

TURN, TURN, TURN

by

Kenneth White

based on the screenplay

"Meet John Doe"

by

Robert Riskin

adapted from the story

"The Life of John Doe"

by

Richard Connell and Robert Presnell

Kenneth White
1108 Wellesley Avenue
Modesto, CA 95350-5044
(209) 567-0600
Ken1White@aol.com

FADE IN:

EXT. SACRAMENTO - SKYLINE - AFTERNOON

Office buildings poke through the blanket of winter fog. Each is topped by a lighted holiday decoration—star, wreath, tree, bell.

EXT. SACRAMENTO - OFFICE BUILDING - AFTERNOON

A neon sign at the top sizzles against the mist. It reads: "KSAC - The Voice of the Valley." Below it, a smaller, neon sign reads: "An AOL Time Warner Company."

A polyethylene banner unfurls, cascading down to cover the smaller neon sign. The new banner reads: "SYNAPSE CORPORATION - Media for Life. A Wholly-Owned Subsidiary of the D.B. Norton Group."

INT. KSAC - OUTER OFFICE - AFTERNOON

It's surprisingly quiet for the middle of the work day. EMPLOYEES try to work in their cubicles, but spend as much time looking around the office as they do working.

INT. CONNELL'S OFFICE - AFTERNOON

ANN MILLER stands, arms crossed, staring hard across the desk at HENRY CONNELL, a no-nonsense, veteran of the business. Connell takes a sip from a glass of milk.

CONNELL

Fireworks.

ANN

Fireworks.

CONNELL

D.B. Norton owns this station now. He wants fireworks.

ANN

No fireworks, no job, is that it?

CONNELL

It's all about ad revenue, Mitchell. No listeners, no ads—no ads, no revenue. No fireworks, no listeners.

ANN

I'm a good reporter, Mr. Connell. You haven't been around here long enough to know that.

CONNELL

D.B. says you're too soft, your stories too tame. Pabulum.

ANN

Look, I need this job. I've got a mother and two kid sisters to support.

CONNELL

It's tough out there for everyone.

ANN

How would you know?

Connell shoots her an irritated look.

ANN

I'm not giving up. Not without a fight.

CONNELL

I was sent here to clear out the deadwood. Your stories aren't what our listeners want. It's that simple.

ANN

I'll take a pay cut.

Connell gives her a look that says, "Your pay cut wouldn't amount to a pimple on D.B. Norton's butt."

CONNELL

We need stories that stir things up. Get people excited. Start arguments. Get people talking.

ANN

I can do that. I know this town, its people. Just give me a shot.

Someone knocks on the office door.

CONNELL

Come in.

Two MEN and a WOMAN enter. They all look pale, scared.

Realizing there's nothing else she can say, Ann turns to leave.

CONNELL

Ann.

(Ann stops, hopeful)

You owe me a story. Get it on the air and you get your last check.

Ann's eyes flash angrily as she leaves.

EXT. SACRAMENTO - DOWNTOWN MALL - EVENING

It's a dreary, fog-shrouded valley evening. The mall dazzles with holiday decorations.

INT. DOWNTOWN MALL - SAME TIME

LOCALS hustle around snapping up gifts. Packs of ADOLESCENTS cruise. FAMILIES window shop. SECURITY eyes everyone.

INT. MALL ARCADE - SAME TIME

ADAM PRESTON and ETHAN POLLARD, two bored 13-year-old boys, play a violent video game.

THOMAS WILKERSON, a trusting 10-year-old, African-American boy, watches in slack-jawed awe.

The game ends badly. In unison, Adam and Ethan rip the controllers loose from their sockets.

ADAM

Frickin' bitch.

ETHAN

Piece of crap.

They flash a hand signal to one another. Thomas still watches.

Adam puts his arm around Ethan, whispers something in his ear. The two boys walk away, slowly. Thomas watches.

Ethan glances over his shoulder. He makes a head gesture for Thomas to follow. Thomas does.

INT. ARCADE BATHROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Adam and Ethan enter the bathroom. They quickly check the stalls. They find no one. Thomas enters the bathroom, hesitant—but curious.

ADAM

Got somethin' to show you, little man.

Thomas edges into the bathroom.

ETHAN

Come closer, good buddy.

Ethan reaches for something inside his trench coat.

Intrigued, Thomas inches toward them.

As Thomas gets within arm's reach, Adam grabs him, claps his hand over Thomas' mouth, and drags him inside one of the stalls.

Ethan slams the door shut behind them and stands guard. The sounds of a struggle leak under the door. Then absolute, deafening silence.

Off-screen, a police squad car radio crackles. An ambulance siren wails.

NEWSCASTER (V.O.)

When police asked the two teen-agers why they murdered the 10-year-old boy, they said, "He looked at us the wrong way."

INT. KSAC - CONNELL'S OFFICE - NIGHT

Connell sips an espresso from a demitasse cup. He toys with a slice of lemon. He grimaces and reaches for an antacid.

Ann stands in front of his desk.

ANN

You said I owe you a story. Give me this one.

CONNELL

It's too big. It could make us.

ANN

Let me show you what I can do.

CONNELL

You sure you're up for this? It's not going to be easy.

ANN

I've got big shoulders.

EXT. SACRAMENTO - RALEY FIELD - DAY

It's another dreary, down day. A CROWD of people fill the minor league baseball stadium.

A stage looms at home plate. People fill the lawn area in front. A banner on the back stage flat reads: "Memorial Concert. Funds to Benefit the Thomas Wilkerson Fund. Heal the Anger."

A QUARTET performs acoustic, Celtic music.

Ann, holding a microphone, interviews a distinguished-looking African-American man in a suit, tie, Fedora, and overcoat. It is JAMES STERLING, the mayor of Sacramento.

ANN

Mayor Sterling, who organized this event?

MAYOR STERLING

The city council and myself, with a little help from the Raley's Corporation.

ANN

With the consent of the parents?

MAYOR STERLING

Absolutely. They were involved from the get-go.

ANN

And the money will benefit the memorial fund?

MAYOR STERLING

One hundred percent will go into an educational fund for the boy's school.

ANN

César Chávez Elementary. That's located in the city's Oak Park area, one of the oldest parts of town.

MAYOR STERLING

And poorest. A community in desperate need of help.

ANN

Out of the ashes of tragedy rises hope.

MAYOR STERLING

Exactly.

The César Chávez Elementary SCHOOL BAND begins playing "Amazing Grace." A ragged, but heartfelt, performance.

ANN

A good deal of this event was also underwritten by media mogul D.B. Norton.

MAYOR STERLING

Yes, he contributed staff to organize the event.

ANN

And wrote a sizeable check himself.

MAYOR STERLING

A very generous contribution. Very generous.

ANN

I understand Mr. Norton attended the same elementary school as the dead boy.

MAYOR STERLING

Yes, a long time ago.

A videotape tribute plays on projection screens on either side of the stage, as well as on the scoreboard screen.

At the end of the tribute, a WOMAN and MAN approach the center-stage microphone. It is EMMA and RICHARD WILKERSON, Thomas' parents.

EMMA WILKERSON

I-I just want to thank all of you for .
. . for coming here today . . .

Mrs. Wilkerson bursts into sobs and cannot continue. Her husband wraps his arms around her shoulders.

RICHARD WILKERSON

I'm sure Thomas is looking down from above. He will always be in our hearts.

Mr. Wilkerson escorts his sobbing wife from the stage.

A CHILDREN'S CHORUS from Oak Park sing a song about childhood.

PASTOR ROGERS, a local minister, steps to the microphone.

PASTOR ROGERS

Could we please have a moment of silence for Thomas Wilkerson.

The CROWD hushes immediately.

PASTOR ROGERS

Broken wings. The world is filled with broken wings. We try to protect them, but we cannot. We try to make the road smoother, the world gentler, but we cannot. We give them shoulders to stand on to reach the stars.

Ann stands to the side of the stage. Her eyes mist over, then harden.

PASTOR ROGERS

Perhaps that is something we can take away from here today. Let us keep hope in our hearts. For, without hope, there are no dreams. And, without dreams, there is no future.

SERIES OF SHOTS

of STUDENTS, the CROWD, FAMILY, and DIGNITARIES on stage.

PASTOR ROGERS

Let us pray for Thomas, and the two young men who lost their way.

"MUDCAT" MARLOW, a local disc jockey who is serving as Master of Ceremonies, steps to the microphone.

MUDCAT

Ladies and gentlemen, the family has asked that we close this event with a few words from a man you all know. A man who needs no introduction. A local success story. One of our own.

Mr. and Mrs. Wilkerson glance at each other, confused.

MUDCAT

He grew up in this town. Went to the same elementary school as young Thomas. Of course, it was known as Orville Wright back then. He has some words of encouragement. Let me introduce you to the man who made today possible. Put your hands together . . . for Mr. D.B. Norton!

The band strikes up "Hail to the Chief." There is scattered applause.

D.B. NORTON strides from backstage. He's trailed by an entourage of ASSISTANTS and BODYGUARDS. He grabs the microphone and surveys the crowd.

NORTON

There but for fortune go you and I, ladies and gentlemen. We're all just one bad decision from disaster.

Norton has more than a bit of Elmer Gantry in him.

NORTON

I was a loser like the two boys who murdered Thomas. But, I got lucky. A teacher saved me. I got an education.

"Mudcat" tries to initiate a round of applause. A few of the dignitaries follow suit. The crowd sits on its hands. Norton could care less.

NORTON

It gave me direction. It gave me hope.
And, like Pastor Rogers said, it gave
me dreams and a future. And that's why
I'm here. I want to help young people
achieve their dreams.

Norton fixes his eyes on the crowd and pauses for effect.

NORTON

Before it's too late.

The crowd murmurs in assent.

HECKLER #1

Norton, you don't belong here anymore.
You live with the rich bitches out in
North Oaks.

Norton's BODY GUARD on stage makes eye contact with some SECURITY OFFICERS in the crowd.

HECKLER #2

This is just one big free ad for your
company.

The security officers fan out along the crowd's perimeter.

HECKLER #3

You got more money than God, Norton.
How 'bout spreadin' it around?

HECKLER #4

We don't want your pity, we want your
money.

There are ad-libbed shouts of support from the rest of the crowd. Some YOUNG MEN begin punching their fists in the air.

Each of the hecklers suddenly finds themselves surrounded by security guards. The guards try to escort them from the crowd.

One of the hecklers pushes a security guard. One of the other hecklers runs and is tackled by a guard. Another heckler is grabbed by the throat by a guard and wrestled to the ground.

Members of the crowd step up to help the hecklers. They shout at the security guards.

More and more people join in, as the crowd turns ugly. The shouting is soon followed by shoving. The shoving by kicking, the kicking by punching. The punching by clubbing.

The crowd quickly divides into camps. Haves versus Have-nots, Parents versus Children, Baby Boomers versus Gen Xers, White versus Non-White, the Franchised versus the Disenfranchised.

As emotions reach flash point, the CITY POLICE and COUNTY SHERIFFS intervene. But, it's gone too far. It's out of control.

Bodyguards hustle Norton off the stage and into his waiting limousine. The limousine guns for the center field exit.

Ann finds herself in the eye of the storm. She's getting knocked around pretty good. Someone smashes her to the ground. She covers her head with her arms just as she's about to be trampled.

Suddenly, a MAN'S voice is heard above the crowd. Everyone stops. It's suddenly, eerily quiet.

Ann struggles to her feet. She peers over the backs of the rioters and sees . . .

JOHN WILLOUGHBY. A man who commands immediate respect. He's a middle-aged, slightly graying, athletic Baby Boomer.

John raises his arm in a gesture of peace and quiet.

JOHN

A dark, cold winter is on the horizon,
people. We'll never survive. Unless we
start taking care of each other.

He drops his hand.

JOHN

Change is on its way, people. Get
ready.

And then he's gone. Disappeared like quicksilver.

Ann jumps up and down above the crowd looking for Willoughby. She steps up on a metal, saw-horse barricade and scans the crowd. She rushes to the steps of the stage. She climbs a few stairs and spins around to search the faces in the crowd. He's gone. She hurries up to Pastor Rogers.

