

Political Justice

By

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INT. DALE VANDERHORST'S APARTMENT - MORNING

DALE VANDERHORST throws his VCR as hard as he can.

WALTER SHRIKE, Dale's co-worker, flinches as the VCR whizzes past him and slams into a large campaign poster for State Senator Wilt Sturgeon. "Like the fish!" proclaims the poster.

WALTER

Dale! Dale! Calm down!

DALE

That son of a bitch!

WALTER

We'll get through this, ok?

DALE

You come in here and you spring this on me *nine hours* beforehand? I still have revisions on Wilt's speech and you want me to do *another* one!? That's fuckin' retarded!

WALTER

Look, it's not--

DALE

OK, you know this anger isn't directed at you, right, Walter?

WALTER

Right.

DALE

I mean, I know you and I respect your work and I know that it's just Wilt being an asshole, but... FUCK!

WALTER

Yeah, I know.

DALE

...fuck!

WALTER

Yeah.

Dale sifts through the wreckage of the VCR with his toe.

DALE

Eh. The only thing I have on VHS is the second half of *Gandhi*, anyway.

WALTER

Come on, I'll give you a ride back to the office.

Dale follows Walter out the door.

DALE

Just one thing: No more goddamn farming metaphors. I'm just not going to do it!

INT. WYOMING STATE SENATE - MORNING

Wyoming State Senator WILT STURGEON stands on the floor of the senate, delivering a speech.

WILT

...and I would urge my esteemed colleagues not to put the cart before the horse on this issue! We have the potential for a growing economy--an expanding economy in Wyoming, but if we want to expand our economy we first have to expand our highway system. Our highway system was fine twenty years ago, but it's getting long in the tooth, and you can't make a silk purse out of a sow's ear.

INT. BOARDROOM - BRAUNBAUER AND ASSOCIATES - DAY

Wilt sits at a conference table, flanked by Walter and Dale. Across from them sit contracting tycoon JOHN BRAUNBAUER, his SECRETARY, and his ATTORNEY. Dale is furiously scribbling in his notebook, paying no attention to the video.

The six of them watch a videotape of the senate proceedings.

WILT (CONT'D)(ON TV)

That's why I would recommend the body's support on senate file four, appropriation of funds for the expansion of the state highway system. Thank you, Mr. President.

PRESIDENT (ON TV)
Further discussion? Alright, we
have heard Senator Sturgeon's
recommendation that when the
committee as a whole rise to report
it do so with a pass recommendation
on senate file four. All those in
favor?

A resounding chorus of "ayes" rings out from the assembled
members.

Braunbauer's secretary pauses the tape. Braunbauer smiles at
Wilt.

BRAUNBAUER
Wilt, I honestly didn't think you'd
be able to pull it off.

WILT
It was just a little bit of
nothing, John.

BRAUNBAUER
A hundred-million dollar
construction fund is not nothing,
Senator--ah... we can be sure that
Braunbauer and Associates will be
the recipient of this contract,
can't we?

Wilt takes a sip of his coffee and grimaces.

WILT
Oh, not a problem, John.

BRAUNBAUER
Tell me Wilt, how do you feel about
House Bill 74?

WILT
The what?

WALTER
Funding increase for higher
education.

WILT
How's that?

ATTORNEY
You don't like it.

WILT

Oh. No. Of course not. Really bad idea.

Braunbauer smiles warmly.

BRAUNBAUER

You make a fine statesman, Wilt.
How's year four going for you?

WILT

Every day I feel like I'm doing my daddy proud. It just gets tough with all these Cheyenne liberals coming in now...

BRAUNBAUER

I think if you keep on track, pretty soon you'll have bigger fish to fry than the Cheyenne liberals.

Braunbauer and his attorney exchange a meaningful glance.

Wilt, not quite sure what's going on, chuckles nervously.

BRAUNBAUER (cont'd)

Oh--we'll be seeing you at the benefits ball tonight, right?

WILT

Wouldn't miss it. I'll wear my best boots.

BRAUNBAUER

You said you were gonna have someone on your staff write out a few words for me to say at the banquet?

WILT

Yeah, uh...

Wilt and Walter look over at Dale, who looks up, makes a few final, frenzied marks in his notebook, tears out the page, and hands it to Braunbauer.

DALE

Sorry about the scribbles, it was kind of short notice.

Braunbauer skims over the speech and nods in approval.

BRAUNBAUER

Very nice. Very nice. Thank you,
uh...

Wilt cuts in before Dale can speak.

WILT

You're welcome. Any time, John.
Anything I can do to help.

Braunbauer shakes Wilt's hand.

BRAUNBAUER

You're a good man, Wilt.

INT. HALLWAY - MOMENTS LATER

On the way out of the meeting, Wilt catches up with Dale.

