

POPULAR

Written by

Marley Schneier

Based on a true story

(Well, *true enough*)

Logline: GOP strategist Lee Atwater won the presidency for George H.W. Bush in 1988, and his campaign changed politics forever - and gave him the worst reputation in America. Now, Lee is on his deathbed, and he needs to tell God his side of the story... before it's too late.

marley.schneier@gmail.com
(508) 314-2840

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INT. POLITICAL RALLY, 1991 - NIGHT

A SILENT, SLO MO CLOSE-UP of a white man SCREAMING to camera.

We can't hear what he's saying. And we can't tell if he's excited or furious. All we know is that it's...

Alarming.

SOUND fades in, and we ZOOM OUT.

We now see a FULL BODY SHOT of this guy. He's waving a mini American flag with all the enthusiasm of a cheerleader on *West Wing*-Sorkonian levels of cocaine.

ZOOM OUT again.

It turns out our guy is actually in a BIG CROWD. Based on the sea of Wal-Mart brand polos and "Karen" haircuts, we *might* be at a Trump rally.

Lights FLASH. TV cameras GLIDE BY.

Finally, we see what's got everyone so excited...

BILL CLINTON (44) leans into a microphone from a podium:

BILL CLINTON
... And I believe that we can *MAKE*
AMERICA GREAT AGAIN!

SUDDENLY, the house lights DIM, and Clinton pulls out...

A SAXOPHONE!

Bill begins to gyrate to his own rendition of "*Your Mama Don't Dance and Your Daddy Don't Rock n' Roll.*"

The crowd goes BATSHIT.

CUT TO:

INT. GEORGE WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY HOSPITAL, 1991 - DAY

Clinton's image SCRAMBLES. We've actually been watching this whole thing on a teeny, tiny TV.

The TV's sound CUTS OUT. In the new quiet, we can only hear one noise... *HEAVY BREATHING.*

The camera PANS, searching for the source of the sound...

As it searches, we catch a glimpse of a framed photo: A man in short shorts, jogging with President George H.W. Bush.

The television JUMPS BACK TO LIFE - just in time for us to see Bill giving his signature "thumb move."

FLASH! The TV goes completely DARK.

CLOSE-UP on BIG, SWOLLEN fingers, pressing the power button on the remote.

LEE ATWATER (40, white) turns to camera. In his trademark South Carolina accent, he says:

LEE
I invented that.

"This Land is Your Land" by Sharon Jones & The Dap-Kings plays.

TITLE: "POPULAR"

OPENING CREDITS.

News reel of election days throughout history. Voters cast their ballots. They smile, wave, show off "I voted" stickers. They all think they know what they're doing...

CUT TO:

INT. GEORGE WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY HOSPITAL, 1991 - DAY

SUPER: 1991

An IV snakes its way up Lee's arm. He's hooked up to too many machines. There is a constant BEEPING - a cold reminder that time is *running out*.

He POINTS to the framed picture of himself and the President. Lee turns and talks directly to us.

LEE
Not bad for a kid from Aiken, South Carolina, huh? Of course, I'm a long way from home these days. But everyone's tried to make this place real nice for me.

We see a table full of cheap flowers and stuffed animals. The hospital gift shop is making a killing.

LEE (CONT'D)
Bless their hearts.

Sitting above the bouquets and trinkets, a MENACING CRUCIFIX stares down from the wall.

LEE (CONT'D)
You like that? That's for *YOU*.

A stack of Bibles sit on the table. Each wrapped in plastic.

LEE (CONT'D)
Those too.

Lee reaches behind the stack and pulls out a copy of *PLAYBOY*. Donald Trump poses on the cover with playmate Karen McDougal.

LEE (CONT'D)
Now, this one's for *me*.
(beat)
I know how it looks, but I really do read it for the articles!

A NURSE enters. She sets down a tray, and disappears. Lee picks up a Jello cup. It doesn't wiggle. He puts it down.

LEE (CONT'D)
Listen, I've really wanted to talk to you, but things have been so busy. Dying makes you very popular!

Lee laughs at his own joke, then turns suddenly solemn.

LEE (CONT'D)
We don't know each other well. I talk *about you* a lot, but I don't talk *to you* very much. But you're supposed to do these things on your deathbed, right? And let's face it: I'm on it. So, I'd like to set the record straight *before* I meet you at the pearly gates. Get ahead of the story, so to speak.

Lee TAPS at the window, and below, we see a mob of REPORTERS and CAMERA CREWS gathered outside the hospital.

LEE (CONT'D)
Look at those vultures. They're *dying* for me to die. I can see the headlines now: "SATAN'S SPIN MAN BITES THE DUST!" They'll write that a "whiff of brimstone" followed me where ever I went.
(pause)
The *Washington Post* actually wrote that once, you know.

Lee glances at his reflection. It seems to depress him.

LEE (CONT'D)

Since I ran the campaign in '88,
they all say I'm no good. In fact,
they think I'm downright evil.

He turns to look us RIGHT IN THE EYE.

LEE (CONT'D)

I admit that I'm no angel, OK? I
drink and I swear and I play guitar
like a demon. And on occasion, I
may have *bent* the rules a 'lil bit.
BUT I never, ever lied.

Lee looks to the Crucifix.

LEE (CONT'D)

I don't have a lot of time. But *God*
dammit, I've got a lot to tell you.

Lee realizes he's said a swear.

LEE (CONT'D)

Sorry. Add that one to my tab. It's
under: *LEE ATWATER*.

Lee WINKS.

CUT TO:

OVER BLACK: Based on a true story.

Well, true enough.

INT. BLUES CLUB, 1988 - LATE, LATE NIGHT

SUPER: 1988

Lee (now 37) is SHREDDING the guitar for a SWEATY crowd.

Lee is only three years younger than when we saw him last,
but he's a different man: Healthy. Handsome. Full of life.

He sings "Bad Boy" by Lee Atwater:

LEE

*Well, I'm a bad, bad boy.
I'm a long, long way from home.
Came up from Carolina.
Mama, I got to do you wrong!*

He tilts his sunglasses low, and bites his lip. Lee turns to the camera.

LEE (CONT'D)
What? You think the GOP can't jam?

The dance moves get *lewder*.

LEE (CONT'D)
(into the mic)
I'm Lee and I'm a *baaaaaad* boy.

The crowd CHEERS.

LEE (CONT'D)
We got a real treat for you now. A man with the voice of an angel, who plays the guitar like he won a deal with the devil...

Lee LOOKS AROUND for the next act.

LEE (CONT'D)
Folks, where is...

SUDDENLY, a man in a pair of AVIATOR GOGGLES parts the crowd.

LEE (CONT'D)
Mr. B.B. King! Sent here straight from heaven, it seems.

The crowd GASPS as B.B. KING (63) glides up to the stage.

B.B. KING
Apologies. Had a helluva time finding a parking spot!

King - an accomplished pilot - holds up his goggles.

B.B. KING (CONT'D)
Give it up one more time for my Blues brother, Mr. Lee Atwater!

The crowd APPLAUDS, and King embraces Lee - you can tell they are old friends.

INT. BACK BOOTH - LATER THAT NIGHT

A BARTENDER brings Lee another whiskey. Lee WINKS at him... Lee would flirt with a ham sandwich.

Lee CLOSES HIS EYES as we hear *B.B. King singing "Every Day I Have the Blues"*:

B.B. KING
*Whoa, nobody loves me, nobody seems
 to care...*

Lee suddenly REMEMBERS that we're there. He turns to camera.

LEE
 Can't help myself. No one - and I
 mean no one - does it like B.B.

Lee CHECKS HIS WATCH. Seeing the time, he throws back what's left of his whiskey, and grabs his suit jacket.

LEE (CONT'D)
 Time to hit the next party.

Lee KICKS OPEN the door. SUDDENLY, we're BLINDED by the light of morning.

I/E. LOUISIANA SUPERDOME - DAY

MATCH CUT to Lee KICKING open another door.

SUPER: Superdome, New Orleans, Louisiana.

A SECURITY GUARD starts to approach, but recognizes Lee.

SECURITY GUARD
 Good luck out there, Lee!

LEE
 Stay golden, Eddie!

Lee SPEEDWALKS through the venue, BURSTING with energy. He gets high off this (...among other things). He greets every person like an old friend, from staffers to janitors.

LEE (CONT'D)
 Kevin! My man!... Hannah, that new
 lipstick is making you *dangerous*...
 K-K-Katie! How's the hubs...

A teleprompter is ROLLED past Lee. He deftly SWERVES, never losing speed.

Lee ROUNDS A CORNER, the SOUNDS get LOUDER, LOUDER, until...

INT. LOUISIANA SUPERDOME - DAY

Lee is smack dab in the middle of a HUGE CROWD.

SUPER: August 18, 1988. Republican National Convention.

SUPER: 82 days until the election.

LEE
(to camera)
Fun, huh?

We scan the crowd. It's reminiscent of the opening shot... Except, a lot *less* excitement, a lot *more* shoulder pads. Lee glances to a woman with a whale spout ponytail in a neon pink scrunchie. He shrugs, turning to camera.

LEE (CONT'D)
What? It's the 80s.

SUDDENLY, a SPOTLIGHT moves across the stage, landing on...

Vice-President GEORGE H.W. BUSH (64).

The crowd APPLAUDS. Politely. Unenthusiastically.

LEE (V.O.)
George Herbert Walker Bush... My boss.

A woman in the crowd reaches for H.W., and he SIDESTEPS her outstretched hand. Lee turns to camera.

LEE
He's not exactly a "people person."

H.W. begins his speech.

LEE (V.O.)
But he *is* gonna be the next President. Of course, he don't know that *for sure*. But Bushie is used to getting what he wants...

BEGIN H.W. MONTAGE.

We flip to a Wes Anderson-y montage of H.W.'s life. His age changes, but his TURTLE-LIKE SMILE remains the same.

1) INT. AIR FORCE TWO - DAY

We see the back of a man's head as he shakes hands with PRESIDENT RONALD REAGAN.

LEE (V.O.)
He wanted to be Vice-President.

The man turns around. It's H.W. He SMILES to camera.

LEE (V.O.)

Check.

2) EXT. OIL FIELD, MIDLAND, TX - DAY

30-something H.W. stands with a group of men.

LEE (V.O.)

He wanted to make gajillions of dollars in oil. Check.

He turns to camera, and GRINS. Then, he spots dust on his loafers. His smile FADES.

3) EXT. YALE UNIVERSITY, NEW HAVEN, CT - DAY

College H.W. reclines on the Yale quad.

LEE (V.O.)

He wanted to be in Skull & Bones. Check & Check.

He FLASHES the coveted Skull & Bones pinky ring to camera.

4) EXT. BUSH ESTATE, GREENWICH, CT - DAY

8-year-old H.W. sits in an armchair reading the paper. His father, SENATOR PRESCOTT BUSH (40s), sits beside him.

LEE (V.O.)

And he wanted all of Daddy's millions. Check, check, and CHECK!

In tandem, they fold down the papers and SMILE.

CUT BACK TO:

INT. LOUISIANA SUPERDOME - DAY

LEE (V.O.)

Nowadays, what he wants more than anything is to be...

H.W.

... Your next President!

The audience applauds. *Tamely*. Lee SIGHS and turns to camera.

LEE

And it was *my* job to get H.W. what he wanted. But I'll be real with you: This wasn't my *easiest* job.

H.W.
 ...Inflation was...
 (shuffles papers)
 ... Um, 12 percent...

H.W. drones on. CLOSE-UP of someone staring at the ceiling.
 CLOSE-UP of someone inspecting their nails.

LEE (V.O.)
 First off, he's kind of a snooze.

CLOSE-UP of someone shamelessly picking their nose. The guy
 really goes to town.

LEE (V.O.)
 Honestly, if I coulda had Reagan
 for a third round, I woulda. But
 the Gipper's 77. He can't remember
 to wipe his own ass anymore,
 nevermind the nuc-u-lar codes. But
 Reagan was a *real* man, you know? A
 cowboy! Half of America thinks
 Bushie is, well...

H.W.
 You must see me for what I am...

Lee turns to camera.

LEE
 (whispers)
 A pussy.

H.W. pushes his glasses up his nose.

LEE (CONT'D)
 And the other half think he's...

CLOSE-UP on H.W.'s cuff links: *Tiny yachting flags.*

CUT TO:

INT. CROSSFIRE, CNN STUDIOS - EVENING

ROWLAND EVANS
 ... A silver spoon, Greenwich-
 raised, Northeastern *ELITE!*

Journalists ROBERT NOVAK (57, white) and ROWLAND EVANS (67,
 white) SCREAM at each other.

ROBERT NOVAK
 That's HORSE SHIT!

The SCREAMING continues.

CUT BACK TO:

INT. LOUISIANA SUPERDOME - DAY

Lee moves closer to the stage as he talks to us.

LEE

There can be no snobs in politics. Every man running for office needs to be *an every man*. Now, I understand that. 'Cuz I'm South Carolina swamp scum! But H.W. is a hoity-toity Yankee. So we didn't always...

Lee thinks about how he's going to phrase this.

LEE (CONT'D)

... Well, I'll say this: I never met *anyone* who wanted to win so bad. Except myself, of course! We at least had that in common. So, as campaign manager, I had some obstacles. But an expert can overcome anything! Besides, politics at this level is a lot like when I ran my buddy Steve for senior class President.

(pause)

Watch this.

Lee points to the stage.

H.W.

... for *freedom*...

A head in the crowd PERKS UP.

LEE

(whispers)

Secret is: The less you say...

H.W.

... and *our children*...

Another head perks up. And another.

H.W. (CONT'D)

... A thousand points of light.

LEE
... The more they dig it.

H.W.
That is my *mission*. And I will
complete it! Thank you...

LEE
Wait for it...

H.W. LEANS IN to the mic:

H.W.
AND GOD BLESS AMERICA!

The crowd goes WILD. Lee does a little victory dance.

INT. BACKSTAGE - MOMENTS LATER

Lee JUMPS onstage with cat-like agility. Two SECRET SERVICE AGENTS approach him.

LEE
Darryl! What's shakin'? Howie!
How's the wife?

AGENT HOWIE
She wants to go on one of those
Caribbean cruises.

AGENT DARRYL
Who'd pay to be trapped at sea for
a week with 1,000 schlubs?

AGENT HOWIE
That's what *I* said!

AGENT DARRYL
I know. I'm saying it to Lee.

LEE
Tell her there might be a tropical
disease spreading in the Bahamas.

AGENT HOWIE
Is that true?

LEE
It *could* be.

Lee dances backwards down the hall, shooting FINGER GUNS at the Agents. The Agents pull out their REAL GUNS to do it back. Lee HOWLS with laughter.

SUDDENLY, both Agents STRAIGHTEN UP. Lee turns to see...

H.W. And he doesn't look happy.

H.W.

Jennifer showed me the polls.
Dukakis is up *17 points*?

JENNIFER FITZGERALD (50s, white, still mad she wasn't voted Prom Queen) scowls at Lee.

LEE (V.O.)

That's *Jinnifur* Fitzgerald. She thinks she's the Queen of Sheba because she's been Bushie's aide for a decade now.

Lee turns to camera.

LEE

(whispers)
And his mistress for *TWO*.

Jennifer SHOVES a fax in Lee's face.

JENNIFER

17 points, Lee! This is unacceptable! This is outrageous! This is George H.W. Bush!!!

LEE

(rolls his eyes)
I know who he is, Jenny.

JENNIFER

For the last time, my name is *Jennifer*.

LEE

Sorry, *Gin-nif-ur*.

Jennifer SEETHES.

LEE (CONT'D)

Look, Sir, you always get a boost after the nomination. Dukakis is still riding his wave from July. But his wave will crash, and there's a *Bush Hurricane* a-comin'!

H.W. stares blankly at Lee.

H.W.

I've been running this country for the last seven years. Me. Not Reagan. Do people get that?

Before Lee can respond, VP nominee DAN QUAYLE (41) butts in.

DAN QUAYLE

Incredible speech, Sir! I liked the thing with the point of lights. Points of light? Points of lights!

Lee suppresses a laugh, and turns toward us.

LEE

Dan Quayle. This kid could throw himself on the ground and miss. But he brings in the youth vote. And he fixes up nice, which pleases the ladies - and some of the gentlemen!

Quayle catches his reflection in a window. This occupies him for the foreseeable future.

LEE (V.O.)

Best part about Quayle is that he didn't get any ideas. If that boy had an idea, it would die of loneliness. Made him a perfect candidate for Veep.

H.W. ignores Quayle, and turns back to Lee.

H.W.

And your plan is?

