

STROM

Written By

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Based on the real life of United States Senator J. Strom  
Thurmond.

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FADE IN.

**INT. OFFICE - DAY**

A room overflowing with accolades, achievements, and awards. A lifetime of work.

POV: A YOUNG MAN, late 20s, in a suit walks through the office but we do not see his face - only his back.

He studies all of the accomplishments that cover the walls. But this is not his office.

VOICE (O.S.)  
I have always been a champion of  
the people. That's been my purpose  
in this life.

The Young Man arrives at a sleek mahogany desk. He runs his fingers across it. The Voice, tinged in an older southern drawl, comes from the other side of desk.

VOICE (O.S.) (CONT'D)  
Now tell me this, what made you  
run for the Senate?

The Young Man picks up a framed photograph off of the desk. The black and white photo is decades old, at least. It shows a MAN passionately speaking to a CROWD of thousands.

YOUNG MAN  
Civil rights, sir.

A pause.

VOICE (O.S.)  
Good, good, good.

PRELAP: The sound of a roaring crowd, at first far away, then closer--

**INT. DIXIECRAT CONVENTION CENTER - DAY**

The CROWD of thousands pack an auditorium. White men and women. Of all ages. Some wave Confederate flags.

Despite the sweltering heat, they enthusiastically cheer on the SPEAKER at the podium.

There's an electricity in the air--

CAPTION: Birmingham, Alabama, 1948.

The speaker is GOVERNOR WRIGHT of Mississippi, a wiry man with glasses in his 50s, who has the attention of the crowd.

GOV. WRIGHT  
We have gathered here today  
because the American system of  
free constitutional government is  
in danger...

His audience shouts back in agreement--

**INT. BACKSTAGE - CONTINUOUS**

Pacing with the temperament of a lion and looking over his notes is J. STROM THURMOND, 40s, Governor of South Carolina.

Even though balding, he is considerably fit, sharp, and attractive. He doesn't look like the bigots in the crowd, he has the face and demeanor of a mastermind.

After a moment, Strom folds the notes and sits down. He gathers himself.

He looks up and sees a CLEANING LADY, African-American, 30s, tidying a portion of the backstage area. Long hours have made her look older than she actually is.

Strom stares at her.

Unaware she is being watched, she goes about her work. Strom is transfixed by her and a depth sinks into his eyes.

Strom's aid, ROBERT FIGG, late 40s, walks over and taps Strom on the shoulder, taking him out of his wayward gaze.

ROBERT FIGG  
It's time.

Figg has a slick seriousness to him as he prompts Strom. Atticus Finch as a card shark.

Strom snaps back to reality.

The sound of the lively crowd grows even louder...

TIME CUT TO:

Strom is now at the podium. He shuffles his notes. His nervousness seeping out--

He sees the sweaty faces of his fellow Southerners. They're listening but they're waiting for something. Something to hold on to.

He looks down. Takes a sip of water. The attention of the audience starts to fade. He's losing them and knows he better act fast--

Strom looks out on the restless crowd. He notices the Confederate flags. And then he puts his notes away.

STROM THURMOND

Truman has forced himself on the Democratic Party, but he cannot force himself on the people of this great country.

The crowd perks up, starts to applaud...

Strom arches his back, his voice gaining stride--

STROM THURMOND (CONT'D)

I want to tell you that progress of the Nigra race has not been due to these so call e-man-ci-pa-tors. It's been due to the kindness of the good southern people.

The crowd now enthusiastically cheering, rooting him on--

Strom releases into his inner lion; his confidence increasing with every word--

STROM THURMOND (CONT'D)

But I want to tell you, that there's not enough troops in the army to force the southern people to break down segregation and admit the Nigger race into our theater, into our swimming pools, into our homes, and into our churches!

The crowd roars, erupting in cheers and applause--

Strom sees their approval. He's captured his prey now. And lets out a dark smile...

FADE TO:

SEQUENCE - THE AMERICAN SOUTH

The hot sun beats down on swampy marshland--

Pristine Churches. Cotton Fields. Confederate flags.

African-American WORKERS outside of dilapidated buildings.

Wealthy White SOCIALITES inside mansions at lavish parties.

This is the southern United States post Reconstruction.

A long road is lined with connecting gnarled oak trees. At the end, a pristine white Antebellum mansion.

Inside, the house is meticulously curated with an exquisite sense of fashion. In the dining room, a large table is set for a feast about to be served.

Hanging on the wall is a framed picture of General Robert E. Lee as he surrendered the Civil War.

CAPTION: South Carolina, 1923.

This is the Thurmond Family Home.

**INT. THURMOND FAMILY HOME - DAY**

A knock at front door. It opens from inside--

YOUNG ADULT STROM, age 21, stands attentively in a cap and gown. An overly confident smile plastered on his face.

Standing inside is his mother, Eleanor. A fragile beauty, 50s, she's considered a saint in this house, but only this house.

ELEANOR THURMOND  
Well, look at you. I'm so very  
proud.

Eleanor promptly hugs him.

Behind her, leaning against a wall is his father, WILL, 60s. A lurking yet commanding presence. There's something calculating about him, as if he knows something you don't.

WILL THURMOND  
We both are.

Will studies his son for a moment.

YOUNG ADULT STROM  
Thank you.

ELEANOR THURMOND  
Come inside now, dinners gon' get  
cold.

Strom does as he's told. But Will has a different idea.

WILL THURMOND  
We'll be there in one minute. I  
want to talk to my son first.

Eleanor exits towards the dining room. Will and Strom move into the living room. They sit in regal wingback chairs.

WILL THURMOND (CONT'D)  
How did you enjoy Clemson?

YOUNG ADULT STROM  
Very much, sir. And I look forward to getting to work here in Edgefield. I was thinking about teaching to start...

WILL THURMOND  
I hear you were quite the lady chaser down there.

Strom blushes.

YOUNG ADULT STROM  
I don't know too much about that, sir.

WILL THURMOND  
I see. Well, I got you a little something. It's likely not what you expect, but nonetheless.

Will takes out and hands Strom an envelope titled "Advice."  
Strom looks back at Will with eager eyes--

WILL THURMOND (CONT'D)  
Go ahead. Those words ain't doing any good inside there.

Strom opens the envelope and takes out the letter.

YOUNG ADULT STROM  
(*reading*)  
To my Son. Remember your God. Be prompt. Take good care of your body. Associate only with the best people, morally and intellectually. Think three times before you act once and if you are in doubt, don't act at all. Do not forget that skill and integrity are the keys to success.  
Affectionately. Dad.

Strom smiles. He stands up and extends his hand firmly. They shake.

WILL THURMOND  
Now I mean every word in there.  
(MORE)

WILL THURMOND (CONT'D)  
Follow it and you'll be exactly  
where you should.

YOUNG ADULT STROM  
I will. Thank you, sir.

WILL THURMOND  
What do you say we go eat?

Suddenly, Strom's eyes are pulled away by two female African American house SERVANTS carrying dishes.

One of them is much younger, about 16. She has a soft, unassuming manner and is a gem of a beauty. Life hasn't had much of a chance to be cruel to her yet.

This is CARRIE BUTLER.

Strom's eyes meet with Carries'. He's never seen anything so beautiful. She smiles at him and nearly stops in her tracks.

But she is quickly hustled away by her CO-WORKER...

WILL THURMOND (CONT'D)  
Strom? You listening to me?

Strom snaps back out of the intimate moment--

YOUNG ADULT STROM  
Yes, sir. Of course.

**INT. KITCHEN - DAY**

Carrie and her older co-worker, LOUISA-MAY, 50s, a strong Mammy type of woman, shuffle into the kitchen.

Louisa-May closes the door.

LOUISA MAY  
Don't you go lookin' at these  
Thurmond men.

CARRIE BUTLER  
I wasn't...

LOUISA MAY  
You were. Don't tell me you  
weren't. I can see it.

CARRIE BUTLER  
Who is he?

LOUISA MAY  
That's Mr. Will's son. Strom. He's  
back home from college now.

CARRIE BUTLER  
Is he nice?

LOUISA MAY  
He's always been a whippersnapper.  
I guess he is. It don't really  
matter, now does it?

Carrie looks confused at Louisa--

LOUISA MAY (CONT'D)  
You don't trust anyone in this  
family. They're politicians. They  
may be nice to us but you can't  
trust a family that helped put  
slave owners back in Washington.

Louisa leans in close to Carrie to make sure she's being clear.

LOUISA MAY (CONT'D)  
Do you understand me, Carrie  
Butler?

Carrie nods...

**INT. CLASSROOM - DAY**

Strom writes "Chapters 6 & 7" on the chalkboard.

A classroom of STUDENTS hang on his every word and take notes.

YOUNG ADULT STROM  
Now, that'll be all for today. Six  
and Seven in your Agriculture  
books for tomorrow. And don't skip  
on the part about vegetables.  
Y'all dismissed.

Strom walks over to his desk. A group of three white high  
school FEMALE STUDENTS approach him.

They are all fairly attractive and stare at him. They stifle  
giggles.

YOUNG ADULT STROM (CONT'D)  
How can I assist you fine young  
ladies?



FEMALE STUDENT #1  
We just wanted to thank you for  
class, Mr. Thurmond.

FEMALE STUDENT #2  
It was very informative.

A pause. Strom waits for something else but realizes that's all there is.

YOUNG ADULT STROM  
Well, I'm glad you enjoyed it. You  
ladies best be making it home now  
and study up for tomorrow.

FEMALE STUDENTS #1 & #2  
We will.

They all nod in agreement. Student #3 smiles devilishly at Strom.

They turn to leave and Strom pinches the rear end of Student #3. She turns around, not overly surprised, but looks at Strom and subtly bites her lip.

Strom walks the Girls towards the door. Girls #1 and 2 exit but Student #3 lingers. She looks at Strom--

And he locks the door.

**EXT. BACKYARD - DAY**

The sun hangs high in the sky. It's hot but the air is still.

Strom and Carrie walk down a dirt path. In the distance behind them, is the Thurmond family home.

CARRIE BUTLER  
Where are we going?

YOUNG ADULT STROM  
Just for a walk. Beautiful day for  
a walk. Outdoor exercise, if you  
will. See a bit of our great  
state.

CARRIE BUTLER  
But you're sure your parents won't  
mind that I'm gone?

YOUNG ADULT STROM  
They won't. As long as you don't  
mind...?

CARRIE BUTLER

I don't.

Strom looks at Carrie and smiles. Carrie looks back at him, nervously struggling for the right thing to say.

CARRIE BUTLER (CONT'D)

So...do you like being a teacher now?

YOUNG ADULT STROM

I do. Gives me a chance to shape the minds of tomorrow.

CARRIE BUTLER

Guess there's nothing more important than the future.

YOUNG ADULT STROM

Except for today.

Carrie smiles. She's starting to relax.

CARRIE BUTLER

Why do they call you Strom, anyway?

YOUNG ADULT STROM

It's my middle name. My first name is James. But Strom is my mother's maiden name. Guess it was a way of honoring her.

CARRIE BUTLER

That's Strom...S-T-R-O-M?

YOUNG ADULT STROM

Yes, Miss.

CARRIE BUTLER

One little letter reversal and you could've been named Storm.

YOUNG ADULT STROM

I'd like to think it would work either way.

They approach a field blocked off by fences. It's full of cotton.

Strom leans over the fence and looks out on the horizon. Carrie follows suit.

YOUNG ADULT STROM (CONT'D)

Tell me about yourself.

CARRIE BUTLER  
What would you most like to know?

YOUNG ADULT STROM  
Anything. What do you want out of  
this life?

CARRIE BUTLER  
I think...I think I'd like to  
travel. See the world. Paris.  
Maybe Italy. Somewhere far away.  
Somewhere with history. Somewhere  
with...romance.

YOUNG ADULT STROM  
We got plenty of romance and  
history right here in South  
Carolina.

Carrie looks at the cotton...

CARRIE BUTLER  
Yes...I suppose we do.

YOUNG ADULT STROM  
My whole family is from right  
here. This very parcel of land.  
And my children, one day, will be  
from here too.

CARRIE BUTLER  
And will you ever leave here?

YOUNG ADULT STROM  
A man never truly leaves where  
he's from. Even someone as  
important as the President.

Strom looks at Carrie--

**INT. THURMOND DINING ROOM - NIGHT**

Strom sits around a table, eating across from his quiet  
sisters, MARTHA and MARY, age 13 and 14. Will and Eleanor sit  
at the respective heads of the table.

YOUNG ADULT STROM  
You should see their faces. So  
eager to learn!

WILL THURMOND  
You're doing good work because  
you're making connections.

(MORE)

WILL THURMOND (CONT'D)  
That's what makes a successful politician.

YOUNG ADULT STROM  
I can go farther. What I'd really like to propose a county wide literacy program. Imagine the education that could be had if every single person in this county was literate.

ELEANOR THURMOND  
Every single type of person...?

YOUNG ADULT STROM  
Absolutely. Every kind. Can any Governor or President say they've-

A nerve is struck--

WILL THURMOND  
That's enough of that now.

Everyone looks down and chews their food.

After a moment, a door opens and Carrie comes in carrying a hot plate full of roast ham. She motions to set it down--

ELEANOR THURMOND  
Thank you, Carrie.

Carrie walks over to the table but accidentally bumps into Strom's chair. She nearly loses her grip on the plate--

Strom extends his hands, helping catch it and in the process, touching hers. They set the plate down together.

Strom, grinning, looks up at Carrie.

YOUNG ADULT STROM  
Almost got me, huh?

Carrie smiles, embarrassed. She quickly exits.

No one else at the table appears enthused...

**EXT./INT. CARRIE'S QUARTERS - LATE NIGHT**

A small shabby house down the road from the Thurmonds'. A staircase leads upstairs to bedrooms.

Crickets chirp outside. All is still.

Strom, careful not to creek the wooden floorboard, tip toes down the hall and arrives at a room with the door ajar.

Strom enters the room, startling Carrie in just the slightest manner.

Carrie wears a night gown and nothing else. On her chest is a grey heart shaped locket. She nervously plays with it between her fingers. The neckline reveals her cleavage.

Carrie breathes heavily, unsure of herself.

Strom looks long and hard at Carrie--

And closes the door.

Strom walks up to Carrie. He touches her face softly. Her black skin shining in the moonlight.

Neither of them has ever experienced something this dangerous before.

Strom grabs her gently by the arms. Then firmer...and in a FLASH--

He passionately kisses her lips.

Strom stops and they gaze into each other's eyes for a moment. They resume kissing--

They undress each other ferociously, each ripping off the other's clothes--

Their force propels Carrie back against the wall--

Strom pants are now off--

And he inserts himself into her.

**EXT. CARRIE'S QUARTERS - LATE NIGHT - CONTINUOUS**

The air no longer feels still. The sounds of lovemaking emitting from inside. The house creaks all over...

They finish.

**INT. THURMOND FAMILY HOME - EVENING**

Strom walks through the house. He looks around, noticing that no one else seems to be around...

CAPTION: Three months later.

Strom follows a hallway to the back part of house. He knocks on the door, which is already open.

**INT. WILL'S HOME OFFICE - CONTINUOUS**

A large room with walls decorated by legal degrees. Family photos sit on top of a majestic mahogany desk.

Strom enters the room--

YOUNG ADULT STROM  
You asked to see me, sir?

Will is sitting at his desk, looking down at a single sheet of paper. He does not look up...

After a moment--

YOUNG ADULT STROM (CONT'D)  
Sir...?

WILL THURMOND  
(reading slowly)  
Remember your God. Be prompt. Take good care of your body. Associate only with the best people, morally and intellectually.

Will's tone now taking a dark and menacing pitch--

WILL THURMOND (CONT'D)  
Think three times before you act once and if you are in doubt, don't act at all. Do not forget that skill and integrity are the keys to success!

Strom, taken aback looks at his father in confusion--

YOUNG ADULT STROM  
Sir, have I done something to-

Will slams his fist down on to the desk--

WILL THURMOND  
Do you take me for an imbecile?

YOUNG ADULT STROM  
(trembling)  
I...uh...of course not-

WILL THURMOND  
Did you think I wouldn't find out?  
(MORE)

WILL THURMOND (CONT'D)  
Dear Lord in Heaven how foolish do  
you have to be? You're a college  
graduate!

YOUNG ADULT STROM  
I assure you sir, I don't know--

WILL THURMOND  
The girl. She's pregnant.

Strom's heart skips a beat.

YOUNG ADULT STROM  
She...she is?

WILL THURMOND  
You're goddamn right she is. Now I  
don't blame you for being a young  
man but I will blame you for being  
a stupid young man-

Strom, breathing heavily, starts to tear up--

YOUNG ADULT STROM  
Father...please forgive-

WILL THURMOND  
What? What do you have to say for  
yourself?

YOUNG ADULT STROM  
I have sinned. I have done wrong.  
I didn't think I-

WILL THURMOND  
Well you did.

YOUNG ADULT STROM  
It's just that...I think Carrie  
and I must be in love.

Will, with lightning in his eyes, looks at Strom with fury--

And lashes out towards him, grabbing his neck and PINNING him  
against the wall--

A framed degree falls and SHATTERS on the floor--

WILL THURMOND  
Don't you dare. You're too young  
to know what love is.

YOUNG ADULT STROM  
 (wheezing out the words)  
 I didn't mean to- (upset you.)

Will tightens his grip on Strom's neck--

WILL THURMOND  
 Let me tell you something, boy. My  
 father did not fight in the Civil  
 War so you could muck up the  
 aftermath. You know he stood next  
 to General Lee at Appomattox.  
 You're choosing to disgrace this  
 family and our legacy now?

YOUNG ADULT STROM  
 No sir-

WILL THURMOND  
 Whites and Blacks are separate.  
 That's the way it is and the way  
 it will always be. They are not  
 people. Like us. You understand  
 me?

