes - and granted, I did embellish the results a bit, but that is my prerogative as a woman. It doesn't change the fact that your doing good means a great deal to me - so much so that I have become quite afraid of you.

ARTHUR

Afraid of me?

JULIA

Yes, I am afraid - very - and I feel it even more now, just looking at you here, because my constitution is now in your hands. Besides, you have done so well that you have only left to disappoint me, and I don't want to be disappointed.

ARTHUR

I will try my best not to disappoint you.

JULIA

Please do - because I have put you on a bit of a pedestal in my mind, which I should not have. I'm usually much cleverer than that. I'm conscious, however, that you are bound to fall, as all men do - and a few silly women, as well.

ARTHUR

(Not cruelly or confrontationally.)
At the same time, I do feel it is only fair to set realistic expectations. Two people cannot always be in complete agreement with each other, Miss Sand - and, wise as you are, you will not always be correct.

(Curiously - this is a real question, not ironic.)
Has it occurred to you that you may not always be right?

JULIA

Of course not!

ARTHUR

That might be one difficulty - because, truly, your support means a great deal to me, as well. In my own way, I feel my own sense of well-being lies in your hands. I find myself looking for your approval in every letter you write. You see, I don't have anyone else to seek approval from anymore. My old friends don't approve of me because I haven't used my power to shower them with graft. My former enemies refuse to approve of me out of stubbornness, no matter what good I may do, because they always think they would do it better. I don't have anyone approving of me now - except you, it seems.

JULIA

We humans are quite terrible, aren't we?

ARTHUR

We are fallen, as you said.

JULIA

Well, I will go on approving - approving and approving - but it is all conditional on your doing good.

ARTHUR

Of course, but your definition of "good" may have to be defined more generously in some cases to be realistic.

JULIA

One senses you have an example.

ARTHUR

In your last letter, for instance, you did go on a good deal - and scold me a good deal - about prosecuting those nine men in the Star Routes case - "without mercy," and I quote. I feel there are some aspects of the case you do not quite understand or appreciate. You, after all, only rely for information on what you read in the newspapers.

JULIA

You feel I am being unfair to you.

ARTHUR

I feel, yes, you are being unfair.

JULIA

Well, call me a mean old Mayan if you must, but I believe in sacrificing people, not standards.

JULIA has reached into the liquor cart and pulled out a folded letter.

JULIA

Here! This is the letter I just finished writing to you and you'll be disturbed to know I added more scolding besides. It is a miracle that you showed up before my sending it, otherwise you may not have shown up at all.

ARTHUR

I'm rather afraid to ask.

JULIA

I had heard a rumor that you were considering replacing the prosecutor in the Star Routes mail fraud case.

ARTHUR

Some people have expressed concerns about the current prosecutor, Mr. Woodward, that is true.

JULIA

You mean certain corrupt people.

ARTHUR

I mean certain people - whose views, like other people, I must consider, as President of everyone in this country.

JULIA

Well, you absolutely cannot replace Mr. Woodward, otherwise it will be a catastrophic blow to your reputation.

ARTHUR

To you, Miss Sand?

SAND

To everybody, Mr. Arthur!

ARTHUR

I beg you to consider that there are over 50 million Americans on this planet and they don't all live at East 74th Street.

JULIA

Well, I must say the view from our rooftop is quite clear, even on a foggy day, and I can see the correct path very clearly from

JULIA (CONT)

it, thank you. I must say, if I knew you'd be so cagey about the whole affair, I may possibly have snarled at you loudly when first I saw you tonight or, at the very least, would not have poured you our best sherry. In fact...

JULIA takes the sherry from ARTHUR and downs it herself. We can tell SHE barely can stomach it. It rather knocks HER flat for a moment.

ARTHUR

Are you all right?

JULIA

(HER voice amusingly cracked from the sherry.)
No, I am not - but not because of too much bad sherry, but because of too much bad Arthur. This is so very discouraging. I sensed that you were hesitant to proceed in the prosecution of the Star Routes case and it seems that I was quite right yet again. You simply cannot turn back now after all the miles you have traveled. Imagine - \$400,000 or more dollars stolen in upcharging the taxpayer for mail routes out west when there are so many people in need! Even if you did prosecute the case, I am fearful you might actually consider pardoning the criminals anyway. It would be disgraceful to let them off the hook - Dorsey, Brady, and Rerdell especially.

ARTHUR

It is the Attorney General who decides whether there should be a prosecution and a pardon.

JULIA

You cannot make the Attorney General the keeper of your conscience and it is cowardly of you to try and shirk responsibility in that manner. You must meet what is before you like a man and have no dodging. Why do you take such comfort in half measures? Does it never strike you that there must be back of them only half a mind? Why do you not do what you do with your whole soul - or have you only half of one? Embezzlement is a temptation for every man and woman in this country! It is the sin of the age - a great moral epidemic - and it must be checked with the severest measures... or else!

ARTHUR

Are you finished, Miss Sand?

JULIA

I'm never finished - but you will be, if you don't prosecute these men and see them in jail!

ARTHUR

Again, Miss Sand, I appreciate your letters and I respect your opinion very much - on many things - but...

JULIA

(Blaring on and on and on.)

It's because they're your friends, isn't it - Dorsey especially! Despite my warnings, you still cling to these bad men and remain deceived by them! Have I poured out my best strength in one continuous appeal to your finer nature, all to no avail? Are the people wrong - am I wrong - in thinking you have changed? Remember how swiftly time glides away. So many men there comes a long pause between the activity of life and the closing scenes of death. How sad it must be for anyone then to look back and feel that that best strength of their manhood has all been wasted on unworthy ends! Do not fill your life with actions that afterward can bring you only regret! Don't spare Dorsey and the others because of "friendship!!"

ARTHUR

(A nerve hit.)

They are friends, yes, but, more besides, they have done things that many other men have done without prosecution - including me. The scale may be greater, but I have been as much a contributor to the rot as any man alive. You said yourself that we are dealing with a sickness in society, not individual men with individual diseases. I will not so quickly destroy these foolish men's lives and hang their severed heads from the battlements when the society in which they lived beckoned them so eagerly into the darkness and told them it was right and just to make the journey. Reform, yes - reform and move forward! That I can do and that I will do! However, to look back, to point an accusing finger at some men behind me, to condemn them before the world from my perch of privilege, and then to grab the nearest stone from the ground and hurl it in their direction... that I shall not do, because it is not for me to cast that stone - not now - and if I do decide to cast it, I shall do it on my own time, Miss Sand - not yours!

JULIA

(Determined to have the last word.)

Well, someone has to cast it, otherwise what's a stone for?!

MRS. SAND'S VOICE

Julia! Is everything all right?