LEE

Mary and I are prepping it now!

H.W.

She back at HQ?

LEE

Just got back from that town hall in Illinois. Went real well.

H.W.

Just get it to me ASAP.

Jennifer picks up H.W.'s bag for him, and hands him a paper.

JENNIFER

The speech for tomorrow, Sir.

H.W.
Great. My room?

Jennifer smiles. Lee catches this.

LEE
Thank you -
(silently mouths)
Jenny.

H.W. turns to leave, but then... He SPINS BACK AROUND. He steps within INCHES of Lee.

H.W.
17 points doesn't look good on you.

LEE
Sir, it's gonna be a landslide.
I'll fix it. Don't worry.

A moment passes as H.W. NARROWS HIS GAZE... Then, he CLAPS Lee on the back. *HARD*.

H.W.
That's what I like to hear.
Wouldn't want to have to send you
back to... What was it?
(beat)
South Carolina?

And with that, H.W. and his entourage are off...

Realizing he's being watched, Lee BRUSHES OFF his obvious panic. He turns to camera.

LEE
It's OK! I'm a pro. And I've got A
PLAN. A good one, too. I've been
doing this a long time for being
such a young buck! You see, started
way back in college...

CUT TO:

EXT. NEWBERRY COLLEGE, 1971 - DAY

We scan the campus of Newberry, a Christian college. We see the back of a boy's head. We assume it's Lee.

He's wearing a "COLLEGE REPUBLICANS" crewneck sweatshirt over a SALMON PINK polo. A girl giggles at everything he says.

SUPER: Newberry College, South Carolina, 1971

The polo-clad boy and his girlfriend ROUND A CORNER...

WHAM! The boy SHOULDER CHECKS someone, who FALLS to the floor. Books SCATTER.

On the ground, we see a young Lee.

The boy doesn't even stop to say sorry. Fuming, Lee watches him stride through campus. From the floor, Lee's look of anger transforms into... *Longing.*

LEE (V.O.)

I studied politics at college, but
my Daddy couldn't buy my spot on
College Republicans.

Lee hears a commotion, and turns to see two HIPPIE GIRLS handing out flyers that say: "STRIKE FOR PEACE! THIS FRIDAY!"

The hippies stand out. Other students seem afraid of them. Lee TAKES NOTICE.

LEE (V.O.)

But I understood something those
boys in College Republicans didn't.
They call it...

INT. NEWBERRY COLLEGE LIBRARY - DAY

Lee peeks out at us from behind a worn copy of "All the King's Men" by Robert Penn Warren.

LEE

POPULISM.

LIBRARIAN

Sssshhh!

LEE

Populism says voters are just like
you and me. They wanna feel heard.
They wanna feel important. Wanna
feel like they're not gonna have
everything taken from 'em. And I
understand that. I *really* do.

A crucifix hangs on the wall behind him. Lee points to it.

LEE (CONT'D)

*"The Lord has given me a well-
trained tongue, that I might know
how to speak to the weary a word
that will rouse them."*

Lee SNAPS his book shut. The Librarian WHIPS AROUND.

LEE (CONT'D)

So, I went into the business of training tongues. Soon, those good 'ole boys *needed me*. Because while they slept so easy on their goose feather pillows at night, their constituents? They weren't so happy. And tapping into that... That made me a star. Them boys realized I could get them something no one else could...

INT. NEWBERRY COLLEGE STUDENT CENTER, 1971 - DAY

LEE (V.O.)

VOTES.

The Polo Boy now delivers a rousing speech.

POLO BOY

*ARE WE GOING TO LET THESE HIPPIES
AND COMMIES TAKE WHAT'S OURS?!*

The CROWD of students SHOUT.

CROWD

NO!!!

We see Lee standing behind him; a proud campaign manager. The Polo Boy looks back at Lee, and acknowledges him. Lee BEAMS.

LEE (V.O.)

After college, I got a front row seat watching the finest populist in the US Senate...

INT. UNITED STATES SENATE, 1975 - DAY

Senator STROM THURMOND (73) yells from a podium.

STROM

*WHITE PEOPLE OF THE SOUTH ARE THE
GREATEST MINORITY IN THIS NATION!*

Half the chamber BOOS. The other half CHEER. 20-something Lee watches from the wings.

LEE (V.O.)

Now, they say Senator Thurmond was racist or whatever...

(MORE)

LEE (V.O.) (CONT'D)
 But that's bull. He was a populist!
 That's all. Besides, he had a kid
 with a Black lady! So, like, how
 racist could he really be?

In the back of the room, SENATOR EDWARD W. BROOKE (50) - the first Black man elected to the Senate - rubs his temples.

INT. FLOYD SPENCE CAMPAIGN HEADQUARTERS, 1980 - DAY

Lee THROWS A DART at a dartboard with a man's face taped to it. Beneath are the words: "TOM TURNIPSEED."

SUPER: Floyd Spence Campaign, South Carolina, 1980

Lee - wearing a SALMON PINK POLO - has a phone to his ear and his feet on the desk. He covers the receiver and turns to us.

LEE
 After the Senate, I started running
 congressional campaigns. Learned
 how to make my candidates real
 electable. Learned some other
 stuff, too.

(to phone)

Hello m'am! I am Sam Hill, and I am
 conducting a poll on the election
 between Floyd Spence and *LIBERAL*
 Tom Turnipseed, who is *A MEMBER OF*
THE NAACP... Oh, you didn't know?

Lee HURLS another dart at the board. He turns to us.

LEE (CONT'D)
 What?! I ain't lying! Them's facts.
 I'm just disseminating them.
 Anyways, soon I made it outta South
 Carolina...

INT. BLACK, MANAFORT, STONE, AND KELLY, 1984 - DAY

Lee poses between ROGER STONE and PAUL MANAFORT. Stone smooths down his side part.

LEE (V.O.)
 Got a job at a fancy firm.

A sign behind them says: "Black, Manafort, Stone, and Kelly."

LEE (V.O.)
 I had a gift. And you know what the
 Bible says about gifts...

The camera FLASHES.

INT. PRESS CONFERENCE, 1984 - DAY

LEE
 (to camera)
 You gotta share 'em!

MULTIPLE CAMERAS FLASH. Lee stands in the middle of a crowd of reporters, happy as a pig in shit.

INT. ESQUIRE PHOTOSHOOT, 1984 - DAY

LEE (V.O.)
 I didn't need all the attention.

Lee's pants are around his ankles, revealing a pair of American flag-themed boxers.

LEE (V.O.)
 ... But I didn't mind it.

The camera FLASHES. The picture JUMPS ONTO an Esquire cover that says: "*Bad Boy Lee Atwater: The GOP's political animal.*"

LEE
 Besides, it got me to...

EXT. WHITE HOUSE SOUTH LAWN, 1981 - DAY

A *Hallelujah* choir sings as President RONALD REAGAN lights the White House Christmas tree. Barely visible behind throngs of staffers, Lee watches Reagan with STARS IN HIS EYES.

LEE (V.O.)
 I made it to the White House, but not to the Oval Office. Yet.

Lee tries to ELBOW his way through the crowd to get closer. Staffers throw him DIRTY LOOKS and JOSTLE HIM BACK.

LEE
 (to camera)
 Truth be told, Reagan's people didn't much like me. A lot of that was because I had gotten kind of a, um, bad reputation. And that was because of, well...

Lee turns to us.

LEE (CONT'D)
I guess we kind of need to talk
about what happened, huh? But it's
not MY fault! HONEST.

INT. CAMELOT STRIP CLUB, WASHINGTON, D.C., 1981 - EVENING

SUPER: 1981

A STRIPPER (20s) spins in front of Lee. He turns to camera.

LEE
It's *this guy's* fault.

Lee points to Professor ALEXANDER LAMIS (40s, white). Lamis is trying his best to avoid looking at the stripper.

LEE (V.O.)
Alexander Lamis. Just some nobody
professor from some nowhere
university writing 'bout populism
for some nerdy-ass book. He just
wanted to interview me! Everyone
was interviewing me! I didn't think
nothing of it. I mean, *look at him.*

Lamis CRINGES as the stripper BOUNCES her butt in his face.
Lee turns to us.

LEE
*That was my first mistake. These
were my second.*

CLOSE-UP on Lee's glass as he stacks it atop FOUR EMPTY ONES.

ALEXANDER LAMIS
Mr. Atwater, if the simplified
definition of populism is claiming
to represent the "common" person,
usually by favorable contrast with
a real or perceived elite or
establishment -

LEE
That was the *simplified* definition?

Lee places a dollar in the stripper's thong.

LEE (CONT'D)
You want a shot, Al?

ALEXANDER LAMIS
Um, no thank you. Mr. Atwater -

LEE

Call me Lee.

ALEXANDER LAMIS

Uh-huh. Down in Charleston -

LEE

You're from Charleston? Boy, what happened to your accent?

Lee flags down a waitress named KIM (20s, Black).

LEE (CONT'D)

Kim, let's do two shots for me and my pal, Al. And buy one for your sweet ass as well, OK?

Kim SMILES, but ROLLS HER EYES as soon as she's out of sight.

ALEXANDER LAMIS

Mr. Atwater, please -

LEE

Lee.

ALEXANDER LAMIS

Uh-huh. The GOP needs fighting power in Congress, and they rely on the South as their base.

Kim returns with the drinks. Lamis takes a timid sip while Lee SHOOTs the whole thing down in one.

ALEXANDER LAMIS (CONT'D)

But the South is the most impoverished part of the country -

LEE

Too poor to paint, too proud to whitewash!

ALEXANDER LAMIS

- and these GOP leaders make cuts to welfare, healthcare, education. Why do Southerners vote against their own self-interest? Why not vote Democratic?

Lee TURNS. His eyes NARROW.

LEE

Why don't you have an accent anymore, Al?

(pause)

(MORE)

LEE (CONT'D)

Because people who sound like me
are stupid, right? Ain't that the
way it is where *you* work?

Lamis looks suddenly ASHAMED OF HIMSELF.

LEE (CONT'D)

Southerners know what Democrats
think of us. Voting for a Democrat
is like putting a "Kick Me" sign on
my own damn back.

ALEXANDER LAMIS

But Republican establishment aren't
Southerners! Nixon, Reagan... Look
at Vice-President Bush. I mean,
these are *coastal elites*!

LEE

(waves his hand)
But they get it.

ALEXANDER LAMIS

Get what?

LEE

What the base want.

ALEXANDER LAMIS

Which is?

Lee stares at Lamis like he's the world's biggest idiot.

LEE

Let's call it... *Protection*.

ALEXANDER LAMIS

Protection? From what?

Lee RAISES his left eyebrow.

LEE

Come on. You know what I'm sayin'.

ALEXANDER LAMIS

I don't understand -

JUST THEN, Kim walks by.

Lee slowly, subtly, NODS in Kim's direction.

Lamis looks confused, then... it clicks. Lamis' eyes GO WIDE.

ALEXANDER LAMIS (CONT'D)
 No! Maybe that worked before de-
 segregation. But it's *the 80s* -

LEE
 Oh, Al. You've been away from home
 too long.

Lee's drink is empty, so he reaches over and grabs Lamis'.

LEE (CONT'D)
 Off the record?

Lamis NODS. Lee takes a DEEP BREATH. He LEANS IN, and says...

LEE (CONT'D)
 I'll square with you. You start out
 in 1954 by saying, *N*****, N*****,*
*N*****.* By 1968, that hurts you,
 backfires. Suddenly, that's
 "racist." So you say stuff like
 "law and order" or "states'
 rights." But we all know what it
 means. That's the "Southern
Strategy." Saying "we want to cut
 this" is a helluva lot more
 abstract than the word ni-

INT. LEE'S HOSPITAL ROOM, 1991 - DAY

Lee WAVES his hands wildly at the camera.

LEE
 HEY. This isn't what it looks like!
 In fact, I'm actually really *happy*
 to FINALLY clear this up.

Lee looks at us with UTTER SINCERITY.

LEE (CONT'D)
 I wasn't telling him what *I DO*. I
 was telling him what's *BEEN DONE*.
 But he didn't include that in his
 little book, so I get a rep as some
 race-baiting yokel. *I was 14 in*
1965! How could *I* have invented the
 Southern Strategy?! I mean, this
 guy FUCKED ME. I'm the victim here!

Lee SHAKES HIS HEAD.

LEE (CONT'D)
 And besides, even if I wanted to
 use the Southern Strategy in '88 -
 WHICH I DIDN'T! - I couldn't.

Lee SITS BACK in his bed.

LEE (CONT'D)
 (to camera)
 I couldn't, because of -

INT. OFF THE RECORD SPEAKEASY, WASHINGTON, D.C., 1988 - NIGHT

A woman's FIERY RED nail POINTS at a reservation sheet.

MARY (O.S.)
 MARY MATALIN. See?

On MARY MATALIN (35, white). Mary is crazy tall. Wearing PEARLS and COWBOY BOOTS, she stands out among the identical suits in this dimly lit hideout for D.C.'s rich and infamous.

MAÎTRE D'
 My apologies, Mrs. Matalin.

MARY
 Miss, actually. Nothing a bottle of
 champagne on the house won't cure.

Mary smiles like an angel, and the MAÎTRE D' suppresses his irritation. He leads her to her table, where a man is already seated. As Mary shakes his hand, the camera spins to reveal... It's Lee.

LEE (V.O.)
 I needed a Deputy, and Mary had
 been H.W.'s Midwest Bureau Chief.

HOURS PASS as Mary and Lee laugh like the best of friends.

LEE (V.O.)
 We hit it off right away. We were a
 lot alike. Her Daddy was a steel
 mill worker from Illinois, and her
 "education" amounted to a stint at
 Beauty School. But when she decided
 she wanted to be in politics, damn
 if she didn't claw her way up.

Mary sees the Maître D' passing by. She lightly - but FORCEFULLY - grabs his arm.

LEE (V.O.)

At first, nobody wanted her at the RNC. But within months, she had those boys eating outta the palm of her hand.

The Maître D' returns with a bottle of Veuve Clicquot.

LEE (V.O.)

She wasn't afraid of anybody. No matter who they were. She used to say...

MARY

... Everybody puts their pants on one leg at a time, right?

Lee LEANS IN to Mary with laser focus.

LEE

Alright, Miss Matalin, here's the test: If you're me, how would you run this thing? Keep in mind that everybody thinks H.W. is a -

MARY

Wimp. Which is for the best. Better a wimp than what he *really* is.

Mary takes a cigar right out Lee's hand.

LEE

Which is...

She blows a perfect smoke ring.

MARY

An asshole.

Lee LAUGHS.

MARY (CONT'D)

Me? I'd amplify what worked in the Midwest. If Dukakis wins, it's a win for big government. For the union stealing money from my Dad's paycheck. For being soft on crime, and letting the Hasty Pudding Club tax us to death.

LEE

That's *cold*. I like it.

MARY

Mr. Atwater, let's get real. We all know H.W. is a home-run. That is... *if you have the right team. I'm sure a lot of boys want this job, but I'm the only woman who can get you there. By a landslide.*

Music to Lee's ears.

LEE (V.O.)

Boy, I liked her. We hated all the same people. We liked all the same music. We agreed on everything. Well, *almost everything...*

Lee is WHISPERING. It's a speech we've heard before...

LEE

... And that's a helluva lot more abstract than the word ni-

MARY

WHOA. Stop right there.

LEE

What?

MARY

I'm not interested in that.

LEE

In what?

Mary RAISES HER EYEBROWS.

MARY

Race-baiting. I don't want any part of that Lamis nonsense -

LEE

No! You misunderstood! *Christ on a cracker.* That Lamis shit gonna follow me to my damn grave?

MARY

Besides, it wouldn't even work.

LEE

Well, *hypothetically...* Why not?

MARY

This is a national election. That Southern shit doesn't fly in the Big Leagues. *No offense.*

LEE

I'm not trying to do it! I was just trying to tell you how we're evolving past it. *As a party.*

MARY

Uh-huh.

LEE

HEY. I'm not some racist, OK? Don't call me that. That's like... the worst word you can call someone.

MARY

I think you know it's not.

A beat of silence.

MARY (CONT'D)

Mr. Atwater, I want this job. But I have conditions. First, there are things I won't do. Southern Strategy is one of them.

LEE

Well, that's...

Lee thinks for just an instant, but we can tell the wheels are turning. *Hard.*

LEE (CONT'D)

That's fine, actually. That's perfect. What's the second condition?

MARY

We're in a spin business. But if you hire me, I promise I'll never spin you, and you promise you'll never spin me. Between *us*, we tell the truth. OK?

Lee LEANS BACK in his chair.