Strom nods, his face starting to turn blue--

WILL THURMOND (CONT'D)  
 You want a successful career? You  
 want to have power? A politician?  
 With influence? The President?

Strom desperately gasps for air--

YOUNG ADULT STROM  
 Yes! Yes, sir!

Will releases his grip. Strom falls to the floor, shaking and  
 crying--

WILL THURMOND  
 Then all of this goes away. You  
 too will go away. For now.

YOUNG ADULT STROM  
 (with every ounce left)  
 No!

WILL THURMOND  
 Yes. I will clean up your shit  
 mess. No one will know about this.  
 I will take care of the mother and  
 I will make arrangements for the  
 child.



Strom looks at his father, defeated--

WILL THURMOND (CONT'D)  
I've already made plans for you to  
leave for awhile. After that,  
we'll discuss your return to  
Edgefield.

The tears stream down Strom's face...

Will exits the room, slamming the door behind him.

**EXT. HOUSE - DAY**

A small, unmarked house on the outskirts of town.

**INT. BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS**

Laying on a bed is Carrie, who is in labor, screaming in  
agony--

In front of her is a DOCTOR, white, 40s, and a NURSE, white,  
30s, who holds her hand. *They\*\*'re almost there...*

Carrie pushes hard, the final moment--

And the baby is born.

The Doctor takes the baby and places it into Carrie's arms. A  
BABY GIRL. Black, but with very fair skin.

Carrie looks at her and smiles. She cries tears of joy, but  
they are laced with grave concern...

But before she can hold the child for long, TWO WHITE MEN, take  
the baby OUT OF HER ARMS--

CARRIE BUTLER  
Just give me a moment with her.

Carrie fights, weakly, to get her child back--

MAN #1  
This was discussed with you. The  
baby goes to live with your  
relatives. It won't be raised here  
in South Carolina.

Carrie starts to cry as the Men exit the house...

**EXT. HOUSE - DAY**

Will Thurmond sits across the street in a parked automobile. He sees the two men exit with the baby.

They nod at him. The task is complete.

FADE TO:

**EXT./INT. THURMOND LAW OFFICE - DAY**

A regal looking office that one wouldn't walk into unless they had serious business.

Inside Strom's office, the letter of advice from his father is framed on the wall. Surrounding it is various accomplishments and degrees in Strom Thurmond's name.

His father's sleek mahogany desk now resides here, covered in paper work. A portrait of Will Thurmond hangs above all keeping a watchful father's eye over the office.

CAPTION: Sixteen years later.

The ever calculating Robert Figg sits in a chair reading a newspaper opposite the desk. Strom looks out a window.

STROM THURMOND

You know what I see when I look out of this window?

ROBERT FIGG

South Carolina?

STROM THURMOND

Opportunity. But I also see lack of opportunity.

Strom looks at Robert.

ROBERT FIGG

What do you mean?

STROM THURMOND

How many Negroes can write their name after my initiative?

ROBERT FIGG

798. And another 648 can read.

STROM THURMOND

Robert, I love this South Carolina with all my heart but it's low standing is due to a high rate of illiteracy and lack of education among our Negroes. If they have better education, not only will they prosper but so will our state.

ROBERT FIGG

That may be, but you're a lawyer and a judge. You're not Governor.

STROM THURMOND

Not yet.

**INT. COACH BUS - DAY**

A young African-American girl, age 16, stares out the window of a large charter bus. She has an unspoken wisdom to her which is undercut by her soft and charming eyes.

This is ESSIE-MAE WASHINGTON, Strom's now teenage daughter.

Sitting next to her is her mother, Carrie Butler, now age 31. Time has not been kind to her but the same grey heart shaped locket hangs around her neck.

CARRIE BUTLER

I'm so very glad we could take this trip together. Finally spend some time with each other.

ESSIE MAE WASHINGTON

I've been looking forward to it a lot, Ms. Butler.

Carrie looks at Essie but decides not to push...

The Bus pulls into the town of Edgefield, South Carolina, which Essie Mae is seeing for the first time. Groupings of sleeping male BLACK HIRED HANDS lay on benches wishing they had work. A confederate flag flies in the town square.

A look of horror and disgust on her face.

CARRIE BUTLER

Welcome home, Essie Mae.

ESSIE MAE WASHINGTON

This isn't my home.

CARRIE BUTLER

Hush your mouth. You might not have been raised here, but you were born here.

ESSIE MAE WASHINGTON

Well, I left, and I don't miss it.

The bus pulls into the station and parks. Carrie and Essie Mae, carrying their baggage, step off the bus.

**EXT. EDGEFIELD BUS STATION - CONTINUOUS**

A white MAN, 40s spits on the ground as Carrie and Essie Mae step off the bus. Essie Mae looks at her mother.

CARRIE BUTLER

Down here, they don't think they lost the Civil War.

**EXT. THURMOND LAW OFFICE - DAY**

A cab drives away. Carrie and Essie Mae stand in front of a medium sized white regal building. A sign out front says "THURMOND & THURMOND."

ESSIE MAE WASHINGTON

My daddy works here?

Carrie nods. They walk up to the front door.

A black GARDENER, 50s, mows the lawn. Essie watches him with inquisitive eyes.

**INT. THURMOND LAW OFFICE - CONTINUOUS**

A black male STEWARD in a white coat, 60s, leads them into a large room. Essie stares at him but he looks blankly back at her and exits.

STEWARD

He will see you shortly.

Essie Mae notices the framed letter of advice on the wall.

After a moment, Strom awkwardly enters the room. He gazes at Carrie for an extended time. Just like the first time he saw her.

He then stares at Essie Mae, his stone face becomes studious, then breaks into a loving smile.

STROM THURMOND  
(to Carrie)  
You have a lovely daughter.

They both turn around. Strom walks over to them.

CARRIE BUTLER  
Essie Mae, meet your father.

SHOCK on Essie's face--

She goes to speak, but no words are coming out. Eventually--

ESSIE MAE WASHINGTON  
Hello...Mr. Thurmond...

Strom motions for them to sit. They do.

STROM THURMOND  
So. What do you think of our  
beautiful city?

ESSIE MAE WASHINGTON  
It's different from my home.

STROM THURMOND  
This is your home, Essie Mae. You  
must think of yourself as a South  
Carolinian. Wonderful city.

Strom doesn't so much speak as he does pontificate in his bully  
pulpit of an office.

Essie Mae still struggles to find any words at all--

ESSIE MAE WASHINGTON  
Nine Governors, I hear...

CARRIE BUTLER  
Maybe ten.

Carrie winks at Strom. He smiles.

STROM THURMOND  
The Palmetto state. Do you know  
what a Palmetto is?

ESSIE MAE WASHINGTON  
No, sir.

STROM THURMOND  
It's a small palm tree native to  
our state. Come look at this.

Strom motions for Essie to move over to his mahogany desk. He hands her a post card.

STROM THURMOND (CONT'D)  
 This is our state seal. See the palmetto, growing out of that fallen oak? That represents one of the many great victories we've had here in South Carolina.

Essie Mae nods.

STROM THURMOND (CONT'D)  
 The Latin phrase here "*Quis Separabit*"...do you know what that means?

ESSIE MAE WASHINGTON  
 No, sir.

CARRIE BUTLER  
 Your father used to be a school teacher...

Strom crouches down a bit so he's on eye level with Essie Mae. He puts his hand on her shoulder--

STROM THURMOND  
 It means 'Who can separate us?'

A pause. Strom hands Essie Mae the post card.

STROM THURMOND (CONT'D)  
 You can keep that.

Carrie stares at Strom with the same affection from all those years before. Strom looks Essie Mae up and down.

STROM THURMOND (CONT'D)  
 (to Carrie)  
 I hope you're feeding her right. I would stay just as you are, not another pound. Be careful of fried food, no matter how good it tastes. And drink lots of water. It helps control appetite. And be sure to walk everywhere you can.

CARRIE BUTLER  
 He used to be a coach, too.

Strom laughs. He sits down next to Essie Mae.

STROM THURMOND

Now what are your plans after high school, young miss?

ESSIE MAE WASHINGTON

I'd like to go to college, sir.

STROM THURMOND

I think that's excellent. Where are you thinking?

ESSIE MAE WASHINGTON

Maybe NYU?

STROM THURMOND

What about coming down to South Carolina? We have a fine college right in Orangeburg. Our...state college.

ESSIE MAE WASHINGTON

That could be...nice.

STROM THURMOND

Well you study hard. How are your studies? What do they have you read?

ESSIE MAE WASHINGTON

Great Expectations. Silas Marner. Moby Dick.

STROM THURMOND

Any Shakespeare yet?

Essie pauses for a moment, then looks at Strom--

ESSIE MAE WASHINGTON

(reciting)

"Tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow, creep in this petty pace from day to day. Till the last syllable of recorded time. And all our yesterdays have lighted fools the way to dusty death. Out, out brief candle."

Both Carrie and Strom are STUNNED--

STROM THURMOND

Well, I declare, Essie. That's fine work. You keep studying like that, there's no telling what you can do. Fine work...

Strom looks at Carrie.

STROM THURMOND (CONT'D)  
She has my sister's cheekbones.

Carrie smiles. Strom stands up.

CARRIE BUTLER  
Alright Essie Mae, we best be  
leaving, we don't want to take up  
too much of your father's valuable  
time.

STROM THURMOND  
Now you stay safe up north. We're  
nearly on the brink of war. But  
we're very lucky to have a strong  
President like Roosevelt at this  
juncture. But you come back down  
to South Carolina soon, y'hear?

ESSIE MAE WASHINGTON  
OK.

Strom looks at Essie and bows cavalierly towards both Carrie  
and Essie Mae. Carrie muffles an "ahem"-style noise.

Strom extends his hand and bone crushingly shakes Carries'.  
Then Essies'.

Strom then goes over to his desk, pulls out a drawer and takes  
out an envelope. He walks over to Carrie and hands it to her.  
It is full of cash...

Carrie and Essie exit the office.

CARRIE BUTLER  
(whispering)  
When did you learn Shakespeare?

Essie shrugs coyly...

**NEWSPAPER SEQUENCE:**

1. Japan attacks Pearl Harbor. America goes to War.
2. Tehran Conference between Roosevelt, Churchill & Stalin.
3. Allies arrive in France. D-DAY. June 6th, 1944.



**EXT. SOMEWHERE OVER FRANCE/INT. GLIDER PLANE - NIGHT**

Bullets from below shatter the sky. Anti-aircraft. Paratroopers fall through the sky. Some miss the gunfire. Some are not so lucky.

Several large combat airplanes fly over Normandy. Attached by rope to each of the planes is a Glider - a motorless, flimsy aircraft that holds machinery and infantry troops.

Inside this particular Glider is Major Strom Thurmond. He is joined by his fellow TROOPS.

A neighboring combat plane is shot to pieces and begins to nose dive. The Glider and all it's men go down with it.

The plane Strom is in heads towards the ground, evading fire. They're still in enemy territory and not in the drop zone. But the gun fire is too strong, so the Glider is cut LOOSE--

It sails precariously through the air. It's headed directly towards an orchard at TOP SPEED--

And it CRASH LANDS, hitting the trees and falling apart upon impact. Troops go flying--

Strom goes down, badly injured but crawls from the wreckage and links up with his fellow troops.

Immediate gun and mortar fire is upon them...

**INT. CARRIE'S HOUSE - NIGHT**

A dimly lit room with discount furniture. In the corner, a suitcase.

Essie sits on a couch listening intently to the radio--

The news report details progress of the American troops at war in Europe.

Outside, the sound of car doors closing followed by laughing. Footsteps lead up to the door. Essie looks over.

MAN (O.S.)

Can I stay over tonight?

CARRIE BUTLER (O.S.)

No, I told you my daughter is visiting...

MAN (O.S.)

Come on, baby...

The sound of some muffled talking, a pause and then a car starting.

A key is inserted into the front door. It slowly opens. Carrie enters.

CARRIE BUTLER  
You're still up.

ESSIE MAE WASHINGTON  
Still listening.

CARRIE BUTLER  
You'll drive yourself crazy if you listen to that non stop.

ESSIE MAE WASHINGTON  
I want to know if he's OK.

CARRIE BUTLER  
They're not going to give a special bulletin just on him, Essie.

Carrie sets her purse on a table and makes herself comfortable. She turns off the radio.

CARRIE BUTLER (CONT'D)  
Look, it's been real nice having you visit me...

ESSIE MAE WASHINGTON  
Do you love my father?

CARRIE BUTLER  
He cares a lot about me.

ESSIE MAE WASHINGTON  
And he's really my father?

CARRIE BUTLER  
Of course he is.

Essies' eyes start to well up...

ESSIE MAE WASHINGTON  
But is he going to be around to be...

CARRIE BUTLER  
To be what?

ESSIE MAE WASHINGTON  
To be a father. To me.

(MORE)

ESSIE MAE WASHINGTON (CONT'D)  
 And will I ever be a daughter...a  
 normal daughter to him?

CARRIE BUTLER  
 Your father is a very important  
 man. He's going places.

Essies breaks down--

CARRIE BUTLER (CONT'D)  
 Sssh, child. It's OK.

Carrie takes Essie's head into her shoulders. This is the first  
 time they've done anything like this.

CARRIE BUTLER (CONT'D)  
 You're gonna be alright. Your  
 father is one of a kind. And  
 you're going to...respect his  
 position in society. You  
 understand me?

Essie nods through the tears.

ESSIE MAE WASHINGTON  
 But will he survive the war?

Carrie looks over at the radio...

**EXT. SOMEWHERE IN GERMANY - DAY**

American TROOPS are stationed waiting in a now bombed out town.  
 A more decorated Lt. Col. Thurmond re-reads a letter signed:  
*"Affectionately, Carrie..."*

Suddenly, a BRIGADIER GENERAL whistles and signals that they  
 are moving out--

Strom hops in a jeep with other OFFICERS and they drive off.

**EXT. WEIMAR, GERMANY - CONTINUOUS**

Strom's jeep and fellow troops now come to a stop--

In front of them is a large building with a Nazi flag. It is  
 gated off and barb wire surrounds the rest of the perimeter.

The very air reeks of death.

CAPTION: Buchenwald Concentration Camp

**INT. BUCHENWALD - CONTINUOUS**

The troops trepidatiously enter the camp--

A large graveyard of exceedingly thin CORPSES, stacked on each other like books, fills one portion of the grounds. Some of the bodies twitch, barely alive.

Several troops begin to vomit--

Some MEN with nooses around their neck are hanging from trees. Empty rooms with blood stained floors hold tables with terrifying used metal equipment.

Strom and a select regiment of troops walk towards the back of the camp where the barracks are.

Scared MEN and WOMEN in striped clothes, slowly creep and come out of the buildings. The horror they have seen is worn all over their faces...

The troops gently approach them...

SOLDIER #1  
(horrified)  
They killed them...they killed  
them just for being different.

STROM THURMOND  
Savages...

FADE TO:

**NEWSPAPER SEQUENCE:**

1. Germany Surrenders. V-E Day. The war in Europe has ended...
2. Japan Surrenders. V-J Day. Pacific Combat has stopped...
3. THE WAR IS OVER!

**INT. FORT BRAGG BASE - DAY**

Strom and fellow TROOPS are celebrating. Their dismissal paperwork sits in front of them.

Strom holds a letter from Robert Figg. He opens it and it reads--

ROBERT FIGG (V.O.)  
Strom.  
(MORE)

ROBERT FIGG (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
 You better come back to South  
 Carolina and run for Governor as  
 soon you're home. You're a war  
 hero!

Strom folds the letter and puts it back in the envelope.

He ponders Figg's proposition for a moment...

**EXT. SOUTH CAROLINA CAPITAL BUILDING - DAY**

Celebration rally. THOUSANDS are here to witness the inaugural  
 speech of the new Governor - Strom Thurmond.

STROM THURMOND  
 We are on the threshold of a new  
 era. A progressive time for South  
 Carolina! And this country!

Despite the heat, the crowd enthusiastically cheers--

STROM THURMOND (CONT'D)  
 We will do away with things that  
 hold us back like the poll tax and  
 we will take steps to move  
 forward. More attention will be  
 given to Negro education.

In the far back of the crowd is a group of young AFRICAN  
 AMERICAN COLLEGE GIRLS from Orangeburg College. They listen to  
 Strom's speech with adoration.

One of the young women is Essie Mae.

STROM THURMOND (CONT'D)  
 We also need to reexamine the  
 working conditions which make for  
 health, decency and welfare of our  
 workers--

The crowd continues to cheer. Strom looks down and his focus is  
 pulled away by a young WOMAN. But this is no ordinary female--

Her magnetic smile draws you to her immediately. She has long  
 dark hair and blue eyes. A shade of a tomboy from years of  
 outsmarting her older brothers. She stands out among a group of  
 WHITE COLLEGE GIRLS in the front.

This is JEAN CROUCH, 21 years old.

Jean smiles at Strom. He fumbles to get back on track--

STROM THURMOND (CONT'D)  
To make sure South Carolinian  
industries are safe for all...

TIME CUT TO:

**EXT. SOUTH CAROLINA CAPITAL BUILDING - CONTINUOUS**

The speeches have ended but the fanfare rages on.

Strom shakes hands with various POLITICIANS and CONSTITUENTS.  
Robert Figg guides him through the crowd pointing out people of  
importance, anxious to shake the new Governors' hand.

Strom spots Jean and moves the direction her way...

Jean sees him coming and walks right up to him. She extends her  
hand.

JEAN CROUCH  
Governor Thurmond. Jean Crouch. My  
high school class visited you when  
you were the judge at Barnwell.

Strom immediately remembers--

STROM THURMOND  
Of course. Jean. Jean. I could  
never forget those pretty eyes. It  
is lovely to meet you again.

Jean blushes--

JEAN CROUCH  
Congratulations, sir.

STROM THURMOND  
Well thank you. Where are you  
studying now?