The idea that others may be listening prompts a sudden return to an unsteady calm. ARTHUR and JULIA are clearly exhausted by this exchange. A moment later, MRS. SAND enters off to the side of the stage.

MRS. SAND

Julia...

JULIA

Everything is fine, Mother.

MRS. SAND

I heard some loud voices from the dining room.

JULIA

(Eyeing ARTHUR.)

The President was just doing a rather loud impersonation of Senator Conkling.

ARTHUR

I should be going anyway, Mrs. Sand, as I have guests who will be missing me. Thank you very much for your generously letting me visit with your daughter.

MRS. SAND

(Eyeing JULIA suspiciously.)

Thank you, Mr. President - she can be a bit much.

JULIA

Oh, Mother!

ARTHUR

A bit, yes.

MRS. SAND

I do hope we will see you again.

MRS. SAND nods a goodbye and exits, leaving ARTHUR and JULIA drowning in an awkward pause.

JULIA

What is it - do you hate me now?

ARTHUR doesn't answer, but just thinks to himself for a moment.

ARTHUR

I feel I have overstayed my welcome.

JULIA

You didn't answer my question.

ARTHUR

I think we have had enough questions for one evening, Miss Sand.

JULIA

(Wanting to say more, but this is all that comes out.)
Perhaps.

ARTHUR stands before JULIA and extends HIS hand for a shake.

ARTHUR

You are a remarkable woman, Miss Sand - one of the most remarkable people I have ever met in my life. I am not exaggerating when I say that reading your letters has been a privilege and that it was a privilege to see you here this evening. I will only say that there are some things about the human heart I feel you do not understand.

JULIA

Perhaps, if you get to it someday, you can write me about it.

JULIA just stares at the hand, not wanting ARTHUR to leave, but not quite wanting to express HER feelings. An uncomfortable pause follows. Just before ARTHUR is about to remove HIS hand, JULIA reaches out and takes it - but rather than letting it go, SHE just clasps it tightly, as if to prevent HIM from leaving HER.

JULIA

I hope you understand, when I speak - often quite loudly - it is only because I care.

ARTHUR

I understand that.

JULIA

Well, I hope you'll understand that when you remember some of the harder things I have said to you.

ARTHUR

I shall try.

JULIA senses SHE must be happy with this nondescript answer and releases ARTHUR's hand. SHE starts to rise to see ARTHUR out - but HE gently puts a hand on HER shoulder. There is something about the touch that shocks HER a bit.

ARTHUR

I can see myself out, thank you.

ARTHUR turns and starts to exit.

JULIA

I will keep writing you.

ARTHUR

Please do, Miss Sand.

JULIA

If I ever stop, it is either because I have entirely lost faith in you or I am dead.

ARTHUR

Goodbye, Miss Sand.

JULIA

For now, Mr. President.

ARTHUR nods and slowly exits - and suddenly is gone. A dead pause fills the stage, as JULIA looks after HIM. Perhaps SHE wishes HE would reappear, but no. After a beat, SHE angrily pounds the chair in frustration at how everything transpired. This seems to be a bit much for HER. HER hands go up to HER head, which SHE holds in pain.

JULIA

Oh, Julia... you are a fool.

JULIA wipes away a few nascent tears in HER eyes. SHE slowly looks up again in the direction of the departed ARTHUR, mourning HIS absence. JULIA'S VOICE rises again. SHE is reading from the letter SHE was reading at the beginning of Act Two. The LIGHTS slowly start to fade on JULIA as the letter is read.

JULIA'S VOICE

Looking back on it now, I regret to say that thoughts of our meeting fill me with sadness. We did not really meet, but only passed each other - and even then, we kicked up a good deal of dirt in the process. I keep returning to that comment I passed when we parted, about how I hoped you would forgive me some of the hardest things I had said. You said you understood, but I do not believe you meant it. Do you really feel towards me so coldly, so distressfully? It pains me to think it, but you must understand my position and my need for you to do well. The saddest disappointments in life are the disappointments in human nature. For your own sake - if no other sake will move you - please do not let the good I have believed in be a mistake.

By now, the LIGHTS have faded in full on JULIA and risen on another area of the stage. ARTHUR is sitting at a desk that has been rolled onstage by the YOUNG WOMEN. A fountain pen is in HIS hand and a stack of papers is before HIM. Among them is Julia's letter. ARTHUR is reading it - or re-reading it

- as if having been distracted from HIS duties and returning to its words for some inner purpose or need.

JULIA'S VOICE

One word more before I close, if you don't mind - but it seemed to me that you were not well when we met, that you were very heavy and worn out. You must not rely too much on your good constitution. There are so many strains it must bear that you must avoid all that are avoidable. You are not to keep your malaise a secret and endure it so patiently. Please take care of your health, as I know all too well how it governs so many things.

Then, from the darkness:

VOICE

The rest will do you good, Mr. President.

The LIGHTS rise generally, as ARTHUR is distracted from reading the letter. A YOUNG WOMEN enters the LIGHT dressed as Lieutenant General PHILIP SHERIDAN - mustachioed and rather intimidating. ARTHUR folds the letter from Julia Sand back into HIS pile of papers, hiding it from view. Behind ARTHUR is HIS son CHESTER.

SHERIDAN

(Rather loudly - "Is he alive?")
Mr. President?

ARTHUR

(Suddenly perking back to life.)
I appreciate your concern for my health.

SHERIDAN

Oh, good - you did hear me after all.

ARTHUR

(Amusingly, referencing HIS loud voice.)
How could anyone not hear you, General Sheridan?

SHERIDAN

Admittedly, it's force of habit for me to talk rather loudly, which you have to do when the bullets are whizzing by you, but sometimes it's worth it off the battlefield, as well - and, damn it, this is one of those times!

SHERIDAN has used the last few words to bang HIS forefinger insistently on ARTHUR's desk. Alas, HIS forefinger lands squarely atop ARTHUR's papers.

ARTHUR calmly picks up the finger and removes the papers. SHERIDAN sighs - a bit annoyed by ARTHUR's lack of response.

SHERIDAN

Ten years ago, the Yellowstone area was set aside by the federal government to be protected for future generations of Americans - the first grant of its kind. Now, there are 4,000 acres of park land that have been put up for sale by the Department of the Interior for commercial development. The Yellowstone National Park Improvement Company is already busy pillaging the area like schoolboys in a sandbox. They're cutting down forests to make room for a 250-room hotel as we speak!

ARTHUR

("You're the only one talking.")
"We?"

