

"ELEANOR ROOSEVELT"

FADE IN:

AN AMERICAN FLAG

Mounted on a cavalry horse rushing across a battlefield. Following it is a REGIMENT OF TROOPS, barely visible in the swirl of dust kicked up by their horses' hooves. We see them here and there, but only the flag really stands out.

LORENA "HICK" HICKOK (V.O.)

Dead women don't age well.

EXT. SAN JUAN HILL, PUERTO RICO (7/1/1898) - DAY

The dust clears, revealing the legendary ROUGH RIDERS storming the hill. Clinging to their McClellan saddles, the soldiers fire Krag-Jorgensen, repeating bolt-action rifles at SPANISH TROOPS backed on their heels. COL. TEDDY ROOSEVELT, 40, is conspicuous in the crossfire, with his tan slouch hat, gold-rimmed specs and powder-puff whiskers.

HICK (V.O.)

Unlike some people we know.

As our boys crest the summit, the swirl of dust engulfs the hill and the bloody clash can no longer be seen. But we hear the CHAOTIC CLAMOR of gunshots and collisions, anguish and glory, as one fateful page of history gets written on that long-ago day.

EXT. NORTH PORTICO, 1600 PENNSYLVANIA AVE., WASHINGTON D.C. (1904)- DAY

The lithe figure of an enigmatic YOUNG WOMAN hesitates on the steps of The White House. Wearing a simple Edwardian ensemble and sensible loafers, she looks up at the ionic columns and sees beyond their Siena marble to bigger things. Her face is a labyrinth of emotions: wonder and awe, intimidation and uncertainty. But these all give way to a faint hint of joy. Perhaps she already suspects she'll be fighting her own epic battle one day.

HICK (V.O.)

I mean, look what happened to Mary Magdalene.

INT. CROSS HALL, THE WHITE HOUSE - DAY

Far from receiving the red carpet treatment, the young woman walks in alone and discovers a major renovation of the building underway. TRADESMEN are hard at work pulling out the old Victorian décor and replacing it with the even older Federal style, albeit with a few Georgian accents. As she negotiates her way across a bed of drop cloths, the young woman quietly acknowledges each man that she passes.

HICK (V.O.)

That business about her being a prostitute. Jeez. Some pope made that up in the sixth century. Never happened.

An usher in English coattails, IKE HOOVER, 30, appears, and directs the young woman towards a grand staircase. Up they go. But they're not alone. The spanking new banister is already getting a workout from the President's pre-teen sons, ARCHIE and QUENTIN. A racing streak of brown varnish highlights their white sailor duds.

INT. FAMILY DINING ROOM, SECOND FLOOR

Ike deposits the young woman - who is, of course, Eleanor Roosevelt - in the doorway. Her Uncle Teddy, now the President, doesn't notice her at first as he skims through a newspaper. His old tan slouch hat hangs on a wall hook besides a portrait of himself with his regiment. His buxom wife EDITH is busy writing a letter.

HICK (V.O.)

And what about Marie Antoinette? "Let them eat cake." She never said that. What happened was her mother married her off at fourteen.

Before Ike can get the President's attention to make a formal introduction, Eleanor cuts him off: "That won't be necessary." Presently, Roosevelt spots his niece and makes a beeline over to give her a hearty, Rough Rider hug. Then Eleanor steps back and brandishes an engagement ring.

HICK (V.O.)

She was the cake.

Not particularly enthralled with the visitor, Edith collects her letter pages and curtly quits the chamber.

INT. COUSIN SUSIE PARISH'S HOME, MANHATTAN (3/17/1905)- DAY

It's St. Patrick's Day and a four-tier wedding cake bides its time on a side table. The crème de la crème of New York society packs the straight-back chairs set up in the drawing room. All eyes turn to the bride, Eleanor, and the President as they march up the aisle.

HICK (V.O.)

Then there's Eleanor Roosevelt. Her I knew very well. HELL, she was my best friend, but not in those early years.

Ted's tux, white collar and top hat look smashing. Eleanor, on the other hand, navigates uncomfortably down the aisle in a drab satin gown that looks a hundred years old. Its cumbersome train and long veil are so obtrusive, they cause her to step on the President's foot!

HICK (V.O.)

Yeah, I know what you're thinking. Trust me, there's more to this gal than the bungling do-gooder they told you about in school.

Waiting for Eleanor at the altar is an irrepressible hunk of Ivy League optimism, FRANKLIN DELANO ROOSEVELT, 24. His eyes are fixed unwaveringly on the bride as if she were Helen of Troy. In the seats, Edith is poker-faced, while her petulant daughter ALICE gawks at the spectacle as if it were the Theatre of the Absurd. Across the aisle, the groom's uppity and doting mother, SARA DELANO, isn't celebrating, either. She turns from the fruit of her womb to glower at the daughter-in-law to be: "What on earth does he see in her?"

HICK (V.O.)

Boy, she had plenty of detractors even back then.

EXT. DUPONT CIRCLE, WASHINGTON D.C. (June 2,1919)- NIGHT

Upscale brick town houses and Japanese magnolia trees bask in the balmy glow of a summer evening. Franklin and Eleanor stroll home from a dinner party. They are holding hands and Franklin is stargazing.

HICK (V.O.)

Eleanor's husband Franklin, of course, went on to become a congressman and then Assistant Secretary of the Navy under Woodrow Wilson.

FRANKLIN

Picture yourself adrift on a moonless night. Trying to find your way home. And only those stars to guide you.

ELEANOR

Don't change the subject. The Interior Department controls the funding at Saint Elizabeth's.

FRANKLIN

See the three in a row there? That's the belt of Orion, the hunter. And there's his tunic. Did you know he was banished to that spot after bragging about all the animals he'd killed?