JEAN CROUCH  
Winthrop. I'll be finishing up my  
Senior year as Valedictorian.

STROM THURMOND  
Maybe I should be congratulating  
you.

JEAN CROUCH  
Maybe you should.

Strom smiles.

STROM THURMOND

Senior year, yes? Y'know...there will be several positions opening in the Governor's office shortly. This would be strictly official business though.

JEAN CROUCH

(a challenge)

What are you hunting, a secretary or a playmate?

STROM THURMOND

Come on down. We'll expect you.

Strom is shuffled back through the crowd by Robert, but there's certainly a new pep in his step...

**INT. SOUTH CAROLINA COUNTY JAIL - NIGHT**

A small brick jailhouse, after hours. In a back room is a small cell. A crusty white JAILER, 60s, sits at a desk lazily keeping watch on a very scared WILLIE EARL.

Willie Earl is African American, 24 years old. He's sweating, and white knuckle gripping the bars of his cell--

WILLIE EARL

I told you I didn't do it. I didn't kill no white taxi man. I took the bus home--

JAILER

Save it.

WILLIE EARL

Talk to my Mama. I spent the night at her place--

A rumbling of NOISE outside. Angry voices shouting become closer and closer. Both Willie and the Jailer listen...

**EXT. SOUTH CAROLINA COUNTY JAIL - CONTINUOUS**

An ANGRY MOB made up of 35 white MEN carrying weapons and torches are walking the street towards the jail.

They approach the County Jailhouse and pound of the door--

INTERCUT WITH INSIDE THE COUNTY JAIL

WILLIE EARL

What was that?

JAILER  
They're outside, we don't have  
to--

A SHOT is fired. The Mob breaks into the jailhouse--

MAN #1  
Where is he?!

MAN #2  
He'll pay for killing one of our  
own!

The Jailer, keys in hand, fumbles to get up--

The Mob enters the back room and finds them.

JAILER  
Now wait one second-

Man #3 COCKS a shotgun and points it at the Jailer--

MAN #3  
You don't want to get involved in  
this old man.

The Jailer slowly sets the cell keys on the table and then runs  
out past the mob.

The mob narrows their sights on Willie, who is on his knees,  
begging--

WILLIE EARL  
Please, no. Oh Lord, please don't  
kill me...

#### **SOUTH CAROLINA GOVERNOR'S OFFICE - DAY**

Strom sits behind his mahogany desk reading a newspaper with  
the headline of "LYNCHING IN GREENVILLE"

In a chair is now advisor Robert Figg, who also, but  
nonchalantly, reads the paper.

STROM THURMOND  
My God. Says they shot this boy in  
the head three times.

ROBERT FIGG  
Don't forget the part where they  
carved away part of his face and  
then left him on the side of the  
road...



Strom puts down the paper.

A portrait of President Truman hangs on the opposite side of the room, seemingly watching him.

STROM THURMOND  
How could this happen? Here in South Carolina.

ROBERT FIGG  
They believe this Willie Earl killed one of their fellow cab drivers. They made an example of him.

STROM THURMOND  
I don't care!

ROBERT FIGG  
The nation is waiting on your response.

STROM THURMOND  
Exactly.

Strom presses a buzzer on his desk--

STROM THURMOND (CONT'D)  
Jean, come in here!

Jean, now Strom's secretary, enters the room--

JEAN CROUCH  
Yes, Governor Thurmond?

STROM THURMOND  
I want you to take this down.

Jean readies her pen and paper--

STROM THURMOND (CONT'D)  
We in South Carolina want the world to know we will tolerate no mob violence. I do not favor lynching and I shall exert every resource at my command to...apprehend all persons who may be involved in such a flagrant violation of the law.

A pause. Strom looks at Jean.

STROM THURMOND (CONT'D)  
Now who can we get this out to?

JEAN CROUCH

We can try The Christian Science Monitor. They're always looking for an exclusive.

STROM THURMOND

Do it. And Bob I want the state police working with the FBI on this. We find these boys. And we bring 'em to justice.

ROBERT FIGG

You think Truman will get involved?

Strom stares at the portrait of Truman disdainfully...

STROM THURMOND

I know he will.

**INT. ORANGEBURG COLLEGE DORM - DAY**

The Orangeburg African American College for Women. A group of FEMALE STUDENTS lay on the beds and floor of a small dorm room.

They skim magazines. Essie Mae reads a book.

COLLEGE STUDENT #1

I think it's good Governor Thurmond condemned these men.

COLLEGE STUDENT #2

Won't matter, they'll just get away with it. You hear there are businesses in Greenville that started a fund-raising campaign for the accused?

The women sigh, defeated.

COLLEGE STUDENT #1

Well the NAACP is backing the Governor.

COLLEGE STUDENT #2

Of course they are.

A pause. Essie looks up--

COLLEGE STUDENT #3

You know, I hear Governor Thurmond has a secret daughter that goes to Orangeburg.

COLLEGE STUDENT #2  
That's not true...

COLLEGE STUDENT #3  
He's visited the campus many  
times! He was just here.

COLLEGE STUDENT #2  
He helps fund this school.

COLLEGE STUDENT #1  
Well, wouldn't be the first time  
something like that has happened  
in South Carolina.

Essie looks down, trying to engage in her book--

COLLEGE STUDENT #2  
Essie Mae, you're awfully quiet  
over there.

ESSIE MAE WASHINGTON  
I am? Sorry, I'm just...reading...

COLLEGE STUDENT #3  
You won't believe what I heard  
about it...

Everyone turns to Student #3, interested. Essie takes a deep  
inhale--

COLLEGE STUDENT #3 (CONT'D)  
I hear...that his secret daughter  
is...Lizzie Thompson!

The girls giggle and roll their eyes. Essie breathes out a sigh  
of relief.

Essie Mae goes over to her bookcase and puts her novel away.  
She grabs a different book and opens it. Hidden inside is an  
envelope full of cash. Only a timid smile escapes.

**INT. TRUMAN WHITE HOUSE - DAY**

A press briefing in the Oval Office.

A group of REPORTERS, predominantly White Men, gather round  
taking notes. They are listening to a stern and authoritative  
PRESIDENT TRUMAN, who is out of sight speaking--

PRESIDENT TRUMAN (O.S.)  
 The central theme in our American heritage is the importance of the individual person. From the earliest moment of our history we have believed that every human being has an essential dignity which must be respected.

**INT. MIDDLE AMERICA CAFE - DAY**

A sign hangs in the window. *"We Serve Coloreds. Take Out Only."*

A meager African American PATRON, 40s, is paying for to go food from the curt White OWNER, 50s.

The radio continues Truman's voice. They listen--

PRESIDENT TRUMAN (O.S.)  
 But the protection of civil rights is a national problem which affects everyone. We need to guarantee the same rights to every person regardless of who he is, where he lives, or what his racial, religious or national origins are.

**INT. SOUTH CAROLINA GOVERNOR'S OFFICE - DAY**

Jean holds a newspaper and continues reading Truman's speech out loud--

JEAN  
 To secure these rights, I have, therefore, issued today an Executive Order creating the President's Committee on Civil Rights.

STROM THURMOND  
 Damn Yankee politicians!

Strom stares at the portrait of President Truman, which now seems to mock him.

He grabs the newspaper from Jean and throws it on the floor--

Robert calmly sits opposite Strom making notes on a pad.

ROBERT FIGG

You knew he was going to get involved in some aspect.

STROM THURMOND

But not like this! He's taking away state's rights. They don't get to come down here and tell me how to run my state.

Jean picks up the newspaper, folds it, and sets it on the desk.

ROBERT FIGG

Truman is standing strong in the face of national pressure. Especially after the Willie Earl case.

STROM THURMOND

This does not look like my Democratic party.

JEAN CROUCH

Strom, he's still a Democrat and he's still President.

STROM THURMOND

(yelling)

Jean, I don't care what he is, do you understand or not?

An uncomfortable pause.

JEAN CROUCH

Speak to me like that ever again personally or professionally and it'll be the last time you do.

The blow lands hard on Strom. He knows he's in the wrong.

Figg looks down with a giant grin on his face, clearly impressed by the tenacity of Jean.

Strom gets up from his desk and goes to Jean.

STROM THURMOND

I'm sorry. I didn't mean to talk to you like that. And you're right. He is the President. For now. Which is exactly why I don't have to support him.

JEAN CROUCH

What are you...

Robert looks up from his papers--

Strom walks across the room, stands on a chair, and removes the portrait of Truman off the wall.

STROM THURMOND  
There. That's better.

Strom puts the portrait on the ground with the side of Truman's face against the wall.

STROM THURMOND (CONT'D)  
I want reporters to see this empty space. They ought know where I stand. Everyone should.

Jean and Robert glance at each other.

**INT. CARRIE'S HOUSE - DAY**

A shabby bedroom. Nothing has been tended to and the place is a few steps from disarray.

Carrie is laid up in bed. There's a paleness to her face. She is not well but doing her best to hide it.

Essie sits on a chair next to the bed. She looks at her mother. She's never been around to help and certainly doesn't know where to start now.

ESSIE MAE WASHINGTON  
You're sick.

CARRIE BUTLER  
No...this is nothing. I'll be fine.

Carrie grunts slightly as she shifts her weight to sit up more. She adjusts the grey heart locket around her neck.

ESSIE MAE WASHINGTON  
You don't look fine.

CARRIE BUTLER  
You came all the way down here to tell me that, huh?

Carrie laughs. Essie looks down, somewhere between frustrated and embarrassed.

ESSIE MAE WASHINGTON  
I've seen my...father.

CARRIE BUTLER

I'm glad you see him from time to time. I think he did a good job setting you up at that school. You should be pretty thankful.

ESSIE MAE WASHINGTON

He...he hands me money now. When he decides to visit. I'm not sure what I'm supposed to do with it.

CARRIE BUTLER

What do you mean?

ESSIE MAE WASHINGTON

I didn't earn it.

CARRIE BUTLER

It's for you. How do you think I paid for any of your trips down here? I didn't. He did. That's his way of...you know...

ESSIE MAE WASHINGTON

No, I don't know.

CARRIE BUTLER

His way of showing...that he cares about you-

Carrie coughs violently--

ESSIE MAE WASHINGTON

OK, OK. You alright?

Essie hands Carrie a glass of water. She takes a sip.

CARRIE BUTLER

Yes. Yes, thank you.

ESSIE MAE WASHINGTON

I suppose I just...well, I never know when he's coming. He doesn't hug me. He didn't raise me. He's just a powerful stranger with a lot of money.

CARRIE BUTLER

So, you wanna be mean to your father?

ESSIE MAE WASHINGTON

No, I...

Essie stops. She's losing and she knows it. Carrie coughs again.

But Essie takes a look at Carrie - her mother - in blood--

ESSIE MAE WASHINGTON (CONT'D)  
You live with this secret. Every day. You...how do you-

CARRIE BUTLER  
That's what you do.

Carrie, using all her strength, grabs Essie's hand.

CARRIE BUTLER (CONT'D)  
You wanna know how you've earned that money? You earn it every day being out there. And being someone who cares about him too-

Carrie coughs again, violently.

Essie squeezes Carrie's hand back. And takes a deep breath.

**EXT. SOUTH CAROLINA GOVERNOR'S MANSION - NIGHT**

A clear night with stars shining in the sky.

Balloons and ribbons drape the facade of the Mansion. A large sign reads "Welcome to the Governor's Ball!"

GUESTS, all in black tie attire make their way to the towards the mansion for the already in progress event.

**INT. SOUTH CAROLINA GOVERNOR'S MANSION - CONTINUOUS**

Politicians, Businessmen, and all prominent South Carolinians are in the room. Everyone is dressed to the nines. They chat, drink, and listen for secrets about each other.

Strom speaks to two male GUESTS who hang on his every word. Although uncomfortable in his tuxedo, Strom carries on.

STROM THURMOND  
I only knew Ms. Logue when I was a Superintendent.

MALE GUEST #1  
But I heard you negotiated the stand off between her and the police. All with guns drawn, no less!



STROM THURMOND

Well yes, I did assist local law enforcement with her surrender.

MALE GUEST #2

There were many rumors of her...vaginal dexterity.

Strom grins and looks down.

MALE GUEST #1

Is it true you escorted her to the court house as well?

But Strom isn't paying attention anymore. He's looking over at Jean, who is talking to an older MAN. This is SENATOR MAYBANK, 50s, a jovial politician with a drink in his hands.

MALE GUEST #2

(laughing)

Doesn't matter since she went to the electric chair after all!

Jean appears to be laughing and gushing all over Maybank.

STROM THURMOND

Excuse me, gentlemen.

Strom walks over towards Jean. She spots him coming a mile away. She smiles.

JEAN CROUCH

Senator Maybank, you just crack me up!

Maybank blushes. Takes a sip of his drink.

JEAN CROUCH (CONT'D)

Would you excuse me for a moment?

SENATOR MAYBANK

Of course, sweetheart.

Jean approaches Strom--

JEAN CROUCH

Walk outside with me for moment?

Strom can barely form words but settles on nodding in agreement.

**EXT. SOUTH CAROLINA GOVERNOR'S MANSION - CONTINUOUS**

Strom and Jean step out onto a patio, pristinely decorated with white lights.

Jean walks a rattled Strom over to the railing's edge...

STROM THURMOND  
Can you explain what that was about?

JEAN CROUCH  
Oh, that silly stuff?

STROM THURMOND  
(stammering)  
Uh, yes, that silly stuff. We are the hosts here and for Maybank to be...ogging all over you and for you to be-

JEAN CROUCH  
I think we can beat him.

STROM THURMOND  
Now, I'm concerned what kind of message you think that-. Wait. What did you just say?

JEAN CROUCH  
I think...we can beat him.

Strom pauses. Looks directly at Jean.

STROM THURMOND  
What do you mean?

JEAN CROUCH  
He'll be up for re-election soon. He barely won his first election.

STROM THURMOND  
No one has talked about opposing him.

JEAN CROUCH  
He has a lot of friends. And I want him to continue to think that.

Strom considers this.

STROM THURMOND  
But I'm Governor.

JEAN CROUCH

And that's only going to last for a certain amount of time. We have to plan for what the next step might be. There's the Senate and the Presidency. And I will always be in your corner supporting you. Now do you want this or not?

STROM THURMOND

I do.

A pause. Strom looks back at the party inside for a moment, then back at Jean.

STROM THURMOND

So, that's all you were doing over there? Just making him...think something?

JEAN CROUCH

Yes, sugar. You really think my eyes would turn from you?

Jean leans in, gently grabs the back of Strom's neck and passionately kisses him.

STROM THURMOND

If I could end every debate with a move as powerful as that kiss, I'd win every single one.

JEAN CROUCH

You've already won.

They kiss again...

**INT. SOUTH CAROLINA GOVERNOR'S OFFICE - DAY**

Strom sits at his desk. The door opens and Jean enters.

JEAN CROUCH

You called for me?

STROM THURMOND

Yes, I need to dictate a letter for you to type up for me.

JEAN CROUCH

Alright. Who shall I address it to?

STROM THURMOND

You can put, 'My Darling Jean.'

Jean smiles. Strom stands up and paces the room, speaking.

STROM THURMOND (CONT'D)

You have proved to be a most efficient and capable secretary, and the high caliber of your work has impressed me very much. It is with a deep sense of regret that I will have to inform you that your services will be discontinued as of the last day of this month.

Jean, immediately distressed looks up at Strom, who doesn't acknowledge her back.

STROM THURMOND (CONT'D)

You can serve humanity best in the new duties which I desire you to undertake. I must confess I love you dearly and want you for my own. I didn't realize that a girl could attach herself so to a man and could twine herself around his heartstrings as you have done. Your charms have won me - heart and soul.

Jean blushes, looks down but keeps writing--

STROM THURMOND (CONT'D)

Anticipating an early reply and hope that it shall be forthcoming as quickly as possible as upon your answer will depend my future happiness. Again, I assure you of my deep love and expressing the hope that the time is not too distant when we can be joined as one and live happily forever.

Jean stops writing. Strom looks at her who, with a head nod, motions that that's everything. Jean closes her shorthand pad and exits the room.

Strom opens his mouth as if to speak, but no words come out. Not knowing what to do, he goes over and sits at his desk.

After a moment, Jean re-enters with the letter typed up. She goes over to him and hands him the letter. He reads it.

STROM THURMOND (CONT'D)

I didn't say 'twine herself.' I said 'entwine herself.' Please fix that.

JEAN CROUCH  
 (matter of fact)  
 I'll have this ready for you to  
 sign.

Jean's expression doesn't change and she exits. Strom again, is without words and sits down.

He hears the sound of the typewriter clicking from outside his office. He stares at the door.

Finally - an envelope slides under the door. He leaps out of his chair and opens it. He reads:

*"My dearest Strom, Yes! My love always, Jean."*

Strom jumps up and down cheering--

The door opens and Jean and Strom embrace...

**EXT. SOUTH CAROLINA GOVERNOR'S MANSION - DAY**

A LIFE Magazine photo shoot with Strom and Jean. He wears tennis shorts, she is in shorts and a sweater. Both appear at the peak of their human condition.

A PHOTOGRAPHER takes pictures of them.

STROM THURMOND  
 See how strong I am! Why I can  
 stand on my head!

Strom looks at Jean, who starts laughing--

Strom promptly gets on the ground then stands on his head. A FLASH and this goes to print with the caption--

*"Virile Governor demonstrates his prowess in the mansion yard day before the wedding!"*

Meanwhile, on the other side of town--

**EXT. SOUTH CAROLINA NEWSSTAND - DAY**

Essie Mae picks up the issue of LIFE Magazine with Strom and Jean on the cover. She looks at it--

The male NEWSSTAND OWNER, 50s, white, stares Essie down.

NEWSSTAND OWNER  
 Don't you be touching my magazines  
 unless you got money to buy them.

Essie looks over at him. She's been through this routine before.

