

THREE PRESIDENTS

Written by

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ACT ONE

INT. THE OBSERVATORY - LARGE SEMI-CIRCULAR ROOM WITH 39 CHAIRS SET ON RISERS, DIRECTED TOWARDS A LARGE WINDOW SPANNING THE LENGTH OF THE ROOM

The observatory, a large vessel floating in a void, unknown whether in space or another dimension, houses every deceased U.S. President.

George Washington stands at the long window, gazing at the United States of America below. There are 39 chairs set on risers, directed towards the large window spanning the length of the wall. George rubs his eyes and continues staring at his country below.

GEORGE

Rest in peace. Such an inaccurate description of the afterlife. A rancorous prison fabricated to unleash unrelenting torment upon its occupants while they spectate in agony as their lives are reduced to insignificant splinters of time. How I yearn to relinquish death's piercing grip upon me and rejoin my countrymen, for that hardship is unparalleled to this enduring sentence that has been placed upon me.

George looks to the heavens.

GEORGE (CONT'D)

I have been your faithful servant, doing my part to better the lives around me, and its through you, that I see the errors of my premature cognition. I can not fathom how such egregious tragedies could have been shielded from my foresight for so long. But answer me Lord, what crime has been committed for this sentence to be bestowed upon me? To watch as my country, falls to the bigotry and evil that I, and many who followed in the centuries passing, fought so hard to defeat. I cannot bear the sight no more. Remove me from this place. This prison. Relieve me of my torment, Lord. Please; I pray.

George bows his head, walks slowly to the first chair on the bottom row, and sits. George puts his face in his hands, defeated.

ABRAHAM

You know, ghosts too, need their rest, and it appears, you are in desperate need of it my friend.

George looks over his shoulder to see Abraham Lincoln standing in the doorway. Abraham walks down the steps and sits beside George.

GEORGE

Abraham; How did you sleep?

ABRAHAM

(sighs)

During my tenure on Earth, I slept on a bed that stretched barely five feet, and now I sleep on a California King.

GEORGE

(chuckles)

Well I take it?

ABRAHAM

(nods)

Indeed. I only wish my companion would sleep as well as I.

Abraham removes his hat and looks at George.

ABRAHAM (CONT'D)

When was the last you slept?

GEORGE

I'm not entirely sure; perhaps a couple days ago. The days seem to blend together now.

ABRAHAM

Perhaps, if you left the Observatory once in a while, it wouldn't seem so far-flung.

GEORGE

(smiles)

Your designated epithet continues its accuracy even in the afterlife.

ABRAHAM

While I appreciate the notion of being known as 'Honest Abe,' I'd prefer Honest Abraham. Never did enjoy the nickname, Abe. Too simplistic.

GEORGE

Agreed. Abraham is more dignified and distinguished. I'll do my due diligence to ensure myself and the others refrain from calling you Honest Abe.

ABRAHAM

I appreciate it, George. Thank you.

George and Abraham sit in silence for a few moments, staring out the window.

GEORGE

Is everyone beginning to stir?

ABRAHAM

They are. I would've been here sooner but when I awoke, I noticed my hat missing. Upon further investigation, I discovered Warren was examining himself with it on.
(irritated)
Again.

GEORGE

(snickers)
Harding is an intriguing individual. I once found him reciting Reagan's 'Tear Down This Wall' speech a couple weeks back. It appears he enjoys imitating past presidents.

ABRAHAM

I suppose imitation is the sincerest form of flattery!

GEORGE

What are the others doing?

ABRAHAM

Theodore and Franklin are re-watching old westerns, William Howard is taking yet another bubble bath, Lyndon is playing fetch in his underwear, and I believe Dwight, Ulysses and Zachary are still trying to finish their game of Risk.

GEORGE

How long has that game endured?

ABRAHAM

(shakes his head)
Nearly a year.

GEORGE

How can one be entertained by such a prolonged game?

ABRAHAM

I don't possess the ability to answer that question, but the answer alludes me as well.

GEORGE

I'm sure it's to determine who is the better officer.

