

ROOSEVELT HEIGHTS

DE NUMBER: 6
WRITER NUMBER: 1

EXT. CHILDREN'S HOSPITAL - DAY

Media EVERYWHERE. Cameras FLASH. People STAND in anticipation in front of the newly renovated Children's Hospital.

We see MERVYN ROOSEVELT, stern faced 43, the political crown jewel of Los Angeles. He cuts a ribbon to dedicate the new facility. LOUD CHEERS.

LATER

Mervyn steps to the podium. Journalists jockey for position, fire questions. Finally a discernible one emerges from the pack.

JOURNALIST 1

Mr. Mayor, with the election being three days away you're slightly ahead in the polls. How does it feel knowing you'll be the next Governor of California by the end of the week?

MERVYN

If I'm elected governor it would be my honor and my pleasure to serve this great state. Hopefully I'll get that opportunity.

JOURNALIST 2

How have you managed to cut crime in half in such a short time and do you plan on adopting this strategy on a state wide level?

MERVYN

First it's been the excellent work of our law enforcement. Second we've made careers in crime less desirable by not hindering people from creating jobs. I believe if a man works he won't have to steal.

JOURNALIST 3

How does it feel to be on the other side?

MERVYN

Well asking hard questions is a lot easier than having to answer them. In hindsight I'm thankful for my prior journalistic career. It forced me to see things from different perspectives.

(MORE)

MERVYN (CONT'D)

It's an excellent skill to have
when you're mayor of LA.

(beat)

You all have a good day.

Mervyn steps away from the podium, approaches an attractive dignified woman, LYNN ROOSEVELT. They embrace then wave at the people.

INT. CHILDREN'S HOSPITAL - LATER

The cameras are all gone. Mervyn walks the halls of a pediatric ward.

He floats in and out of rooms, greeting the children. He's known on a 1st name basis.

A lone journalist follows him from a distance. He documents his acts of kindness.

INT. MERVYN'S OFFICE - NIGHT

Mervyn sits at his desk. A newspaper is placed in front of him headlined: "ON THE BRINK OF GOVERNOR ROOSEVELT. CHANGE IS COMING". His campaign team rouses with exhilaration. The team leader, LEWIS SINGLETON, approaches Mervyn.

LEWIS

Wow. Everything we've worked for is finally coming to fruition. It's been a long four years. Now we're almost to the finish line.

Mervyn observes the headline, his expression indifferent.

LEWIS (CONT'D)

Roxanne and I have reservations at Spago to celebrate. You and Lynn should join us, and don't worry about the bill. I'll foot it this time Mr. Governor.

MERVYN

We haven't won anything yet.

A KNOCK on the door. A staff member opens it. We see the lone journalist. He speaks with the staff member. The staff member then approaches Mervyn.

STAFF MEMBER

Hey Mervyn. I've been telling this guy all week how busy you are.

(MORE)

STAFF MEMBER (CONT'D)
 He continues to insist on an
 interview with you.

Mervyn looks him over.

MERVYN
 He's persistent. A must have for a
 young journalist...Sure I'll see
 him.

Lewis recognizes Mervyn's approval.

LEWIS
 (to room)
 OKAY PEOPLE. WE GOT ANOTHER
 INTERVIEW. LET'S CLEAR IT OUT.

The room empties quickly. James sits across from Mervyn.

MERVYN
 How can I help you?

LONE JOURNALIST
 James Lawrence. Southland Daily
 News.

He shows him his credential.

JAMES
 Thanks for the interview on such
 short notice.

MERVYN
 I know how it is. You got a story
 to write, you need an interview.
 Let's get started.

JAMES
 Alright.
 (organizes notes)
 Why did you decide to run for
 governor?

Mervyn ponders the question.

INT. LIVING ROOM - DAY

Mervyn sits near an elderly black woman.

ELDERLY BLACK WOMAN
 I don't know how you keep finding
 the time to come by here.

MERVYN

How are you?

ELDERLY BLACK WOMAN

I'm doing okay Mr. Mayor. How about yourself?

MERVYN

Working hard to fulfill my word to you. Become governor one day.

ELDERLY BLACK WOMAN

I'm sure you'll get there. All in His timing.

BACK TO:

INT. MERVYN'S OFFICE - NIGHT

Mervyn waits for a response.

