

Congresswomen  
(or the Catfight)

by  
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## SYNOPSIS

At the end of WWII, Clare Booth Luce (Republican) and Helen Gahagan Douglas (Democrat) served one overlapping term in Congress. Viewed by the press as glamour queens from across the aisle, the congresswomen agreed to never debate each other.

While celebrating the end of the war with their male colleagues, Clare and Helen run into each other in the powder room of a popular DC bar & grill. Between secrets and cocktails, their unwavering public pact disintegrates in this imagined conversation.

Delving into privilege, tragedy, and complicated personal lives, these trail-blazing women debate much more than politics, questioning their duty to God, their sensuality, their right to power, and their role as mothers (both present and absent).

## CHARACTERS

(2 Women, 3 Men)

Clare Boothe Luce                      Congresswoman, early 40s

Helen Gahagan Douglas              Congresswoman, mid 40s

**YOUNG STUD** (played by a single actor)

Common Man                              Working class/low ranking military man

Julian Simpson                            British officer, 20s

Roald Dahl                                 British Spy, late 20s

**PRIME STUD** (played by a single actor)

Military Man                              High ranking US military officer, 40s

Donald Freeman                         Managing Editor of Vanity Fair, 40s

George Willoughby                      United States General in Thailand, 40s

**OLD STUD** (played by a single actor)

Political Man                              Wealthy politician, early 60s

Bernard Baruch                            Wealthy financier, early 60s

Joseph P Kennedy                        Ambassador to Great Britain, 50s

SETTING

The action takes place inside a ladies' powder room in an upscale hotel/bar and grill in Washington, D.C.

TIME

A night in early September 1945 following Congress' official declaration of the end of the war.

**PROLOGUE NOTE:** With minor edits, the following speeches of Clare Booth Luce and Helen Gahagan Douglas have been lifted directly from history. Also, the dialogue of the male characters has been supplemented from personal letters and quotes.

## THE CONGRESSWOMEN

Two women stand on opposite sides of the stage in front of podiums. They are back-lit, in silhouette.

On the back wall, center stage, a SLIDE image of a large American Flag appears. Within the flag, are projected black and white images from WWII and surrounding events.

Lights up on HELEN GAHAGAN DOUGLAS. Stage left in front of a podium, Helen is in her mid-forties, tall and confident, a winning smile. She wears, a conservative, but tailored lady's suit. She addresses a large audience of supporters.

During her speech, the COMMON MAN wanders on stage. He is dressed in a subtle combination of working class attire and a low ranking military uniform. He listens.

SLIDE IMAGES: 1) Eleanor Roosevelt comforting the unfortunate; 3) "Rosie the Riveter," working on assembly lines; 4) Men and women waiting in ration lines.

## HELEN

An army of forty-eight million have benefited directly under President Roosevelt's New Deal. I do not know whether these women call themselves Democrats or Republicans. I only know that their government under Roosevelt has reached out to lighten their burdens and brighten their lives. Women are doing everything of an emergency nature that they have been asked to do to help win the war. After the war it will be as necessary for women to support themselves as it will be for men to support themselves. No one understands that more than our President.

(MORE)

**HELEN (CONT'D)**

His wise and considered leadership has steered this country through its darkest hours. The American people can rest assured that we are on the right track as long as President Roosevelt remains at the helm.

SOUND of applause.

Lights up on CLARE BOOTHE LUCE, early forties, stage right. She is intensely feminine, petite, with an underlying bite and fragility. She wears a glamorous but conservative dark colored dress. She addresses the Republican National Convention.

The Common Man switches his attention to Clare. While she speaks, the POLITICAL MAN appears and stands by the Common Man. The Political Man smiles and engages the Common Man, building a camaraderie.

SLIDE IMAGES (during her speech): 1) Soldiers fighting the war in Europe and Japan; 2) FDR speaking; 3) Men lying dead on the battlefield.

**CLARE**

We all know G.I. Joe, the American soldier, the protector of our great Democracy, the man who will return home triumphant after fighting a long and hard war. But what about G.I. Jim? Who was he? Like Joe, Jim was the fellow next door. But Jim, was immobilized by enemy gunfire, immobilized for all eternity. Buried in an unmarked grave, Jim is the heroic heir of the un-heroic Roosevelt decade, a decade of confusion and conflict that ended in war. The inefficiency, evasion and personal whim in the management of the country's business has distorted our democracy into a dictatorial bumbledom. We Republicans must now nominate a president who will ensure that Jim's sacrifice shall not prove useless. A fighting man dies for the future as well as the past; to keep all that was fine of this country's yesterday, and give it a chance for a finer tomorrow.

SOUND of applause.

The Political Man turns to the Common Man, gesturing toward Clare's body. The Common Man timidly nods and makes a half-hearted sexual gesture toward Clare. Lights fade.

Lights up on Helen addressing the House Floor. During her speech, the Common Man turns his focus to Helen. A MILITARY MAN appears. He wears a uniform that implies he is high ranking. He stares Helen up and down. Though she continues speaking as if he is not there, the Military Man begins moving closer and circling her.

SLIDE IMAGES: 1) African American units fighting the war i.e. Tuskegee Airmen; 2) Images of Black families living in poverty; 3) Burning cross.

HELEN

It is about the Negro soldier I wish to speak today, I wish to pay him the respect and to express the gratitude of the American people for his contributions to the greatest battle of all time. Three-fourths of all Negroes in the armed forces came from areas in this land of the free where their people had been held down for generations, denied education, denied the right to participate in self-government, denied even the right to self respect. They went into the armed forces ill-equipped, through no fault of their own, for the tremendous job required of them. But they did the job, all the same, handicap or no handicap. And they did it magnificently.

Lights up on Clare.

During her speech, the Political Man enters with two gas masks. He hands one to the Military Man. Out of his pocket the Political Man pulls a cigar. The Military Man lights it.

Nonchalantly, the two men pass a cigar back and forth while the women speak. Gradually, the image of the American Flag smolders, slowly catching fire as smoke (fog machine) seeps onto the stage.

SLIDE IMAGES: 1) Images of the 1920s, post-WWI decadence; 2) Depression era, stock market crash; 3) Dust Bowl victims; 4) Long unemployment lines.

CLARE

It is Congress' job to bring out a tax bill during this emergency which will help drain off excess dollars. For the wild-burning dollars of a war boom could sweep the nation until all of America were swallowed up in a fierce fire of inflation, leaving nothing in its wake but a charred and bankrupt economy. We Americans must submit to heavier, wider, and higher taxes than we have had before in our history. Those who can afford it - the merely well-to-do and the frankly rich - must be taxed almost to the constitutional point of confiscation. All other members of the community must be reduced by taxation to the level of their actual needs in clothing, food, housing, schooling and health. In short, we must bring a tax bill adjusted, not to the people's wants, but their actual current need.

SOUND of applause.

Lights up on Helen then Clare addressing the House Floor.

During Helen and Clare's speeches below, the Military Man leers over Clare, while the Political Man watches and encourages him. Helen takes no notice as the Political Man caresses the outline of her body and moves his face (wearing the mask) closer to her back and neck. The Common Man becomes concerned and steps in to interfere.

In a sharp, dominating gesture, the Military Man intimidates the Common Man with his superior ranking. The Common Man salutes and moves away.

SLIDE IMAGES: During HELEN's Speech: 1) Public projects, WPA 3 C's at work; 2) TVA building dams; 3) Farmers working healthy crops.

SLIDE IMAGES: During CLARE's speech: 1) Public lynching; 2) Joseph Stalin cut side by side with Henry Wallace and FDR; 3) Fat cats smoking cigars, making big business deals 4) Harry Truman

HELEN

The Democratic party is the true conservative party.

Lights up on Clare.

CLARE

The Democratic party is less a party than a podge, it is a mishmash of die-hard, warring factions.

HELEN

We have conserved hope and ambition in the hearts of our people. We have conserved the skills of their hands.

CLARE

Take the extreme Right or Jim Crow Wing of the party, led by lynch-loving Bourbons, it is anti-Semitic, anti-Catholic, anti-foreign. In short, antediluvian.

HELEN

We have saved millions of homes and farms from foreclosures. We have rescued banks and insured crops.

CLARE

Then there is the Left or Moscow Wing of the party. This is currently master-minded by Stalin's Mortimer Snerd, Henry Wallace, champion of a misguided foreign policy he calls Freedom of the Air. No matter how you slice it, Wallace's naïve attempt at global thinking is pure globaloney.

HELEN

The Democratic Party has built schools. We have checked flooding rivers and turned them into power. We have begun a program to free men and women from the constant nagging fear of unemployment, sickness, accident - and the dread of old age.

CLARE

Finally, there is the Center, or Pendergast Wing of the Democratic Party. This is run by the wampum and boodle boys, the same big city bosses who gave us Harry Truman in one of their more pixilated moments.

HELEN

Ours, the Democratic party, is the conservative party.

Lights down on Helen and Clare. While the Common Man struggles to breathe through the smoke, the Military Man and Political Man have on the gas masks. Flames appear over the image of the American Flag as it pulsates with heat.

The Common Man cannot breathe. He goes to the Political Man for help. The Political Man sells him his gas mask.

By this time, the flag is engulfed in flames, the stage filling with smoke. The Common Man struggles to put on the gas mask as he exits, escaping the fire.

The Military Man and Political Man dance in sexual ecstasy, feeling their power.

SLIDE images build in intensity of 1) Bombed out German cities; 2) American soldiers liberating Nazi concentration camps 3) American factories churning away at top production 4) Huge crowds of people in the streets celebrating the end of the war.

SOUND of cheers echoes all around. The cheers crescendo and go out. Lights down. There are a few beats of silence. The American Flag disappears. The men are gone. The stage is cold and dark.

Cool, area light up on Clare, speaking on the House Floor. During the following, SOUND of a CHILD'S LAUGHTER echoes around the women. Clare is deeply affected by the laughter, but maintains her composure.

CLARE

Existence for human beings at Buchenwald, Nordhausen, Bergen-Belsen, Ohrdruf, Lagenstein, Dachau and other extermination centers was a descent into the bowels of hell.