LEE

Lord. I never met anyone like you.

MARY

And you never will. Because, let's face it, you need me. Otherwise it's just you -

Mary looks in either direction. Each table is full of old men whose cuff links cost more than a teacher's salary.

MARY (CONT'D)

- and the gentlemen of the Greenwich Homeowner's Association. Could be good to have someone *FROM* your team *ON* your team.

Mary extends her hand.

MARY (CONT'D)

Do we have a deal?

A beat as they stare each other down.

LEE

Deal.

Lee and Mary SHAKE ON IT. Mary yells to the Maître D'.

MARY

We're going to need more champagne!

INT. LEE'S OFFICE, BUSH CAMPAIGN HEADQUARTERS, 1988 - MORNING

SUPER: Bush Campaign Headquarters, Houston, Texas

We look around Lee's office. Worn sneakers by the door, some B.B. King albums, a TV that never stops playing the news...

And a DARTBOARD with MICHAEL DUKAKIS' face taped to it.

Lee sits at his desk, feet up, reading the *New York Times*.

LEE (V.O.)

But even with Mary by my side, the campaign was shakier than I'd hoped. Our strategy before the Convention was mostly saying the word "Reagan" as many times as possible. But now...

The headline reads: "REAGAN BACKERS SHIFT SIDES."

LEE (V.O.)

We needed a new plan. And I knew just the one...

A pair of HIGH-HEELED BOOTS appear at the door, and Mary strides into the office. She places a souvenir White House shot glass on Lee's desk - clearly purchased at the airport.

MARY

Don't say I never got you anything.

LEE

Look at what these dopes wrote!

Lee TOSSES the newspaper to Mary. She catches it, and tosses it RIGHT BACK. It hits him SMACK in the face.

MARY

Keep up. I already made the calls and counter stories are cooking.

LEE

Well I'm cookin' up a new ad from Roger for the weekend.

MARY

Ugh. Roger.

LEE

You got a problem with Roger?

MARY

He's a creep, Lee. He's good at making ads, but -

The phone RINGS. Lee picks up.

LEE

(to phone)

Yeah? Oh. Sure. Tell her...

Lee TURNS AWAY from Mary.

LEE (CONT'D)

(whispering)

Tell her I'll come by tonight. Send her a bottle of champagne.

(quieter)

I SAID CHAMPAGNE.

Mary TAPS HER FOOT. Lee hangs up.

LEE (CONT'D)

You were saying Roger's a creep?

MARY

Apparently so are you. Aren't you married?

LEE
Maybe that was Sally, Ms.
Suspicious. Ever consider that?

MARY
No.

LEE
Enough ragging on me. Go back to
ragging on Roger. You were saying?

MARY
I wouldn't want to spend a weekend
with Roger Ailes, that's all.

LEE
Why? Your secret boyfriend got you
all booked up?

MARY
I don't have a boyfriend.

LEE
Yeah, right. I see you sneaking
around, making little phone calls.
He doesn't work here, does he?

MARY
Definitely not.

LEE
So you DO have a boyfriend!

Mary can't help but laugh. Lee switches into business mode.

LEE (CONT'D)
So, I've been thinking on this, and
I think I know our problem.

On the TV, H.W. is being interviewed. Lee points to him.

LEE (CONT'D)
Problem is... No one wants to have
a beer with *that* guy.

MARY
Well, luckily, he's running for
President. Not Prom King.

LEE
We're not energizing the base,
Mary. And he's no Reagan. He's not
going to win coast-to-coast. He
needs the South.

MARY

Oh, the base would never vote for Dukakis!

LEE

No. But for that guy...

On TV, H.W. is showing the interviewer his prized collection of horseshoes.

LEE (CONT'D)

... They might not vote at all.

MARY

I can sense you have some crazy idea, so why don't you tell it to me so I can tell you how bad it is.

LEE

Well, here's the thing. Voters either want an every man, or a *self-made* man. If he's rich, he's got to be aspirational.

MARY

H.W. isn't a self-made man.

LEE

Right. That's not an option. So, let's talk... *Texas*.

MARY

Yes, I've heard of it.

LEE

Well, he *lives* in Texas. That's real America, isn't it?

MARY

All of America is real America.

LEE

No, it's *not*. Texas is a lot more America than, say, *Harvard Yard*.

Mary picks up what Lee is putting down.

MARY

Oh... you mean, *Texas*.

LEE

Texas.

MARY

Texas...

A BEAT as Mary thinks this over.

MARY (CONT'D)

He *does* need to be more relatable.

LEE

An average Joe.

MARY

An average *George*.

LEE

Ha! Love that. Let's get A.C. and Pinkie in here and run it by them. Watch their heads spin?

Mary gets up to open the door.

MARY

(under her breath)

An episode of Sesame Street could make *their* heads spin.

INT. OFFICE FLOOR - MORNING

Mary OPENS THE DOOR and SHOUTS ACROSS THE OFFICE.

MARY

A.C.! Pinkie!

Two men PERK their heads up like meerkats. They look directly at each other, and then... BAM! They are RACING through the office. PAPERS FLY, INTERNS SCREAM!

INT. LEE'S OFFICE - MORNING

They reach the door at the SAME TIME, and both try to SQUEEZE IN first. Then, they both TUMBLE in a heap on the floor.

LEE

I think A.C. won that one. Mary?

MARY

How do both of you have actual wives?

LEE (V.O.)

A.C. and Pinkie. Two of my finest campaign staff.

We focus on JAMES "PINKIE" PINKERTON (30, white).

LEE (V.O.)

Now, Pinkie was a robot trapped in a man's body. The emotional range of a fax machine. I used to call him "Encyclopedia."

Lee turns TO CAMERA.

LEE

Watch this. Pinkie, name every Vice President.

PINKIE

Adams, Jefferson, Burr -

LEE

Now, only the Republicans.

PINKIE

Hannibal Hamlin, Schuyler Colfax -

LEE

Now, only the ones from Kentucky.

Pinkie thinks for half a second.

PINKIE

Richard Mentor Johnson, John C. Breckinridge -

LEE

Alright. Off, HAL.

We pan to ANDREW aka "A.C." CARD (41, white).

LEE (V.O.)

Andrew Card. Called him "A.C." Not much going on in that block-head of his, but he had a certain...

A.C. STANDS and we see that he's 6'5".

LEE (V.O.)

Authority. That came in handy.

Lee turns to the two men.

LEE

Boys, we need to energize the base.

A.C.

Roger *is* always saying we need to push harder on wedge issues.

PINKIE

Immigration.

A.C.

Abortion.

PINKIE

International relations.

A.C.

All the -ations, really.

Mary RUBS HER TEMPLE.

LEE

Well, we got a plan.

MARY

It's really more of an idea -

Lee INTERRUPTS her.

LEE

We're going to turn this silver spoon yuppie into an All-American Texas cowboy!

MARY

That's really simplifying it -

Lee interrupts her AGAIN.

LEE

It's populism. It *is* simple.

A.C.

What's that mean, though?

PINKIE

Populism is a range of political stances that emphasize...

LEE

It just means we're dialing up that hometown feeling.

PINKIE

... Famous examples include Huey Long. Strom Thurmond. David Duke -

LEE

No, not David Duke! Like, Johnny Cash. Or Jesus!

MARY

I thought we were going to workshop this?

LEE

We don't have time! We have an election to win! Right, boys?

Lee reaches out to HIGH FIVE A.C. and Pinkie.

A.C.

Let's CRUSH it!

PINKIE

Go Bush.

MARY

I think this is going to be harder than you think it's going to be.

LEE

Don't be such a worry wart. I've done this a thousand times!

(turns to A.C.)

A.C., from now on, everything they throw at H.W. - *Yankee, Ivy Leaguer* - throw it back. I don't want to hear the word "Dukakis" without the words "liberal elite" next to it!

A.C.

Sure thing, chief.

LEE

And Pinkie? No more stuff about Reagan or the C.I.A. From now on, it's World War II, Navy hero, family man, *Christian*. America America rah rah rah blah blah blah.

Pinkie BLINKS. Message received.

LEE (CONT'D)

Well? They hooked your brains up to your legs yet, or what? Get movin'!

MARY

Hold on! We don't even -

But A.C. and Pinkie are GONE.

LEE

Roger can start digging for stuff.
Un-American stuff...

(points to Mary)

You start on the press. Get the interviews rolling - anybody but Dan Rather. Headlines need to say: *George H.W. Bush: Texas' Native Son*. Get Junior out there more, too. His accent will work wonders -

MARY

HEY!

Lee FREEZES.

MARY (CONT'D)

We need to think this through.

LEE

This was your idea! *An average George*, remember?

MARY

This isn't as easy as swapping out his boat shoes for cowboy boots!

LEE

That's BRILLIANT.

MARY

Lee, *please*.

LEE

Mary, we're three months from election day. No time to pussyfoot. Besides, this *always* works! Like Pinkie said. Huey Long! Etc. Etc.

MARY

Huey Long got shot!

LEE

Oh, just the once!

Lee LAUGHS. Mary doesn't. Lee walks to her.

LEE (CONT'D)

Mary, I need a big 'ole landslide. I need the *popular* vote. This will get 'em to the polls, trust me. And when it does, you and I become King and Queen of the RNC.

Lee puts his hand on Mary's shoulder.

LEE (CONT'D)
So, are you with me?

JUST THEN, Lee's assistant BROOKE (20s) pops her head in.

BROOKE
Air Force Two leaving soon.

LEE
You got my stuff?

Brooke holds up a suitcase.

LEE (CONT'D)
And?

In the other hand, Brooke holds up a six-pack of beer.

LEE (CONT'D)
Also, need you to meet me at the
plane with something. You get to go
shopping today, Brookie! Know how
you girls love that.

Mary and Brooke share a KNOWING LOOK. This is the type of garden variety sexist shit they both deal with all damn day.

Brooke leaves, and Lee turns to Mary.

LEE (CONT'D)
So?

A beat.

MARY
Let's do it.

Lee knocks Mary under the chin, and walks out the door.

ON Mary, looking CONFLICTED...

INT. OFFICE FLOOR - MORNING

Lee strides through the office, high-fiving staffers...

INT. AIR FORCE TWO - DAY

MATCH CUT to Lee striding down the aisle of Air Force Two, high-fiving the Press Corps and throwing beers their way.

INT. AIR FORCE TWO, VICE PRESIDENTIAL SUITE - DAY

As Lee approaches the Vice-President's Suite, his confidence totally fades. He HESITATES at the door handle. SUDDENLY...

H.W. (O.S.)
Lee. Get in here.

INT. VICE PRESIDENTIAL SUITE - DAY

H.W. is at his desk; his back to Lee.

H.W.
You fix the polls?

LEE
I'm here to talk about that, Sir.

H.W. spins around.

H.W.
So... *Talk.*

Lee starts BOUNCING HIS LEGS nervously.

LEE
Here's the thing -

H.W.
Stop that. Sit still.

LEE
Sorry, Sir. I was born prematurely
and my nervous system didn't
develop right.

H.W. STARES BLANKLY.

LEE (CONT'D)
You're not relatable enough.

H.W. GLARES.

LEE (CONT'D)
I mean, we haven't *made you*
relatable enough. Sir.

H.W.
Fine. Add more jokes to the
speeches.

Lee pulls out a large shoe box.

LEE

Voters wanna feel like they know you.

H.W.

I'm their leader, not their golf buddy.

LEE

OK. That's the first thing: No more talking about golf.

Lee SLIDES the box to H.W. Inside is a pair of COWBOY BOOTS.

H.W.

What are these for?

LEE

We're re-focusing our strategy. Honing in on patriotism. Freedom. Family. You know... USA number one!

H.W.

You're just saying random words.

LEE

No, I'm saying *powerful* words.

H.W. PUSHES the shoe box BACK ACROSS THE TABLE.

H.W.

Lee, this is a *dignified* office. For *dignified* people. I can't act like... You know.

H.W. motions at Lee. Lee takes the hit.

LEE

Let me explain it better. We're the party of the American Dream, right? School prayer. Family values. *One nation, UNDER GOD.*

This last line piques H.W.'s interest.

LEE (CONT'D)

Dukakis and his kind want to take that away from us. We've been focusing on your experience. What *you've done*. Now, we need to focus on what you're *going to do*: *MAKE THIS COUNTRY GREAT AGAIN.*

H.W. stares at Lee for what feels like eternity. Then...

H.W.

Make sure Jennifer gets this new stuff before debate prep.

Lee BEAMS.

LEE

Now, don't take those boots off until November 8th.

H.W. stares down his glasses at Lee.

LEE (CONT'D)

Sir.

With a wave of his hand, Lee is dismissed.

LEE (V.O.)

The plan was set. Only one more thing could stand in my way...

INT. DEMOCRATIC NATIONAL CONVENTION, 1988 - EVENING

SUPER: Democratic National Convention, 1988

Governor MICHAEL DUKAKIS (55) waves to an adoring crowd. (Note: While the crowd is a little less white than Bush's... They're still pretty white).

LEE (V.O.)

Michael Dukakis.

CUT TO:

EXT. TOW PATH, GEORGETOWN, WASHINGTON, D.C. - DAWN

The tranquil Tow Path. The water from the canal glimmers in the early morning light. Ducks swim peacefully. Until...

"Bad Medicine" by Bon Jovi BLASTS THROUGH THE SILENCE.

The ducks FLEE, startled by the music.

Lee is JOGGING, his walkman BLARING music.

LEE

Sorry for my appearance. But if I don't run every day, I'll die. I gotta do my seven miles or I go nuts. Besides, I do my best thinking here on the Tow Path. Only place I feel... calm.

Lee takes off his headphones to talk to the camera.

LEE (CONT'D)
Anyways, Dukakis had it all. Son of immigrants. A veteran. He was even a Goddamn boy scout. I mean, look at this...

CUT TO:

INT. 1988 DEMOCRATIC NATIONAL CONVENTION - EVENING

Dukakis speaks from a podium.

DUKAKIS
My friends, if anyone tells you that the American Dream belongs to the privileged few and not to all of us, you tell them that the Reagan era is OVER, and that a new era is about to begin!

The crowd goes wild.

CUT BACK TO:

EXT. TOW PATH, GEORGETOWN, WASHINGTON, D.C. - DAWN

Lee pretends to barf into the canal.

LEE
PUKE. I hate bleeding hearts.
What's worse, he hired this lady -

CUT TO:

INT. DUKAKIS CAMPAIGN HEADQUARTERS, BOSTON - DAY

SUSAN ESTRICH (36, white) talks to staffers.

LEE (V.O.)
Susan Estrich. First female president of Harvard Law Review. Now, first female manager of a Presidential campaign. I mean, talk about trying too hard.

Susan's staff of suck-ups APPLAUD. CUT TO a lone BLACK WOMAN in the back. She claps, but we can tell she doesn't think that speech was so impressive.

But more on *her* later...

CUT BACK TO:

EXT. NATIONAL MALL, WASHINGTON, D.C. - DAWN

The sun rises over the Potomac as Lee strides onto the National Mall.

LEE

Now, I did a few things here and there to knock Dukakis off his high and mighty horse...

CUT TO:

EXT. MASSACHUSETTS STATE HOUSE - DAY

Reporters chase Dukakis down Beacon Street.

LEE (V.O.)

Little things. Totally harmless.

REPORTER #1

Governor, what do you have to say about rumors that your wife, Kitty, burned an American flag?

Dukakis SCOWLS at Susan.

SUSAN

Kitty Dukakis would never -

The reporters SWARM, descending on Dukakis and Susan.

CUT BACK TO:

EXT. CAPITOL HILL - DAWN

Lee runs up the steps of Capitol Hill.

LEE

And Dukakis did a few things that knocked himself off his own horse.

CUT TO:

EXT. TANK - DAY

Tiny Dukakis bobs up and down in his infamous "tank ad."

CUT BACK TO:

EXT. CAPITOL HILL - DAWN

Lee runs back down the steps.

LEE

I mean, losing to *this* guy?

CUT TO:

EXT. TANK - DAY

Dukakis' helmet almost falls off.

CUT BACK TO:

EXT. NATIONAL MALL - DAWN

Lee stops to take a breather.

LEE

I couldn't stand the humiliation!
But I figured the first debate
would get us outta the Bush league.

(beat)

So to speak.

INT. WAKE FOREST UNIVERSITY AUDITORIUM - EVENING

SUPER: First Presidential Debate. Winston-Salem, North Carolina.

Two podiums stand on an empty stage.

SUPER: 44 days until the election.