ESSIE MAE WASHINGTON  
Do you know...

NEWSSTAND OWNER  
What'd you say?

ESSIE MAE WASHINGTON  
Do you know who that man is?

NEWSSTAND OWNER  
Yeah. I do. Do you?

ESSIE MAE WASHINGTON  
That man is...that man is...

Something breaks in Essie's voice. The Newsstand Owner does not look enthused.

ESSIE MAE WASHINGTON (CONT'D)  
That's my...He's...

But she can't get out the words. She can feel the Owner looking at her--

She stops herself.

Essie shoves him money, takes the magazine, and leaves.

**INT. PHILADELPHIA NATIONAL CONVENTION HALL - DAY**

The Democratic National Convention. Each state is represented in sections. Some DEMOCRATS hold signs in support of Truman for re-election.

A uneasy looking DELEGATION from Alabama and Mississippi, including Governor Fielding Wright, who watches the podium.

President Truman takes the stage.

PRESIDENT TRUMAN  
It is with humility, dedication,  
and endless confidence in these  
United States of America, that I  
accept your nomination for  
President!

And at that moment, Governor Wright rounds up the Alabama and Mississippi delegations and THEY WALK OUT--

**EXT. PHILADELPHIA NATIONAL CONVENTION HALL - CONTINUOUS**

The Alabama and Mississippi Delegations walk down the steps exiting the building.

REPORTERS notice and run up to them--

REPORTER #1  
Governor, are you leaving the  
Convention?

GOV. WRIGHT  
Yes, we are.

REPORTER #2  
Are you not supporting President  
Truman in this election?

GOV. WRIGHT  
No, we are not.

REPORTER #1  
Who are you supporting then?

Governor Wright stops, realizing he can't breeze by these questions.

GOV. WRIGHT  
We are supporting all the Southern  
Americans that are alienated by  
the Democrats of the north. We do  
not have faith in this current  
party to accurately speak on our  
behalf. So, we are forming our own  
party.

REPORTER #1  
What's the name of this new party?

GOV. WRIGHT  
We are the State's Rights  
Democrats.

REPORTER #3  
That sure is a mouthful.

GOV. WRIGHT  
Well, that's how we feel south of  
the Mason Dixon line.

REPORTER #1  
So...you're Dixie...crats.

All the Reporters quickly write the phrase down. Governor Wright grimaces at the word.

REPORTER #2  
 Governor, is there going to be a  
 Dixiecrat nominee for President?

Governor Wright looks at the Reporter...

**INT. DIXIECRAT CONVENTION CENTER - DAY**

Strom is on stage finishing his speech--

Backstage, Jean and Robert listen as grave concern sweeps over their faces.

STROM THURMOND (O.S.)  
 ...into our theater, into our  
 swimming pools, into our homes,  
 and into our churches!

The crowd cheers--

Jean shakes her head looks down. Robert crumples a copy of Strom's speech notes.

They were not expecting words like this...

The African American Cleaning Lady listens to the speech for a moment...then goes back to her work.

STROM THURMOND (O.S.) (CONT'D)  
 And I will accept your nomination  
 for President of the United  
 States.

The crowd cheers even louder...

CUT TO:

**NEWSPAPER/PHOTOGRAPH SEQUENCE:**

President Truman wins the Presidency in a landslide victory!

Truman laughing while holding a newspaper that mistakenly says his Republican opponent, Dewey, defeated him.

All the way at the bottom of the newspaper, a clipping that reads "STROM THURMOND FINISHES THIRD"

**EXT. ORANGEBURG COLLEGE - DAY**

A sunny day outside the campus library.



On a bench sits a tall, young man. He is debonair, with olive skin and wavy hair. Measured confidence plastered over his handsome face.

This is JULIUS WILLIAMS.

As FEMALE STUDENTS, enter and exit the library, Julius smiles at all of them. They, in return, cannot resist his charm. The girls smile, laugh, and some even blow kisses back at him.

Coming towards the library is Essie Mae. Her head is buried in a book as she walks. Her face is puffy and doesn't appear to be in the best of moods.

JULIUS WILLIAMS  
Hey there, what's so bad about today?

Essie doesn't look up.

JULIUS WILLIAMS (CONT'D)  
Hey, stuck-up.

Essie looks over, spots Julius, and gives him an icy glare.

JULIUS WILLIAMS (CONT'D)  
Yikes. Don't kill me. Just trying to brighten up your day.

ESSIE MAE WASHINGTON  
It's not very bright.

JULIUS WILLIAMS  
Well, I've already assessed that.

ESSIE MAE WASHINGTON  
Just dealing with some rough news...that's all.

JULIUS WILLIAMS  
All the more reason you could use some positivity. Why don't you sit down. Take a moment. See the world.

Essie pauses. She's now noticing how attractive Julius is.

JULIUS WILLIAMS (CONT'D)  
I don't bite. I promise.

It's hard to resist his charm...

ESSIE MAE WASHINGTON  
Maybe just for a moment.

Essie conscientiously sits on the opposite end of the bench as Julius.

JULIUS WILLIAMS  
What are you reading?

ESSIE MAE WASHINGTON  
*Quicksand*. Nella Larsen. Do you know it?

JULIUS WILLIAMS  
Honestly, I can't say that I do.

ESSIE MAE WASHINGTON  
Do you even read?

JULIUS WILLIAMS  
I'm pre-law. I'm always reading.

ESSIE MAE WASHINGTON  
I see.

A pause. Julius extends his hand--

JULIUS WILLIAMS  
I've seen you around campus.  
Julius Williams.

Essie, starting to relax, reaches out and shakes back.

ESSIE MAE WASHINGTON  
Essie Mae Washington.

JULIUS WILLIAMS  
OK then, Essie Mae. Where are you from?

ESSIE MAE WASHINGTON  
Well. Here, South Carolina, but I wasn't exactly raised here. It's a long story. What about you?

JULIUS WILLIAMS  
Savannah. Probably not as interesting compared to one of your novels. But that's why I come here.

ESSIE MAE WASHINGTON  
To...South Carolina?

Julius laughs.

JULIUS WILLIAMS  
No, the library.

Essie, embarrassed, now realizes what he meant.

ESSIE MAE WASHINGTON

I think what I love most about the library is the feeling that you can take a trip in your mind and be anywhere, at anytime, and be anyone other than yourself.

A pause. Julius thinks this over.

JULIUS WILLIAMS

I like that. I like that a lot. I'd agree but I'd say it's even better if you can share the story of that trip with someone after it's over.

ESSIE MAE WASHINGTON

Maybe that's why they put these benches out here.

JULIUS WILLIAMS

Maybe.

Essie and Julius both smile. They sneak glances of each other.

JULIUS WILLIAMS (CONT'D)

So maybe you'd share one of them with me sometime?

ESSIE MAE WASHINGTON

I'd consider it. On this bench?

JULIUS WILLIAMS

How about at the Alpha dance this Friday? That's my fraternity.

Essie does her best to play real cool. She looks at Julius, gathers her books, and stands up.

ESSIE MAE WASHINGTON

Sure, you can tell me all your thoughts on *Quicksand* then.

Julius laughs--

But Essie's not joking. She smiles and heads toward the library...

Julius, as if weighted to the bench, immediately stops laughing. He thinks for a quick moment and--

He scrambles to get a piece of paper and pen out of his bag--

JULIUS WILLIAMS  
 (calling out)  
 What was her name? Stella-

ESSIE MAE WASHINGTON  
 (shouting back)  
 Nella Larsen!

Essie grins and heads inside the library.

**INT. ORANGEBURG LIBRARY - DAY**

Essie sits at one of the tables, ferociously studying.

A LIBRARIAN approaches Essie and hands her a note. Essie, confused, opens it. It reads:

*"Please report to the Dean\*\*'s office immediately."*

**INT. ORANGEBURG COLLEGE - DAY**

The College President's office. The desk placard that reads "President." Strom stares at it.

A lonely moment marred by the weight of his own failure.

But a knock at the door interrupts Strom as Essie Mae enters--

ESSIE MAE WASHINGTON  
 Oh. Hello. I didn't know it was  
 you-

STROM THURMOND  
 You have to forgive me for being  
 so busy, Essie Mae. Please sit.

Strom shakes her hand. Essie doesn't sit.

STROM THURMOND (CONT'D)  
 The president tells me you've been  
 doing just fine here.

ESSIE MAE WASHINGTON  
 My mother is dead.

And the wind is KNOCKED OUT of Strom--

STROM THURMOND  
 What did you say? Did I hear you?

ESSIE MAE WASHINGTON  
 My mother is dead.  
 (MORE)

ESSIE MAE WASHINGTON (CONT'D)  
 She died in October. Kidney  
 failure.

STROM THURMOND  
 Ohh...

Strom's eyes fill with tears. A long pause.

STROM THURMOND (CONT'D)  
 Nobody told me.

ESSIE MAE WASHINGTON  
 You were busy, sir.

STROM THURMOND  
 My God, what a terrible thing...

ESSIE MAE WASHINGTON  
 She hadn't heard from you.

STROM THURMOND  
 I knew there was a man in her  
 life...

ESSIE MAE WASHINGTON  
 You got married, Governor.

STROM THURMOND  
 Not before she...

Strom's voice trails off. Essie stands up. She heads for the door.

She pauses, turns and looks back at him--

ESSIE MAE WASHINGTON  
 How could you have said all those  
 terrible things?

STROM THURMOND  
 What things?

ESSIE MAE WASHINGTON  
 About Negroes.

STROM THURMOND  
 Essie Mae, there is no man in this  
 country who cares more about the  
 Negro than I do. I think you know  
 that. Look around here.

Essie has clearly wounded Strom.

ESSIE MAE WASHINGTON  
 All this stuff you said about  
 keeping us out of your homes, your  
 churches, your swimming pools...

STROM THURMOND  
 Is that really where you want to  
 go, Essie? A white swimming pool?  
 We're talking about private  
 property. Would you want the  
 government telling you what to do  
 with your property? Truman wants  
 to tell people how to run their  
 businesses. What employees to  
 hire, whether they're qualified or  
 not. That's communist, Essie. Then  
 we're all slaves. Do you want that  
 in your country?

ESSIE MAE WASHINGTON  
 I want black people to have jobs.

STROM THURMOND  
 So do I. That's why I love this  
 school. It gets Negroes *qualified*.

ESSIE MAE WASHINGTON  
 The backs of the buses, railway  
 coaches, colored balconies at the  
 movies...it's not fair.

Strom stands, a finality now in his voice--

STROM THURMOND  
 It's the South, Essie Mae. It's  
 the culture here. It's the way we  
 live.

ESSIE MAE WASHINGTON  
 Hitler said the Jews are inferior.  
 You said the Negroes are inferior.

STROM THURMOND  
 That's not true. Different. Not  
 inferior. How dare you compare me  
 to Hitler...You can't change the  
 South.

ESSIE MAE WASHINGTON  
 You don't want to, sir. We can't  
 even get served at the counter at  
 Woolworths.

STROM THURMOND

Why would you want to? The food's no good.

ESSIE MAE WASHINGTON

I guess I want the choice.

Strom digests this for a moment.

STROM THURMOND

Stand up for what matters. Not hot dogs at Woolworths. Ask your school president what I'm doing. This state depends on the Negro. But give me time. Give me a chance.

ESSIE MAE WASHINGTON

A lot of Negroes, Negroes here, are hurt by what you said.

STROM THURMOND

That's politics, Essie Mae. You're in the heat of a campaign, you get misquoted, taken out of context. I wasn't against Negroes, I was against Washington. Look at my deeds, not my words.

ESSIE MAE WASHINGTON

Words matter.

A pause. They look at each other.

ESSIE MAE WASHINGTON

Are you...sad you lost?

And with that question, he can no longer look at her.

Strom reaches into his briefcase and hands Essie Mae an envelope. It is full of hundred dollar bills.

STROM THURMOND (CONT'D)

This is for you. And for your new boyfriend I've heard about.

Strom gathers his things, heads towards the door.

STROM THURMOND (CONT'D)

I'm terribly sorry about your mother.

Strom starts to choke up--

STROM THURMOND (CONT'D)  
 I truly cared for that woman. She  
 was a wonderful person. A  
 wonderful woman...I can't...

Strom leans in to hug Essie. But she backs away.

ESSIE MAE WASHINGTON  
 Goodbye, Governor.

And she exits the office.

**EXT. SOUTH CAROLINA GOVERNOR'S MANSION - MORNING**

A young, slightly pudgy MAN in a tight suit, mid 20s, rings the door bell. He carries a far too full briefcase. In the other sweaty hand, he clutches a rosary.

He paces, puts the rosary back in his pocket and waits for someone to answer the door.

This is HARRY DENT.

**INT./EXT. SOUTH CAROLINA GOVERNOR'S MANSION - CONTINUOUS**

Jean opens the door and smiles--

JEAN THURMOND  
 Harry. So lovely to see you.  
 Please come in. You needn't be  
 nervous.

Harry smiles back, but doesn't heed her advice...

Jean leads Harry through the house. His wide eyes taking in all the wonder of the Governor's house...

JEAN THURMOND (CONT'D)  
 I think you could be just what he  
 needs. Especially after the last  
 election. He'll need counsel.

Jean leads him to a long table.

JEAN THURMOND (CONT'D)  
 Here. Sit down. He'll be with you  
 in a minute.

Harry sits. SERVANTS start to bring large overflowing plates of food, family style, to the table.



And with the force of a great storm moving over a vast plane, Strom enters the room and sits at the head of the table.

STROM THURMOND  
My, this looks delicious!

Harry stands up, extending his hand.--

STROM THURMOND (CONT'D)  
Mr. Dent. Please sit down. Let's eat.

Strom starts filling his plate. He talks and eats simultaneously--

STROM THURMOND (CONT'D)  
Now you've recently graduated Clinton, yes?

HARRY DENT  
Yes, sir.

STROM THURMOND  
What was that event I was there for?

HARRY DENT  
Political Emphasis Week.

STROM THURMOND  
Right, right. You don't eat?

HARRY DENT  
No, I do...

Harry notices Strom's lack of table manners when eating. He begins to relax and cautiously helps himself to some food.

STROM THURMOND  
You have political ambitions of your own?

HARRY DENT  
I'd like to think so. Though I have doubts about some people in the Democratic party.

STROM THURMOND  
Yeah, well you're not alone. But I ain't done yet.

Harry is suddenly distressed by what he's just said--

HARRY DENT

Mr. Thurmond, I just want to say how disappointed I was in the outcome of your campaign for the Presidency...

STROM THURMOND

Harry. Let me tell you something. Never look up a dead horse's rear end.

This time Harry takes the advice. He quickly changes the subject--

HARRY DENT

Mr. Thurmond, if you are looking for anyone to aid you in any future-

STROM THURMOND

You know how to drive well?

HARRY DENT

I'm sorry?

STROM THURMOND

(slowly, while eating)  
Do you drive well?

HARRY DENT

I believe so. Yes. Yes I do.

Strom swallows the last bites and puts down his utensils. He looks Harry square in the eyes--

STROM THURMOND

I need someone to drive Jean around. For any events I attend as Governor and beyond that. Jean will always ride in a separate car. So she's safe. Is this something you can handle?

Harry pauses. He wasn't expecting a job offer, or at least that quickly.

HARRY DENT

Yes. Yes, sir. I can do that.

Strom smiles, looks at Harry, and takes a long sip of iced tea.

**INT. MUNICIPAL CENTER - DAY**

Governor Thurmond, with much fanfare, enters the building. Stevenson and Eisenhower signs decorate the walls. Election day, 1952.

Jean and Robert follow behind him. Harry, struggling to keep up, juggles the paperwork of today's agenda.

Strom shakes hands of CONSTITUENTS and VOTING OFFICIALS and then heads to the private voting booth.

Strom looks at the ballot in front of him. It reads:

ADLAI E. STEVENSON (DEMOCRAT)

DWIGHT D. EISENHOWER (REPUBLICAN)

Strom pauses. He looks up. Everyone is doing there best to pretend they're not watching him.

But he's consumed with the names in front of him. He starts to sweat. He looks down and breathes. Goes back to the names and studies them, focusing on the "Democrat" and "Republican" monikers--

And then he marks for EISENHOWER.

**INT./EXT. CAR - NIGHT**

A dimly lit four lane highway late in the evening. Cars whoosh by at an alarming rate.

Senator Maybank and a STAFF MEMBER review documents in the back of a Chevrolet Deluxe four door sedan. A steel tank of an automobile.

SENATOR MAYBANK

And we can tack this provision on to the appropriations bill?

STAFF MEMBER

Absolutely. The Maybank Amendment will- WATCH OUT!!

Maybank looks up to see an 18 wheeler semi veering off the median. It's headed right toward them--

The driver swerves. Horns honk. Maybank closes his eyes--

THE UNSTOPPABLE TRUCK PLOWS INTO MAYBANK'S CAR.

**EXT. SOUTH CAROLINA CEMETERY - DAY**

The funeral procession has just ended. FUNERAL ATTENDEES pay their final respects to Senator Maybank, now in the ground.

Strom stands on the sidelines next to Harry. They study everyone else present...

HARRY DENT

Every politician in South Carolina seems to be here. Who's going to fill his seat in the Senate?

STROM THURMOND

The election is in two weeks. They're scrambling. Maybank's body isn't even cold yet. Look at this.

Strom points to EDGAR BROWN, a shady looking bald man in his 60s. He is shuffling quickly, with no regard for anyone in his path. A black limousine pulls up and he gets inside...

STROM THURMOND (CONT'D)

Now where do you think State Senator Brown is going to in a hurry at 4 in the afternoon after a funeral?

Harry thinks for a second--

HARRY DENT

Columbia. The deadline for the nomination is today. Wait, who even runs the committee for that?

STROM THURMOND

He does. Among others. He assumes he's got the nomination all locked up. But he thinks I don't know how to play ball.