Tight, cool lights up on Helen.

HELEN

Mr. Speaker, mixed with feelings of elation on August fourteenth that we had come finally to the end of the war, was a feeling of stupefaction.

CLARE

No American can imagine what grisly tortures were visited upon the prisoners for the smallest infractions of the camps' inhumane disciplines.

HELEN

I realized that we had come to the end of one age and that we are witnessing the birth of another because of the smashing of the atom and the release of atomic energy.

CLARE

No words can describe them or evoke the ghastly sights and sounds and unutterable smells that day and night afflicted all the occupants of these infernos.

HELEN

We cannot retrace our steps.

CLARE

Torture for torture's sake is nothing new.

HELEN

This new age demands of us an entirely new concept in our responsibilities toward one another. These responsibilities must be based fundamentally on a fully Christian, moral attitude.

CLARE

Carefully calculated starvation of hundreds of thousands of human beings in the building of a modern aggressive war machine - this surely is something new and terrible to the world.

HELEN

Now, more than ever before, is the time for all of us to read our Bible, to live by the principles found within the Golden Rule. The first order of business of this Congress and the peoples of the world is the question of the survival of mankind.

SLIDE IMAGE of an atom bomb mushroom cloud. Blackout.

Nighttime. Early September of 1945. Congress has recently resumed after the summer recess and official surrender of the Japanese, marking the end of WWII.

SOUND of a loud celebration, dominated by male laughter and conversation, fades up.

Lights up on the LADIES POWDER ROOM/LOUNGE of a popular Washington, D.C. hotel bar and grill. There is a settee, chairs and a vanity area with mirror and sink. There are two lavatories with doors in the back.

HELEN GAHAGAN DOUGLAS races in from the bar. When she opens the door, SOUND of the celebration climaxes, then drops as the door closes. Helen is smiling but weary. Her suit loosened and hair disheveled, she heads to the lavatory, struggling not to pee herself.

CLARE BOOTHE LUCE enters. SOUND of celebration is heard as she opens and closes the door. Clare appears freshly pressed with not a hair out of place. She holds a martini and smokes a cigarette. She sees Helen exit into the lavatory. After a moment, Helen lets out a relieved moan and then pees for a long time. Clare laughs silently.

SOUND of a Little Girl's far away laughter freezes Clare on the spot.

Tight area light on JULIAN SIMPSON, a young British military officer in full uniform. He cradles a baby in his arms. He touches the baby's forehead as a priest would touch a baby during baptism. He smiles, proud of the child.

JULIAN SIMPSON

What if she had been ours Clare? What if we had been brave enough to make a go of it despite the odds against us? You were so young, under such pressure from your mother to hook a millionaire. I begged you not to marry George Brokaw - not because I was afraid of losing you, but for what I feared you would suffer.

Area light of up CHARLES WILLOUGHBY, army colonel, mid-fifties, well-groomed and handsome, wears his military pants and officer's jacket. His chest is bare. He lights a pipe.

CHARLES WILLOUGHBY

I received your stiletto correspondence, Clare. Bear no doubt, it tore my heart straight out. Through your husband - Mr. Time and Life magazine - you have become accustomed to a higher scale of living. I thought I had something more substantial than material luxuries to offer you. I am a mere army Colonel, Clare. I cannot compete with Henry Luce.

A tight area light up on JOE KENNEDY. He wears nothing but a robe (about to fall open) and slippers.

JOE KENNEDY

I knew I'd end up in the confessional the minute I saw you. The things we did, Clare. Things I could never have done with Rose. Come over to our side. You don't have to be good to be Catholic, my dear. We love sinners to reform.

Area light down. The toilet flushes. Clare snaps to attention. Helen enters.

CLARE

What is the expression Mrs. Douglas? Like a racehorse?

HELEN

(caught off guard)

Oh, Mrs. Luce! If Sam buys me one more beer, I'm afraid I'll explode or pass out!

CLARE

You don't seem smashed, Mrs. Douglas. Topsy perhaps. But then, with those big doe eyes of yours, you always look a little tipsy to me.

Clare stands close, watching Helen.

HELEN

I suppose I have a strong constitution for celebration.

CLARE

Must be our wicked Broadway pasts.

Clare takes another long drink.

HELEN

Perhaps.

(Beat.)

As satisfying as it is to finally celebrate the end of the war with my fellow Congressmen, my constitution is fading.

CLARE

I am sure he is simply caught up in some meeting or rather. He'll be here soon, dear.

HELEN

I beg your pardon?

CLARE

Mrs. Douglas, you have been staring longingly after the front door all evening. Whosever arrival you are anticipating, clearly has not materialized. Yet.

Helen turns away from Clare and begins fixing herself in the mirror.

HELEN

I have been waiting for several of my favorite colleagues to arrive.

CLARE

There is a certain colleague from Texas who seems to have taken quite an interest in the freshmen Congresswoman from California.

HELEN

I have no idea what you're talking about.

CLARE

I suppose coming here to inform you that Lyndon Johnson walked into the bar at the precise moment you disappeared into the powder room was a misguided gesture of female solidarity.

Helen makes a small start toward the door, but contains herself. She focuses her nervous energy into her grooming. Clare smiles, sips her martini.

HELEN

Congressman Johnson has become a great friend. He has been a godsend for helping to organize my office.

CLARE

He's been organizing other matters from what I understand.

HELEN

He has introduced me to some influential people, if that's what you mean.

Clare plops glamorously on the settee, smoking her cigarette.

CLARE

I watched you this week, listening to Truman's 21 *Thousand* - Point Reconversion Plan -

HELEN

(correcting)

I think you mean twenty-one.

CLARE

(ignoring correction)

You had your little pen and paper, dutifully taking notes - so pretty and shiny without makeup - in your appropriately gray, yet beautifully tailored suit. And I thought, no wonder Lyndon is falling in love with you.

HELEN

Excuse me?

CLARE

He's not out there, by the way. I was only kidding. How is the sex? Or are you still dancing around it?

Helen is flustered. She pulls herself together.

HELEN

Mrs. Luce, with all due respect, I do not appreciate this intrusive speculation into my private life. You, of all people, should know better.

CLARE

Your directness is adorable and noted. Very well, I will spit it out. This is difficult to admit, but men from Texas well, they are known for their bragging. It's best you don't hear this from anyone else. When I first came to Washington, Lyndon Johnson showed me around town as well, if you know what I mean.

Helen flushes with anger but tries hard to maintain her composure. She recovers.

HELEN

Mrs. Luce, that is a personal matter between you and Lyndon Johnson. I have no interest in it.

CLARE

Excellent. Most women don't like me, Helen, but I have a good feeling about you.

HELEN

Oh. How nice. Well, in that case, there is something that I wish to discuss with you.

CLARE

What is that, Mrs. Douglas?

HELEN

The most pressing matter on Congress' plate, now that the war is officially over, is what to do about this atom bomb business. How we move forward on nuclear energy will determine the fate of mankind. I thought, perhaps, you and I -

CLARE

You wish to talk to me about the state of mankind in the lady's lavatory of Ebbitt's Bar and Grill?

HELEN

Well - we can't be seen publicly discussing the world's problems - what other chance will we have?

CLARE

(glancing around, considering)

I stand corrected regarding the venue, Helen. I'm sure more than one congressman has discussed world altering legislation with his dick in his hand.

HELEN

(laughing)

I am relieved you agree. As I was saying -

CLARE

Oh no, Mrs. Douglas, I was merely being clever.

(downs the last of her martini)

I've had two martinis. My acumen for discussing political matters ceases at one and a half.

HELEN

This matter is far beyond a political issue. Though we are in opposite parties, I believe you and I both understand the need to secure a future for our children that does not end in self-annihilation.

CLARE

Oh please don't tell me you think we should write bipartisan legislation together. I can see the headlines now. Glamour Queens Put Aside Party to Stand with Mothers Everywhere!

HELEN

I didn't think it would go that far, but why not?

CLARE

I may have a strong voting record on so-called female causes, but I have no desire to be pigeonholed as a Crusader for Women. It is hard enough to be taken seriously.

HELEN

I believe our joint effort would offset any superficial observations from the press. Atomic energy is not a just woman's issue. It is a human issue.

CLARE

Mrs. Douglas, do you remember our meeting during your first week in Congress?

(Helen nods.)

Even when in agreement, we do not raise the same issue on the House Floor. I have no interest in a cat-fight with you. I was under the impression we were of one mind on the matter.

HELEN

I said that I didn't like fencing, Mrs. Luce - sly quips and cutting insults substituting as meaningful discussion.

CLARE

(smiles slyly, condescending)

Oh dear Mrs. Douglas, cleverness is not the only indication of intelligence, though I am more blessed with that attribute.

HELEN

(ignoring the insult)

If we focused our efforts, we can use the attention for good - and yes, I know there will be more written about our choice of hats and favorite recipes - but if through all that, we can make the world a better -

CLARE

(bursts out laughing)

Make the world a better place! Oh you are precious! Lyndon Johnson must eat you like candy.

HELEN

Mrs. Luce, I am a married woman. Please respect that.

CLARE

All right. What's Melvyn Douglas like in the sack? I've written plays, but I've never done it with an actor. Of course, my most successful play was *The Women*. No opportunities.

HELEN

Mrs. Luce, I am positive that Melvyn would not approve of -

CLARE

Who cares whether he'd approve? Where is he? In Hollywood? An entire continent away.

HELEN

(defensively, but trying to  
remain composed)

When Melvyn enlisted in the army, our home was in Los Angeles where I maintained our family. With the war over, my husband has returned to his work in Hollywood, while I serve the people in Congress. We thought it better not to disrupt our children's lives by uprooting them to Washington.

CLARE

No need to get all stuffy, Mrs. Douglas. When duty and family conflict, difficult decisions are in order. You don't have to tell me that. I'm sure Mr. Douglas understood the full responsibilities of your running for office and has stood by you all the way.

HELEN

He has stood by me, yes, though he had to jump onto a moving train.

(MORE)

**HELEN (CONT'D)**

He was stationed in India during the election and never received my correspondence. He read about my victory in the newspaper.