WILT

Hey Dale, how's the speech for
tonight coming?

DALE

It's getting there.

WILT

How soon can I see a draft?

DALE

It's tight, Sir. I was going to
work on it this morning, but you
needed me to write that thing for
Braunbauer, so...

WILT

I'm sure you can do it.

DALE

I don't think you understand. I can
only work so fast, and...

WILT

By the way, I don't take cream with
my coffee, Dale. You should know
that by now.

DALE

Sir, I don't see how--

WILT
Just remember next time, right? OH!
OH!

DALE
What?

WILT
Walter says I need to be more
God-fearing.

DALE
Umm...?

WILT
Walter says if I want to be safe in
the election I need to be more
God-fearing.

DALE
Oh.

WILT
But I don't wanna be too... you
know... gloomy about it, you know?

DALE
Um...

WILT
So do you think you could just put
a little joke about Jesus in the
speech tonight? Just something
tasteful in there near the start?

Dale looks vaguely sick. Wilt slaps Dale's back.

WILT (cont'd)
Thanks, sport. I'll take a look at
the speech once we get back to the
office.

DALE
It's not going to be ready...

WILT
Go ahead and take twenty minutes
for lunch. See you soon.

Wilt walks off down the hall. Dale watches him go and when he is out of sight, kicks over a trashcan, spilling its contents across the floor. Seeing the mess he has made, he rights the trash can and begins picking up the garbage that spilled out.

INT. OFFICE OF U.S. CONGRESSMAN CARVEY - EVENING

U.S. Representative THOMAS JEFFERSON CARVEY sits at his desk in his Washington office. He is on the phone. He is ashen, and speaks haltingly.

CARVEY

John... you don't understand. John,
I can't run for reelection.

On the television, TOM CANDLE is giving a speech.

CANDLE (ON TV)

...and so it is with great pride
and optimism that I announce my
candidacy for congressional
representative of the beautiful
state of Wyoming.

Carvey turns and looks at the screen.

CARVEY

Look, no, I know what this does to
you. But I simply cannot run again.
Yes... No, I know he's a Democrat.

CANDLE (ON TV)

Being a congressional
representative is no small
responsibility, and if elected, I
pledge to wield my vote in service
of this state----all its residents,
and all its natural resources.

CARVEY

The answer's no, OK? I'm not gonna
let some scummy so-and-so digging
up dirt on my family. Last time was
bad enough.

INT. CHEYENNE CIVIC CENTER - BENEFITS BALL - EVENING

A large banquet is set up in the convention center. At the front of the room, John Braunbauer stands at a podium, delivering the speech Dale had written for him.

Wilt, Walter and Dale stand in the back of the ballroom. Wilt is reading a piece of paper.

WILT

Mmm.

WALTER
Look good?

WILT
Mmm.

WALTER
Wilt?

WILT
Mmm.

WALTER
Wilt!

WILT
Mm... what?

WALTER
The speech. How does it look?

WILT
Oh, not bad. Not bad. I may need to
spice it up a bit here and there,
but...

DALE
No!

Dale looks, aghast, at Walter.

WALTER
Uhh... Wilt, Dale's right. You
should really just read the--

WILT
It's my speech. I can't make
changes to my own...

DALE
Sir, it's just that you're not
really a very good--

Wilt rounds on Dale and shoots him a vicious look.

WILT
Not a good what? Statesman? Person?
I do better than I'd like you to
see... try.

All three of them stop arguing, trying to figure out what
Wilt just said.

BRAUNBAUER

...and now I'd like to introduce a man who works very hard for all of you every day...

Walter checks his watch.

WALTER

Oh! Jesus! Come on!

Walter grabs Wilt and rushes off in the direction of the podium.

BRAUNBAUER

Senator Wilt Sturgeon!

Dale calls after Wilt:

DALE

Just read the speech!

INT. CHEYENNE CIVIC CENTER - BENEFITS BALL - LATER

Wilt delivers his speech flatly and uncomprehendingly.

Dale stands alone in the back of the room, listening and occasionally cringing. He plays tic-tac-toe-against himself on a cocktail napkin. He keeps losing.

WILT

It is through cooperation with local businesses and community leaders that we can all...

(now deviating from his notes and speaking extemporaneously)
...strive together, and--

DALE

Oh God.

WILT

--and work now for a better tomorrow.

DALE

Jesus.

LUCY, sharply dressed and more intelligent than you might expect a Wyoming resident to be, edges over to Dale.

WILT

(on a roll)

And I think that's why we're all here. To work now for a better tomorrow, and work for the little guy, so that his tomorrow can be just as better as ours.

DALE

(muttering to himself)

Maybe if I set the building on fire.