Strom looks at Harry.

HARRY DENT

So let's follow him.

STROM THURMOND

Then let's go, we gon' be late if we don't catch up to him.

And they take off--

**INT. HOUSE - NIGHT**

A balmy but calm night in a small house off campus. It's modest, but nicely decorated.

Essie and Julius sit at the dinner table. They just finished eating. Julius hold's Essie's hand while his other one grips a beer. Content and happy.

Their hands have wedding rings on them now. This is their home.

But Essie doesn't seem relaxed. She takes a sip of water, breaking the hand holding...

JULIUS WILLIAMS

I should go over my case before tomorrow...

ESSIE MAE WASHINGTON

Jules. It isn't Lizzie Mae Thompson.

JULIUS WILLIAMS

OK. So, what's your theory? Everybody's got one.

ESSIE MAE WASHINGTON

It's not Lizzie. It's me.

Julius BUSTS OUT laughing. Essie let's him do this for awhile.

Julius, after a few moments, notices Essie isn't joining in on the laughter. He looks at her--

JULIUS WILLIAMS

You are joking.

A pause.

JULIUS WILLIAMS (CONT'D)

Aren't you?

Essie forces a smile--

ESSIE MAE WASHINGTON

Will you hate me?

JULIUS WILLIAMS

The only one who hates is *that* one. Why are you fooling with me?

ESSIE MAE WASHINGTON

I'm not fooling.

Julius takes this in.

JULIUS WILLIAMS  
I guess I'm not going to get much  
sleep tonight.

ESSIE MAE WASHINGTON  
Do you hate me?

JULIUS WILLIAMS  
Honey, I love you. It's  
just...crazy. It's hard to sink  
in.

ESSIE MAE WASHINGTON  
I know.

A long pause. Julius is holding down a hurricane inside.

JULIUS WILLIAMS  
Do you love him?

ESSIE MAE WASHINGTON  
He's my father.

JULIUS WILLIAMS  
Is that a yes or no?

ESSIE MAE WASHINGTON  
He's been helping me. Us. Try to  
understand.

JULIUS WILLIAMS  
I'll never understand him. But I  
will always love you.

Julius takes Essie's hand they interlock fingers.

**INT. THURMOND LAW OFFICE - DAY**

A meeting of the minds. Strom sits around the usual mahogany  
desk with Robert, Harry, and Jean.

HARRY DENT  
With the election so close,  
they're going try avoid a primary.  
And they'll get it.

Strom looks for confirmation at Robert--

ROBERT FIGG  
With these circumstances, yes.

JEAN THURMOND  
So, that means Strom can't run.

HARRY DENT  
Not exactly.

ROBERT FIGG  
It just means he won't have the nomination. And he'd have to run against Brown.

JEAN THURMOND  
So he'd run...

STROM THURMOND  
As a write-in candidate.

A collective sigh in the room.

HARRY DENT  
We don't have money. Or even a headquarters. And the election is in less than two months.

JEAN THURMOND  
But there's always angle we can play, right?

HARRY DENT  
You've been out of politics for a couple years, these people would need to remember who you are-

ROBERT FIGG  
To remember the candidate for President that stood up for them in '48...

Strom considers this. He looks at Jean, who appears deep in thought. Then a light bulb turns on--

JEAN THURMOND  
People want the right to a choice, no? And Brown has swooped in and taken this nomination. The people of South Carolina were *denied* their God given choice.

HARRY DENT  
So we make it look like Brown was making a power grab-

STROM THURMOND  
Which he is-

ROBERT FIGG  
And we give the power back to the  
people.

A collective agreement...

STROM THURMOND  
Who can we get to support?

JEAN THURMOND  
Governor Byrnes will.

HARRY DENT  
Wasn't he best man at Brown's  
wedding?

JEAN THURMOND  
Yes, but Byrnes called him a  
"sawed off SOB" after they  
quarreled over some Clemson  
trustee matter...

Strom chuckles--

ROBERT FIGG  
And Byrnes is an Eisenhower man.  
He could help us fund-raise, get  
the word out...

HARRY DENT  
Alright. Still, a write in  
campaign. Even those that are  
registered and educated have never  
elected a write in candidate. This  
is South Carolina, after all.

JEAN THURMOND  
Then we just have to communicate  
it to them.

HARRY DENT  
And how are we going to do that?

Jean looks at Strom...

**EXT. STATE CAPITAL - DAY**

Strom speaks at podium on the Capital steps. A large CROWD has  
gathered out front to listen--

STROM THURMOND  
This is a fight for principle.  
(MORE)



STROM THURMOND (CONT'D)

It is a fight for government by the people instead of government by a small group of committee men. That is why I want to represent you, the great people of South Carolina as your next United States senator.

Jean, practically in disguise with a hat and sunglasses starts to applaud. The crowd joins in with her...

**INT. OFFICE - DAY**

A legal office. Meticulously organized papers sit in on a desk.

Robert Figg sits, telephone in hand.

ROBERT FIGG

This is Bob Figg calling for Governor Byrnes. Yes. I assure he's going to want to take this call. You can tell him it's about keeping South Carolina the way it should stay.

**INT. COLUMBIA HOTEL - DAY**

Jean, batting her eye lashes, looks at the bumbling HOTEL MANAGER, male, 50s--

HOTEL MANAGER

Well, I suppose we'd be happy to allow Mr. Thurmond access to a room as the *official* campaign headquarters...

**INT. HOTEL ROOM/CAMPAIGN HQ - DAY**

A buzzing hotel room turned office. Strom and Robert go over speeches. Jean talks to a small fleet of STAFFERS.

Harry is on the phone, he covers the receiver--

HARRY DENT

(to everyone)

I think we got *The News and Courier!*

**NEWSPAPER SEQUENCE:**

*The News and Courier* headline reads "THURMOND IS THE MAN"

*The Greenville News* reads "BROWN IS GREEDY"

*The State* reads "THURMOND RUNS ON PRINCIPLES AND MERIT"

**INT. SOUTH CAROLINA GOVERNOR'S OFFICE - DAY**

GOVERNOR BYRNES, a gentle but wise looking man in his 60s, holds a press conference with REPORTERS--

Strom and Jean Thurmond stand at his side.

GOVERNOR BYRNES  
 ...And therefore, it is my proud  
 honor to endorse Strom Thurmond  
 for Senator of South Carolina!

Reporters petition for questions as CAMERAMEN take a photo-op of the two politicians shaking hands.

Governor Byrnes leans in and whispers in Strom's ear--

GOVERNOR BYRNES (CONT'D)  
 I have an idea for an editorial.

Strom eagerly looks at the Governor--

**NEWSPAPER SEQUENCE:**

A full page of a newspaper shows a mock up of the entire voting ballot. At the top it reads "WRITE IN STROM THURMOND"

Underneath that reads "Here's How To Do It!" An arrow points to the ballot line for US Senator and the blank space with Strom Thurmond's name written out.

It's a foolproof guide for the voter on exactly what to do.

**EXT. SOUTH CAROLINA MUNICIPAL BUILDING - DAY**

Election Day. Smiling YOUNG GIRLS, all under the age of 10, are dressed in red, white, and blue. They stand outside with a DELEGATION for Strom Thurmond.

The young Girls hand out pencils with Strom Thurmond's name engraved on it to VOTERS that enter the building.

**INT. MUNICIPAL BUILDING - DAY**

A white male VOTER, 30s, who doesn't appear to be of the highest intelligence, studies the ballot. It looks exactly like the newspaper editorial.

He writes, with the pencil he was handed outside, "Strum Turman."

*Close enough.*

**INT. HOTEL ROOM/CAMPAIGN HQ - NIGHT**

Election night. Strom, Jean, Robert and the entire STAFF, wait on pins and needles...

Harry is on the phone, everyone watching him--

HARRY DENT  
83,525 for Brown and...143,444 for  
Thurmond!

The room ERUPTS IN CELEBRATION!

Strom and Jean kiss passionately...

JEAN THURMOND  
(smiling)  
What are you going to do, Senator?

STROM THURMOND  
Going to put the values of South  
Carolina back in Washington.

Measured concern creeps onto Jean's face as the celebration continues in the background...

**INT. SUPREME COURT - DAY**

The nine SUPREME COURT JUSTICES, led by a lukewarm and poker-faced CHIEF JUSTICE EARL WARREN, 60s, are gathered at their posts.

SPECTATORS, CLERKS, and REPORTERS pack the room to the brim.

No one can tell what the decision is by Warren's dry tone--

CHIEF JUSTICE EARL WARREN

We come then to the question: Does segregation of children in public schools solely on the basis of race, deprive the children of the minority group of equal educational opportunities? In the case of *Brown v. Board of Education*, we *unanimously* conclude that in the field of public education the doctrine of 'separate but equal' has no place. Separate educational facilities are inherently unequal.

And those in favor burst into joy! The dissenters are not pleased. Regardless, the room is LOUD...

**INT. JULIUS AND ESSIE MAE'S HOME - NIGHT**

Julius drinks a beer on the couch as their three year old son, JULIUS JR. sits on his lap.

ESSIE MAE WASHINGTON

Did you see this?

Essie holds up the day's newspaper. *Brown v. Board of Education* is the headline, but farther down the page other headlines read:

"CIVIL RIGHTS INITIATIVE SPARKED"

"MARTIN LUTHER KING JR PRAISES SUPREME COURT DECISION"

JULIUS WILLIAMS

It's not going to change anything.

ESSIE MAE WASHINGTON

Yes, it is. This is change. This is progress.

Julius laughs cynically. Julius Jr. starts to cry--

JULIUS WILLIAMS

Talk to you know who if you want change and progress.

Essie takes the high road. Doesn't even look at Julius. Instead, she picks up Julius Jr. and takes him into the next room.

**INT. UNITED STATES SENATE - DAY**

Freshman Senator Strom Thurmond walks next to recently promoted Press Secretary and Chief Advisor, Harry Dent.

HARRY DENT

It's too late. Supreme Court has already passed it. Whatever Southern Manifesto you and Senator Byrd try to cook up, there's no way it passes the Senate. And you'll likely make more enemies than friends.

STROM THURMOND

I'm not here to make friends.

Entering the chambers is LYNDON BAINES JOHNSON, currently the Senate Majority Leader. A cowboy in a suit, LBJ moves with the same boisterous energy and charisma as Strom.

But LBJ has years on the comparatively young Senator, who he immediately spots--

LBJ

Well there he is, the freshman senator, write in elected and all. We haven't had enough time to chat.

STROM THURMOND

I couldn't agree more, Senator Johnson.

LBJ

Let's walk and talk. I hear you have an interest in the armed services committee?

They move through the Senate chambers--

STROM THURMOND

Yes sir. I'd like to think I'm qualified after serving in the war.

LBJ

Well, you should be very proud of the service to your country.

STROM THURMOND

And I intend to continue that service to the state of South Carolina, as well as the country.

LBJ

You have ambition and energy. I like that. Always good to have a fellow Democratic Southerner here.

Strom feigns a smile. Johnson stops, turns to him--

LBJ (CONT'D)

Now what's all this I hear about a Southern Manifesto? Something about being upset about Brown v. Board?

STROM THURMOND

We are talking about the state's rights-

LBJ

Let me ask you something. Are you a family man?

STROM THURMOND

Yes-

LBJ

You're married? With children?

STROM THURMOND

Married. Yes...

LBJ

Well, maybe one day in the future you will understand that it is our children that will inherit this mess. The least we can do is prepare them. Regardless of race.

STROM THURMOND

I'm for education, but in the south, we-

LBJ

The Supreme Court makes decisions for the south, north, east and the west.

STROM THURMOND

And I intend to make decisions for the people of my state of which I have been elected.

LBJ

Well. It appears you also have conviction.

LBJ puts both his hands on Strom's shoulders--

LBJ (CONT'D)  
 Good luck getting on that Armed  
 Services Committee.

LBJ exits to his desk leaving Strom in his wake.

*Welcome to the Senate.*

**INT. STROM THURMOND'S SENATE OFFICE - NIGHT**

TV FOOTAGE:

President Eisenhower, the once and always a General, sits at his desk in the oval office.

VOICE (O.S.)  
 And now a message from the  
 President of the United States.

President Eisenhower speaks clearly and concisely to the camera--

PRESIDENT EISENHOWER  
 Good evening, my fellow citizens.  
 For a few minutes this evening I  
 want to speak to you about the  
 serious situation that has arisen  
 in Little Rock. This morning a mob  
 again gathered in front of the  
 Central High School of Little  
 Rock, obviously for the purpose of  
 again preventing the carrying out  
 of the Court's order relating to  
 the admission of Negro children to  
 that school.

INTERCUT WITH:

**EXT. CENTRAL HIGH SCHOOL - DAY**

Armed FEDERAL TROOPS descend on the high school.

Mobs of PROTESTORS, some shouting and waving confederate flags...

PRESIDENT EISENHOWER (O.S.)

I have today issued an Executive Order directing the use of troops under Federal authority to aid in the execution of Federal law at Little Rock, Arkansas. As you know, the Supreme Court of the United States has decided that school segregation laws are unconstitutional. We must demonstrate to the world that we are a nation in which laws, not men, are supreme.

The Troops escort the LITTLE ROCK NINE, made up of young African American students, through the crowds and into the Arkansas high school.

*The Battlefield of the American South.*

**INT. STROM THURMOND'S SENATE OFFICE - EVENING**

Strom and Harry disdainfully watch President Eisenhower's speech. Strom has had enough and turns off the TV--

HARRY DENT

This is just the beginning. LBJ will push his Civil Rights voting bill through the Senate.

STROM THURMOND

Not if I have something to say about it. And Harry, I'm thinking I'm going to have a lot to say.

Harry looks gravely at Strom...

**INT. UNITED STATES SENATE - NIGHT**

Cough drops and water sit on a desk. Strom behind it, inhales. Prepares himself and takes the Senate floor.

STROM THURMOND

Mr. President, I rise to speak against the so-called voting-right bill H.R. 8137, which was passed by the House of Representatives. There are mainly three reasons why I feel the bill should not be passed. The first is that it is unnecessary...

CAPTION: 8:54 PM. August 28th, 1957



STROM THURMOND (CONT'D)

I now expect to take up the voting laws in each of the 48 States and show that each of the States allow adequate protection to voting rights. The first state is Alabama...

Harry Dent is seen rigging up a bucket near the doorway of the Senate. He tests it out. A man can keep one foot on the floor of the senate and relieve himself - if need be.

STROM THURMOND (CONT'D)

Next is the voting laws for Minnesota...

Time painfully passes by in the humid atmosphere...

STROM THURMOND (CONT'D)

And now the voting laws for Wyoming...

Jean enters the back of the Senate floor. She's tired and in poor health but carries a covered plate of dinner.

CAPTION: 1:40 AM

She hands the food to Harry. They look at each other as if to say, *I don't know how long he's going to do this...*

STROM THURMOND (CONT'D)

In accordance with these laws, I will now read from our Declaration of Independence. Ahem. We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness...

Other SENATORS start to squirm in their seats. They know what's going on here...

However, BARRY GOLDWATER, 50s, Republican Senator who also looks like he could be your foul tempered Physics professor, watches Strom with keen eyes--

LBJ

I will yield this floor back to the matters at hand and motion we reconvene at 10 am and not indulge in this filibuster.

Goldwater is the type of man who would berate a girl scout for not knowing every ingredient in the cookies she's selling. So he profanely INTERJECTS--

BARRY GOLDWATER  
Absolutely not. We will protect  
his right to the floor.

And Strom keeps droning on, however passionate...

CAPTION: 8:15 AM

Strom gulps a glass of orange juice. His body seems to absorb it like a sponge.

STROM THURMOND  
Now I was a trial judge for eight  
years and came into close contact  
with jurors...

Harry Dent, exhausted, stares on in amazement at Strom...

CAPTION: 2:30 PM

LBJ  
Would the Senator speak up? I do  
not want him to strain his voice,  
but I should like him to speak a  
little louder so I shall be sure  
no motions are being made or  
anything of that sort.

STROM THURMOND  
I urge my colleague to come sit  
closer to me if he cannot hear.  
Now anyway, I want to see every  
man vote. Every man who is  
qualified...

And Strom keeps on going.

CAPTION: 5:37 PM

Harry and Jean are back on the sidelines. At this point they're just concerned...

STROM THURMOND (CONT'D)  
Mr. President, I urge every Member  
of this body to consider this bill  
most carefully. I hope the senate  
will see fit to kill it.

And with one last breath--

STROM THURMOND (CONT'D)  
I expect to vote...against the  
bill.

The Senate floor chuckles--

CAPTION: 9:12 PM, August 29th.

Strom stops speaking and nearly collapses into his seat. Harry  
rushes to his side...

TIME CUT TO:

**INT. UNITED STATES SENATE - CONTINUOUS**

Voting has just finished. LBJ counts the final tally--

LBJ  
I have 60 votes in favor, 15  
against. The bill passes.

The gavel is banged. Strom woefully looks up, defeated.

**INT. STROM THURMOND'S SENATE OFFICES - DAY**

Essie Mae, pregnant with her second child, holds the hand of  
her first child, JULIUS JR., now age 7.

They walk towards the Senator's check-in desk. THURMOND'S  
STAFF, treats them both as royalty and gush over young Julius.

A SECRETARY opens the door to Thurmond's office and Essie Mae  
and Julius Jr. enter--

Strom looks up from his desk and sees them. He focuses on  
Julius Jr. and slowly his face LIGHTS UP--

He pauses for a second, then giving in, he runs over to him and  
lifts him into the air. Julius Jr. smiles and laughs--

*This is my Grandson...*

STROM THURMOND  
How are you both? What do you  
think of Washington?

ESSIE MAE WASHINGTON  
It's very nice, Senator.

STROM THURMOND  
Look how strong I am!

Strom is playing with young Julius, lifting him over his head. He sets Julius Jr. down and the Secretary collects him.