CLARE

When the shock wore off, I'm sure that he was very proud.

HELEN

Melvyn has always supported me.

CLARE

Indeed! Nothing but the most ardent support would allow a man to abandon his beautiful wife, alone, in Washington D.C., surrounded by powerful scheming men.

HELEN

When you were writing from the front lines - entrenched with soldiers for weeks - did your husband tag along?

CLARE

Are you joking? With Harry around, I'd have never gotten into Colonel Willoughby's private quarters. Or General Truscott's.

HELEN

What happened in private quarters is none of my business.

CLARE

Oh Mrs. Douglas, I am simply making light of the rumors. You understand, of course. Take the tittle-tattle about you and Congressman Johnson...

HELEN

Mrs. Luce, as I have already expressed, I am in no mood for gossip.

CLARE

Very well, Mrs. Douglas, you win. I'll discuss the nuclear issue with you if you have Mike pour me a scotch. Dewar's if he has it.

Helen hesitates, unsure if Clare is serious. She can't resist the possibility.

HELEN

I will see what I can do.

Clare hands Helen her empty martini glass and grasps Helen's hand with her other.

CLARE

For God's sake don't let any of those men engage you. Joe Martin had me cornered for almost an hour, going on about some paper route he had as a child. I don't care that he is the minority leader. I finally had to walk away. You're too nice, Helen. If I have to come get you, there will be a terrible scene.

HELEN

I will be right back.

CLARE

Thank you.

Helen exits. SOUND of celebration is heard still going full swing as the door opens and closes. Clare goes to the mirror. She takes a deep breath. She closes her eyes.

Lights up on ROALD DAHL, an RAF pilot during the war and member of the Irregulars, a small group of young British spies. He has nothing on but an RAF cap and a towel wrapped around his waist.

ROALD DAHL

Goddamn woman! I am fucked out for bloody sake! You screwed me from one end of the room to the other for three goddamn nights. Get off!

Area lights up on DONALD FREEMAN, late thirties. He is the balding, out of shape editor of Vanity Fair. He wears boxers, glasses and socks with garters.

DONALD FREEMAN

You needed me to show you the ropes at Vanity Fair so you'd be ready when the moment came to snatch the managing editor job for yourself. Why would you really want me when a man like Bernard Baruch was at your disposal? Never mind it was through my contacts that you were introduced! I believed in you Clare. The only one who saw through that porcelain skin and those delicate features into your true talent! Why can't you love me, Clare? Why?

He reaches for her pathetically.

Area lights up on BERNARD BARUCH, a wealthy financier and entrepreneur, attractive and fit, in his early sixties. He wears an open dress shirt over his T-shirt and boxers. He is full of energy and Southern gentility.

BERNARD BARUCH

You attract everyone's attention with your glow. Your extraordinary spirit shines from your eyes. When courage was given out, you were sitting on the front bench. I remember the first time I met you, so young and fresh and ambitious. You turned your gaze on me and said in that sweet voice "Mr. Baruch, I would like you to teach me all about business policy." I've been hooked ever since. So what if you used your sex to influence me and I used my influence to boost your career? You deserved success, Clare. We all fuck our way to the top one way or another.

Area lights fade. Helen enters with the scotch and a pint of beer. SOUND of loud male laughter from bar at opening of door. Helen hands the scotch to Clare. Clare downs it.

CLARE

Thank you. That should do the trick.

(handing Helen the empty glass)

You are very pretty, Mrs. Douglas.

HELEN

As are you, Mrs. Luce.

CLARE

True, but my beauty emanates from a delicate radiance, whereas you are what I would call the Amazon Princess type. You have a bright-eyed way about you. That toothy all American grin is well used to your advantage on the House floor. I've seen Lyndon staring at you like an addiction.

HELEN

I am not privy to Congressman Johnson's alleged addictions.

CLARE

Mrs. Douglas, all this power, in the middle of a war, how could a girl not fall on her back, at least once or twice? You know, if you didn't want people to talk about you and Lyndon, perhaps you shouldn't disappear in his office, leaving the chit chatty aids mulling around, wondering at all the animal noises.

HELEN

What business is this of yours?

CLARE

Absolutely none! If it were legitimately my business, it would be colossally boring.

HELEN

Wouldn't it be easier to gossip with the other congresswomen about me?

CLARE

Chattering about someone behind her back is no fun unless you are plotting her demise. Besides, except for Margaret, the rest of our fellow Congresswomen are a gaggle of boring, unambitious frumps filling in for the dead husbands.

HELEN

We may take a greater interest in the business of governing than most of our fellow Congresswomen, but that's no reason to insult them.

CLARE

I merely observe how much more accomplished you seem than our female peers - quite frankly, that goes for our male peers as well. Your freshman appointment to Foreign Affairs was quite impressive. Men have needed years of seniority to earn a spot on that committee.

HELEN

I could make the same observation about you and Military Affairs. I believe you were appointed upon your arrival in Washington.

CLARE

Mrs. Douglas, my background as a war correspondent garnered my qualifications as exceptional for Military Affairs.

(playfully sarcastic,  
suppressing a giggle)

Just as your reputation as an actress earned your spot on Foreign Affairs. Showmanship trumps substance so your appointment is a tad more prestigious. After such an illustrious beginning, I hope you don't find your star ceases to rise now that Truman is in the White House. It is well known that you don't support him.

HELEN

I support the president. We are both Democrats.

CLARE

But, you're different sorts of Democrats, aren't you? After that loss of composure you displayed at the national convention, he might not be so anxious to see your influence in Congress grow.

HELEN

Loss of composure?

CLARE

I heard that you were quite fond of Henry Wallace. But perhaps that is one of those rumors we were discussing.

HELEN

Henry Wallace is a good friend.

CLARE

And you support your friends?

HELEN

Absolutely.

CLARE

And you think standing on a chair and sobbing in the middle of the Democratic National Convention is a good show of that support? Mrs. Douglas, though appropriate for the Broadway stage to which you are accustomed, don't you think it a bit inappropriate to the dignity of a congresswoman?

HELEN

How do you even know this?

CLARE

Oh Helen, everyone knows.

HELEN

Vice President Henry Wallace served with exception. He was the voice of the Progressive movement; he made its ideas accessible. It was pure politics they played - replacing him with Truman. I wanted it clear that I knew that.

CLARE

You are still stinging about Wallace. He is an intelligent and talented man. Being replaced by Truman was a stab in the back, but I expect nothing less from your party. Though the methods were deplorable, I wholeheartedly agree with the outcome. Imagine Helen, right now, if Henry Wallace, one tip-toe shy of a communist, were president of the United States?

HELEN

I do imagine it and I mourn the future we've lost. Truman doesn't have the drive or the acumen to steer the country on the same path as Franklin.

CLARE

Oh for heaven's sake, Helen, how would a man like Wallace achieve even the slightest cooperation from Congress?

HELEN

Henry Wallace would not only have continued President Roosevelt's policies, he would have taken them further.

CLARE

That is exactly why he terrified me. He was thrown under the bus during the Democratic convention, I agree. But I was relieved none-the-less when it cost him the nomination - knowing what we all knew - but would not say- about Franklin Roosevelt's failing health.

HELEN

Would *not* say? You announced to the entire world that Franklin Roosevelt was a dying man.

CLARE

Somebody had to. In his final months, our beloved President had fallen far too ill for the rigorous duties his office required. The deal he made with Russia and Churchill at Yalta? We should've hired sky writers over eastern Europe: "Take Me, Stalin, I'm yours!"

HELEN

Hitler would not have been defeated were it not for the aid of Russia. Our president did the only thing that he could do and that is treat the Soviets as our ally, which, during the war, they very much were.

CLARE

Roosevelt never articulated any tangible foreign policy, unless it was a paraphrase of Churchill. We became dependent upon the Soviets when Roosevelt lied us into the war because he didn't have the political courage to lead us into it.

HELEN

Melvyn and I were one of the first to speak against isolationism, but the country was split. We were a hair's breath out of a Depression, Mrs. Luce, and wars are costly affairs.

CLARE

I am well aware, Mrs. Douglas. I recently angered my constituency when I argued to cap individual incomes at \$25,000 to pay for it.

(laughs)

My office received letters saying I was a big a Judas to my class as Roosevelt. One thing I have never been apologetic about is my support for our men in uniform.

HELEN

I didn't realize you were apologetic about anything. If you couldn't issue a retraction of Globaloney, I cannot imagine remorse is in your character.

CLARE

I have a great deal of remorse, Mrs. Douglas. When it comes to politics, admitting wrong is rarely in one's best interest. Regarding the protection of American lives and property, I have no cause for contrition.

HELEN

Mrs. Luce, your globaloney speech was a brazen and ill-timed attack on the Vice President. There we were trying to defeat Hitler, and you announce to our European and Soviet allies that the United States should rightfully dominate the world's air space?

CLARE

That's not what I was saying! I meant that this excessively liberal, communistic idea of Wallace's: Freedom of the Air - that the air belongs to the people - is naïve and dangerous. Enemy aircraft can and have appeared without warning. The press seized on the word, globaloney, and it overshadowed the true substance of my speech.

HELEN

Even those in your own party decried globaloney as a cheap oversimplification, just like your goddamn G.I. Jim nonsense!

CLARE

I was defending the American soldier!

HELEN

Hitler had a hell of a lot more to do with our casualties than Franklin!

CLARE

Mrs. Douglas, I only implied -

HELEN

To throw your president under the bus by suggesting thousands of our fighting men died in vain *after defeating fascism* was a self-serving, disgusting breach of taste for which you should be ashamed of yourself!

CLARE

Go to hell!

HELEN

Good night!

Helen exits leaving Clare alone. Lights up on Donald Freeman.

DONALD FREEMAN

You throw everyone under the bus, don't you Clare? You are rather adept at it. I died with your scratches all over my back. Now you know what it is like to lose something you truly loved. Did she know you loved her? How could she when you never took the time? You were too busy clawing your way up the ladder at *Vanity Fair*. When you tired of that, you jammed your painted claws into Henry Luce and *Life* magazine. Your Harry, you call him! The front lines were no place to take a child and you loved every minute of it, of forgetting you were a mother. There was no place in your life for your child. There was only a place for Clare and temporary space holders for anyone who could further your ambitions.