INT. BACKSTAGE - SAME TIME

The Bush team stand in a tight circle like boxing coaches prepping a fighter for the ring. Jennifer rub's H.W.'s shoulders. He SWATS her away.

MARY
 ... And then we move into
 decriminalizing marijuana.

H.W.
 (reciting)
 Slippery slope, etc. Got it.

Lee ROCKS on his heels excitedly.

LEE
 But first, drugs in schools -

H.W.
 Lee! Stand still, darn it. I can't
 be the "hard on drugs" candidate
 and have a campaign manager who
 looks like he's just snorted all
 the coke in North Carolina.

An AWKWARD beat between the two men. Mary JUMPS IN.

MARY
 We *have* to hit the Pledge of
 Allegiance, Sir.

H.W.
 Where?

LEE
 Bring up the ACL-Jews and weave it
 in there.

H.W.
 Lee. Don't be vulgar. People could
 hear you.

Lee imperceptibly twitches.

MARY
 HEY! Let's talk about the ranch -

As Mary takes over, Lee's eyes wander to the competition.
 Susan is prepping Dukakis while a makeup artist touches up
 his CATERPILLAR BROWS. Sensing Lee's gaze, Susan turns.

LEE
 (mouths to Susan)
 How's it hangin'?

Susan HUFFS. Then, Lee notices a young woman behind Susan.
 We've seen her before. This is DONNA BRAZILE (29, Black).

The house lights DIM. Lee looks to the stage. *SHOWTIME.*

INT. WAKE FOREST UNIVERSITY AUDITORIUM - EVENING

H.W. and Dukakis walk onstage. They shake hands, and take their places. Moderator JIM LEHRER (54) turns to camera.

JIM LEHRER

Good evening. Welcome to the first presidential debate of the 1988 campaign. I'm Jim Lehrer of PBS.

LEE (V.O.)

It was fight night, and I was ready for my guy to deliver a *knock-out*.

QUICK CUTS:

We see FLASHES of H.W. struggling.

H.W.

(confused)

... Between the Midgetman missile... or Minuteman? Um...

H.W. (CONT'D)

(angry)

I still have minutes left, JIM.

H.W. (CONT'D)

(whines)

Awww, come on!

INT. BACKSTAGE - EVENING

Lee and Mary exchange a NERVOUS LOOK.

INT. WAKE FOREST AUDITORIUM - EVENING

LEE (V.O.)

But H.W. was flopping around like a big mouth Bass. Meanwhile, that goody two-shoes Dukakis...

QUICK CUTS:

DUKAKIS

... My parents came to this country as *immigrants*...

The crowd APPLAUDS.

DUKAKIS (CONT'D)

... And as an American...

LEE (CONT'D)

Friend?

(pause)

Girlfriend?

DONNA

Oh. So, you're Lee Atwater.

LEE

In the flesh, Donna...

DONNA

Brazile. Deputy Field Director.

Lee looks at her warily.

LEE

I've never seen you before. You don't look like you're part of Susan's usual crew...

DONNA

Nope.

LEE

So, where are you from?

DONNA

Same place as you. Or at least nearby. Judging from your accent.

Donna does a little circle with her hand.

DONNA (CONT'D)

Louisiana.

LEE

Here? Some of the very best are from here! Snooks Eaglin, Earl King, Lightnin' Slim...

DONNA

"If it wasn't for bad luck, I wouldn't have no luck at all."

Lee is impressed. And a little... Unsettled.

LEE

Louisiana, huh? That's *unusual*.

DONNA

Is it?

LEE

Dukakis' team are all Boston. All Harvard. All men, too. Well, except Susan. But that's still Harvard. And you must be the only...

DONNA

You're telling me I'm the only Black person? Gee, hadn't noticed.

LEE

I'm just saying it's...

DONNA

"Unusual." You said that. You have a problem with me being here?

LEE

No. You're just... Well, honestly, you'll be a bit trickier for me to figure out. Not like the rest.

DONNA

Neither are you.

LEE

Me? How?

DONNA

I don't know. You don't exactly seem like someone who'd get invited to go sailing at Kennebunkport.

Lee is taken aback. He didn't like that comment ONE BIT.

But before he can snap back, Lee catches H.W. looking like he's forgotten his lines in the fifth grade play.

INT. ONSTAGE - EVENING

Onstage, PETER JENNINGS (50) is asking H.W. a question he *DOES NOT* remember the answer to.

PETER JENNINGS

Mr. Vice-President, you've used the phrase "card-carrying" so many times since Governor Dukakis first acknowledged that he was a card-carrying member of the ACLU. I'd like to know why?

H.W. stares at Jennings like he's speaking in tongues.

INT. BACKSTAGE - EVENING

Lee SPRINTS to the side of the stage and LOCKS EYES with H.W.

LEE
 (whisper yells)
 PLEDGE. OF. ALLEGIANCE!!!

INT. ONSTAGE - EVENING

H.W.
 Do we want this country to go that far left? I think I'm more in touch with the mainstream of America. I don't agree with a lot of the positions of the ACLU.

H.W. is gaining confidence as he sees the audience PERK UP.

H.W. (CONT'D)
 I don't want my ten year old grandchild to go to an X-rated movie. I don't think they're right to take tax exemption away from the Catholic Church. I don't want to see kiddie pornographic laws repealed. And I don't want to see "under God" come out from our currency!

APPLAUSE! He's on a roll!

H.W. (CONT'D)
 And I believe in the PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE!

THUNDEROUS APPLAUSE.

INT. BACKSTAGE - EVENING

Lee SMIRKS at Donna. But for some reason, she doesn't look fazed. In fact, she looks... *Smug*. Lee turns - panicked - back to the stage...

INT. ONSTAGE - EVENING

PETER JENNINGS
 Governor? A response?

DUKAKIS

If the Pledge of Allegiance was the acid test of one's patriotism, well, the Vice President's been the presiding officer in the Senate for the past seven years. He's never *ONCE* suggested that a session begin with the Pledge of Allegiance!

The crowd OOOHS.

INT. BACKSTAGE - EVENING

Donna turns to Lee with a sly smile. JUST THEN, Susan SNAPS her fingers at Donna like "let's go."

Donna's nostrils flare *ever so slightly*, but she swallows it.

DONNA

I'm sure we'll meet again, Lee
Atwater.

Donna heads off as the house lights TURN ON.

INT. BACKSTAGE - EVENING

H.W. shakes Dukakis' hand, and walks offstage.

Instantly, his SMILE FADES into a SCOWL that could scare a King Cobra. He practically CHARGES at Lee.

LEE

Sir, let's just regroup -

But at the last moment, H.W. brushes RIGHT PAST HIM.

He SNATCHES his coat from Jennifer, and calls back to Lee as he STOMPS toward the door:

H.W.

Lee, you can find your own way back
to Houston.

The door SLAMS. A beat as Lee stands there, shell-shocked.

Mary walks up, and places her hand on his arm.

MARY

Hey, he'll cool off. And, you said
your Mom lives not far from here,
right? How long is the drive home?

LEE

Three hours.

MARY

A nice drive! You should go see
your Mom. That'll do you good,
right? To go home?

Lee LOOKS UP at Mary. He seems like he wants to tell her something...

A COUGH. Mary turns to see one of the Secret Service Agents holding the door for her.

MARY (CONT'D)

Have a good visit, OK?

Mary leaves, and Lee is left alone in the hallway.

Lee stands in his own hurt. Until it transforms. Into something else. Into...

BLIND RAGE. He STORMS OUT of the building and into...

EXT. I-95 SOUTH - MIDDLE OF THE NIGHT

A RED CORVETTE WHIPS DOWN A HIGHWAY. It's the middle of the night. Fog covers the abandoned road. But the Corvette's BOOMING RADIO disturbs the silence.

Bessie Smith's "Devil's Gonna Get You" blasts:

*"Devil's gonna get you
Devil's gonna get you
Oh, the devil's gonna get you
The way you're carryin' on..."*

We see Lee in the driver's seat, a cigarette dangling from his lips, whiskey bottle in his lap.

His face is twisted. He's still dwelling on the debate. And has been for hours. SUDDENLY...

An exit sign. The car is going so fast we almost miss it:

US-1 S TO AIKEN

Lee SLAMS ON THE BRAKES.

He stares up at the sign.

After a LONG BEAT, he TURNS THE WHEEL. The Corvette slowly crawls toward Aiken.

EXT. AIKEN, SOUTH CAROLINA - EARLY MORNING

A sign reads:

You are now entering AIKEN, SOUTH CAROLINA

The best small town in the South!

Lee passes a large statue of Robert E. Lee. The other Lee STARES DOWN at him with eerily blank eyes...

Large antebellum homes appear. Grand staircases. Giant, well-tended Palmettos. THEN...

EXT. AIKEN - EARLY MORNING

Lee crosses a wooden bridge over a muddy canal. A NUCLEAR POWER PLANT looms in the distance. The houses on this side of town have shrunk, and multiplied. This is certainly the wrong side of the tracks. Lee turns onto "Wildwood Road."

EXT. LEE'S CHILDHOOD HOME - EARLY MORNING

The Corvette IDLES in front of a small, dilapidated home.

Lee turns off the car. He stares at the house.

THEN, he sees someone MOVE inside.

In a FLASH, Lee STARTS THE ENGINE, and RACES OFF.

EXT. AIKEN, SOUTH CAROLINA - EARLY MORNING

Lee BARRELS toward a STOPLIGHT. He realizes it's RED. The car SCREECHES to a halt just in time.

A beat as Lee sits under the annoyingly long light. Then, he sees a sign with an arrow pointing right:

GREENLAWN CEMETERY

Lee squints at the sign...

And TURNS RIGHT.

EXT. GREENLAWN CEMETERY - EARLY MORNING

Lee walks among the headstones, frantically searching for something...

He finds it.

Lee walks up to a TINY GRAVE. Cherubs decorate the headstone.
Lee LEANS DOWN. He TRACES HIS FINGERS across the engraving:

JOSEPH WILLIAM ATWATER

November 18, 1953 - October 10, 1956

His eyes fill with tears.

Just then... CRACK.

Lee WHIPS AROUND. It's just a GROUNDSKEEPER, raking leaves.
Lee wipes his eyes as he marches back to the Corvette.

LEE (V.O.)

I can admit I wasn't in a good
place after that first debate.

Once in the car, Lee picks up a GIANT, 80s CELL PHONE, and
begins dialing.

The Corvette VROOMS off so fast that it leaves skid marks in
front of the little cemetery.

EXT. PARKING LOT - MORNING

A car sits on the roof of a parking structure.

LEE (V.O.)

I was desperate. And you know what
they say about desperate times...

A man approaches the car...

I/E. CAR - MORNING

LEE (V.O.)

... They call for CNN.

The man OPENS the door and JUMPS in the car, terrifying the
driver! Who happens to be...

Journalist Robert Novak. We last saw him screaming his lungs
out on Crossfire.

ROBERT NOVAK

AHHHHHH!

LEE

Is that any way to greet your favorite source?

Lee is wearing the same clothes as last night.

ROBERT NOVAK

What happened to you? You look like you just got back from hell.

LEE

Maybe I did.

ROBERT NOVAK

Lee, what's with this MacGyver shit? Why can't we just go to breakfast like normal people?

LEE

Isn't it more fun this way?

Novak ROLLS HIS EYES.

ROBERT NOVAK

What do you have for me?

LEE

You're still on our team, right?

ROBERT NOVAK

If you mean am I still a Republican, yes.

LEE

Got a story for you. *Exclusive*.

ROBERT NOVAK

Go on.

LEE

Didn't hear it from me, but Dukakis...

(whispers)

He once took a trip to the nut house.

Novak's face DROPS. He's disappointed.

LEE (CONT'D)

I mean, that's *something*, Bob. Dukakis' brother died, and he went to a shrink -

ROBERT NOVAK

He went to a shrink, or he was in an institution? Because those are two very different things.

LEE

Oh, come on! You want President Looney Tunes?

ROBERT NOVAK

Lee, it's 1988. Even *I* go to a shrink these days.

LEE

I'm telling you, the guy's got mental issues -

ROBERT NOVAK

Lee, you just said his brother died! How would *you* feel if *your* brother died?

A beat. Lee's face slowly fills with... FURY.

LEE

If you're too much of a *PUSSY* to handle it, I've got plenty of other people who *CAN*!

Lee leaps out of the car and *SLAMS* the door. Novak rolls down the window to call after him.

ROBERT NOVAK

Lee! What's the matter with you?

INT. BUSH CAMPAIGN HEADQUARTERS - AFTERNOON

A group of staffers watch a clip from SNL on an office TV. Dana Carvey plays a stumbling, bumbling H.W.

DANA CARVEY

Once again, stay the course, we're on track, a thousand points of light, um, stay the course, thousand points of light... Did I say that already?

The staffers can't help but laugh.

SUDDENLY, Lee bursts in. Everyone goes *SILENT*.

Someone *BANGS* the TV off as Lee *STOMPS* by.

I/E. MARY'S OFFICE - AFTERNOON

Lee BUSTS into Mary's office. Mary looks up, taking in his wrinkled clothes, baggy eyes...

MARY

Whoa. What happened to you?

Lee THROWS DOWN a stack of newspapers.

LEE

This.

A headline reads: "DUKAKIS ALL FIRED UP AFTER FIRST DEBATE."

MARY

Hey, it's not all bad news. We're actually five points ahead.

Lee KICKS a small trash can. It rolls to the floor.

LEE

I'm not eking out a loser's victory by five measly points!

MARY

Don't hurt my innocent trash can.

Lee starts PACING.

MARY (CONT'D)

When was the last time you slept?

LEE

We have to DO something, Mary!

MARY

Hey, H.W. was harsh on you, OK? You didn't deserve that.

LEE

He doesn't listen to me, Mary! He thinks I'm some hayseed from Hicksville! He can't... He won't...

MARY

LEE!

Lee STOPS.

MARY (CONT'D)

Sit.

He does.

MARY (CONT'D)

We've got everything going for us:
A sitting Vice-President, a running
mate who looks like a Ken Doll come
to life, and an opponent who isn't
tall enough to reach the mic.

Mary puts her hand on Lee's back.

MARY (CONT'D)

It was one bad debate. It's not a
big deal.

SLOWLY... Lee's face CRUNCHES. He SNARLS:

LEE

Let me ask you something: Why are
you a Republican if you don't want
to win?

Mary is taken aback.

MARY

Really? Fine. Because I believe
things can be better -

LEE

You know, I could have us in a ten
point lead by now. But nooo. *You
won't do this, you won't do that.*

MARY

Because it's not just about
winning! It's *how*, and -

LEE

Of course! Holy Mary, patron saint
of honest campaigns!

MARY

Ok. That's enough. I know you're in
a bad way right now, but -

LEE

You're the angel, and I'm just the
low-life devil on your shoulder -

MARY

CAN YOU STOP INTERRUPTING ME.

Now Lee is taken aback.

MARY (CONT'D)

Listen to me before you say more things you'll regret: *We are going to win.* The Veep debate is coming up, and we can nail it, but ONLY if you keep your head on straight.

(beat)

So please don't make me worry that you're going to blow it by doing something dumb. *Because. We. Don't. Need. To.*

Lee SQUINTS at her.

LEE

Remind me who the boss is here?

MARY

(under her breath)

Ha. Great question.

Lee STANDS.

LEE

Whenever A.C. and Pinkie get here, send them to me. Where the hell are they, anyways?

MARY

At home. With their families.

Mary's eyes soften.

MARY (CONT'D)

When's the last time you saw Sally? Or the girls? Give her a call.

LEE

She doesn't... She doesn't want to hear from me right now.

Lee goes to the door.

MARY

I don't think that's true.

He turns back, VENOM on his lips.

LEE

And what would YOU know about it?

Mary's eyes widen as Lee STORMS OUT.

INT. OMAHA CIVIC AUDITORIUM, BACKSTAGE - EVENING

SUPER: Vice-Presidential Debate. Omaha, Nebraska.

SUPER: 33 days until the election.

A MAKE-UP ARTIST powders Dan Quayle.

LEE (V.O.)

A month until the election, and I
had nothing to show for it except
an angry Mary...

Mary gives Lee the COLD SHOULDER.

LEE

(to camera)
... And *this* dipshit.

Quayle POUTS in the mirror at his own reflection.

MARY

On the experience question -

DAN QUAYLE

How many times do we have to go
over this?!

Quayle RIPS OFF his bib and starts to throw a tantrum.

LEE (V.O.)

Being VP is like being second-
runner up for Miss America. No one
cares. Except the second runner-up.

Lee CLAPS Quayle on the back.

LEE

Danny Boy! We're looking good! Are
we feeling good?

