

KING BUDDY'S RETURN

a play by

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## KING BUDDY'S RETURN

**SYNOPSIS:** Using a THEN and NOW stage setup—the THEN being a celebrity roast of comedian and actor Buddy Clover in a hotel banquet hall and the NOW being his baronial library to which he returns after serving five years in prison for sexual assault. Buddy sets about planning a reputational rehabilitation, aided by his wife, his manager and a publicist. The banquet scene that opens the play presents Buddy as a hugely popular performer, respected by his peers and even by the President of the United States. Scene 2 begins 20 years later as Buddy returns home from prison, intent on restoring his good name—or at least leaving better rather than bitter memories behind. As he says, “I don't want the first words of my obituary to be 'Disgraced comedian.’” But hovering in the background is the still enraged woman whose testimony sent him to prison.

### THE ROAST CAST

Buddy Clover (early 50s)  
Ron Randall, (early 50s)  
Miss America, Glenda Revill (early 20s)  
Bayard Kitsinger, Chancellor of Lanchester University (mid 60s)  
First Lady, Melinda Watkins (mid 60s)

### THE LIBRARY CAST

Buddy Clover, (early 70s)  
Abe Foglesong, Buddy's manager (early 70s)  
Linda Clover, Buddy's wife (early 70s)  
Aileen Hope, Buddy's publicist (late 30s)  
The Clovers' maid (unnamed) (mid 20s)

### CENTER STAGE CAST

Maggie Trent (early 30s)

SCENE 1 The Roast, 20 years ago.

**THE SETTING:** A long table with a lectern at the center and five seats facing the audience. Seated stage right, left to right, are Bayard Kitsinger, president of Lanchester University; Miss America, Glenda Revill; host Ron Randall [beside lectern]; Buddy Clover, First Lady Melinda Watkins.

**OFFSTAGE MALE ANNOUNCER:** Welcome ladies and gentlemen to the fifth annual Roast From the Coast. Tonight we shine our blinding spotlight on that Monarch of Mischief, that Lion of Laughter, King Buddy Clover. Please welcome your host for the evening, the inimitable and inevitable Ron Randall.

**RON:** *(Standing and stepping behind the lectern)* Thank you invisible god-like voice. *(Looking up as if to address the voice)* Who writes your material? *(Pause)* Well here we are and what a sparkling **(1)**

crowd you are. Such glitter! Such chatter! I've not seen this much excitement since the library stopped charging overdue fines. Friends, we are eyewitnesses to entertainment history. It's been my personal privilege to watch Buddy Clover blossom from standup comic to TV host, to movie star, to bestselling author, to producer to philanthropist. *(Pause)* And on the seventh day, he incorporated. It's hard to overstate Buddy's importance. He has a publicist for that. And just look around you. Buddy knows how to raise a crowd, He doesn't send out invitations—he issues summonses. *(Looking toward the guest of honor)* You know I'm just kidding, don't you Buddy? Right? I want to live to see my daughter finish college. In all honesty, though, I think Buddy's getting a bit jaded with all these awards. There's a clause in his contract now that says the red carpet has to have a passing lane. What next? A drive-through window? I'm sure it's a mere coincidence that we're having this roast the same week Buddy has a new book and movie coming out. As he's often said, serendipity is much more effective if you plan for it. In case you haven't learned it from the morning shows, Buddy's latest book is called “Subway to Stardom.” It traces his life story from humble beginnings to humble magnificence. If you think “Subway to Stardom” sounds a bit self-congratulatory, you should know that his original title was “It's Me! It's Me!” But his ghostwriter talked him out of it. His movie is “Muchas Gracias, Broadway” in which he stars as an illegal Mexican immigrant who winds up winning a Tony award. Are you sensing a theme here? *(Pause)* There'll be more ass-kissing tonight than you'd see at a Missouri mule festival. Among those bestowing lip service to our guest of honor are Miss America, the chancellor of Lanchester University and, most exciting of all, America's First Lady, Melinda Watkins. *(Raising his fist in the air)* Let the revels begin! Please stand and give a collective curtsy to Miss America, Glenda Revill.

MISS AMERICA: Thank you all. I don't usually appear in public without my sash and crown, but I couldn't get them through security. Security is always tight around Buddy, but I wasn't prepared for him to pat me down personally. And such a thorough patdown, too. The first time I met Buddy was when he served as a judge at our Miss America pageant. He was the perfect gentleman. After the first round, he smiled, shook my hand and offered me his best wishes. The second time we met was when I became a finalist. He smiled, kissed my hand and asked if I had a ride home. The third time was after I won. He smiled, kissed me on the lips and offered to buy me a car. That's when it occurred to me Buddy might be a flirt. My suspicion was confirmed last week when he called and asked if I'd go on tour with him to entertain the troops. I said, “But Buddy, there 's no war.” He said, “Not yet. But I have friends at the Pentagon.” Oh, that Buddy! Such a tease. *(She pauses and gestures toward the next speaker)* Please welcome Lanchester University Chancellor Bayard Kitsinger.

BAYARD KITSINGER: I know I'm supposed to take a swipe at Buddy. After all, it's a roast. But what can you say against a guy this generous and thoughtful. I might even say “cunning.” Most of you know Buddy as a comrade and co-worker. But to me, he is and always has been a champion of higher education. His gifts to colleges all across America have become legendary. However, I can tell you from my own experience, he's no pushover. We dickered for months over every tiny detail before he agreed to fund our Fine Arts Building. But at last I was able to convince him that the project would look more dignified without a neon sign over the entrance flashing “Buddy's Place.” *(He gestures by holding up and closing and unclosing his first to simulate a light blinking.)* Even so, he was a good sport about it. In fact, he's designed the uniforms, pledged to cover all travel expenses and even serve as mascot for our women's beach volleyball team. *(Steps away from lectern and then turns back for a parting remark)* Oh, Buddy, since you asked, team practice is Saturdays and Sundays from noon to 4. *(Pause)* And now from the ludicrous to the sublime, I give you First Lady Melinda Watkins.