ANN

Pastor, do you know that man?

PASTOR ROGERS

Yes, that's John Willoughby. He teaches at César Chávez.

ANN

Did you see where he went?

PASTOR ROGERS

I didn't. I'm sorry.

INT. KSAC - ANN'S OFFICE - EVENING

It's a shambles. Half-filled packing boxes are scattered around the room. Papers cover the floor. Books spill out of bookcases. Ann pounds away wildly at her computer keyboard. An open book lies face-down beside the computer. The title reads: "The Fourth Turning: An American Prophecy."

ANN

Wants fireworks, huh?

INT. KSAC - STUDIO - EVENING

Ann speaks into the microphone.

ANN

I spoke with an unusual man at the end of today's rally. He didn't want to be recorded. And, he asked me not use his name. So, I'll just call him, "The Gray Champion." He had some provocative things to say.

EXT. TOWER BRIDGE - SAME TIME

John Willoughby leans on the rail of the bridge, staring into the waters of the Sacramento River, swirling below.

ANN (ON THE RADIO)

"At first," he told me, "I was upset with the lawyers, then the politicians, because it seemed that partisan politics was the source of our divisiveness. But, in looking around, it seems the whole world is falling apart."

BACK TO ANN

ANN

I asked him why. He attributed all the greed, the lust, the hate, and man's inhumanity to man on the alienation, fear, and lack of trust ordinary citizens feel.

BACK TO JOHN

ANN (ON THE RADIO)

He suggested that all the selfishness, anger, and inhumanity seen around the world is due to the media pitting us against each other. And, to the fact that our children have no hopes or dreams.

BACK TO ANN

ANN

He told me that only a strong family can give children that hope. And only a good education can help them achieve those dreams.

BACK TO JOHN

ANN (ON THE RADIO)

He explained something he called, "The Fourth Turning." A cyclical, historical moment of crisis, danger, and opportunity. He said it's almost upon us and it will determine whether we survive as a people or not.

BACK TO ANN

ANN

Then, he threw me a real curve. He said he's so disillusioned by the way things are that, in protest, he's going to commit suicide by jumping from the Tower Bridge on Christmas Eve night.

BACK TO JOHN

ANN (ON THE RADIO)

If you ask me, the wrong people are jumping off bridges.

BACK TO ANN

as she flips off the microphone. LOUISE, Ann's producer, enters the booth. Louise picks up Ann's copy and scans it.

LOUISE

Hey, Ann, this is bogus, isn't it?

ANN

I'll be cleared out in an hour, Louise.

MONTAGE - PUBLIC RESPONSE

1. Front page headlines of the Sacramento Bee proclaim: "The Gray Champion - KSAC Radio Report Strikes Nerve!"
2. VOLUNTEERS at the store-front office of the Thomas Wilkerson Memorial Fund open stacks of envelopes filled with cash and checks.
3. Switchboard OPERATORS at KSAC can't keep up with the calls about "The Gray Champion."
4. A FEMALE ANCHOR reads the news. Inserted in the corner of the TV screen is a graphic of a man's shadowy profile with the caption: "Who is the Gray Champion?"
5. The topic of every call-in show on KSAC is about "The Gray Champion."
6. The cover of Sacramento Magazine features Ann with the caption: "TURN, TURN, TURN: Is the Fourth Turning Upon Us?"

EXT. SACRAMENTO - STATE CAPITAL - DAY

The golden dome of the capital floats in mist.

INT. GOVERNOR'S OFFICE - DAY

LIEUTENANT GOVERNOR MICHAEL WALT and PRESS SECRETARY CONNIE FARRELL stand near the Governor's desk. They read the morning Sacramento Bee.

FARRELL

(reads newspaper)

". . . partisan politics is the source of our divisiveness."

(smacks paper)

There it is. D.B. Norton's opening attack on the Governor.

LIEUTENANT GOVERNOR WALT

It's just a radio story, Connie.

FARRELL

By a reporter who works for Norton's radio station.

GOVERNOR ROBERT JACKSON enters.

GOVERNOR JACKSON

Connie—Mike, good morning.

The press secretary tosses the newspaper on the Governor's desk.

FARRELL

See this, Governor?

GOVERNOR JACKSON

Had it served with breakfast.

LIEUTENANT GOVERNOR WALT
 Connie thinks it's Norton's work.

FARRELL
 Of course it is. Why else did he buy
 Synapse? Why did he hire a hard-charger
 like Connell? I tell you, Governor,
 he's after your job.

GOVERNOR JACKSON
 Don't bust a blood vessel, Connie. I'll
 look into it.
 (hits intercom)
 Emma, get me Spencer at the Bee,
 please.

INT. SACRAMENTO BEE - EDITOR'S OFFICE - DAY

EDITOR CHARLES SPENCER talks on the telephone.

SPENCER
 Yes. Yes. I saw it, Governor. You ask
 me, it's a phony story. Huh? Okay, I'll
 get the Mayor, maybe the Senator, to
 check it out.
 (hits intercom)
 Get Mayor Sterling on the phone.

INT. CITY HALL - RECEPTION - DAY

The RECEPTIONIST speaks into the telephone.

RECEPTIONIST
 Sorry, the Mayor's on the other line.

INT. MAYOR'S OFFICE - DAY

MAYOR STERLING listens on the telephone.

MAYOR STERLING
 Yes, I know, Senator. I've had a dozen
 calls already.

The receptionist enters.

RECEPTIONIST
 Spencer of the Bee on your private
 line, Mr. Mayor.

MAYOR STERLING
 (to receptionist)
 I'll be right with him.
 (into telephone)
 Yes, Senator, I'm still here.

INT. SENATOR'S OFFICE - DAY

SENATOR JOHN VENEMAN paces. He shouts into the speakerphone. He holds the front page of the Bee in his hand and occasionally slaps it in his palm for emphasis.

SENATOR VENEMAN

This Gray Champion needs to be talked to. Now. We can't have people jumping off bridges just because they've lost faith in their public servants.

BACK TO MAYOR'S OFFICE

Sterling is still on the phone. The receptionist waits.

MAYOR STERLING

His timing couldn't be worse. I'm up for re-election this year, too.

(to receptionist)

Get Connell on the phone.

The receptionist leaves.

MAYOR STERLING

(into telephone)

Maybe it's a bandwagon worth hopping on.

The intercom buzzes. The Mayor pushes a button.

RECEPTIONIST (ON INTERCOM)

Mr. Connell is holding on line one.

MAYOR STERLING

Senator, I've got Connell on the line. Let me see what I can find out.

INT. KSAC - CONNELL'S OFFICE - DAY

Connell listens on the telephone.

CONNELL

Yes, Mayor.

(listens)

I understand your concern. I appreciate the Governor's situation. And the Senator's.

(listens)

I've got everybody and his butler out looking for him. We're running bulletins on the air.

(listens)

I'll get back to you, Mayor.

(hangs up)

The door opens and a man enters. BEANY walks fast, talks fast, and accomplishes next to nothing.

BEANY

I went up to Miss Mitchell's house, boss, like you asked. Boy, she's in a bad way.

CONNELL

Where is she?

BEANY

Hey, you wanna know somethin'? She supports a mother and two kids. Whaddya know 'bout that?

CONNELL

(impatient)

Did you find her?

BEANY

No. Her mother's awful worried about her. When she left the house, she said she was goin' on a roarin' drunk. Er, Miss Mitchell, I mean. Ann, I mean.

CONNELL

Get out there and find her!

BEANY

Sure. Hey, but the biggest thing I didn't tell you . . .

The intercom buzzes.

CONNELL

What.

SECRETARY (ON INTERCOM)

Police Commissioner Hawkshaw on two.

BEANY

Her old man was Doc Mitchell. You know, the guy that saved my mom's life and wouldn't take any money for it.

CONNELL

Remember him. Dabbled in politics. School board or city council. Kind of a lefty.

BEANY

Same guy.

Connell shoots Beany a look that says, "Don't let the door hit you on your way out."

BEANY

Okay, okay, I'll go look for her.

Beany heads for the door. He accidentally knocks over an illuminated globe.

CONNELL
 (into telephone)
 What's the problem, Commissioner?
 You've had enough time to round him up.

As Beany reaches down to corral the rolling earth, the door to Connell's office opens. Beany stares at the toes of a pair of stylish, though slightly worn, women's shoes. His eyes work their way up.

CONNELL
 It's not what I want, it's what D.B.
 wants. He's counting on you, Hawkshaw.

Connell finally notices there's someone in the doorway.

ANN
 (innocently)
 You wanted to see me?

Ann saunters into the room. Connell is so hot you could fry an egg on his forehead.

ANN
 I'm confused because I distinctly
 remember being fired.

CONNELL
 You were, er, and are. But you've got a
 job to finish.

ANN
 What's that?

CONNELL
 You still owe me that last report.

ANN
 I already did that one.

CONNELL
 It's not done.

ANN
 Oh, really.

CONNELL
 The whole town's lost it. All these
 bleeding hearts are whining over this
 Gray . . .

ANN
 Champion.

CONNELL

And you're the only one who knows who he is.

ANN

He doesn't exist.

CONNELL

We'll get him on the air—
 (suddenly realizes
 what she just said)
 What?

Connell gets up from his desk. He motions to Beany to leave and shut the door. Beany exits, closing the door.

CONNELL

Say that again.

ANN

There is no Gray Champion. I made him up.

CONNELL

You made him up.

ANN

You said you wanted fireworks.

Connell recovers from the shock, then wheels on Ann.

CONNELL

Don't you know this entire town has adopted this guy. He's struck a nerve. And people want to know more about him. They want to save him. And now—

ANN

Wanted to show you what I could do.

CONNELL

Get out of my sight. I've got some explaining to do.

Ann turns to leave. She stops and turns to face Connell, her eyes excited.

ANN

Wait a minute.

CONNELL

Don't make me call security, Mitchell.

ANN

Norton hired you to shoot some life into this station, didn't he?

Connell backs up, blinded by her enthusiasm.

ANN

The whole town's curious about this Gray Champion and, boom, just like that, you're ready to bury him. There's enough electricity on this guy to light the city, maybe even the state.

CONNELL

What guy?

ANN

The Gray Champion.

CONNELL

What Gray Champion?

ANN

Our Gray Champion. The one I made up. Now, look, suppose there was a Gray Champion and he walked in here right now, I'd make him a deal.

CONNELL

A deal?

ANN

Sure. You get a story that's got this much play, you don't drop it like a hot potato. You know what I'd do?

CONNELL

You'd . . . ?

ANN

Between now and let's say, Christmas, when he's threatening to jump, I'd-

CONNELL

"He" doesn't exist.

ANN

(waves him off)

I'd run a daily story starting with his boyhood. A wide-eyed kid facing a chaotic world. The problem of the common man, the average Joe—all the John Does in the world.

Despite himself, Connell is interested.

ANN

So, he pours his soul out. He protests against all the evils in the world. The greed, the lust, the hate, the fear. All of man's inhumanity to man.

Connell leans against the desk, eyes glued on Ann.

ANN

Then comes the drama. He meets discouragement. He finds the world has feet of clay. His ideals crumble. So, what does he decide to do? He decides to commit suicide in protest against the state of civilization.

Connell leans toward Ann, anticipating the climax.

ANN

Arguments start. Should he commit suicide or not? People call and write, pleading with him. But, no, he'll remain true. On Christmas Eve, hot or cold, he goes.

Connell just stares at Ann, struck dumb for one of the few times in his life.

ANN

It's a two handkerchief series—maybe three. We can run it right up until Christmas Eve. All in the spirit of the holiday season.

Ann finishes, takes a deep breath—awed and, at the same time, proud of what she's just done.

CONNELL

(quietly)

Very impressive, very impressive indeed, Mitchell. But, would you mind telling me who jumps on Christmas Eve?

ANN

The Gray Champion.

CONNELL

(loses control)

What Gray Champion?

ANN

The one I just made up you lunkhead!