ABRAHAM

(enlightened)
Ah! Of course! They're trying to break the tie! Andrew was telling me Dwight and Ulysses are tied at eight wins apiece.

GEORGE

Andrew Jackson?

ABRAHAM

(nods)
He has seven wins and Zachary has four.

GEORGE

Taylor has some catching up to do.

ABRAHAM

He does. I'm sure their invitation is still valid.

GEORGE

(shakes his head)

I have no time for strategy games.
I'm needed here.

ABRAHAM

Ah yes; needed in an empty room
where its visitation dwindles with
every passing year. I see Kennedy
and Jefferson frequesnt this room
often, and Theodore, Franklin and
Coolidge are here almost as much.

GEORGE

And you?

ABRAHAM

(shrugs)

I'm here as much as the next.

GEORGE

(smiles)

Honest Abe. I've always preferred
Humble Abraham. You and I both know
you're here as often as I.

ABRAHAM

That may be, but I've learned how
to step away. The bags under your
eyes are worsening and I haven't
seen you leave this room for weeks
now.

GEORGE

(softly)

I can't quiet my mind. There was so
much more I could've done Abraham.
I could've given more if I had more
time. I could've done more.

ABRAHAM

Don't fall into that abyss George.
We were given valuable time and
dwelling on what we didn't do, and
what we should've done will only
drive you mad. Nixon is still
recovering from his fall into that
abyss. He, like many of us, made
mistakes we wish we could take
back. But all we can is hope those
who precede us, learn from our
mistakes and strive to do better.

GEORGE
(taken aback)
Strive to do better?

George rises from his chair and walks to the window.

GEORGE (CONT'D)
They seek only to better themselves
by acting solely upon their self-
interests. And when some seek to
better the lives of their fellow
Americans, they argue and stall.
There is no compromise, no
compassion, no empathy and no
tolerance. Only division, hatred
and indifference.

George walks away from the window and returns to his seat,
slumping in his chair. Abraham rises and approaches the
window. He looks hopeful.

ABRAHAM
I don't say this often George, but
I believe you're wrong.

George looks up and remains seated.

GEORGE
Do tell.

ABRAHAM
You know what I see?

George remains silent.

ABRAHAM (CONT'D)
I see America striving forward. I
see students braving the elements
as they march through blizzard
winds breezing between the
skyscrapers of New York City. I see
artists, laying the final touches
on their layest masterpieces in San
Francisco as bikers and runners
weave through tourists on
Fisherman's Wharf. I see surfers
desperately swimming to catch their
next wave on the crystal clear
waters of Oahu. I see people,
across our great country, going
about their live and working to
make their lives, and lives of
their fellow countrymen better.

Abraham turns to George.

ABRAHAM (CONT'D)

What do you see my friend?

George stands and joins Abraham at the window. George pauses, not saying anything.

GEORGE

I see frustration brewing. I see people waiting, in both car and store, for their daily caffiene fix. I see parents impatiently waiting for their children to ready themselves for school. Chefs grumbling to themselves, cursing as they prepare for tonight's dinner service. I see Americans going about their day. It's another typical day.

ABRAHAM

It may seem that way, but there is a veil concealing an invisible force at work. Can you see it?

George continues looking out the window.

GEORGE

I see nothing. What is this invisble veil supposedly shielding?

ABRAHAM

Progress.

George scoffs. He refuses to understand Abraham's point of view.

GEORGE

Progress? It appears our definitions of progress do not align.

ABRAHAM

Perhaps, but maybe I need someone with a different prespective.

President Theodore Roosevelt, donning a pristine three piece suit enters the Observatory. Teddy loudly enters the room with an unlit cigar between his lips.

TEDDY

I thought I'd find you two in here!
Mind if a join you lonesome loners?

ABRAHAM
Not at all Theodore!

TEDDY
Abe. How many times must I say it.
Please call me Teddy.

ABRAHAM
Only when you call me Abraham.

Teddy smiles.

TEDDY
Seems we're at an impass.

ABRAHAM
Indeed.

Both men laugh as they shake hands.

TEDDY
Now, what are you two staring at?
America I presume?

ABRAHAM
Correct. Finished with your
westerns already?

