

"ELEANOR ROOSEVELT"

Written by Rosemary Regello

BASED ON A TRUE STORY

Rosemary Regello
7855 Firestone Way
Antelope, CA 95843
(916) 722-6779
regello@thecityedition.com

"ELEANOR ROOSEVELT"

FADE IN:

AN AMERICAN FLAG (1898)

Mounted on a cavalry horse that's advancing across a battlefield. A REGIMENT is barely visible in the swirl of dust kicked up by many horses. We see a flicker here and there of the troops, but only the flag stands out.

LORENA "HICK" HICKOK (V.O.)
Dead women don't age well.

EXT. SAN JUAN HILL, PUERTO RICO - DAY

The dust clears, revealing the legendary ROUGH RIDERS storming the hill on that long-ago day.

HICK (V.O.)
As a matter of fact, history spits
on their graves.

Clinging to their McClellan saddles, the troops fire Krag-Jorgensen, repeating bolt-action rifles at the Spanish army. COL. TEDDY ROOSEVELT, 43, is conspicuous at the head of the pack with his tan slouch hat, powder-puff whiskers and gold-rimmed specs.

HICK (V.O.)
Unlike other people we know.

As our boys crest the summit, the battle dissolves back into the dust of history.

EXT. GREEK COLUMNS AT ENTRANCE TO 1600 PENNSYLVANIA AVE., WASHINGTON D.C. (1904)- DAY

Standing before a great hall of power, the lithe figure of an enigmatic YOUNG WOMAN hesitates. She seems to realize she'll be fighting her own epic battle before long. As such, her face is a labyrinth of emotions: worry, skepticism, ire... and resolve.

HICK (V.O.)
I mean, look what happened to Mary
Magdalene.

INT. CROSS HALL, THE WHITE HOUSE - DAY

Far from being greeted with the red carpet treatment, a major structural renovation of the building is underway. As she negotiates her way across a bed of drop cloths, the young woman quietly acknowledges the TRADESMEN before her.

HICK (V.O.)

That business about her being a prostitute. Some pope made up that story back in the sixth century.

Finally an usher in English coattails, IKE HOOVER, 30, catches up with her. As they climb a grand staircase, its spanking new banister is already getting a workout from the President's pre-teen sons, ARCHIE and QUENTIN. A racing streak of brown varnish stains their white sailor outfits.

INT. FAMILY DINING ROOM, SECOND FLOOR

Ike deposits the young woman - who is, of course, Eleanor Roosevelt - in the doorway. Her Uncle Teddy, who is now President, doesn't notice her as he skims the newspaper. Neither does his buxom wife EDITH, as she scribbles out a chore list for the housekeepers.

HICK (V.O.)

And what about Marie Antoinette? "Let them eat cake." She never said that. What happened was her mother married her off at fourteen.

Before Ike can get the President's attention to make a formal introduction, Eleanor cuts him off: "That won't be necessary." Presently, Roosevelt spots his niece and makes a beeline over to give her a hearty, Rough Rider hug. Less enthralled with the visitor, Edith collects her chore list and curtly quits the chamber.

HICK (V.O.)

She was the cake.

INT. COUSIN SUSIE PARISH'S HOME, MANHATTAN (3/17/05)- DAY

It's St. Patrick's Day and a four-tier wedding cake bides its time on a side table. The crème de la crème of New York society packs the drawing room. All eyes turn to the bride, Eleanor, and her escort, the President.

HICK (V.O.)

Then there's Eleanor Roosevelt. Her I knew very well. Hell, she was my best friend, but not in those early years.

Ted's tux, white collar and top hat look smashing. Eleanor, meanwhile, skulks down the aisle in a drab satin gown handed down from her grandmother. The cumbersome train and obtrusive veil cause her to step on the President's foot!

HICK (V.O.)

Yeah, I know what you're thinking. Trust me, there's more to this gal than that the bungling do-gooder they told you about in school - if they mentioned her at all.

Waiting at the altar is FRANKLIN DELANO ROOSEVELT, 20, an irrepressible hunk of Ivy League optimism. In the seats, the President's petulant daughter ALICE marvels over what she thinks a glaring mismatch. Sharing that sentiment is the groom's uppity and doting mother, SARA DELANO. Sara turns from the fruit of her womb to glower at the daughter-in-law to be: "What on earth does he see in her?"

HICK (V.O.)

Boy, she had plenty of detractors even back then.

EXT. DUPONT CIRCLE, WASHINGTON D.C. (6/2/1919)- NIGHT

Upscale brick town houses and Japanese magnolia trees bask in the balmy glow of a summer evening. Franklin and Eleanor, now in their thirties, stroll home from a dinner party. Franklin is stargazing.