There is silence for a moment.

CONNELL

Wait a minute. Are you suggesting we go out and find someone to say he's this guy and he's going to commit suicide on Christmas Eve? Is that it?

ANN

You're slow, but you're catching on.

CONNELL

Who, for instance?

ANN

I don't know.

Connell throws his hands up in frustration and nearly goes over the desk backwards.

Then, Ann has a thought.

ANN

Actually, I do know someone.

CONNELL

Mitchell, do me a favor will you? Go out and get married and have lots of kids. Whatever you do, stay out of the radio business.

ANN

You're supposed to be a smart guy, Connell. If it was raining hundred dollar bills, you'd be out looking for a lucky penny you lost some place.

Louise, Ann's producer, bursts into the office brandishing a sheet of paper.

LOUISE

Check this out. Look what the Bee is running on their web site. They're claiming the Gray Champion is a scam.

Connell grabs the paper and scans its contents.

CONNELL

(reads)

". . . amateur journalism.
Sensationalism. A phony. Puppetmaster."
You believe this? We can't-

Ann was just about to give up. When she hears this, her eyes brighten alertly.

ANN

That's right. Just fall into their trap. Go ahead. Say the Gray Champion doesn't exist. You know what that's going to look like?

CONNELL

"Amateur journalism," huh. That bunch of punks. I can teach them more about—

Connell is interrupted by the buzzing intercom.

CONNELL

Yes.

RECEPTIONIST (ON INTERCOM)

Mr. D.B. Norton on the secure line.

Connell blanches for a moment. He picks up the receiver from a separate phone.

CONNELL

Mr. Norton, what . . . I just got it.

(listens)

Miss Mitchell and I were just discussing that.

(listens)

Yes, sir. She knows who he is.

(listens)

Yes, sir. I'll keep you posted.

Connell hangs up the phone and takes a deep breath.

CONNELL

Okay, Mitchell. Here's the deal. Right from the top. Mr. Norton wants this man produced. And produced now.

ANN

Make the Bee eat their words?

LOUISE

If you ask me, Hank, you're playing with dynamite.

CONNELL

I don't answer to you.

(to Ann)

Find this guy. Get his story. And start the series. It's your last shot.

ANN

You won't regret it.

CONNELL

I better not. Or, you'll never work in this town again.

ANN

Sure. And, um, there's no reason for anyone to know the real story, either.

Ann gives Connell and Louise a conspiratorial glance.

EXT. CÉSAR CHÁVEZ ELEMENTARY SCHOOL - DAY

It's a shabby little school in the low-rent part of town. School is just letting out for the day.

INT. CLASSROOM - DAY

It's a bright, cheery, welcoming room. Ann and John Willoughby sit in kid's chairs in the middle of the classroom. An audiotape recorder whirs on the desk between them.

JOHN

I used to pitch.

ANN

Baseball?

JOHN

Uh-huh. Till I blew out my elbow.

ANN

Surgery?

JOHN

It didn't take.

ANN

Where'd you play?

JOHN

Minor leagues, mostly. Modesto, Fresno, Tacoma.

ANN

You play anymore?

JOHN

Just with the kids. Here at school. And I coach a couple of teams.

ANN

Did you always want to be a teacher?

JOHN

I always figured I'd be working with kids. Fastball or not.

EXT. PLAYGROUND - LATER

John runs through a series of offensive football plays with some of the after-school rec KIDS. He then moves over to the other side of the ball and goes through some defensive moves with the rest of the KIDS. He's incredibly patient, attentive, and a very good listener.

An athletic looking older MAN, with a slight limp, ambles up next to Ann.

COACH (O.S.)

The kids love him.

Ann is startled. She turns. The Coach extends his hand.

COACH

Jack Leach is the name. You can call me "Coach." Everyone else does.

ANN

Pleasure, "Coach." He's good with kids.

COACH

The best.

ANN

You teach here?

COACH

Used to. Long time ago. Now I volunteer. Help him out when I can.

ANN

Known him long?

COACH

Most of his life. Taught him when he went here. I moved over to the credential program at UC Davis. Was his master teacher there. Coached him on the varsity baseball team.

ANN

You probably know him as well as anybody.

COACH

Pretty much.

ANN

Tell me about him.

COACH

(skeptical)

Give me one good reason.

ANN

I'd like to do a story. About what he's doing here . . . with the kids.

COACH

Can I trust you not to be like all the rest?

ANN

Cross my heart, hope to die.

The Coach eyes her, then decides to take the chance.

COACH

Well, he's a local boy. An only child.

ANN

Parents still alive?

COACH

No, dad died while he was in college. Heart attack. His mom passed a few years ago. Loneliness if you ask me. He went to school here, like I said.

The Coach gestures to the buildings around him.

COACH

Same time as D.B. Norton, in fact.

ANN

Married? Children?

The Coach throws her a distrustful look.

COACH

Married. Wife died in a nasty car crash in the fog. No kids.

ANN

That's so sad.

COACH

Ever since, his whole life's been dedicated to his teaching and his students.

ANN

What kind of man is he?

COACH

Honest, compassionate, and committed. To helping kids achieve their dreams.

ANN

How noble.

The Coach shoots her another look, wondering if she's being sarcastic. She's not.

COACH

'Course that's tough to do around here. It's probably the poorest school district in the state. He pays for a lot of stuff out of his own pocket, but he's not a rich man.

ANN

How does he feel about not being able to do more?

COACH

Frustrates the heck out of him. And makes him pretty darned mad.

They both turn just as John finishes working out with the kids. They all hug him before scampering off into the dusk.

INT. CLASSROOM - LATER

John sits at his teacher's desk. The Coach leans against the blackboard behind John. Ann stands in front of the teacher's desk.

ANN

It would be a weekly series. Running right up until Christmas Eve.

COACH

That's a lot of story to tell.

JOHN

You sure I'm that interesting.

ANN

Oh, I'm very sure. Look, the world's a mess. You see that every day, John. Right here in your own backyard. This is the kind of story that could change things. For good.

It's obvious John wants to do this, even needs to do this, but he's wrestling with the implications. You can almost see the wheels turning behind his eyes.

JOHN

A lot of people do need help.

ANN

Unfortunately, they can't get that help without money. And money is something D.B. Norton's got lots of. Can you imagine the kind of influence that kind of money has?

COACH

For good. And bad. Don't forget, there's always two sides, Ann.

ANN

Would you be willing to be the Gray Champion, John? Would you be willing to say you said those things? Would you be willing to step up to the plate?

John stares out the window. He's having a hard time making a decision. Finally, he decides to go for it.

JOHN

I guess so. Sure, why not. We've got nothing to lose but our illusions.

Ann whoops and rushes around behind the desk and hugs John.

JOHN

But, let's take it slow.

ANN

Absolutely.

INT. CLASSROOM - LATER

It's just John and the Coach. Drinking coffee.

COACH

Be careful, John. It smells a little off.

JOHN

I'm a big boy, Coach.

COACH

Watch out who you get in bed with, boy. Keep your eyes open and watch out for who's pulling the strings. Don't want to have to pick up the pieces again.

INT. KSAC - CONNELL'S OFFICE - DAY

Ann stands in the center of the office as Connell paces, excited.

CONNELL

Did you take a photographer?

ANN

We're a radio station.

CONNELL

True. Okay, so we'll keep his identity a secret. For now.

ANN

Did you speak with Mr. Norton?

CONNELL

Says for us to go the limit. Wants us to build a bonfire under every big shot in the state.

ANN

Swell.

Connell takes a sheaf of papers from his desk.

ANN

Is that the contract?

CONNELL

I want you to sign this agreement. And your hero needs to sign this one. It gives us an exclusive story under his name, day-by-day from now until Christmas day.

ANN

Stroke of midnight Christmas night, we're through, right?

CONNELL

If that's the way you want it.

ANN

That's the way I want it.

CONNELL

Then start pounding that keyboard, kiddo. This is terrific. No responsibilities on our part. Just statements from the Gray Champion and we can tell it the way it is.

ANN

Before you get too far down that road, don't forget to make out that check for ten grand.

CONNELL

Tell me something. The Gray Champion, where'd that come from?

ANN

It's from a story by Nathaniel Hawthorne. About a man back in 1689. He stepped between the Redcoats and the citizens of Boston. Avoided a massacre. They called him the Gray Champion. He inspired the people to depose the British governor. Set the country on course for revolution. Hawthorne prophesied he would come again, when times were bad, to save the country again.

INT. KSAC - ANN'S OFFICE - EVENING

Ann burns the midnight oil. She stares at her computer monitor.

ANN

(reads, to herself)

I sat down with the Gray Champion over several nights and this is some of what he had to say.

INT. KSAC - STUDIO - EVENING

Ann speaks into the microphone.

ANN

(reads into mic)

"America is adrift. We're heading toward a waterfall. We don't like where we're going. Something has got to give. A change is coming. An unraveling."

INT. ELECTRONICS STORE - SAME TIME

CLERKS and CONSUMERS listen to a bank of radios.

ANN (ON RADIO)

"We're on the verge of a turning. A turning is a time of transition. Turnings come in cycles of four."

INT. OFFICE - LUNCH ROOM - SAME TIME

OFFICE WORKERS listen to the radio.

ANN (ON RADIO)

"The First Turning is a High.
The Second Turning is an Awakening.
The Third Turning is an Unraveling.
The Fourth Turning is a Crisis.
The Fourth Turning is upon us."

INT. POST OFFICE - SAME TIME

POSTAL WORKERS listen to the radio while sorting mail.

ANN (ON RADIO)

"Something big will have to sweep
across America to save us from what's
coming."

INT. VAN - SAME TIME

A SOCCER MOM listens to the radio.

ANN (ON RADIO)

"We must return to classic values.
Trust, reliability, teamwork, patience,
compassion, and selflessness."

EXT. CONSTRUCTION SITE - SAME TIME

HARD HATS listen to the radio on their break.

ANN (ON RADIO)

"One embrace, one kind word, one
gesture changes everything. Like
ripples from a stone tossed in a lake."

INT. BEAUTY SHOP - SAME TIME

SALON WORKERS and their CLIENTS listen to the radio.

ANN (ON RADIO)

"A change is coming, so get on board."

MONTAGE

of newspaper headlines, posters, news broadcasts, magazine
articles, web pages, billboards, and handbills featuring
excerpts and artist's renderings derived from Ann's series.

INTERCUT

images of PEOPLE's reactions to the radio broadcasts and
media coverage.

SUPERIMPOSE

a line graph—indicating audience numbers and station ratings
for KSAC—steadily climbs.

SUPERIMPOSE

an old-timey thermometer on a hot day, illustrating ad
revenue. The red mercury keeps rising and rising and rising
until it blows out the top and bubbles over.

EXT. OFFICE BUILDING - DAY

The modern, though retro-looking, tile-and-adobe Mission-style building covers an entire city block. A small, understated brass plaque at the front entrance reads: "Calafia Institute."

INT. OFFICE BUILDING - EXECUTIVE OFFICE - DAY

Two very young, very intense ASSOCIATES stand shoulder-to-shoulder. They hold electronic note-taking devices. They both stare levelly at a SHAPE sitting in the shadows behind a large desk.

SHADOW SHAPE

I don't care what the media say. This "Gray Champion" is a myth. If he's not, let's see him. I will prove this whole thing is being engineered by a vicious, ambitious man with a dark purpose.

The Shadow Shape tosses a newspaper onto the desk. The cover of the Sacramento Bee features a photograph of D.B. Norton. The headline reads: "Media Empire Earnings Skyrocket."

In a box beside the headline is a black, head-and-shoulders silhouette of a man's profile. Superimposed over it is a large question mark. The caption reads: "Who is the Gray Champion?"

INT. KSAC - CONNELL'S OFFICE - DAY

Beany slouches in a chair across from Connell, toying with the globe he knocked around earlier. The same copy of the Sacramento Bee sits on Connell's desk.

BEANY

You're gonna have to do the dog-and-pony thing with this guy. boss.

CONNELL

Don't I know it.

