

FADE IN:

EXT. SAN JUAN (AKA KETTLE) HILL, PUERTO RICO (7/1/1898)

An American flag mounted on a cavalry horse leads the legendary ROUGH RIDERS as they advance on a regiment of SPANISH TROOPS. Leading the charge, COL. TEDDY ROOSEVELT is conspicuous in his tan slouch hat, gold-rimmed specs, powder-puff whiskers, slightly stout physique, and hallmark bravado.

LORENA "HICK" HICKOK (V.O.)
Dead women don't age well. Unlike
some people we know.

As the horses crest the summit, the dust from their hooves almost entirely obscures our view. We're left with the sound of GUNSHOTS, COLLISIONS, and HORSES YELPING to furnish the general gist of the battle.

HICK (V.O.)
I used to write for the Associated
Press, so I'm sort of an expert on
the subject.

From the dust news clippings emerge onscreen, highlighting the heroics of Teddy and his volunteer brigade.

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

A cold and inclement winter morning. Walking up the steps of the executive mansion, snow drops gently upon the lithe figure of an enigmatic ELEANOR ROOSEVELT, 20. In her simple Edwardian ensemble and sensible loafers, she stops to admire the Siena marble columns before entering the building.

HICK (V.O.)
I mean, look what happened to Mary
Magdalene. That business about her
being a prostitute... Jeez. Some pope
made that up in the seventh century.

INT. CROSS HALL, THE WHITE HOUSE - DAY

Far from receiving the red-carpet treatment, Eleanor walks alone down a corridor where renovations are in progress. TRADESMEN remove the old Victorian décor and install an updated take on the even older Federal style. As Eleanor negotiates her way across a bed of drop cloths, she quietly acknowledges each of the workers.

HICK (V.O.)

Never happened. Ask the Vatican.
They sent out a press release.
Didn't exactly make the evening
news, did it?

At last, an usher in English coattails, IKE HOOVER, 30, appears. He escorts Eleanor up the newly varnished grand staircase, which is already occupied by the President's pre-teen sons, ARCHIE and QUENTIN. The boys slide down the balustrade, which leaves a streak of dark brown highlights across their white sailor duds. Eleanor winks at them.

HICK (V.O.)

This gal here - she's another
example of revisionist history.
Only her I knew very well. Eleanor
Roosevelt wasn't the stumbling,
mumbling do-gooder you read about
in school. Although it took awhile
for her to get into her stride.

INT. FAMILY DINING ROOM, SECOND FLOOR

The old tan slouch hat and riding crop hang on the wall in the background. Eleanor's uncle, now the President, sits at a small breakfast table, reading *The Washington Times*. His austere, buxom wife EDITH scribbles out a chore list beside him.

When Eleanor and Ike step into the doorway, Edith pats Uncle Ted roughly on the arm. Roosevelt spots his niece, makes a beeline to the door and gives her a hearty hug.

TEDDY ROOSEVELT

Ellie, there you are. So, what's the good news you couldn't tell me on the phone? Is it Franklin?

(Eleanor brandishes a ring.)

Well, bully!

Roosevelt lifts her off her feet, spins her around. Less than impressed with the news, Edith quits the room.

EDITH

Congratulations, dear.

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 frosting sits on a side table. The crème de la crème of NEW YORK SOCIETY packs the straight-back chairs set up in the drawing room. A PIANIST plays Here Comes the Bride and all eyes turn to the President and Eleanor,

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While Ted's tux, white collar and top hat look smashing, Eleanor has to make the best of it in her great grandmother's drab satin gown. Behind her, Archie and Quentin struggle to hold aloft its cumbersome train.

Waiting for them, FRANKLIN DELANO ROOSEVELT, 24, stares intently at Eleanor as if she were Helen of Troy. FDR is an irrepressible hunk of Ivy League optimism awash in thick blonde hair.

Not surprising, Quentin drops his end of the train. This causes Eleanor to stumble. Behind the boys, with the other BRIDESMAIDS, their petulant sister ALICE, 20, finds the guffaw priceless.

In the front row, First Lady Edith levels a stern look at Alice. The giggling stops. Across from Edith, the groom's uppity mother, SARA DELANO isn't happy, either. She glowers at her daughter-in-law to be: "What on earth does he see in her?"

HICK (V.O.)