Lights up on Charles Willoughby.

CHARLES WILLOUGHBY

Did you ever really love me, Clare? Or was I just your ticket to the action, to a private dinner with General McArthur? A soldier boy-toy like Lucian Truscott? I wrote to your daughter. Did Ann tell you? I wanted to earn her affection.

(MORE)

## CHARLES WILLOUGHBY (CONT'D)

I knew how much her step-father adored her. I thought it might ease the blow when you left Harry - if she had another father figure waiting, a man willing to love her like a daughter because he loved her mother. We made promises to each other, Clare. Promises you didn't have the decency to acknowledge when you ended our relationship with a note.

Lights up on Julian Simpson. He holds a baby in his arms.

## JULIAN SIMPSON

She might have been the first of many - if you had possessed the courage to follow your heart. I would never have beaten you in a drunken rage like George Brokaw, or caused you to miscarry over and over until I killed your womb. How could a man treat his wife like that? A wife young enough to be his daughter. I would've cherished you. You might still have Ann and many more children to comfort and love you. But you wouldn't be Clare Boothe Luce, playwright, journalist, congresswoman. You've always chosen yourself, Clare. Nothing is going to change that.

Clare begins crying. Helen re-enters with a glass of water. Clare instantly pulls herself together, but not before Helen has seen her.

## HELEN

Are you all right, Mrs. Luce? When you didn't come back into the bar, I became concerned.

Helen hands Clare the glass of water.

## CLARE

Thank you, Mrs. Douglas. I'm fine. Some emotion about the war.

(takes a few drinks, recovers)

Any sign of Lyndon Johnson?

## HELEN

I spoke to his aid. He informed me that Congressmen Johnson would not be joining us this evening.

CLARE

The wife demanding his attention or more prestigious company, perhaps?

HELEN

I do not know his reasons.

CLARE

He sent the aid so you wouldn't wait for him all night. That shows some regard.

HELEN

Mrs. Luce, I did not say that Lyndon sent his aid on my behalf. There are many of Congressmen Johnson's colleagues present who may have been anticipating his arrival. Once again, I will ask you not to make assumptions about my personal relationship with Lyndon Johnson.

CLARE

Your socialist husband shouldn't mind sharing.

HELEN

Melvyn is not a socialist. He is not a communist. He is a liberal progressive!

Helen starts to leave.

CLARE

If it's that easy to provoke you, Helen, you're not going to have a hell of a time in politics.

HELEN

Labels are dangerous, Mrs. Luce. False accusations of communism ruined reputations. Melvyn has experienced enough anti-Semitism without putting more targets on his back.

CLARE

(sincere)

I meant no harm, Mrs. Douglas.

Helen relaxes, deciding to let the matter pass. She considers leaving.

She regards Clare with concern and decides to stay. She sits.

HELEN

My second tour as an opera singer was doomed by the war, like the first one was doomed by the Depression. Right before my first concert in Italy, I found myself at a café with a British music critic. We struck up a conversation. He didn't know that my husband was Jewish. He rather ardently attempted to convince me to join the Nazi party. The things he said about the Jewish people terrified me - such utter, evil nonsense. I quit my tour immediately. I flew home to Melvyn and cried in his arms. I miss - well.

CLARE

What? What do you miss?

HELEN

When marriage works, nothing on earth can take its place. Melvyn and I haven't lived together romantically since before the war. I don't want him in my bed anymore than he wants me. - not at this stage anyway. Don't get me wrong. We are great friends. He supports me, but it's not to the same. I miss learning from him. My family was Republican and so was I. I never questioned anything. Then one morning Melvyn woke me up - we'd been together a few months. He had a giant stack of books in his hands, "We can't get through life making love. We have to study too!" He opened my eyes to the suffering around us, the migrant workers treated like animals in California and all over the west. By the time I toured the Dust Bowl - one speech from Franklin and I was in. Though, I never thought in a million years, I would end up in Congress and how separated from my husband I would feel when I did.

CLARE

Harry and I were just married when I started writing plays. He was madly in love with me then. He encouraged me to take up journalism - mostly because he did not like theater people. By the time I ran for Congress, he supported me, but like you, our bedroom had gone cold - not that it was ever a raging inferno. We live separate lives. It is easier that way.

HELEN

If we were under the same roof, I'm not sure Melvyn and I could remain together. Perhaps the timing of my service is fortuitous, a necessary and noble distraction from a difficult time in my marriage. I can bring something to Congress, shine a light, help keep the country on the Progressive path.

CLARE

I don't wish to see our country go over the cliff that Sneaky Franklin and the New Dealer Gang have been steering us toward, but I agree with you about embracing service in times of uncertainty.

Helen takes a breath and decides not to respond dig on Roosevelt. She rises and smiles politely.

HELEN

It has been lovely chatting with you Mrs. Luce. I must say goodnight. If I leave right now, I can make it home in time to call Melvyn and the children before they go to bed.

CLARE

Yes, for career women like us - with children - a three hour time difference is a godsend.

Clare's mood drops suddenly. Helen makes a small move to comfort Clare who remains frozen and lost in herself for a moment.

CLARE

Do you call them every night?

HELEN

Most nights, yes, but not all. I talk to them everyday. Of course, they are here with me sometimes.

CLARE

Have you spoken to them already today?

Helen nods. She has.

CLARE

Then there's no need to rush off. Unless, of course, they are expecting your call for some reason.

HELEN

It's not that - I - well, they are not expecting my call. To be honest, they are probably not home.

CLARE

You poor thing. You cannot lie. It's adorable. You didn't like what I said about Franklin and the New Deal Gang. But, you didn't want to get into another argument. So, you used the pretense of calling your family as a way to graciously abandon our conversation?

HELEN

Perhaps.

They laugh. Clare pats the seat next to her. Helen sits.

CLARE

During my first official dinner at the White House, I found myself seated next to a young and beautiful man. Steel blue eyes, a lean and ribbon physique. Roald Dahl.

(winks)

On his other side, perched this gorgeous starlet. Yet he spent all night charming me, a woman fifteen years older. We found ourselves in a private corner. He confided in me about an upcoming mission in North Africa. Military men always adore me. I kept him locked in my hotel room for two days until he was exhausted and of no use. If he fell asleep afterwards like most men, his stamina may not have been compromised. Oh God! He'd go on and on about dear old Mother England and her good fight against the Nazis, as if they were holding Europe together all on their own.

(falling into memory, more serious)

I'd drift off and fall into the most vivid dreams. His plane crashed in Libya. He was given the wrong coordinates. I can still imagine the blood spouting from that pretty face.

HELEN

You know that Roald Dahl was a spy? And he likely made sure he had a seat next to you - a Congresswoman and wife of Henry Luce - at the dinner?

CLARE

What do you mean?

HELEN

President Roosevelt enjoyed Hollywood gossip. In exchange for mine, he'd offer up his own. Dahl and his pal, Ian Fleming, were on a mission. To ensure that the wealthy and influential aligned with Britain regarding to foreign policy. They charmed high society by any civil means necessary.

CLARE

He did not alter any of my views, I assure you. Nor did I share any classified information. Despite all his dashing war tales, never once did my feelings on England's brutal colonialism or America's right to secure our air space falter.

HELEN

I am relieved to hear that, Mrs. Luce, and not surprised.

CLARE

Four years ago in Trinidad, I spent a few days in house arrest. British customs found a draft of my next article for Life Magazine. I referred to the RAF pilots as *flying fairies*. It never would have made it past my editor, but it caused quite a stir among the allies. I am glad that I am not like most women. Whenever they nest, they feel the need to conform to a man's point of view. I dabbled briefly in the Democratic party because of Bernie's influence and the disaster that was Herbert Hoover. But, I quickly returned to my senses. Once Melvyn got you into bed, he owned your mind as well.

HELEN

Intimacy softened me to his point of view. But, it wasn't the sex that changed my mind, it was the ideas he shared, the books he gave me. He educated me. Melvyn didn't just screw me and tell me what to think. Yes, I wanted to please him.

(MORE)

**HELEN (CONT'D)**

But, I was truly ignorant of politics. I never thought about why I considered myself a Republican other than I loved my father and that is what our family had always been. I listened to the president's radio addresses all on my own. I toured the dust bowl - *on my own*. Melvyn may have introduced me to the progressive path, but I continued because it aligned with who I am and what I believe.

**CLARE**

You are gorgeous, Helen. No wonder you've attracted a man like Lyndon - a younger man as well, I might add.

**HELEN**

Eight years hardly makes him younger.

Clare smiles, acknowledging that Helen has made an admission. Clare grabs Helen's beer and takes a drink.

**CLARE**

Perhaps you are just good friends, Mrs. Douglas. As unwavering New Dealers and FDR disciples you have much in common. A consummation of minds, so to speak.

Helen does not respond to this. Claire sits calmly and patiently, refusing to be the next one to speak.

**HELEN**

If I tell you about one of my affairs, can we drop the Lyndon Johnson chit-chat?

**CLARE**

If I find it sufficiently tantalizing.

Helen thinks, then decides to throw Clare a bone.

**HELEN**

I was in Europe when the Depression hit, on my very first tour as an opera singer. All the savings I had from my years on Broadway were cleaned out. My family was devastated. My father was very depressed.

CLARE

Fortunately George gave me a stash of alimony at the start of the Depression. It sustained Ann and me until my career could support us.

HELEN

My career shifted. I had to leave my first European tour as an opera singer and return to acting. I took the lead in a Broadway play called *Diplomacy*. That's when I met Tyrone Powers.

CLARE

Oh my goodness. Tyrone Powers, what a delicious - wait! He would have been a boy, a teenager!

HELEN

No, not that one.

CLARE

Oh my. You mean *senior*?

HELEN

Despite the age difference, our relationship grew quite affection, sweetly intimate. I learned a great deal.

CLARE

My God, Helen, he was old enough to be your grandfather.

HELEN

Let she who is without Bernard Baruch in her closet, cast the first stone.