DAN QUAYLE

Not good.
(to himself in the mirror)
GREAT.

Lee turns to camera.

LEE

Ruh-roh.

INT. OMAHA CIVIC AUDITORIUM STAGE - MOMENTS LATER

TOM BROKAW (48) turns to Quayle, standing beside Democratic Vice-Presidential nominee LLOYD BENTSEN (67).

LEE (V.O.)
He was NOT *great*.

TOM BROKAW
... But surely, you must have some plan in mind about what you would do if you became President?

Quayle FORCES A SMILE through GRITTED TEETH.

DAN QUAYLE
AHEM. I'll answer this one more time. This is the fourth time, Tom.

TOM BROKAW
Third.

The crowd LAUGHS. Quayle DOES NOT.

DAN QUAYLE
The question you're asking is, "What qualifications does Dan Quayle have to be president?"

ALL EYES fall on Quayle. He SHRINKS under the pressure.

DAN QUAYLE (CONT'D)
I, um... I...
(shouts)
I HAVE AS MUCH EXPERIENCE AS JACK KENNEDY DID!!

The audience GASPS.

Lloyd Bentsen leans into his mic.

LLOYD BENTSEN
Senator, I served with Jack Kennedy. I knew Jack Kennedy. Jack Kennedy was a friend of mine. Senator, *you're no Jack Kennedy*.

The audience CHEERS.

INT. OMAHA CIVIC AUDITORIUM, BACKSTAGE - EVENING

LEE
(to camera)
Ah, shit.

Lee tries to make eye contact with Mary, but she's not having it. Lee's SHOULDERS SINK.

LEE (V.O.)
So that blew. And just when I
thought things couldn't get any
worse...

INT. AIR FORCE TWO - DAY

LEE (V.O.)
H.W. started listening to me.

H.W. is surrounded by reporters.

H.W.
Well, Governor Dukakis got all his
foreign policy views from Harvard
Yard's boutique!

He holds for LAUGHTER... But no one laughs.

REPORTER
Um, didn't you go to Yale?

H.W. shifts in his loafers.

H.W.
Yes, but... Yale's so diffuse,
there isn't a symbol, I don't
think, in the Yale situation, any
symbolism with it.

The reporters look at each other.

REPORTER
Huh?

H.W. freezes. THEN, he remembers what Lee told him.

H.W.
Harvard is all *liberalism* and
elitism!

The reporters start frantically scribbling.

LEE (V.O.)
 Press pitched a real hissy fit
 about that one.

ARCHIVAL TV FOOTAGE:

CAROLE SIMPSON
 Speaking to reporters on Air Force
 Two as he flew from Houston...

TOM BROKAW
 ... Mr. Bush, Yale class of '48...

PETER JENNINGS
 ... blamed Harvard liberalism...

INT. CROSSFIRE, CNN STUDIOS - EVENING

ROBERT NOVAK
 I won't turn this country over to
 Massachusetts liberalism -

ROWLAND EVANS
 Bob, Bob. The man went to Yale.
 It's all the same -

ROBERT NOVAK
 It is not, Rowland! I went to the
 University of Illinois, alright?
 Where did you go?

ROWLAND EVANS
 Yale, but -

ROBERT NOVAK
 So *SHUT UP* already!

Novak and Evans devolve into their usual screaming match.

INT. MARY'S HOUSE, WASHINGTON, D.C. - DAY

LEE (V.O.)
TWO debates where I coulda used
 carrot sticks instead of candidates
 and done better. I had to talk to
 someone. But the *someone* I needed
 really DID NOT wanna talk to me.

Mary is on the couch in her home office reading the papers.

On the side table is a framed Roy Lichtenstein cartoon. A dialogue bubble above a crying woman reads: "I CAN'T BELIEVE I FORGOT TO HAVE CHILDREN!"

Mary underlines part of an article. She chuckles.

MARY
(mutters)
These bastards.

The doorbell RINGS.

MARY (CONT'D)
It's open!

Mary looks around the room.

MARY (CONT'D)
Honey? What did you forget -

Lee appears in the doorway in his running clothes.

MARY (CONT'D)
Oh. It's *you*.

An awkward, unbearably silent beat. Unsure what to do, Lee walks to the window, admiring the view.

LEE
Sure is a pretty town.

MARY
Full of the ugliest people.

Lee turns to face Mary.

LEE
I'm sorry if I offended you the other day, OK? I'm under a lot of pressure.

MARY
It's all about you, isn't it.

LEE
No! I'm trying to save us from being humiliated.

MARY
What have *I* done to be humiliated?

LEE
I mean "*us*" as in... *Republicans!*

MARY

We're the party of Nixon. We're used to being humiliated.

LEE

Mary, I'm serious! H.W. is a disaster. I can't get through to him. He talks right over me. You know how that makes me feel?

MARY

Yeah. *I do.*

THAT shuts Lee up.

MARY (CONT'D)

I know about Novak. You said you'd be honest with me.

A beat as Mary STARES LEE DOWN.

LEE

You're right. I shoulda told you I called him.

MARY

I thought we were partners.

LEE

We are! What you think...

(beat)

It means a lot to me. I'm sorry if I haven't shown it, but you mean a lot to me, Mary. Honest to God.

Mary SIGHS.

MARY

Fine. Then explain something to me. So, we had one bad debate. OK, we had *two*. So what? We're *still* winning. What are you *so* afraid of?

Her eyes SOFTEN.

MARY (CONT'D)

Tell me. Between just us. So I can understand.

LEE

Your secret boyfriend isn't hiding in the closet somewhere?

MARY
No, he's out.

LEE
Out where?

MARY
Don't change the subject.

LEE
It's embarrassing, that's all.

MARY
Since when did you get so proud?

LEE
I've always been this proud.

MARY
Ha. You should run for office then.

Lee looks down at his feet.

LEE
Boys like me don't do that.

Mary looks at Lee with pity.

MARY
You can make a President, but you can't be one? Come on, Lee.

LEE
I need to win, Mary. If I can't, I don't deserve to be here.

MARY
How would YOU say this...

Mary attempts a Southern accent:

MARY (CONT'D)
That's plumb-crazy!

Lee LAUGHS, and Mary does too.

MARY (CONT'D)
Lee, you have to believe me: *We're going to win.*

Lee NODS... but we can see doubt lingering on his face.

MARY (CONT'D)

God, when you came in here, I was so mad at you.

LEE

Well, they say I'm very charming.

Lee starts to leave, but then... he does a DOUBLE TAKE. A men's LSU sweatshirt is laying on the couch. He picks it up.

LEE (CONT'D)

Do you ever wonder... If we'd met another time, would we have been...

Mary holds his gaze for a moment.

MARY

There's no point, Lee. You're married. And I'm...

Lee fingers the edges of the sweatshirt.

LEE

Right.

He lingers at the door.

MARY

I'll see you at the Capitol Hill Club, OK?

LEE

Sure. Sure. See you there.

Lee leaves. ON Mary, watching him go from the window.

EXT. CAPITOL HILL CLUB, WASHINGTON, D.C. - DAY

In the shadow of Capitol Hill sits an inconspicuous building with a green awning. A gold plate at the entrance says: "Capitol Hill Club."

The doors MYSTERIOUSLY OPEN, and we FLOAT inside...

INT. CAPITOL HILL CLUB, HALLWAY - DAY

LEE (V.O.)

The Capitol Hill Club. Headquarters of the RNC.

The camera glides past portraits of powerful men. We move toward a door, and the NOISE LEVEL increases...

Lee is standing at the end of the hallway, waiting for us.

LEE

Behind this door is one of the most exclusive clubs in the world. Wanna go inside?

CLOSE UP on the GOP seal on the door: An elephant, rearing up on its hind legs.

Lee grins, then SWINGS the door open...

INT. CAPITOL HILL CLUB, COCKTAIL PARTY - DAY

Into a roaring cocktail party.

LEE (V.O.)

Yes, these are some of the most powerful men in America.

Mary does a cheers with Bob Dole.

LEE (V.O.)

Well, and Mary.

The camera CIRCLES the room, surveying the party and all its familiar faces.

We land back on Lee. He's putting on his usual schtick for the crowd... But here, no one seems to be laughing.

KARL ROVE (38, chubby, glasses) walks toward him. Lee sees him coming, and flinches. He plasters on a smile.

KARL ROVE

Well, if it isn't the bad boy!

LEE

And the boy genius.

KARL ROVE

(intentionally loud)

Yes, I've had a lot of success down in Texas. *FIRST* Republican elected as Chief Justice of the Texas Supreme Court. *You're all welcome.*

The previously stony-faced crowd LAUGHS for Rove.

KARL ROVE (CONT'D)

Lee here ran my very first campaign! Can you believe that?

MARY

That the one where you went through
your opponents' dorm trash can?

KARL ROVE

Well, I -

MARY

Then the RNC had the FBI
investigate you?

Rove gives Mary a DIRTY LOOK.

KARL ROVE

Still single, Mary?

Rove looks her up and down.

KARL ROVE (CONT'D)

Shame. You're so pretty.

(pause)

For your age.

Rove turns to Lee, boxing Mary out of the convo.

MARY

(under her breath)

Dick.

Rove leads Lee off to the side of the circle.

KARL ROVE

Shame about that Maureen Dowd
article in the Times. Maybe you
need a better team.

Rove nods toward A.C. and Pinkie. They're playing quarters
with champagne flutes.

LEE

I've got it under control, Karl.

KARL ROVE

Good. Good. Maureen Dowd is just a
bitter old lesbian, anyways.

Rove TURNS BACK to Mary.

KARL ROVE (CONT'D)

No offense, Mary!

Mary ROLLS HER EYES.

LEE
Lesbians aside, um... it's gonna be
a landslide!

Crickets. Mary CRINGES at the horrible joke.

LEE (CONT'D)
Um... Speaking of slides, gotta
slide myself over to the bar!

As Lee walks away, we hear Mary go at Rove again.

MARY
Karl, remind me how you made all
your money? Oh yeah, you stole it
from your first wife!

INT. CAPITOL HILL CLUB, COCKTAIL PARTY - DAY

Lee grabs two drinks from a tray, and CHUGS BOTH. As he
reaches for a third, he BUMPS into a man's back.

LEE
Sorry, pard'ner!

The man TURNS AROUND. Lee's face GOES RED...

It's H.W., standing with two country club types.

LEE (CONT'D)
So sorry, Sir.

H.W.
Lee, you know our *three-time*
Secretary of State, George Shultz.
And our *future* Secretary of State,
James Baker.

Lee holds out his hand. No one shakes it.

H.W. (CONT'D)
How are those polls looking? We
have to make sure James here isn't
out of a job before he gets one!

H.W. claps JAMES BAKER's (70s, white) back.

LEE
You can start picking your
stationary, Jimbo!

Baker PURSES HIS LIPS at Lee. GEORGE SHULTZ (70s, white)
shoves an empty glass at Lee.

GEORGE SHULTZ
Get me a drink, would you son?

Lee NODS obediently.

INT. CAPITOL HILL CLUB, BAR - DAY

Lee looks for a bartender, but there's none in sight. So, he REACHES OVER the bar to help himself.

SUDDENLY, someone SWIPES the bottle right out of his hands! We turn and see a man with ALARMING GIRTH holding the bottle.

This is ROGER AILES (48).

LEE
Roger! My wily media man!

Lee pulls Ailes into a handshake hug combo.

ROGER AILES
That's what Dowd called me, huh?
Carpet-munching moron. Things so
bad that you have to rob the bar?

LEE
Who's saying things are bad?

Roger NODS at the group of men across the room, gathered like bullies in the schoolyard. When they see Lee look over, they all TURN THEIR HEADS.

ROGER AILES
Lee, what have I told you? If you
don't like what's being said about
you, you just have to be LOUDER
than everybody else! Now, let's get
outta this mausoleum.

Roger motions for Lee to follow him. He heads toward a BACK DOOR, pausing only to LEER at a young waitress.

Mary - mid-conversation with Baker - sees Lee with Roger out of the corner of her eye. Her BROW FURROWS.

EXT. ALLEY - SUNSET

Lee and Roger sit on the stoop of the service entrance, passing the stolen bottle back and forth.

The BELLS of nearby Saint Peter's Church RING OUT.

ROGER AILES
You're in trouble, Lee.

LEE
If I'm in trouble, you are too.

ROGER AILES
You know my theory, right?

LEE
If it's about women, I can tell you
you're wrong.

ROGER AILES
No, my "orchestra pit" theory.

LEE
You know damn well I've never seen
an orchestra.

ROGER AILES
Two guys onstage. One says, "I have
a solution to the Middle East." The
other falls in the orchestra pit.
Who makes the evening news?

LEE
Roger, speak English.

ROGER AILES
Voters don't get to meet their
President, Lee. Everything they
know about him is from the T.V.!

Roger STANDS, using the alley as his own personal stage.
Roger is very... *dramatic*.

ROGER AILES (CONT'D)
Think of this election like a
Western, OK? There's the good guys.
That's us. John Wayne.

He pretends to TIP his cowboy hat.

ROGER AILES (CONT'D)
But good guys are only good guys if
there are BAD GUYS.

LEE
I have a bad guy!

ROGER AILES

Dukakis is NOT the bad guy. That man couldn't scare a kitten with a heart condition. BUT what if...

(pause)

He's the guy that *opened the door* for the bad guy.

Roger LEANS TOWARD Lee.

ROGER AILES (CONT'D)

You know my guy Larry? The man is the Monet of attack ads. He'll make something subtle. Classy, even.

Lee WAVES ROGER OFF.

LEE

I can't. And I don't need -

Roger GRABS Lee's wrist. HARD.

LEE (CONT'D)

Jesus! Let go of me!

ROGER AILES

When you gonna stop taking orders from Miss Illinois, huh? This is your ONE SHOT. And you and I both know... You won't get another.

The Church Bell TOLLS again. Lee looks up at it.

He turns, slowly, to Roger.

LEE

What about *Willie Horton*?

Roger's lips CURL INTO A SMILE...

INT. JESSUP CORRECTIONAL INSTITUTE, MARYLAND - MORNING

CLOSE-UP on a man's closed eyes. They POP open as fluorescent lights BUZZ on. Seconds later, an ALARM blares.

WILLIAM HORTON (late 30s, Black) swings his legs out of bed.

LEE (V.O.)

His name was William. But Roger told me "Willie" sounded better.

He combs his beard, puts on his glasses, makes his bed.

Another ALARM. The door opens.

Right as they are about to exit, William grabs his cellmate's arm, and pulls the boy back FORCEFULLY.

LEE (V.O.)
In 1974, William robbed a 17-year-old gas station attendant.

William points at the boy's UNTIED SHOE. The boy thanks him.

INT. PRISON CAFETERIA - MORNING

William eats a breakfast of COLD MUSH.

LEE (V.O.)
Stabbed him 19 times. Stuffed his body in a trash can.

INT. PRISON LIBRARY - AFTERNOON

William reads *Charles Dickens' "Great Expectations."*

LEE (V.O.)
Got sentenced to life.

INT. PRISON WORK ROOM - AFTERNOON

CLOSE-UP of William's focused face. He's sewing a Victoria's Secret label into a pair of lacy panties.

LEE (V.O.)
In 1986, William was released as part of a weekend furlough program in Massachusetts.

Behind him, rows and rows of men sew more lingerie.

LEE (V.O.)
When the weekend was over, he never came back. And no one ever went to look for him.

INT. PRISON YARD - EVENING

William walks the prison yard. A basketball ROLLS BY.

LEE (V.O.)
The next year, he raped a lady after stabbing her fiancé.

William picks up the ball and THROWS IT BACK to its group.

INT. PRISON CAFETERIA - EVENING

William stares at another lackluster meal.

LEE (V.O.)
A *white* lady.

INT. PRISON CELL - NIGHT

The lights BUZZ OFF. William lays in bed, WIDE AWAKE.

LEE (V.O.)
The man who authorized that
furlough program?

CUT TO:

An image of Michael Dukakis APPEARS ONSCREEN.

V.O.
(sinister voice)
Michael Dukakis.

The image FADES OUT. SCREECH. The video *FAST FORWARDS*, and William's face appears against a blue background -

V.O. (CONT'D)
- murdered a boy in a robbery,
stabbing him 19 times -

INT. EDITING BAY - DAY

We've been watching a VIDEO EDITOR (20s, white) cut the Willie Horton commercial. Roger's guy, LARRY MCCARTHY (40s, white), hovers nearby.

LARRY MCCARTHY
Take it back to where it says
"Willie Horton."

EDITOR
Dude, I already told you, we can't
change anything after it's been
approved by the Networks.