ELEANOR

No, that's not correct. His lover Artemis shot him by mistake with his own bow and arrow.

FRANKLIN

Well, that's disturbing news.

ELEANOR

What's disturbing is how our government operates veterans' hospitals. That place is a travesty of neglect.

FRANKLIN

Maybe he's better off up there than down here.

ELEANOR

Franklin.

He knows better than to argue with her on the merits. He changes tactics instead.

FRANKLIN

You know, Artie, you shouldn't have cornered Secretary Lane at dinner like that.

ELEANOR

He's evading his responsibility.

FRANKLIN

It was a festive gathering. Not the time or place to lecture a cabinet chief on the lives of asylum inmates.

ELEANOR

It's his asylum. Someone needed to wrap it around his neck, like an albatross.

FRANKLIN

In that case, why not use my bow and arrow? Take him down like an elk.

As Eleanor steps off the curb, an automobile recklessly barrels down the street. Franklin reels her back onto the sidewalk with time to spare. The car SKIDS and turns in the intersection. A BEAT. They continue walking.

ELEANOR

And those inmates, as you call them, aren't insane. They're shell-shocked.

FRANKLIN

Whatever that is.

ELEANOR

That hospital's funding is such a pittance, they might as well be prisoners of war.

FRANKLIN

Well, of course, I sympathize with you there. Everyone's grumbling about the budget cuts.

ELEANOR

Couldn't he order some sort of investigation?

FRANKLIN

Ah, a commission of inquiry... You know, that might actually work. You do have a head for this business, my love. Unfortunately, it's not the head that interests me.

Franklin slips his arms around her and sweeps her sideways. Eleanor hangs in his arms, not resisting. She trusts him. However, from this vantage point she sees Orion and remembers she's still peeved. The clash of the Titans ends in the steamy epiphany of a kiss. They look at each other, transfixed - until a BLAST of dynamite jolts them back to the ordinary world.

FRANKLIN

What the devil was that?

EXT. ROOSEVELT RESIDENCE, "R" STREET - NIGHT

Eleanor and Franklin run towards their three-story townhouse. The first floor windows have been blown out. But Ground Zero is across the street. ATTORNEY GENERAL MITCHELL PALMER, in pajamas and slippers, stares blankly at the demolished front wall of his home.

FRANKLIN

Go check on the kids. I'll see about Palmer.

INT. ROOSEVELT RESIDENCE

In the front parlor, Eleanor finds the maid, SALLY, pacing back and forth in a state of panic. Shards of glass litter the floor by the drapes.

SALLY

It's the end of the world. It's the end of the world.

ELEANOR

(grabbing her)

Calm down. Where is everyone?

Sally points a forefinger to the heavens.

THIRD FLOOR HALLWAY

Eleanor bobs her head in and out of her children's bedrooms. From the third, she retrieves one-year-old JOHNNY and hurries to the end of the hall.

BEDROOM OVER STREET

The oldest Roosevelt son, JIMMY, 10, has heard the blast. Still half-asleep, he peers down at the street from his cracked window, perplexed.

ELEANOR

Jimmy. Did you see what happened?

(He shakes his head.)

Well, it's alright now. Go downstairs and wait in the kitchen with Sally.

Here, put on your thongs.

Jimmy complies with the directive. Cradling the baby, Eleanor takes over his vigil at the window.

ELEANOR'S POV

Franklin comforts a distraught Palmer as neighbors venture out of their homes. A SIREN shrieks in the distance.

HICK (V.O.)

It was the summer of 1919 and a bomb was delivered to the house of the Attorney General of the United States.

EXT. PALMER'S TOWNHOUSE

Palmer babbles incoherently as Franklin steadies him and pokes through the debris with a stick.

PALMER

Shattered night. Merciful god. The time will come for thee and thine to bear witness.

FRANKLIN

Boy, something sure smells like the dickens.

Franklin's stick uncovers a chunk of smoldering human arm. He sizes up Palmer's behavior, then turns to look up at the window his wife is staring down from.

EXT. SENATE HEARING ROOM, U.S. CAPITOL - DAY

The Senate Appropriation Committee hears testimony from a more composed Attorney General Palmer.

PALMER

A total of nine bomb blasts around the country, on June 2nd. Before that, thirty-six prominent men, including Mr. J.P. Morgan, targeted with letter bombs in April. It seems most of those were held up at the post office on grounds of postage due. There was one fatality, a butler, I believe.

Franklin enters the chambers. He looks around for someone he doesn't find, and takes the empty seat next to SENATOR TOM WALSH, 60. Franklin extends his hand.

FRANKLIN

Franklin Roosevelt.

WALSH

Senator Tom Walsh. Montana.

FRANKLIN

Say, have you seen Secretary Lane?

WALSH

Can't say that I have.

FRANKLIN

Hmmm... We're testifying next. So, who's winning?

Walsh shrugs his shoulders, unimpressed with the testimony.

PALMER

These Russian Bolsheviks, bankrolled by Hun money, are plotting to destroy us as surely as the moon brings in the tide. That's why I want a one half million dollar supplemental appropriation without delay. Without it, the Bureau of Investigation cannot crush this alien filth.

FRANKLIN

(confiding)

He was theeing and thouing me the night of the bombing. He's a quaker, you know. And a pacifist.

WALSH

Not anymore.

PALMER

At this time I'd like to introduce the head of our new general intelligence division, John Edgar Hoover. Mr. Hoover is a two-year veteran of my office and is tracking radicals with a new filing system he's created.

HOOVER, 27, a short man in a dapper gray suit, rises to acknowledge his introduction.

WALSH

A two-year veteran...

Franklin can't believe the choice, either.

FRANKLIN

Shell-shocked..

End Excerpt

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