FRANKLIN

Picture yourself adrift on a moonless night. Trying to find your way home. And only those stars to guide you.

ELEANOR

Don't change the subject. The Interior Department controls the funding at Saint Elizabeth's.

FRANKLIN

See the three in a row there? That's the belt of Orion, the hunter. And there's his tunic. Did you know he was banished to that spot after bragging about all the animals he'd killed?

ELEANOR

That's not what happened. His lover Artemis shot him by mistake with his own bow and arrow.

FRANKLIN

Well, that's rather disturbing.

ELEANOR

What's disturbing is how our government operates veterans' hospitals. That place is a travesty of neglect.

F.D.R

Maybe he's better off up there than down here.

ELEANOR

Franklin.

He knows better than to argue with her on the merits. He scrambles for the high ground instead.

FRANKLIN

You know, Artie, you shouldn't have cornered Secretary Lane like that.

ELEANOR

He's evading his responsibility.

As she steps off the curb, an automobile recklessly barrels down the street. Franklin reels her back onto the sidewalk with time to spare. They watch the car turn and head off in the direction they're walking. Then they cross.

FRANKLIN

It was a dinner party. Not the time or place to lecture cabinet officials on the cage-like existence of asylum inmates.

ELEANOR

It's his asylum. Someone had to wrap it around his neck like an albatross.

FRANKLIN

In that case, why not use my bow and arrow? Take him down like an elk.

ELEANOR

And those inmates, as you call them, aren't insane. They're shell-shocked.

FRANKLIN

Shell-shocked. Whatever that is.

ELEANOR

But the budget is such a pittance, they might as well be prisoners of war.

FRANKLIN

Well, of course, I can sympathize with you there. Everyone's grumbling about the budget cuts.

ELEANOR

Couldn't he order some sort of investigation?

FRANKLIN

Ah, a commission of inquiry... You know something? That might actually work. You do rather have a head for this business. Unfortunately, it's not the head that interests me.

Franklin slips his arms around her and sweeps her sideways. Eleanor hangs in his arms, not resisting. She trusts him. However, from this vantage point she can also see the Orion constellation. She remembers she's still peeved.

The animus only adds to his attraction and the clash of the Titans ends in the steamy epiphany of a kiss. They look at each other, transfixed - that is, until a BLAST of dynamite jars them back to their surroundings. Smoke rises from the next block.

FRANKLIN

What the devil was that?

EXT. ROOSEVELT RESIDENCE, "R" STREET - NIGHT

Eleanor and Franklin reach their three-story townhouse. The first floor windows have been blown out. Ground Zero is across the street, at the home of ATTORNEY GENERAL MITCHELL PALMER, 55. In pajamas and slippers, he stares blankly at his demolished front wall

FRANKLIN

Go check on the kids. I'll see about Palmer.

INT. ROOSEVELT RESIDENCE

In the front parlor, Eleanor finds the maid, SALLY, pacing back and forth in a state of morbid panic. Shards of glass litter the floor by the drapes.

SALLY

It's the end of the world. It's the end of the world.

ELEANOR

(grabbing her)

Calm down. Where is everyone?

Sally points a forefinger to the heavens.

THIRD FLOOR HALLWAY

Eleanor bobs her head in and out of her children's bedrooms. From the third, she retrieves one-year-old JOHNNY and hurries to the end of the hall.

BEDROOM OVER STREET

The oldest Roosevelt son, JIMMY, 10, has heard the blast. Half-asleep, he peers down at the street from his still intact window, perplexed.

ELEANOR

Jimmy. Did you see what happened?

(He shakes his head.)

Well, it's alright now. Go downstairs and wait in the kitchen with Sally.

Here, put on your thongs.

Jimmy complies with the directive. Cradling the baby, Eleanor takes over his vigil.

ELEANOR'S POV

Franklin comforts a distraught Palmer as neighbors venture out of their homes and a SIREN wails in the distance.

HICK (V.O.)

In 1919, Franklin Roosevelt was Assistant Secretary of the Navy. Mitchell Palmer, his neighbor, was Attorney General. No one saw who delivered that bomb, at least while the man was still in one piece.

EXT. PALMER'S TOWNHOUSE

Palmer babbles incoherently as Franklin steadies him and pokes through the debris with a stick.

PALMER

Shattered night. Merciful god. And the time will come for thee and thine to bear witness.

FRANKLIN

Boy, something sure smells like the dickens.