McCarthy takes a photo of HORTON'S MUG SHOT out from his pocket. He SLAPS it onto the table.

LARRY MCCARTHY
Put this in there.

EDITOR
Man, I gotta get outta here. I have
a date with this girl Linda, and
it's kind of a big deal -

McCarthy takes out a checkbook.

LARRY MCCARTHY
Make the mug shot BIG. And darken
the resolution on his face. I need
him to be BLACK. You understand?

EDITOR
Listen, I can't do -

McCarthy hands him the check. The Editor's jaw DROPS.

LARRY MCCARTHY
Send it to the networks the second
you're done. Oh, and *dude*?
(beat)
If you know what's good for you,
you'll keep this to yourself.

The Editor NODS.

LARRY MCCARTHY (CONT'D)
Send Laura some flowers.

EDITOR
Linda.

Larry RAISES AN EYEBROW.

EDITOR (CONT'D)
I mean, *thank you*.

Larry smiles at the screen.

LARRY MCCARTHY
See you on the six o'clock news,
Willie.

CUT TO:

ARCHIVAL TV FOOTAGE:

PETER JENNINGS
A firestorm of media coverage this
morning...

CONNIE CHUNG
 ... after a controversial ad
 featuring Willie Horton...

DAN RATHER
 ... who raped a woman while on a
 weekend furlough from a
 Massachusetts prison...

INT. CBS NEWS ROOM - DAY

Activist JESSE JACKSON (47) gives an impassioned interview.

JESSE JACKSON
 If this is where the Republican
 Party is headed, I shudder to think
 of what they're going to do next!

INT. RUSH LIMBAUGH SHOW - DAY

RUSH LIMBAUGH (37) spits into a radio microphone.

RUSH LIMBAUGH
 Dittoheads, here's my question:
 Ever noticed how composite pictures
 of wanted criminals all resemble
 Jesse Jackson?

INT. DUKAKIS CAMPAIGN HEADQUARTERS - DAY

Dukakis is at the head of a conference room table; SEETHING.

He's surrounded by gray-haired men... And Susan. Everyone
 avoids eye contact with him. The silence is *unbearable*.

Finally, Susan can't stand it anymore.

SUSAN
 Governor, we can do an attack ad -

DUKAKIS
 I'm not doing that! How many times
 do I have to repeat myself?

SUSAN
 Sir, Lee Atwater isn't going to
 stop until he's bled us dry...

Susan looks toward the corner of the room.

SUSAN (CONT'D)

And we have something.

Standing in the back is... DONNA. Unnoticed until now.

Susan SUMMONS HER forward. Dukakis peers down at her.

DUKAKIS

Well?

DONNA

Governor, I have it on good authority that Bush has been having an affair with his assistant, Jennifer Fitzgerald.

DUKAKIS

Psssh! Everyone knows that!

DONNA

The voters don't.

Dukakis turns to Susan.

DUKAKIS

I'll say this one last time: I WILL NOT get in the mud with someone like *Lee Atwater*!

Donna TAKES A STEP toward the table.

DONNA

Sir, with all due respect, Bush is running on family values. The American people deserve to know he isn't who he says he is.

Dukakis STARES at her.

SUSAN

The Governor and I will take it from here, Donna. Thank you.

The room FILLS WITH NOISE as the men begin to discuss. Donna SINKS back into to her place on the wall.

EXT. LIMA POLICE DEPARTMENT, LIMA, OHIO - DAY

ON a pair of shiny COWBOY BOOTS. TILT UP to H.W. He's at a campaign rally, standing by a group of (mostly white, all male) police officers with puffed up chests.

A banner above them reads: "THE FRATERNAL ORDER OF POLICE
ENDORSE GEORGE H.W. BUSH!"

H.W.

When it comes to *LAW AND ORDER*,
these gentlemen know...

EXT. LIMA POLICE DEPARTMENT - DAY

Off to the side, Lee uses a cellphone the size of a brick.

LEE

(to the phone)

Well, we didn't make the ad. One of
the PACs did. You know Mary would
never approve of an ad like that...

Lee listens to the person on the other end.

LEE (CONT'D)

(to the phone)

Bob, regardless of who made it,
facts are the facts. Willie Horton
is a rapist and a murderer, and
Dukakis set him loose to go a-
rapin' and a-murderin' at his
leisure. If it was up to the
Governor, he'd tuck those criminals
in with silk sheets and leave
little chocolates on their pillows!

Lee CHECKS HIS WATCH.

LEE (CONT'D)

(to the phone)

Great. Lookin' forward to the
story, pal.

Lee HANGS UP, then DIALS ANOTHER NUMBER.

LEE (CONT'D)

(to the phone)

Tom? Jerry?

CUT TO:

INT. BUSH CAMPAIGN HEADQUARTERS - DAY

PINKIE

We are here!

Pinkie holds the phone while A.C. THROWS DARTS at Lee's dartboard, where Dukakis' face has been replaced by Horton's.

INTERCUT - EXT. LIMA / INT. BUSH CAMPAIGN HEADQUARTERS - DAY

LEE
Reader's Digest article ready?

PINKIE
Seven-page spread.

LEE
What's the title?

PINKIE
"Getting Away With Murder."

LEE
Ooh boy! At the rate we're going,
people are gonna think Willie
Horton is Dukakis' running mate!

Lee LAUGHS. A.C. jumps up and butts Pinkie off the phone.

A.C.
What are you two laughing about?

LEE
Put Pinkie back on.

PINKIE
You know we can put it on speaker
phone, right?

Lee spies Mary.

LEE
Call me when it's published.

Lee HANGS UP.

INT. BUSH CAMPAIGN HEADQUARTERS - DAY

A.C. looks around the room.

A.C.
Wait. We have a speaker phone?

EXT. LIMA POLICE DEPARTMENT - DAY

Lee sheepishly walks over to Mary.

LEE
Got us a spread in Reader's Digest.

MARY
Oh, you're back to telling me things now?

LEE
Mary, I didn't run it. Roger did.

MARY
Roger works for *YOU*.

LEE
Roger works for the highest bidder. This was the PAC. Not me.

Lee ROCKS ON HIS FEET.

LEE (CONT'D)
Besides... It's not a lie.

MARY
What?!

LEE
Willie Horton wasn't some sweet little angel strung up on a cross. He's a *murderer*. He's a *rapist*.

MARY
That's not the point!

LEE
What IS the point? Please, tell me! We're getting good press from this thing! So, what's up your ass, huh? Because I'm SICK of fighting with you! If I wanted to fight all the time, I'd go home to MY WIFE.

Mary's nostrils FLARE.

MARY
I told you I wouldn't do the Southern Strategy. *Very clearly*. Now, I'm going to have to run around, cleaning up YOUR MESS -

LEE
You're mad because you have to do more work? Well -

MARY
THAT'S NOT WHAT I'M MAD ABOUT.

A few rallygoers TURN, hearing the commotion.

Mary takes a DEEP BREATH, and lowers her voice.

MARY (CONT'D)
You promised me honesty. So please,
tell me the truth... *Did you do it?*

Lee looks into Mary's WIDE, PLEADING eyes.

LEE
No.

Mary EXHALES.

MARY
Good. Fine. Let's drop it.

LEE
Great. Dropped.

CUT TO:

H.W. points at the audience.

H.W.
... And I've talked to women like
Karen over there, who just want
their children to be safe...

CUT BACK TO:

MARY
(to Lee)
Which one is Karen?

Lee BITES HIS LIP.

LEE
100% Honesty? I made her up.

Mary shakes her head, laughing.

MARY
I'll deal with the Horton thing
when we're back in D.C.

LEE
I've been tellin' them what's what,
but it *is* better coming from you.
You've got that angel face.

Lee SQUEEZES HER CHEEK. She SWATS him away.

They both watch as the POLICE CHIEF hands H.W. a Sheriff's badge.

SUDDENLY, a woman approaches H.W. with a... LIVE CHICKEN.

MARY

Um, what is she doing?

The chicken SQUAWKS. H.W. holds it AS FAR AWAY FROM HIS BODY as he can.

Lee and Mary look at each other, and simultaneously CRACK UP. They STIFLE their laughter as they run onstage to save H.W...

INT. VARIOUS - DAY

Mary makes her rounds with the press.

A) CBS STUDIOS, "FACE THE NATION" - MORNING

Mary BLOWS on a mug with the "Face The Nation" logo on it. She turns to anchor LESLEY STAHL (47).

MARY

You know, Lesley, I don't believe in negative politics. Neither does Vice-President Bush. That's something I admire about him...

B) ABC STUDIOS, "GOOD MORNING AMERICA" - MORNING

Mary takes a sip out of another mug. This one says "Good Morning America" on it. She turns to hosts JOAN LUNDEN (38) and CHARLES GIBSON (45).

MARY (CONT'D)

... The Vice-President just sees people as people. Not race or gender. He cares about bringing out the best in a team. Just like here! Joan, Charles - you make such a fantastic team. Don't they?

The audience CLAPS. Charles BLUSHES.

C) NBC STUDIOS, "THE TODAY SHOW" - MORNING

Mary sips another mug - this one with the "Today" logo on it. She's seated next to JANE PAULEY (38) and BRYANT GUMBEL (40).

MARY (CONT'D)

The Vice-President is *not* an idealist, but he *is* an optimist. And I think the world could use more optimism, don't you?

They sure do.

INT. AIR FORCE TWO - NIGHT

Mary and Lee sit next to each other, scribbling on notepads, making each other laugh.

Lee climbs up on his seat, and WAVES A NEWSPAPER. The headline reads: "*BUSH LEADING DUKAKIS BY TEN POINTS.*" Lee holds it triumphantly as he shouts to the Press Corps.

LEE

I know we have our differences from time to time, but Goddamn, I gotta say: I fucking LOVE y'all today!

The journalists LAUGH, playfully throwing things at Lee.

MARY

Sit your ass down, Lee!

Mary laughs, pulling at Lee's jacket. BUT THEN...

The plane begins to hit some TURBULENCE. The seats SHAKE.

And in the BLINK OF AN EYE, Agent Howie appears.

LEE

Look at Howie riding the waves!

But Howie isn't his usual jovial self.

AGENT HOWIE

Timberwolf wants to see you.

MARY

It's kinda bumpy right now, Howie!

AGENT HOWIE

Not you. Just Lee.

Lee cocks his head.

LEE

Well, alright then...

Lee struggles to GET UP as the plane ROCKS BACK AND FORTH.

INT. AIR FORCE TWO - NIGHT

Lee walks down the aisle, trying to stay balanced.

LEE
Feels like I'm walking the plank
here, Howie!

Howie HALTS at the door.

LEE (CONT'D)
Howie? Hello? What's going on?

But Howie's face is BLANK.

SUDDENLY, the turbulence STOPS.

But Lee is still shaking as he walks into the Suite...

INT. VICE-PRESIDENT'S OFFICE - NIGHT

H.W. spins his chair around.

H.W.
Rocky there for a bit, wasn't it?

LEE
Yes, Sir.

H.W.
So... Willie Horton.

LEE
Yes, Sir.

H.W.
Jennifer says we're up 10.

LEE
Yes, Sir.

H.W. slides his glasses down his nose.

H.W.
Should we try for 20?

SUDDENLY, H.W. does something he never does. He *SMILES*. Lee has to stop his jaw from dropping open.

H.W. (CONT'D)
A speechless Lee Atwater! Now,
that's a first.

LEE
Well, 20 might be -

H.W.
It's a joke, Lee.

LEE
Oh. Ha. Sir.

H.W.
What's the plan for the final
debate?

LEE
Well, what we learned with Quayle -

H.W.
No one cares about the Vice-
President, Lee. I should know.

H.W. STANDS. He walks to the front of the desk, and SITS.

H.W. (CONT'D)
I mean, what's your plan for *after*?

Lee cocks his head.

H.W. (CONT'D)
You've got something else up that
sleeve of yours, right?

H.W. adopts a PATERNALISTIC tone.

H.W. (CONT'D)
It's been a long campaign, huh? I'm
tired. Bet you are, too. But it's
worth it, in the end. So, listen to
me, son: Whatever you have to do...

H.W. places HIS HAND on Lee's shoulder.

H.W. (CONT'D)
Just do it.

H.W. LEANS OVER Lee.

H.W. (CONT'D)
You've come so far, Lee. Just a
little further now. Huh?

Lee STARES UP at H.W. THEN, Lee looks back down, crestfallen.

H.W. (CONT'D)
Good man.

INT. AIR FORCE TWO - NIGHT

As Mary is busy charming the press, Lee sits down IN A DAZE.

EXT. ANDREWS AIR FORCE - NIGHT

BOOM. Thunder cracks through the sky.

Mary - surrounded by the press gaggle - sees Lee RUNNING off the Tarmac. She YELLS over the WHIRRING ENGINE.

MARY
WHERE ARE YOU GOING?

LEE
I GOTTA THINK!

Lee SLIPS on the wet Tarmac, but keeps running.

MARY
SLOW DOWN! YOU'RE GONNA KILL
YOURSELF!

LEE (V.O.)
But I never could slow down. Maybe
that was my problem.

INT. THE TOMBS, GEORGETOWN, WASHINGTON, D.C. - NIGHT

We enter Georgetown University's notorious college bar. 20-somethings (mostly white) YELL, STUMBLE, SLOBBER. It's hard to believe these are the future leaders of America.

The door OPENS, and Donna Brazile walks in. She SCANS the messy bar, WINCING at a couple viciously making out.

The crowd parts, and in the back, we see... *Susan*.

Donna walks to her. Donna sits down, looking uncomfortable.

SUSAN
See that couple over there?

Donna TURNS. The formerly lip-locked couple is now FIGHTING.

SUSAN (CONT'D)
They'll end up married.

DONNA
Susan, why are we -

SUSAN

Here? Oh, I just love it here.
Reminds me of my college days. Back
when things weren't so serious.

DONNA BRAZILE

I can't imagine *you* doing *that*.

The girl is now SWIPING THINGS off the table like a possessed
cat. Beer SPLATTERS recklessly onto the floor.

SUSAN

Oh, I was *worse* than that.

Susan GRINS.

SUSAN (CONT'D)

So, I talked to the Governor about
your idea on Bush's affair. Bold
suggestion. I liked it.

Donna SITS UP.

SUSAN (CONT'D)

The Governor didn't.

Donna cocks her head, puzzled. Then, it hits her.

DONNA

Oh my God. You're firing me. You're
firing me *here*?

SUSAN

I thought it would soften the blow.

Donna has another realization.

DONNA

No. You thought if you did it
outside the office... No one would
even notice I was even gone.

SUSAN

Oh, don't be so dramatic, Donna!
You're young. You'll get another
chance. Hell, I've had dozens.

Donna STANDS.

DONNA

Yeah. People like YOU always do.

EXT. THE TOMBS, GEORGETOWN, WASHINGTON, D.C. - NIGHT

RAIN pours as Donna BURSTS out of the noisy bar. Tears welling, she starts to walk to the bus stop.

But then... She TURNS, and walks down the hill to M Street.

INT. BLUES ALLEY, GEORGETOWN, WASHINGTON, D.C. - NIGHT

Lee sits on a barstool at Georgetown's most famous Blues Club, drowning out his worries with a trio of whiskeys.

Unlike up at the Tombs, weeknights down here are quiet. Most of the patrons are locals, and the majority are Black.

Onstage, a SINGER covers *B.B. King's "Chains and Things."*

SINGER

*Talk about hard luck and trouble.
Seems to be my middle name.
All the odds are against me.
Yes, I only play a losing game...*

SUDDENLY, a familiar voice:

WOMAN (O.S.)

You said you were also a -
(hiccup)
- Blues man.

Lee looks over and sees DONNA, just a few barstools down.

DONNA

But I wouldn't believe it until I
saw it. And now, I saw it!

LEE

Donna?

DONNA

That's my name. Don't wear it...
Well, don't wear it!

Donna is *drunkety-drunk-drunk-drunk*.

DONNA (CONT'D)

You look as miserable as me!

LEE

I'm fine.

Lee signals for another drink as Donna CLUMSILY moves to the barstool next to him.

DONNA
They fire you, too?

LEE
What? They fired you?

DONNA
Shoulda seen it coming, right?

She NUDGES Lee's elbow. He STRAIGHTENS UP.

LEE
You and me are not the same, Donna.

DONNA
No shit, Sherlock. I'm fucked. But I think... I think you're worse, because you're fucked, and you won't even admit it.

LEE
Donna, you're drunk.

DONNA
Doesn't mean I'm wrong.

Donna looks Lee DEAD ON.

