

A NATURAL MAN

written by

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EXT. BRIDGE - DAWN

The towering forest, the deep ravine, the rising sun. The only thing left is to scrawl "WELCOME TO COLORADO" across the horizon in some blocky font for the perfect postcard.

The scene and silence are broken by a sporty BMW driving along the paved road. It pulls over just before a bridge and stops on the shoulder.

ROOSEVELT, late 30s, exits the car. He walks onto the bridge that spans the ravine, stops a third of the way across and leans over the railing. He wears the start-up founder uniform: dark-wash jeans, button-down shirt with no tie, blazer. He's clean shaven.

There's no smile on his face, nor is there alcohol on his breath. He is stoic and stable. He pulls out his smart phone, opens a voice recording app, and presses record. He slips the phone into his jacket breast pocket.

After a few moments he climbs over the railing. He turns, facing outward, still holding onto the railing behind him.

His breath quickens.

ROOSEVELT

When someone decides to jump, they don't - they don't do it for the trip down. They don't want gravity to grab and pull them. They - they do it for the impossible chance that they'll let go ... and not fall. That maybe there will be a moment when gravity - or time or space - will stop. Will pause. And in that moment, instead of an unavoidable drop, they'll just go out. And up. And up. And just keep going. There will be no pinnacle. No crest. But there will be no fall. They will break those unbreakable laws, they will let go of everything holding them down. And they'll live in that moment - that small, fragile inch -

He leans forward, still holding on. His foot slips.

CUT TO BLACK.

EXT. HAMMOND HOME - NIGHT

Roosevelt drives through winding country backroads until he arrives at a property with "HAMMOND" painted on the mailbox. The postcard-worthy views continue with a sprawling farm, complete with red barn and towering grain silos. While full of character and history, these farming structures are blurring the line between "rustic" and "decrepit".

Roosevelt parks his car and gets out. He's dressed in tattered jeans and a t-shirt. Has a few days of scruff on his face. He pops the trunk and pulls out a large duffel bag. He's not just here for a visit.

He walks up to the front door, takes a breath, and lets himself in.

INT. HAMMOND HOME - CONTINUOUS

The home is a museum to the late 70s, complete with avocado-colored appliances and laminate flooring and wallpaper - but just the strip of wallpaper that runs all the way around the room horizontally, two-thirds of the way down the wall.

ROOSEVELT
(yelling into the ether)
I'm home.

Roosevelt's mother, JANE, is contagiously cheerful. She has spent her life as a homemaker, and has loved nearly every minute of it. She perpetually has a pie that just came out of the oven - and will, of course, insist you have a piece.

JANE
Rose?! Rosie?!

She scurries into Roosevelt's arms. She peppers him with questions only half-concerned with their answers.

JANE (CONT'D)
What a perfect surprise! Did you drive all day? Why didn't you tell us you were coming? We just finished dinner but I've got a pie just about to come out of the oven. Have you eaten?

ROOSEVELT
I wasn't sure whether I was going to have to stretch the drive into another day. By the time I realized I wouldn't have to, I figured I'd surprise you.

LEONARD, tall, skinny, glasses, wearing a knit cardigan ambles into the room - a folded magazine in hand which he continues to read.

LEONARD
(not looking up)
Roosevelt, you did it all in one day? What is that drive, 20 hours?

Leonard finally looks at Roosevelt, gives him a smile and a nod.

ROOSEVELT
About 22 from San Francisco, but I spent last night in Salt Lake. Did it in two days. I wasn't sure if I was going to have to stretch it into three.

LEONARD
Well yeah, two days should be plenty of time.

Roosevelt has no response. Jane breaks the silence before it gets awkward.

JANE
Come sit down, I'll get you something to eat. Did you hear that dad died?

Jane tries to muffle her laughter.

ROOSEVELT
(to Leonard)
You've died? How did that happen?

LEONARD
(rolling his eyes)
I'm not sure where the rumor started.

ROOSEVELT
It's already escalated to "rumor" status, not just one person's misunderstanding?

Jane finally stops trying to constrain her laughter and lets out a cackle.

JANE

You know your father. The window of opportunity to correct people has passed, so it's easier to just play along.

LEONARD

I'm not "playing along". Everyone will figure it out on Sunday at church.

ROOSEVELT

Will your sermon be on the resurrection?

Jane and Roosevelt have a short laugh. Then there's another short silence, this one broken by Leonard.

LEONARD

I sold the farm.

ROOSEVELT

No, dad. You bought the farm.

LEONARD

Bought what farm?

ROOSEVELT

The proverbial farm. When someone dies they "bought the farm."

LEONARD

Not the proverbial farm. The literal farm.

ROOSEVELT

You sold this farm?

Leonard looks at Jane, not quite scolding.

LEONARD

You didn't tell him?

Jane pushes herself away from the table and waves her hands, excusing herself.

JANE

I can't remember who I've told what to.

LEONARD

Well, Stella - you know Stella -

ROOSEVELT
The Stella I went to kindergarten
through high school with?

LEONARD
Yes.

ROOSEVELT
Yes, I know Stella.

LEONARD
Well, she approached me a few
months ago about buying our
property.

ROOSEVELT
So not just the farm.

LEONARD
The farm, the house, the church.
All of it.

Roosevelt is having a hard time taking it all in. It's not
that there's too much sentiment tied up in the house, it's
that no one bothered telling him.

ROOSEVELT
I don't know what to say. Is it a
done deal?

LEONARD
Well, she and I shook on it last
night.

ROOSEVELT
But nothing is signed yet.

LEONARD
No, but we shook on it.

Jane peeks her head back into the conversation and sits back
down.

JANE
They shook on it.

ROOSEVELT
Well, could I also shake on it?

LEONARD
What do you mean?

ROOSEVELT

I'm just surprised you didn't come to me. Don't you want to keep it in the family?

LEONARD

How? You finally turn a profit with your money digging business?

ROOSEVELT

We weren't money digging. We were currency mining.

LEONARD

The difference is?

Jane sees where this is going and cuts them off.

JANE

Uh - you were?

ROOSEVELT

I were what?

JANE

You said you WERE money dig... er ... currency mining.

ROOSEVELT

Yes. I also sold the farm, as it were. Which is the real reason I'm here. I'm moving back.

LEONARD

You sold your company?

Roosevelt turns to Jane, surprised.