Boy, she had a ton of detractors even back then. Fortunately, Franklin Delano Roosevelt wasn't one of them. Believe me, this fellah knew a good woman when he saw one.

INT. CHRISTIAN HUERICH'S CASTLE, PACIFIC (DUPONT) CIRCLE
6/2/1919 - NIGHT

A reception for WILSON ADMINISTRATION OFFICIALS and THEIR WIVES percolates inside the Victorian gem that is the famous brewer's home. Eleanor, now 30, bides her time on a couch with a group of STODGY MATRONS. The ladies sample assorted candy as they whisper gossip about other guests crossing the room.

Eleanor ignores her counterparts, honing her sights on one man. Behind the couch, Secretary of the Interior FRANKLIN LANE (54, bald and stout) chats with the party host, CHRISTIAN HUERICH, 77. Huerich's red vest and bow tie starkly contrast with the conservative three-piece suits worn by the other men. This includes Lane, who guzzles beer from a ceramic stein.

HICK (V.O.)

Anyway, one night back in 1919,
something strange happened in the
District of Columbia. I mean,
stranger than usual.

At last, Huerich moves on to chat with other guests. Eleanor seizes the moment, springs over to Lane just ahead of a CONGRESSIONAL PAGE, 19, vying for the privilege.

ELEANOR

Secretary Lane. I'm Mrs.
Roosevelt. The wife of that
gentleman over there.

She points out Franklin, who's leaning against an ornate fireplace as he enjoys a frothing beer from a large Pilsner glass. An old Harvard chum, LATHROP BROWN, bends his ear.

SECRETARY LANE

Roosevelt? Oh, you mean you're
Ted's niece?

ELEANOR

Well, yes. That, too.

SECRETARY LANE

Don't be bashful, miss. I
remember Ted and his Rough Riders
charging up San Juan Hill. Epic
day in history.

ELEANOR

Yes, it was. Although our Fifth Army Corps suffered a great deal in that war. And speaking of that, I wonder if I might have a word with you about something.

SECRETARY LANE

(drinking from a beer stein:)
What's on your mind, young lady?

ELEANOR

I'm afraid it's the hospital for our veterans here in Washington.

SECRETARY LANE

(sudden, palpable consternation)
Saint Elizabeth's? You'll have to talk to the hospital administrator.

ELEANOR

Yes, I spoke with him and his staff yesterday. Evidently, their budget is woefully inadequate, and it's created a deplorable situation for the patients.

LANE

Too bad about that.

ELEANOR

Of course, as Secretary of Interior you manage their funding.

LANE

Congress controls the purse, not me.

ELEANOR

I realize that. But don't you agree, we must do what we can for these men

LANE

(stops WAITER for refill)
So, write your congressman.

ELEANOR

Do you really mean to say this depravity and neglect warrants passing the buck onto someone else? I simply can't believe that.

The waiter overshoots the stein, splashes Lane's sleeve. Eleanor grabs the towel off the waiter's arm and starts wiping Lane's sleeve.

ELEANOR

Here, let me explain exactly what I saw yesterday to give you an idea of what the staff is dealing with.

The ladies on the couch have stopped munching and now watch with rapt attention as Eleanor puts the screws to Lane.

FIREPLACE

Franklin has also gotten wind of the beatdown. As he monitors the situation, Brown rambles on.

BROWN

Pity about the President, isn't it? I heard that stroke put the period at the end of his sentence. Of course, the public knows nothing as usual. So, how's the Navy treating you?

FRANKLIN

What? Oh, you mean Secretary Daniels? I doubt the man's ever raised a sail in his life.

BROWN

And he runs the operation? Surely, he can't be that ignorant.

FRANKLIN

How would you know, Brownie? You don't work there.

BROWN

Just saying. Something bothering you, old boy?

FRANKLIN

I work for a dunce. And I'm married to a raving socialist.

BROWN

Think I'll go load up on more caviar. Want some?

Franklin waves him off, continues scrutinizing Eleanor and Lane. Lane is now wiping sweat from his neck with his hankie,. As Franklin is about to intervene, when a young woman in an alluring gown, LUCY MERCER, 28, steps smack in front of him.

LUCY

Good evening, Mr. Roosevelt.

FRANKLIN

And you are?

LUCY

I'm your wife's new social secretary.

FRANKLIN

Ah, hah. Think I heard something about that appointment. Please remind me of your name.