FIRST LADY: *(The slightest bit tipsy, she pauses before speaking)* I'm waiting for the applause to end. Or start. I apologize that my husband—whom some of you may know as El Presidente—could (2)

not be with us this evening. It breaks his heart. Unfortunately, his Secret Service detail insisted on going to Olive Garden for the endless salad, and he couldn't bear to disappoint them. You will take that into account, won't you, when he runs for office again? Assuming I let him. *(Pause)* In a sense, my husband and Buddy are in the same business—making Americans happy. *(Pause)* At their own expense, of course. I am told by the Department of Specious Quotations that Abraham Lincoln once remarked, “Where there is laughter, there is freedom.” *(A pause to reflect)* Or maybe it was the waitress at Olive Garden who said it, that pushy poly sci major who keeps forgetting our bread sticks. I'm not entirely clear on that point. Anyway, the president weeps that he must take a rain check. So he asked me to announce—and here it comes—our beloved Buddy Clover has been chosen as the next recipient of the Presidential Medal of Freedom. *(She waits for applause and cheers from the other speakers.)* Way to go Buddy! *(She stands straight, beckons him to the podium and says in a stage whisper)* Is this farce about over?

BUDDY: *(He grasps the podium with both hands, leans back, smiles broadly and sweeps his arm toward the speakers seated on either side)* Ah, so many good friends and so much ill-concealed envy. I love it! Some of you may have noticed I was all choked up as the First Lady was speaking. So who the hell's idea was it to serve chicken nuggets? I am enormously grateful for the First Lady's kind words and startling announcement. Even if I weren't, I'd pretend to be. Her husband has snipers stationed up there in the air ducts. *(He points upward)* The Presidential Medal of Freedom! Wow! *(Pauses shakes his head in disbelief)* Wow!! That is one fine career-topping award. I already have a place for it on my reinforced trophy shelf—right between my Merit Badge for Modesty and the Eternal Flame. Isn't Miss America delightful. Today so regal, so gorgeous, so full of herself. Tomorrow wiping her hands on her apron and saying “More coffee?” My old drinking pal, Ron Randall, arrived early on the red carpet—he had to vacuum it. A man's gotta make a buck when he can, eh Ron? And, by the way, nice job on my hedges. That crack Professor Kitsinger made about my having bad taste really stung—and it's kind of ironic coming from a man who does karaoke poetry readings. Still we remain close friends. We wouldn't be quite so close if he'd ever get his hand out of my pocket. As Ron told you I have a brand new book and movie for your entertainment pleasure. So I'll be asking to see your receipts and ticket stubs when we cross paths again. Goodnight all. I'm as disappointed as you are that there's no door prize.

*Lights fade and out*

SCENE 2 Buddy's library, the present

*(Buddy Clover's library/office. His desk and chair sit in front of a wide ceiling high bookcase. To the left of the desk is a sideboard for liquor and glasses. Facing the desk is a sofa and a semicircle of easy chairs with small tables beside each. A Maid in uniform and white apron enters carrying a bouquet of flowers, which she puts on the sideboard. She leaves and returns with a champagne bottle in a silver bucket, which she places beside the flowers. She reaches into the sideboard and withdraws three champagne flutes and arranges them in a row near the bucket. She exits.)*

*(Linda—with a telephone to her ear--and Abe enter and take their seats in adjacent easy chairs facing Buddy's clean-topped desk.)*

LINDA: OK. Hurry home. *(Laying the telephone aside)* Buddy's on his way. He's had a few things to check with his lawyers. They're still sticking to him like Velcro.

ABE: Wonder what mood he'll be in? Should we hit the champagne or hide behind the sofa? (3)

LINDA: Oh, you can bet he'll be the same old cheerful Buddy. That's his default pose. Besides this is his big liberation day. He was understandably angry his first few months inside. But by the time he got settled in, he was already turning the experience into a comedy routine. I don't think he's bitter. He's basically come to terms with the fact that he was the villain. No one else to blame. And obviously not the women who testified against him.

ABE: You've been his rock through all this shit. Most wives would have bailed out long ago.

LINDA: I never once thought of leaving him. It had nothing to do with marriage vows or any of that high-principled nonsense. We've always been like roots tangled together, each of us anchoring the other. You wouldn't expect it from a serial adulterer, but he's always been kind and tender to me. Always funny to talk to. Always asking and often taking my advice. I was never his fashion accessory. *(Pause)* He really is a genius, you know. But, like most men, he's always wanted more sex than a normal marriage could supply. Or fake. So it hardly seemed fair—even to me—that he resign himself to doing without. I just wish he'd taken a discreet mistress. That I could have handled better. It would just be something we were both aware of but never mentioned. Instead he became a predator. *(Pause)* The funny thing is, I think he could have gotten all the sex he needed the way other celebrities always have—just being around and letting the women come to him. *(Pause)* God knows there were plenty of willing ones. Well, he's paid the price for it. All in all, I'd rather face the embarrassment of staying with him than the darkness of turning him away.

*(Buddy sticks his head in the door and looks around as if assuring himself he's in the right place. He clears his throat theatrically to gain attention.)*

BUDDY: Yoo-hoo! Is this the halfway house for snatch addicts?

LINDA: Only if you're halfway cured.

*(She and Ben stand and embrace him. They're long, heartfelt embraces. Linda and Ben step back as if to appraise him, while he pivots slowly in a circle, his arms out to his sides.)*

BUDDY: *(Turning away from them and looking around the room,)* Could you guys give me a minute? *(Linda and Ben nod and exit. Buddy stands still until they're gone. Then he walks slowly to the bookcase and begins scanning the spines of the books he hasn't seen for five years. He trails his fingers along the spines and picks out a book, sniffs it and opens the cover. He pages through it for a moment, then lays it on his desk. He continues to scan the covers and then glance all around the room before strolling over to the sideboard and pouring himself a glass of champagne. He returns and sits in the chair behind his desk and rocks back and forth before pulling out and looking into the desk drawers. Content that all is in order, he gets up, walks over and takes a seat in the semicircle of easy chairs Linda and Ben have been sitting in.)*

BUDDY: *(Turning toward the door and announcing in a loud voice)* OK, fans. The bar's open.

*(Linda and Ben come back in, see the champagne in Buddy's hand and each pours himself a drink and return to sit in the chairs they occupied originally.)*

BUDDY: I gather from the empty desk that my friends haven't deluged me with welcome-home cards.