LUCY

Oh, it's not that bad.

Dale is startled to see Lucy beside him, but happy for a little conversation.

DALE

(forlornly)

I'm his speech writer.

LUCY

Well... uhh...

WILT

And in that better tomorrow, I see a vision...

DALE

I don't get paid nearly enough, um...

LUCY

Lucy. I'm with the Boomerang.

DALE

New blood. What all do you cover?

LUCY

Politics.

DALE

That's it? Jesus, y'all must be the only paper left in the state with a full-time political correspondent.

LUCY

Yeah, well you know all about us Laramie media fat cats. Money to burn.

WILT
And that vision is a vision of--of
progress!

Dale winces, then starts applauding loudly.

DALE
Start clapping. He'll think he's
done.

Lucy applauds and the rest of the room soon follows suit.

WILT
Thank you. Thank you. And God
bless.

Wilt leaves the podium and walks up to Dale. He ignores Lucy completely.

WILT
Hey, I did good, didn't I? "Work
now for a better tomorrow." You
like that?

DALE
Sir...

WILT
I made that up myself.

DALE
Sir...

WILT
I didn't see the Jesus joke in
there, Dale.

DALE
Sir, can you honestly think of a
single joke about Jesus that isn't
massively offensive?

This silences Wilt for a moment while he thinks. Then, seeing a new face, he turns and smiles at Lucy.

WILT
Hello. I'm Wilt Sturgeon. Like the
fish!

He shakes her hand.

LUCY
I'm pleased to meet you.

WILT
I bet you are. I bet tonight you weren't expecting to meet a real-life senator.

DALE
State senator.

WILT
State senator.

Wilt turns back to Dale.

WILT
Say, Walter and me are gonna go talk to John. He was saying some things about a campaign.

DALE
He got some soft money for your reelection?

WILT
Walter said he wasn't talking about reelection. I'm going to go get some of them small pies, and I'll meet you and Walter at John's table in a few minutes.

DALE
Actually, sir, I was hoping I could--

Wilt suddenly loses it and shouts in Dale's face:

WILT
Dale, I am fed up with you! Maybe you're a half decent speechwriter, but so what? I'm a senator! And I'm your boss!

DALE
Sir, I--

WILT
I'll meet you and Walter at John's table in a few minutes!
(suddenly cheerful)
Oh! How 'bout this one, Dale: Where does Jesus live?

DALE
I don't know, sir.

WILT
God's house! Get it?

DALE
I--that's a good one, sir.

Wilt chuckles, slaps Dale's back, and walks off. Dale glares after him.

LUCY
Charming.

DALE
(blustery; imitating Wilt's
accent)
Ladies and gentlemen, I come here
today to ask you all a simple
question: what is the difference
between Jesus Christ and an oil
painting?

LUCY
Call me crazy, but it sounds to me
as if you don't like your job very
much.

DALE
You're very perceptive.

LUCY
You're very witty.

DALE
I'm gonna go get hammered.

Dale weaves off through the crowd, towards the bar. Lucy watches him go and scribbles something in her notebook.

INT. BENEFITS BALL - BRAUNBAUER'S TABLE - LATER

Braunbauer, Wilt and Walter sit around the table. Wilt has a plate piled high with ribs, mashed potatoes, bread and two miniature quiches.

BRAUNBAUER
I have to say, Wilt, We couldn't be
happier with the job you've been
doing.

WILT
Hmm? Oh. Yeah!

BRAUNBAUER
How would you feel about running
for the U.S. House?

Wilt chokes on his food.

WILT
Really? Isn't TJ running?

Braunbauer shakes his head.

WALTER
Why not?

BRAUNBAUER
I don't rightly know. Darndest
thing. And then there's this Tom
Candle what's-his-name moved here
from California, and you know as
well as I do what it would do to us
if he wound up in Washington. Just
as soon kill you as look at you.

WILT
Sure, John. Sure...

BRAUNBAUER
State highways are one thing, but
Braunbauer and Associates is
thinking bigger. Federal interstate
contracts. And we need a friend on
the inside to help us out.

WALTER
And you think you can find us the
capital to run a campaign?

BRAUNBAUER
Sure, sure. You in, Wilt?

WILT
...yeah!

WALTER
Just to be clear, we wouldn't want
to imply that we'd be awarding you
construction contracts just because
you got us into Washington.

Braunbauer Laughs. Wilt chuckles along with him. Walter
smiles.

EXT. CONVENTION CENTER - LATER THAT NIGHT

It is raining.

Dale stands, drunk, outside the civic center. Wilt, Walter and Braunbauer exit the building speaking loudly.

WILT

...and so I says to him, that's no
moose, that's my mother!

They guffaw. Wilt sees Dale.