ROOSEVELT

You didn't tell him?

Jane pushes herself away from the table and waves her hands, excusing herself.

JANE

I can't remember who I've told what to. And you said you were thinking about selling. Not that it was all done and finished.

ROOSEVELT

Well, it's not quite all done and finished.

(MORE)

ROOSEVELT (CONT'D)

I'm meeting with the buyer first thing tomorrow morning to hear their valuation and offer. I should make a good chunk of change when we sell, and I might as well reinvest it here.

Mom is so proud of her little boy.

JANE

Oh, you're such a fancy business man now. Look at you. Why don't you two boys call it a night. I'll make waffles in the morning and then we can catch up then.

ROOSEVELT

Does that sound alright to you, dad?

LEONARD

I'm fine with waffles.

ROOSEVELT

I mean me potentially buying this place.

LEONARD

It seems like a different path than the one you're on.

ROOSEVELT

I think I could use something a little different.

INT. NEWSROOM - DAY

DANIELLE (DANNY) MCCORMICK paces back and forth down a hallway, psyching herself up. Her brow is furrowed. She's determined. She wears jeans and a flannel shirt with the sleeves rolled up. She carries a well-worn notebook and a mechanical pencil. A pen is also clipped to the front placket of her shirt.

She pauses, rounds the corner and approaches BREWSTER, her editor. He's gray at the temples and has a short goatee. The bags under his eyes come standard with the number of years he's sat behind that editor desk. Even though he's wearing more formal clothes than Danny - slacks and an oxford, dress shoes - she looks more professional. He's also doing sudoku.

DANNY

What're you doing?

BREWSTER
Trying to avoid alzheimer's.

DANNY
Is there really any evidence of
that?

BREWSTER
That I have alzheimer's?

DANNY
That those puzzles help.

BREWSTER
Would you rather I say "Distracting
myself from my slow and inevitable
march toward death"?

He puts down the puzzle.

BREWSTER (CONT'D)
What do you need?

DANNY
I'm going crazy.

BREWSTER
Try sudoku.

DANNY
I'm serious.

BREWSTER
So am I. Danny, you've been here
what, 18 months? You haven't earned
the right to be crazy yet. Doug -
Doug's been here since 1972. HE'S
fucking crazy.

DANNY
If I have to cover one more stupid
county commissioner meeting, one
more "will anyone second the
motion," one more "any opposed",
I'm going to throw myself out a
window.

Brewster turns back to his puzzle.

BREWSTER
Go ahead. It's why we lease a one-
story building.

DANNY

You've gotta give me something else.

He puts the puzzle back down.

BREWSTER

Listen, you're a good reporter. You're getting your 1A stories - most of them you deserved. But you have to put in your time. I can't take someone else off -

DANNY

(interrupting)

I don't need a whole different beat. I just need something a little different. I really think the county flack has blocked my email address.

BREWSTER

So you're doing something right.

DANNY

Just ... please. Anything.

Brewster slowly swivels in his chair and turns to his embarrassingly outdated computer (which also come standard with every newsroom).

BREWSTER

Well, let's see, I have another email from Anne Crickley about another pet adoption push at her no-kill shelter. And Billy - I know you know Billy - he left another voicemail about, I'm sure, another conspiracy by the police to kill us all. Either of those sound good to you?

DANNY

(sighs)

So, county commissioner meetings.

BREWSTER

(feigning excitement)

You mean COUNTY COMMISSIONER MEETINGS! The annual budget should be coming up soon. There's always one or two good - well, decent - stories there.

(MORE)

BREWSTER (CONT'D)

See if they're spending too much money on whistles or something.

EXT. REGIONAL AIRPORT - DAY

Roosevelt and HARVEY stand outside at a small airport on the tarmac - both looking out toward the runway that runs perpendicular. They both wear the start-up founder uniform: dark-wash jeans, button-down shirt with no tie, blazer, sunglasses. Roosevelt is in dress shoes. Harvey in chucks.

HARVEY

What're you going to do with your half?

These two have been friends their whole lives. It's hard to know where the sincerity ends and the sarcasm begins.

ROOSEVELT

You mean my 51 percent?

HARVEY

You always have to bring that up?

ROOSEVELT

Well, I'm clearly more important than you.

HARVEY

Yet only manage to get half as much done.

ROOSEVELT

I'm actually thinking about buying my parent's place. It's like Mark Twain said, "Buy land. They're not making it anymore."

HARVEY

Did he really say that?

ROOSEVELT

Doesn't matter. Anything he ever said you should treat as scripture.

HARVEY

Even the stuff he didn't actually say?

ROOSEVELT

Especially what he didn't actually say. What're you doing with your half, Harvey?

HARVEY

Retire. Spend the rest of my days snorting cocaine off high-class hookers.

ROOSEVELT

I think you're being overly optimistic.

HARVEY

About the valuation?

ROOSEVELT

About the hookers. Do you really want to sexually frustrate women the rest of your life?

HARVEY

I'm hoping the money eases the frustration.

ROOSEVELT

For them?

HARVEY

For me.

ROOSEVELT

Seriously, though.

HARVEY

Politics, maybe? Locally, first. You just can't get into the game until you have money or are retired.

ROOSEVELT

Well, as a politician, you'll have plenty of access to cocaine and hookers.

A light aircraft flies by and lines up for its landing.

HARVEY

There she is.

The plane is flown by JOANNE, 62. She's rich, cultured, educated, powerful, adventurous, not gaudy. Think Helen Mirren, not real house wives. The plane lands and taxis, coming to a stop near the two men. Joanne leaves the cockpit, grabs a briefcase/bag and throws it over her shoulder, opens the airstairs and exits the plane.

JOANNE

Gentlemen! Gentlemen! Good to see you both.

Roosevelt and Harvey meet her halfway. They shake hands.

JOANNE (CONT'D)

I'm glad this little meeting worked out.

HARVEY

We're glad you happened to be flying through.

JOANNE

Yes, I'm meeting my wife in Jackson Hole. Finally enjoying a little vacation. So this was not out of my way at all.

ROOSEVELT

Perk of owning your own plane.

JOANNE

And having a pilot's license. Anyway, the reason I'm here today...

She pulls some papers out of her bag.

JOANNE (CONT'D)

My team has come back with this valuation of your company, and they've written up this initial proposal for your review.