ABE: Don't fret. They'll probably drive by your gate after dark and flash you a cheerful thumbs up.

LINDA: (*Sourly*) Yeah, at 90 miles an hour.

BUDDY: Damn! It's good to be back in this room. If I work at it hard enough, maybe I can convince myself I never left. So . . .how have things been here at Rancho Diablo these past five centuries?

ABE: Well the good news is that even with your staggering legal bills, you're still a very wealthy man, what with your real estate, royalties and all that. No sweat there. I guess what we've got to do now is decide what to do next. Are you officially retired? Are you going to lead expeditions into the Amazon? Record an album of Taylor Swift songs? Assuming I still have the job, what's the manager of a famous ex-con to do?

BUDDY: (*His temper flaring*) Well, the first thing you do is lay off that “ex-con” shit. Some things just aren't funny anymore unless I say they are—and that's a big one. (*He adopts a more mellow tone*) I prefer to think of myself as a correctional school alumnus.

ABE: (*Properly chastened and lifting his hands in a surrender position*) Sorry, chief. If my sword weren't in the shop, I'd fall on it.

BUDDY: (*Whimsically*) And if I could find a better manager I'd let you.

LINDA: How's your health been? Your face is as gray as oatmeal.

BUDDY: I don't doubt it. Sun lamps were hard to come by in lockup. Give me a few days to get my civilian legs working, and we'll head for the beaches of Mustique. Right now, I've got the same questions Abe has. I need to figure out how to become acceptable in polite company again. But one thing I'm sure about, and that's making a complete break from all the legal crap I've put up with the past five years. No more court shenanigans. No appeals for pardons, no interviews about time spent, no meetings with lawyers. I know this may sound looney tunes, but I want to build a brand new Buddy Clover. If I don't do something positive with the time I've got left, all my obituaries are going to begin with (*Tracing his finger across the air to indicate he's reading a headline*) “Disgraced comedian dies.” So how do I avoid that? How do I begin to prove that the new Buddy Clover—given the opportunity—can do just as much good as the old Buddy Clover did?

LINDA: Wouldn't it be better to wait a while until the public shaming dies down before launching a resurrection move. What do you think, Abe?

ABE: I'm inclined to go with Buddy on this. The fact is it's going to be awkward to try a comeback no matter when he starts. And I see no upside in waiting until people forget about him and then refreshing their memories about the very thing you want them to get past. (*He pauses and looks directly toward Buddy*) It should go without saying—but I'll say it anyway—everything depends on you keeping Buddy Junior on a leash.

BUDDY: Jesus H. Christ! Don't you think I know that? From now on I'll be so damn celibate monks will be asking me how I do it.

ABE: The immediate problem with rehabbing your image is that the media doesn't have to pay attention to you anymore. At least not respectfully. To them you're damaged goods and a punchline on late shows. Americans may love a hero, but they absolutely delight in stoning a villain. Let's say you write a book. Who'd publish it given the backlash you'd get from feminists? Who'd promote it, and would bookstores stock it? Even if they did, who'd give it a fair review instead of parading their political correctness by dishing up old dirt? Would critics portray you as a true repentant or a privileged crybaby? You've got the same problem if we attempted a documentary. If you produced it, who'd carry it? If you gave carte blanche to another producer, what's to stop him from nailing you to the cross for sensational value? You can always score some quick points by giving money to a good cause, but what good cause would take the risk of associating its name with that of a sex offender?

BUDDY: OK, Mr. Sunshine, you've pretty much painted me into a corner. Are you saying I'm fucked no matter what I do?

ABE: Not at all. I just don't think we should spin our wheels trying the usual "I've-learned-my-lesson" approach. We've got to anticipate and disarm all the arguments against you, all the mud and insults they'll throw. We've got to find a new way to make you irresistible. How about you and Linda slip away and get some sun, while I brainstorm the problem with a hotshot publicist I know. She's a big deal at the company that masterminded your first book tour—the Larchmont Group. Remember them?

BUDDY: Vaguely. You're talking 25 years ago.

ABE: Well, they've become monster opinion-makers since then. Offices everywhere and some of the biggest accounts in the biz. I'll brainstorm with them while you're gone to see what angles we can come up with. And I'll be sure we keep it all very hush-hush.

BUDDY: You do that. And while you're at it, ask them if they charge extra for miracles.

*(All three stand up and walk casually from the room. The Maid returns to pick up the champagne glasses and put everything away.)*

END OF SCENE 2:

SCENE 3 Buddy's library a month later

*(Back in Buddy's library. Buddy is seated at his desk. Linda stands behind him looking down at a document on the desk when the Maid [introduced in Scene 2] enters and approaches the desk.)*

MAID: Your guests are here.

LINDA: Bring them in, dear.

*(Maid goes to entrance and returns leading Abe and Aileen. Buddy stands up and he and Linda walk around the desk to greet them. Maid exits.)*

ABE: Buddy, Linda, meet Aileen Radford. She was Rumpeltiltskin's instructor when he was just learning how to spin straw into gold. *(Linda gives Abe a quick hug and she and Buddy shake hands with Aileen.)*

AILEEN: Mr. Clover, I'm delighted to meet you, I've always been a huge fan of your humor..

BUDDY: Then maybe I should ask for *your* autograph. My fans ain't what they used to be. And, by the way, it's "Buddy," not "Mr. Clover." I also answer to "Hey, you."

ABE: (*Sizing Buddy and Linda up and down.*) Looks like the beach did you two a world of good—especially you, Linda. You brought some of the sun back with you. (*They all take their seats in the semicircle of chairs.*) So are we ready to discuss Operation Renew? I've explained the background and the end goal to Aileen. Now we've just got to find something to fill in that yawning middle part. But Aileen knows the framework. By the way—and just to impress the hell out of you—she was the point person in that Larry Porter dustup a few years ago after he got drunk and went on a racist rant that cost him a movie deal.. It took some doing and left Old Larry over a year in media purgatory. But, thanks to Aileen's diplomatic wizardry, he ended up with some high-profile Black friends—who became his best friends—plus a nomination for the NAACP Brotherhood award. Now I call that damage control.