WILT (cont'd)

Hold on a second, John, I gotta
talk to Dale here.

BRAUNBAUER

I gotta head home anyways. Wife'll
probably kill me.

WALTER

Yeah, me too.

BRAUNBAUER

See you guys tomorrow!

Braunbauer and Walter exit. Wilt, also rather drunk, approaches Dale.

WILT

You hear the good news?

DALE

What's good about it?

WILT

The news?

DALE

The news.

WILT

The news. Uhh... well... I'ma be a
U.S. congressman! And you're gonna
put me there!

DALE

Buhh...

WILT

This gonna be big, Dale. This is
gonna be real big. We'll start the
campaign tomorrow.

DALE
 Tomorrow? Shouldn't you... think
 about this for a while?

Wilt loses his patience again.

WILT
 Dale! Announcement! Tomorrow! Press
 conference! You're lucky I don't
 tear your head off!

DALE
 You know what, sir?

WILT
 What?

Dale seems ready to launch into a long tirade, then thinks
 better of it and backs down.

DALE
 I'll see you tomorrow.

WILT
 That's the spirit! I know it's
 short notice for a speech, I know,
 but this is important. Make sure
 it's real nice and professional.

DALE
 Sure.

Wilt slaps Dale's back.

WILT
 See you tomorrow, buckaroo.

Wilt stumbles off to his car, leaving Dale alone in the
 rain.

DALE
 Bastard.

Dale begins to stagger away, loudly reciting poetry.

DALE (cont'd)
 I died for beauty but was scarce
 Adjusted in the tomb,
 When one who died for truth was
 lain
 In an adz--aguh...

A car pulls up next to him. Lucy is driving.

DALE (cont'd)
Next-door room...

Lucy HONKS her horn. Dale nearly falls over.

DALE (cont'd)
Awwrr! AAa! Jesus!

Lucy rolls down her window and laughs.

LUCY
Sorry!

DALE
You should look where you're going.

LUCY
You look like you need a ride.

DALE
No, no, I can walk. It's fine.
I'm--I'm a pretty good walker.

LUCY
Get in, I'll take you home.

DALE
No, it's--I can walk.

LUCY
Get in.

Dale thinks for a moment, then gets in. They drive off.

INT. LUCY'S CAR - NIGHT

Dale stares vacantly out the window at the sparse scenery.

DALE
He's going to be in the U.S.
Congress.

LUCY
Excuse me?

DALE
Wilt Sturgeon. "Like the Fish".

LUCY
Ah. Well, at least that means
you've got a job.

Dale scoffs. Another moment passes.

LUCY (cont'd)
You know... he doesn't have to be
elected... I mean, if you think
he's that bad.

DALE
If he doesn't win I'm fired.

LUCY
The Boomerang's always looking for
a good political correspondent.

Dale looks suddenly very green.

DALE
Pull over.

EXT. STREET - NIGHT

Lucy pulls over to the side of the road. Before the car has
come to a stop, Dale leaps out of the passenger side and
vomits into a ditch.

Lucy calls across to him.

LUCY
Or you could try writing a novel.
I've read your speeches--you've
definitely got the talent.

DALE
Lucy, I 'preciate that you're not
turned off by the sight of a man's
vomit, but what do you know about
me?

Lucy pauses.

DALE (cont'd)
Nothing. You don't know jack shit
about me. So stop trying to screw
my life up more than it already is.

Lucy gets out of the car and walks over next to Dale.

LUCY
You're a smart guy, Dale. You just
need to take a risk!

DALE
No, I *need* to get Wilt the Fish
elected to the United States
senate.

Lucy leans in and kisses Dale. Dale is surprised but doesn't resist. The kiss doesn't last long. Lucy pulls away and retches.

LUCY
Oh God. That was disgusting!

Dale is flustered.

DALE
Don't blame me, I'm the drunk one,
Remember?

LUCY
Blech!

Lucy spits a great many times and shoves a handful of breath mints into her mouth. She continues freaking out.

LUCY (cont'd)
That was one of the worst...

DALE
I'm sorry...

LUCY
Just awful! Blech! Oh my God, Eww!

DALE
Why did you do that?

LUCY
I don't know, I just... eww!

INT. LUCY'S CAR - LATER

Lucy and Dale ride in awkward silence, both staring straight ahead. Dale looks as though he is in a state of shock. Lucy isn't too pleased either.

As they ride, though, Lucy begins to soften. She even looks over at Dale and smiles a bit, although Dale doesn't notice.

Dale takes a breath as though he is about to say something, then thinks better of it.

After a while longer, Dale finally breaks the silence.

DALE
Here's me.

Lucy stops the car. They look at each other for a little bit longer than is socially acceptable in such situations.

LUCY
You've got options, Dale. Don't
forget that.