LUCY

Lucy. Lucy Mercer.

FRANKLIN

That's it. A pleasure, Ms. Mercer. Well. Here, let's get something to lift your spirits.

Franklin flags a SECOND WAITER, grabs two frothing Pilsner glasses off the tray. He hands one to Lucy.

LUCY

Oh, goodness, thank you. It's an honor to finally meet you. I've been nervous about this all afternoon.

FRANKLIN

Well, that was time misspent.
Rest assured, Miss Mercer, I'm as
benign as this Persian rug we're
standing on.

LUCY

That's not what I've heard.

FRANKLIN

Who've you been talking to?

LUCY

Your wife.

FRANKLIN

Eleanor? Her opinion doesn't
count.

LUCY

It is.

FRANKLIN

I suppose I should brief you on
how to manage her. Why don't we
find a quieter place to talk,
shall we?

Lucy acquiesces, and they slip out of the room. Still taking
fire in the trenches, Lane wishes someone would come to his
rescue. But no one does. The matrons are back to munching,
now thoroughly engrossed in Lane's predicament.

EXT. DUPONT CIRCLE - NIGHT

Two hours later. Upscale brick town houses and Japanese
magnolia trees bask in the balmy warmth of a summer evening.
Eleanor and Franklin stroll home from the party. Franklin's
upbeat. Also, a tad inebriated.

FRANKLIN

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

ELEANOR

The way I see it clearly, the Interior Department is responsible for that hospital and no one else.

FRANKLIN

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

ELEANOR

That's not what happened. His lover Artemis shot him with his own bow and arrow.

FRANKLIN

Well, that's disturbing news. Maybe he's better off way up there than down here.

ELEANOR

Franklin! You're not listening.

Perturbed, Franklin stops and turns his wife to face him. Intending to scold her, he bites his tongue. They walk.

FRANKLIN

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

ELEANOR

He's evading his responsibility!

FRANKLIN

It was a festive gathering. Not the time to lecture a cabinet chief on inmates in an asylum.

ELEANOR

It's not an asylum and they're not inmates. They're shell-shocked. I'd like to wrap St. Elizabeth's around that man's neck, like an albatross.

FRANKLIN

In that case, why not use my bow and arrow? Take him down like an elk. Everyone's under-budget right now. And Woodrow. You know the situation there.

They step off the curb, cross an intersection, turn down another street, walk in silence. Finally:

ELEANOR

Don't you think he could order some sort of investigation?

FRANKLIN

You mean a commission of inquiry? You know, that might work. In any case, I can't have my wife being the Edgar Allen Poe of dinner parties.

Out of nowhere, an EXPLOSION rocks the serene, tree-lined street. Both Roosevelts see smoke rising a few blocks ahead.

FRANKLIN (CONT.)

What the devil was that?

ELEANOR

Our house!

EXT. "R" STREET (CONTINUOUS)

Eleanor and Franklin race toward three-story townhouse. They find its first-floor windows all blown out. There's ebris and blood everywhere. The house across the street, however, is in far worse shape. Standing before it, ATTORNEY GENERAL MITCHELL PALMER, 47, clad in pajamas and a bathrobe. He appears lost.

ELEANOR

Franklin, look. It's the Attorney General.

FRANKLIN

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

INT. ROOSEVELTS' TOWNHOUSE

Eleanor's maid, SALLY, 55, paces back and forth across the living room. She's in shock. Shards of glass litter the floor by the drapes, along with plaster that's fallen. Even the drapes have been dislodged.

SALLY

IT'S THE END OF THE WORLD! IT'S
THE END OF THE WORLD!

ELEANOR

Sally. Calm down. Where is
everyone?

Sally points her forefinger to the heavens.

THIRD FLOOR HALLWAY

Eleanor rushes up the stairs to the landing. She bobs her head in and out four bedrooms. At the second doorway, we hear the voice of Eleanor's daughter ANNA:

ANNA AT EIGHT (O.S.)

Mother, what happened? Where's
papa?

ELEANOR (O.S.)

He's outside. Everything's
alright now. I'll be back in just
a bit.

Eleanor reappears, enters the next bedroom. Moments later she emerges with a baby in her arms, JOHNNY. Then she hurries to the end of the hall.