BUDDY: (*To Aileen*) So, Aileen, can you foresee a turnaround in my future.

AILEEN: I wouldn't be here if I couldn't, but I do have to get something sticky out of the way first. At the risk of sounding both pushy and naive, I've got ask if you're sincere about making amends or simply expecting to go through the motions?

BUDDY: (*Annoyed*) What's the difference as long as I do my part and you're getting paid for yours? You're not my priest.

AILEEN: (*Rising as if to leave*) I was afraid of that. There's really no point in my being here.

BUDDY: (*Standing and facing her*) Hold on. Please. I apologize. I'm in new territory. It's just that I'm not used to having to justify myself to the people who work for me.

AILEEN: Well, if we're going to work WITH you, I need the right to question you any time I have a doubt. (*She sits back down.*) My company's taking a considerable risk having you as a client. The sad fact is you're not a prize PR catch anymore. Before you got into all your trouble, it would have been a feather in my cap to win the great Buddy Clover account. Now some very perceptive people are going to wonder if I'm not putting my own credibility at risk. (*Pause*) If this is just a ploy, an angle—if you're just faking regret, one of these days you'll slip or crack, and I'll end up with egg on my face. I'll be screwed with the producers and reporters I have to work with every day. They've got to trust I'm being straight with them. If you get mad and explode in public, if you act indignant, if you're caught harassing the first women who gives you an erection, you're done. I'm done. There won't be a second act for you, and I'll wind up ghostwriting celebrity chef cookbooks for a living.

BUDDY: (*Holding up both hands in mock surrender*) I give! I'm a little pissed off—but I give. So let me assure you that I'm one hundred percent, cross-my-heart committed to becoming an even better guy than I was in my heyday. Now, can we get back to the job at hand?

AILEEN: Let's do that. First, a quick rundown of what Abe and I have gone over. We agreed that whatever we do, you'll always have to stay directly in the spotlight. There can't be any hiding behind Abe, me or press releases. You take the flack as well as the credit. And you can't project your honesty and sincerity by funding another Buddy Clover charity, no matter how noble it is. That rules out (7)



such moves as setting up an educational foundation or a public policy think tank, financing disease research, organizing an arts group, endowing a library or swinging a hammer for Habitat to Humanity like Jimmy Carter did.

BUDDY: I see. That pretty much reduces me to a blood donor or school crossing guard..

ABE: (*Leaning forward to wisecrack and lighten tension*) See! Now you're thinking.

AILEEN: It's not quite that bleak, Mr. . . Buddy. How would you feel about running for political office, specifically for the U. S. Senate. I can assure you the media would be all over that. It would be such a big splash they couldn't ignore you.

BUDDY: You are kidding? Right?

ABE: We're serious as an overdue light bill.

AILEEN: The better we explain it, the more you'll love the concept.

BUDDY: I'll save you the trouble. That's a solid "NO." Jesus Christ, that's the stupidest thing I've ever heard of. I know zilch about politics and care even less. Here's a thought: Why don't I start a religion—you know, the Church of Abracadabra--and tell the world it can go fuck itself because God loves me. That should work like a charm, don't you think?

LINDA: I've got to go with Buddy on this. He'd be a laughing stock getting into a cage fight like that. And for what?

AILEEN: Buddy, you asked me to trust your sincerity, now I'm asking you to trust my expertise at least long enough to hear me out.

BUDDY: OK. Have a go at it, but I remain uninterested.

AILEEN: We're not talking about a run-of-the-mill campaign where you work through a political party and seriously concentrate on winning.

BUDDY: So you want me to run and lose? This gets better and better.

ABE: No, Buddy. Winning or losing is really off the point. It's positive exposure we're after, not votes. The campaign is more important than the election it leads to.

AILEEN: It's almost certain the media would consider you an oddity at first. A one day story. But give them a resounding announcement speech and a few cheering crowds, and you'll get more and more press—and, if we work it right, good press, better than the candidates who are only chasing votes. Your campaign will set you apart because it will actually be inspirational.

LINDA: I don't know much about politics, but I do know the Democrats and Republicans here in Connecticut would chew Buddy up and spit him against the wall. I've seen it happen time and again to (*She makes air quotes*) "inspirational" candidates who clashed with professionals.

ABE: Oh, we wouldn't be butting heads here in Connecticut. Too many political intrigues and too many people here to deal with. And you wouldn't run as a member of any party. You'd be an independent.

BUDDY: How could I run for the Senate and not run in the state I live in?

AILEEN: We think you should run in West Virginia.

BUDDY: (*Frustrated but intrigued*) Would it offend you if I just sit here and look puzzled? Why West Virginia of all goddamn places?

AILEEN: It has fewer people. It's relatively small, so it's easy to cover. And it's demonstrated that it's open to outsiders running for office there. (*Pause*) That is if you have the name and the cash. And I have it on good authority you're cool in both those departments. Jay Rockefeller—actual name John D. Rockefeller IV—moved to West Virginia cold as a social worker and headlined his way to the top, first winning as governor and then as senator—for FIVE terms. So it's been done.

ABE: And state hopping is accepted political practice. Rockefeller's uncle, like him a New Yorker—carpetbagged into the governorship of Arkansas. Robert Kennedy and Hillary Clinton both became senators from New York—even though neither originally lived there. You'd have to buy a place in West Virginia to establish residence, of course—nothing fancy—but that's all you need to get on the ballot. The beauty part is that if you ran you'd have an immediate claim to the nation's attention. Hell, you're already more famous than the President. People couldn't help from seeing the new Buddy Clover taking shape. Isn't that what you want—a stage where you can make the case you still matter?

LINDA: Wouldn't his criminal history disqualify him?

AILEEN: Not as far as we can tell. But even if they did try to use his record against him, he can still campaign as he's contesting it. Again, the point is to get positive exposure and let the election niceties take care of themselves..

BUDDY: Let's say I agreed to this. What then? What have I got to offer that would set me apart from any other political huckster.