DALE
Bye.

Dale gets out of the car. Lucy calls after him.

LUCY
You're a good writer, Dale.

Dale nods clumsily and walks up the steps to his apartment. Lucy makes sure he gets into his building alright, then drives off.

INT. DALE'S APARTMENT/BATHROOM - NIGHT

Dale unlocks the door to his dingy third-floor apartment and steps inside. He sighs heavily and throws his coat over a chair.

He goes into the bathroom, turns on the shower and stands at the sink, staring at himself in the mirror. He pulls a bottle of mouthwash from the medicine cabinet.

He takes a giant swig of the mouthwash and swishes it around in his mouth. As he swishes, he gets angrier and angrier. He spits the mouthwash into the sink, stomps over and climbs into the shower, not realizing that he is still in formal attire.

Thanks to all the alcohol, this realization dawns on him slower than it should.

He steps back out of the shower, now wearing a sudsy tuxedo. He slips stepping out, and grabs onto the shower curtains for support. The curtains tear away from their support and Dale tumbles to the floor.

Just then there is a KNOCK on his door.

Dale gets up and dashes to the door (slipping several times along the way), still wearing his wet and soapy tuxedo.

INT. HALLWAY/DALE'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Dale opens the door to reveal LUCY, holding his briefcase.

LUCY
 (startled by Dale's
 appearance)
 Oh. Hi.

DALE
 Hi.

LUCY
 Did you know your lobby door
 doesn't lock?

DALE
 What? Yeah... uh... nobody cares.
 Why...?

Lucy holds up the briefcase.

LUCY
 You left this.

She hands it to him.

DALE
 Oh. Thanks.

A moment of socially awkward silence passes with Dale and Lucy staring at each other. Then they both decide to speak at the same time.

LUCY
 I was--

DALE
 My laptop--sorry--my
 laptop's in here, I'd be
 kind of... lost without it.

LUCY
 I see you have an interesting
 evening lined up.

Dale looks down at his attire.

DALE
 Oh--no... I... some trouble with
 the... shower...

Another moment of awkward silence as Lucy looks expectantly at Dale.

Dale realizes he's being impolite.

DALE (cont'd)
Oh, sorry. Come in!

LUCY
No, I need to be going. I have an
early day tomorrow.
(she whips out a pen and
notepad)
Word is your boss might be calling
a press conference in the morning.
Care to comment?

Dale leans in and kisses her. Suave, for a drunk guy.

He leans back out, and a silent look passes between them.
Much less awkward this time.

Lucy smiles and puts her notepad away.

LUCY (cont'd)
(quietly)
I'm gonna quote you on that.

She turns and walks down the stairs. She stops halfway down
and looks back up at him, smiling.

LUCY (cont'd)
Nice. Minty.

She turns and leaves.

Dale watches her go, grinning ear-to-ear. After she is out
of sight, he closes the door.

INT. DALE'S APARTMENT - LATER

Dale lies sleeping in his bed. He smiles with satisfaction.

After a few moments, he gasps and jolts wide awake.

DALE
The speech!

Dale leaps out of bed, dashes over to his desk and flips
open his laptop.

DALE (cont'd)
(frantic)
Uhh... ummm...

Dale looks at the clock. It's 5:30 in the morning.

DALE (cont'd)
 (mumbling to himself as he
 types)
 My pleasure to announce...
 candidacy of the United States
 Senate--candidacy to
 Senate--candidacy senator... ah
 fuck.

Dale takes a handful of extra-strength Tylenol®, drinks half a glass of water, massages his head and throws the rest of the water in his face.

DALE (cont'd)
 Issues. Issues. Gotta have core
 issues.

He goes back to typing furiously.

DALE (cont'd)
 Federal budget... immigration...
 uhh...

Dale is out of ideas. He looks around in frantic defeat, sighs uselessly, and resumes typing.

FADE TO BLACK

FADE IN:

EXT. WYOMING STATE CAPITAL - MORNING

Wilt Sturgeon stands at a podium on the steps of the Capital. Behind him stand Braunbauer, Walter, Sturgeon's perpetually-smiling wife PAULA, and their eight-year-old son JEREMY.

Wilt is in the middle of announcing his candidacy to a lackluster group of journalists and supporters. He reads from a teleprompter.

WILT
 ...and so it is with great honor
 and anticipation that I now
 announce my candidacy senator for
 the United States.

Dale, bloodshot, watching the speech from one of the news vans, drops his head to the table with an audible CLUNK, momentarily distracting the members of the press corps.

WILT
 In a nation with issues like the
 federal budget and defect.
 Immigration is an issue that needs
 to besser help?

Dale lets out a low MOAN. The NEWS TECH GUY looks at him
 askance, then pokes his shoulder.