SHERIDAN

(Ignoring this barb - or trying to.)
If something isn't done, Yellowstone will be turned into another Niagara - a cesspool full of slimy businessmen and gawking tourists, who most people would like to see plummet down the falls anyway. The land sale allows for railroads, cattle ranching, logging, and mining. I tell you, the Yellowstone National Park Improvement Company must be stopped. Anytime a company has "Improvement" in the name you know damn well the thing they're improving will soon go to Hell!

ARTHUR

You have a sweet way with words, General.

SHERIDAN

There should be Congressional oversight of any commercial contracts involving park lands. You can't leave it to a bunch of goddamn bureaucrats in the Department of the Interior to decide what is done with park land - not with the way our civil servants are appointed.

(Pointedly.)

That's why you endorsed civil service reform - is it not?

ARTHUR

So my touring Yellowstone will help, is that it?

SHERIDAN

Yes, Mr. President - and it will be damn good for your health as well. You yourself said that you're tired and worn out. Let's get you away from these grifters in Washington. Take some of your Cabinet - or, hell, take all of them. They'll do far less damage to the country thousands of miles from Washington anyway. I'll personally lead an expedition across the length and breadth of Yellowstone. We'll keep the blasted reporters away - send

SHERIDAN (CONT)

regular cables, take some choice photographs, give them quotes of you extolling the beauty of nature. The American people will gobble down every new dispatch. We'll gin up such support for preserving Yellowstone that no bureaucrat or speculator would even think of putting a hand on her again.

ARTHUR

I will think about it.

SHERIDAN

You're an angler, aren't you, sir?

ARTHUR

I enjoy fishing - although it's been a while.

SHERIDAN

Well, the fishing is excellent in Yellowstone.

ARTHUR looks at SHERIDAN for a second and then slowly nods.

ARTHUR

Very well, go forth and plan your expedition.

SHERIDAN

Thank you, Mr. President - you won't regret it.

ARTHUR

By the way, General - you'd make a great politician.

SHERIDAN

Are you mad? I wouldn't want to sit in Congress with those fools!

SHERIDAN turns and exits. A pause hangs in the air. ARTHUR exhales as if having recovered from a battle and HIS body can bear no more. HE seems to be getting older before our eyes.

CHESTER

I think the General is right, Father.

ARTHUR

About Yellowstone generally or about my health?

CHESTER

Both, Father - and he's also right that it will do you good. You've been tired, but more than that, you've been downcast since you visited Miss Sand.

(Sheepishly removing a letter.)

She sent you another letter.

ARTHUR wearily takes the letter and looks at it, as if dreading to read it.

CHESTER

What happened with Miss Sand, Father?

ARTHUR

I'm not sure, Chester - I only know I was hoping to get comfort from the only source truly supplying it and instead I heard more demands. Demands to my right, demands to my left, demands behind me, demands in front. I am surrounded all the time by people telling me what to do. It's hard to hear your own thoughts through all the shouting. Sometimes, you even forget that you have any thoughts of your own to begin with - and if you don't have your own thoughts, then what are you? You're nothing - and yet you feel like you're even less.

ARTHUR looks at the letter, contemplating if HE should read it.

ARTHUR

I am tired, Chester - tired of Washington, of Congress, of reporters, of politicians - and I want to go home. Like a little boy, I just want to go home - but I can't. I still have two-and-a-half more years of it and a few more battles yet to fight. I needed faith to begin this journey when Garfield died and I need faith to continue it now - faith in me, that is. I didn't have enough in myself, but Miss Sand did. If not for her, I don't think I could have managed this far. Now, it almost seems to me that voice is gone, receding into the mist.

ARTHUR slowly puts the letter aside, unopened.

ARTHUR

I know it sounds odd for a big, burly man to seek approval from a crippled woman who can barely walk and hear - and yet, there are harder things in life to explain. I looked for approval from Julia Sand as I used to look for approval from my own father - and then, suddenly, she started to sound just like him. I thought she was the voice of God, but now... I'm not sure. I don't know where God's voice is anymore.

CHESTER

I'm no expert, Father - but I figure, God being God, His voice can be anywhere and anytime He chooses. Maybe it's inside of you now, and that's all you need.

A LOUD SCOFF cuts through the moment. ARTHUR and CHESTER turn to find that CONKLING has entered.

CHESTER

You don't have an appointment, Senator Conkling.

CONKLING

I don't need an appointment, young man.

CHESTER looks angrily at ARTHUR, appalled by this arrogance. ARTHUR nods back at HIM - "It's all right."

CONKLING

(To CHESTER.)

I'd like to be alone with the President... please.

ARTHUR nods again to CHESTER, gesturing HIM out. CHESTER leaves, though not very willingly.

CONKLING

So - your "friend" needs an appointment to see you.

ARTHUR

I'm not just your friend, but President of the United States.

CONKLING

Ah, yes, I forgot - and who exactly made you President of the United States, Arthur?

ARTHUR

The people did.

CONKLING

Charlie Guiteau did.

ARTHUR

Roscoe...

CONKLING

And before that, who got you elected Vice-President of the United States? Was that "the people," as well? Granted, yes, it was some people - but not quite the people. It was the pliable, dependable people who did it. It was government employees across this great land in states like New York who received little cards in the mail, urging them to vote for the right candidate on election day, knowing that, if they did so wisely maintain the prosperity of the country, they may just be getting a little extra Christmas bonus next year - merely their share of the riches their wise vote bestowed on the nation. It was those people who elected you Vice-President, Arthur - and it was one of those people, deluded though he was, who made you President. It might therefore do you well to look down on that high horse you've been riding on these many months. Look closely enough and you'll discover it's nothing but a jackass.

ARTHUR

You should leave, Roscoe.

CONKLING

Oh, I'm not done, Arthur.

CONKLING dramatically removes a folded newspaper from HIS coat pocket, as if a magician performing a magic trick.

CONKLING

(Brandishing the newspaper.)

Here it is, the front page of the *New York Herald* - November 3, 1881 - chronicling your speech at Delmonico's upon the declaration of our great Republican victory!

(Indicating an article.)

Shall I quote you?

(Reading.)

"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."

(Looking up.)

Do you remember, Arthur?

(Reading again.)

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

CONKLING looks up expectantly at ARTHUR - "do you know what comes next?"

ARTHUR

(Lamely, knowing what's coming.)

Soap.

CONKLING

(Getting in HIS face.)

Correct, Arthur - soap! Someone from the crowd cried out "soap" - which, as you know damn well, is not quite as clean as it sounds. We're talking about purchased votes from those very government employees we were just discussing. Money is that extra lubrication that makes it possible for a politician to squeeze into office - just barely. There are enough real voters out there to make it a bit of a challenge at times - but still, we manage. It's a delicate wire we always walk - it always has been - and it requires cunning and coordination and collaboration to pull it off. Above all, it requires loyalty - loyalty to your friends. They should not require appointments and they damn well should not suffer prosecution!