CLARE

You did have your precious nose stitched into Franklin Roosevelt's sewing circle.

HELEN

Franklin sometimes referred to you as Barney's Girl.

CLARE

Apart from *Bernie* Baruch's massive wealth and connections, he possessed the energy and virility of a man a third his age and a charisma and sophistication beyond anyone.

(MORE)

## CLARE (CONT'D)

He still does. Bernie has and always will be a man I admire. After Hoover's disastrous presidency, when Bernie was able to sway my allegiance Democratic, it was I who suggested we needed a third political party with the slogan "A New Deal for America." Roosevelt's wonder boys overheard me and ran with it. I almost joined your cult.

## HELEN

(trying to be casual)

So, uh, you and Lyndon? Were you just pulling my leg? Or were you two...

## CLARE

Oh, how sweet. I assure you, Helen, you have nothing to worry about. It was a single unremarkable toss off in a hotel room. I had drinks with Sam and him. Sam got tired and went home. Lyndon suggested we get a room. And I was all for it. But, I had a few things to say first. I knew I'd never have another opportunity to explain to him how his political beliefs were absurd. I confess, I may have overplayed it and blown the anticipation. We stripped down as if at the doctor and he lay back on the bed. He grinned, unfurling that woolly mammoth between his legs like it was a ride and all I had to do was climb on. I was barely stimulated and, as you know, he is both long and thick. Some men don't understand that you can't pop them inside you as fast as you drop your knickers. It is always those with large pricks who are the worst about it, when they should be the most sensitive.

## HELEN

I've found Lyndon considerate in that regard. He's not always gentle, though he seems to know my moods. He walks into the room and his presence alone is stimulating.

Helen has finally admitted the affair. Clare is thrilled, but contains herself, calmly keeping the subject going.

## CLARE

That's your head, Helen.

HELEN

What?

CLARE

Tyrone and Melvyn were both actors. You understood each other's minds. Then Melvyn pushed it further with the socialist thinking and all the books -

HELEN

Melvyn is not a social-

CLARE

Let me finish. And now you and Lyndon. Both New Dealers. You both idolized Roosevelt. Once a man latches into your mind, your sex soon follows. I bet you even found Franklin appealing in a sensual way.

HELEN

Don't be ridiculous! He was like a second father to me.

CLARE

That hasn't stopped you before.

HELEN

Clare!

CLARE

Oh poor Helen. That Texan has so wrapped around your brain, all he has to do is drop his drawers and holler, "Ride-em cowgirl!" Roald and Bernie so impressed me with their knowledge of a woman's southern hemisphere and willingness to linger. Unfortunately, though it gives us great pleasure, some men find the tropics too messy.

HELEN

Clare, my dear, it's not that Lyndon refuses to explore below the equator. Though he may have docked, he knew better than to stick his tongue into a frozen port.

Clare is speechless. She almost seems prepared to get angry then bursts out.

CLARE

Touché!

They laugh.

HELEN

I'm sorry that crossed the line. I'm so rarely clever in the moment that I couldn't resist.

CLARE

Go out and get us more drinks and I'll forgive you, you bitch.

(as Helen turns to go)

And Helen -

HELEN

Yes, I know. Be quick.

Helen exits. Lights up on Roald Dahl.

ROALD DAHL

I hated fucking you, you know? I begged them to assign me someone else - anyone. Christ, I would have rather fucked a man. You disgusted me, I told my superiors. "Close your eyes and think of England," they said.

JOE KENNEDY

You warned me, Clare. I thought running a country was like running a business. That's how I set out to deal with Hitler. I'm no crusader for the Jews, that's for sure, just like most Americans. I wanted to keep this country out of a war - a war, I'll remind you that I lost my son, Joe, in - and almost lost Jack. Rose is the devout Catholic in the family, not me. Turning to God is the only way to survive the loss of a child.

Helen returns with a gin and tonic and Manhattan on the rocks. Clare takes the Manhattan.

HELEN

The bartender disappeared into the back. Sam and Joe were arguing about something, so I stole their drinks and ran. Jon Rankin saw me, of all people. I winked at him and shook my ass. He was so shocked, he couldn't speak.

CLARE

You'll pay for that later.

HELEN

I know, but it is a night of female solidarity. I put our needs before my own.

CLARE

You are a gentlewoman and a friend and in love with Lyndon Johnson whether you'll admit it to me or not.

HELEN

Of course, I am. I wouldn't sleep with him, if I didn't love him.

CLARE

Oh. You're one of *those* women.

HELEN

One of those women?

CLARE

You require affection. That's why, even though I'm much younger than you, I've fucked a lot more men.

HELEN

You're one year younger.

CLARE

Well, at least Lyndon reciprocates a depth of feeling. But, if your politics ever diverge, he will possess more than one means to wound you.

HELEN

I don't see that happening. Lyndon and I agree on foreign policy, taxes, equal rights, social security...

CLARE

Times change. That man is ambitious. Love would never get in his way. And if you hurt him, he will strike you deep.

HELEN

Why would I hurt Lyndon?

CLARE

Big egos are fragile egos, Helen. Your honesty will brew trouble with him sooner or later. I've been in the House two years longer. I've watched these men. They can't hide from women like us. You're an actress. I'm a writer. We see in their gestures, in their expressions, exactly into who they are.

HELEN

I'm not blind to Lyndon's insecurities, Clare. His erratic shifts in mood are alarming to say the least. An aid will make the most innocuous comment and he'll fly into a rage. Still, it's all very exciting. I feel alive. When President Roosevelt died, Lyndon kept me from losing hope.

CLARE

How did he do that?

HELEN

Turn your dirty mind back on and it's exactly how you'd think. But there was more to it. I was so upset when Franklin died.

CLARE

You were hysterical for weeks.

HELEN

He was our President.

CLARE

Go on.

HELEN

When Henry Wallace was denied the Vice-President nomination, I had a terrible feeling because, yes, I knew what you knew - what everybody knew. Franklin was dying.

(MORE)

## HELEN (CONT'D)

So, when he went, and Truman assumed the presidency, it felt like a dream died. Something beautiful had been swept away and we were never going to get it back.

## CLARE

Well, I don't feel the same about Roosevelt's vision, Helen, but I understand what you mean about the dream.

## HELEN

Lyndon and I made love. I cried. Great heaving sobs. There was no hesitation from him, no flinching away from the size of my grief. He was a tree, a rock, a cave. Something about losing myself to him - my hope survived.

## CLARE

Women like us need sensual passion. It quickens our blood and sharpens the mind. Good sex makes us better congresswomen, in my opinion.

## HELEN

Knowing I have someone like Lyndon on my side, that he believes not only what I believe, but he believes in me, in who I am and what I could accomplish. - it means the world.

(laughing)

I barely had my office unpacked when I looked up and saw him sitting across from me, his feet propped up on my desk, "Welcome to Washington, Mrs. Douglas." In one flabbergasted second, all my doubts and fears about becoming a congresswoman turned to exhilaration.

## CLARE

I take it that you hadn't felt that kind of excitement in a long time.

## HELEN

I first met Melvyn when we were cast in *Now or Never* on Broadway. I left the producer's office consumed. The first time we made love, naked and sweating, rolling until we were twisted into each other - I had never known such wholeness before. Then, a few years into our marriage, a cold draft crept in. I discovered he was having an affair, many affairs.

(MORE)

HELEN (cont'd)

He suggested we divorce. I refused and- I closed a part of myself. I threw all my efforts into service.

CLARE

I happened to catch you and Melvyn in *Now or Never*. George took me out for dinner and a show - one of his rare nights sober. Silly play. One good roll in the hay and a stifled opera diva is cured of her ailments? The elusive magical prick... You two almost sold it. It was a shame they replaced you in the movie. Gloria Swanson's chemistry with Melvyn wasn't nearly so steamy.

HELEN

She was a great actress and she was Joe Kennedy's mistress. Back then, Joe got whatever he wanted.

CLARE

Not everything. He made of fool of himself while Ambassador to England. Even after it became obvious to everyone that Hitler was a monster, Joe remained hellbent on appeasing him.

HELEN

What's going to happen, Clare, when the world faces another monster like Hitler and he has nuclear weapons to advance his evil intent?

CLARE

We keep nuclear weapons from the hands of people like that. We keep the technology held tightly against our chest.

HELEN

I disagree. We should share it with the Soviets and other countries. If we all have it, we can all agree on a plan for developing it. Safe nuclear energy could solve all sorts of problems and advance third world countries. But only if we do it right. We're doomed if it becomes an arms race.

CLARE

Helen, there is no possibility of my voting to share our nuclear technology with the Soviets. I regard communism as the greatest threat against the United States. It must be curbed and eradicated, wherever possible. You cannot cooperate with something that wants to destroy you.

HELEN

Perhaps we have reached an impasse on this issue. But to say that communism must be curbed and eradicated wherever possible? I don't think that it is up to us to decide for the entire planet. I hold considerable hope in the United Nations. It is yet in the nascent stages, but there now exists a tribunal, an international policy making institution comprised of members from all countries.

CLARE

Policy doled out by a bunch of administrative bureaucrats will not affect anything without strong military backing. Who is going to provide that? It will fall on the backs of the most developed countries.

HELEN

If all nations are involved in the decision process, I think that military force, in many cases, can be avoided. There will be real change, you'll see.

CLARE

Helen, I am afraid your naivete rivals that of an unborn child. Though it would be ducky if you were right.

HELEN

I have been lobbying President Truman to nominate me as a delegate to the United Nations Assembly. There is every indication that he supports me. He's no Franklin Roosevelt, but I believe I can work with him.

CLARE

What we heard from President Truman this week sounded an awful lot like a continuation of Roosevelt policies. Believe me, Truman will face obstacles to that agenda.

HELEN

I was encouraged. He clarified his position on extending unemployment. And, I look forward to the details of his national healthcare plan.

CLARE

The unemployment benefits, though reasonable in a post-war military reduction, need to be curbed.

(MORE)

**CLARE (CONT'D)**

As far as this national health care business, I'll withhold my judgment until I receive the full pitch. Quite frankly, the idea smacks of socialism.