NEWS TECH GUY
 Hey, you Dale Heurling?

DALE
 Nooo.

NEWS TECH GUY
 This is for you.

The news tech guy hands Dale a folded up piece of paper,
 reading:

EAST PARKING LOT. AFTER THE PRESS CONFERENCE.

DALE
 This from Lucy?

The news tech guy shrugs.

WILT
 We need a leader for Wyoming who
 can lead on the issues in
 Washington. And that leader, I
 think, is me. Wilt Sturgeon. Like
 the fish!

Wilt gives a thumbs-up and leaves the podium.

The audience lapses into scattered and confused applause.

EXT. WYOMING STATE CAPITAL - PARKING LOT - LATER

Dale walks through the mostly deserted parking lot.

Walter catches up with him.

WALTER
 Dale! That was horrible.

DALE
 Yeah, I'm sorry. I totally spaced
 it until like six this morning.

WALTER
Yeah, well I could tell.

DALE
I was out late. I met a girl.

WALTER
You did? Congratulations. What's her name?

DALE
Lucy. She's a reporter.

Walter rolls his eyes.

WALTER
A match made in heaven.

DALE
Oh, whatever. Wasn't Maggie a pollster?

WALTER
Not the same thing.

Dale laughs.

DALE
"Hello? Are you eating dinner? Do you mind if I interrupt your meal to ask you nine hundred important questions about agricultural subsidies?"

Walter cracks a smile.

WALTER
Yeah? How about "I'm a shriveled husk of a human being who finds pleasure in the suffering of others?"

DALE
(sarcastic)
Yes. Yes, you are. Oh! You meant reporters!

WALTER
Are we bad people?

DALE
Yeah, probably.

WALTER

I'll write up a press release. Tell the world. Your friend Lucy can come beat us with a rake for the Sunday edition.

DALE

Wilt's probably pissed about the speech, isn't he.

WALTER

You know, you aren't going to believe this, but he didn't even notice.

DALE

No shit?

WALTER

Shit. Thought it was a good speech. How am I supposed to explain that?

Mimicking Wilt, Dale slaps Walter on the back.

DALE

I'm sure you'll find a way, buckaroo.

WALTER

Har har.

DALE

Sorry about the speech.

WALTER

Just don't let it happen again. Where you headed? Need a ride?

DALE

No, I was gonna meet Lucy here.

WALTER

Romantic.

DALE

Well, she's a reporter. They're not a creative group.

Walter walks off and calls back to Dale.

WALTER

Meeting at 1:00. Don't forget. I'm gonna go pick up TJ at the airport, but I should be back in time.

Dale salutes Walter and continues trudging through the parking lot, looking for Lucy.

As soon as Walter is gone a black Prius whirs up next to Dale. The door opens. TOM CANDLE is inside.

DALE
Tom Candle?

CANDLE
So you got my note. Let's take a ride.

Dale looks around to see if anyone else is in the parking lot.

CANDLE (cont'd)
C'mon. We have some things to discuss.

Cautiously, Dale gets into the car. They drive off.

INT. TOM CANDLE'S PRIUS - MOMENTS LATER

CANDLE
I'm a fan of your work, Dale.

DALE
Really?

CANDLE
Dale, do you realize what a dismal voting record your boss has when it comes to the environment and the working poor?

DALE
I just work for the man.

CANDLE
So you don't care that if he had it his way he'd chop up the poor and burn them for fuel?

DALE
I think that's a little harsh.

CANDLE
No, I don't think it is.

DALE
...yes it is.

CANDLE
OK. Yeah, you're right. It's a bit of an overstatement. Anyway, you're telling me that you just do this for a paycheck, nothing else?

DALE
I was an English major. This is what I do. I write. Sturgeon pays me for it, so it works out alright.

CANDLE
That's exactly precisely what I wanted to hear, Dale.

DALE
Why's that?

Candle tosses Dale an envelope. Dale opens it. Inside is a large wad of cash.

DALE (cont'd)
Is this a job offer?

CANDLE
Oh goodness no. I've already got a writer. Ed... something. No, I have a special project for you.

DALE
And what's that?

CANDLE
You know how long it's been since a Democrat's been elected in this state. I need a little... help, if I'm going to have any real chance of winning.

DALE
You want me to... what?

CANDLE
I want you to get Wilt Sturgeon's foot so far into his mouth that he shits boot leather for a week.

Dale is stunned.

DALE

You want me to sabotage our campaign?

CANDLE

After seeing this morning's performance I kind of wonder whether I need to pay you for that at all, but what the hell. I'm a generous guy!

DALE

I... I don't think I can do this. Isn't this really, really illegal?

Candle's face hardens.

CANDLE

You're going to do this for me, Dale.