JAMES

So this whole campaign is a result of a promise you made to some old woman somewhere?

MERVYN

Pretty much.

JAMES

That seems to good to be true.

MERVYN

Well that's not the only reason of course, but for me it was the tipping point when it came to committing to this race or not committing.

James looks at him, searching for more.

JAMES

With all due respect Mr. Roosevelt all men thrive on ambition, personal drive, even the good guys like yourself.

MERVYN

(stern)

Like I said, that's why I entered the race.

James hesitantly moves on.

JAMES
How's your family?

MERVYN
They're well.

JAMES
Your wife Mrs. Roosevelt?

MERVYN
She's doing okay.

JAMES
Was it always in her plans to be a
governor's wife?

INT. HOTEL ROOM - DAY

Mervyn and Lynn enter. Mervyn wearied by the day, loosens his tie.

MERVYN
What do you think?

Lynn sits in front of a beauty mirror, takes off her jewelry.

LYNN
You nailed it. I would definitely
put that speech in the top ten.

MERVYN
(smiles)
I think that's being a bit too
generous?

She stops what she's doing, looks at him through the mirror.

LYNN
Not at all. The people...they
really like you.

Mervyn settles near a window, looks upon falling autumn leaves.

MERVYN
I think I want to run.

No response. Moments pass.

MERVYN (CONT'D)
Honey did you hear what I said?

LYNN
I like this Mervyn.

He faces her.

MERVYN
I like this too.

LYNN
Then why aren't you satisfied!
Isn't this enough?

MERVYN
You know it's not about that.

She releases a frustrated sigh.

LYNN
Have you thought about what this
could mean for us? We've built a
good life together. Why do you want
to put everything in jeopardy? Sure
they'll let you run a city, but
running a state!

MERVYN
I know Lynn-

LYNN
Do you really? Those people will
leave no rock unturned until they
find what they need to discredit
you- TO DISCREDIT US! It's not
worth it.

Mervyn goes over to her, grabs hold of her hand.

MERVYN
I think it could be.

BACK TO:

INT. MERVYN'S OFFICE - NIGHT

JAMES
That doesn't surprise me. Deciding
to run for any office places a
heavy load on even the strongest
marriages.

MERVYN
We all understand what we've signed
up for.

(MORE)

MERVYN (CONT'D)

When you run for office it's not just you running. It's your family, it's your past, your present, and getting people to believe in the promise of your future.

JAMES

You wonder why anybody would want to do it.

MERVYN

Yeah.

James' posture changes, less friendly, more business.

JAMES

So Mervyn. Do you think you're a good man?

MERVYN

I don't know. I'd say I'm a changed man.

JAMES

Ever since you found religion right?

Recognizing a change in the tone of conversation Mervyn doesn't respond.

JAMES (CONT'D)

I apologize Mr. Roosevelt. I know your faith is very important to you.

Mervyn relaxes.

MERVYN

Not a problem.

JAMES

During your term as mayor you've implemented drastic changes to countless policies. Things that seemed unchangeable. What would you say is the main principle you use to guide your decision making when something difficult comes across your desk?

MERVYN

I strive to do what's best for the people.

James stares, as if looking for deceit within him.

JAMES

Was that your philosophy when you were covering Thomas Hilliard? You remember him don't you?

Mervyn's look changes to one of concern.

MERVYN

Excuse me?

JAMES

You used to work for the Westlake Chronicles I believe. It was about twenty years ago. You were doing a story on Mr. Hilliard.

Mervyn gives him a burning stare.

INT. WESTLAKE CHRONICLES OFFICE - NIGHT

A young Mervyn sits in a dark cubicle, focused, typing feverishly.

LATER

He approaches his superior. Drops a file on his desk.

WESTLAKE CHRONICLES EDITOR

This the Hilliard story?

Mervyn nods.

He picks it up, scans through.

WESTLAKE CHRONICLES EDITOR (CONT'D)

You know this guy's case is being reviewed by the governor? This may be too controversial for our taste.

MERVYN

Yeah, but controversy sells right?

The editor thinks for a moment.

WESTLAKE CHRONICLES EDITOR

Okay we'll print it...Great work Roosevelt. You're gonna make a name for yourself with this one.

BACK TO:

INT. MERVYN'S OFFICE - NIGHT

Mervyn looks up at James.

MERVYN

What did you come here for?