(Brandishing the newspaper.)

Oh, but wait - let us quote the last bit again!

CONKLING (CONT)

(Reading, louder and more viciously.)

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

(Throwing down the newspaper at ARTHUR's desk.)

Soap!

ARTHUR looks at the newspaper that has been flung down before HIM, like a gauntlet of sorts. CONKLING approaches HIM menacingly, eyes flaring.

CONKLING

In this speech, you praise Thomas Dorsey - the man whose vote-buying was integral to getting you elected - the same Thomas Dorsey who's currently threatened with prosecution in the Star Routes case by your Justice Department!

ARTHUR

This is not your business, Roscoe.

CONKLING

Damn you, everything about Chester Arthur is my business, because I own you - I own you because you owe every damn step in your life to me, until Charlie Guiteau did you a favor - and you're not going to prosecute Dorsey!

ARTHUR

There are other considerations at play, Roscoe.

CONKLING

(Interrupting HIM.)

You are going to dismiss the over-zealous prosecutor - that bastard Woodward - and replace him with William Chandler. He'll do a nice song and dance routine for the press and then drop the case - or at least find a few peons to prosecute who didn't pay their party dues last election. I've already had a nice long chat with Chandler and we'll have a horde of Congressmen tomorrow pushing for his appointment. You can bow to the "people's will" and acquiesce, since you're clearly too cowardly to appoint Chandler without some form of cover.

ARTHUR

I'm not going to appoint him, Roscoe.

CONKLING

What did you say?

ARTHUR

I said I'm not going to appoint Chandler - and in fact, I have today instructed Woodward to begin the prosecution.

CONKLING

You're insane.

ARTHUR

I suppose I should also tell you that I will not be removing Robertson as Collector of the Port of New York.

CONKLING

What? Over one thousand jobs!!

ARTHUR

Also, Congress is submitting the Civil Service Reform Bill to me next week and I shall be signing it as-is, without alteration.

Enraged, flabbergasted, devoid of words, CONKLING just stares at ARTHUR for a moment - and then erupts like a constipated volcano.

CONKLING

You're a damn stupid son of a bitch!

ARTHUR

(Meaning it.)
I'm sorry, Roscoe.

CONKLING

You don't know what the hell you're doing!

ARTHUR

Oh, I know, Roscoe. For the very first time in my life, I know what I'm doing.

CONKLING

(Getting in HIS face.)
Listen to me, you goddamn fool - because you may think you're in the clear now as President, with people fawning all over you and kissing your hands - but you won't be President forever, Arthur! Two more years and what the hell will become of you? I'll make damn sure you're not nominated by the party again - and then what? Then it'll be back to New York with you - but you might as well go to goddamn Arabia, because I'll make sure you're not welcome anywhere. One word from me and no one will so much as glance at you on the street.

ARTHUR

(Backing up, trying to get away from HIM.)
Stop, Roscoe.

CONKLING

(Continuing HIS advance.)
Go back to your parties and see if anyone talks to you!

ARTHUR

(Backing up.)
I said stop!

CONKLING

(Advancing on.)
Go to party headquarters and see if they even remember your name!

ARTHUR

(Almost had enough.)
Roscoe!

CONKLING

You can sit and rot in that old brownstone of yours - but even there, with Nell dead, you'll have nothing... nothing!

ARTHUR

(Exploding, with great command.)
Damn it, Roscoe, it's time for you to understand that I won't be pushed anymore! I won't be pushed around anymore - not by you, not by anyone!!

CONKLING freezes, shocked at ARTHUR's virulence. A heavy pause descends upon the stage. ARTHUR unsteadily sits at the desk - exhausted. It has taken every ounce of HIM to do what HE has had to do. ARTHUR waits a moment to recover before speaking again.

ARTHUR

(With quiet dignity.)
I appreciate all you've done for me, Roscoe. This has all been very hard for me, but it has something I have to do. I didn't expect you to understand - but I do expect you to leave. I don't want to see you again.

CONKLING

You are a stupid son of a bitch.

With that, CONKLING turns and walks out, leaving ARTHUR in silence. Overcome, ARTHUR sits for a moment in repose, visibly shaking. Slowly, HE reaches out and takes the letter from Julia Sand. He opens it and reads, as JULIA'S VOICE rises again.

JULIA'S VOICE

Well, my very bad friend - so you have let all these weeks since our first meeting and last parting go by without writing me a line. How atrocious! You are quite mistaken in supposing that I think you the gentlest mannered man that ever lived, as I may

JULIA'S VOICE (CONT)

have indicated before. I could imagine one much gentler. I wasn't expecting a sugary little note in a lace envelope from Tiffany's, citrus-scented and on strawberry-and-cream tinted paper, but I feel something would at least be appropriate to acknowledge I exist and give me hope that you have not entirely abandoned course. You said before that my letters meant a great deal to you, but it's hard to believe that when all I hear from you is the unfulfilling sound of silence.

Sighing, ARTHUR puts the letter face-down on the table - but as if JULIA won't be silenced, HER voice continues. The LIGHT slowly falls on ARTHUR as SHE continues, bathing the stage in black.

JULIA'S VOICE

Thanks to you and your bad manners, I swear that my hearing is bad again and my headaches getting worse. I warned you that you had my constitution in your hands. Of course, I'm sure the fact that I'm a woman makes you even more likely to hate me. A man will forgive a woman for telling a lie, even if it breaks his heart, but he will never forgive her for telling the truth, if it happens to wound his vanity. You know I'm right, because you are a man, after all. Therefore, I do not expect you to forgive me - but it is for the rest of your administration I wish you will do what is good for the country honestly and earnestly and not to be turned from it by any peevish considerations. I will be your friend always - even if you persist in being very offended with me!

By now, the stage is dark, save for a LIGHT on ARTHUR. MISS RICKORY appears behind HIM.

MISS RICKORY

She kept writing?

ARTHUR

And writing and writing.

MISS RICKORY

Did you ever respond to her?

ARTHUR

No.

MISS RICKORY

If I may ask... why, if it would have meant so much?

ARTHUR

If I must be truthful, I didn't want to hear from her - not anymore. After I signed the Civil Service Reform Bill and let

ARTHUR (CONT)

the Star Routes prosecution go forward, I just wanted peace and quiet - and rest... rest.

The LIGHTS fall in full on ARTHUR and MISS RICKORY. A SPOTLIGHT picks up a YOUNG WOMAN onstage, facing out at us.

YOUNG WOMAN

The New York Tribune, August 4, 1883... Today, President Arthur left Washington by train, along with several members of his cabinet, headed for Cheyenne, to begin his expedition to Yellowstone National Park.