Both the men begin thumbing through the pages.

ROOSEVELT

Can you give us a moment?

Joanne agrees and takes a step backward. The men turn and slowly walk away, reading as they go.

JOANNE

(calling out to them)

The short version, I'm offering you about 450 thousand, well, 448 thousand dollars ...

Roosevelt's brow furrows as he reads.

ROOSEVELT
 (to himself)
 One dollar?!

JOANNE
 I'm sorry?

ROOSEVELT
 (turning, feigning
 cheerfulness)
 Just a moment!
 (reading outloud, quickly
 to himself)
 Liabilities are assessed at 448,632
 dollars and 39 cents. The buyer
 agrees to pay 448,633 dollars and
 39 cents.
 (to Harvey)
 So it's a dollar. Not 448 thousand
 whatever dollars. We're going to
 get a check for one dollar.

HARVEY
 Well, she's a billionaire. She's
 probably not going to write us a
 check for a dollar.

ROOSEVELT
 When we started this company, we
 didn't sit on our balcony in our
 shitty San Francisco apartment,
 drinking shitty beer, hoping one
 day we'd sell it for a dollar.

HARVEY
 (not listening to Rose)
 I mean, we're talking about literal
 pocket change here.

ROOSEVELT
 (not listening to Harvey)
 We didn't leave home and put
 everything on red just to get back
 one dollar.

HARVEY
 (still to himself)
 She IS a billionaire though. She
 probably doesn't have pocket
 change. Maybe she WILL write us a
 check.

ROOSEVELT
(still to himself)
We were going to make a difference.
Do something that actually mattered
to people.

HARVEY
Wire transfer, maybe?

Roosevelt pauses. Looks at Harvey incredulously.

HARVEY (CONT'D)
(redirecting his
attention)
You can't think about it like that.
She's taking on all the debt. She's
taking on all the liability. We've
built a 448 thousand dollar company
in three years. That's not nothing.

ROOSEVELT
That IS nothing. We need it to be
more than nothing. I need more than
nothing.

HARVEY
It's enough for low-grade cocaine
off low-class hookers.

The men turn and approach Joanne.

ROOSEVELT
I - we need more than a dollar for
the company.

Harvey is embarrassed. Roosevelt is trying to be bold,
refusing to understand who he's up against. Joanne is a bit
annoyed, but keeps her composure.

JOANNE
Rose, I'm sorry. Your EBITDA speaks
for itself.

ROOSEVELT
I know, but there has to be
something. We have put a lot into
this company and I still feel
strongly it's worth more than
you're offering.

JOANNE

(sternly)

Now, young man, I know you're not trying to come across as insulting, but I don't usually even bother doing these things in person. That's what I have lawyers. That's why I have people. And while your "strong feelings" are not what I'm about to base the value of this company on - I've liked you. Both of you. You both seem to have good heads on your respective shoulders. So - let's keep this professional.

Roosevelt realizes his misplaced boldness.

ROOSEVELT

We're just going to have to think about it.

JOANNE

I don't need you to agree to it now. But I do need you to agree to it soon. And I do need you both to sign this to acknowledge you received the offer.

Joanne pulls another folder out of her bag, holding out a piece of paper of them to sign. The men do.

She looks at the page as she returns it to her bag.

JOANNE (CONT'D)

I should have realized "Rose" was short for something. Roosevelt. Family name?

ROOSEVELT

Not quite. My grandmother - my mother's mother - was a young woman during the depression - and she was quite politically active. Very supportive of FDR, the new deal, all that. Roosevelt was always a legend for my mom.

JOANNE

How lovely. What a wonderful heritage. He truly was an American great.

(beat)

I'll tell you what.

(MORE)

JOANNE (CONT'D)

Both of you - as I've said, I'm impressed with your company and with your drive. And Rose, Roosevelt, I know you said you wanted more, so I will give you something - regardless of whether you accept this deal.

She reaches into her bag and pulls out two business cards - handing them to Harvey and Roosevelt.

JOANNE (CONT'D)

These have my personal cell phone number on them. You are welcome to - very occasionally - contact me with whatever business venture you undertake next. And maybe we can continue to work together. Maybe this can be au revoir instead of adieu.

INT. STELLA'S OFFICE - LATER

Roosevelt and STELLA are already mid-conversation. Stella wears professional attire. Blazer. Pencil skirt. She sits back in her chair. In her mind, this is a chat with an old friend, not a business meeting.

STELLA

I don't really like how you've swooped in here in the eleventh hour.

ROOSEVELT

I just found out last night.

Stella laughs.

STELLA

Just found out? That your family has communication issues? I've known that for years.

ROOSEVELT

My own family disfunction aside, there have also been some developments in the past 48 hours.

STELLA

What kind of developments? You finally started to have a normal human relationship with your dad?

ROOSEVELT

I'm sure that will never happen.

(beat)

Look, I haven't told a lot of people this, but I sold my company. I have a big chunk of change burning a hole in my pocket. I had enough of the big city, so I've moved back home and I'm hoping we can turn this little podunk town into something.

Stella takes a moment to consider this new information.

STELLA

How much did you sell it for?

ROOSEVELT

I can't say.

STELLA

Turn it into something? What kind of something?

ROOSEVELT

I don't know that yet. But I'll be better able to do something about it with your help.

Stella is perfectly aware Roosevelt is intentionally trying to seem meek and accommodating, which she welcomes.

STELLA

You and I have been stuck in this shit town forever, and it hasn't gotten any less shitty since we were kids. And anyone who manages to escape, always seems to make their way back.

ROOSEVELT

(sarcastically)

I can't help but feel like that I was directed somewhat toward me.

STELLA

You are just one in a long string of rejects.

ROOSEVELT

Listen, you don't want the house. You don't want the church. And I don't want the land. We would be partners. Fifty-fifty.

(MORE)

ROOSEVELT (CONT'D)

And I'm going to be easy to convince when it comes to however you want to develop that land - because I don't care what you do with it.

STELLA

Easier than if I had no one else I had to convince?

ROOSEVELT

My family has a history here - even longer than your family. We know people. We have old friends.

Stella is visibly uncomfortable with the implication of what Roosevelt is suggesting.

ROOSEVELT (CONT'D)

Nothing black hat. Nothing underhanded. Just to help grease the skids. I'm going to be able to get us - get you - the meetings you need to have to turn that land into a bowling alley or a strip mall ... or a strip club for all I care.