BEANY

He's gettin' more popular than Jesus.

CONNELL

Careful. They killed John Lennon for saying that.

BEANY

Ever seen him?

CONNELL

Lennon?

BEANY

No, him.
(points at newspaper)

The intercom crackles to life.

RECEPTIONIST (ON INTERCOM)

Miss Mitchell to see you.

CONNELL

(into intercom)
Send her in.

Ann enters and strides to Connell's desk.

CONNELL

I've had it up to my earphones with
this hoax, Mitchell.

ANN

It's no hoax. It's real.
(points at newspaper)

CONNELL

Is he real?

ANN

As down-to-earth as you'll ever see.

CONNELL

No matter. I'm pulling the plug.

ANN

You can't. We've only just begun.

CONNELL

I'm not risking the company's
reputation, or my reputation, on some
new age, voodoo sentimentality.

ANN

You wanted fireworks. You got them. You
got people talking and thinking and
believing. You can't put that genie
back in the bottle now.

CONNELL

Can't risk it. It could be my ass.

ANN

It could be your ass if you bail out
now. D.B. would want you to milk it for
all it's worth. Fact is, he's counting
on it.

Connell glances at her, a look on his face that says, "What do you know that I don't?"

CONNELL

No more reports without my approval.

ANN

I'm not going quietly on this one, Connell. Besides, I'm beginning to like this hero I've created.

EXT. NORTON ESTATE - POLO FIELDS - DAY

Norton gallops his polo pony across a golf-green manicured field. His objective is a small, white ball in the middle of the field.

A second RIDER pulls alongside. Norton spurs his pony and veers into the second rider, driving him and his pony to the ground.

Another PLAYER lashes his pony ahead of Norton. The pony stumbles and falls. Norton leaps over the rolling man and pony. Norton gallops forward, driving the ball through the goal posts.

EXT. NORTON ESTATE - STABLES - DAY

Norton wipes down his horse. A GROOM approaches.

GROOM

Mr. Connell and Miss Mitchell are at the house, sir.

NORTON

Ask them to wait.

INT. NORTON ESTATE - STUDY - DAY

Ann and Connell sit in low chairs across from Norton, who sits behind a massive desk. The chairs make Ann and Connell look like children in a grown-up's house.

ANN

Personally, I think it's just plain stupid to drop it now.

Norton studies Ann for a moment, then glances at Connell.

ANN

The mail is overwhelming. It's a pop culture phenomenon.

NORTON

What are you afraid of, Connell? It's doubled our audience. We've got advertisers waiting in line.

CONNELL

Nobody believes he exists. They all think he's a fake. They want to see him in the flesh.

ANN

Well, what about it? Let them see him. We'll go them one better. They can also hear him. Why not put him on the air?

Norton appreciates Ann's fire.

CONNELL

Watch your step with her, D.B. She'll make you crazy.

ANN

Oh, please.

CONNELL

I'd bury this guy and cut our losses before someone sues you for everything you've got.

ANN

Excuse me, D.B., but you do that, and you're as unimaginative as he is.

CONNELL

No, Mitchell, you've found a horse to ride and you're not about to let it go. It's your ticket to the big time.

ANN

Sure, it's a meal ticket for me. But, it's also a windfall for somebody like Mr. Norton who's trying to crash national politics.

(she turns to Norton)

That's what you bought Synapse for, isn't it? You want to reach a lot of people, don't you? Well, put the Gray Champion on the air and you can reach 290 million of them. He can say anything and they'll listen.

Norton is completely fascinated by Ann. Connell stares at her derisively.

ANN

Forget about the Governor and the Mayor. They're small fry. We're talking national buzz. If the Gray Champion can be such a huge hit around here, imagine what he'd do every place else in the country. And you'd be pulling the strings, Mr. Norton.

Norton continues to study Ann. He snaps out of his reverie and turns to Connell.

NORTON

Get down to the office and set up a simulcast.

CONNELL

Why, D.B., you're not going to fall for—

NORTON

Do it, now.

CONNELL

So much for all my years of experience.

Connell gets up and heads for the door. Ann picks up her bag, prepared to follow Connell.

NORTON

Er, don't you go, Ann. I want to talk to you a moment.

Connell eyes Ann, shrugs and leaves. Ann waits, somewhat nervously.

NORTON

Please, sit down.

She does. Norton studies Ann for a moment.

NORTON

This "Gray Champion" idea is yours?

ANN

Pretty much.

NORTON

You think you could write a speech for this guy that could get people excited?

ANN

Positively.

NORTON

You think you can explain this "Fourth Turning" nonsense in a way people can get behind it?

ANN

It's not nonsense.

NORTON

No, it's not.

ANN

At least someone believes in me.

NORTON

Play your cards right, Ann, and you'll never have to worry about anything ever again.

Ann's eyes brighten, flattered and intrigued.

The door bursts open and TED SHELDON storms in, a fascist dandy in his razor-sharp, para-military style uniform.

NORTON

Somehow always shows up when there's a pretty woman around.

(laughs)

Miss Mitchell, this is my nephew, Ted Sheldon. Ted, Miss Mitchell.

ANN

How do you do?

TED

Not as good as you, I'm sure.

NORTON

All right, Casanova. I'll give you a break. See that Miss Mitchell gets home safely.

TED

Always reading my mind, aren't you?

NORTON

And, Ann, I think from now on you'd better work directly with me.

ANN

Yes, sir.

Sheldon escorts Ann to the door. Norton follows them and shows them out, a victorious smile on his face.

INT. CÉSAR CHÁVEZ ELEMENTARY SCHOOL - MUSIC ROOM - DAY

John conducts a rehearsal of the school CHORUS. They sing a contemporary song about community and people taking care of people. They finish together and on key. John smiles.

From off, someone claps. John turns. Ann stands by the door.

JOHN
 (to chorus)
 Same time, next week.

The students start to scramble. He holds his hand up. They stop.

JOHN
 I'm very proud of you all. Now get out
 of here.

The room is empty faster than you can say, "No more teacher's dirty looks."

John stuffs the sheet music into a tattered portfolio. Ann steps up next to the podium.

ANN
 Voices as sweet as a band of angels.

JOHN
 A year from now they'll all have
 changed. You won't even recognize their
 voices.

John accidentally knocks his conductor's baton off the podium.

John and Ann both reach to pick it up off the floor. Their hands touch. They allow the contact to linger a moment. John withdraws his hand first.

JOHN
 I was thinking—

ANN
 Dangerous thing to do.

JOHN
 No, really, I was thinking about
 something we talked about way back when
 this whole thing started.

ANN
 Now you're holding me accountable for
 things I've said.

JOHN

I'm not sure about this suicide thing.
I'm not sure it sends the right
message.

ANN

(quickly back-
pedaling)

Oh, it was just something I made up.
You know, to add a little drama.

JOHN

I don't want people, especially kids,
to think it's okay to just give up.

ANN

Don't worry. Nobody's really expecting
you to follow through with it.

JOHN

Good, because it's important they know
they shouldn't quit without a fight.

ANN

It's a gimmick, John. It's what we, in
my world, call a "ticking clock." It
sets a deadline.

JOHN

Guess I still don't know that much
about your world.

ANN

It lets people know that if something
doesn't happen by a certain time, then
something else is going to happen. It
creates a sense of urgency, that's all.
You know, drama.

JOHN

Well, if it helps convince people,
maybe we can keep it in a little
longer.

ANN

It can't hurt.

EXT. ANN'S HOME - NIGHT

It's an Arts and Crafts, California-style bungalow in an
older, established neighborhood of wide streets, expansive
lawns, and old trees.

INT. ANN'S HOME - DINING ROOM - NIGHT

Ann sits at a computer tucked in the corner. She reads the hard copy of something she's written, mouthing the words.

Suddenly, impulsively, she wads it up and tosses the paper to the floor. She stands and moves away from the computer table. The floor is littered with similar balls of paper.

Agitated, Ann paces.

Just then, Ann's two sisters—IRENE, aged nine, and ELLEN, aged eleven—dash into the dining room from the adjoining living room, squealing mischievously. They leap on their older sister.

ANN

Hey, hey, you two squirrels. I thought you were asleep.

IRENE

We just wanted to kiss you goodnight.

The two little girls embrace and kiss Ann.

ANN

You two are just stalling. I already said goodnight.

Ann's mother, MARY MITCHELL, appears in the living room.

MRS. MITCHELL

Girls, let your sister be. It's well past your bedtime.

IRENE

Oh, all right.

MRS. MITCHELL

Scoot now.

ELLEN

G'night.

Mrs. Mitchell affectionately swats the two girls' bottoms as they rush off. She crosses to a desk in the dining room and opens a drawer, searching for something.

ANN

Stick a fork in me, Mom. I'm done. I'll never get this speech right.

MRS. MITCHELL

Oh, yes, you will. You're very clever.

ANN

That coming from a completely unbiased source.

MRS. MITCHELL

Of course.

Mrs. Mitchell continues to rummage through the desk.

ANN

What are you looking for, Mom?

MRS. MITCHELL

Some of the money you gave me the other day.

ANN

(concerned)

It's gone already.

MRS. MITCHELL

Two growing girls. And so many people going without.

ANN

You're amazing, Mom. You're just like Pop used to be. We're barely making ends meet and you're taking care of the neighbors.

MRS. MITCHELL

There's so much need and we have plenty now.

ANN

Mom, that advance is long gone. We owed practically everybody in town. You've got to stop giving it away.

Ann's mother looks up, surprised at her daughter's tone.

Ann immediately regrets what she's just said. Her face softens. She walks to her mother and places her arm around her shoulder, tenderly.

ANN

Don't pay any attention to me. I guess I'm just upset about all this. Here I am with a shot to get somewhere, a chance to do something that will really make a difference, and maybe give us the first bit of security we've had since Pop died, and I'm stuck.

Mrs. Mitchell looks at the paper strewn across the floor.

MRS. MITCHELL

It looks it.

ANN

I don't know. I just can't get it to jell.

MRS. MITCHELL

That is too bad, dear.

ANN

Here I've created somebody who's going to give up his life for a principle, millions of people are going to listen to him, and unless he says something that's, well, sensational, it's just no good.

MRS. MITCHELL

Well, honey, I don't know what kind of speech you're trying to write, but judging from the samples I've read, I don't think anybody will listen.

ANN

What?

MRS. MITCHELL

Darling, there are so many complaining political speeches. People are tired of hearing nothing but doom and despair. If you're going to have him say anything, why don't you let him say something simple and real, something with hope in it? If your father were alive, he'd know what to say.

ANN

Yes, he would.

MRS. MITCHELL

Wait a minute . . .

Mrs. Mitchell crosses back to the desk, finds a loose key, and unlocks a compartment. Ann watches her, curiously.

Mrs. Mitchell walks back to Ann. She hands her a small, leather book.

MRS. MITCHELL

That's your father's diary, Ann.

ANN

Father's . . . I never knew he had a diary.

MRS. MITCHELL

There's enough in there for a hundred speeches. Things people ought to hear nowadays. You be careful of it, won't you dear? It's always helped me keep your father alive.

Ann holds her mother's hand to her cheek.

ANN

I will, Mom. I will.

Ann's mother abruptly leaves.

Ann opens the diary. Her eyes sparkle expectantly. She becomes riveted by the first thing she reads.

EXT. JOHN'S HOME - DAY

A ranch-style bungalow sits in the middle of an older neighborhood. It's an unusually bright afternoon for winter.

EXT. JOHN'S HOME - BACKYARD - DAY

John toes the rubber of a mound. The Coach squats behind home plate. The Coach flashes a sign. John winds and throws. The hardball pops in the Coach's glove.

COACH

How'd that feel?

JOHN

Not bad. Not bad at all.

The Coach throws the ball back, squats behind the plate, and flashes another sign. John rocks and fires. Smack!

John touches his shoulder like he's expecting it to hurt, but it doesn't. And he smiles.

The Coach stands and walks toward John.

COACH

I've been thinking.

JOHN

That's always dangerous.

COACH

How long you planning to play out this "Gray Champion" thing?