**HELEN**

The desire to protect this country's citizens when they are at their most vulnerable is not- Franklin's programs have lifted the poor. I saw it with my own eyes. Young, desperate men coming back to life, building parks and roads, infrastructure. We can't simply cut people off. Too many of our citizens are yet vulnerable.

**CLARE**

Working for a buck is one thing. Handouts from the government, like unemployment and social security, are something else entirely.

**HELEN**

What is wrong with the impulse to take care of our elderly or to feed and clothe sick children or giving families an opportunity to escape shanty towns? Farmers were thrown off their land following one of the greatest natural disasters in our history. And we left them, to suffer and die, in a country that calls itself Christian, built by our wise forefathers on humanitarian values.

**CLARE**

I am not against helping the poor. I voted for aid to European women and children. I sided with FDR on maternity appropriations for wives of enlisted men. But, I will not support these communistic ideas, seeping into our Democracy and hindering the growth of capitalism, our economic backbone. Our forefathers built this country on the idea that if you are intelligent and willing to work hard, you can make something of yourself and prosper.

HELEN

When money is monopolized by the few and they use that money to buy politicians solely for the purpose of expanding their own power, then for heaven's sake, you end up with another kind of royalism, a class system disguised as survival of the fittest economics, where the wealthy deify themselves as the givers of charity for whom they see fit to bestow - the precise kind of system that our forefathers rebelled against.

The debate escalates both verbally and physically as their passion and command of the issues is expressed.

CLARE

Even though labor has held this country ransom in unconscionable times, I think that workers should be allowed to organize and bargain for fair wages and safe working conditions. But, you have to let capitalism run its course. We will kill industry if we over unionize it. And where will that put the average man? On the street with no jobs to be had!

HELEN

We, as servants of the people, have a responsibility to see to its morality, to ensure that opportunism and abject selfishness do not drive our economy. You need look no further than the Crash of '29 to see the inevitable result of greed at the helm. Look at the sweat shops that appeared like pock marks during the industrial age. We all deserve basic human rights. It is up to us to see that unscrupulous capitalism doesn't violate those rights.

CLARE

Why is it a basic human right that we all have two cars in every garage, two chickens in every pot, and two pairs of nylons on every chicken? Basic human rights do not mean rights to materialism. That's a dangerous gauge we set on not only our happiness, but the expectations of being an American. Frankly, "all men are created equal" is generous to say the least. There will always be those that have more and those who have less. But that doesn't preclude one from seeking happiness as happiness is a product of spirit.

(MORE)

## CLARE (CONT'D)

This idea that man lives by bread alone is a communist idea and it weakens America, because it weakens the fortitude and character of our souls.

## HELEN

Why does every idea these days seem to be a communist idea or an anti-communist idea? Can't ideas simply be ideas?

## CLARE

You must vastly underestimate the threat communism poses to this nation.

## HELEN

I don't see it as a threat, at least not internally. While democracy thrives in this country, and, I believe it still does, there will be no significant draw to communism as a system of government.

## CLARE

When Eastern Europe falls under Soviet control, you'll feel differently, I guarantee it. It doesn't matter if the people are drawn to it or not. Stalin will take what he wants. It's up to us to stop him.

## HELEN

We can't go around policing the world.

## CLARE

Isn't that exactly what they said for why we shouldn't fight fascism in Germany?

## HELEN

It's just... Ugh!

(does not have the answer)

It's going to be endless war, Clare? Is that what you're saying? The fighting is never really going to stop.

## CLARE

I don't know, Helen. Why don't you get us some more drinks and maybe we'll figure it out?

HELEN

All right, but last round. My head will be pounding in the morning.

CLARE

Really? I'm never hung over.

HELEN

Why am I not surprised?

CLARE

Hurry back.

Helen Exits. Lights up on Bernard Baruch.

BERNARD BARUCH

What's all this nonsense about becoming a nun? I don't see you leaving politics, Clare. It's in your blood. You think denying the world your talent, your insight, your intellect - you think this honors Ann? You had your troubles, but in the end, she loved you. She admired you. She wanted to be you. Don't stop being who you are, Clare. You won't succeed and it's not what Ann would have wanted.

Helen returns with a bottle of opened red wine. It is about half full.

HELEN

It's quieting down out there. I snatched this from behind the bar. No clean glasses anywhere.

CLARE

Shall I take the first swig?

HELEN

By all means, christen the bottle.

Clare takes a swig and hands it to Helen. They pass it back and forth.

CLARE

A word of advice, Helen?

HELEN

Yes, Clare.

CLARE

Keep true to your causes, but do not allow any one man to represent them. Remember that most politicians, most men - when it comes to their political beliefs - are more flexible than you are.

HELEN

Compromise is part of politics. We must meet in the middle to get anything done.

CLARE

I'm not talking about true compromise on behalf of the greater good. I'm talking about abandoning high ideals for backroom deals, shape-shifting to advance up the ladder. Franklin Delano Roosevelt was not a perfect man, Helen.

HELEN

I know that, Clare. I'm not as wide-eyed as you'd like to think. Eleanor begged him to stop the intimidation of the Negro population. Lyndon and I were equally frustrated by his unwillingness to confront the racism of the Southern Democrats. President Roosevelt was afraid that it would split the party. He was probably right.

CLARE

A New Deal for the American People - except for the Negro? Why not? This country was founded on the principles of equality and freedom, excluding the Black population. I believe our forefathers made the same excuse in fear of splitting the country. And, it split anyway didn't it?

HELEN

If he hadn't been ill - now with the war and the Depression behind us - President Roosevelt might have challenged the Southern Democrats. This was his last term. He wouldn't need them anymore for re-election.

CLARE

Stop deifying your precious Roosevelt. There wasn't a word in his platform indicating that he intended to confront the Southern problem - a problem he was happy to leave in the hands of the Southern states. My God, Helen! Black men and women are enduring the unspeakable as we sit here and swig our wine. It's only a matter of time before they've had enough and take matters into their own hands. Their lives may depend on it.

HELEN

The last thing this country needs, after a war, are race riots. We can pass legislation to address equality, but we need time.

CLARE

(in a Southern bell accent)

Why Miss Helen, you white folks is so wise. We'll just wait on you to do somethin' cause these lynchins don't hurt a bit.

HELEN

You don't think I'm horrified by what goes on down South? I feel helpless. I hate sitting on the same side of the aisle as Lightnin' John Rankin! When he said we had not been able to win the war because of Negroes on the front lines, I wanted to rip his goddamn face off! Do you know the sacrifices Black soldiers made for this country?

CLARE

I'm in full agreement, but then I'm not a member of the Jim Crow party.

HELEN

My district is a salad bowl of mixed races and it has taken everything I have had to earn and keep their faith and respect because of the Southern Democrats. Not that I was without ignorance myself. When I started out campaigning, I arrived to speak to a Colored congregation. The place was packed. I was introduced to thundering applause. I looked out at this sea of smiling brown faces and blurted, "I just love the Negro people!" Dead silence. Every smile gone.

CLARE

(laughing)

Goodness gracious, Helen, it is a wonder you won the election.

HELEN

I got straight to the issues. No more condescending after that. By the end of my speech, they were cautious, but I had won them back. When I came to Washington, I got right to it. I hired the daughter of one of my constituents as my secretary - Juanita, a wonderful young Colored woman. I've gotten them to desegregate the White House cafeteria. There were grumblings, but the world didn't fall in.

CLARE

For crying out loud, Helen, those barriers exist in a D.C. fish bowl, not the real world. I cancelled a speech with the DAR when they banned Marian Andersen from singing. That didn't change their minds. It didn't stop any lynchings.

HELEN

How can so many people believe in such vile nonsense? That skin color determines the character and value of a human being.

CLARE

At Mempkin, our plantation in South Carolina, we have to come in by boat because all the roads in the area are so heavily trafficked by the Ku Klux Klan. Like it or not, they believe that vile nonsense to their core. Every time one of my servants is late, it's because they were harassed by some ignorant redneck on the way to work. Do you know how many luncheon's and dinner parties the KKK has ruined? The Black population feels the iron hammer of ignorance and hatred on a daily basis. Violence will eventually be answered with violence. It's the only thing those bigoted thugs will understand.

HELEN

It doesn't have to be that way. Look at what Ghandi has done in India.

CLARE

Perhaps you're right Helen and a Negro Ghandi will rise above the bounds of oppression before violence bursts them apart.

HELEN

This country does not lack brilliant Black men and women. Though we have set the odds severely against them, they do rise up.

CLARE

Oh believe you me, Helen, I have no doubt that the Black men and women have what it takes to claw through oppression. Leaders will emerge, but they will take arms. Otherwise, they'll be slaughtered. Don't try to tell me you think the Ku Klux Klan will simply come to its senses and lay down its rifles. Reason is not core to their twisted morality.

HELEN

(acceptance, despair)

Black families will continue suffering injustice and unacceptable abuses with little or no interference from the United States government for the foreseeable future. Thank you, Congresswoman Luce. You have won the argument. I am powerless.

Helen falls silent, into a dark place.  
Clare regrets the mood shift. After a moment, Helen rises.

CLARE

Where are you going?

HELEN

To the loo.

CLARE

Oh.

HELEN

Do you need to go?

CLARE

No.

Helen exits into the stall. Sound of peeing fades as lights come up on Donald Freeman.

DONALD FREEMAN

I should have known, when I first met you, that your ambition had no bounds. Conde Nast never hired you at Vogue. You showed up one day and sat at an open desk. No one dared ask you to leave because you were so strikingly beautiful. If reality doesn't suit Clare, she changes reality. If that doesn't work, she metamorphizes - but only on the surface. She's always the same underneath. Selfish. Cold. Scheming.

Helen flushes. Lights down on Donald Freeman. Helen enters. Clare begins speaking without looking at her.

CLARE

When I was nineteen, I fell madly in love for the first time. Julian was poor, a British naval officer. He lived with his mother. We adored each other. It would've been hard work, but we might have made it. Who knows? In the end, it didn't matter. Mother believed my interests were better served by marrying George Brokaw, a middle-aged man-baby who couldn't stay off the bottle. Oh, but he was rich, filthy rich. Against everything in my soul, I let my mother convince me.

