

"ELEANOR'S FILE"

FADE IN:

AN AMERICAN FLAG

Mounted on a cavalry horse racing across a battlefield. A REGIMENT OF TROOPS is barely visible in the swirl of dust kicked up by their horses' hooves. We see a flicker 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 the Spanish army. COL. TEDDY ROOSEVELT, 40, is conspicuous at the head of the pack with his signature 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 envelopes the scene until we see little of the bloody clash that ensues. But we can still hear the CHAOTIC CLAMOR of gunshots and collisions, anguish and glory, as this fateful page of history is 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 with sensible shoes, she takes a moment to admire the Siena marble and ionic columns. Yet her face is a labyrinth of emotions: worry, ambivalence, uncertainty, and then out of nowhere a hint of joy. Perhaps she suspects she'll be fighting her own epic battle here 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 discovers a major renovation of the building is underway. TRADESMEN are hard at work, pulling out the old Victorian décor and replacing it with the more stately Federal style. As she negotiates her way across a bed of drop cloths, she quietly acknowledges each worker.

HICK (V.O.)

That business about her being a prostitute. Jeez. Some pope made that up six hundred years after she died.

An usher in English coattails, IKE HOOVER, 30, appears. He directs her towards a grand staircase and 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 is visible on 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, who is now President, doesn't notice her at first as he skims the newspaper. His old tan slouch hat and rifle hang on the wall. His buxom wife EDITH is busy writing a letter.

Before Ike can get the President's attention to make a formal introduction, Eleanor cuts him off: "That won't be necessary."

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, and things went downhill from there.

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.

Unimpressed with either Eleanor or her ring, 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, with green icing, 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 her escort, the President.

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, meanwhile, 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 that the bungling do-gooder they told you about in school.

Waiting at the altar is an irrepressible young hunk of Ivy League optimism, FRANKLIN DELANO ROOSEVELT. His eyes are fixed on the bride, as if she were Helen of Troy. In the seats, the First Lady looks bored, while her petulant daughter ALICE gawks at what she regards as a circus spectacle. Across the aisle, the groom's uppity mother SARA DELANO, 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, NIGHT

Upscale brick town houses and Japanese magnolia trees bask in the balmy glow of a summer evening.

HICK (V.O.)

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

Franklin and Eleanor stroll home from a dinner party.
Franklin is stargazing.

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 cabinet chiefs 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

Shell-shocked. 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... Hmmm. 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 nearby 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 still intact 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.)

Bet you never heard about this episode in Roosevelt history. 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. "Shell-shocked..."

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

The 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, 62. Franklin extends his hand.

FRANKLIN

Franklin Roosevelt.

WALSH

Senator Tom Walsh. Montana.

FRANKLIN

Say, have you seen the Secretary Lane?

WALSH

Can't say that I have.

FRANKLIN

He's supposed to meet me here. We're testifying next. So, who's winning?

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, pudgy former Library of Congress clerk rises to acknowledge his introduction in a dandyish gray suit.

FRANKLIN

A two-year veteran. That'll show 'em.

End excerpt

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