The SPOTLIGHT dies on the YOUNG WOMAN and picks up another YOUNG WOMAN in another area of the stage.

YOUNG WOMAN

The Boston Daily Advertiser, August 6, 1883... President Arthur and his expedition, including a 75-man cavalry escort and 175 pack animals, led by Lieutenant General Philip Sheridan, left Green River, Wyoming today for Yellowstone, which the party is expected to reach in a little over two weeks.

The SPOTLIGHT dies on the YOUNG WOMAN and picks up another YOUNG WOMAN in another area of the stage.

YOUNG WOMAN

The Hartford Daily Courant, August 24, 1883... President Arthur and his entourage arrived at Yellowstone National Park yesterday, where the President extolled the beauty of the park, proclaiming the journey - quote - "better than anything I ever tried before."

The SPOTLIGHT dies on the YOUNG WOMAN and picks up another YOUNG WOMAN in another area of the stage.

YOUNG WOMAN

The Chicago Times, August 28, 1883 - President Arthur continues to make his way across Yellowstone National Park with his retinue and even caught 105 pounds of fish the other day with Senator Vest, which, by all accounts, left Mr. Arthur in a gay mood indeed.

The SPOTLIGHT dies on the YOUNG WOMAN and picks up another YOUNG WOMAN in another area of the stage.

YOUNG WOMAN

The Daily Missouri Republican, August 31, 1883 - Today, President Arthur and his expedition reached the end of their

YOUNG WOMAN (CONT)

journey across Yellowstone National Park, concluding the unprecedented 350-mile expedition.

The SPOTLIGHT dies on the YOUNG WOMAN and picks up yet another YOUNG WOMAN on another area of the stage.

YOUNG WOMAN

The Kansas City Times, September 4, 1883 - President Arthur and his remaining entourage arrived by train in Chicago, where the President will attend a 10,000-person reception in his honor. President Arthur reports that he has never felt in better health after his journey to Yellowstone.

The LIGHTS have risen again generally onstage. ARTHUR is sitting down, breathing heavily and in great pain. HIS pant legs are rolled and HIS bare legs are covered in hot towels. A YOUNG WOMAN, dressed as DR. BRODIE HERNDON, Arthur's cousin and physician, stands beside HIM. CHESTER is also present and is applying a new hot towel to one of ARTHUR's legs. ARTHUR noticeably winces when the towel touches HIS skin.

ARTHUR

So much for Yellowstone.

DR. HERNDON

You must have regular applications of hot towels until the swelling goes down, Mr. President. If you don't, it will get much worse and you may not be able to walk at all. Even at this rate, the chances that your legs will inflame again with even a modicum of standing is extremely high. You might as well reconsider those long receiving lines at the next White House reception. If you want to limit further inflammation, you must also change your diet. It's imperative that you reduce alcohol, cheese, and red meat - and without delay. Even more, you must get as much rest and relaxation as possible.

ARTHUR

Rest and relaxation are unrealistic tonics for the President of the United States.

DR. HERNDON

Naturally, I understand, Mr. President, but...

ARTHUR

Oh, for God's sake, Brodie - call me "Arthur."

DR. HERNDON

You may be my cousin, but you're also my President.

ARTHUR

Yes - as my legs must remind me.

DR. HERNDON

Anyway, Arthur - I should be going.

ARTHUR

Thank you, Brodie - I appreciate very much your staying here during the summer and looking after me. I don't know what I would have done without you. You're the only one I can trust to be discrete in this nest of spies and gossipers. I don't want any of this getting out.

DR. HERNDON exchanges an uncertain glance with CHESTER.

ARTHUR

What?

CHESTER

A reporter from the Chicago Times yesterday did report you as being in ill health.

ARTHUR

Well, make damn sure we put out a statement immediately to say that it is all nonsense and he is a liar.

CHESTER

Father, they won't believe that.

ARTHUR

Choose someone the public trusts - Secretary Lincoln, for instance - and make sure it gets out that I'm suffering from... too much sun... something!

A YOUNG WOMAN, as a SECRETARY, enters.

SECRETARY

Mr. President, a Mr. Burt is outside.

DR. HERNDON

Silas Burt?

ARTHUR

(Heartened by this.)
Please - send him in.

CHESTER

But, Father, aren't you worried about him seeing you like this?

ARTHUR

Silas is a friend - the old kind.

ARTHUR nods at DR. HERNDON and CHESTER to leave. THEY start to exit, as SILAS BURT enters.

BURT
Hello Chester - it's good to see you.

CHESTER
It's good to see you, too, Mr. Burt.

BURT
(To DR. HERNDON.)
Brodie.

DR. HERNDON
(To BURT.)
Silas.

CHESTER and DR. HERNDON exit. A pause follows, as BURT examines ARTHUR's deprecit condition.

BURT
Hello, Arthur.

ARTHUR
I didn't think I'd see you again, Silas.

BURT
Well, a lot has happened since that day we last met in your cottage in New Jersey. You became President of the United States - and I must say, you've done better than I thought. You've come a long way for a man without a plan. You've come an even longer way for a man with one.

ARTHUR
I appreciate that, even though your reform friends still don't like me.

BURT
I'm afraid most men hate to admit when they're wrong about someone.

ARTHUR
And you, Silas? Do you think you were wrong about me?

BURT
(After a beat.)
Yes, Arthur.

ARTHUR
Thank God - because, for a time, I thought you were right.

BURT

I was thinking of visiting you anyway - but I knew I had to come when I saw the report in the Times about your health.

ARTHUR

Well, as you can see, I've "never felt better" - which only proves you should never trust anything you read in the papers.

BURT

Apparently not - but either way, I wish you a speedy recovery.

ARTHUR

That would indeed be quite a wish.

(A beat.)

I'm dying, Silas.

BURT

What do you mean, Arthur?

ARTHUR

I mean I'm dying, Silas - from a kidney ailment called Bright's Disease. It's fatal and there is no cure. Every day my kidneys die a little more and a little more. I could have months to live or a year or two. I don't know how long, but it's become much worse since the beginning of the year. Sometimes I can barely eat, or stand, or sleep... or think.

BURT

How long have you known all this?

ARTHUR

Since shortly after I became President.

BURT

That long, Arthur - and you haven't told anyone?

ARTHUR

Only Chester and Brodie know.

BURT

Oh, Arthur...

ARTHUR

I don't want to be pitied, Silas - not after fighting so much. Besides, I've done what I came to do.

BURT

Well, Arthur, I'm sorry you're not going to run for President again. I would have liked to vote for you.

BURT smiles and tenderly presses
ARTHUR's hand.

BURT

I'll let you get some rest.

BURT exits, leaving ARTHUR alone with HIS thoughts. A moment later, CHESTER enters again.

