

***ON THE PROPER TIME TO SLIP THE CABLE***

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“the wise man will live as long as he ought, not as long as he can”

- Seneca

**CHARACTERS**

THE DISTINGUISHED SENATOR FROM NEW YORK

Female, an established professional, decisive

HER PRESIDENTIAL CAMPAIGN ADVISOR

Male, a skilled negotiator, contemplative

*(A quiet room in a distinguished New York college just before a major political speech. Vague crowd noises and introductory words can be heard coming over a sound monitor in the room.)*

SENATOR

How did he do it?

ADVISOR

Look, we're right on the edge of time here. Is the speech okay?

SENATOR

The speech is fine. Just --

ADVISOR

Good. Baruch is waiting. Terry's out there rallying the troops until you take the stage, but she can't go on forever.

SENATOR

Tell me how he did it.

ADVISOR

Um -- he slit his wrists.

SENATOR

You're sure it wasn't poison -- ?

ADVISOR

No, no. He slit his wrists, and sat in a warm bath to get the, uh -- to get the blood flowing. Never goes out of style.

SENATOR

So who was poison?

ADVISOR

Socrates was poison.

SENATOR

Is that who I'm thinking of?

ADVISOR

I don't know.

SENATOR

What did he write?

ADVISOR

Nothing. Plato wrote everything.

SENATOR

Who else was there?

ADVISOR

Well, who wasn't there? Cato, Brutus, and Marc Antony all died by the sword. Socrates, Hannibal, Cleopatra, and Bodicea took poison.

SENATOR

Which one was Boudica?

ADVISOR

She was queen of one of those torc-wearing paint-yourself-blue variety of Celt – her husband was king and when he died he left the kingdom jointly to her and the Roman empire. Sound familiar?

SENATOR

Don't be cute.

ADVISOR

I'm not the one stalling.

SENATOR

Boudica.

ADVISOR

Okay. Anyway, she gets ousted because the Romans don't recognize inheritance through women. So they exile her, rape her daughters and such, so she rallies eighty thousand of her closest friends to go over to Londonium and rip the Romans a new one, which they do until the Romans send up a legion.

SENATOR

And then?

ADVISOR

The Roman Legion just stood its ground while hordes of screaming Celtic hellions throw themselves on their spears. At the end of the day you're looking at four hundred dead Romans to eighty thousand dead Celts, give or take.

SENATOR

So she lost.

ADVISOR

It turns out that passion isn't always enough.

SENATOR

What became of her?

ADVISOR

She escaped, took poison, and died. Death before dishonor. I'll tell them you're on your way. They must be getting tired of stalling.

SENATOR

Where do we stand?

ADVISOR

A few minutes late, but otherwise fine. They love you out there, Terry's going to announce you as the next president of the United States.

SENATOR

We're down by two hundred delegates.

ADVISOR

The gap is narrow enough. We can make up the difference in Supers - with the right leverage we can still clinch this.

SENATOR

And then what? The Republican ticket has already started campaigning, and in the meantime you want me to fight all the way to the Convention? That's a three month GOP lead. We might as well gift wrap the presidency and hand it to the Red states while we're at it. If Obama has the nomination, what are we even doing here?

ADVISOR

I thought you were 'in to win'?

SENATOR

Do not push my rhetoric back on me. We're over thirty million in debt and by the time this is over I'm going to have to pitch in at least ten million of my own money. Please just stop being my campaign manager for a minute and level with me.

*(pause)*

ADVISOR

He got it this afternoon –

SENATOR

Okay.

ADVISOR

-- and barring a political catastrophe, he's going to keep it.

SENATOR

You could have told me.

ADVISOR

At this point we can either give it to them, or make them take it. Either way I'm sure they're expecting a concession speech. I didn't want to throw you.

SENATOR

So instead I get to go out there and talk like we're still in this. How will that go over?

ADVISOR

I'm sorry.