Stella chuckles.

ROOSEVELT (CONT'D)

What DO you want to build there?

STELLA

I hadn't really given it much thought.

ROOSEVELT

Bullshit. What do you want to build?

Stella narrows her eyes, debating whether to divulge.

ROOSEVELT (CONT'D)

You want me to sign an NDA?

STELLA

An indoor beach.

ROOSEVELT

Huh?

STELLA

Surfing. Waves. Boardwalk. Volleyball. All of it.

(MORE)

STELLA (CONT'D)

We've got mountains and hiking and skiing all around us. And it's beautiful. But the closet ocean is 1000 miles away. Let's bring it here. These land-locked beach resorts already exist elsewhere, and they are profitable.

Roosevelt stands up.

ROOSEVELT

Then let's get to work on getting you some ocean-front property.

Roosevelt reaches out his hand. Stella pauses. Then they shake on it.

INT. COUNTY COMMISSIONER MEETING HALL - LATER

Danny sits in the back row of a sparsely filled county building. Three COUNTY COMMISSIONERS, including LARRY GIBBONS, sit at the front of the room. All three are older, white men. COMMISSIONER GIBBONS is a barrel-chested, broad-shouldered, suspended man with a bald head and a gravelly voice.

COUNTY COMMISSIONER #1

We will now open the floor to public comment for next year's budget.

An old woman, MRS. HAYES, with a manilla folder filled with visual aids approaches the podium and microphone.

MRS. HAYES

Gentlemen, there is a pothole on my road that needs to be taken care of
...

Mrs. Hayes continues to drone on in the background while Danny thumbs through a print out of the county budget. She goes page by page, seeing boring, mundane line item after boring, mundane line item. She sighs. Closes the packet.

Then stares blankly ahead.

MRS. HAYES (CONT'D)

As you can see from these photographs, there is no reason the county should not be able to address this problem in the coming budget year. Thank you.

Mrs. Hayes takes her seat.

COUNTY COMMISSIONER #2
Thank you, Mrs. Hayes.

COMMISSIONER GIBBONS
As a point of order, I'd like to
move we amend the budget to include
C.B. 623 as it currently reads.

COUNTY COMMISSIONER #1
We have a motion. Will anyone
second the motion?

COUNTY COMMISSIONER #2
I second the motion.

COUNTY COMMISSIONER #1
We will now vote on adopting C.B.
623 and amending it to the annual
county budget. All in favor, say
'aye'.

COUNTY COMMISSIONERS
(all three in unison)
Aye

COUNTY COMMISSIONER #1
Any opposed?

Silence. Danny thumbs through her packet, looking for a copy
of the mentioned amendment.

COUNTY COMMISSIONER #1 (CONT'D)
The amendment passes as it
currently reads. I move to vote on
passing the proposed annual county
budget. Will anyone second the
motion?

COMMISSIONER GIBBONS
I second the motion.

Danny continues to look through her papers, finding nothing.

COUNTY COMMISSIONER #1
We will now vote on adopting the
annual budget for Grace County,
Colorado. All in favor, say 'aye'.

COUNTY COMMISSIONERS
(all three in unison)
Aye

COUNTY COMMISSIONER #1
Any opposed?

Silence.

COUNTY COMMISSIONER #1 (CONT'D)
The annual budget for Grace County
hereby passes with unanimous vote.
If there is no further business, we
will adjourn until next month.

Silence.

COUNTY COMMISSIONER #1 (CONT'D)
This meeting is hereby adjourned.

The county commissioners get up from their seats. Danny
rushes up and approaches Commissioner Gibbons.

DANNY
Hi, Commissioner Gibbons, there's
no copy of amendment C.B. 623 in my
budget packet.

Gibbons is more annoyed by Danny than anything else. He has a
general distrust of journalist, but he especially can't be
bothered by someone as green and young as Danny.

COMMISSIONER GIBBONS
Right, because it's an amendment.
The printout you have is the
proposed budget as of this morning.
We've since amended it.
(more playful teasing than
scolding/condescending)
Were you not paying attention?

DANNY
Where can I get a copy of the
amendment?

COMMISSIONER GIBBONS
When we publish the final budget,
after it gets approved by the
state.

DANNY
When will that be?

COMMISSIONER GIBBONS
Typically two or three weeks.

DANNY

Well, don't you think we want to inform the county residents of what's in the budget?

COMMISSIONER GIBBONS

I am not at all concerned about what "we" think.

Danny scribbles notes in her notepad.

COMMISSIONER GIBBONS (CONT'D)

Is this on the record?

DANNY

You're talking to someone you know is a reporter and we're at a public meeting. What is the amendment for?

COMMISSIONER GIBBONS

Allocation of funds.

DANNY

What funds?

COMMISSIONER GIBBONS

County funds.

DANNY

For what purpose?

COMMISSIONER GIBBONS

Listen - off the record - I don't have any comment on whatever typical journalist spin you're trying to put on our run-of-the-mill, hum-drum county meeting.

DANNY

Are you saying your "no comment" comment is off the record?

COUNTY COMMISSIONER #3

Yes.

DANNY

That's not how this works.

COMMISSIONER GIBBONS

I don't want to read that I declined to comment. "Commissioner Gibbons could not be reached for comment."

DANNY

So you want me to write, according to Commissioner Gibbons, quote "Commissioner Gibbons could not be reached for comment" close quote?

COMMISSIONER GIBBONS

Is there anything else you need?

DANNY

Besides what I've already asked for? On the record, is it common to pass last-minute budget amendments?

COMMISSIONER GIBBONS

It's not uncommon.

DANNY

And I can quote you on that?

COMMISSIONER GIBBONS

Knock yourself out.

INT. HAMMOND HOME - LATER

Roosevelt enters and shouts to whomever is home.

ROOSEVELT

Got it all worked out with Stella today. She's got a lawyer friend who is making some adjustments to the contract, but you'll essentially be joint partners. We'll own the buildings. She'll own the land. Fifty-fifty split.

Roosevelt goes from room to room. The house seems empty.

ROOSEVELT (CONT'D)

You and I can work out how much of the equity you might want to keep. I know you were going to sell it all, but ...

Roosevelt continues to look around.