TEDDY
Aye. Franklin has a game of chess
planned with Woodrow in the study.

GEORGE
You don't fancy yourself a game of
chess? I'm sure Thomas wouldn't
mind teaching you.

TEDDY
Jefferson? That is a man whose
ideology does not align with mine.
I prefer the hunt and being among
nature. Surrounded by books is my
hell.

Abraham chuckles.

ABRAHAM
So, what brings you here Theodore?

TEDDY
Checking on things; making sure
she's doing alright.

ABRAHAM

She's doing fine, although George doesn't seem to think so. Tell me Theodore, answer a question for me if you please. What do you see?

TEDDY

In our country?

Abraham nods.

Teddy walks up to the window and leans against it, taking a few seconds to answer.

TEDDY (CONT'D)

I see beauty.

(pause)

Inspiration.

(pauses)

Love.

(pauses and smiles)

I see light shining in the darkness. Dim, but enduring. Only growing stronger with time.

George is aghast, not understanding either man's perspective.

GEORGE

Please explain yourself Roosevelt.

TEDDY

You don't see it? Look at her beauty! Can't you see the vastness of the Grand Canyon? The majesty of Yosemite and Yellowstone? Or the wide open fields of the Great Plains. Our nature is unrivaled across the globe.

GEORGE

(disappointed)

You're referring to nature?

TEDDY

(proudly)

That I am! It is an incalculable added pleasure to any one's sum of happiness if he or she grows to know, even slightly and imperfectly, how to read and enjoy the wonder-book of nature. We and nature are synonymous.

George grows visibly frustrated.

GEORGE

Abraham wasn't referring to nature.
What do you see when you look at
our nation?

TEDDY

(beat)

My statement stands. I see nature.
I have always said I would not have
been President had it not been for
my experience in North Dakota. I
opened my eyes in North Dakota, and
I've been a changed man since.

George doesn't understand.

GEORGE

The reasoning of your viewpoint
alludes me. Negativity and
bleakness are all I see. I see a
nation who fails, whose darkness
overshadows its light. A nation
that will succumb to tyranny at the
behest of those who claim to be its
greatest advocate

Teddy maintains looking out the window.

TEDDY

The poorest way to face life, is to
face it with a sneer. There are
many men who feel a kind of twisted
pride in cynicism; there are many
who confine themselves to criticism
of the way others do what they
themselves, dare not even attempt.
There is no more unhealthy being,
no less worthy of respect, than he
who either really holds, or feigns
to hold, an attitude of sneering
disbelief toward all that is great
and lofty, whether in achievement
or in that noble effort which, if
it fails, comes to second
achievement.

(pause)

It is not the critic who counts,
not the man who points out how the
strong man stumbles, or where the
doer of deeds could have done them
better. The credit belongs to the
man who is actually in the arena,
whose face is marred by dust and
sweat and blood;

(MORE)

TEDDY (CONT'D)

who strives valiantly; who errs,
 who comes short again and again.
 Because there is no effort without
 error and shortcoming; but who does
 actually strive to do the deeds;
 who knows great enthusiasms, the
 great devotions; who spends himself
 in a worthy cause; who at the best
 knows in the end the triumph of
 high achievement, and who at the
 worst, if he fails, at least fails
 while daring greatly. So that his
 place shall never be with those
 cold and timid souls who neither
 know victory nor defeat.

Teddy, George and Abraham stand in silence. George soaks in his friends words, hurt but understanding.

GEORGE

The Man in the Arena. Unfortunately
 I am the man looking on from the
 stands, unable to enter. I am a
 mere spectator on the outside
 looking in, desperate to go another
 round.

George looks to Abraham.

GEORGE (CONT'D)

I stand here, day after day,
 looking out this infernal window,
 unable to take action. You both see
 beauty, looking on with pride, but
 when I look, I only see hate and
 disgust and disappoint. I yearn to
 be optimistic, and I yearn to be
 the Man in the Arena, but here I
 remain trapped. Where is the
 positivity is that Abraham?

Abraham remains silent, never looking away from George.