AILEEN: Well, to start with, you wouldn't be a huckster. You'd be running a legitimate campaign with an honest vision of what you could do if you won. But you'd actually be doing things to help the voters in the meantime—giving them encouragement, ideas and tools they can use before the election ever takes place. That's where my company and I come in. We're your idea factory and your message shapers. We feed the media a steady diet of the new and improved Buddy Clover. You provide the face, the voice and the sincerity, all of which you're bubbling over with. It's not like you'd be doing good for the first time, what with all your earlier gifts to education and medical research. You'd be a novice politician but a veteran people-pleaser. That role's not a stretch for you..

BUDDY: (*Turning to Linda*) Does any of this make sense to you.

LINDA: Well, she's at least lifted it out of the realm of nonsense. (*To Aileen*) But if you do convince him to run, don't count on me playing the long-suffering but forgiving wife. I will not be the adoring eyes and photo op. That would instantly expose Buddy as a phony from our first picture together. Domestic bliss can't be our calling card. I'll stand with Buddy all the way. Abe you know that. (9)

But it would have to be in the background. Way in the background.

AILEEN: Well, we certainly can work with that. I think you're right, Linda. Keeping you out of the spotlight might even work to our advantage, since it would play up the difference in Buddy's campaign. I say we plan a two-way approach: The first is to make Buddy impervious to the criticism that's sure to come at him at first. We anticipate and have simple, bulletproof answers to both the legitimate and the smart ass questions meant to trip him up. The second thing is to compile an agenda of good works he can put in motion from the very start of his campaign.

ABE: Here's the image we're looking for: Total positivity. You're not attacking anybody or anything—not even your political opponents. You're a booster, an improver, a friend in need who has no time for petty squabbles. You deliver your messages—with our help, of course—as if you're handing out free bottles of sunshine. But we'll see to it you don't come across as naive. You'll recognize things need to be fixed. But you'll focus entirely on building, not tearing down..

AILEEN: It's been proven that even laudable slogans, like “war on poverty” or “attacking crime” or “rooting out corruption” conjure up harsh images we want to avoid. So we frame the statements in terms of “rescue,” “support,” “encourage,” “inspire,” “nourish.” It may not be the language that drives people into a frenzy, but it presents you as that rarest of creatures, a politician you can actually feel good about.

ABE: One problem we can be sure of no matter what we do. And that's Maggie Trent coming after you like a banshee. Sending you to prison hasn't cooled her down a degree as far as I can tell. I've never seen or read one of her interviews since the trial that she didn't depict you as a total monster. A lot of her rants are on You Tube—so you can't escape them. As soon as she hears you're running, she'll come after you with a club, denouncing you as a phony and an opportunist. She's intractable. But you can't afford to hit back at her or even look resentful. She's a major hazard, and we have to equip you to deal with that.

BUDDY: Obviously, I can't blame her.

AILEEN: No you can't. You should never say her name or even allude to her in public. It won't soothe her and will only damage you by stirring up the past. The more she attacks, the more you'll need to ignore the bait and double-down on your good vibes toward the world.

LINDA: I still feel a little shaky, Buddy, but Aileen and Abe do make a good case.

BUDDY: OK, troops, for the time being it's a go.

SCENE 4: Two months later

*(Once again in Buddy's library, now turned into a pre-campaign headquarter. There are more chairs. His desk is piled high with computer, books and paper. There are small tables everywhere, topped with papers, coffee cups and soft drink bottles. Buddy, in shirtsleeves, sits at his desk, head down, reading a document. Abe and Aileen sit in the easy chairs, while Linda reclines on the sofa.)*

BUDDY: *(He looks up from the document to face the paper-shuffling and phone texting going on in front of him.)* This looks good, Aileen. How's the opening speech coming along?

AILEEN: (*Holding a clipboard throughout the scene*) We're working in your notes and corrections. It should be updated and good to go by tomorrow. We'll also have the press release and video ready officially announcing your candidacy. I've planted some discreet hints in the media that you're considering a run. That'll build interest in the actual announcement.

ABE: With Linda's and Aileen's input, I've got a list of questions you need to prepare yourself for. Some of them are doozies, so don't throw your Grammy statues at me. You answer them as you normally would, and we'll tell you why you're wrong.

BUDDY: Shoot. I'm wearing my bulletproof vest.

ABE: (*Using his best game-show voice*) And the first question is: Is this a ploy to make people forget about your sexual assault conviction?

BUDDY: (*Hesitating a moment*) Certainly not forget. What I did was wrong. No questions, no excuses about that. That's why I want to do some good to help make up for the wrong.

AILEEN: The sentiments are right, but the answer's too stop and go, too convoluted. It needs more punch.

LINDA: What if you said, "Because I did wrong, I intend to do things right from here on "

AILEEN: That's better, but it sounds a little pompous, as if he's speaking from a balcony.

ABE: How about, "I want to make up for the wrong I've done. It's as simple as that."

LINDA: That implies he thinks a good deed can erase a bad one. That's more likely to enrage critics than soothe them.

AILEEN: OK, we'll work on that one. (*She makes a note on her clipboard.*) Next question, Abe.

ABE: What connection do you have with West Virginia?

BUDDY: None so far. But I know the people are open-minded. And the population is small enough I think I can have a positive impact.

AILEEN: Not bad. Let's go with that one. (*She writes it down on her clipboard.*)

ABE: I think he should stop with "open minded." The rest of it sounds kind of clunky and forced.

LINDA: I agree. (*Aileen notes change on her clipboard*)

(*The Maid edges in, hands Linda a note, which she reads and then nods yes and hands back the note. The Maid exits.*)

ABE: Ready for the next one. Aren't you trying to buy the election?

BUDDY: No.

AILEEN: I like that. But pause for a moment before you answer, like you're thinking hard about it. If the media want more than that, make them specify, let them do the heavy lifting.

ABE: (*Looking at the next question on his list*) Have you had contact with Maggie Trent since your trial.

BUDDY: I haven't.

ABE: What would you want to say to her if the two of you came face to face?

BUDDY: (*Snapping out*) I'd say, "Pardon me, miss, is this grief taken?" Buddy Clover, you've still got it. Always the snappy comeback.

AILEEN: OK. Let's all chuckle to relieve the tension. But remember, Buddy, to the common folk wit and sarcasm reeks of insincerity. Try again.

BUDDY: And the correct answer is: "I'm too busy dealing with what IS to speculate on what Ifs."