STREETSIDE BEDROOM

Eleanor steps in to find her oldest son, JIMMY, 10, peering down at the street from his window.

ELEANOR

Jimmy. Did you see what happened?
(He shakes his head.)
Why don't you go into Anna's room
for now? Here, put on your
slippers.

Jimmy withdraws, Eleanor takes his place at the window, rocks Johnny in her arms.

ELEANOR'S POV

Franklin stands beside Palmer as NEIGHBORS slowly venture out of their homes. A SIREN squeals in the distance.

EXT. PALMER'S TOWNHOUSE (CONTINUOUS)

Franklin steadies Palmer on his feet as the latter babbles incoherently.

PALMER

Merciful god. The time will come
for thee and thine to bear witness
to thy wrath.

FRANKLIN

Easy there, Mitchell. Help is on
the way. Are your wife and
daughter alright?

(Palmer nods.)

Boy, something sure smells like
the dickens.

Franklin grabs a stick, pokes through the rubble. He uncovers a scorched, bloody CHUNK OF FLESH beneath a rock shard. He looks at Palmer babbling, then turns instinctively to the upstairs window in his townhouse. Eleanor looks down at him.

FRANKLIN (CONT'D)

(to himself:)

"Shell-shocked."

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

A week later. MEMBERS of the House Appropriation Committee hear testimony from a more composed Attorney General Palmer. He's dressed in a pin-stripe suit with a blood-red satin hankie perfectly folded as it sticks out of his jacket pocket. Eleanor and Franklin sit together in the audience, listening.

PALMER

Nine bomb blasts around the country on June Second. Before that, thirty-six prominent men, including Mr. J.P. Morgan and John D. Rockefeller, targeted with letter bombs. It seems most of those were held up at the post office on grounds of postage due.

FRANKLIN

(confiding to Eleanor:)

They can pack a bomb in an envelope but they skimp on the stamps.

ELEANOR

Yes, it's strange.

PALMER

A butler in New York was killed that night. And a maid lost both hands when she retrieved a package off the doorstep.

As Palmer rants on, BUREAUCRATS and CONGRESSIONAL STAFF trickle into the room to hear his testimony. Franklin checks the entrance, watching for someone.

PALMER (CONT'D)

Gentlemen, these radicals, many of them Bolsheviks, are bankrolled by Hun money with the goal is to destabilize our democracy. Out of their sly and crafty leap cupidity, cruelty, insanity and crime. This is a plain fact. And like a prairie fire, the blaze of revolution they've lit on our shores is beginning to consume every American institution. That's why I'm requesting a half-million-dollar supplemental appropriation so we can collect these agitators and put them behind bars.

Franklin notices Secretary of Interior Lane walk up the center and sit at the other end of the same aisle.

FRANKLIN'S POV

Lane spots Franklin, warmly tips his hat. Then Lane spots Eleanor. He grimaces, averts his gaze.

HEARING ROOM

Franklin pouts, checks the back door again.

ELEANOR

Pay attention, Franklin. Doesn't it sound like they're planning to arrest political people?

FRANKLIN

Think I know who'll be at the top of that list. By the way, Lane said he's going ahead with the commission of inquiry.

ELEANOR

Really. Why didn't you tell me before?

Now it's Franklin's turn to scold Eleanor. He shushes her as staffers continue streaming into the room.

PALMER

At this time, I'd like to introduce the head of our new General Intelligence Division, John Edgar Hoover.

J. EDGAR HOOVER, 24, a short man in a gray tweed suit, rises sheepishly to acknowledge his curtain call.

PALMER (CONT'D)

A two-year veteran of my office, Mr. Hoover was formerly employed at the Library of Congress. He's setting up a new file system for tracking radicals.

FRANKLIN

(to Eleanor:)

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

(checks entrance again, waves
in that direction)

Ah. There's Lucy. Now off you go
to tea.

ELEANOR

Shoot. I'd rather stay here.

FRANKLIN

But there's not enough seats.
Look at all these fellows.

ELEANOR

I suppose. I'll see you tonight
then.

Eleanor collects her things, exits into the side aisle. One fellow immediately grabs the seat. Now Eleanor has to fight an upstream wave of other men to get out the chamber. As she beats against the current, Lucy beams her dreamy eyes at Franklin. And he's not bashful about responding in kind.

(end excerpt; for info, contact rregello@thecityedition.com)