ROOSEVELT (CONT'D)

I also talked to Larry about helping out, helping get it back in order. He said it shouldn't be a problem.

He walks upstairs and into his parents' bedroom. He opens the door slowly. Leonard is lying on his bed, face down.

ROOSEVELT (CONT'D)

Dad?

As Roosevelt moves closer, he realizes his dad is not breathing. He tries to wake Leonard up, but his dad is unresponsive. He reaches into his pocket, pulls out his phone and dials 911.

ROOSEVELT (CONT'D)

Yes, this is Roosevelt Hammond. At 15 James Street. My dad. He's Leonard Hammond. He's 72. He isn't moving. I don't think he's breathing. Please send someone. I think he may be dead.

(beat)

Yes again!

INT. HOSPITAL - NIGHT

Leonard is in a hospital bed, stuck with tubes and monitors, completely unresponsive. Roosevelt and Jane sit next to him, hunched over in their respective chairs.

JANE

I spent so much time thinking about what I'd do when he died that I was totally unprepared for what I would do while he died.

ROOSEVELT

I know.

JANE

I just assumed dying would be something he planned, just like everything else in his life. Even with something sudden, I would have expected a contingency.

ROOSEVELT

I know.

JANE

I would have expected a note in the mail, or a call from the attorney. I wouldn't even have been surprised if your father -

(chuckling to herself)

(MORE)

JANE (CONT'D)

- if your father, after exhausting all of his other options, would have delivered the news himself, in his usual, matter-of-fact way.

(beat)

"I've died," he would say. Then he would have walked away, settled himself into his coffin, and then be whisked away off to the cemetery.

ROOSEVELT

I know.

JANE

For fuck's sake, Rose. Say something else.

That was the third time Roosevelt had ever heard his mother swear. The first time he heard her use "the F-word". Roosevelt runs his fingers through his hair. And lets out a sigh.

ROOSEVELT

Well, I can take care of a few things to make it easier. I can have the house landline and the church landline forward to my cell phone, and then pass along any messages you may need.

JANE

Yes, that would be helpful.

ROOSEVELT

I'll call Cindy from the church and she and the other sisters from the congregation can put together a few meals.

JANE

Oh, I don't want to be a bother.

ROOSEVELT

Mom, how many times have you made meals for them? Let them have a turn, alright? And I assume he has a living will and more of those, uh, types of documents?

JANE

Yeah.

ROOSEVELT

Is that in the safe deposit box?
The fire proof box at home?

JANE

I'm not sure.

ROOSEVELT

Well, that's probably the next
step.

JANE

Rosie, I have to tell you
something. Your father ...

ROOSEVELT

What ...

JANE

As put together as he was
professionally, and socially ...

ROOSEVELT

What it is mom?

JANE

(growing more rambling)
We're broke. That's why we're
selling everything. And that's why
I didn't tell you, because I didn't
want to lie to you if you asked.
But he has given away every red
cent he ever earned. His heart was
too damn big for his own good. He
just couldn't tell people 'no' and
now I don't know how we're going to
pay for any of this.

Roosevelt puts his arms around his mom to calm her down.

ROOSEVELT

Hey hey hey hey ... everything's
going to be fine. He's been a
pastor at that church for 40 years.
Is Pastor Jones still the assistant
there?

Jane nods.

ROOSEVELT (CONT'D)

I'll give him a call. I'll let him know what happened, that he'll have to give the sermon tomorrow, and to ask the congregation if they could chip in during your time of need. God knows dad's been there when they've needed it.

INT. CHAPEL - MORNING

We see an empty pulpit in a full church. The room is silent. Roosevelt comes from off screen, wearing a suit and tie, and stands behind the pulpit, addressing the congregation.

ROOSEVELT

Pastor Jones is in Africa, I found out last night, on his latest six-month mission trip. But you all already knew that.

The congregation laughs. Roosevelt is speaking mostly extemporaneously. There are "ums" and "uhs" as he speaks. Some stuttering. Some tripping over words - but nothing too serious.

ROOSEVELT (CONT'D)

My father also had a heart attack last night, and is still in a coma at the hospital. But you all already knew that, too.

Roosevelt chuckles at that. The congregation does not.

ROOSEVELT (CONT'D)

And most of you already know who I am - even though I don't yet know as many of you as I probably should. I'm Roosevelt Hammond. I'll be filling in temporarily until either Pastor Jones gets back or my father recovers, whichever comes first. And I'm confident both of them will return. You all have spent much more time in this chapel than I have. I aim to remedy all of that over the next months and years.

Roosevelt shuffles some papers he has on the pulpit and begins reading from the pages. He is comfortable and well-spoken in front of the congregation, but lacks any fire and passion and flair of a typical pastor.

ROOSEVELT (CONT'D)

I know a handful of you were here when Leonard gave his first sermon in this very chapel, but many of you may not know the story behind it. In 1978, Paul Harvey gave his now-famous "So God Made a Farmer" speech. And, as far as I can tell, Leonard was the only person listening that day who was infuriated by it. In his mind, on the eighth day God would have made a shepherd - not a farmer. Leonard was so taken with this idea that he met with the head pastor at the time - Pastor Mack, I'm sure some of you remember him - and asked not only if he could give a guest sermon, but also if he could become a part-time pastor. Mack agreed and Leonard gave his own version of "So God Made a Farmer" - which I found a copy of among his things. And just as he used this sermon to be a guest pastor, it seemed fitting that I use his same words today as I fill in. But don't get any ideas about a similar, permanent career change for me.

The congregation laughs.

ROOSEVELT (CONT'D)

(extemporaneously)

And I apologize to Sister Paula down here on the front row who I KNOW was there that day 39 years ago. I know your memory is like a steel trap, so hopefully this isn't too repetitive for you.

The congregation laughs.

ROOSEVELT (CONT'D)

On the eighth day, God looked down on his planned paradise and said, "I need a caretaker." So God made a shepherd.