CHESTER

I will help you up to bed, Father.

ARTHUR

No, no - I will stay here and rest.

CHESTER turns to exit, when...

ARTHUR

Please give me that letter from Miss Sand - the one she sent before I left for Yellowstone.

CHESTER removes the letter from HIS coat pocket and hands it to ARTHUR.

CHESTER

I thought you'd ask for it eventually.

ARTHUR

You said she hasn't written anything since.

CHESTER

No, Father - nothing.

ARTHUR nods, slowly opens the letter, and begins to read. CHESTER exits, as JULIA'S VOICE rises again.

JULIA'S VOICE

My very, very, very bad friend - who does not deserve that I should care where he goes or what becomes of him! It seems a very long time since I saw you last summer. I feel about 10 years older and have lived recently through so much care and sorrow. I thought recently that I had suffered all I could suffer - but I was mistaken. Now I believe we do not reach that point until we are dead. Sometimes, I have an idea I would like you to come and talk to me. It is absurd, I know - but I can't help it. I like the sound of your voice - even if you are such an awful old sinner. If you don't see this until you return, I would like you to tell me about your trip out west. Will you come? Of course, if you are an old bundle of worldliness and have no heart at all, you needn't - but you know best whether you are that or not. If you can remember a time when you were very unhappy and I tried to say things to comfort you and you did care for my sympathy, then do come. It is very hard for me to take hold of life again - and I am very grateful to those who help me at all to be cheerful.

ARTHUR crisply folds the letter and puts it back in the envelope. HE then closes HIS eyes in pain and sits back in the chair to rest. The LIGHTS slowly fade again, remaining on ARTHUR. MISS RICKORY enters the LIGHT beside HIM.

MISS RICKORY

Did you ever hear from her again?

ARTHUR

No, I never did end up hearing again from Julia Sand. I expected she would write me again when I vetoed the Harbor Bill and proceeded with the Star Routes prosecution, but I never received a letter. She told me before that she would keep writing until either she lost faith in me or she died. Well, I ruled out the second option soon enough. I had my secretary scour the newspapers from New York every day in search of her name on a death notice, but he never found anything that mentioned a "Julia Sand." Perhaps she was angry that she never received a note from me, despite the difficulties I explained to her. Perhaps there was something else I did that she disapproved of, as there always was something. By then, however, I didn't have any more space in my soul left to care anymore. I was using most of my energy just to keep breathing.

MISS RICKORY

If you'll forgive me, Mr. President, none of that explains why you're here.

ARTHUR

Oh, it will... soon.

A LOUD BAND strikes up across the stage and the LIGHTS rise on the back. Pictures of Grover Cleveland, Democrat Governor of New York and presidential candidate, flank the stage. A loud banner proclaims Cleveland's campaign slogan - "Public Office is a Public Trust." There is a LOUD CONVERSATIONAL HUM in the air, indicating we are at a political rally. Another YOUNG WOMAN enters as a DEMOCRATIC PARTY OFFICIAL and waves HIS hands feverishly.

DEMOCRATIC OFFICIAL

I have just received a cable from Washington!

The CROWD quiets down expectantly to a fevered hush. The DEMOCRATIC OFFICIAL removes a note from HIS pocket.

DEMOCRATIC OFFICIAL

(Reading.)

"Results for the presidential election of 1884... Senator James G. Blaine of Maine - candidate of the Republican Party - 4,856,905 votes. Governor Grover Cleveland of New York - candidate of the Democratic Party - 4,914,482 votes."

(Triumphantly, waving the note.)
Cleveland's won!

The CROWD CHEERS and HOLLERS.

ARTHUR

(To MISS RICKORY.)

It was the first time a Democrat was elected since the Civil War - another reason for the party to hate me. Cleveland even ran on a reform platform, capitalizing on the reforms I signed. The reformers in the party said we would have won had I done more. The recalcitrants said we lost because I did too much. Either way, for me the result was the same. I just wanted to go back to my home in New York City - and, after Cleveland was inaugurated, that's precisely what I did. I didn't know how much time I had left to live... I still don't.

The LIGHTS fade on the back, smothering the jubilee in darkness. ARTHUR is still in HIS chair, HIS legs covered in the hot towels. The stage is now bathed in a funeral-like silence. CHESTER enters. MISS RICKORY remains and watches off to the side.

CHESTER

How are you feeling, Father?

ARTHUR

I only wish I knew, Chester - but just when I start to feel a little better, I suddenly become much worse. I thought leaving the White House would help me rest, but all these months later, I feel even worse than I did when I left Washington. Maybe I should go to the cottage in New Jersey and breathe in the ocean air. They say Garfield drew great comfort in his last days from listening to the water rush back and forth. It would be a nice thing, I think, to fade away by the sea.

ARTHUR notices CHESTER looking glum.

ARTHUR

Is anything wrong?

CHESTER reaches into HIS pocket and hands ARTHUR a letter.

ARTHUR

Returned?

CHESTER

It's marked that there is no one named Julia Sand at that address.

MISS RICKORY

(Commenting from HER spot afar.)
So you did write her.

ARTHUR

(To MISS RICKORY.)
Eventually.

MISS RICKORY

What made you change your mind?

ARTHUR

(After a beat.)
When you are staring death in the face and see the grim reaper approaching you to shake your hand, you become conscious of all the things you never said - and, then suddenly, you have a desperate desire to say them.

ARTHUR stares a long time at the letter, contemplating HIS next move. HE stares... and stares... and stares... Then HE suddenly reaches down and determinedly throws off the hot towels around HIS legs.

CHESTER

Father!

ARTHUR

Get the carriage out.

CHESTER

What are you doing?

ARTHUR

I want to go to East 74th Street.

The LIGHTS fade further, as ARTHUR finishes tearing off the hot towels. CHESTER helps ARTHUR rise with great discomfort and hands ARTHUR a cane. ARTHUR nods HIS thanks and hobbles out into the darkness. The LIGHTS rise slightly on another area of the stage where the garden gate is situated. We are back in the Sand household. A moment later... KNOCK, KNOCK, KNOCK! A pause follows and then... KNOCK, KNOCK, KNOCK! THEODORE SAND enters from one

side of the stage. HE is dressed down, as if having just returned from work.

THEODORE

Coming!

THEODORE crosses to the other side of the stage where the garden gate is located. HE opens the gate, revealing ARTHUR in the gateway. THEODORE seems surprised to see HIM - but we sense this is as much because ARTHUR is the former President as it is because of ARTHUR's dilapidated condition.

THEODORE

Mr. President.

ARTHUR

Not anymore, Mr. Sand.

THEODORE

All the worse for the country, sir.