DALE

Suppose I just went to the FEC?

Candle motions to the DRIVER, who turns around in his seat, pulls out a handgun, and points it at Dale.

CANDLE

We're going to do this right, Dale. And we're going to do it clean. And when it's done you'll never have to work for someone you hate just to pay the bills.

Dale is terrified.

CANDLE

Why the hell do you think someone like me comes all the way out here to run for office? You think it's 'cause I like the smell of cow shit? No! It's because I can only afford to run in a state like this!

DALE

Why do you want to run?

CANDLE

I'm positioning myself for the presidency.

DALE
Are you kidding?

CANDLE
I most certainly am *not* ki--

With the driver preoccupied, nobody has been watching the road. The Prius scrapes heavily against a bright yellow Hummer at an intersection and screeches to a halt.

EXT. STREET - CONTINUOUS

Across the street from the accident is a small Mexican restaurant.

Candle, the driver, and Dale climb out of the Prius. Out of the Hummer leaps heavily-armed nut job politician PHILLIPS WINCHESTER, who begins screaming incomprehensibly at the driver.

CANDLE
Looks like this is your stop. Think about it, OK? Here's my card.

Candle hands Dale a business card, reading:

TOM CANDLE. HONESTY FIRST.

Candle gestures to the restaurant.

CANDLE (cont'd)
Go have lunch. On me. You look tired.

Dale, dazed, wanders over to the restaurant. Candle shouts after him.

CANDLE (cont'd)
I want to know by Friday!

Winchester stops screaming at the driver and looks over at Candle.

WINCHESTER
Hey... hey... You're Tom Candle!

CANDLE
Yes--yes, I am.

Winchester offers his hand to Candle.

WINCHESTER
 I'm running against you! Phillips
 Winchester! American Liberties
 Party!

Candle, not really paying attention, shakes Winchester's hand.

CANDLE
 Nice to meet you.

WINCHESTER
 You used to be mayor of Santa
 Monica, right?

CANDLE
 Yes, back in--

WINCHESTER
 I'm gonna tear you a new asshole.

Candle is silent for a moment, then changes the subject.

CANDLE
 So, how does auto insurance work
 out here?

INT. MEXICAN GRILL - LATER

Dale enters the restaurant, looking dazed.

Lucy, who is seated at a booth in front of a laptop, waves at him. He walks over to the table.

LUCY
 I didn't see you at the press
 conference. You look terrible.

DALE
 Uhh.

LUCY
 Dale?

DALE
 Yeah?

LUCY
 Did you write that speech?

DALE

Yeah.

LUCY

That was a really bad speech.

DALE

Yeah.

LUCY

Dale?

DALE

I haven't slept since...

Dale begins counting on his fingers.

LUCY

You look really tired. Sit down.

Dale sits down.

DALE

Hmm...

LUCY

Yeah?

DALE

I'm being paid to do illegal things.

LUCY

What?

DALE

I just had a gun in my face.

LUCY

What?

DALE

I should sit down.

LUCY

Oh... that reminds me. You think I could interview you for my piece on Sturgeon's announcement?

Dale begins to cry.

DALE
I fuckin' hate my job, Lucy.

Lucy is taken aback.

LUCY
You're really in bad shape, aren't
you? Come on, come with me.

Lucy gets up, takes Dale by the hand, and leads him out of
the restaurant.

EXT. DENVER INT'L AIRPORT PASSENGER PICKUP - DAY

TJ Carvey exits the building just as Walter stops his car
and gets out.

CARVEY
Perfect timing!

They hug.

WALTER
Good to see you, TJ. How's D.C.?

CARVEY
Won't stop raining.

Walter throws Carvey's bags in the trunk. They get in the
car and drive off.

INT. WALTER'S CAR - LATER

Walter drives north on the interstate, towards Cheyenne.

CARVEY
They came after my family, Walter.

WALTER
Who?

CARVEY
Candle, I think. It was all
anonymous. They said they had
pictures of Jeremy...

WALTER
That's low.

CARVEY

I think they know about the gambling, too.

WALTER

We're gonna get these guys, TJ.

CARVEY

Good.

WALTER

We want you to help.

CARVEY

Oh... you know I couldn't do that. Braunbauer's still pissed at me for dropping out, and besides, your guys is just kind of a doofus, isn't he?

WALTER

Oh, come on. He's alright. How about this: let me take you to see Wilt, and we'll go from there, OK?

Carvey doesn't respond.

WALTER (cont'd)

You gonna just let Candle do this to you? You're better than that.

Carvey looks out the window.

EXT. PHILLIPS WINCHESTER'S COMPOUND - DAY

John Braunbauer stands next to Phillips Winchester outside Winchester's fortified compound in the wilderness.