(MORE)

ROOSEVELT (CONT'D)

God said, "I need somebody willing to get up before dawn, feed the hungry, work all day among my children, feed the hungry again, eat supper and then go to town and stay past midnight visiting the widows." So God made a shepherd. "I need somebody with arms strong enough to fight off the money changers yet gentle enough to comfort the grieving mother. Somebody to call out sinners, tame cantankerous husbands, come home hungry, have to wait lunch until his wife's done feeding those who haven't had a warm meal in days and tell them to be sure and come back real soon - and mean it." So God made a shepherd. God said, "I need somebody willing to sit up all night with a newborn baby. And watch it die. Then dry his and the parents' eyes and comfort two people who, at that moment, have lost everything. I need somebody who can shape a sermon from a single verse, repair a door hinge at a moment's notice, who can bless a home with prayer, fasting and hard work. And who, year round, will finish his forty-hour week by Tuesday noon, then, exhausted from fixing and mending and comforting, put in another seventy-two hours." So God made a shepherd. God had to have somebody willing to visit each lamb of his flock before the first winter storm and yet stop and race to help when he sees the first smoke from a neighbor's place. So God made a shepherd. God said, "I need somebody strong enough to clear trees and heave bails, yet gentle enough to calm babies and teach children, who will stop his sermon mid-sentence to have the congregation's ten strongest men pull a tractor out of a ditch. It had to be somebody who'd care deep and straight and not cut corners. Somebody to teach and preach, and mourn and hunger and thirst and make peace, and show mercy and be persecuted and finish a hard week's work with a drive to church. Somebody who'd bring a family together with the soft strong bonds

Organ music plays in the background. The congregation stands up and begins mingling. Roosevelt comes down from the pulpit and begins shaking hands, starting with PAULA.

PAULA

It was even better the second time around, young man.

ROOSEVELT

Thank you very much.

Roosevelt continues to walk down the pews as people mingle and talk. A well-dressed congregant - Ruby Sutherland - an older woman with even older money, and who isn't afraid to flaunt that fact with gaudy jewelry - shakes Roosevelt's hand and slips a padded envelop into his suit pocket.

RUBY SUTHERLAND

Here are my tithes and offerings,
Pastor Hammond ... I mean ... Rose.
I hope this helps you with your
father.

ROOSEVELT

Well, every little bit helps. It is
very much appreciated.

As Roosevelt goes through the crowd, he sees VICTORIA, mid-30s. She's leaning against a pew with a half smile. She's dressed in a short-sleeved, a-line dress.

VICTORIA

Nice speech you plagiarized.

ROOSEVELT

I think "paid homage to" is the
correct term.

VICTORIA

If I didn't know you had cheated on
every English essay in high school
I might be inclined to believe you.
So you're back. Forever?

ROOSEVELT

Seems like it.

VICTORIA

I hope you can find something else
to steal for your next sermon,
otherwise you're sunk.

ROOSEVELT

We'll see.

VICTORIA
I will see, for myself, next
Sunday.

Victoria begins to walk away.

ROOSEVELT
(calling out to her)
Victoria? Not before then?

VICTORIA
(without turning around)
Not before then.

INT. PASTOR'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

Roosevelt walks through the door to his dad's office and CHARLIE, a 15-year-old boy who serves as an assistant is there waiting for him.

ROOSEVELT
Hey Charlie.

CHARLIE
Hi, Pastor Hammond.

ROOSEVELT
Rose is fine.

CHARLIE
Yes, sorry, Mr. Rose, your
appointments are here.

ROOSEVELT
Appointments?

CHARLIE
Yeah, your dad would meet with some
brothers and sisters, one on one
after services each Sunday.

ROOSEVELT
Um, okay, send the first one in? I
guess.

An old man, MR. FORD, dressed in his Sunday best enters.

ROOSEVELT (CONT'D)
Come on in, Mister ... Ford. Have a
seat.

They shake hands. They both sit.

MR. FORD

I wanted to let you know I'll be praying for your father.

ROOSEVELT

Thank you. That's very much appreciated.

MR. FORD

And your dad has done a lot of good in this community, and I'm sure you'll keep doing a lot of good.

ROOSEVELT

I'll do my best.

MR. FORD

Charity needs to start locally, is what I always say. We don't need those government bureaucrats in Washington telling us how to spend our money or help our poor. We can do that just fine on our own, thank you very much.

Roosevelt is unsure of how to respond to that.

ROOSEVELT

Well ... thank you for sharing.

MR. FORD

That's it. I just wanted to give you my support, Rose.

ROOSEVELT

I appreciate it very much.

Both men stand and Rose begins to walk Mr. Ford out.

MR. FORD

(to himself)

Rose, Rose.

(to Roosevelt)

You know, I've never bothered to ask, is Rose short for something?

ROOSEVELT

It's short for Roosevelt.

MR. FORD

That's not a family name, is it? I don't remember your mom or dad mentioning anything about that.

ROOSEVELT
No, sir. My dad was just a very big fan of Theodore Roosevelt.

MR. FORD
Good, strong-willed man, that Teddy. Well thank you again. And good luck.

ROOSEVELT
Thank you.

Mr. Ford leaves.

ROOSEVELT (CONT'D)
(to himself)
Well, that wasn't so hard.

Roosevelt opens the door to find several people waiting in the lobby.

ROOSEVELT (CONT'D)
(cheerfully)
Who's next?

INT. NEWSROOM - DAY

Brewster leans over Danny's cubicle.

BREWSTER
So you've got two options here.

DANNY
Do either of them include a martini?

BREWSTER
Hemingway you are not, at least not yet, but ... your county budget story, I can run it, as is, on page 21 where no one will see it but the 3 old ladies who, I'm convinced, read the whole paper front to back just to see if there are any typos. Or I can give you another day to find out what's actually in that amendment and maybe we can get it a little closer to the front.

DANNY
Have you ever run a front-page budget story?

BREWSTER

No.

DANNY

Have you ever run a 1B budget story?

BREWSTER

No.

DANNY

Have you ever run a county budget story that has unearthed any sort of valuable, public-empowering information?

BREWSTER

No. But I've also never seen a last-minute, non-public amendment to a county budget.

DANNY

Commissioner Gibbons said it wasn't uncommon.

BREWSTER

Yes, I saw the one, singular, earth-shattering quote - a double negative, by the way - you were able to glean from Larry.

DANNY

He told me to call him Lawrence.

BREWSTER

Because he doesn't like you. Which is why you'll need to look elsewhere.

DANNY

Even though it's probably nothing.

BREWSTER

Especially because
(using air quotes)
it's probably nothing.

INT. PASTOR'S OFFICE - LATER

We see multiple jump cuts of multiple conversations, with Roosevelt slowly slumping further and further into his chair, looking more and more overwhelmed.