ESSIE MAE WASHINGTON  
 (to Julius Jr.)  
 Now I'm going to talk to Mr.  
 Thurmond for a minute, you be well  
 behaved for those nice ladies out  
 there, alright?

Julius Jr. nods and the Secretary smiles, leading him out.

Strom points to a grouping of barbels in the corner.

STROM THURMOND  
 I work out every day here. And  
 always walk to the Senate. It's  
 very important to exercise, Essie.

Essie nods, somewhat ashamed.

ESSIE MAE WASHINGTON  
 Do you like it here, Senator?

Essie Mae looks at Strom's office wall. Full of awards and accomplishments. Pictures of him and Jean.

She looks at the same mahogany desk he's always had. On it is a miniature American Flag...and a Confederate one.

STROM THURMOND  
 I do. Washington is very busy  
 place with lots of challenges.  
 There is still much work to be  
 done for this country...

ESSIE MAE WASHINGTON  
 ...Am I detecting interest in  
 something greater than the Senate?

STROM THURMOND  
 You've always known my ambitions.  
 Naturally, there are many concerns  
 with a decision like this...so if  
 I were to...would you be...

Strom treats his words as gently as newborn a baby.

ESSIE MAE WASHINGTON  
 Are you asking if I'd...support  
 you in this endeavor?

Strom nods--

ESSIE MAE WASHINGTON  
I would do nothing to harm you.  
Publicly. Senator.

STROM THURMOND  
I...appreciate that, Essie Mae.  
This is my life's work.

Essie feels another chip in an already cracked glass.

ESSIE MAE WASHINGTON  
What about Kennedy running?

STROM THURMOND  
I could beat him. He's soft on  
crime. And he's in with the mafia.  
He's their boy...

ESSIE MAE WASHINGTON  
Kennedy is a war hero, like you.

STROM THURMOND  
He's a lightweight. All that boy  
has is his hair and lovely wife.  
But Jean and her are friends...

Essie realizes that he'll likely drone on and decides to sit  
down. Strom notices and takes the hint.

STROM THURMOND (CONT'D)  
Well. You have a lovely family.

ESSIE MAE WASHINGTON  
Thank you, sir. Maybe you can have  
some children yourself now. Raise  
them in a big, white house.

STROM THURMOND  
I don't know. Jean is...The  
campaign will be rigorous. But I  
couldn't do it without her.

Strom walks over to his desk and grabs an envelope. Essie Mae  
stands up, watching him curiously.

STROM THURMOND  
That aside, I do know you have  
another one on the way...

Strom hands her the envelope. It is filled with an exuberant  
amount of \$100 bills.

STROM THURMOND (CONT'D)  
For the children.  
(MORE)

STROM THURMOND (CONT'D)  
 And maybe it can help with a  
 larger house for you and Julius.

Essie's eyes soften and start to well--

ESSIE MAE WASHINGTON  
 Thank you, Senator.

Strom, leans in but at the last second extends his hand for a  
 handshake. He then politely kisses her on the cheek.

*Almost like a normal father and daughter.*

**INT./EXT. STROM AND JEAN'S HOME - EVENING**

Strom stands, befuddled, outside the front door. He checks his  
 pockets, then his coat...

He forgot his keys.

STROM THURMOND  
 Jean? It's me. Can you open the  
 door? I reckon I left my keys at  
 the office...

Strom knocks on the door. No response. He waits...

He rings the door bell. Then again--

STROM THURMOND (CONT'D)  
 Jean? Where are you Jean? Come on  
 now, I had a terrible day at work,  
 you'll never believe what  
 happened...

Strom goes over to the window and peaks. He sees:

Jean, COLLAPSED on the floor. She's struggling to crawl towards  
 the door--

**INT. HOSPITAL - DAY**

An anxious Strom stands outside the surgery room. A DOCTOR  
 walks towards him, sees him and looks down--

DOCTOR  
 Senator. Unfortunately, the  
 surgery was not a success. The  
 malignant tumor had progressed too  
 far into her brain.

STROM THURMOND  
What...what are you saying?

DOCTOR  
Unfortunately, we were not able to  
save her.

STROM THURMOND  
But...This can't be. You can't  
mean that. I can't believe  
that...I won't believe that...

Strom starts to BREAK DOWN. A crying mess of rage filled tears.  
He can't hear a word the doctor is saying...

DOCTOR  
I know this is the worst news. Her  
condition was hopeless...

And with that, the most important thing in his life is gone  
forever.

FADE TO:

**EXT. WASHINGTON - DAY**

TV FOOTAGE:

The King of Camelot, President John F. Kennedy stands at a  
podium. A CROWD of Thousands have come to witness his  
inauguration day.

PRESIDENT KENNEDY  
So let us begin anew - remembering  
on both sides that civility is not  
a sign of weakness, and sincerity  
is always subject to proof. Let us  
never negotiate out of fear. But  
let us never fear to negotiate.

As JFK speaks, a MONTAGE shows:

**EXT./INT. - GRAVEYARD/STROM'S HOME/OFFICE/US SENATE -  
DAY**

Strom alone at Jean's grave. He's alone. He lays down a bouquet  
of flowers.

Strom gets up at the crack of dawn. He exercises. Eats a  
healthy breakfast. Starts his work at the Senate before anyone  
else arrives. And stays after everyone else has left.

There's a cold efficiency to him now...

PRESIDENT KENNEDY (O.S.)  
 Let both sides explore what  
 problems unite us instead of  
 belaboring those problems which  
 divide us. Let both sides unite to  
 heed in all corners of the earth  
 the command of Isaiah--to "undo  
 the heavy burdens and let the  
 oppressed go free."

It is now after hours and Strom is back home. He opens his  
 briefcase. Alone, he reviews the next day's work...

PRESIDENT KENNEDY (O.S.) (CONT'D)  
 And so, my fellow Americans: ask  
 not what your country can do for  
 you--ask what you can do for your  
 country. My fellow citizens of the  
 world: ask not what America will  
 do for you, but what together we  
 can do for the freedom of man.

**INT. UNITED STATES SENATE - DAY**

Strom sits on a panel. Next to him is Senator Goldwater. The  
 gavel is banged and the room is brought to order.

In front of them is the dapper but business oriented Attorney  
 General ROBERT F. KENNEDY.

CAPTION: July, 1963

STROM THURMOND  
 Now Mr. Kennedy-

ROBERT F. KENNEDY  
 You can please refer to me as Mr.  
 Attorney General.

STROM THURMOND  
 Mr. Attorney General. Now under  
 your proposed Civil Rights bill,  
 can you detail its public  
 accommodations section?

ROBERT F. KENNEDY  
 In what sense of the matter,  
 Senator?



STROM THURMOND

For instance, how many Negroes from North Carolina would have to have their hair cut at a barbershop in South Carolina for it to be considered desegregated?

ROBERT F. KENNEDY

Well, I don't think I could provide you with an exact number...

STROM THURMOND

You are aware of the interstate commerce clause of the constitution, are you not?

ROBERT F. KENNEDY

I am aware of that, yes.

STROM THURMOND

But you still cannot answer how your bill would affect this scenario?

RFK knows he's been caught in a loophole--

ROBERT F. KENNEDY

Well. At this time, not precisely.

STROM THURMOND

Maybe I should speak to your friend Martin Luther King. Perhaps he knows more about this legislation than you do. No further questions.

**INT. UNITED STATES SENATE BUILDING - DAY**

RFK stands discussing the civil rights bill to his STAFFERS.

Strom is walking in his direction. He looks up and spots him. Clearly, the last person Kennedy wants to see right now.

Strom approaches him--

STROM THURMOND

Mr. Attorney General.

ROBERT F. KENNEDY

Yes, Senator Thurmond.

STROM THURMOND

I have something for you.

Strom reaches into his suit pocket and pulls out a tiny little book. It reads:

*"What Everyone Should Know About The Constitution."*

With a cartoon cover, it has clearly been designed for children.

Strom hands it to Kennedy--

STROM THURMOND (CONT'D)

Here. It's written in such an interesting way, that almost anyone can understand it.

RFK struggles to keep his cool...

ROBERT F. KENNEDY

Thank you Senator, for your kindness and courtesy.

Strom nods kindly, smiles and keeps on moving.

Kennedy doesn't know whether to laugh or to cry.

**EXT. SOUTH CAROLINA - DAY**

Strom drives through his home state. Windows down, carefree for the tiniest of moments...

He passes by a building that has the United States' flag at half mast. He looks at it questionably but keeps driving.

He then drives by a Post Office, which also has the flag at half mast. Strom immediately turns on the radio--

RADIO ANNOUNCER

We are now confirming that the President, John Fitzgerald Kennedy has died from his the bullet wounds he sustained in Texas...

Strom immediately PULLS OVER to the side of the road--

His head sinks to the steering wheel. Grieving.

After a moment, he looks up, ALERT--

STROM THURMOND

Lyndon...

**INT. CONGRESS - DAY**

The State of the Union address. CONGRESSMAN and ATTENDEES watch the newly christened President...

PRESIDENT JOHNSON

Let us carry forward the plans and programs of John Fitzgerald Kennedy, not because of our sorrow or sympathy, but because they are right.

Members of Congress stand up and clap, then sit back down.

PRESIDENT JOHNSON (CONT'D)

Let this session of Congress be known as the session which did more for civil rights than the last hundred sessions combined. Let me make one principle of this administration abundantly clear:

Strom sneers at LBJ skeptically.

PRESIDENT JOHNSON (CONT'D)

All opportunities - in employment, in education, in housing, and in every field - must be open to Americans of every color. We must abolish not some, but all racial discrimination. For this is not merely an economic issue, or a social, political, international issue. It is a moral issue.

Some Democrats and fewer Republicans do not stand up and clap.

Strom stays seated and looks across the aisle. He sees Senator Barry Goldwater. His arms are crossed.

Goldwater notices Strom looking at him...

**INT. AUDITORIUM - DAY**

The 1964 Republican National Convention.

A rowdy crowd of REPUBLICANS cheer the cruel and harsh spirited Goldwater as he spits fire from the podium--

BARRY GOLDWATER

Anyone who joins us in all sincerity, we welcome.

(MORE)

BARRY GOLDWATER (CONT'D)

Those who do not care for our cause, we don't expect to enter our ranks in any case. And let our Republicanism, so focused and so dedicated, not be made fuzzy and futile by unthinking and stupid labels.

The crowd reacts loudly, cheering--

BARRY GOLDWATER (CONT'D)

(relishing)

I would remind you that extremism in the defense of liberty is no vice. And let me remind you also that moderation in the pursuit of justice is no virtue.

The crowd continues clapping and stands up. It mostly full of White Men.

Not all POLITICIANS seem pleased with this hateful battle cry. But Strom is.

**EXT. MIDDLE AMERICA - DAY**

A white MAN, 50s, walks out on to his front lawn. He comes to a stop where his property meets the road.

He plants a "BARRY GOLDWATER FOR PRESIDENT IN '64" sign in the ground. It finds a home right next to--

A Confederate flag.

**INT. REPUBLICAN PARTY HQ - NIGHT**

A small but private meeting room with armchairs.

Strom and Goldwater sit opposite each other. Seated in the middle of them is Harry Dent.

BARRY GOLDWATER

Thank you for meeting with me, Gentlemen.

They size each other up for a moment.

HARRY DENT

We've been discussing-

BARRY GOLDWATER

Yes?

STROM THURMOND

How best we can help the South.

Goldwater nods...

BARRY GOLDWATER

Well, the nomination is only one part. A presidency is another. Truthfully, I thought I'd be up against Kennedy.

STROM THURMOND

And I thought I'd you'd be a part of my cabinet already.

HARRY DENT

It's been fairly obvious that both of you have the same voting record. What Mr. Thurmond and I are wondering is...what if we're on the wrong side...

BARRY GOLDWATER

It doesn't surprise me that Mr. Thurmond holds the same American values dear to him as his constituents.

HARRY DENT

We've spoken to our South Carolinian...friends and it seems we are at a pivotal moment here.

BARRY GOLDWATER

What are you looking for?

STROM THURMOND

To help steer this country...back in the right direction.

BARRY GOLDWATER

Well. You know my platform.

Strom looks at Harry and takes over--

STROM THURMOND

Alright. The way Harry and I see it...I have three choices in front of me. I can keep quiet. I can come out for you but remain a Democrat, or...I can come out for you and go all the way over to the Republican party.

Goldwater raises his eyebrows--

STROM THURMOND (CONT'D)  
I'll do whatever will help you  
most.

Strom motions to Harry, who hands Goldwater a sheet of paper.

HARRY DENT  
We've drafted up a potential  
statement...

Goldwater reads it. They wait. Goldwater looks up at Strom--

BARRY GOLDWATER  
Don't change one word.

**INT. SOUTH CAROLINA CAPITAL BUILDING - NIGHT**

A Press Conference. REPORTERS, and TV CAMERAMEN have packed in the room.

Strom walks up to the podium. A DIRECTOR waits for a light to turn on and then points to Strom, signaling him--

STROM THURMOND  
My fellow South Carolinians...

Eager anticipation in the eyes of the Reporters--

STROM THURMOND (CONT'D)  
The Democratic Party has abandoned  
the people. It is leading the  
evolution of our nation to a  
socialistic dictatorship.

The Cameras start flashing, this is a SCOOP--

On TV, the tag line reads "STROM THURMOND (D.,-S.C.)"

STROM THURMOND (CONT'D)  
The Democratic party has forsaken  
the people to become the part of  
minority groups and has rammed  
through Congress unconstitutional,  
impractical, unworkable, and  
oppressive legislation which  
invades inalienable personal and  
property rights of the  
individual...

While Strom speaks, it is INTERCUT WITH:

**INT. MIDDLE AMERICA CAFE - DAY**

The cafe OWNER walks up towards the front windows and removes the sign, begrudgingly, that reads "We Serve Coloreds. Take Out Only."

STROM THURMOND (CONT'D) (O.S.)

The party of our fathers is dead. Those who took its name are engaged in another Reconstruction, this time not only of the South, but of the entire nation. If the American people permit the Democratic party to return to power, freedom as we know it in this country is doomed.

**INT. AUDITORIUM IN SWEDEN - DAY**

The Nobel Peace Prize awards celebration. A room full of ATTENDEES. A PROFESSOR on stage holds a medal to give out.

An African American Man, 30s, distinguished and humble in his manner, approaches. The Peace Prize is draped around his neck.

This man is MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR.

STROM THURMOND (CONT'D) (O.S.)

The Republican nominee for President against all the odds and opinion polls, has demonstrated his fidelity to freedom, independence, and the Constitution by his actions and his votes in the Senate. For me there is no alternative. This requires that I do everything in my power to help Barry Goldwater return our nation to constitutional government through his election to the Presidency.

**INT. ESSIE MAE AND JULIUS' HOME - NIGHT**

Julius Jr., age 13, his brother RONALD, age 12 and his sister WANDA, age 11, run through the house, playing.

Essie Mae and Julius watch Strom making this very speech live on TV. Julius, sips a beer, hardly surprised at Strom's words.

But Essie is.

STROM THURMOND (CONT'D) (O.S.)  
 I have chosen this course because  
 I cannot consider any risks in a  
 cause which I am convinced is  
 right...

The TV tag line now flashes "STROM THURMOND (R.,-S.C.)"

**INT. CBS NEWSROOM - NIGHT**

Election night coverage. TV FOOTAGE:

The anchor, WALTER CRONKITE, noble and unassuming in all his actions, sits behind the news desk. One of the few voices of impartial truth.

ANNOUNCER (O.S.)  
 Direct from CBS news headquarters  
 in New York, this is the CBS  
 evening news with Walter Cronkite.

WALTER CRONKITE  
 Good Evening. Across this nation  
 of ours it appears the populous  
 has gone to the polls in record  
 numbers, perhaps more than 71  
 million of us have trooped to our  
 polling places today and cast our  
 ballots for the presidency of the  
 United States.

Cronkite looks at his notes in front of him--

WALTER CRONKITE (CONT'D)  
 And now with the polling centers  
 closed, through our CBS IBM vote  
 profile analysis, we are able to  
 say that Lyndon Johnson is the  
 probable winner.

**INT. STROM THURMOND'S SENATE OFFICE - NIGHT**

Strom and Harry watch the CBS evening news on TV as Cronkite calls the election.

The TV shows a map of the country indicating who each state predominantly voted for. The states that voted for Goldwater are in RED and the states that went for LBJ are in blue.

Goldwater wins Arizona, Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama, and South Carolina. LBJ takes every other state.



It's an embarrassing defeat for Goldwater and the Republicans.  
Strom switches the TV off. They're crushed.

HARRY DENT  
(devastated)  
I...I suppose I'm just  
disappointed. I'm sorry, Strom.

STROM THURMOND  
What are you sorry for? You're not  
solely responsible. I didn't  
run...I couldn't.

HARRY DENT  
Yes. But I know you're upset.

STROM THURMOND  
I am. But maybe this isn't all  
that bad for us.

Harry doesn't understand--

HARRY DENT  
What, what do you mean?

STROM THURMOND  
Goldwater was a little too  
extreme. We both knew that.  
But...imagine if we had a better  
candidate. A sensible candidate.

HARRY DENT  
I'm not sure I follow...?

STROM THURMOND  
You're missing the silver lining.  
You saw the voter's map, right?

Harry nods. Strom extends his arm to Harry's shoulder--

STROM THURMOND (CONT'D)  
We gave Goldwater the south. Half  
those states haven't voted  
Republican since Reconstruction.  
That is a solid south, Harry. We  
delivered.

Harry takes this in. *Maybe this isn't so bad after all.*

STROM THURMOND (CONT'D)  
Elections happen every few years,  
Harry. That's the beautiful thing.  
(MORE)

STROM THURMOND (CONT'D)  
 And now we have the great  
 opportunity to build the South  
 Carolina Republican party.