JOHN

I made a commitment.

COACH

You know she's looking out for only one person and it ain't you.

JOHN

I don't think she's that kind of person.

COACH

Pollyanna.

JOHN

She can get what she wants as long as I get what I want.

COACH

You sweet on her?

JOHN

I'm doing it for the kids.

COACH

Don't forget that. Don't confuse what you want to do for those kids with what you're feeling for her and this "Gray Champion" character she's created.

JOHN

You won't let me.

COACH

Damn right.

JOHN

I know what I'm doing.

COACH

If it turns out to be some kind of racket, what are they going to think?

JOHN

I won't let that happen.

COACH

Those kids are counting on you. Don't let them down.

The Coach plops the ball into John's outstretched glove.

EXT. JOHN'S NEIGHBORHOOD - EVENING

John jogs. He listens to music on headphones.

As he sprints across a street, a black stretch limousine screeches around the corner, whips in front of John, and stops.

The door opens and a crew cut, Secret Service reject steps out and holds the door open. He wears a small, embroidered patch on his suit jacket. It reads: "Calafia Institute. Security Force."

John, annoyed but thinking it's just bad driving, starts to jog around. The man moves to block John's way. John stops.

Crew Cut gestures for John to remove his headphones. He does.

From inside the limo, John hears a MAN'S VOICE.

DEVLIN (O.S.)

I'd be careful about the company I keep.

John peers inside the limo. Crew Cut gestures for John to get inside. He does.

INT. LIMOUSINE - CONTINUOUS

John blinks in the dim light. He sees a SHAPE in the shadows. As his eyes finally adjust to the dimness, he sees a large, very pale man of no discernible age. The man extends his hand in greeting.

DEVLIN

Ethan Devlin's the name. A pleasure to meet the man capable of mesmerizing D.B. Norton.

JOHN

I'm not working for Mr. Norton.

DEVLIN

His stations, his strings.

JOHN

I'm working with Ann Mitchell.

DEVLIN

Same difference.

JOHN

You seem to know a lot about Mr. Norton's business.

DEVLIN

Should say I should. We grew up together. Went to school together. Your school. Same time as you. We were best of friends. Closest of strangers, some might say. Then partners. He wasn't very good at sharing. Squeezed me out. Made it my job to bury him. Any way I can.

JOHN

What's that got to do with me?

DEVLIN

Nothing, and everything.

JOHN

I'm no good at riddles.

DEVLIN

What's he paying you?

JOHN

Nothing.

DEVLIN

You're no good at business, either.

JOHN

He promised to help support my foundation. Help my kids.

DEVLIN

You have in writing?

JOHN

Miss Mitchell took care of it.

DEVLIN

You're worse than no good, you're not even on the sonar.

JOHN

Her word is good enough for me.

Devlin taps on the smoked glass between him and the DRIVER. The glass swishes down. A HAND passes a legal-sized folder through the window. Devlin takes it. The glass swishes back up. Devlin hands the folder to John.

DEVLIN

That's a contract. Legal and binding.

JOHN

For what?

DEVLIN

I'm setting up a foundation to help educate underprivileged kids around the country. There's also a component to underwrite sports programs.

John opens the folder.

DEVLIN

I want you to run it.

JOHN

You said it yourself, I'm no good at business.

DEVLIN

Don't have to be.

John picks up the contract.

DEVLIN

You care about kids. That's all that's required.

JOHN

You don't strike me as the kind of man who gives away something for nothing. What do you expect in return?

DEVLIN

(after a dramatic
pause)

Admit you're a fake.

John drops the contract. He rubs his hands like he's just touched something foul.

DEVLIN

When you do your broadcast, all you have to do is say the whole thing's a hoax. That Norton put you up to it.

JOHN

Revenge isn't attractive.

DEVLIN

I have a long memory. Good friends make bad enemies.

JOHN

I made a promise.

DEVLIN

Norton doesn't honor commitments.

JOHN

Not to Norton. To Ann Mitchell. And my kids.

DEVLIN

What are those kids going to think when they find out you're a fake? And they will. One way or another.

JOHN

That sounds like a threat, Mr. Devlin?

DEVLIN

I don't threaten, John. I deliver.

JOHN

Let me think about it.

DEVLIN

You do that.

JOHN

I'll let you know.

DEVLIN

You do that, too.

EXT. TOWER BRIDGE - LATER THAT NIGHT

John leans on the railing. He tosses stones into the river below. The water rushes by.

He looks downstream to where it's been, he gazes below at where it is, and sweeps his eyes upstream to where it's going.

COACH (V.O.)

The past flows into the present and feeds the future. It's all connected, John.

EXT. JOHN'S BACKYARD - DAY

John and the Coach stand toe-to-toe on the mound.

JOHN

I'm a teacher, not a crusader.

COACH

Jesus, Mohammed, Gandhi, King. They were all teachers.

JOHN

Don't even. I couldn't carry their jockstraps.

COACH

They changed the world.

JOHN

I just want to help my kids.

COACH

They didn't want the job, either.

JOHN

Why me? I'm just this guy. A wanna-be ballplayer.

COACH

Who knows? Maybe you were next in line.
Or, fate liked you. Who knows.

JOHN

Luck of the draw.

COACH

I've seen kids that were good and kids
that were lucky. I'd always take lucky
over good, 'cause lucky always seemed
to win.

JOHN

A little cynical there, Coach.

COACH

Just practical.

JOHN

I got too many catchers flashing me
signs. Ann's calling for a fastball
right down the middle. This Devlin dude
wants the screwball. Old Norton wants
the curve. I'm ready for the showers.

COACH

Only got one choice, John. The same one
you've had your whole life.

JOHN

What's that?

BACK TO TOWER BRIDGE - DAY

John fires a rock into the heart of the rushing river.

COACH (V.O.)

You've got to go with your best pitch.
Got to go with what got you here.

INT. TELEVISION STUDIO - GREEN ROOM - EVENING

John poses for photographs. The Coach sits on a couch. Ann
hovers behind the PHOTOGRAPHERS.

Two FEMALE PRODUCTION ASSISTANTS stand in the doorway. They
check John out.

PHOTOGRAPHER #1

Hold it, slugger. Smile. That's money.

The photographer snaps off a shot.

PHOTOGRAPHER #2

Over here, Mr. Willoughby. Make me
believe. Front page.

The other photographer flashes a picture.

ANN

Okay, guys, that's enough for now.
We'll get more later.

Ann shoos the photographers out, gives the girls a look that says, "Hands off," and closes the door almost before they can get out of the way.

ANN

All set for the big show, John?

JOHN

I suppose.

ANN

Nervous.

JOHN

A few butterflies.

ANN

No different than opening day.

COACH

He always threw up opening day.

Ann removes a single sheet of paper from a folder and hands it to John.

ANN

Here's the speech. It'll be on the
prompter also. You can read from this,
or the prompter. Just like we
rehearsed.

John scans the paper.

Ann's cellular phone rings. She flips up the lid, checks the screen.

ANN

(into cell phone)

Hey, Mom.

(listens)

That's sweet.

(listens)

Hope you and the girls enjoy it.

(listens)

He's right here. I'll tell him.

(listens)

I love you, too. 'Bye.

ANN

Mom said to "dust them," whatever that means.

JOHN

Any last words from you?

ANN

Just be yourself. The camera's going to eat you up.

The CATERER enters. He crosses to check the food on a side table. The Coach is freshening his cup of coffee.

CATERER

(whispers)

He the guy?

COACH

The guy?

CATERER

That "Gray Champion" guy? The guy who's gonna jump?

COACH

That's John Willoughby. They call him the Gray Champion. Now, as far as jumping—

CATERER

We got a bet going. Whether he jumps or not. Odds now are twenty to one he don't.

COACH

Like those odds.

CATERER

Most of us don't think he should. I mean, what difference is it going to make, you know?

COACH

Damned if I know. Guess we'll find out shortly.

There's a knock on the door. The door opens and the STAGE MANAGER peeks inside.

STAGE MANAGER

One minute to air.

ANN

We'll be right there.

The stage manager closes the door.

ANN

One minute to go, and the score is nothing to nothing. Now, please, John, you won't let me down, will you?

JOHN

Never.

ANN

Everything in this speech, they're things a certain man believed in. My father. When he talked, people listened.

JOHN

Hope I measure up.

ANN

Funny. The other night, my mother said to look in your eyes and I'd see my father there.

Ann stares into John's eyes a moment.

The stage manager sticks his head in the door again.

STAGE MANAGER

Hey, what do you say?

JOHN

Okay, we're coming.

ANN

Get in there and pitch, John.

(kisses his cheek)

Good luck.

For a moment, John just stares at her, under a spell. Then, he goes to the door and leaves. Ann watches him. The Coach comes up, takes her arm, and they leave together.

INT. STUDIO - MOMENTS LATER

John follows the stage manager into a cavernous studio. Ann and the Coach follow.

The AUDIENCE sits in banked seats behind the cameras. As soon as they see John, an audible whisper sweeps the room.

The stage manager escorts John to a simple podium sitting in a pool of light in front of a limbo background.

Ann and the Coach stop behind the cameras next to a floor monitor. Ann watches John with intense interest.

The AUDIO TECH hooks a microphone to John's lapel. The MAKEUP PERSON dabs the perspiration from John's forehead. WARDROBE smoothes the shoulders of his sports coat.

The ANNOUNCER stands in front of another camera. Behind him is a floating display screen with the Synapse logo.

INT. CONTROL ROOM - SAME TIME

Controlled chaos. The DIRECTOR checks the master clock. The TECHNICAL DIRECTOR scans his notated script. Through the glass partition, we can see the entire studio below. John stands alone in the spotlight.

DIRECTOR
(to the TD)
Let's see what he's got.
(to the room)
Stand-by everyone. Ten seconds to air.
(to preview monitor)
Make 'em cry, big guy.

INT. STUDIO - SAME TIME

The stage manager stands between the announcer's camera and John's camera.

STAGE MANAGER
Quiet please. Stand-by.

John squints to see through the bright lights and behind the cameras. Searching for . . .

Ann inches as close as she can to the stage without getting in front of the cameras. The Coach watches her.

John finally catches sight of her and smiles.

STAGE MANAGER
We're live in 10-9-8-7-6 . . .

The stage manager positions himself next to the announcer's camera. He holds five fingers under the lens of the camera. He closes them one at a time. 5-4-3-2-1.

The stage manager points at the announcer and the tally light on top of the camera lights.

ANNOUNCER
Good evening, ladies and gentlemen.
This is Kenneth Frye. Tonight's special program is brought to you by KSAC, the Voice of the Valley, and The Synapse Corporation, Media for Life.

Uncertainly, John looks around at the CREW, the audience, the director and TD in the control room above.

ANNOUNCER (O.S.)

You are about to meet a man who has received quite a bit of press lately. A man who has publicly declared that he intends to commit suicide on Christmas Eve.

John sees Crew Cut standing beneath the control room window. John's eyes narrow. His hand goes to his coat pocket, like he's checking for something there. Crew Cut winks.

ANNOUNCER (O.S.)

Because he's fed up with the way things are in this crazy old world. Tonight, he's going to tell us why.

John turns and looks at Ann. There's a warm, pleading look in her eyes. She smiles and nods. John smiles back.

ANNOUNCER (O.S.)

Ladies and gentlemen, The Synapse Corporation takes pleasure in presenting the man who is fast becoming the most talked-about person in the whole country! Mr. John Willoughby—"The Gray Champion!"

The crowd erupts in enthusiastic applause, whistles, and yells.

The stage manager throws John a cue, but John still stares at Ann.

The stage manager frantically windmills his arms and points at the camera lens.

John finally snaps out of it and turns to the camera.

JOHN

Hello, my name is John Willoughby. I teach elementary school . . . I used to play baseball. Some of you know me now as "The Gray Champion."

Ann beams with pride. The Coach smiles. Crew Cut scowls.

JOHN

There are some things going on that I'm worried about. Some things I'd like to talk about.