AILEEN: Bingo!

ABE: Moving right along—Why should West Virginians vote for an outsider?

BUDDY: Because my ideas should mean more than my residence.

LINDA: Not bad, but it borders on sounding smug.

AILEEN: Remember the thoughtful pause. And for God's sake don't ever say, "That's a good question." Stall for time with a pause. The media will see that as a sign of respect. Besides, it will make it harder for them to reduce you to a sound bite.

ABE: The next one: Will you stay in West Virginia if you lose the election?

BUDDY: (*Amiably*) Oh sure, by the time the election comes around, I'll already have projects in motion that I'll be staying with.

AILEEN: That's good. I like it. Makes you sound statesman-like. "Oh, sure." That's beautifully casual.

ABE: And mentioning projects gives the media something to delve into besides your history.

AILEEN: Here's a show stopper: Where do you stand on abortion?

BUDDY: Being a man, I don't think I should have a vote on it. But I stand totally behind a woman's right to choose.

LINDA: (*Cupping her hand to her ear*) Is that the sound of a campaign going down the toilet I hear?

AILEEN: Sounds like a great answer to me. We can't kiss up to everyone.

ABE: Just a couple more. Will your wife play a role in your campaign?

BUDDY: Yeah, she'll be driving the bus and selling T-shirts. Sorry, Aileen. I just had to take one more shot. I'll play it straight now. (*He tries again*) Linda will be indispensable as always. Her ideas and enthusiasm are what ultimately convinced me to run.

AILEEN: Well said, Buddy.

LINDA: It's almost like I coached him.

ABE: And one more. Unlike most candidates, you say you're going to start doing things for voters before the election. Do you think your opponents should also take this approach?

BUDDY: I'm the new guy in town, they're the veterans. I respect them too much to set myself up as a model. But if I'm going to offer myself as a public servant, I see no reason to wait to begin that service. Why not start now?

AILEEN: Sounds perfect to me.

LINDA: (*Jokingly*) Good job, Your Highness. You fake humility well.

ABE: And with that zinger, I call a cease fire until there's a real press conference.

BUDDY: Anything else.

AILEEN: Nothing that can't wait until tomorrow. Ger some rest, Buddy, and dream big.

END OF SCENE 4

SCENE 5: The present

(*With the rest of the stage dark, Maggie Trent walks in from the wings to center stage to stand in the spotlight and face the audience. But she speaks as if making a statement to the camera.*)

MAGGIE: I am posting this video for all the victims and survivors of sexual assault. (*Long pause to compose herself*) Buddy Clover, who ruined my life and traumatized dozens of other women, has been released from prison after serving only five years of what, in my mind, should have been a life sentence. Now it appears he's going to try to salvage his ruined reputation by running for the United States Senate. Imagine that! It's outrageous, but it's classic Buddy Clover deception— “Good for me and tough luck for you.” (*Pause*) I'm serving a sentence for which there can be no pardon or parole, no early release for good behavior. (*Longer pause*) As you might expect from a man who's used to having his own way, Buddy Clover is reaching out for redemption. He's playing a new role—but still a role—he hopes will prevent the world from seeing him for what he was and is. He's hoping that by doing a few high profile good deeds people will eventually forget or forgive the poisonous evil he's done. It may work. But not with me, it won't, and not with all the others whose friendship he cultivated and whose trust he betrayed. Don't believe this grinning hypocrite. (*Pause*) The heartbreaking part of this is that most of us looked up to him as a mentor only to discover too late that he was sizing us up as prey. I am by nature a trusting person. You see where that's gotten me? Imagine a life in which (13)

your every waking hour and every action is soiled by fear and suspicion? That's the life Buddy Clover has left for me and others. So I am here to tell the world that I intend to be his scarlet letter, his permanent stain as long as I have a finger to point and a voice to raise. Go back to your fancy mansion, Buddy Clover, and live in lonely shame as we do. The world's had enough of you.

END OF SCENE 5

SCENE 6: The present

*(A stagehand brings a lectern to the stage front center and exits into the wings. After waiting a minute for the audience to take it all in, Buddy, dressed in a neat, well-tailored suit, walks in from the wings and stands behind the lectern. He's carrying a sheaf of notes and consults them before looking up to engage the audience.)*

BUDDY: Dear Citizens of West Virginia. I'm sorry to be so formal but I haven't lived here long enough to say. "Fellow West Virginians." That would be pushy. I'm used to being in front of the camera as a performer, but today I'm simply Buddy Clover not playing anyone else. I come to you today to announce that I am running for the United States Senate from West Virginia. But first I want to address a few concerns I'm sure you have before I get into the reason I want your votes—but far more than that, your trust. I am a convicted sex offender who's spent five years in prison for that crime. Perhaps you're wondering why I'm here rather than hiding at home in shame. I've been saturated in shame, identified with shame and, for a time, immobilized by shame. But I've come to believe that living in shame instead of trying to rise above it is a form of suicide. It is all pain and no gain. I will never live long enough to clear my name. The damage I've done is too great, too unforgivable. But I do hope to put my shame in perspective by surrounding it with righteous deeds. The desire for redemption is what leads me here.

You may also wonder why a guy whose lived in Connecticut chooses to start his political life in West Virginia. That's an easy one. First, West Virginia's population is small enough and its boundaries compact enough that I believe I can have a greater positive impact here than anywhere else I ran. More than that, though, West Virginia, with its natural beauty and proximity to the population centers of the East Coast, has advantages no place else can offer. With so much here for America to appreciate,, there's no reason our state should lose the talents and energy of its young people who move elsewhere for jobs. As rich as it is in beauty, natural resources and room for development, it is far richer in untapped human talent. That's where the real wealth lies if only we will recognize it, support it and put it to use.

Apart from all this, West Virginia has a truly maverick spirit. It is neither North nor South, Republican nor Democrat, rural nor urban, set in its ways or open to the world. When I say maverick spirit, I think of how this heavily Protestant state voted for John F. Kennedy when pollsters were saying the nation would never elect a Catholic president. West Virginia was the state that proved them wrong. And when a young fellow named Jay Rockefeller—a Northeast carpetbagger like me—moved to West Virginia, you were open-minded enough to realize his goals were yours too and elect him, first as your governor and then your senator for five terms in a row. West Virginians dance to their own music. And it's damn good music, isn't it?

