

FADE IN:

AN AMERICAN FLAG

Mounted on a cavalry horse racing across a battlefield. Following it, a REGIMENT OF TROOPS is barely visible in the swirl of dust kicked up by their horses' hooves. We see flickers of 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 famous hill on their McClellan saddles. They fire their Krag-Jorgensen repeating, bolt-action rifles at the SPANISH TROOPS perched on the hilltop. Leading the attack, COL. TEDDY ROOSEVELT, 40, is conspicuous in the crossfire. He wears his signature tan slouch hat and gold-rimmed specs atop powder-puff whiskers.

HICK (V.O.)  
Unlike some people we know.

As our boys crest the summit, the swirl of dust engulfs the hill. Then the bloody clash fades from view, but for the CHAOTIC CLAMOR of gunshots and collisions. And a page of history is written in all its anguish and glory.

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

A winter's day, cold and white. On the steps of the executive mansion, snow falls gently on the lithe figure of an enigmatic YOUNG WOMAN. She's wearing a simple Edwardian ensemble and sensible loafers as she looks up at the Siena marble columns on either side of the steps. Her face is a labyrinth of emotions: wonder, awe, uncertainty... But these presently give way to a faint hint of joy.

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 by herself through the building. She knows the way, but is surprised to find a major renovation in progress. TRADESMEN are busy pulling out the old Victorian décor and replacing it with the Federal style of walls and paneling, albeit with a few Georgian accents. As she negotiates her way across a bed of drop cloths, the young woman quietly acknowledges each of the workers.

HICK (V.O.)

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

At last, an usher in English coattails, IKE HOOVER, 30, appears. He directs the young woman towards a grand staircase and up they go. But there's traffic along the way. The spanking new banister is getting a workout from the President's pre-teen sons, ARCHIE and QUENTIN. A racing streak of brown varnish highlights their white sailor duds as they slide and tumble.

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 *The Washington Times*. His old tan slouch hat hangs on a wall hook besides a portrait of himself with his regiment. Beside him, 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. That prompts another hug.

HICK (V.O.)

She was the cake.

Not terribly enthralled to see 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, who escorts her 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 stands in glaring contrast to him, navigating 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 trip and 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 named FRANKLIN DELANO ROOSEVELT, 24. With his eyes fixed unwaveringly on the bride, he calls to mind Paris staring at Helen of Troy.

In the seats, the First Lady is poker-faced, while her petulant daughter ALICE gawks at the entire spectacle as if this were the Theatre of the Absurd. Across the aisle, the groom's uppity, grim-faced 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 in this fashionable neighborhood. Franklin and Eleanor, in their thirties now, stroll home from a dinner party. He is stargazing.

HICK (V.O.)

Eleanor's husband Franklin, of course, went on to become a state senator 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 barrels down the street in their direction. Franklin reels his wife back onto the sidewalk with time to spare. The car SKIDS and turns in the intersection, heads away. The Roosevelts are mystified but shrug it off. 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 dash towards their three-story townhouse. They arrive to find the first-floor windows blown out. But Ground Zero is across the street. ATTORNEY GENERAL MITCHELL PALMER, 47, 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

Eleanor enters to find her oldest Roosevelt son, JIMMY, 10, peering down at the street from his window. He's groggy with sleep, 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.)

In the summer of 1919, a bomb was delivered to the house of the Attorney General of the United States, Mitchell Palmer.

## EXT. PALMER'S TOWNHOUSE

Palmer babbles incoherently as Franklin steadies him on his feet. With his other hand, he 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 turns to Palmer, who's still babbling. Then he looks up at the window his wife is staring down from and remembers something: "Shell-shocked."

END EXCERPT

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