DONNA (CONT'D)
Don't you get it, Lee? The day after inauguration, *you're gonna get taken out with the trash.*

Lee stares at her. Then... he SCREAMS right in her face.

LEE
What do you know? You're *nobody* in this town. NOBODY. But ME? You look for me on inauguration day! I'll be the one on TV, next to the *GODDAMN PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES!!!*

The bar goes SILENT. Everyone TURNS toward Lee. He REDDENS. Suddenly poised, Donna LEANS FORWARD, *unafraid.*

DONNA
Who do you think you are?
(beat)
Horton? *Everyone* knows that was you. You should be *ashamed* to show your face here. But you aren't. Because you're so fucking entitled, you think everywhere in the entire world belongs to you.

Lee SHRINKS under the gaze of the widening crowd.

DONNA (CONT'D)
 Actually, you're right. I'm not like you. Because I'm going to do the right thing. I'm going to tell you the truth, since no one else will, least of all yourself...

Donna WHISPERS in Lee's ear.

DONNA (CONT'D)
 You can sell your soul to the devil, Lee Atwater, but you'll never, ever be one of them.

A RINGING NOISE enters Lee's ears. SUDDENLY, the bar is SPINNING... Lee has to GET OUT. Lee GRABS HIS JACKET.

EXT. BLUES ALLEY - NIGHT

Lee HURRIES through Georgetown. The rain gets HEAVIER.

Lee's HEARTBEAT grows LOUDER. THUMP. THUMP. THUMP.

PRE-LAP: The sound gets *FASTER*, and *FASTER*, and...

EXT. LINCOLN MEMORIAL - DAWN

THUMP. THUMP. THUMP.

Lee's sneakers SMACK the wet steps of the Lincoln Memorial.

His face is RED and ANGRY as he CLIMBS THE STAIRS. He SPRINTS to the back. Faster. Faster. FASTER -

His eyes WIDEN as he sees THE LEDGE. He SCREECHES TO A HALT.

He shakes as he looks at the TWENTY FOOT DROP he just barely avoided falling down. PANTING, he sinks down a column onto the marble floor.

After a minute, he LOOKS INTO THE CAMERA.

LEE
 Do you know what that is?

He POINTS across the Potomac to a house, high on a hill.

LEE (CONT'D)
 Lee House. Not me. The other one.
Robert E. Lee.

Lee points BEHIND HIM to the Lincoln Memorial.

LEE (CONT'D)

Lincoln and Lee were pals, actually. Lincoln asked Lee to be commander of the Union Army. But Virginia seceded, and Lee went with her. Lincoln never forgave him.

Lee looks across the river to the house.

LEE (CONT'D)

The South was winning for three outta five years. Goes to show ya: You can NEVER be too far ahead. They're always right behind you.

Lee sees a PENNY on the floor. He picks it up.

LEE (CONT'D)

Everyone thinks Lincoln was that big man in that big chair. "*The Great Emancipator.*"

(beat)

Bullshit. Lincoln didn't give a lick about freeing slaves. "*If I could save the Union without freeing any slave, I would do it.*" All Lincoln cared about was his reputation. If he lost the South, he'd go down as the worst President in history. He was NO hero. But *HE* gets to be on the penny.

Lee tosses the penny in the air. It lands on tails.

LEE (CONT'D)

War ends. Lee surrenders. Lincoln doesn't know it, but he'll be dead in five days. But before that, what does he do? Shake hands? *No.* Lincoln tells the Army to start burying Union soldiers in Lee's yard. Dead bodies. Scores of them. One final "*fuck you.*"

Lee STANDS.

LEE (CONT'D)

Now that land is Arlington Cemetery. And Lincoln sits here. His back turned to Lee. His back turned to the South. For all eternity.

Lee walks to the front of the Memorial.

LEE (CONT'D)
Honest Abe was a liar. But it
didn't matter. Because it ain't
honesty that wins the day. It's
fear. And fear...

Lee STARES OUT at the National Mall, sprawled before him. He
looks directly at us, manic in his eyes.

LEE (CONT'D)
That's something I understand.
That's something I can use.

INT. MAR-A-LAGO CLUB, PALM BEACH, FLORIDA - NIGHT

CLOSE-UP of flip-flops under a table. We TILT UP to see a man
in a HAWAIIAN SHIRT, PLASTIC VISOR, and a GOLD ROLEX.

Seated in the back is... ROGER, wearing a LOBSTER BIB.

ROGER AILES
How great is this joint, huh?

Across from him sits Lee, hiding his disgust as Roger ATTACKS
a leaky lobster with his BARE HANDS.

A TEEN WAITRESS clears a plate. Roger grabs her wrist.

ROGER AILES (CONT'D)
Tell him who used to own Mar-A-
Lago, honey.

She tries to get her wrist back - to no avail.

TEEN WAITRESS
Uh, an heiress, I think.

ROGER AILES
Marjorie Merriweather Post. As in
Post Cereals.

The girl stares blankly.

ROGER
Fruity Pebbles, blondie. That
tidbit will get you better tips.
What do you say?

TEEN WAITRESS
Uh... Thank you?

ROGER AILES

Good girl.

Roger PATS HER HAND.

ROGER AILES (CONT'D)

Marjorie was a real looker.
Lunatic, but a looker. She wanted
this place to be the "Winter White
House."

Lee surveys the room. Absolutely every inch is GOLD-PLATED.

ROGER AILES (CONT'D)

Then she croaks, Trump comes down
here, and he can't get into the
Palm Beach Country Club. So he's
like, fuck 'em! And he told them he
was going to create a country club
that even takes *Blacks* AND *Jews*.
They HATED that! Ha!

LEE

Roger, this is all fascinating, but
I took a plane to be here.

ROGER AILES

What do you need, friend?

LEE

An ad.

ROGER AILES

Coulda told me that on the phone.

LEE

No. *THE* ad. The ad to end all ads.

A beat. Roger puts down his lobster.

ROGER AILES

The season finale.

Lee NODS.

ROGER AILES (CONT'D)

Finally! Whatcha thinkin'?

Lee LEANS into the table.

LEE

Something...

(beat)

Dark.

COMMERCIAL FOOTAGE:

Male prisoners walk through a REVOLVING DOOR.

V.O.

... His revolving door prison policy gave weekend furloughs to first degree murderers...

In SLOW MOTION, a BLACK MAN walks through.

V.O. (CONT'D)

While out, many committed crimes like kidnapping and... *RAPE*.

The Black man looks straight to camera. His image - and his alone - FREEZES.

INT. BEVERLY HILTON HOTEL, BEVERLY HILLS, CA - LATE NIGHT

Lee has been watching a tape of the "Revolving Door" ad.

SUPER: Night before the final Presidential Debate. Los Angeles, California.

SUPER: 26 days until the election.

Lee PAUSES the tape, and turns to A.C. and Pinkie.

A.C.

Jesus.

PINKIE

Christ.

A.C.

Has Mary seen this?

Lee doesn't respond.

PINKIE

Is she *going* to see it?

Lee is silent. A.C. and Pinkie exchange a look.

A.C.

Lee, I don't think -

LEE

You *don't* think, Andrew. You *do*.

PINKIE

But Mary said -

LEE

I don't CARE what Mary said!

A.C. and Pinkie are STARING at the door. Lee turns around...

MARY is standing in the doorway.

LEE (CONT'D)

Mary -

Mary TURNS, and leaves the room without a word.

INT. BEVERLY HILTON HOTEL, BEVERLY HILLS, CA - LATE NIGHT

Lee sits alone in his room. He stares at the clock: 3:18 A.M.
He picks up the phone.

LEE

Hello, me again... Can you connect
me to Room 819 one more time?

The phone RINGS. No answer. He RE-DIALS.

LEE (CONT'D)

Yes... Once more... Thanks.

The phone RINGS. And RINGS. Lee SLAMS it back down.

He sits on the bed, RESTLESS. Then, he grabs his SNEAKERS.

INT. BEVERLY HILTON HOTEL STAIRWELL - LATE NIGHT

The POUNDING of FOOTSTEPS on the cement stairwell.

In a BLUR, Lee ROUNDS A CORNER. He's running up and down the
stairs with FIRE in his eyes. SUDDENLY, he STOPS -

Sitting on the stairs above him is MARY. Smoking a cigarette.
She LIFTS HER HEAD, and LOOKS AT HIM.

MARY

Horton was you.

Lee takes a deep breath, and nods.

MARY (CONT'D)

So... That's why you hired me.

LEE

Why?

MARY

I said I wouldn't do the Southern Strategy. You said you wouldn't make me. Then you let me go all around town, telling people we would *never*. *I was your alibi*.

(pause)

Do you deny it?

Lee won't look Mary in the eyes.

MARY (CONT'D)

At least have the decency to look me in the eyes while you fuck me.

(huffs)

You're such a liar.

Suddenly, Lee is LIVID.

LEE

How am I a liar, huh? That ad you saw up there is REAL FOOTAGE of REAL CRIMINALS in a REAL PRISON.

MARY

Sure. Tell yourself that.

LEE

What are you trying to say, huh? Just come out and fucking say it. You think I'm a racist, right?

MARY

You're worse. You're someone who is more afraid of being CALLED a racist than actually BEING ONE!

Lee fixes his gaze right on Mary.

LEE

Fine. Let's just pretend the ad *IS* racist, huh? You think I *invented* racism? Racism is out there, Mary, whether or not I make an ad.

MARY

Then you're pandering to them. You're legitimizing them!

LEE

No, I'm *using* them. Someone's got to. You act like it's a minority.

(MORE)

LEE (CONT'D)

But white people are the majority of votes in this country, and white people - whether you can admit it or not - are all... *kinda racist.*

MARY

Not all white people.

LEE

Oh. Don't act so innocent.

MARY

What are you talking about?

LEE

I know you, Mary Matalin. I've seen the pictures hanging on your walls. The people you hang out with. Now you want to pretend you work for the NAACP? Yeah fucking right. You've always known EXACTLY who you're working for.

MARY

I do NOT work for racists!

LEE

You work on *what* matters to you, in the order it matters to you. Sure, maybe you care a little. But face it: You care about everything else a helluva lot more.

MARY

I am not a racist, Lee.

LEE

Sure. Tell yourself that.

A LONG BEAT passes between them. Finally, Mary STANDS UP.

MARY

You know, you might be right, Lee. But that ad is WRONG. And if you run it, you and me... *We're done.*

Mary walks down the stairs. Lee YELLS AFTER HER.

LEE

How can we be done, huh?! WE NEVER FUCKING STARTED!

The door SWINGS shut. Lee puts his HEAD in his hands.

I/E. PAULEY PAVILION, LOS ANGELES, CA - EVENING

People stream into the auditorium to watch the last debate.

SUPER: Second Presidential Debate. Los Angeles, California.

SUPER: Three weeks until the election.

INT. BACKSTAGE - EVENING

H.W.

- That's when I go into the death penalty? Lee?

Lee is staring off, dazed. He snaps back to.

LEE

Yes. Um, then into death penalty when a police officer is killed.

H.W.

You told me we were using "gunned down" instead of "killed."

LEE

Right. Yes.

MARY passes by. Lee TRACKS HER.

H.W.

Lee, I'm not paying you to make googly eyes at Mary.

LEE

Sorry, Sir.

H.W.

You're not going soft on me?

LEE

No, Sir.

H.W.

And you're ready? *For after?*

FLASH. The stage lights TURN ON.

LEE

Sir, I was actually thinking we shouldn't run the -

BUT THEN, Lee sees...

INT. ONSTAGE - EVENING

Dukakis. And he looks DEATHLY. Sweating, sneezing, practically green.

Dukakis has THE FLU.

INT. BACKSTAGE - EVENING

Lee's eyes go WIDE, like a shark catching the scent of blood. He turns back to H.W.

LEE

Sir, it's taken care of.

H.W. WINKS at him, and walks onstage.

INT. ONSTAGE - EVENING

Dukakis SNEEZES into his hand, then reaches out to shake H.W.'s. The two men shake... But once at his podium, H.W. wipes his hands off on his pants.

BERNARD SHAW

I am pleased to welcome you to the final presidential debate. I am Bernard Shaw of CNN.

BERNARD SHAW (48) turns to Dukakis.

BERNARD SHAW (CONT'D)

The first question goes to Governor Dukakis. Governor, if Kitty Dukakis were *raped and murdered*, would you favor death penalty for the killer?

The crowd GASPS. A beat as everyone waits for a reply.

DUKAKIS

No, I don't, Bernard.

MURMURS OF DISAPPROVAL from the audience.

A stunned Bernard Shaw COUGHS, and composes himself.

BERNARD SHAW

Mr. Vice President, your rebuttal.

H.W.

This campaign is a question of values.

(MORE)

H.W. (CONT'D)

You see, I do believe that some crimes are so heinous - and I'd say *particularly something like, the death of a police officer* - that I do believe in the death penalty. In fact, WE NEED IT.

The audience APPLAUDS. LOUDLY. As H.W. continues to talk, Dukakis' face FALLS.

LEE (V.O.)

In that moment...

INT. BACKSTAGE - EVENING

Lee BEAMS from behind the stage.

LEE (V.O.)

I could taste it.

Seeing Lee's face, Mary's falls. She silently turns, and leaves the theater...

INT. ONSTAGE - EVENING

The crowd APPLAUDS. LOUDER, and LOUDER...

LEE (V.O.)

And not long after that -

PRE-LAP: WILD APPLAUSE.

INT. BUSH VICTORY PARTY - NIGHT

TV sets around the room show Tom Brokaw on the news:

TOM BROKAW

With a record-breaking share of the POPULAR vote. A SWEEP of the SOUTH -

The crowd CHEERS for their new President. And there's Lee. *Right in front.* He turns to us with a wide smile:

LEE

I won.

TOM BROKAW (O.S.)

George Herbert Walker Bush is now the 41st President of the United States.

INT. WASHINGTON CONVENTION CENTER - NIGHT

SUPER: Inaugural Gala, Washington, D.C.

January 21, 1989. 74 days since the election.

Lee plays guitar alongside some of the most famous R&B stars in the world: BO DIDDLEY, CARLA THOMAS, PERCY SLEDGE.

Lee does a FULL SPLIT. The CROWD GOES WILD between gulps of taxpayer-funded booze.

SUDDENLY, the band starts up "*Hail to the Chief.*" H.W. walks onstage, holding hands with BARBARA BUSH (63).

CUT TO:

From the back, Jennifer watches Barbara wave, and a tear falls down her cheek.

CUT BACK TO:

H.W. GRABS Lee, and PULLS HIM to the mic.

H.W.

How about a round of applause for the new CHAIRMAN OF THE RNC!

LEE (V.O.)

I always imagined this would be the best night of my life -

But as Lee looks out into the audience, into the most glamorous and exclusive party on Earth...

His smile FADES. He doesn't recognize a single face.

INT. WASHINGTON CONVENTION CENTER - LATER THAT NIGHT

As the party dies down, Lee is off drinking. Alone.

LEE (V.O.)

But I didn't feel how I thought I would.

In need of a refill, Lee walks to the unattended bar, and REACHES OVER to steal a bottle.

H.W. (O.S.)

You don't need to steal the liquor, Lee. No new taxes starts *after* the party's over.

Lee turns to see H.W.

H.W. (CONT'D)
Secret Service are going to have to
carry Junior outta here.

On the dance floor, GEORGE W. BUSH (42) is DRAGGING his
mother around in a drunken Fox Trot.

LEE
Wouldn't be the first time, Sir.

H.W.
True.

Lee takes a DEEP BREATH, and TURNS to the new President.

LEE
While we have a moment, I'd just
like to say: Thank you, Sir.
Winning this election has been the
greatest honor of my life.
(pause)
I'll be honest, there was times I
wasn't sure I could pull it off!

H.W.
Well, wasn't really up to you.

Lee COCKS his head. H.W. turns to face him.

H.W. (CONT'D)
Let me tell you something, Lee.
When I was at Andover, Henry
Stimson - the Secretary of War - he
came to speak to us boys. He said
it was up to us - the next
generation of real and true
Americans - to save this country.
That speech changed me. It's why I
enlisted.

(pause)
When I was shot down in the
Pacific, I was floating out there,
and I made a promise. I told God
that if I lived, I'd devote my life
to America.

Lee is RIVETED. H.W. has never talked to him like this.

H.W. (CONT'D)
 When they pulled me out of the water, I knew I was destined for greatness. *And today, I'm President of the United States.*

Lee's smile DISAPPEARS when he realizes what H.W. is saying.

LEE
 Wait. You... You think GOD won you this election?!