I'm going to run my campaign in an unusual way. Instead of promising you what I'll do for you IF and AFTER I'm elected, I'm doing some things right now. Because I was raised in a one parent family, I have a soft spot for all single parents with young children. Usually it's a mom, but not always. So (14)

I've already funded 10 scholarships—they're called Plus Ones. They provide full tuition for any selected student to any college in the state, PLUS a matching scholarship for his or her mother or father. Why shouldn't good parents be rewarded, too? If the parent of a scholarship winner isn't able or doesn't choose to attend, then the Plus One can go to another family member or even the winning student's best friend. I thought of calling them "buddy scholarships," but that would be bragging, wouldn't it? My campaign has also established what we call a General Store website to deal with any ideas, questions, problems, plans, complaints or opportunities having to do with West Virginia or its residents. The site will be online and fully staffed next week. Finally, for now—we'll do more later—we've scheduled a two-day Opportunities Festival at the Charleston Civic Center this summer. Details will be posted on the General Store website. It's going to be a wild free-for-all. Everyone's invited. There'll be stages and conference rooms for performing and sharing ideas. I'll be there both days from 10 in the morning to 4 in the afternoon to chat with anybody about anything that has to do with boosting our state and its people. There'll be free daycare and entertainment. My conversations with citizens will be recorded and posted online for everyone's benefit—unless, of course, for those of you who might want to keep our conversation private.

To begin with, I'll pay for these projects myself. But I have lots of friends and associates who also want to contribute (*Dramatic pause*) as long as their name's not associated with mine. What you will not hear in my campaign is any criticism of my opponents. I believe they want the same good things for you that I do and will go about achieving them in their own ways. Best of luck to them. Well, that's my pitch—and that's all folks. But just for now. Thank you for hearing me out, and good night.

SCENE 7: Two days later

*(Buddy's library. He is seated at his desk going through file folders. Some he returns to the desk drawers, others he places in the open brief case at the right side of his desk. He is dressed in a short-sleeve summer shirt and khakis. After all the file folders have been disposed of, he turns to his bookcase and picks from various shelves three books which he also puts in brief case. As his back is turned, the Maid enters with a tray bearing a club sandwich and what appears to be a martini. Buddy looks back over his shoulder and flashes her the forefinger to thumb approval sign. She places the tray on a table beside the easy chair closest to Buddy's desk and exits. Buddy seats himself in the easy chair and picks up the martini. Just then his phone buzzes.)*

BUDDY: *(First looking at the phone screen, then putting it to his ear.)* Howdy ma'am. Do I sound suitably rustic? Yeah, we landed about an hour ago. I'm too damn old for this long distance commuting. How's it with you?*(Pauses to listen)* .Abe and Aileen stopped for coffee. They'll be here in a couple of ticks to give me a rundown of how things are going so far. *(Pause)* Just packing up some papers and bidding a reluctant goodbye to my favorite retreat. *(Long pause)* That's good news. You think you'll like bus travel? *(Long pause, then he chuckles and says jokingly)* Oh, sure, I rattle my bones over those unpaved roads and you come back here and live like Cleopatra. *(Pause)* Do you think two staffers will be enough assistance to start off with? *(Pause)* Well, just be sure we withhold their Social Security fees. No need to have a mini-scandal this early in the game. *(Pause)* My aim is to pack and tie up all the loose ends here and fly back to Charleston tomorrow night. Will that work? *(Pause)* Love you, too. *(He turns off the call, sets the phone aside and resumes sipping his drink, just as Ben and Aileen enter. They're also dressed in casual summer wear and carrying Starbucks coffee cups. Aileen has the phone to her ear.)*

ABE: *(Looking around).* Looks like you're ready to roll.



BUDDY: Just about. Who knew making amends involved so much packing?

AILEEN: (*Closing her phone*) That was the Washington Post. I'm awarding your announcement speech five stars. It'll be a while before you're Mr. Clean, but I can see the dirt washing away already.

BIDDY: Tell me more. I feed on applause.

AILEEN: There's plenty of it. NPR and the Post both want interviews. I even got a feeler from the New York Times, but it was from one of its freelancers, not an actual editor. I'm thinking we should hold out for a real Times offer and give them an exclusive. But we won't wait too long. Momentum and all that. The Charleston paper headlined its story "Carpetbagger or Lone Ranger?" The piece said, "Clover makes a lot of sense. But can he deliver?" AP called you "a refreshing voice," and Politico said, "finally an independent escapes the lunatic fringe."

BUDDY: Sweet! (*He raises his glass in salute.*)

ABE: A martini this early?

BUDDY: I consider vodka a sports drink.

ABE: Have you heard from Linda about life in Hooterville?

BUDDY: Just got off the phone with her. Our bus and driver have arrived from Nashville. Linda's getting it ready for the road. We'll start the first tour of the state Monday morning.

ABE: Tell Linda to be sure to lay in a stack of Bibles for us to throw to the natives if they get restless.

AILEEN: (*Tentatively*) May I offer a cautionary note? Once you start joking about a place, wisecracks tend to slip out automatically. We're ass deep in the Internet Age, my friends. Everyone's shooting and posting videos, so tonight's off-the-cuff quip—innocent though it may have been—becomes tomorrow's campaign spoiler. The smallest misstep—especially this early—can undo everything we've accomplished in an instant..

ABE: (*To Buddy*) Is it just me or are we being scolded?.

BUDDY: I'm pretty sure she had you in mind since I'm contractually beyond reproach.

AILEEN: Feel better now, you guys? (*Pause*) Can we talk about Buddy's schedule?

BUDDY: The floor is yours.

AILEEN: Here's the route. We kick off the tour in Charleston, then it's on to Logan, Huntington, Fairmont, Wheeling and Parkersburg. We'll hit Morgantown and the university crowd on our next circuit. Nobody's going to show up for an early morning or late evening rally until we gain some momentum. So we start with afternoons and try to hit three to four towns a day

BUDDY: Works for me. When I started doing standup, I rode buses all the time.

ABE: (*To Aileen*) Any flack yet from Maggie Trent?