Strom looks at Harry--

STROM THURMOND (CONT'D)  
 You should know, with that in  
 mind, that I am recommending you  
 as the Chairman.

The last thing Harry was expecting was a promotion.

HARRY DENT  
 I...I don't know what to say-

STROM THURMOND  
 Don't say anything, just get to  
 work. We need someone that we  
 control in the White House by  
 '68...

**EXT. WEST SIDE OF CHICAGO - NIGHT**

Pitch black on the city streets. Then, the sound of GUNFIRE--  
 Sharp and erratic--

CAPTION: Chicago, 1966.

Police cars are arbitrarily parked. Behind them, OFFICERS with  
 rifles fire on an apartment building--

Sniper fire comes out of the building, striking the police  
 cars. The officers duck and return fire--

Blood stains on the streets and in the alleyways...

**EXT. STREETS OF CHICAGO - CONTINUOUS**

Several store fronts have been bashed in, glass is littered  
 everywhere. All of them have been looted.

Some buildings have been set ablaze and still burn...

**EXT. CHICAGO BAPTIST CHURCH - DAY**

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. stands next to a mass of REPORTERS  
 pushing microphones into his face--

MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR.  
 We are trying to conduct a non  
 violent movement here in Chicago  
 and we are going on with that  
 program - but we need support. We  
 do not advocate riots; we think  
 they are socially destructive and  
 that they are self defeating.

MLK turns gravely to a Reporter--

MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR. (CONT'D)  
 But as the late President Kennedy  
 said, those that make this  
 peaceful revolution impossible  
 will make a violent revolution  
 inevitable.

**EXT. MARQUETTE PARK NEIGHBORHOOD - DAY**

A march of PROTESTORS, made up of Dr. King, his supporters -  
 both black and white - move their way into the Marquette Park  
 streets.

But this is an overwhelmingly white neighborhood.

Select LOCALS, with evil in their eyes, stay, for now, in  
 alleyways, on roof tops, and inside buildings.

POLICE stand on the street side lines. They know they are the  
 only line of defense between order and savagery.

The march moves further along but Dr. King notices that all  
 seems quiet, when--

A MOLOTOV COCKTAIL EXPLODES ON THE STREET--

Bottles and rocks are thrown at the protestors. Racist insults  
 are heard. Police MOBILIZE--

But chaos ensues.

Dr. King is STRUCK in the head by a rock and GOES DOWN--

**EXT. JULIUS AND ESSIE MAE'S HOME - NIGHT**

Essie takes grocery bags out of the back seat of her car.  
 Juggling the many bags, she locks the car and heads to her  
 front door.

But the sound of loud crashing noises are coming from inside  
 the house. She's nervous but heads to the door--

**INT. JULIUS AND ESSIE MAE'S HOME - NIGHT - CONTINUOUS**

Essie Mae cautiously enters. She looks in on the living room.

The couch cushions are turned over. A floor lamp is knocked over. On the coffee table, a half empty bottle of liquor.

One the floor is a very drunk Julius.

Next to him is MONICA, their youngest daughter, age 6.

MONICA

Mommy's home!

JULIUS WILLIAMS

Oh hey, baby. How...how are-  
(you)?

ESSIE MAE WASHINGTON

Oh, I'm just fine. This is what  
you've been up to? Gettin' drunk  
and tearing up the living room?

JULIUS WILLIAMS

Now hold on...

Essie puts down the grocery bags. Takes her coat off. And starts to reassemble the room.

JULIUS WILLIAMS (CONT'D)

I was working earlier. I was. Come  
on, I can do this.

ESSIE MAE WASHINGTON

No, you can't.

Julius goes to take a cushion from Essie's hands but trips in the process and FALLS on the floor--

Monica starts to CRY--

ESSIE MAE WASHINGTON (CONT'D)

Goddmanit Julius, they shouldn't  
have to see their father like  
this.

JULIUS WILLIAMS

At least they have a father.

ESSIE MAE WASHINGTON

Don't. Start.

MONICA

What's happening?

Julius, fighting for strength, climbs his way back up to standing--

JULIUS WILLIAMS  
A father who's here. Who loves  
them. Who takes care of them-

ESSIE MAE WASHINGTON  
This is how you take care of  
them?!

Essie grabs Monica and sets her on the couch. She's crying  
tears of her own now too--

JULIUS WILLIAMS  
It might not be an envelope of  
cash. There's no hush money. It's  
right here. In this home. A  
family-

Julius stops, starts to grab at his chest...

ESSIE MAE WASHINGTON  
My father is not an excuse for you  
to-. Julius.

Julius looks at Essie, he's WIDE-EYED--

JULIUS WILLIAMS  
I can't. I can't breathe.

Julius leans against the couch, grasping for air--

ESSIE MAE WASHINGTON  
Jules what's wrong?

Julius collapses back down on to the floor. He's having a HEART  
ATTACK--

ESSIE MAE WASHINGTON (CONT'D)  
Julius!

**EXT. JULIUS AND ESSIE MAE'S HOME - NIGHT**

Julius, on a stretcher, is loaded into an ambulance.

**INT. HOSPITAL - NIGHT**

Essie Mae sits in the waiting room. Her children are asleep  
next to her.

She hears footsteps coming toward her. She looks up and sees a DOCTOR. The Doctor sees her. He looks down. Essie knows immediately--

Julius is gone.

She SCREAMS--

**EXT. SUBURBAN SUBDIVISION - DAY**

A calm and peaceful middle class neighborhood.

A MAN, 40s, drives his sedan through the subdivision streets. He is looking down, trying to find a radio station.

He fuddles with the nob, not looking ahead when--

An adorable looking DOG runs into the street and--

SMACK.

The car screeches to a stop.

Across the street, two young BOYS, start to cry...

**EXT. SUBURBAN BACK YARD - NIGHT**

The children, their mother BETTY, and their father, Harry Dent stand around a small grave with a makeshift cross under a tree.

The boys are still sniffing and both Betty and Harry look like they've been crying...

**INT. DENT FAMILY HOME - DAY**

Next day. A sadness hangs in the air.

In the living room, the boys watch TV. Betty, in full housewife attire, works in the kitchen. Harry sits at the kitchen table reading a newspaper.

The door bell rings--

HARRY DENT  
I'll get it.

Harry goes and opens the door.

A speedy MESSENGER, male, late teens, holds an adorable PUPPY in his arms, as well as a note.

MESSENGER

Hi. Is this the Dent household?

HARRY DENT

Hi. Uh, yes, it is...

The messenger hands Harry the Puppy and the letter.

MESSENGER

These are for you.

The messenger promptly leaves. Harry, rather confused, goes back into his house.

Betty and the children stand with open eyes and mouths, focusing on the cute little Puppy, who is smiling.

**INT. HARRY DENT'S HOME OFFICE - DAY**

A well kept and organized room. Paperwork on his desk. Degrees and awards on the walls. A crucifix hangs above all.

Harry is on the phone. He holds note from earlier in his hand.

HARRY DENT

You'll never believe this but I just received the most interesting gift.

STROM THURMOND (O.S.)

From who?

HARRY DENT

Dick Nixon.

And the note in Harry's hand reads:

*"Harry. So sorry to hear about your family\*\*'s loss. Let's talk soon. Best Regards. Richard M. Nixon."*

**INT. PLAZA HILTON HOTEL - NIGHT**

The door to Nixon's suite opens--

Standing at the door is H.R. HALDEMAN. Sporting a buzz cut hair, he looks like he could pass as the no nonsense gym teacher you feared in high school. He's the man behind Nixon.

H.R. HALDEMAN

(smiling)

Strom. Harry. Bob Haldeman.

Haldeman shakes hands with Strom and Harry.

H.R. HALDEMAN (CONT'D)  
Please, come in.

Strom and Harry enter. Haldeman leads them into the next room.

H.R. HALDEMAN (CONT'D)  
Dick's right over here.

Harry whispers an aside to Strom--

HARRY DENT  
Can you believe Nixon still trusts  
this guy after '60 and '62...?

Strom glares at Harry. They enter the living room of the suite.

A MAN rises from the sofa and turns around to greet his guests. This man has a warm, if not charming face. He is not rattled by age or consequence yet. He looks like someone you'd want to grab a beer with.

This man is RICHARD NIXON.

He smiles and extends his hand--

RICHARD NIXON  
Strom...Harry. So good to see you  
both.

They all shake hands.

RICHARD NIXON (CONT'D)  
Harry, how's that little puppy  
treating you?

HARRY DENT  
Very well, thank you.  
You've...made our family whole  
again.

RICHARD NIXON  
Wonderful to hear. That's the best  
thing about dogs. They are family.  
And they will always be loyal to  
the family.

A pause. Strom and Nixon look at each other like two predators in front of a carcass...

RICHARD NIXON (CONT'D)  
Please. Let's sit.

Everyone sits...prudently.



RICHARD NIXON (CONT'D)  
I'm excited to discuss the  
prospect of establishing an even  
stronger relationship between us.

STROM THURMOND  
I don't think Governor Reagan  
would be too keen on that.

RICHARD NIXON  
Well, I'm hoping I can offer you  
something much greater than Mr.  
Reagan can.

HARRY DENT  
We figured you'd written off the  
South. Focus on the urban vote to  
carry you.

RICHARD NIXON  
You'd be a fool to think I'd  
ignore a good portion of this  
country full of upstanding  
Americans.

Strom leans forward--

STROM THURMOND  
I am far from a fool, Mr. Nixon.

RICHARD NIXON  
I know. I know that neither of you  
are. Bob and I know what you were  
able to achieve for Goldwater in  
'64.

H.R. HALDEMAN  
What we're interested in now is,  
do you think you could hold the  
south in '68?

Harry looks at Strom for their next move--

STROM THURMOND  
You want this wrapped up in the  
primaries. To keep your options  
open.

RICHARD NIXON  
Ideally, yes.

H.R. HALDEMAN

We're trying to avoid a situation where we have to make deals on a future vice president.

RICHARD NIXON

I'm not going to ram a man down the throat from any section of this country.

HARRY DENT

That's smart, if not ambitious.

RICHARD NIXON

Is it a vice presidency you're courting?

Strom looks at Harry. They smile.

STROM THURMOND

Now Mr. Nixon, you and I both know I can accomplish a lot more where I am. It's not a question of where I stand. It's a question of where I stand to you.

Nixon considers this.

RICHARD NIXON

What about George Wallace. It looks like he'll run too.

STROM THURMOND

The South is going to need just as much loving from you as it's gonna get from Wallace. But you tell me who the better lover is.

HARRY DENT

Look, we can't deliver your message for you. You have to tell these people directly.

A pause.

H.R. HALDEMAN

What we want to know is, will you be standing next to us? Or will you be standing next to Wallace or Reagan.

Strom looks at Harry, then back to Nixon--

STROM THURMOND

There's been...a lot of government interference in regards to our way of life in the south. How southerners are expected to be these days...perhaps you can tell us your feelings on that.

Haldeman motions to Nixon as if to answer, but Nixon quells him.

RICHARD NIXON

Let me make it straight at the outset, that I am for civil rights and I have supported it and believe in it.

Strom looks at Harry. They're waiting for the moment of truth.

RICHARD NIXON (CONT'D)

When I look at what's happening up north, in Chicago and such...these are problems caused by extremists of both races. Both sides. No one wants any more of that.

STROM THURMOND

That's what I'm concerned about.

RICHARD NIXON

The world is changing, Strom. When you started in the Senate and I swore you in, it was a different world then, wasn't it? And it's become even more different now, hasn't it? That's why you changed with it.

STROM THURMOND

Mr. Nixon, you can't make a silk purse out of a sow's ear.

Nixon and Haldeman look at each other, befuddled--

HARRY DENT

What Senator Thurmond is saying, in a Southern manner, is...that you can't make something good out of something that is inherently bad.

This sinks in. Nixon and Haldeman understand.

RICHARD NIXON

Then what I can tell you  
is...under a Nixon administration,  
when it comes to civil rights, I  
will not stop anything that has  
been accomplished...but I will not  
enforce any new initiatives or  
legislation.

And with that sentence, the civil rights movement has the rug  
pulled out from under them.

STROM THURMOND

Then I think you have yourself a  
Southern strategy.

Nixon smiles then stands up, followed by everyone else.

STROM THURMOND (CONT'D)

(to Nixon)

I imagine it'll be pleasant to  
visit you in the White House  
whenever I deem necessary.

RICHARD NIXON

There will be a seat waiting. For  
both of you.

All parties shake hands. Haldeman starts to lead them out--

STROM THURMOND

And Harry will send you over a  
list of acceptable Vice  
Presidents.

RICHARD NIXON

I look forward to it.

**INT. ARENA - DAY**

A Republican campaign rally in South Carolina. A crowd of  
thousands has gathered chanting Nixon's name.

A SPEAKER is on stage rallying for Nixon...

Backstage, Strom stands with Harry Dent. They look over Strom's  
speech notes.

HARRY DENT

You ready?

STROM THURMOND

This is the south, Harry.  
(MORE)

STROM THURMOND (CONT'D)  
 If I only go out there and lift  
 one finger, they'll cheer.

In another corner, Haldeman and Nixon confer. They're waiting  
 to see what happens.

A young Nixon STAFFER, followed by an even younger WOMAN,  
 approaches Harry and Strom.

STAFFER  
 Excuse me Senator, there's someone  
 here that would like to meet you  
 quickly.

HARRY DENT  
 This is hardly a good time-

Strom turns around and sees the young Woman. She is 19 years  
 old. Dressed up and sporting her "MISS SOUTH CAROLINA" sash.  
 She's poised, appears cunning, and definitely a show stopper.

This is NANCY MOORE.

STROM THURMOND  
 I'm sure we have time, Harry.

STAFFER  
 This is, well you can see, Ms.  
 South Carolina, Nancy Moore-

STROM THURMOND  
 Nancy. How lovely to make your  
 acquaintance.

NANCY MOORE  
 It's an honor to meet you, sir.

STROM THURMOND  
 Guess I should be congratulating  
 you.

Nancy blushes--

NANCY MOORE  
 I've read about your time in the  
 Senate in high school. You'll have  
 quite the legacy.

STROM THURMOND  
 I just do the work of the people.  
 Are you...still in high school?

NANCY MOORE  
 I just graduated.

Strom smiles at her.

STROM THURMOND

Good, good. You know we're always looking for smart interns down at my office in Washington. Perhaps you might be interested?

NANCY MOORE

Sir, I'd relish the opportunity to interview.

STROM THURMOND

I'm sure someone in my office can set that up, right Harry? We should make time despite all this campaign run around.

NANCY MOORE

I'll look forward to it.

STROM THURMOND

So will I.

Harry clearly annoyed, doesn't know where to start but settles on handing Strom back the speech--

HARRY DENT

Alright, now-

VOICE (O.S.)

Ladies and Gentlemen, I present to you, Senator Strom Thurmond!

Strom takes his cue and starts walking--

HARRY DENT

Just like '48?

STROM THURMOND

Better.

Strom walks on stage and the crowd ROARS--

**INT. STROM THURMOND'S SENATE OFFICE - NIGHT**

Strom and Essie Mae are alone in his office. After hours. They look at each other.

STROM THURMOND

I was very sorry to hear about your husband.

ESSIE MAE WASHINGTON  
Thank you. I suppose we both  
understand this type of pain.

STROM THURMOND  
I suppose we do. Julius would've  
been a real credit to- (his race).

ESSIE MAE WASHINGTON  
Credit to America.

Strom pauses. Studies Essie.

STROM THURMOND  
*America* is being overrun by the  
Democrats. They're cowards.  
They're the ones responsible for  
Cuba. They put us in Vietnam.  
They're soft on welfare.

Essie Mae musters every bit of courage in her body--

ESSIE MAE WASHINGTON  
The Democrats are soft...on  
segregation.

Strom snaps sharply to Essie--

STROM THURMOND  
I never said that.

**INT. WHITE HOUSE - DAY**

A Press conference in the Oval Office.

President Lyndon Johnson speaks directly to the TV Camera, as  
his solemn STAFF stands in the background--

PRESIDENT JOHNSON  
With America's sons in the fields  
far away, with America's future  
under challenge right here at  
home, I do not believe that I  
should devote an hour or a day of  
my time to any personal partisan  
causes. Accordingly, I shall not  
seek, and I will not accept, the  
nomination of my party for another  
term as your President.

**INT. CONVENTION HALL - NIGHT**

Richard Nixon speaks at a podium to the entire enthusiastic  
REPUBLICAN DELEGATION--

RICHARD NIXON

My fellow Americans, eight years ago, I had the highest honor of accepting your nomination for President of the United States. Tonight, I again proudly accept that nomination for President.. But I have news for you. This time there is a difference. This time we are going to win.

**EXT. LORRAINE MOTEL - NIGHT**

Martin Luther King, Jr. steps onto the balcony from his hotel room.

He turns back towards inside before closing the door--

MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR.

Ben, make sure you play "Take My Hand, Precious Lord" in the meeting tonight. Play it real pretty.

MLK looks out on the city of Memphis before him. Lights sparkle in the distance. He inhales the fresh air.

Suddenly A GUN SHOT--

**EXT. INDIANAPOLIS NEIGHBORHOOD - NIGHT**

Senator Robert Kennedy stands on the back of a flatbed truck speaking into a microphone.

A large AFRICAN AMERICAN CROWD, with eager eyes and ears, have come to hear him speak...

ROBERT F. KENNEDY

I have some very sad news for all of you, and I think sad news for all of our fellow citizens, and people who love peace all over the world, and that is that Martin Luther King was shot and was killed tonight in Memphis, Tennessee.

The crowd erupts into WAILING--



ROBERT F. KENNEDY (CONT'D)

For those of you who are black - considering the evidence evidently is, there were white people who were responsible - you can be filled with bitterness, and with hatred, and a desire for revenge.