Winchester fires a machine gun at a rusted-out helicopter sitting on the far side of a clearing.

After the jackhammer-like sound of automatic weaponry dies down, Braunbauer takes off his gun muffs and speaks.

BRAUNBAUER

Good shot!

WINCHESTER

Brought this baby back from 'Nam.

BRAUNBAUER
You were in Vietnam?

WINCHESTER
No.

BRAUNBAUER
...oh.

WINCHESTER
Why are you here, sock fucker?

BRAUNBAUER
I wanted to discuss your campaign.

WINCHESTER
Yeah, that's quite a thing, isn't it?

BRAUNBAUER
Braunbauer and Associates would like to back your run for office.

WINCHESTER
I thought you guys had the Republicans in your pocket.

BRAUNBAUER
To be perfectly honest, Wilt Sturgeon is kind of a doofus. We're just not sure if he's a viable candidate.

Winchester cackles menacingly.

WINCHESTER
So you want me to climb into your pocket?

BRAUNBAUER
Phil--can I call you Phil? What does your campaign budget look like?

WINCHESTER
Here's betting you could double it.

BRAUNBAUER
I can do better than that. I can make Sturgeon go away. Then you've only got that pansy Candle to deal with.

Winchester casually shoots Braunbauer's Mercedes full of holes. Then he calmly puts down the gun.

BRAUNBAUER (cont'd)

Jesus!

WINCHESTER

You think you can buy me, sock fucker? I've run every two years for the past twenty years! Did it ever occur to you that if I was the least bit concerned with winning I might try changing my strategy? I joined this race to talk about the issues, not pander to rich fuck-asses like yourself!

Braunbauer is speechless.

WINCHESTER

You get to walk home, sock fucker.

Winchester exits through his armored gate.

INT. LUCY'S HOUSE - AFTERNOON

Dale wakes up on Lucy's couch. He hears a loud banging coming from somewhere. He gets up and begins looking around. he finds the living room to be rather grungy, and notices plastic hanging from the ceiling.

As he rounds a corner, the banging gets louder. As he looks into the kitchen he sees Lucy pounding at an interior wall with a sledge hammer.

She notices him watching and stops hammering.

LUCY

Don't worry, it's not a bearing wall.

DALE

This is... quite a project.

LUCY

Yeah... I can't not remodel.

DALE

How's that?

LUCY
I put this wall in last year.
Decided I didn't like it. I dunno.
You feeling better?

DALE
Not really, no.

LUCY
Well, you look better anyway.

DALE
Thanks. What time is it?

LUCY
About 4:00.

Dale smacks himself in the head.

DALE
Great. Missed the meeting.

LUCY
You needed a nap. Oh! What if I
moved that wall in this way a foot
and a half, would that be better?

Dale looks at the wall she is gesturing at. It looks like a perfectly good wall.

DALE
...no.

LUCY
And then I can put the refrigerator
over here! It's perfect!

DALE
I should call Walter.

LUCY
I'm thinking blue counter tops.

DALE
Nope, I think actually I'm going to
commit election fraud instead.

LUCY
You know, it's probably not in your
best interest to say that sort of
thing to a reporter.

Dale pulls the wad of cash out of his pocket and drops it on the counter.

Lucy stops dead in her tracks.

They both just stand and stare at the money for a while.

Dale eventually speaks, still staring at the money.

DALE

Did you know that Wilt Sturgeon
will read anything you put in front
of him?

Lucy replies, not taking her eyes off the money.

LUCY

Yeah... I sort of gathered that.

DALE

Have you ever seen a political
campaign destroy itself from the
inside out?

LUCY

Not since Mondale.

DALE

That was funny.

LUCY

Thanks. I try.

EXT. DEAD INDIAN PASS - PRESS CONFERENCE - AFTERNOON

Tom Candle is standing at a podium in front of a gorgeous vista, delivering a speech on the environment to a crowd of supporters and a few news cameras.

CANDLE

This is one of the many beautiful
views in this state, and it the
duty of our federal government to
protect these natural areas from
being overrun by housing
developments and logging. As your
representative, I would support
increased efforts to--

From the back of the crowd, a gun goes off. Candle dives to the ground.

CANDLE (cont'd)

Oh my lord! Oh my lord!

The GUNMAN stands at the back of the crowd, still holding up the smoking gun.

He SCREAMS incoherently and sprints off away from the gathering.

Three police officers run after him, tackle him to the ground, and put him in handcuffs.

Candle is picked up and hurried off by security.

CANDLE

I'm alright! I'm alright, folks!

The gunman, being hauled off to a police car, screams to the crowd.

GUNMAN

Tom Candle is the work of the devil! Devote your lives to Jesus!

The gunman is locked in the police car, which drives away.