SENATOR

So that's that. What if we hold out? We had the lead in the polls, for god's sake!

ADVISOR

We were simply outmaneuvered.

SENATOR

I was backed into a damned corner!

ADVISOR

Still, a checkmate is a checkmate. He got the vote. You put up a good fight, but now it's time to pick up our toys and go home. If you want to know, I blame your husband.

SENATOR

Excuse me?

ADVISOR

For leaving your family on such stony ground within the party.

SENATOR

Do you imagine it would have been any easier without him? A divorcee in office, maybe the French can get away with that, but not in America.

ADVISOR

Blest be the tie that binds.

SENATOR

It certainly does.

ADVISOR

Sorry.

SENATOR

I really really really don't care any more. *(beat)* Why do we ever do this? Does anyone realize what a burden a life of leadership is?

ADVISOR

People need something to rally around.

SENATOR

Of course -- look what it did for Boudica. I'm struggling to see the point. When I listen to myself I hear someone very tired and very angry who can't stop no matter how much she wishes she could.

ADVISOR

And as soon as this blows over you can relax.

SENATOR

I don't think I'd even know how. So I will say what I have to say and do what I have to do to make this go as smoothly and as swiftly as possible, but I really really thought this was my shot. It was my shot. And now I am facing what may be the worst news of my life right before I go out there to tell them -- what exactly?

ADVISOR

Do you want me to rewrite the speech?

SENATOR

This isn't about the damn speech. This is about us having every reason to get there. And now we have to rethink our entire approach. I never entered this game to play king-maker. Let the aides play that Machiavellian shit. I was in to win. What else is there?

ADVISOR

The greater good. And saving face.

SENATOR

Well, the first is a no-go, so we'll have to shoot for the second. If we do this we have to do it quick. We hesitate and it looks like stalling. Two days. That's enough.

ADVISOR

So, Wednesday. I'll draft a speech.

SENATOR

Keep it simple. I drop out of the race and he takes the nomination. There's going to be a lot of eyes on this, so keep it short and sweet.

ADVISOR

Unless ... you don't back down.

SENATOR

Oh, the pundits would have a field day with that. Watch the battle axe swing!

ADVISOR

Hear me out. Just because he controls the terrain doesn't mean he won't slip up. And if he does, we'll be there to pick up the slack. An endorsement will allow you to save face and still hold your ground.

SENATOR

Fishing for a comeback?

ADVISOR

If we suspend you still keep your delegates. Then if push comes to shove and he becomes unelectable, we renounce our support and let the supers flock to you in Denver. A guaranteed nomination.

SENATOR

In a catastrophe?

ADVISOR

In a sense.

SENATOR

Lovely. Why not? If they throw themselves on their sword, we can still pick up the pieces. If we're going to do this I want to meet him before this reaches the press. Privately. One on one.

ADVISOR

Um, wow. You're going to have a very hard time pulling that off.

SENATOR

I need some assurances.

ADVISOR

Putting your affairs in order?

SENATOR

Let me worry about that. Call him, and don't put it down till you reach him – not his campaign manager – him. I want this on a closed-circuit -- you, me, and him. And don't release any statements until we do this face to face.

ADVISOR

What about the speech?

SENATOR

I'll give it as written. Why the hell not, right? It won't make a difference.

ADVISOR

I'm sorry.

SENATOR

It's okay. Just get him on the phone.

ADVISOR

I will. Are you ready?

SENATOR

I think so.

ADVISOR

I'll let them know. Knock 'em dead.

SENATOR

Yes. Thank you.

*(ADVISOR exits. A moment we hear an announcement through the PA system.)*

ANNOUNCEMENT

*-- LADIES AND GENTLEMEN, IT IS MY GREAT HONOR TO ANNOUNCE OUR DISTINGUISHED SENATOR FROM NEW YORK – THE NEXT PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA!*

*(Endless cheering. SENATOR braces herself and exits.)*