ABRAHAM

We all desire another round in the
 arena; to right the wrongs of our
 past, and aspire to do more than we
 did. But our time has expired, and
 we've been gifted an opportunity to
 spectate.

GEORGE

And what are we spectating?

ABRAHAM

Progress. There is a veil, nearly concealing it, but down there, I see the youth of today learning how to better the future. I see progress in communication. The connection the world shares through the internet can now be accessed by almost everyone around the world. Progress through innovation. Life has been made easier with every new piece of technology and it's helped those who are unable to help themselves. Our United States are battling a raging storm, desperately trying to remain afloat, but the night is always darkest before the dawn my friend. I believe we will see a new revolution unfold, where people will put aside their differences, ignore the cultural and racial bias that have plagued our past, and look toward building a better America, thus creating a better world and a brighter future.

George nearly believes him.

GEORGE

And you're sure you're not looking upon our nation with rose colored glasses? How do you see this future materializing?

ABRAHAM

She has been absent for some time, but I believe she will soon rise from the ashes and fill the hearts of young people.

GEORGE

Who?

ABRAHAM

She's the same entity that flowed through Lewis and Clark as they paved their way through the west. In the heart of Harriet Tubman as she brought freedom to slaves in the south. In the soul of Susan B. Anthony as she fought for women's suffrage. In the determination of Martin Luther King Jr.

(MORE)

ABRAHAM (CONT'D)

who fought for Civil Rights. In the courage of Amelia Earhart as she crossed the Atlantic. In the adventurous spirit of Theodore Roosevelt and his Rough Riders as they explored the beauty of our country in their fight to preserve it. And in the patriots who rebelled against a tyrannical king.

Abraham looks to George.

ABRAHAM (CONT'D)

She is the same entity that stood by you as you crossed the Delaware.

George smirks and nods.

GEORGE

The American Spirit.

ABRAHAM

There are many things I wish I could've done during my time on Earth, but such is the cruelty of hindsight. We can only hope that those who succeed us, learn from our mistakes and strive to do better. Americans have always asked themselves throughout their existence, how can we do better? Sometimes it's breaking barriers, while other times it's admitting past mistakes. Each propels us forward and reveals the possibility for a brighter future ahead. I too, yearn to be the man in the arena, but our time is up. All we can do now, is cheer from the stands, but we mustn't look for the negatives, but highlight the positives. Things may seem dark now, but soon the skies will clear, the seas will calm, and progress will move forward once again. 'When you're living on your knees, you rise up,' and I believe the United States will soon rise up again.

George is calmed and understands. Teddy looks at Abraham, confused.

TEDDY

Did you just quote Hamilton?

Abraham laughs and places his hat on his head.

ABRAHAM

It's difficult not to, when Thomas
and James listen to it non-stop.

Teddy shakes his head.

TEDDY

Conceited white wigs.

GEORGE

(beat)
America will be alright?

Abraham nods and clasps George's shoulder.

ABRAHAM

She'll be alright.

George smiles and breaths a sigh of relief.

GEORGE

Gentleman, is taking a nap before 8
a.m. deemed too early?

TEDDY

For men of our age? Bully no! I nap
as often as I can!

George looks out the window.

GEORGE

(whispers)
She'll be alright.

TEDDY

What do you two say to grabbing
breakfast before George's long-
needed slumber? I do enjoy
listening to Harrison regale us
with tales of his unfounded
ambitions for his shortened
presidency, while I eat my steak.

GEORGE

Now that will lift my spirits!

Abraham straightens his hat and exits the room with Teddy.
George follows closely, but stops in the doorway, taking one
last look at America.

GEORGE (CONT'D)

The alternate domination of one factor over another, sharpened by the spirit of revenge, natural to party dissension, which in different ages and countries has perpetrated the most horrid enormities, is itself a frightful depotism. The disorders and miseries, which result, gradually incline the minds of men and seek security and repose in the absolute power of an individual; and sooner or later the chief of some prevailing faction, more able or more fortunate than his competitors, turns this disposition to the purposes of his own elevation, on the ruins of Public Liberty. I pray, we the People, can overcome such a tragedy.

END OF ACT ONE