Franklin's stick uncovers a chunk of smoldering human arm. He sizes up Palmer's behavior, then turns to look up at the window his wife is staring down from. "Shell-shocked..."

EXT. SENATE HEARING ROOM, U.S. CAPITOL - DAY

The Appropriation Committee hears testimony from a more composed Attorney General Palmer.

PALMER

A total of nine bomb blasts around the country, on June 2nd. Before that, thirty-six prominent men, including Mr. J.P. Morgan, targeted with letter bombs in April. It seems most of those were held up at the post office on grounds of postage due. There was one fatality, a butler I believe.

Franklin enters the chambers. He looks around for someone he doesn't find, and takes the empty seat next to SENATOR TOM WALSH, 62. Franklin extends his hand.

FRANKLIN

Franklin Roosevelt.

WALSH

Senator Tom Walsh. Montana.

FRANKLIN

Say, have you seen the Secretary of the Interior?

WALSH

Can't say that I have.

FRANKLIN

Lane was supposed to meet me here. We're testifying next. So, who's winning?

Walsh doesn't hazard a guess.

PALMER

These Russian Bolsheviks, bankrolled by Hun money, are plotting to destroy us as surely as the moon brings in the tide. That's why I want a one half million dollar supplemental appropriation without delay. Without this money, the Bureau of Investigation cannot crush the alien filth.

FRANKLIN

(confiding)

He was theeing and thouing me like a Quaker the night of the bombing.

WALSH

He is a Quaker. Didn't you know?

FRANKLIN

Hadn't the slightest. Now he's the Kaiser.

PALMER

At this time I'd like to introduce the head of our new general intelligence division, John Edgar Hoover. Mr. Hoover is a two-year veteran of the agency.

HOOVER, 27, the short, pudgy former Library of Congress clerk rises in a dandyish gray suit to acknowledge his introduction.

FRANKLIN

A two-year veteran. That'll show 'em.

EXT. ROOSEVELT ESTATE, CAMPOBELLO, MAINE (1921) - DAY

A 24-foot sailboat, the "Vireo", is tipped to one side, abandoned on the sand before a 34-room colonial home. A CHIME clangs, heralding a thick bank of fog that rolls in.

HICK (V.O.)

In the Twenties, Franklin Roosevelt was sidelined from politics after contracting polio at his summer home on Campobello Island.

Out on the bay, a small steamer chugs out to deeper water, as if making a getaway.

HICK (V.O.)

And that showstopper came on the heels of another bombshell. He'd been caught having an affair with Eleanor's social secretary, Lucy Mercer.

INT. DEMOCRATIC WOMEN'S FUNDRAISER, NEW YORK (1924)- DAY

Packed to the rafters with an ebullient CROWD of upper-class women. At the sight of Eleanor's entrance at the back of the hall, the ladies become positively giddy. She shakes hands, gets hugged and kissed like a messiah as she makes her way toward the podium.

HICK (V.O.)

Like other women who've been wronged by bigwig husbands, Eleanor decided it was time to get into the family business.

Accompanying Eleanor are two Democratic Party organizers: NAN COOK, who's thin, tomboyish and all-business; MARION DICKERMAN is on the plump side, with swarms of brown hair barely contained on the bun, and far more congenial soul than her partner.

AT THE PODIUM

ELEANOR

Gov. Miller is affected with the moral blindness of a man futilely digging in the ruins of our old industrial system, hoping to find some charred bits to salvage. Yet we women are by nature progressives, looking always ahead, which is why we've decided to go forward with the forward-thinking Democrats.

INT. ROCHESTER HOTEL, UPSTATE NEW YORK (1928)- DAY

Mayhem prevails on the floor of the State Democratic Convention, where TWO MALE DELEGATES squabble over parliamentary procedure.

HICK (V.O.)

After she helped Al Smith defeat his opponent in the governor's race, Eleanor got credentials for a dozen women delegates to attend the state Democratic convention.

Eleanor's sitting in an aisle seat near the back of the hall, knitting. Nan and Marion are beside her, along with the other female delegates. They all watch the fiasco on-stage in stone-cold silence.

HICK (V.O.)

Naturally, the male delegates kept the gals muzzled. They were locked out of meetings and kept from speaking at the main gathering. So much for the party of the future.

Eleanor sighs, checks the watch on a shabby chain dangling from her neck, then bids her goodbyes to the other women.

HOTEL LOBBY

LORENA "HICK" HICKOK, 40, is grumbling into the telephone through the smoke of her cigarette. She's a stout, no-nonsense reporter with dark wash-and-wear hair, plain skirt, sleeveless cardigan... and golf shoes.