INT. NORTON ESTATE - STUDY - SAME TIME

Norton and Ted Sheldon watch the program.

JOHN (ON TV)
Some people don't like what I have to say. Powerful people.

Sheldon glances at Norton. Norton smiles.

BACK TO STUDIO

The audience is totally caught up in John's speech.

JOHN
People with influence. People like—

Suddenly, Crew Cut's voice booms through the studio.

CREW CUT
You're a fake, pal. You don't know what you're talking about.

Quick flashes of reactions from the audience, Ann, the Coach, the director, John.

CREW CUT
You didn't write that speech. You haven't written any of it. You're saying somebody else's words.

Two SECURITY OFFICERS and several PAGES surround Crew Cut and start to hustle him out.

CREW CUT
You gave us your word, Willoughby.

JOHN
(continuing)
Those people don't have to worry. I'm not going to talk about them tonight.

Ann smiles admiringly.

JOHN
I'm going to talk about us. You and me.

John is becoming strangely absorbed in what he is saying.

JOHN
The number one problem I see in the world today is alienation. To most of you, your neighbor is a stranger, a man with a barking dog and a fence around him. I learned one thing playing ball. No one can be a stranger when they're on the same team. A winning team.

BACK TO NORTON'S STUDY

Norton and Sheldon intently watch the screen.

SHELDON

How would he know? He never made it out of Class A Modesto.

Norton stops Sheldon with a hand gesture. He doesn't want to miss a word.

BACK TO STUDIO

The Coach glances at Ann. Her eyes are glued to John.

JOHN

If we want this to get better, we've got to tear down the fences that separate us. You'll tear down a lot of hate and mistrust at the same time.

Everyone in the audience is eating this up.

JOHN

I know a lot of you are saying to yourself, "He's asking for a lot. A miracle even." Well, you're wrong. It's no miracle. I see it happen once every year. At Christmas time.

John himself is visibly affected by what he's saying.

JOHN

There's something incredible about the spirit of Christmas. Seeing what it does to people, all kinds of people. Why can't that spirit last the whole year long? If it ever did, we'd develop such a strength that nothing could stop us.

BACK TO NORTON'S STUDY

Norton wears a hungry smile.

JOHN (O.S., ON TV)

We live in wolfish times. Our society devours its young. It's time to stop discarding our children. They're not the enemy.

Sheldon picks at his fingernails, bored.

JOHN (ON TV)

Our children need to talk and we need to listen. We need to resurrect the family. We need to sit down and have dinner together. We need to keep our kids in school.

Norton impulsively walks to the study door.

JOHN (ON TV)

Fear, greed, violence, inhumanity. They can all be traced back to the decay of the family and the death of education.

Norton opens the study door slightly. A small hallway connects to the pantry. Norton walks to the pantry door and opens it slightly.

JOHN (ON TV)

Without a strong family and a good education, these kids have no hopes or dreams. And without them, we have no future.

INT. PANTRY - SAME TIME

All we can see through the slightly open pantry door is one side of the room. The HOUSEHOLD STAFF cluster around a small TV on a side table. They watch, fascinated.

JOHN (ON TV)

That person next door, your teammate, is going to be real important real soon. You're going to need him and he's going to need you.

Norton's eyes brighten with an idea.

BACK TO STUDIO

Ann's eyes go from John to the audience and back to John.

JOHN

We can't win the game without teamwork and respect. Don't wait until they call the game on account of darkness.

The Coach flashes John a thumbs-up sign.

JOHN

(hesitant)

I'm a man of my word. I said before that if we don't turn this around, there's no reason to stick around.

Everyone in the audience understands the implication without John having to spell it out.

Ann puts her hand to her mouth, frightened yet impressed.

JOHN

I will keep my promise. Goodnight.

John walks away from the podium and out of the spotlight. He goes straight to Ann. She meets him halfway.

ANN

You were wonderful.

The Coach extends his hand.

COACH

No runs, no hits, no errors.

John and the Coach shake hands. But, John doesn't look all that happy.

The audience suddenly realizes the speech is over. They rise as one and begin wildly applauding. The studio rings with cheers.

ANN

We need to celebrate, or something.

JOHN

Or something.

ANN

They needed that. We all needed that.

JOHN

I suppose.

ANN

Do you have any idea the good you've done?

JOHN

Not really.

ANN

Just wait. This is going to be huge. And it's all because of you.

JOHN

Yeah, because of me.

COACH

You okay, son?

JOHN

I'll be okay. I just need to get away for a while.

John heads for an exit door. Ann looks at the Coach, who just shrugs. They both watch John leave.

MONTAGE

1. In a downtown newsstand, the front page of every magazine and newspaper features an article and/or picture of John's television speech.
2. Inside an institutional-looking multi-purpose room, several PEOPLE sit in a circle, talking. The blackboard behind the group reads: The "Fourth Turning" Club. Below it is a partial list of the key points of John's speech.
3. A REPORTER interviews a VOLUNTEER at the store-front office of the Thomas Wilkerson Memorial Fund. The volunteer holds up a sack-full of mail and a hand-full of checks.
4. The cover story for Der Spiegel features a photo of John and a title that translates into: "Plea for Humanity Sweeps Globe."
5. A MALE ANCHOR on the BBC reports the latest news. Inserted in the corner is a photo of John with the caption: "The Power of One".
6. A storefront window displays a sign that reads: "Friends of the Fourth Turning Meeting Tonight!"
7. In her office at KSAC, Ann has posted a map of the world. A sign above the map reads: "Fourth Turning Clubs." A number of pins are stuck in various locations. She sticks a new one in Baghdad, Iraq.

EXT. TOWER BRIDGE - DAY

John leans on the rail and gazes into the river below. A wistful, almost sad, look washes over his face.

ANN (V.O.)

Get in there and pitch, John.

John shakes his head, a self-berating smile on his lips.

JOHN (V.O.)

It's no miracle. I see it happen once every year. At Christmas time.

John clasps his hands together, leans down, and presses his forehead against his thumbs.

ANN (V.O.)

Everything in this speech are things a certain man believed in. My father. When he talked, people listened.

John looks up and stares out at the Sacramento skyline.

JOHN

(to himself)

What a fool.

John looks west. He walks toward his car parked on the access road.

INT. NORTON ESTATE - STUDY - DAY

Norton sits at his desk, staring out the window at his immaculately manicured estate.

ANN (ON SPEAKER PHONE)

He's gone.

Norton swivels and addresses the speakerphone.

NORTON

What do you mean he's gone?

CONNELL (ON SPEAKER PHONE)

Disappeared. Waltzed out of the studio into thin air.

NORTON

What about that friend of his?

ANN (ON SPEAKER PHONE)

He doesn't know, either.

NORTON

Find him. My staff can't keep up with all the mail and phone calls.

Norton spreads out a handful of telegrams. They lie on top of a copy of the Sacramento Bee. The headline reads: "What Can One Man Do?" The sub-head reads: "John Willoughby, The 'Gray Champion', and the 'Fourth Turning' Movement."

NORTON

We need to keep this thing rolling. It's too good.

EXT. DAVIS - MAIN STREET - DAY

John walks through the small university town. He passes an independent bookstore. His smiling face is taped to the window. Arrayed below the photo is a display for the book, "The Fourth Turning: An American Prophecy" by William Strauss and Neil Howe. John continues walking.

John passes a movie theater. The marquee reads: "Can one man change the world? Attend an informational seminar tonight about the 'Gray Champion' and the 'Fourth Turning' Phenomenon." John walks on.

A delivery truck drives by. On the side is a sign that reads: "Join the Davis Chapter of the 'Fourth Turning' Club."

EXT. DAVIS - CENTRAL PARK - DAY

John sits on a park bench. ERNIE, a middle-aged man, sits on another park bench, holding a newspaper. He stares at the front page, then glances at John. John looks away, trying to avoid eye contact.

Ernie walks over and hovers near John.

ERNIE

Are you him?

JOHN

Who?

Ernie turns the paper toward John and taps John's picture.

ERNIE

Him. John Willoughby. The Gray Champion.

JOHN

I'm a teacher.

ERNIE

(eyes brightening)

You can't kid me. I saw you on the tube. It's you all right.

(extends hand)

My name's Ernie.

BERT and ELAINE, a young, tie-dyed couple pushing a stroller, pass behind John's park bench.

ERNIE

(to couple)

It's John Willoughby. Sitting here big as life.

Bert and Elaine stroll around to get a closer look.

BERT

Who'd you say it was?

ERNIE

The Gray Champion.

(taps newspaper)

Picture's right here.

MARY, a professional woman carrying a briefcase, overhears and approaches.

MARY

You're right, it is him.

(to John)

Your speech made me cry.

John stands, looking frantically for a way out of this.

GEORGE, a mail carrier, joins the crowd.

GEORGE

That's him. The guy from TV.

More PEOPLE walk up, curious about the commotion. They all recognize John immediately.

HARRY, a salt-of-the-earth tomato farmer, pushes his way through the crowd. He removes his worn-out straw hat.

HARRY

Excuse me, mister. If you're who they say you are, I've got something to say to you.

John tenses.

HARRY

Thanks to you, . . .

The crowd tenses.

HARRY

My family and me had breakfast together for the first time in I can't remember how long. All of us. We not only talked, we listened.

John relaxes and sits. The people in the crowd ad-lib their heartfelt agreement.

HARRY

So, this afternoon, on my way to the farmer's market, I signed up for our local "Fourth Turning" club.

A police car pulls up. A POLICEMAN gets out of the car and surveys the scene. He leans back inside and comes out with the handset to his radio. He speaks into the handset.

HARRY

Even my neighbor acted different this morning. Actually wished me a good day and tossed me my paper. That never happens.

A second police car arrives. Then a California Highway Patrol cruiser. And a sheriff's van.

EXT. SACRAMENTO AIRPORT - SAME TIME

A private jet taxis toward the terminal. The logo on the side reads: "THE D.B. NORTON GROUP."

BACK TO DAVIS PARK

From the back of the crowd, WILLIAM, a university professor toting a backpack, holds his arm up to get John's attention, as he edges through the crowd.

WILLIAM

My wife and I have a teenage boy. He's been a problem. We were all set to send him off to a school in Idaho. Your words made us decide to keep him with us and begin home schooling.

ESTHER, a young African-American mother, holds OLIVIA, her young daughter, by the hand.

ESTHER

We've unplugged the TV. We're reading to our children for the first time in a very long time. It's wonderful.

Two POLICE OFFICERS, one HIGHWAY PATROLMAN, and two SHERIFF'S DEPUTIES fan out along the edge of the crowd.

CLARENCE, a weathered old man wearing a National Rifle Association baseball cap, shouts from the back.

CLARENCE

That's nothin'. Heck, I took all my guns down to the police station just this AM. Turned 'em all in. You wanna know why? 'Cause I ain't afraid of my neighbors no more. I ain't goin' to make my home a fortress no more. Won't never be no cold dead hand. Not ever.

John is visibly touched and overwhelmed by all this good will.

From off-screen, the wail of sirens pierces the calm, afternoon air. As the crowd turns toward the sound, two motorcycle cops drive up, followed by a limousine.

Ann and Norton step from the back door of the limo.

ANN

Better let me talk to him.

NORTON

Fine, but spin it right. Sell it as a great cause for the common man.

Ann nods as they start for the crowd.

The cops push through the people. In their wake, Ann and Norton follow.

John, seeing Ann, gets to his feet.

ANN

Hello, John.

JOHN

Hello.

NORTON

John, I'm D.B. Norton.

JOHN

I know who you are.

NORTON

We'd like to talk with you alone.

Norton gestures to a nearby gazebo. It's obvious John doesn't appreciate Norton's take-charge attitude.

Reluctantly, John follows Ann into the gazebo.

GAZEBO

Norton motions for Ann and John to sit. Ann does.

JOHN

I'll stand if you don't mind.

ANN

John, something terribly important has happened. They're forming "Fourth Turning" Clubs. All over the country.

JOHN

Here, too? But, why?

NORTON

To carry out the principles you talked about in your speech.