CONGREGANT #1

How much masturbation is too much?

CONGREGANT #2

How do I know if God wants me to keep my job?

CONGREGANT #3

I just really feel like gluten has to be from the devil, right? Is there anything biblical about that?

CONGREGANT #4

I just don't understand why there would be a passage in the Bible about the emissions of horses.

CONGREGANT #5

We have sex three or four times a month. I want to do it more. He wants to do it less. How often do you think God wants us to have sex?

CONGREGANT #6

I mean, having two bears maul and murder little children just because they made fun of him for being bald seems like an overreaction. It does NOT sound like a merciful God to me.

CONGREGANT #7

I have sinned. So much sinning. Way to much sinning, if you ask me.

CONGREGANT #8

I just so appreciate these little talks - with your father, and now with you. It makes me feel so energized and invigorated to take on the week.

Roosevelt sees out a last congregant. He's visibly exhausted. He pokes his head outside his office and looks at Charlie.

ROOSEVELT

Charlie? Any more?

CHARLIE

No, sir. That's the last of them. You're all done for the day.

Roosevelt goes back into his office and collapses in his chair. He runs his hands through his hair. He rubs his face.

He pats his suit coat and remembers the envelope from Ms. Sutherland in his pocket. He pulls it out and opens it up, dumping out the contents.

Two large stacks of \$100 bills fall out, each stack with a \$10,000 currency strap. Roosevelt is shocked. He thumbs through the money. He looks around wondering where to put it, what to do with it.

Jane enters the office with a to-go carton of homemade food.

JANE

How'd your sermon go?

ROOSEVELT

What are you doing here? Why aren't you at the hospital?

JANE

The sisters brought me food, but I couldn't eat it all. So I brought some for you. I'm heading right back, don't worry.

ROOSEVELT

How is he?

JANE

Same as yesterday, so - not worse.

Jane sees the stacks of money in Roosevelt's hands.

JANE (CONT'D)

Is that from Ms. Sutherland? Padded envelope? Slipped into your pocket?

ROOSEVELT

What do I do with it? Wait, how did you know that?

JANE

(pointing)

Put it in the safe.

Roosevelt puts it in the safe.

JANE (CONT'D)

And then keep meticulous accounting records. The money is from Sister Sutherland. Ruby Sutherland. Her husband is dead and now she's richer than God and you're going to get a couple of those a year. You have to accept them.

ROOSEVELT

Well of course I'm going to accept
- wait. What do you mean? Why
wouldn't I accept them?

JANE

She's going to ask for favors,
Rosie. And you're going to have to
be very clear with her - and very
aware yourself - about where the
money goes, what it is and isn't
used for. Dad never gave me any
details about it, but he was always
wary of that woman. Ye cannot serve
God and mammon. And that woman is
100 percent mammon.

She puts the food down on his desk.

JANE (CONT'D)

Bon appetit

INT. COFFEE SHOP - DAY

Roosevelt and Harvey are in a coffee shop, which serves as
their make-shift office. They are the only ones there.

HARVEY

I am 100 percent not on board with
that.

ROOSEVELT

Why not? It's foolproof. We take
the money from the church and we
put it into the company for a few
months, we bolster our numbers, and
once it's trending up, we'll sell.
The new valuation will be more than
one dollar - much, much more - and
we'll be more than able to pay back
any money we borrowed from the
church.

HARVEY

So we're taking a no-interest loan
from God?

ROOSEVELT

Are you worried he's a vengeful
God? A God of wrath?

HARVEY

(sarcastically)

What on earth would ever give me that idea?

ROOSEVELT

If it helps, it's really a no-interest loan from my parents - well, from Ruby Sutherland, really. She won't miss it and my parents haven't given me anything besides my crippling depression.

HARVEY

So this is the least they could unknowingly do.

ROOSEVELT

They refused to invest in our business. So now that things are up and running, here's their opportunity. And they profit from it anyway when I buy their properties from them.

HARVEY

I still don't like this at all.

ROOSEVELT

Alright, well, I'm using my veto.

HARVEY

I thought you already used your annual veto.

ROOSEVELT

I did, but then I traded you for yours so you didn't have to be the point of contact for all these valuation discussions.

HARVEY

Oh yeah, I hate all that shit.

Victoria enters the coffee shop.

ROOSEVELT

(loudly-ish)

Alright, well, I'm going to call our billionaire friend, let her know we won't be accepting her offer, and that she should try back in three or four months.

Harvey looks at Roosevelt with eyes that say "Really?"

HARVEY
(quietly)
I'm guessing you'd like me to
leave.

ROOSEVELT
That'd be great.

Harvey grabs his coat and begins to walk out the door.

HARVEY
Hi, Vic! Bye, Vic!

Victoria stands at the counter, waiting for her drink.

ROOSEVELT
I thought you said I wouldn't see
you before next Sunday.

VICTORIA
Well, Jacob had to wait 7 years for
Rachel, and then he didn't even get
her. I wanted to see if you could
wait 7 days.

Roosevelt looks at her with narrowed eyes, confused.

ROOSEVELT
Jacob? Rachel?

VICTORIA
You know, if you're going to be
giving sermons each week, you
really should start reading your
bible. You did well yesterday,
regardless.

ROOSEVELT
Well thank you.

Victoria nods her head in the direction of now-gone Harvey.

VICTORIA
Sounds like you and he have got
some important wheeling and dealing
you're doing with your investors.

ROOSEVELT
Not technically investors at this
point since they're buying the
company, but yeah.

(MORE)

ROOSEVELT (CONT'D)

Just trying to make sure we're making the right business decisions here. Crunching all the numbers. Running the gantt charts.

VICTORIA

If you're trying to sound smart, you're coming up a little short.
(beat)
How's your dad doing?

ROOSEVELT

The same. Not better. Not worse.

The barista hands Victoria her coffee and Victoria begins to walk out of the shop.

VICTORIA

Well, give your mom my best. I know everyone says this, but let me know if there's anything I can do to help.

ROOSEVELT

Do you wanna grab some coffee some time?

Victoria hold up the coffee she just bought.

VICTORIA

You mean, like, a different coffee at a different time?

ROOSEVELT

Yeah.

VICTORIA

And you think that'll help your dad?

ROOSEVELT

Unrelated to your offer to help.