H.W.
 Manifest destiny, Lee. Couldn't have gone any other way.

LEE
 Sir, with all due respect, I won you this election. ME. I gave everything to this election. I lost everything for this election.

H.W. shrugs.

H.W.
 Well, that's what I pay you for.

Lee's eyes FILL WITH ANGER.

H.W. (CONT'D)
 (to himself)
 Cheese and crackers.

Junior has TAKEN OFF HIS SHIRT and is WAVING IT like a lasso.

H.W. (CONT'D)
 Enjoy the party, Lee. You earned it.

Lee's face turns RED. His ears begin to RING. Then, his vision BLURS.

The room is SPINNING as Lee watches all these high class people, now drunk and falling all over each other...

The shapes SHIFT and MELT and ALL OF A SUDDEN, the people start to look like...

MONSTERS.

Lee SHUTS HIS EYES, COVERS HIS EARS, but the ringing only gets LOUDER. It begins to MORPH, TRANSFORMING INTO...

A DISTANT, HIGH-PITCHED SCREAM.

EXT. ALLEY - MOMENTS LATER

WHOOSH! Lee BURSTS into a back alley.

He GRABS at the wall to steady himself. He GULPS in the cold air, catching his breath.

JUST THEN, a group of partygoers walk by. Ties askew. Cigars in their mouths. Jackets over their shoulders. One of them POINTS at Lee.

YOUNG MAN #1
Lee Atwater? Holy shit, man!

YOUNG MAN #2
Horton ad, dude. Fucking genius!
Paul, it's Lee Atwater!

The alleged PAUL looks like he's about to vomit. He RETCHES, but then, surprisingly, it passes. He LOOKS UP at Lee.

PAUL
(slurring)
Con-bash-ulations.

The young man walks over to Lee. He PUTS HIS ARM AROUND HIM.

YOUNG MAN #1
(whispers)
Gotta keep these n***** where they
belong, right?

He LAUGHS, and PUNCHES Lee's arm.

Lee stands there, TOO SHOCKED to move. He watches the herd of men move on.

Still REELING, Lee SINKS to the ground. He TILTS HIS HEAD BACK, resting it on the wall. THEN, he sees...

A GIANT CROSS. Staring down from the spire of Immaculate Conception Church. Lee turns to us.

LEE
This was probably a sign, huh?

Lee gets up, and starts to walk home.

LEE (V.O.)
But I confess... I was too scared
to listen.

INT. CAPITOL HILL CLUB - DAY

LEE (V.O.)
 After the election, I got
 everything I wanted.

A valet opens the door to the Club. But this time, he's opening it *for Lee*.

INT. LEE'S RNC OFFICE, CAPITOL HILL CLUB - DAY

Lee walks into an office, with his name engraved in SHINY GOLD LETTERS on the door.

A stack of newspapers are waiting for him:

"GOP'S MOST FAMOUS DIRTY CAMPAIGNER HEADS RNC"

"BAD BOY LEE ATWATER TURNS LIES INTO TRUTHS"

"LEE ATWATER: BUT WHAT IS A MAN PROFITED?"

Lee picks one up.

LEE (V.O.)
 But somehow, I had an even worse
 reputation. Maybe the worst in
 town. And in a town like D.C.,
 that's really sayin' something.

SUDDENLY, he spots a picture of Mary on the front page. She's sitting in the Oval Office, laughing. The headline reads:

"FOR WOMEN LIKE MATALIN, BETTER CLIMATE IS SEEN"

Lee stares at the picture. Then, he turns to us.

LEE
 I knew I needed to change.

INT. BLACK, MANAFORT, STONE, AND KELLY - DAY

Roger Stone and Paul Manafort stand in the same poses as before, but there's A HOLE where Lee used to stand.

LEE (V.O.)
 I resigned from the firm.

INT. KING'S EBENEZER BAPTIST CHURCH, ATLANTA, GA - DAY

Lee stands at the podium in front of a sign that says, "Martin Luther King Day, 1989."

LEE (V.O.)
I tried to do some... uh, *minority outreach.*

The (entirely Black) audience of Atlanta's most famous church stare up at Lee. He LAUGHS NERVOUSLY.

EXT. HOWARD UNIVERSITY, WASHINGTON, D.C. - DAY

LEE (V.O.)
I joined the board of Howard.

Students march with signs that say: "Atwater Must Resign!"

LEE (V.O.)
...Briefly. But still.

INT. RECORDING STUDIO - DAY

Lee and B.B. King sing "Red Hot & Blue" together.

LEE (V.O.)
I recorded an album with B.B. King.
Gave the profits to charity.

EXT. RED HOT & BLUE RESTAURANT, ARLINGTON, VA - DAY

Lee and B.B. King pose under a sign that says: "RED HOT & BLUE BBQ!"

LEE
Even started a BBQ restaurant!

NEON SIGNS fill the window, advertising BBQ, ribs, and beer. Among the many signs - undetectable at first glance - is a neon Confederate flag.

INT. HOTEL BALLROOM - MORNING

LEE (V.O.)
But no matter what I did -

Lee sits at a fundraising luncheon with blank eyes.

LEE (V.O.)
- I just felt... bad. But like,
really bad.

Lee looks at his plate. He seems like he's going to HURL.

BOB DOLE
Here he is folks, Lee Atwater!

Lee walks onstage.

LEE
Well, as Bobby boy said -

SUDDENLY, Lee looks down. His leg is SHAKING UNCONTROLLABLY.

CONVULSIONS take over his body. He tries to GRIP the podium,
but SLIPS...

His head hits the floor with a THUD. Lee's eyes SNAP SHUT.

As he slips from consciousness, he hears that SCREAM once
again. But this time, it's CLOSER. And now, we realize...

It's a child's scream.

CUT TO BLACK.

INT. GEORGE WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY HOSPITAL - DAY

MATCH CUT as Lee's eyes POP OPEN. He finds himself in a
hospital bed. A doctor comes in, and delivers bad news.

LEE (V.O.)
Brain cancer. A tumor the size of a
golf ball. A lot of people in town
said I deserved it...

INT. GEORGE WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY HOSPITAL - DAY

LEE (V.O.)
... But I don't know how anyone
could deserve what happened next.

Lee is wheeled down a hallway by a nurse.

LEE (V.O.)
I had to get radiation. Left me
paralyzed on my left side.

INT. GEORGE WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY HOSPITAL - NIGHT

Lee glances at his guitar, sitting unplayed in the corner.

LEE (V.O.)

The treatment also gave me something called "amusia." I went tone deaf. Couldn't play music. Couldn't even *hear* it no more.

INT. GEORGE WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY HOSPITAL - VARIOUS

We see a MONTAGE of Lee's days. He walks wearily from his bed to the window, then back to bed. Over and over.

LEE (V.O.)

The radiation swole me up. Eventually, got so big I couldn't look at myself in the mirror.

Every day, Lee's body gets larger.

LEE (V.O.)

I didn't want Sally or the girls there. A hospital is no place for little girls. I couldn't have them remembering their Daddy like this.

Down on the street, a carefree runner STRIDES BY. Lee watches him from the window.

INT. GEORGE WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY HOSPITAL - NIGHT

Lee stares out the window at the glittering D.C. skyline.

LEE (V.O.)

The clock was running out, but I had one last campaign to run. This time, for *my soul*.

INT. GEORGE WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY HOSPITAL - DAY

An old, skeletal PRIEST waves his hands over Lee.

LEE (V.O.)

First, I converted to Catholicism! I figured they were the most, you know, *intense* of the lot.

A nurse NAILS A CRUCIFIX to the wall. Lee turns to us.

LEE

In Ezekiel 18:32 you said, "Repent,
and live!" I didn't expect to live,
but I did go about repentin'.

CUT TO:

INT. DUKAKIS CAMPAIGN HEADQUARTERS - DAY

Sad-looking staff pack up the office. Meanwhile, Dukakis
reads a paper.

LEE (V.O.)

I wrote letters to everyone,
telling them I was sorry if they
ever felt hurt by me. And I had the
letters put in all the papers, so
everyone would know just how sorry
I was.

The headline reads:

"LEE ATWATER APOLOGIZES FOR 'NAKED CRUELTY' OF CAMPAIGN"

Dukakis CHUCKS the paper across the room.

CUT BACK TO:

INT. GEORGE WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY HOSPITAL - DAY

A MONTAGE of visitors come in and out.

LEE (V.O.)

I asked people to come see me.

We see a parade of familiar faces: *A.C., Pinkie, Roger...*

LEE (V.O.)

And I told them all to bring me
just one thing...

Each person hands Lee a BRAND NEW BIBLE, wrapped in plastic.

LEE

(to camera)
The Lord's Book.

Each Bible is placed in an EVER-GROWING TOWER.

Lee looks to the door, hoping for Mary. But she doesn't come.

INT. GEORGE WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY HOSPITAL - DAY

Lee is lowered into a machine. A WHIRRING noise begins.

LEE (V.O.)
I spent my 40th birthday in chemo.

INT. GEORGE WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY HOSPITAL - DAY

Lee sits in bed, STARING out the window.

He sees a TALL WOMAN walking by. He PERKS UP. He watches as she walks toward the hospital doors. But then she TURNS, and we see her face... *It's not Mary.*

JUST THEN, a KNOCK at the door.

LEE
I told y'all to leave me be today -

MARY (O.S.)
To their credit -

Lee WHIPS AROUND.

MARY (CONT'D)
The nurses did try and stop me.

Lee SITS UP. He smoothes down his hair.

LEE
How'd you get past 'em?

MARY
They say I'm very charming.

Lee LAUGHS. It quickly devolves into a COUGHING FIT.

LEE
It sounds worse than it is. Really!

MARY
Let's get you some water.

As she fills a glass, Mary looks around the room.

MARY (CONT'D)
Nice digs you have here.
Very...

She looks at the crucifix.

MARY (CONT'D)
Monastery chic.

Mary walks to the bed. Lee GRABS HER HAND.

LEE
Mary... I'm sorry. For all of it.
I'm so, so sorry.

A beat.

MARY
I forgive you.

They sit there, HOLDING HANDS. Lee looks down.

LEE
I never told you about my brother.
And I want to tell you, before...
Well, his name was Joe.

Mary nods, listening.

LEE (CONT'D)
I was five and Joe was just a baby.
It was a rainy day and we'd been
cooped up inside. I was driving
Mama nuts, so she said we could
make doughnuts. She went to get
something, and told me to watch
Joe. But I was crawling outta my
skin, so I started running up and
down the stairs. Then, out of the
corner of my eye, I saw him crawl
into the kitchen. I didn't think
nothing of it, but then I
remembered...
(beat)
The pan of frying oil on the stove.

Lee's voice STARTS TO SHAKE.

LEE (CONT'D)
By the time I got in there, he was
reaching up, and -

Lee CLOSES HIS EYES.

LEE (CONT'D)
That scream.

TEARS FALL onto his cheeks.

LEE (CONT'D)
I never stop hearing that scream.
Every day, Mary.

Mary wipes away a tear of her own.

MARY
That's not your fault, Lee.

Lee OPENS HIS EYES. Suddenly, he starts HYPERVENTILATING.

LEE
It should've been me. I've wasted
my life, and now, it's too late.
And I know I deserve it... But I've
seen what it's like to die, Mary.
And I don't want to die! *I don't
want to die! I don't want to die! I
don't want to die! I don't -*

Mary GRABS his face. He STARES at her, eyes full of fear.

MARY
You listen to me, Lee Atwater. That
is NOT going to happen to you. And
it's NOT too late. It's NEVER too
late to become someone worth being.
And you ARE someone. You are
someone TO ME. You hear me?

Lee NODS, wiping away his tears.

Mary STANDS, wiping her tears too.

MARY (CONT'D)
We need to get outta here.

EXT. TOW PATH - SUNSET

The sun sets over the Tow Path, turning the canal pink. Mary sits on a bench, with Lee in his wheelchair beside her.

LEE
Hey, wanna hear something crazy?

MARY
Always.

LEE
At the inauguration, H.W. told me
he won because *God* wanted him to.

MARY
Well... Hail Mary.

They share a laugh.

LEE
Got a surprise for you.

MARY
It's *your* birthday, isn't it?

LEE
Well, figured I owed you one.
Probably more than one.

From his coat pocket, Lee pulls out a wrapped gift.

MARY
This better not be one of those
damn Bibles.

Mary unwraps it. It's a "Red Hot & Blue" CD.

MARY (CONT'D)
Are you kidding me?

LEE
Just open it.

Inside is a photograph of Mary and Lee, their heads on each other's shoulders, asleep on the campaign bus. She flips the photo over, and reads a note on the back:

*Dear Mary,
You have gotten me through many
storms. I deeply love you.
- Lee*

She turns to Lee, HOLDING BACK TEARS.

MARY
I'll get you through this one, too.

They sit quietly, watching the sun set over the Capitol...

PRE-LAP: *"There Must Be a Better World Somewhere" by the B.B. King Blues Band plays.*

EXT. TRINITY CATHEDRAL CHURCH, COLUMBIA, SOUTH CAROLINA - DAY

TWO LITTLE GIRLS play on the stairs of a church. A sign outside reads:

"HAPPY EASTER 1991!"

Around the corner, we see a group of mourners dressed in black, standing in a graveyard.

LEE (V.O.)
They say I had a helluva funeral.
Heard the crème de la crème of
Washington were there.

We recognize many of the faces, from "Junior" to Karl Rove. Roger pats a weeping Susan on the back.

LEE
The President couldn't make it -

CUT TO:

EXT. BEACH, FLORIDA KEYS - DAY

H.W. stands knee-high in water, reeling in a fish.

LEE (V.O.)
- But I'm sure he was just busy.

CUT BACK TO:

EXT. TRINITY CATHEDRAL CHURCH - DAY

The Priest motions for someone to come forward. A PREGNANT WOMAN steps up, and tosses dirt into the grave.

From the back, Mary watches with heartbreaking intensity.

LEE (V.O.)
I worked so hard to get outta
Aiken. But in the end, I wound up
right back where I started.

On the headstone:

HARVEY "LEE" LEROY ATWATER

February 27, 1951 - March 29, 1991

We see that Lee is buried right next to his brother, Joe.

INT. GEORGE WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY HOSPITAL - DAY

CHURCH BELLS CHIME from nearby Georgetown. Mary is standing in Lee's hospital room, packing up as she talks on her phone.

MARY

I just need ten more minutes to finish up... Love you too.

She places the framed picture of Lee and H.W. into a box.

LEE (V.O.)

When it comes to my life, all I can tell you is that I tried my best to do right. And when my best failed, I promise you that I am sorry.

(beat)

Lord, am I sorry.

Mary goes to THE CABINET. She tries to open it... But it won't open. Determined, she PULLS. And again. And again. Finally, she KICKS THE DOOR.

POP!!!

Mary JUMPS BACK as *DOZENS OF BIBLES BURST OUT.*

Mary looks to her feet. She picks one of the Bibles up...

STILL WRAPPED IN PLASTIC.

She looks at the rest. Every copy is *STILL WRAPPED.*

Every. Single. One.

Mary LOOKS TO THE SKY, and a *SMILE FILLS HER FACE.*

MARY

Bullshit.

CUT TO BLACK.

"Bad Boy" by Lee Atwater plays.

Footage rolls of the real Lee playing guitar at the 1988 Inaugural Ball.

TITLE CARDS:

Lee Atwater died on March 29, 1991. He was 40 years old.

TITLE CARDS:

Mary Matalin ran George H.W. Bush's second Presidential campaign. He lost to Bill Clinton, whose campaign manager was James Carville... her secret boyfriend, and future husband.

In 2016, she officially registered as an Independent.

Roger Ailes went on to found Fox News. He resigned from Fox in July 2016 for multiple allegations of sexual harassment.

Susan Estrich was his lawyer.

Donna Brazile ran Al Gore's presidential campaign in 2000, making her the first African-American woman to head a major presidential campaign.

Al Gore lost to "Junior."

Andrew "A.C." Card joined the George W. Bush Administration. He's best known for this:

INSERT - The famous photo of A.C. telling President Bush about the 9/11 attacks in an elementary school classroom.

James "Pinkie" Pinkerton became a *Fox News* contributor and a columnist for a website called *Brietbart*.

Governor Michael Dukakis still lives in Massachusetts with his wife Kitty. Neither have ever burned a flag.

William Horton is still serving out his life sentence.

TITLE CARDS:

In his final days, Lee Atwater wrote an apology to former opponent Tom Turnipseed.

In that letter, Lee wrote:

"What I've done was wrong. It was bad, and bad for the country."