AILEEN: Oh, yeah. She posted a rant online that almost turned ME against Buddy. Just kidding. But she is one enraged chick.

BUDDY: Should I take a look at it?

AILEEN: I wouldn't. Our ploy is to rise above criticism, not be distracted by it. We've pared down your speech, Buddy, so you'll never be talking more than 10 minutes at a stop. After that, you mingle and listen. And don't be pissed off if your first crowds are more like clusters. Not to be cynical, but from a media point of view the people are basically stage props. With big crowds you sell inspiration, with small ones its sincerity.

BUDDY: *(With deliberately exaggerated self confidence)* I can DO that.

AILEEN: Then my work here is done. I'm heading back to the office. You coming, Abe?

BUDDY: *(To Abe)* Stay around, why don't you, and have a drink with me.

ABE: You go ahead, Aileen. *(With a wink)* Buddy's sounding lonely.

*(Buddy gets up, gives Aileen a hug, and as she exits he goes to the sideboard where the liquor is.)*

BUDDY: What are you having?

ABE: How about a beer—and no glass? I'm feeling proletariat.

*(Buddy fixes himself another martini and pulls out a can of beer for Abe. He walks back over, sits down and hands Abe his beer. They don't actually clink drinks, but they make a vague gesture of it.)*

BUDDY: I've got a feeling there won't be many relaxing moments from here on out.

ABE: True. True. But it sure feels good to actually be doing something. I'll be the first to admit, I would never have thought of getting you into politics. It's definitely the right move. You're even beginning to look like a statesman. So now that you've watched her work, what do you think of Aileen.

BUDDY: What do I think? I think I'd like to fuck her.

ABE: Well who wouldn't? But for god's sake don't try it. Should I call the vet and have you neutered? I hear the soreness wears off in a week.

BUDDY: Relax, Abe. I was just making a common male observation, not sending flowers. I need a break from having to second-guess every damn thing I want to say. I'm still a comedian at heart. Speaking of painful operations, after I had my dog neutered, all he'd do was lie around looking at wallpaper samples and listening to show tunes. *(Pause)* That's a joke, Abe. Remember those?

ABE: Yeah, I'm laughing on the inside. When you feel an impure thought coming on, tell it to me. I've always been your pressure valve.

BUDDY: ONE of my pressure valves. Alas, there were others, as the Trent et al. vs. Clover complaint will attest.

ABE: You've never said much to me about Maggie Trent. I didn't know her all that well.

BUDDY: She was a sweet kid. *(Pause)* Was.

ABE: You think she'll ever get off your back?

BUDDY: Not a chance, but I swear Abe. I'd give her a million bucks and let her pound me until her arms wore out if it took even the slightest edge off her anger. She wouldn't have to forgive me. We really were the best of friends. We had such good times hanging out with each other *(Pause)* Chattering, telling jokes, making fun of the jerks we had to work with. *(Pause)* I betrayed her big time. It's that simple, that awful.

ABE: They don't call sex the tender trap for nothing.

BUDDY: You seem to have eluded the trap.

ABE: Lorene and I had a good marriage. All 32 years. I never strayed from it—not that I wasn't tempted about every 10 minutes.

BUDDY: Oscar Wilde said, “I can resist anything except temptation.”

ABE: I'll defer to you on that.

BUDDY: I don't know, Abe. The older I get the more I wonder if women ever really enjoy sex for its own sake—the way we do—or if it's their thank-you gift for the attention we pay them. They know they're sitting on magic and we'll do anything to penetrate the mystery. *(Pause)* Maybe to them sex is always an act of violence they feel they have to put up with for its other benefits. *(Pause)* Or just to survive, I don't know if a woman can ever be totally honest about her feelings toward sex. We focus on the orgasm—but who the hell knows what they're thinking about. Cuddling? Talking? Getting it over with? *(Pause)* When Linda and I were dating, she was all over me, damn near wore me out. Then we get married, my career starts taking off, she has her own thing going and pretty soon it's *(Simulates a hesitant voice)* “OK, if you really want to.” She and I made a valiant attempt to revive the old feelings in Mustique, but we couldn't get the juices flowing. We fumbled around like teenagers—but without the urgency. So we laughed it off and went out and had coffee. That's love American style when you're both creaking like old wooden boats at anchor.

ABE: Sorry to hear that.

BUDDY: There's lots of vanity involved. I never thought I was a great lover, but I know I was an attentive one. Then this thing with Maggie blows up and those other women—the ones I thought were consenting adulterers—are in court saying in effect that my lovemaking was so repulsive I should go to jail for it. Clearly I overestimated my charm.

ABE: Cherish the good memories.

BUDDY: Once, after my first TV show was canceled, I started feeling sorry for myself, really depressed, you know, and a friend suggested I see his therapist. A woman. I did and within half an hour I realized I was trying to turn her on with my killer wit. It didn't work, but my improv was so good it cured my depression. *(Long pause)* I don't know at what age a man is supposed to lose interest in sex, but I'll pass on the information if I ever get there. Maybe I should see a vet—as long as it's not a woman.

ABE: You have my number.

BUDDY: And you've got mine. Oh, well, to quote Annie Hall, “la de da, la de da.”

ABE: *(He rises, stretches as if to relieve stiffness and steps toward the exit.)* Thanks for the beer and the glimpse into your Spring Break fantasies. I'm going to clear out of here and leave you to your packing. I've got to file some papers with the Election Commission if we're going to keep you legal.

BUDDY: Take care. See you at the airport. *(Abe exits with a wave. Buddy returns to the seat behind his desk and continues to rummage through papers as the Maid comes in and begins stacking the drink cups and glasses on her tray. She carries them over to the sideboard, sets them down and begins wiping off the surface. Buddy turns and looks intently in her direction, almost as if seeing her for the first time. Then he gets up, walks slowly over behind her and puts his left hand on her shoulder. He lets it rest there for a moment and then starts to rub her back, but before his hand slides all the way to her bottom, she gently but firmly pushes his arm away, picks up the tray and walks hurriedly toward the exit. All the lights but the spotlight go down, leaving Buddy standing there motionless, watching her leave.)*

LIGHTS OUT, END OF PLAY.