JAMES

It's strange how a person like you Mervyn- the spitting image of integrity- a man of the people, could do something like that. Your story portrayed Thomas in such a brutal way. The governor could never consider a pardon after that. The public would've been outraged. But I guess that's what you got to do to get ahead sometimes. Bend the truth. Occasionally leave out some key facts. That's how innocent men appear to be guilty. But whatever sells right?

Mervyn has no words.

JAMES (CONT'D)

You could've saved him Mervyn. Why didn't you huh? You know what happened to him right?

MERVYN

YES...I KNOW!

Mervyn regains his composure.

JAMES

Poor guy. I heard he had such a horrible time in there that he was counting down the days to his execution.

Mervyn sits in long silence.

JAMES (CONT'D)

Let's make this simple. Call a press conference. Let them know you're pulling out of the race. When I turn on my TV and see your announcement I'll catch a healthy case of amnesia. No one will ever know about this and my guy wins.

Mervyn stares straight down at his desk.

INT. LIVING ROOM - DAY

Mervyn sits near an elderly black woman. It's Ms. Hilliard, Thomas Hilliard's mother.

Mervyn struggles to speak.

MERVYN

I'm so sorry Ms. Hilliard. I- I
know I can't bring Thomas back, but-

He hesitates to finish.

She gently takes his hand, gives him a gaze of assurance.

MERVYN (CONT'D)

When that time comes, when I become
governor, I promise I'll work
tirelessly to help ensure that no
innocent man is ever put to death
in California again. That will be
my memorial to him.

She receives his words. Tears stream down her face.

BACK TO:

INT. MERVYN'S OFFICE - NIGHT

Mervyn forces himself to face James.

MERVYN

I can't do it.

JAMES

What?

MERVYN

I can't pull out.

James puzzled.

JAMES

I strongly encourage you to
reconsider. If I go public with
this your career is over. Accept my
proposal and you go out on top,
free from scandal, remembered for
all your good deeds, remembered as
the saviour of Los Angeles who
valued his family over his career.

(MORE)

JAMES (CONT'D)

That's why you're pulling out,
because you love your family. The
people will eat it up.

Mervyn sits more upright, a stronger resolve.

MERVYN

Good idea. I'll keep that in mind.

JAMES

I see.

James gets up, readies to leave.

JAMES (CONT'D)

One last question for you Mr.
Roosevelt. What are you going to
say to the people who revere you as
the golden standard when your past
finally comes to surface?

He points to framed scripture on the wall.

James goes over, reads it. It's 2 Corinthians 5:17,
"Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has
come. The old has gone, the new is here!"

JAMES (CONT'D)

Huh.

(beat)

If you're foolish enough to go
through with this good luck to you
on election day.

He leaves.

Mervyn still seated, rotates his chair toward his window.

Through it he beholds the city, stares listlessly at the
lights.

INT. MAYOR'S PRESS CONFERENCE ROOM - DAY

Media waits patiently for Mervyn's arrival.

The doors open. Mervyn and Lynn enter hand in hand.

Mervyn's staff and campaign team look on nervously.

Mervyn and Lynn make their way to the podium. Cameras flash
rapidly. Lynn sits close by, Mervyn at the forefront,
prepares himself to speak.

As if time grew fatigued, he reaches to adjust the microphone. Stage lights shine down, cascade over him.

Silent uncertainty until---

MERVYN

(clears throat)

I uh-I want to thank everyone who is here today. I appreciate everyone coming out on such short notice. Thank you.

He stops. The media begins to murmur amongst themselves. Cameras flash again and again.

He looks back toward Lynn. Her head is bowed. She finally looks up. Seeing him she nods him forward.

He finds strength.

MERVYN (CONT'D)

I appreciate the great opportunity afforded me to run for governor of this great state. Unfortunately I fear that an event in my past could possibly instill doubt in the minds of many voters concerning my character. I figure that the story of my past coming from me would be better than coming from some outside party out to defame my campaign. Consequently I'm coming clean today.

The media now in a near quandary.

MERVYN (CONT'D)

I understand that what happened back in 1991 is in my past, but not a day goes by that I'm able escape thoughts about what transpired. The reason I've been able to move forward is that I've learned how to constantly remind myself- I'm a different man from back then, a new man. So in so few a words here's my testimony---

FADE OUT.