HELEN

Perhaps, your mother didn't want to see you struggle.

CLARE

You have a generous regard for my mother's character, Helen. When I married George Brokaw, she had her ticket to high society. She didn't care how much I suffered. Oh that horrible man. His superficial self-important friends. That ridiculous baby talk in bed. When I told her that he'd beaten me on one of his drunken binges, that I was going to kill myself if I didn't divorce him, Mother implored me to hold out until the booze destroyed his liver and he dropped dead.

HELEN

I am sorry you went through that Clare, especially when you were so young.

Helen moves to comfort Clare. Clare moves away.

CLARE

Me, a gorgeous, intelligent woman with the whole world before her, wasting six years of her life playing house with a man like George Brokaw. I attempted one last compromise before heading to Reno - not for myself, but for the sake of Ann. I would have kept up appearances if only he'd not fuss about the other men in my life. Despite his countless affairs, the bastard would not comply.

HELEN

Not many men would agree to that sort of arrangement.

CLARE

Harry and I don't live under such hypocrisy. We don't flaunt our indiscretions, but we certainly don't interfere with each other's private lives.

HELEN

Melvyn brought Lyndon up, rather awkwardly when I saw him in New York last month. He knows, but he didn't confront me. He seemed relieved, less guilty about his own infidelity.

CLARE

I know that relief.

HELEN

Part of me hoped he might fly into a jealous rage. Though for all the complexity of feeling he displays in his work, expressions of extreme emotion are not in Melvyn's nature.

CLARE

Your congressman seems more the type to fly off the handle.

HELEN

Lyndon is far more challenging in that regard.

CLARE

I could map Harry's movements by the hour. Anytime, day or night, he may be thousands of miles away, and I could tell you exactly what he was doing.

HELEN

Even when the passion goes belly up, it would break your heart to lose the friendship.

CLARE

Harry is a good friend, that is true. I wasn't some predatory alley cat, who charmed him away from his devoted wife and children. He pursued me. Despite what everyone said, I didn't bust up a marriage for choice writing assignments in *Life* Magazine or Harry's money. I'd married for money the first time around and I was miserable. I would never be dependent on a man again - not like my mother was. When my father disappeared, we lived like street urchins, scrapping to keep a rat infested room at crumbling boarding house. Life didn't get better until mother attracted the right sort of men to take care of her. Don't ever be a fool, Clare! Never marry for love! Marry for money!" Mother beat that into my brain, God knows how many times.

HELEN

When she was young, women didn't even have the right to vote. She believed it was your only path to security.

CLARE

Money can't buy happiness. That is the truth. Though it sure can make you a hell of a lot more comfortable while you're miserable.

HELEN

I don't think it takes much to be happy. I believe it is attainable for everyone as long as basic needs are met.

CLARE

Of course, Helen, you are one of FDR's disciples. Poor and happy is a simple man's game. If my life had been simpler, maybe...

(MORE)

CLARE (CONT'D)

(drifting inside herself)

I might have spent more time with her. Maybe Ann would...

HELEN

When I heard about your daughter, Clare, my heart broke for you. I can't imagine losing a child.

CLARE

Pray that you never do.

(takes a swig, sets bottle  
aside)

I have spoken to Joe Kennedy quite a bit of late, about his faith, what it's like to be a Catholic in politics. You know, Jack dated Ann for a short time.

HELEN

Was Joe's son serious about your daughter?

CLARE

There was some affection between them, but Jack's courtship of Ann never came to much. Ann was too serious for a boy like that. Pure fun! Like his father. Joe and I had a few encounters in Europe right before the war. Once, I flew across the Atlantic with him and Rose. We laughed the entire way. Of course, we did more than that when it was just the two of us.

HELEN

Did Rose ever suspect anything?

CLARE

She's not the sort to make a fuss. Look at all those children she bore him. A devoted Catholic wife deserves a break.

HELEN

I take it faithful was a vow the preacher skipped at your wedding.

CLARE

I had a good intentions. But, Harry always put me on a pedestal. "Oh sweet angel!" he'd cry and bury his face in my breasts like a boy.

(MORE)

## CLARE (CONT'D)

"For God's sake Harry, just fuck me!!" It wasn't long into our marriage that he couldn't perform - not with me anyway.

## HELEN

With Melvyn and me, our mutual admiration and respect has never diminished, even if the passion has quite thoroughly disappeared.

## CLARE

Harry and I have accomplished a great deal together. He loved Ann and... I'm used to him now, as a permanent fixture in my life, a rock of male eccentricity and power. Harry supports me in whatever I do. We ignore the rest.

## HELEN

I am committed to my marriage and my children. Lyndon loves his wife no less than I do my husband. Our time together will pass.

## CLARE

Women our age do not equate love and eternity.

## HELEN

I can't imagine that some part of me won't always love Lyndon. He's shaped something inside me, changed me for the better, I think. Passion must be enjoyed while one has it, I think. It always wanes.

## CLARE

The highs and lows of passion - yes, I know something about that. Fortunately, I am finished with unbridled lust that knocks your socks off. It is fleeting, as you say, and I'm always left with icy feet.

## HELEN

A few years ago, I was off passion myself Clare, committed to a celibate life of service. Now I'm having more fun than I could ever imagine. You never know what lies before you or what you'll become.

CLARE

I've screwed men over four continents. I've rarely felt peace or satisfaction. Bishop Sheen said that I need to sever sex from my life's motivations.

HELEN

I don't know how Bishop Sheen figures in all this. But you can't simply pop into the surgeon to have your sex drive removed.

CLARE

If that were that case, I would have the surgeon remove more than my sex drive. He could start with my tongue. Stop my endless spewing of clever vitriol. If I could only muster the will to bite the damn thing off. Donald Freeman was right. I am a heartless bitch. When I went back to Bernie, Donald called me a whore. I told him Bernie was an old man, but strong and hard like a man should be. No dirty fingernails. No cream puff belly. I said if I wanted to screw women, I would have remained a suffragette. Then he drove his car into a tree. He lingered for days. I never went to see him.

HELEN

We all say terrible things when we're angry Clare. I'm sure you didn't mean it.

CLARE

I wouldn't be so sure, Helen. When I took his position at *Vanity Fair*, the staff whispered that I drove him to his death. Mother taught me that an ambitious woman can't be too precious about sex. Men certainly aren't. I wasn't some vacuous tart screwing my way up the ladder for kicks. I had ideas. I had talent. I had... Oh God! Another body mutilated on the tracks of Locomotive Clare. I should have stayed with Ann's father. I deserved a man like George Brokaw. I deserved to get knocked around! I deserved to lose my daughter.

HELEN

Clare, your daughter had her whole life ahead of her. Other people loved her. God doesn't work that way.

CLARE

Then, how does God work, Helen? She was only twenty years old. If I had only known - how short her time would be. I would've said the hell with running for Congress. The hell with writing! I wouldn't have divorced George. I would've taken Ann to a little beach house or an apartment in Paris. I would've been with her, every second of everyday.

HELEN

Clare, you feel guilty that you couldn't foretell the future, that you accomplished great things. That takes sacrifice. But not one this great. Your daughter's death was an accident.

CLARE

I deposited Ann with her grandmother time and again to go off on some frivolous pursuit. I stuck her in boarding schools because I was too busy to raise her. You know something about that one yourself.

HELEN

I hate not having more time for my children, but I don't think we do our kids, especially our daughters, any favors by ceasing to be who we are because we have chosen motherhood. Men certainly don't prioritize fatherhood over accomplishment. They are not expected to do so.

CLARE

But we are, aren't we? We are supposed to stay in the background, let our husbands have the stage, let them take credit for our thoughts and ideas while we bake pies and mind the children. I refused to do my sacred duty. There's a price for that. God made me pay it.

HELEN

I am trying to serve my country, to build a better future for all of us, my children included. I believe that Peter and Mary Helen will come to understand that it is my mother's love for them to live in peace on a healthy planet with all the world's children.

CLARE

Oh, Helen, for the first time I truly see myself in you. You are so sure of what you can accomplish, that - through the passion of your reasoning - your influence will be felt. You are but a tiny rivet in a five-hundred member body that comprises half of the legislative wing, which is a third of the total government. You'd be a pebble, darling, except you're a woman. You're not even a speck.

HELEN

Perhaps I won't have the same experience as you.

CLARE

Because you think your ideas are superior to mine and therefore you'll have a better shot at success?

(Helen is silent)

I tell myself, if I were a man, I would be thought cavalier and insightful instead of a raging bitch. I would've sky rocketed into influence! Maybe that's true. Maybe it isn't. Whatever the reason, I don't possess what is necessary to accomplish anything of significance in politics.

HELEN

Clare, whether I agree with you, you seem to have the country's best interest at heart. Seeking elected office must come from a desire to make the world a better place.

CLARE

(sarcastic)

Oh yes, Helen! That's why we're all in this. For the selfless sacrifice of public service!

(beat)

I did want to help win the war. For all my sarcasm, my motives were altruistic.

HELEN

Clare, they still can be. We must save our children from the horrors of nuclear war. Hiroshima and Nagasaki showed us exactly what we are capable of. It can't happen again. I have nightmares.

(MORE)

**HELEN (CONT'D)**

Mary Helen and Peter crying out and there is nothing I can do. We should never have dropped the atom bomb. If Franklin hadn't died, we might have found another way.

**CLARE**

Helen, you have to be out of your mind! Truman didn't pull the Manhattan Project out of his hat and voile, in four months you've got an atom bomb. Your precious Franklin was behind it one hundred percent. The Japanese were licked, but they weren't going to surrender until every Japanese soldier was dead and they had taken thousands more American lives along with them.

**HELEN**

We targeted civilians when we dropped those bombs!

**CLARE**

Hitler didn't target the civilian population?! Don't oversimplify this, Helen. Harry and I toured China with Chiang Kai-shek long before most Americans knew we were fighting a war on more than one front. The Japanese slaughtered Chinese civilians just as Hitler slaughtered the Jews. Hirohito was hellbent on world domination. The population followed him with hysterical devotion. The Japanese army mercilessly bombed Chinese villages, raped and tortured women and children. We had the means - horrible means, yes! - to end this abominable war suddenly and decisively. Like Truman, Roosevelt would've seen the wisdom - political and moral - behind saving thousands of American and European lives.