THEODORE gestures to ARTHUR - "please, come in." ARTHUR enters very slowly, leaning heavily on HIS cane.

ARTHUR

How is your mother?

THEODORE

Mother is dead.

ARTHUR

I'm sorry to hear that.

THEODORE

She died three years ago.

ARTHUR

She was most gracious to me when I came here before.

THEODORE

How may I help you, sir?

ARTHUR

I have come to see your sister Julia again.

THEODORE

(A bit uneasily.)
I'm sorry, Mr. President, but Julia isn't here. She hasn't been here for some months now.

ARTHUR

Oh? May I ask where she is?

THEODOR

She is not well at all these days.

ARTHUR

I'm very sorry to hear that, as well.

THEODORE

Julia is now at a hospital north of the city.

ARTHUR

I would have hoped by now she would be engaged or perhaps even married. I recall she had a gentleman suitor of whom she was very fond.

THEODORE

I'm afraid he's dead, too, Mr. President.

ARTHUR

Dead?

THEODORE

A few years ago now, Julia went with Mr. Semon - the young gentleman you mentioned - to a summer resort in Mount Desert, Maine. Unfortunately, he drowned in the ocean while taking a swim. Julia was on the shore and saw everything. She called for help, but otherwise couldn't do anything to help him.

ARTHUR

When did all this happen?

THEODORE

Actually, it was about the time you went to Yellowstone - because Julia was talking quite a lot about that and following you in the newspapers.

ARTHUR

It must have been terrible for her.

THEODORE

Julia never quite recovered from Mr. Semon's death - and later that year, when Mother also died, it was too much for her to bear... too much.

ARTHUR

If I may ask, where is this hospital you mentioned?

THEODORE

It's the Middletown State Homeopathic Hospital up in Middletown, west of Newburgh.

The LIGHTS shift again to another area of the stage and fall on ARTHUR and THEODORE. A YOUNG WOMAN briskly enters as the cheerful, brisk-paced DR. SELDON H. TALCOTT, Superintendent of Middletown State Homeopathic Hospital. ARTHUR follows HIM belatedly, hobbling on HIS cane.

DR. TALCOTT

This way, Mr. President.

ARTHUR

I appreciate your waiting for me, Dr. Talcott - as I am not as mobile as I once was.

DR. TALCOTT

(Clearly thrilled to have a celebrity at the hospital.)
Oh, no, Mr. President - it is our honor to have you here. We are very proud of the work we've done at the Middletown State Homeopathic Hospital. We take a different tactic with our treatment regimen. We don't believe our patients are prisoners here, so we give them a great deal of freedom. We engage them in various forms of occupational therapy, art exhibitions, and writing. We even have our own baseball team, which, I must tell you, does rather well in local championships. I find baseball is as good for the mind as it is for the body.

ARTHUR

You have a fine institution, Dr. Talcott.

DR. TALCOTT

Thank you, Mr. President.

ARTHUR

Where does Miss Sand reside?

DR. TALCOTT

Ah, right over there...

DR. TALCOTT gestures to the far side of the stage where the garden gate is located. HE and ARTHUR walk towards the gate, until TALCOTT stops. We see a SHADOWY FIGURE seated in the darkness just beyond. The FIGURE is staring out in the distance as stationary as a statue. DR. TALCOTT raises HIS hand and knocks on the gate - KNOCK, KNOCK!

DR. TALCOTT

(Very cheerfully - perhaps too much so.)
Good afternoon, Miss Sand! It's Dr. Talcott.

The FIGURE doesn't even flinch, as if dead to the world. DR. TALCOTT waits a moment out of common courtesy, then turns to ARTHUR.

DR. TALCOTT

We'll just go in. Sometimes, as you'll see for yourself, there's no use waiting for a response.

DR. TALCOTT opens the gate. The LIGHT rises softly on the seated figure of JULIA SAND.

DR. TALCOTT

Why, Miss Sand, you do look lovely today. I've brought a very distinguished visitor to see you.

ARTHUR has entered the LIGHT around JULIA. HE stops upon seeing HER and, broken, just stares. Far from HER appearance when last HE met HER, JULIA is dressed in a rather drag, nondescript dress, HER hair combed but not styled. SHE maintains HER crisp formality as a human statue - save for the fact that SHE fiddles incessantly with a fountain pen in one hand. There is paper on a small table in front of HER and a mountain of letters piled around HER.

ARTHUR

(To DR. TALCOTT, horrified, but trying to hide it.)
Is she... normally like this?

DR. TALCOTT

Sometimes she is - and sometimes not - all depending on the day itself. Miss Sand has been here a few months now and has settled in quite well. She spends most of her time writing - letters mainly. Of course, they're just rantings of various sorts that are not fit for human eyes. She started all this letter-writing when she was still with her brother and, as it gives her comfort and as the letters have no danger of going anywhere, we see no harm in letting her continue.

ARTHUR

Who does she write?

DR. TALCOTT

It would be easier to ask who Miss Sand doesn't write, as she writes to practically everybody. I believe you are aware of the sad situation with her young suitor. Sometimes she believes the young man never drowned at all, but has been spirited away and is in danger of being murdered. At other times, she believes the

DR. TALCOTT (CONT)

gentleman has, in fact, already been killed by some nefarious cabal of villains. Either way, Miss Sand spends her time writing to prominent politicians across the country demanding the young man's fate be investigated and the murderers - or would-be murderers - brought to justice. She's written Mayors, Senators, Governors, Congressmen.

(Suddenly thinking, almost finding it charming.)
Funny enough, she's written about fifty letters to you alone.

ARTHUR

To me?

DR. TALCOTT

After all, you were the President.

ARTHUR

How many letters has she written entirely?

DR. TALCOTT

Oh, my - it must easily be in the hundreds by now.

ARTHUR turns back to JULIA, who has started to scribble incessantly on a piece of paper - another letter. DR. TALCOTT approaches HER. HE puts HIS hand on HER pile of letters. JULIA immediately stops, reaches out, and clasps HIS hand, as if afraid HE will disturb HER letters.

DR. TALCOTT

You are running out of room, Miss Sand. I will make sure these are all mailed for you.

JULIA thinks for a moment and then nods. SHE returns to HER scribbling on the paper. DR. TALCOTT scoops up a bunch of letters and goes to ARTHUR.

DR. TALCOTT

I would recommend only a short visit, Mr. President. She does tend to tire out quickly when conversing.

DR. TALCOTT walks through the garden gate and closes it. ARTHUR is left alone with JULIA. JULIA keeps scribbling, scribbling, scribbling.

ARTHUR

Miss Sand?

JULIA suddenly stops writing and pauses... pauses... pauses... but then suddenly starts up again.

ARTHUR

Miss Sand?