The crowd shouts back but stops to listen--

ROBERT F. KENNEDY (CONT'D)

We can move in that direction as a country, black people amongst blacks, and white amongst whites, filled with hatred toward one another. Or we can make an effort, as Martin Luther King did, to understand and to comprehend, and replace that violence, that stain of bloodshed that has spread across our land, with an effort to understand, compassion and love.

**INT. DENT FAMILY HOME - NIGHT**

Harry's two boys are up late are watching TV. Alone. Their eyes are glued to the screen--

On the TV is STAR TREK. CAPTAIN KIRK holds the dashingly beautiful UHURA, African American, in his arms.

UHURA

I am not afraid...

The nail biting tension between Kirk and Uhura escalating by the second as they stare into each other's eyes and--

THEY KISS--

**INT. STROM THURMOND'S SENATE OFFICE - CONTINUOUS**

Strom looks at Essie with sadness undercut by conviction. Essie stares right back at him--

ESSIE MAE WASHINGTON

But black people should be separate from whites?

STROM THURMOND

What are you getting at?

ESSIE MAE WASHINGTON

Should we be separate then?

Tears building in Essie's eyes--

STROM THURMOND  
What's gotten into you?

ESSIE MAE WASHINGTON  
If you mean what you say, how  
could you...how could you...love  
my mother?

Strom is SPEECHLESS--

ESSIE MAE WASHINGTON (CONT'D)  
Do you look at me as a Negro,  
Senator?

Strom looks down, trying to compose himself. He then focuses  
back on Essie.

STROM THURMOND  
I look at you with a lot of pride,  
Essie Mae.

ESSIE MAE WASHINGTON  
You will not flatter yourself out  
of this. It will not work this  
time.

STROM THURMOND  
I look at you...I have always  
looked at you...

ESSIE MAE WASHINGTON  
I hate to say this, but do you  
realize how black people feel  
about you?

Strom inhales deeply--

**INT. AMBASSADOR HOTEL - DAY**

Robert Kennedy finishes a speech at the hotel ballroom in Los  
Angeles. Cameras flash.

He shakes hands, smiles, and waves to the excited CROWD that  
has come to see him.

He exits through a kitchen door, a GROUP OF PEOPLE follows him.  
RFK shakes hands with a Hispanic BUSBOY when--

MULTIPLE GUN SHOTS--

RFK GOES DOWN. CHAOS ERUPTS--

**INT. CBS NEWSROOM - NIGHT**

TV FOOTAGE. A large screen reads "ELECTION NIGHT '68"

ANNOUNCER (O.S.)  
Reporting election headquarters,  
Walter Cronkite.

Walter Cronkite sits behind his news desk. Behind him, a large screen showing the status of the Presidential race.

WALTER CRONKITE  
Now with 96% of precincts  
reporting the Popular vote shows  
Nixon at 43%, Humphrey at 43% and  
Wallace at 13%.

A graphic behind Cronkite shows the numbers...

**INT. LORRAINE MOTEL - CONTINUOUS**

Martin Luther King Jr's body is now inside on the floor of the motel room.

His staff around him - rushing to help - panic ensuing as the blood slowly drips out of his head and on to the carpet.

**EXT. AMBASSADOR HOTEL - CONTINUOUS**

Robert Kennedy is still on the ground, bleeding out. His staff around him watching in horror--

People are rushing to get help--

The Busboy holds RFK's hand...

**INT. DENT FAMILY HOME - NIGHT**

Harry Dent, his family, and their dog, all sit on the couch watching CBS news Election night coverage.

The screen now shows the electoral votes:

NIXON - 56% // HUMPHREY - 36% // WALLACE - 8%

WALTER CRONKITE  
CBS News is now calling Richard  
Nixon as the winner of the United  
States' presidency.

Harry smiles, ecstatic about the victory--

**INT. NIXON HEADQUARTERS - NIGHT**

Nixon gives his acceptance speech to a large CROWD--

RICHARD NIXON

I saw many signs in this campaign...but the one that touched me most said "Bring Us Together." That will be the great objective of this administration at the outset.

**INT. STROM THURMOND'S SENATE OFFICE - CONTINUOUS**

Strom motions to sit down at his mahogany desk as if notes would be there. But they're not.

STROM THURMOND

I am dedicated to the improvement of the Negro race-

Essie stops Strom sitting or evading--

ESSIE MAE WASHINGTON

This is not a campaign speech. I am not a statistic.

STROM THURMOND

I never said you were.

ESSIE MAE WASHINGTON

And I never question our arrangement. I have never said anything. I have done my best to be a respectful...daughter to you. But you are taking away my identity.

STROM THURMOND

I've done a lot for the Negro cause. I put the men on the Willie Earl case on trial-

ESSIE MAE WASHINGTON

And what was the result of that? They were all acquitted. All of them.

STROM THURMOND

But there hasn't been a lynching since-

ESSIE MAE WASHINGTON

Black people *hate* you, Senator. My husband *hated* you. I tried to speak up for you. But he hated you. Almost all black people do. They don't just see you as the enemy. They see you as their worst enemy. Is that the way you want to be looked at?

Essie shoves the mini Confederate flag on his desk--

Tears are now streaming down her face--

She can't hold back now--

ESSIE MAE WASHINGTON (CONT'D)

More and more black people are going to be voting. They want you out of office. Do you want them to turn you out, sir? Because if you don't, you better change your ways.

Essie motions to leave. Strom reaches into a desk drawer.

STROM THURMOND

Wait. I'm...glad you spoke your mind. I surely speak mine.

ESSIE MAE WASHINGTON

No matter what you do, the damage is done. What other damage will you cause? You've already lost me. Try not to lose the rest of the country.

Strom, desperate, hands an envelope full of cash to Essie. She pushes it away--

Strom presses it back into her hand. Essie smacks it away, fighting her father--

The cash falls out of the envelope and on to the floor--

Essie's struggles to leave but Strom's persistence turns their interaction into a sloppy and bitter embrace.

Tears drop from Strom's eyes too. They hold each other for a moment. Strom kisses her on the forehead--

Essie Mae aggressively ends the hug and walks out the door, closing it sharply as she leaves.

STROM THURMOND  
Goodbye...

FADE TO:

**MONTAGE**

1. EXT. WASHINGTON DC - DAY

Inauguration Day, 1969. President-elect Nixon stands, his hand raised in oath, and is sworn in by Chief Justice Earl Warren.

CHIEF JUSTICE EARL WARREN  
...I will faithfully execute the office of President of the United States...and will to the best of my ability, preserve and protect and defend the Constitution of the United States...so help me God.

RICHARD NIXON  
(repeating)  
...I will faithfully execute the office of President of the United States...and will to the best of my ability, preserve and protect and defend the Constitution of the United States...so help me God.

2. INT. LOS ANGELES CLASSROOM - DAY

Essie Mae stands in front of a class full of HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS. On the board are notes regarding the American Civil War.

She genuinely connects with each student.

3. EXT. WHITE HOUSE - DAY

President Nixon welcomes Strom Thurmond. They shake hands and smile, chum like. As winners do.

But Strom can't shake the bittersweetness inside...

An African American BUTLER holds open the door for them and they walk into the White House. After all, it's finally Strom's house now.

4. INT. WHITE HOUSE - DAY

H.R. Haldeman leads Harry Dent through a bustling White House. They reach an office. It has Harry's name written on the door.

Haldeman shakes his hand and leaves. Harry sits behind his desk, looking pleased with himself and his new position.

5. EXT. CHURCH - DAY

Bells ring out a wedding ceremony. GUESTS clap as Strom exits the church with his new bride, Nancy Moore.

They appear to be happy...

6. EXT. STROM THURMOND'S SENATE OFFICE - DAY

A white male SENIOR STAFF MEMBER, and a black man, THOMAS MOSS, walk up to Strom.

SENIOR STAFF MEMBER

Excuse me, Senator Thurmond, I wanted to introduce you to the young man we've been telling you about. This is Thomas Moss.

Thomas Moss extends his hand. Strom sizes him up and down.

Strom then shakes his hand...

STROM THURMOND

OK. I see. Well, if you're as talented and as qualified as everyone on my staff says you are, we are very pleased to have you join us here.

THOMAS MOSS

Thank you for the opportunity, sir.

7. NEWSPAPER SEQUENCE/EXT. WHITE HOUSE - DAY

A SERIES OF headlines from The Washington Post read:

HEADLINE - "Break in at Watergate complex"

H.R. Haldeman walks out of the White House. Looking down, he avoids PRESS MEMBERS attempt to ask him questions.

HEADLINE - "FBI Finds Nixon Aides Sabotaged Democrats"

Next, Harry Dent is seen leaving the White House. Also in disgrace.

HEADLINE - "Nixon Resigns"

Finally, Richard Nixon walks out of the White House for the last time. He waves and does his signature salute, then boards a helicopter, leaving Washington D.C., forever.

## 8. INT. THURMOND ELECTION HQ - NIGHT

Strom and Nancy celebrate a re-election victory. Their four CHILDREN, sport "Re-elect my Daddy in '78" T-shirts.

Strom waves, elated, to the PRESS and his SUPPORTERS.

On the sidelines is Thomas Moss and several other AFRICAN AMERICAN STAFFERS.

## 9. INT. BANK - DAY

Essie takes a large sum of cash out of an envelope and makes a deposit. The envelope is from the office of United States Senator Strom Thurmond.

## 10. INT. THURMOND HOUSEHOLD - NIGHT

Nancy Moore Thurmond, at home, alone at the kitchen table. An empty bottle of wine next to her. She opens a pill bottle and takes more than she knows she should.

## 11. UNITED STATES SENATE - DAY

A Constitutional Amendment is up for a vote--

PRESIDENT OF THE SENATE  
On H.R. 3112, which prohibits the violation of voting rights by any practices that discriminate based on race, how does the senior Senator from South Carolina vote?

STROM THURMOND  
We vote yes.

## 12. INT. CHURCH CONGREGATION HALL - DAY

Mass has just ended. Strom Thurmond talks to various PARISHIONERS.

At the end of the hallway is Essie Mae. Next to her is her teenage sons and daughters, JULIUS, RONALD, MONICA and WANDA.

In a crowd full of White parishioners, they look like the Jackson 5.

Strom looks over and sees them all. Essie attempts a smile at him. He smiles back to them, excuses himself, and walks over towards his...family.



STROM THRURMOND  
 (to Essie)  
 Let's find a room where we can all  
 be together.

13. UNITED STATES SENATE - DAY

A Bill is up for a vote--

PRESIDENT OF THE SENATE  
 On H.R. 3706, amending United  
 States Code to make the birthday  
 of Martin Luther King, Jr. a legal  
 public holiday, how does the  
 senior Senator from South Carolina  
 vote?

STROM THURMOND  
 (confidently)  
 We vote yes.

14. INT. THURMOND HOUSEHOLD - DAY

Strom sits opposite Nancy at a table. Two LAWYERS are present  
 with them. Nancy's lawyer hands legal papers over to Strom.

It's a Separation from Marriage agreement.

Strom looks at a bitterly sad Nancy...

15. INT. US CONGRESS - DAY

Strom, now age 94, at the front of the Senate stands next to a  
 young by comparison, 74 year old JUSTICE WILLIAM REHNQUIST.

All MEMBERS watch. Rehnquist raises his right hand--

STROM THURMOND (CONT'D)  
 Do you solemnly swear, that in all  
 things a-pertaining to the trial,  
 of the impeachment of William  
 Jefferson Clinton, President of  
 the United States, now pending,  
 you will do impartial justice  
 according to the Constitution and  
 laws, so help you God?

JUSTICE WILLIAM REHNQUIST  
 I do.

Strom shakes Rehnquist's hand.

16. INT. WASHINGTON DC BALLROOM - DAY

A large room full of CONGRESSMEN and PRESS.

"Happy Birthday Strom" & "Happy 100th" signs are over the room.

Strom sits in a wheelchair. He is frail and weak. An AIDE holds up a microphone to his mouth--

STROM THURMOND

Thank you all. I love all of you  
men, but you women even more.

The crowd chuckles...

In the back of the room, an EMS TEAM is on stand by...

TIME CUT TO:

A man who looks like he could pass as a baptist minister on TV is actually Mississippi Senator TRENT LOTT. He stands next to Strom and speaks to the audience gathered--

TRENT LOTT

I want to say this about my state.  
When Strom Thurmond ran for  
president, we voted for him. We're  
proud of it. And if the rest of  
the country had followed our lead,  
we wouldn't have had all these  
problems over the years, either.

Audible gasps amongst mostly silence amongst the room...

Strom watches but appears as if his attention is elsewhere.

17. INT. US SENATE - DAY

The Senate in session. Strom sits at his post, his eyes mostly closed. We're unsure if he's sleeping or not...

His AIDE taps him on the shoulder and whispers in his ear.

Strom perks up. He lifts his hands into the air and with a weak voice says--

STROM THURMOND

The Senate stands adjourned.  
That's all.

18. INT./EXT. SOUTH CAROLINA CHURCH - DAY

A CROWD is gathered outside, gradually filtering into the church. Everyone is dressed in black.

"How Great Thou Art" plays softly from inside the church.

A large casket draped in an American Flag is near the alter.

FADE TO:

**INT. HOTEL BALLROOM - DAY**

CAPTION: SIX MONTHS LATER

The Adams Mark Hotel in South Carolina. An empty podium awaits a crowd of REPORTERS. A video crew is also set up, ready to capture whatever is about to happen.

**INT. HOTEL BALLROOM - BACKSTAGE - CONTINUOUS**

Essie Mae, age 78, sits in a chair. Within arms length are her ADULT CHILDREN.

Essie shuffles some notes, attempting to control her nerves.

She notices that in the distance is a Hispanic CLEANING LADY who is pushing a trash can through a hallway.

Essie studies the Hispanic woman. She loses herself watching her. Everything becomes bleak for a moment.

But Essie remembers something and reaches into her pocket for. After a second, she finds it and takes it out--

It's her Mother's grey heart shaped locket.

She looks at it the way you would look at your own child.

**INT. HOTEL BALLROOM - CONTINUOUS**

Reporters are growing anxious--

Finally, a curtain is pulled and Essie Mae approaches the podium. Cameras FLASH...

She poises herself. Looks out at the crowd. And speaks--

ESSIE MAE WASHINGTON

My name is Essie Mae Washington-Williams. My mother, who is now deceased, was named Carrie Butler, and she worked for the Thurmond family. I was born in Aiken, South Carolina on October 12th, 1925. My father's name was James Strom Thurmond.

Gasps from the crowd as Essie exhales peacefully.

**INT. STROM THURMOND'S SENATE OFFICE - DAY**

A FLASHBACK.

Strom Thurmond sits in his wheelchair. In front of him is the mahogany desk. He's very old but not nearly as frail as the last few years before his death.

A MAN stands looking over the accolades. He sees the picture of Strom speaking to the crowd at his Presidential rally. It is the same man, though older, from the beginning--

This man is Senator JOE BIDEN.

STROM THURMOND  
Sit down, Joe, sit down.

Biden sits, with slight unease...

STROM THURMOND (CONT'D)  
Remember the first time you came  
to see me, when you were freshman  
Senator Biden?

Biden shakes his head.

STROM THURMOND (CONT'D)  
Joe, I wanted to tell you  
something then that I'll tell you  
now. First though, you are going  
to take my office one day, aren't  
you?

JOE BIDEN  
Yes sir, Mr. Chairman.

Strom runs his hands across the mahogany desk in a loving way...

STROM THURMOND  
You see this desk?

Biden nods...

STROM THURMOND (CONT'D)  
This desk was the flagship of the  
Confederacy from 1954 to 1968. We  
sat here. Most of us from the Deep  
South, the old Confederacy, and we  
planned the demise of the civil  
rights movement.

Strom looks hard at Biden--

STROM THURMOND (CONT'D)  
 And now it's time: it's time that  
 this desk go from the possession  
 of a man against civil rights to a  
 man who is for civil rights.

A pause. Biden is stunned--

STROM THURMOND (CONT'D)  
 One more thing, Joe. The civil  
 rights movement did more to free  
 the white man than the black man.

Joe looks at him with confusion, not fully understanding the  
 last part...

But Strom exhales peacefully.

**EXT. SOUTH CAROLINA CAPITAL GROUNDS - DAY**

A beautiful, sunny day.

Fresh green cut grass lines the path leading to the South  
 Carolina State House.

Essie's voice continues from her press conference--

ESSIE MAE WASHINGTON (O.S.)  
 Throughout his life and mine, we  
 respected each other. I never  
 wanted to do anything to cause  
 detriment to his life or the lives  
 of those around him.

Along the path, there are A SERIES OF STATUES:

1. ROBERT E. LEE, General of the Confederate Army, riding atop  
 a horse and heading into battle.

ESSIE MAE WASHINGTON (O.S.)  
 (CONT'D)  
 At this juncture of my life, I am  
 looking for closure. I am not  
 bitter. I am not angry. In fact,  
 there is a great sense of peace  
 that has come over in the past  
 year. Once I decided that I would  
 no longer harbor such a great  
 secret that many others knew, I  
 feel as though a tremendous weight  
 has been lifted.

2. JEFFERSON DAVIS, President of the Confederacy, widely  
 gesturing mid speech.

ESSIE MAE WASHINGTON (O.S.)  
(CONT'D)

I am Essie Mae Washington-Williams  
and at last, I feel completely  
free.

3. STROM THURMOND, gallantly striding with one foot forward.  
The State Capital building right behind him.

On the base of the statue, his name is boldly carved.

Another side of the monument's base lists all his  
accomplishments and Government titles.

Further down reads, "The Father of Five Children."

But the "Five" appears in darker chisel, as what was originally  
there, was removed and then re-done.

Below that are the names of all four children he had with  
Nancy.

And beneath that, in darker, fresh chisel, reads "ESSIE MAE."

FADE TO BLACK.

THE END