ANN

You don't know how big this thing is. You should see all the telegrams, faxes, and e-mails we've gotten.

JOHN

Changing things? For good?

ANN

Uh-huh.

JOHN

It was a publicity stunt and it worked,
right?

Ann is a little confused and shocked by John's words.

ANN

(tentative)

It started that way, but it isn't that
any more. Mr. Norton wants to get
behind it and sponsor "Fourth Turning"
Clubs all over the country. He wants to
send you on a lecture tour.

JOHN

Me? Why me? I'm just—

ANN

A regular Joe. A plain old John Doe.

NORTON

With your ability to move people, it
might grow into a glorious movement.

JOHN

I'm just a teacher. I don't want—

John stops, distracted by the crowd that has swelled and is
pushing against the police, who are holding them back and
trying to maintain a perimeter around the gazebo.

Norton sees this. He gets an idea. He gestures to the POLICE
COMMANDER to let the people through. The crowd surges around
the gazebo like waves lapping around a lighthouse.

The people just stand there, awkwardly. Some grin
sheepishly, others stare at John.

Norton nudges John toward the gazebo railing. John walks to
the railing. Ann and Norton follow. The crowd moves closer
to the gazebo.

Bert, Elaine, Ernie, Harry, Mary, Clarence, and the rest look up
at John. John makes eye contact with each one. Their eyes implore
him to lead them, to show them the way.

In the front of the crowd, VIOLET, an elderly lady, catches
John's eye. She gestures that she wants him to move closer. John
leans toward her.

VIOLET

May God bless you, my boy.

Violet gently kisses John's hand.

John swallows a lump in his throat. He quickly glances at his hand, then self-consciously stuffs his hand in his pocket.

The entire crowd watches him. John runs his hand through his hair. He steals a fleeting glance at Ann and Norton, then grins awkwardly.

Ann walks over to John. She faces him, looking up into his eyes.

ANN

Don't you see what a wonderful thing
this could be. But, we need you, John.
We can't do it without you.

Everyone waits for John to speak, but he begins pacing around, confused and indecisive.

Ann and Norton watch him, expectantly.

John continues to pace, torn by clashing emotions. He stops, glances at the crowd—a soft, thoughtful expression in his eyes. Then, as his thoughts shift, he runs his left hand over his pitching arm.

JOHN

(low, to Ann)

I'm all mixed up. I don't get it. All
these great people think I'm going to
kill myself, or something. And for
what? For who?

The crowd watches his every move.

ANN

I don't know.

NORTON

What do you say, John? Let's see where
it takes us.

Finally, John nods his head, but there's a trapped, panicked look on his face.

Ann and Norton exchange victorious glances.

EXT. SACRAMENTO - FOURTH TURNING HEADQUARTERS - DAY

In the store-front window, a poster-sized photo of John stares back at us. Above the door is a sign that reads:
"HEADQUARTERS OF THE FOURTH TURNING CLUBS OF AMERICA."

INT. FOURTH TURNING HEADQUARTERS - SAME TIME

A computer-generated map of the U.S. is displayed on a wall-sized, electronic screen. Across the top it reads: "Fourth Turning Clubs." Blinking lights indicate where clubs currently exist.

Norton talks to a GROUP OF MEN.

One of the men, CHARLES WILLSON, has the look of a polished, professional, high-pressure promoter.

NORTON

Willson, I want you to personally go along with Willoughby and Miss Mitchell to handle the media.

WILLSON

Can do, D.B.

Another of the men, MICHAEL JOHNSON, has the look of a seasoned, successful, lapel-tugging politician.

NORTON

Johnson, your crew will do the mop-up job. They'll follow Willoughby into every town and see that the clubs are properly organized.

JOHNSON

I'm all over it.

NORTON

I don't want to take any chances, Johnson. You understand?

JOHNSON

Crystal clear.

NORTON

Before we're done, I want that whole map covered.

The CAMERA HOLDS on the map, which serves as a backdrop for the following MONTAGE. As the MONTAGE proceeds, lights begin to flicker across the land.

MONTAGE

1. Flashes of banners reading: "Gray Champion Coming" - "John Willoughby Tonight" - "Fourth Turning Meeting."
2. Flashes of John speaking, superimposed over shots of AUDIENCES of various sizes and demographics.
3. Flashes of Ann typing at her computer.
4. Flashes of John on TV and the radio—with Ann at his side, Willson and Johnson behind them.
5. Flashes of PEOPLE listening.

6. Flashes of PEOPLE applauding.
7. Flashes of signs being nailed up: "Fourth Turning Club - Let's Take Care of One Another, Let's Take Care of America."
8. Against a series of stock shots of each, the names of American cities zoom up in the foreground.
9. Supered over the cities, the computer-generated U.S. map blinks as lights pop on in rapid-fire succession.
10. A picture of John on the cover of Time Magazine, with a caption under it reading: "Man of the Year."

INT. FOURTH TURNING HEADQUARTERS - DAY

Norton stands at a podium in front of the electronic wall map. Every state is covered with blinking lights. The room is filled with REPORTERS, VOLUNTEERS, CITY, COUNTY, and STATE OFFICIALS, and local, "Fourth Turning" CLUB MEMBERS.

Connell stands off to the side of Norton, scrutinizing his boss thoughtfully.

On the other side of Norton stands Sheldon, flanked by Willson and Johnson.

NORTON

Ladies and gentlemen, this thing has been nothing short of a prairie fire. We've received applications for more clubs than we can possibly handle.

Norton hits a button on the podium and the image on the wall screen changes to a rendering of the interior of a convention hall. The caption at the top of the rendering reads: "1st Annual Convention of Fourth Turning Clubs, Sacramento, Christmas Eve Day."

NORTON

Staging a convention to bring the entire country together is the next logical step. Over twenty-four hundred clubs have confirmed that they're sending delegates.

Connell watches Norton. A deeply disturbed look crosses his face.

NORTON

I want to thank you all for coming today and being part of this historic occasion. For those of you who are interested, lunch will be served in the adjoining room.

Norton barely gets the last words out before there's a mad scramble for the food in the next room.

The room is suddenly empty, except for Norton, Connell, Sheldon, Willson, and Johnson.

CONNELL

That convention of yours is going to cost plenty.

NORTON

Worth every penny.

CONNELL

You've spent a fortune getting this whole movement going.

NORTON

(annoyed)

Your point?

CONNELL

What's in it for you?

NORTON

I'll have the satisfaction of knowing that my money has been spent supporting a worthy cause.

Connell stares at Norton a moment, then realizes he's been told to mind his own business.

CONNELL

I see. I'd better stick to running the station, huh?

NORTON

I think that's a good idea. And, Connell, I want all the paper we've generated on this "project." Contracts, letters, receipts, speeches. Everything.

CONNELL

Yeah, sure.

EXT./INT. NEW YORK - HOTEL SUITE - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Ann stands near a desk, organizing and stuffing papers into her briefcase. Her luggage is packed and ready to be taken out. She seems lost in worried thought.

There's a knock at the door.

ANN

Come in.

The door opens and Willson enters.

WILLSON

We leave for the airport in half an hour.

(gestures)

Is that Johnny-boy's room? I'd better hustle him up.

ANN

He'll be ready on time.

Willson gives her a fish-eye look.

ANN

(gestures)

I'm in the adjoining room.

WILLSON

Ah, good, I mean . . .

(crosses to Ann)

Did you see his picture on the cover of Time?

Willson drops the magazine on the desk in front of her.

ANN

Yeah. Good likeness.

Willson goes to the wet bar and pours himself a scotch.

WILLSON

Got to give you credit, Annie-girl. I've handled a good many big-time promotions in my day, but this one has got me spinning. And, now, a convention. Say, if you could only guarantee he'd jump off that bridge on Christmas Eve, we'd us have the makings of a folk legend.

Ann is lost in troubled thought.

ANN

(nods toward door)

What do you make of him?

WILLSON

Well, I don't know what spin you want, but I'll give you mine. Number one, he's got that "common man" thing down. Number two, he's beginning to believe that stuff you made up. Number three, he thinks you're the second coming of Joan of Arc, or something.

This is definitely troubling Ann.

ANN

Yeah, I know.

Ann paces around the room.

WILLSON

Number four. Well, you know what number four is. He's crazy over you. It's running out his ears.

Willson smacks his lips.

WILLSON

It's the whole enchirito, baby.

Ann runs her hands through her hair. She wheels around on Willson.

ANN

You left out number five, Willson.
We're all heartless assholes.

Ann returns to stuffing her briefcase.

Willson is mildly stunned, then drains his drink.

John exits his bedroom into the living room of the suite, carrying a suitcase.

JOHN

All packed.

WILLSON

Good, I'll go get Beany-boy.

JOHN

You do that, Charlie-boy.

Willson winks good-naturedly and leaves.

John turns to Ann, who concentrates on her packing.

John looks at Ann with great interest. He walks toward her.

Ann feels him coming, but does not turn.

JOHN

Can I help?

ANN

No, I don't think so.

John wanders over to a chair and sits on the arm, still watching her.

Ann is conscious of his eyes on her. She fumbles with her packing. Finally, she turns.

John stares at her, a warm smile on his face.

Ann becomes self-conscious and turns back to her briefcase and papers.

JOHN

(laughs lightly)

You know, I had a crazy dream last night. It was about you.

ANN

About me?

JOHN

Sure was wild. I dreamt I was your father.

This statement bothers Ann slightly. She turns slowly to John.

JOHN

There was, there was something I was trying to stop you from doing. So, er, so I got up out of bed and I walked right through that wall there, right straight into your room.

(laughs nervously)

You know how dreams are.

Ann stares at him, concerned about where this dream is headed.

JOHN

And there you were, er, in bed.

(clears his throat)

But you—you were a little girl. You know—about ten.

John pauses to recall the scene.

JOHN

And very pretty, too. So, I—I shook you, and the moment you opened your eyes, you hopped out of bed and started running like the devil in your nightgown.

Ann sits on the edge of the desk, worried but resigned. John stands to act out his dream.

JOHN

You ran right out the window there. And you ran over the tops of buildings and roofs and everything for miles, and I was chasing you.

(chuckles)

And all the time you were running you kept growing bigger and bigger and bigger—and pretty soon you were as big as you are now. You know—grown up. And, all the time I kept—I kept asking myself, "What am I chasing her for?" And I didn't know.

(laughs)

Isn't that a weird one? Well, anyway, you ran into this building, and then I ran in after you—and when I got there, there you were getting married.

John looks at Ann. He suddenly realizes he's treading on sensitive ground.

JOHN

(awkwardly)

And the nightgown had changed into a beautiful wedding gown. You sure looked pretty, too.

(clears his throat)

And then I knew what it was I was trying to stop you from doing.

Ann looks uncomfortable, not quite sure how to handle this.

JOHN

Dreams are sure nuts, aren't they?

Ann smiles, confused and uncertain.

JOHN

Well, would you like to know who it was you were marrying?

ANN

(forced lightness)

A tall, handsome stranger.

JOHN

No, not that bad.

(coughs)

It was Norton.

ANN

D.B.?

JOHN

Yeah, Norton. The big kahuna.

Ann turns back to her briefcase, but her attention is on John.

JOHN

But, here's the funniest part of it all. I was the guy up there doing the marrying. You know, the Justice of the Peace or something . . .

ANN

I thought you were chasing me.

JOHN

Well, I was. But, I was your father then, you see. But, the real me, John Willoughby, I was the man up there with the book. You know what I mean?

ANN

(slightly amused)

I guess so. Then what happened?

JOHN

Well, I took you across my knee and I started spanking you.

Ann turns and stares at him, eyes widening.

JOHN

(quickly explaining)

That is, I didn't do it.

(correcting himself)

I mean, I did do it, but it wasn't me. You see, I was back to being your father then. Well, I laid you across my knee and I said, "Annie, I won't allow you to marry a man that's—that's just rich, or that has his secretary send you flowers. The man you marry has got to swim rivers for you. He's got to climb high mountains for you. He's got to slay dragons for you. Yes, sir."

Beany enters with two BELL HOPS. They stop behind John.