**HELEN**

It's only a matter of time, isn't Clare? A matter of time before the Russian's have it, before England and France follow suit. Could you imagine what a man like Hitler would've done with the atom bomb? How long before another Hitler rises in the world, another Hirohito? How long do we have before a nuclear bomb ends up in the wrong hands? A maniac who will die for the cause of ending the world?

CLARE

As our war with the Nazis proved, the world of totalitarianism and the world of liberty are doomed to come into conflict. It's a matter of our winning that conflict before it is too late.

HELEN

Too late? Never in our history have we had the capability to destroy the entire planet.

CLARE

(drifting)

I remember China on the road to Mandalay, the stench hitting me as we came around a clearing. We reached the moat - bodies of Chinese children floating in the water, babies bobbing like apples. When I close my eyes, I see them - charred and melted faces, their eyes are fixed in horror.

HELEN

Clare, are you all right?

CLARE

You live through a few bombings, Helen, you think death is the worst that can happen. I felt lucky when I cheated it, exhilarated. But then it hits, not me - I'm a feline. I have too many lives - it takes my daughter, my only child. They told me that her injuries knocked her unconscious; she died instantly. She didn't suffer. That's what they wanted me to know. Some deaths are far worse than others, I suppose. There are things men do in this world that make death welcome, preferable.

HELEN

Clare, the more you try and make sense of it, the more it is only going to send you into despair. All this death and destruction, it makes no sense.

CLARE

When I toured Buchenwald, I'd already heard about the horrors of Hitler's concentration camps. In a moment of defiance, I went to face death head on. I had seen its worst when it took Ann, there was nothing else it could do to me.

(MORE)

## CLARE (CONT'D)

I recognized the smell of decay as we approached. There was no choking back vomit like in China. I knew what to expect. Or, at least I thought I did. I'd already seen the most despicable atrocities man could imagine. I examined the stacks of emaciated bodies. I hadn't seen anything. Gray skin stretched over skeletons, no muscle left to speak of. Black eyes, so pained, so lost. I tried to comfort them. The confusion... I couldn't penetrate it. It was unfathomable what humans will do to one another. We're horrified now. But, it will all kick up again - more death, more slaughter. As long as there are people. The players shift, but the war games will never end. Not until every last miserable human being has been blown off the planet.

## HELEN

Clare, when more time passes, you'll feel hope again. It's going to be all right.

## CLARE

It's not going to be all right. You've never lost a child, Helen. There is no hope after that. The back of her skull was crushed. Her pelvis was crushed. But there wasn't a scratch on her beautiful face. She looked perfect lying in her casket. She looked like an angel. God! Why?! I told her to lock the doors so they don't fly open. Her grandmother was tossed out of the car in front of a train. Ann promised to be diligent after that. She promised me. I wasn't around to remind her. It's my fault. God, I can't take it anymore. I want her back. Please God anything! I'll do anything!

Clare breaks down into sobs.

## HELEN

Clare! Sssh. It's all right. It's not your fault.

There is a knock at the Powder Room door. Clare gasps, afraid to be discovered in such a state.

Helen rushes to the door and opens it. SOUND from the bar as she opens the door, has grown quiet. Helen slips out.

HELEN

Mike! You must be wondering...

Shaking, Clare tries to pull herself together. She stares blankly in front of her, then sinks onto the settee.

Area light up on Charles Willoughby.

CHARLES WILLOUGHBY

I fell into a desperate longing, a sudden knowledge of the dragging of time and the years passing. Then, I felt your lips and hope returned. Months of war toll on and on. In this separation, my darling, remember how natural and free we were together, how that was the true way of life.

ROALD DAHL

Are you really capable of depth of feeling, Clare? Or do you just like sex, so you play a role?

BERNARD BARUCH

Don't let anyone fool you, Clare. We all like sex and we all play roles.

Helen enters with a plate of food and a glass of water. She watches Clare. Clare opens her eyes, suddenly clear.

HELEN

It's pretty empty out there. Most of the others have gone home. Sam was having a late dinner. I convinced him to split it with us.

CLARE

I'm not hungry.

HELEN

We'll let it sit. Maybe when you've calmed down-

CLARE

Thank you, Helen. I am calm. I am not going to seek re-election next term.

HELEN

You're not even half way through this term. You don't have to make that decision right at this moment.

CLARE

There is no deciding to it. I am answering a new call.

(looks at Helen seriously)

I am going to devote myself to our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

Helen laughs lightly. Clare remains serious.

HELEN

Honestly?

CLARE

Never more true in my life. I have been studying Catholicism with Bishop Sheen. I am giving myself to God.

HELEN

You're becoming a nun? Have you told your husband?

CLARE

I am merely converting, Helen, not joining a cloister. As far as Harry, he rather likes me in Congress and he rather dislikes the Catholic faith. His father was a Presbyterian missionary, in hot competition with the Holy Church for Chinese souls. I can see him now, when I break the news. He's going to get all boiled up, his face will turn red and he will stomp out of the room, muttering something unintelligible.

HELEN

At his age, I hope the news doesn't provoke a heart attack.

CLARE

I would miss old Harry terribly I'm afraid, though I did almost leave him for a soldier. Ann grew quite fond of General Willoughby. He wrote her letters. I think she had a crush on him. If she hadn't...

(MORE)

**CLARE (CONT'D)**

I don't know, Helen, you believe a lot of things during the war that fall to shreds within the banality of everyday life. I need God to help me with the boredom of peace.

**HELEN**

You don't have to abandon politics because you have embraced religion. Most of our colleagues are men of faith.

**CLARE**

This must be pure, Helen. I don't want the press saying that I converted to win favor with my Catholic constituency.

**HELEN**

What does it matter? If you were elected for a third term, you'd be a senior member of Military Affairs. You would have a strong say in shaping our nuclear policy.

**CLARE**

I know Congress moves at a snail's pace, but we will pass something before I have left those hallowed halls. Nuclear power should not be under military control.

**HELEN**

We must create a civilian committee to oversee our nuclear program. I agree with our scientists that, if we share the knowledge with our allies, we can lead the world in the right direction.

Clare grabs the plate of food.

**CLARE**

Don't get all riled up, cowgirl! A civilian committee is one thing! But, I'm not about to hold hands with Russian Communists and sing let there be peace in the land!

Clare takes a bite of steak. Helen stares at Clare as she shoves a few more bites down her throat, followed by a long gulp of water.

HELEN

You said that women like us need sexual passion to feel alive. I don't think they approve of that sort of thing on the Roman Catholic side.

CLARE

They don't approve of that sort of thing on any side, Helen, not for women.

(puts plate aside)

Believe me, I've had more than my share of sexual passion and all the great dramas that come with it. I want to sleep soundly at night. I only feel peace when I feel God.

Helen studies Clare. She's not quite convinced, but decides to stop challenging her.

HELEN

I believe in God. I couldn't have run for Congress without my faith. More than that, I believe I am serving God through my service to the American people. You and I may disagree on many things, but you have such a zest for life, a fearlessness like I have never seen, a need to devour the world.

CLARE

And all the men in it.

HELEN

Clare. Didn't God make you who you are? Why would you be expected to give that up?

Silence.

CLARE

When I visited the Italian front, early one morning, I came upon a group of young soldiers receiving communion. A visible light shone from them as they knelt, solemnly, in an awareness of nothing but God. To know God with the totality of my being is the only way I can live with my grief.

HELEN

And you think you need the Catholic Church to truly know God?

CLARE

Oh I know what you're thinking. The Inquisition, the corruption. It's about power, not God. It's hard to explain. I feel called.

HELEN

All right, Clare. I respect your decision. Who I am to say how God calls us each to serve? I hope you find comfort on your Catholic journey.

CLARE

You helped me tonight. I am grateful. Perhaps we should stop by Lyndon's house on the way home. We can throw rocks at his bedroom window to see if he'll come out to play.

HELEN

I have quite a full agenda tomorrow. I can't wait to get my head on a pillow.

CLARE

Yes. Time for sleep.

They prepare to leave. Clare turns and grabs her dirty plate. She hands it to Helen. Clare hands Helen the wine bottle. She steps past Helen toward the door.

CLARE

Grab that glass by the sink on your way out.

Helen grabs the glass and follows. As Clare reaches the door, she turns, nearly causing Helen to run into her.

CLARE

It will be hard for me to give up sex, Mrs. Douglas. Quite hard.

## HELEN

Sex will be there if you change your mind, Mrs. Luce.  
Besides, isn't that what confession is for?

Clare smiles and takes Helen's face in her hands. She looks into Helen's eyes and, with gratitude and affection, Clare kisses Helen on the lips. Helen accepts the kiss and the full sentiment behind it. She returns with her own sense of having been heard and seen. Once the moment is over, Clare turns to leave, making no more of it. She holds the door open for Helen. Helen, beaming, delighted, exits. Clare follows.

Lights fade.

SLIDE IMAGE: 1) Picture of a middle-aged Clare Boothe Luce from her Italian Ambassador days.

Slide fades into caption:

1) "After her conversion to Catholicism and subsequent break from politics, Clare Boothe Luce returned to the international stage as Ambassador to Italy in 1952, appointed by President Eisenhower." 2) "She served on the President's Foreign Advisory Board under Richard Nixon, Gerald Ford and Ronald Reagan. In 1983, Ronald Reagan awarded her the Presidential Medal of Freedom."

SLIDE IMAGE: 1) Photo of Helen Gahagan from her Nixon Campaign followed by the caption: "Helen Gahagan Douglas ran for the California seat in the U.S."

Senate against Richard Nixon in 1950. She was defeated soundly in one of American history's dirtiest tricks campaigns. She never sought public office again; 2) "In the 1960s, Helen vigorously protested the Vietnam War. During a visit to the White House, then President Lyndon Johnson turned away from her during the receiving line, refusing to shake her hand."