VICTORIA

I want to hear about Rachel and Leah in next Sunday's sermon.

ROOSEVELT

There's a Leah too?

VICTORIA

There's a Leah too.

ROOSEVELT

Are you using scripture as a bargaining chip for a date?

VICTORIA

I don't want to be deceived on the wedding night.

INT. COUNTY RECORDS - DAY

Danny sits in a sterile, non-descript, government building lobby. A sign that reads "COUNTY RECORDS" hangs from the ceiling. Even though there are several booths/cubicles, only one is currently occupied by an employee. The two of them are the only ones there. It's silent for a while.

DANNY

And you're sure there's nothing you can do to speed up this process?

COUNTY WORKER

No ma'am.

The silence returns.

DANNY

And nothing I can do?

COUNTY WORKER

No ma'am.

Silence.

DANNY

What are the odds that this FOIA request is going to be done today?

COUNTY WORKER

I'm sorry ma'am. I can't say.

DANNY

You don't know? Or you can't say?

COUNTY WORKER

I can't say.

DANNY

Who is your manager?

COUNTY WORKER

Commissioner Gibbons.

DANNY
Of course.

More silence. Then someone from the back yells.

COUNTY WORKER #2
(loudly)
Danielle McCormick?

DANNY
Yes?

COUNTY WORKER #2
Here are the documents you
requested.

DANNY
Thank you!

Danny takes the manilla folder and opens it up to find a single piece of paper it in. There is barely any text on it either. All it says is:

At least \$25,000 out of current expenses shall be appropriated for the expansion of local social center.

DANNY (CONT'D)
This can't be right.
(turning to county
workers)
Is this it? There has to be more.
Like who wrote it? Who submitted
it? Which center? What is this
money for?

Both workers stare at her blankly. Danny yells in frustration.

INT. NEWSROOM - LATER

Danny, manilla folder in hand, marches into the newsroom, straight to Brewster's desk. She tosses down the folder.

DANNY
It's like that asshole knew I was
going to FOIA him so he's trying to
be ambiguous.

BREWSTER
Now, let's not devolve into name
calling. It's COMMISSIONER Asshole.
(reading out loud)
(MORE)

BREWSTER (CONT'D)

"At least \$25,000 out of current expenses shall be appropriated for the expansion of local social center."

DANNY

There's nothing there! Four hours at the county office and I get one fucking sentence.

BREWSTER

A sentence with a dollar amount.

DANNY

(angry/exasperated)

But what is it for? Out of which current expenses? What constitutes "expansion"? Which local social center?

BREWSTER

You know, those would all be really great questions for your source.

DANNY

What fucking source? No one over there will fucking talk to me?

BREWSTER

Listen, you're probably not on the brink of Watergate here. So while I appreciate the passion, let's channel that fire into whichever 400-level journalism class taught you to man the fuck up. There are assistants, deputies, assistant deputies, and all sorts of other bees in the county hive. And there are only so many centers in the county that could possibly qualify for - and need - that kind of money. So go get a cup of coffee and a phone book and start making some phone calls.

Danny calms down a bit. Walks over to the coffee pot and fills a mug. She begins to walk off.

BREWSTER (CONT'D)

Where are you going?

DANNY

To make some phone calls.

BREWSTER
(half joking?)
The coffee was for me.

DANNY
(half joking?)
Go fuck yourself.

INT. NEWSROOM - CONTINUOUS

Danny sits at her desk and starts cold calling. Montage/jump cuts of call after call after call, rejection after rejection.

INT. HOSPITAL - NIGHT

Roosevelt is in Leonard's hospital room, sitting by his side. Roosevelt wears the start-up founder uniform: dark-wash jeans, button-down shirt with no tie, blazer. He's clean shaven.

ROOSEVELT
(to Leonard)
So, that's my plan. If you're okay with all that, just lie there motionless.

Roosevelt waits.

ROOSEVELT (CONT'D)
Okay. Harvey is on his way here. So if you change your mind while he and I talk, out loud, right here next to you - just chime in.

After a moment, Harvey enters the room.

HARVEY
(more casual than he should be)
The money is all gone.

ROOSEVELT
What do you mean, gone?

HARVEY
So, I put it all into servers in that mining farm in Iceland.

ROOSEVELT
And?

HARVEY

Well, we certainly mined more currency, but the overall value of the currency has dropped more than we just put in.

ROOSEVELT

I don't know what that means.

HARVEY

It means it's gone. It could be back tomorrow - the exchange could skyrocket. But as of right now, it's all gone.

ROOSEVELT

So you're saying in the past 4 hours we accumulated \$20,000 more in debt

HARVEY

Yes.

ROOSEVELT

Twenty thousand more debt that we'll now have to sell.

HARVEY

More or less, yeah.

ROOSEVELT

Fuck!

Just then, several of the machines Leonard is plugged into start beeping. Alarms are going off. Nurses are rushing in and escorting Roosevelt out.

ROOSEVELT (CONT'D)

What's going on? Why is that beeping? What's happening? Can somebody tell me something?

Roosevelt's cell phone rings. It's a number he doesn't recognize. In a daze, he answers.

ROOSEVELT (CONT'D)

Hello?

DANNY

(through the phone)

Hi, my name is Danielle McCormick with the Sharonview Transcript.

(MORE)

DANNY (CONT'D)

I was calling to try to get in touch with whomever oversees the First Christ Center.

ROOSEVELT

(reeling from the chaos)
Sorry. I can't talk right now.

DANNY

Are you affiliated with the First Christ Center?

ROOSEVELT

I don't know.

DANNY

You don't know? Can you tell me anything about what the center is used for?

ROOSEVELT

I'm not sure.

DANNY

Can I call you back?

ROOSEVELT

I can't. I don't know. I can't talk.

EXT. BRIDGE - DAWN

We pick back up just before Roosevelt's foot slipped. We see his back, from far away, and slowly zoom in as we faintly hear the speech he's telling himself.

ROOSEVELT

... And they'll live in that moment
- that small, fragile inch -

He leans forward, still holding on. His foot slips.

But he holds on. He regains his footing and holds the railing more tightly.

Roosevelt takes a few final deep breaths -

Before climbing back over the railing. He pulls his phone out of his pocket and deletes the audio file he just recorded.

Then he gets in his car and drives away.

FADE TO BLACK.