JULIA stops scribbling again and slowly looks up at ARTHUR.

ARTHUR

Do you remember who I am?

JULIA looks at ARTHUR for a moment and then quickly, without a word, turns back to scribbling. Slowly, ARTHUR pulls up a chair and sits beside HER.

ARTHUR

I'm Chester Arthur - the President.

JULIA stops scribbling again and looks up and out in deep thought, but not at ARTHUR. SHE then, yet again, returns quickly to HER scribbling.

JULIA

(Almost as if SHE were talking to HERSELF.)
Oh, Arthur... he was my bad, bad friend...
(Suddenly turning to ARTHUR.)
Did you know him?

ARTHUR

(After a beat - comprehending that SHE doesn't know HIM.)
I think you knew him better than I did.

JULIA

He was a bad friend - very, very bad.

ARTHUR

It so happens I saw him the other day.

JULIA

(Scribbling, scribbling.)
Very, very bad...

ARTHUR

He remembers you very well.

JULIA

(Scribbling, scribbling.)
Very bad...

ARTHUR

He wanted you to have this.

ARTHUR has taken the letter HE wrote Julia Sand and put it on the table next to JULIA. JULIA immediately stops scribbling and looks at the letter. SHE slowly puts HER hand over the letter, as if protecting it from some harm.

JULIA

(Truly happy.)

Oh... he finally wrote me a letter...

JULIA takes the letter in HER hands and looks at it for a moment.

JULIA

(Becoming teary.)

I so very much wanted him to write me a letter.

Gently, JULIA starts to open the letter, but then stops.

JULIA

I was rather harsh with him when we met and never got to tell him how proud I was of him.

It seems JULIA has frozen in thought again. ARTHUR takes the letter and finishes opening it for HER.

ARTHUR

I'll tell him for you.

ARTHUR hands JULIA the letter. SHE looks at it for a moment in silence. We can't tell if SHE's actually reading it or not. Then slowly we hear HER start to cry. SHE lets the letter drop from HER hands.

ARTHUR

Miss Sand, are you all right?

JULIA

He's... he's dead...

ARTHUR

I'm sorry?

JULIA

He's dead... dead...

ARTHUR

(Touching HER gently, hoping to bring HER back to reality.)
Miss Sand?

JULIA

They killed him...

JULIA cries out and throws the letter from Arthur aside. SHE feverishly grabs the fountain pen again and scribbles even more madly than before on the papers. SHE continues to sob throughout, louder and louder.

JULIA

He's dead, he's dead!

Shakingly, ARTHUR rises as fast as HE is able and calls out across the stage.

ARTHUR

Doctor!

JULIA is now maddeningly, hysterically slashing the papers with HER pen.

JULIA

Dead... dead... dead!

DR. TALCOTT rushes in and immediately pivots for JULIA.

DR. TALCOTT

It's all right, Miss Sand... it's all right!

Unable to bear it anymore, ARTHUR grabs HIS cane and hobbles away, as the LIGHTS fall on DR. TALCOTT trying to calm JULIA, who keeps shouting and shouting and shouting... "He's dead! He's dead! They killed him!"... over and over and over again... ARTHUR hobbles away as fast as HE can, as the LIGHTS shift to the present day of the play. ARTHUR hobbles out and around the stage, as HE did at the very beginning. HE reaches the bench and sits again in exhaustion, taking a deep breath. The CRIES OF JULIA have now disappeared into the GENTLE WIND outside the Middletown State Homeopathic Hospital. We have left ARTHUR's mind and returned to the English garden, which we now understand is on the hospital grounds.

The SOUNDS OF NATURE return - the CHIRPING OF BIRDS, the RUSTLE OF WIND. MISS RICKORY has re-entered, along with the YOUNG WOMEN - all as THEY were at the start of the play. THEY are surrounding ARTHUR now, as HE has come to narrate the end of HIS story. We understand now that MISS RICKORY is a nurse and the YOUNG WOMEN mental patients of the hospital.

MISS RICKORY

That's why you came here - to see Julia Sand.

ARTHUR, still a bit overcome, can only nod in response.

ARTHUR

You, I presume, are a nurse here?

MISS RICKORY

Yes - and now that you mention it, I do remember seeing Miss Sand - although I didn't know her name.

(Taking HIM by the hand.)

She'll be all right here.

ARTHUR

She didn't read my letter.

MISS RICKORY

I'll make sure she reads it.

A LOUD BELL rings offstage, summoning the patients back to the hospital.

MISS RICKORY

It's time to go to supper.

(To the YOUNG WOMEN.)

Come, Girls!

ARTHUR

Thank you for talking with me, Miss Rickory.

MISS RICKORY

Thank you for talking, Mr. President.

ARTHUR slowly rises, but finds, too depleted in soul, that HE cannot. MISS RICKORY goes and helps HIM rise. SHE then hands ARTHUR HIS cane.

MISS RICKORY

I hope you have a safe journey home.

ARTHUR

Oh, the rest of my journey will be very short.

MISS RICKORY nods, understanding.

MISS RICKORY

(To the YOUNG WOMEN.)

Come, Girls - say goodbye to the President.

The YOUNG WOMEN wave at ARTHUR, who smiles and waves back. MISS RICKORY exits and the YOUNG WOMEN follow HER out. However, one YOUNG WOMAN stays behind. It is the YOUNG WOMAN who walked up to ARTHUR at the start of the play. SHE tentatively approaches ARTHUR. ARTHUR looks at HER - "Yes?" The YOUNG WOMAN reaches from behind HER back and gives ARTHUR a flower SHE picked from the garden.

ARTHUR

Thank you, Philippa.

ARTHUR takes the flower and puts it in HIS lapel. The YOUNG WOMAN smiles at HIM and exits. ARTHUR looks after HER for a moment and then looks around the garden one last time. HE slowly starts to hobble out on HIS cane. The LIGHTS rise on the back. We see a silhouette of JULIA SAND staring forlornly out into the distance. ARTHUR'S VOICE sounds from the stage.

ARTHUR'S VOICE

To Miss Julia Sand - I hope you will forgive me that it has taken me so long to write to you. I hope you understand my reasons and I want you to know that, despite everything, I am glad we met and I hope to meet you again someday. I don't know when or where that might be - in this life or the next - but meet we must, and in happier circumstances. When we met, I never truly had the opportunity to tell you how much your letters have meant to me. Thank you for writing to me. Thank you for being honest with me when no one else was honest. Thank you for believing in me when no one else believed. Thank you for being the voice I needed to give my life a purpose it never had - for I owe you not only my purpose, but my salvation. I am and always will be respectfully yours, Julia Sand.

By now, ARTHUR has hobbled out and the LIGHTS have fallen - and that is...

THE END.