HICK

Yeah' it's degenerating into the usual bedlam. These jerks make the IWW look like choirboys... No, I got to stay to the bitter end. So how's the pup doing? ... Two poopos, what a good Prinz. AP wants thirty column inches out of this. That's a laugh.

Hick notices Eleanor at the coat check getting her mink. GOVERNOR AL SMITH, 55, marking time by the elevator, also notices her. Smith's double-breasted, pin-striped suit screams "machine politician". A carnation in the lapel. He dispatches TWO UNDERLINGS after Eleanor.

HICK (CONT.)

Listen, Smith's up to something. I gotta go.

As Smith and the rest of his entourage board the elevator, Hick hustles over to the entrance so she can peer out the glass doors.

STREET - HICK'S POV

Smith's cronies cajole Eleanor out of boarding a cab. Grudgingly, she walks with them back toward the hotel.

LOBBY

The trio reenters. Hick has taken up a new position of stealth by the concierge desk. Her head buried in a newspaper, she spies Eleanor through two slits cut out for eye holes.

Eleanor strides through the lobby and boards the elevator with the cronies. Hick watches the elevator doors open and the group exits on the mezzanine. The cronies knock at a door and it opens. They enter a suite.

MEZZANINE

Hick alights from the same lift. She passes the suite and tries the next door. It's unlocked.

ADJACENT SUITE

Hick walks over and cracks open a door that connects to Smith's room. Now she can eavesdrop on the pow-wow.

SMITH'S SUITE

It's a roughshod campaign headquarters. Lots of paint cans. His lackeys perched around him, Smith presides over the proceedings from a leather chair and banker's desk.

SMITH

Listen to me. Whatever his obligation on that land deal, John Raskob's going to cover it.

ELEANOR

You mean Warm Springs? Oh, well I'm sure it's not about that.

SMITH

Then what's the problem? New York needs a governor.

ELEANOR

Then I imagine you'll try calling him tomorrow.

SMITH

I've been trying all week. He's avoiding me.

ELEANOR

Well I'm sure it's nothing personal. Franklin's doctor has him on a strict regimen for his water therapy.

Smith turns to his crew.

SMITH

She thinks I'm an idiot.

ELEANOR

Governor Smith, I don't think -

SMITH

Al.

ELEANOR

I don't think you're an idiot. But I do have a class to teach first thing tomorrow and Rochester's a long way from Manhattan. I really must head off to catch my train.

SMITH

Just get him on the line.

ELEANOR

I'm sorry, I can't do that.

SMITH

So let me get this straight, Eleanor. You're willing to let history march on without your husband, ending his political career - just like that.

ELEANOR

(Vesuvius with a muffler)

In case you hadn't noticed, my husband's not exactly in a position to march.

SMITH

Look, my staff's going to take care of that, too. He can stay in that tub down in Georgia as long as he wants.

ELEANOR

Excuse me.

She starts for the door.

SMITH

I didn't mean it like that. I love the man. Everyone knows that.

ELEANOR

I take it you need someone else on the ticket to help you carry New York.

SMITH

So what if I do? We're all here to help each other, aren't we?

ELEANOR

I don't remember you being much help getting my delegates a place at the rostrum today.

SMITH

That's Charlie Lewis. He's running the show here. I had nothing to do with that.

ELEANOR

No, you're just the party's candidate for President.

SMITH

That's right. And you're thumbing your nose at him. In front of all these witnesses.

The lackeys act like this is a major *faux pas* on Eleanor's part. She vacillates awhile longer, takes the receiver.

ELEANOR

Yes, Warm Springs Georgia... Hello, this is Mrs. Roosevelt. Is my husband available? ... Franklin? ... Yes it's me... Uh-huh, well, I'm glad it went well today. Al Smith needs to speak with you... He's right here. You do what you think is best.

She hands back the phone and departs. Smith beams a victory glow to the others, then moves in for the kill.

SMITH

Frank. How are you?

EMPTY SUITE

Hick's in a state of amazed euphoria. On the verge of scoring the scoop of a lifetime, when a HOTEL GUARD taps her shoulder. She clicks the door shut.

HICK

Uh, I was just looking for my fellah. He cheats on me, you know. Probably in the bar. I'll go look there.

INT. 49 - 65TH STREET, MANHATTAN - DAWN

Eleanor opens her front door and picks up the *New York Sun*. She brings it inside, casually turns to the front page: "ROOSEVELT ANNOUNCES RUN FOR GOVERNOR."

HICK (V.O.)

Eleanor got the big news the next morning, but not from her husband.

Whether she's pleased or disappointed, her poker face doesn't tell us.