JOHN

And all the time, er, the guy up there, you know, with the book, me, just stood there nodding his head and he said, "Go for it, Pop, whack her one for me, because that's just the way I feel about it, too."

John wipes the sweat from his forehead.

JOHN

So he—er, your dad—says, "Come on down here and whack her yourself." So I came down and I whacked you a good one. And then he whacked one—and I whacked you another one, and we both started whacking you like . . .

John demonstrates by slapping his thighs, first with one hand then with the other. Suddenly, he becomes aware of Beany and stops, embarrassed.

BEANY

Well, if you're done whackin' her, let's hit the bricks.

(to bell boys)

All that goes.

(to John)

You got to take the employee elevator to the garage. Got a whole bunch of autograph hounds and pizzerias out front.

The bell hops load Ann and John's luggage on a cart and leave. Beany follows.

Ann glances over her shoulder at John as she goes out.

ANN

It's only a dream, John. It has nothing to do with the way things really are.

INT. NEW YORK - AIRPORT - BOARDING GATE - DAY

John and Ann wait in an empty row of chairs together. Ann's briefcase and carry-on rest in the seat between them. They sit silently for a moment. Strains of music float through the terminal.

JOHN

How many people do you think we've talked to already, besides on television?

ANN

I don't know. Maybe half a million.

JOHN

Half a million. What makes them do it, Ann? What makes them come and listen and start their clubs the way they do? I've been trying to figure it out.

ANN

(trying to disillusion
him)

Look, John—what we're handing them are platitudes. Things they've heard a million times. Things like, "Love thy neighbor," "Clouds have a silver lining," "Turn the other cheek." It's just a—

JOHN

(sincerely)

Yeah, I've heard them a million times, too. But, maybe they're like me. Maybe they're just beginning to get an idea about what those things really mean.

Ann is deeply concerned. She watches John, helplessly.

JOHN

You know, I've been watching them lately. Watching when we talked to them. I could see something in their faces. I could feel they were hungry for something. Know what I mean?

Ann nods, a troubled look on her face.

JOHN

Maybe that's why they come. Maybe they're just lonely and want somebody to say hello to. I know how they feel. I've been lonely and hungry for something practically my whole life.

Ann forces a smile. The moment threatens to become awkward—until they are saved by the PUBLIC ADDRESS ANNOUNCER.

ANNOUNCER (OVER P.A.)

We'll now begin boarding for today's flight to Sacramento.

INT. NORTON ESTATE - DINING ROOM - DAY

Norton, Ann, and Sheldon enter and cross to the table.

Sheldon pulls out a chair for her.

Ann starts to sit and notices a fur coat flung over the back of the chair.

ANN

Somebody sitting here?

NORTON

No, no—that's your seat.

SHELDON
And this is your coat.

ANN
Mine?

NORTON
A little token of our appreciation.

Ann pauses a moment, glances toward Norton, while Sheldon gently drapes the coat over her shoulders.

ANN
D.B., I don't quite know what to say.

NORTON
Well, don't say anything at all. Just sit down.

Ann sits. She picks up her table napkin—and something she sees suddenly makes her look with surprise at D.B.

Bewildered, Ann holds up a jewel box.

NORTON
Go ahead, open it.

Ann opens the box and holds up a lovely diamond bracelet. Her eyes dance.

ANN
It's lovely. Absolutely lovely.

SHELDON
And a new contract goes with it.

Norton and Sheldon exchange satisfied glances.

Ann admires the bracelet on her wrist—and then turns to Norton, looking directly at him.

ANN
(shrewdly)
What's up, D.B.?

Norton laughs.

ANN
(fondles bracelet)
Must be big.

NORTON
(to Sheldon)
You know, that's what I like about her. Right to the point, like that. All right, practical Annie, here it is.

Norton leans forward. Ann waits. Sheldon watches her face.

NORTON

At tomorrow night's convention, before a live audience of fifty thousand people, and talking over a nation-wide TV, radio, and web hook-up, John Willoughby will announce the formation of a third party.

ANN

(eyes widening)

A third party?

SHELDON

Yes. The "Fourth Turning" Party.

Ann is thunderstruck.

NORTON

Devoted entirely to the interests of the common man all over the country. John will also announce the third party's candidate for the presidency. A man whom he, personally, recommends. A great humanitarian. The best friend the common man has ever had.

ANN

(in an awed whisper)

Mr. D.B. Norton.

Norton verifies her guess by leaning back, a pleased grin on his face.

Ann looks from Norton to Sheldon, a little overwhelmed by the magnitude of the project.

SHELDON

D.B. won't say it, Ann, so I will. A smart, ambitious, and attractive woman might find it worthwhile to hook onto a rising star like his. Perhaps even ride it all the way to the White House. As First Lady.

EXT. SACRAMENTO - RALEY FIELD - MORNING

It's Christmas Eve day.

The sky is gray. There's a slight drizzle. The place is a beehive of activity. PEOPLE stream into the stadium.

Ringling the stadium is an encampment of TV remote trucks, their antennae stuck in the air. It's an electronic forest. NEWS REPORTERS stand under canopies in front of their trucks, speaking into the camera.

CNN REPORTER

Although the opening of the convention is still hours away, the delegates and spectators are already pouring into Raley Field. Many are carrying petitions . . .

NBC REPORTER

. . . asking John Willoughby not to jump. It is a phenomenal movement. The common man, the joi polloi, old John Doe, have been laughed at and ridiculed, but here they are, having traveled thousands of miles, to come here . . .

CBS REPORTER

. . . to pay tribute to their hero, John Willoughby. And, in these days of wars and hunger, it's a hopeful sign that a simple idea like the "Fourth Turning" can sweep the country. An idea . . .

ABC REPORTER

. . . based on compassion, on giving and not taking, on helping your neighbor and asking nothing in return. If a thing like this can happen, you can't tell me that humanity is falling apart.

INT. ANN'S HOME - FRONT DOOR - MORNING

Ann's mother opens the front door. John stands on the threshold. He holds a small box of flowers in his hand. Water drips from his hat.

MRS. MITCHELL

Oh, John. Come in.

JOHN

I'm kind of—it's kind of raining out a little—

MRS. MITCHELL

That's all right. Come in.

John takes a few tentative steps into the entryway, not quite knowing what to do.

Mrs. Mitchell takes his hat and hangs it on the hall tree.

MRS. MITCHELL

It's wonderful to see you. Come in.
Come in.

Mrs. Mitchell leads John into the living room.

MRS. MITCHELL
Sit down. Please, sit down.

JOHN
(mumbles)
Thanks.

John sits on the edge of a chair, still clinging to the box of flowers. He suddenly holds the box out.

JOHN
(awkwardly)
These are for Ann . . .

MRS. MITCHELL
(takes the box)
Oh, how nice.

JOHN
Flowers.

MRS. MITCHELL
I see. I'm terribly sorry, John, she isn't here.

JOHN
She isn't?

MRS. MITCHELL
No, she just left. I'm surprised you didn't run into her. She went over to Mr. Norton's house.

JOHN
Oh.

MRS. MITCHELL
Was there something you wanted to see her about?

JOHN
Yeah. I, uh, well . . . No, it'll wait.
(suddenly)
Say, he's a nice man, isn't he? D.B., I mean Mr. Norton. He's, er, he's done an awful lot for the . . .

Mrs. Mitchell watches him, slightly amused.

John struggles with what he wants to say.

JOHN
Well, I guess I'll see her later at the convention.

MRS. MITCHELL

I'll see that she gets the flowers.

John stands.

JOHN

Thanks. Good-bye, Mrs. Mitchell.

MRS. MITCHELL

Good-bye, John.

John starts for the front door. He stops suddenly. He glances out of the corner of his eye toward Mrs. Mitchell. He walks back toward her.

JOHN

Mrs. Mitchell. I, er, I'm kind of glad Ann isn't here. You see, I was, I came over here hoping to see her alone and kind of hoping I wouldn't. You know what I mean? There was something I wanted to talk to her about. But, well, i-it'll wait, I guess. So long.

Mrs. Mitchell senses what is on his mind. Her face becomes serious.

John smiles helplessly, waiting for her say something, anything.

JOHN

Say, Mrs. Mitchell, have you ever been married?

(catches himself)

Oh, sure you have.

(grins sheepishly)

You must think I'm crazy.

(shakes his head)

On that note, I guess I really should be going.

John heads for the door again. When he reaches the entryway, he's stopped by Mrs. Mitchell's voice.

MRS. MITCHELL (O.S.)

John, my husband said, "I love you. Will you marry me?"

JOHN

(whirls)

He did? What happened?

MRS. MITCHELL

I married him.

John walks back to face her.

JOHN

It was as easy as that?

MRS. MITCHELL

Yes, it was.

JOHN

Mrs. Mitchell, I—I love Ann and it's going to be awfully hard for me to say it because, well, I'm just a teacher.

John is really struggling.

JOHN

And, you know, I'm afraid she's in love with another man.

MRS. MITCHELL

John, she only has a business relationship with Mr. Norton.

This throws John for a moment.

JOHN

No, she's in love with the man she made up. This "Gray Champion" guy. That's pretty tough competition.

It's obvious Mrs. Mitchell is very fond of John and deeply sympathetic.

JOHN

He'd know what to say. Me, I get up to it and around it and in back of it, but—but I never get right to it. So, the only chance I've got is, well, if somebody could kind of give her a warning sort of. A heads up, to sort of prepare her for the shock.

MRS. MITCHELL

You'd like me to talk with her.

JOHN

Well, I was thinking that—Yeah, you know, kind of break the ice.

MRS. MITCHELL

Of course, I'll do what I can, John.

John's face lights up gratefully.

JOHN

Thank you, Mrs. Mitchell. That's great. You're great.

John turns to go, but almost immediately turns back. He plants a kiss on Mrs. Mitchell's cheek and leaves.

EXT. ANN'S HOME - SIDEWALK - CONTINUOUS

A limousine idles at the curb. Beany and the DRIVER stand in front of it. Four MOTORCYCLE POLICE wait.

BEANY

(to driver)

This convention is gonna be one of the biggest things that ever happened to this town. Heck, this country.

John appears at the doorway of Ann's home. He puts on his hat then pretends to wind up to throw a fastball at Beany.

BEANY

Why, they're coming from all over.
(sees John)

Heads up!

John throws.

Beany pantomimes catching the invisible fastball.

John bounds down the sidewalk. The driver holds the door open.

JOHN

Hey, guys. Anyone had breakfast yet? I could eat a horse.

BEANY

No, we was waitin' for you, John.

JOHN

Let's eat then.

John is about to enter the car when he hears a voice.

CONNELL (O.S.)

Just a second, John.

Connell closes the door to the taxi. He walks, rather unsteadily, toward John.

JOHN

Hello, Mr. Connell.

CONNELL

(broad wink)

Hiyah, John.

(carefully enunciates)

I would like to have a little talk with you.

Connell stumbles and John catches him.

CONNELL

What's, what's the matter—are you falling?

JOHN

Gravity.

Connell takes John's arm, prepared to lead him off.

BEANY

(protesting)

Hey, Boss.

CONNELL

Oh, quiet, quiet.

(to John)

Say, tell me something, old pal. Did you—did you read that speech you're going to make tonight?

JOHN

No, I never read the speeches before I make them. I pretty much trust Ann.

CONNELL

Uh-huh. That's pretty much what I thought. Beany, go down to the office and ask my secretary to give you the speech. There's a copy on my desk.

BEANY

Boss, you know Mr. Norton told me not to leave him, not even for a minute.

CONNELL

(shoos him away)

Go on, go on. We'll be at Tubman's Bar up the street.

Connell gestures loosely in a general direction up the street and again takes John's arm.

John watches him, rather amused to see Connell out of control. John allows himself to be led away.

INT. TUBMAN'S BAR - LATER

In a corner booth, John and Connell sit close together, drinks in front of them.

John's drink remains untouched. Connell takes a long swig.

From off-screen, a sad love song floats in the air.

CONNELL

You're a nice guy, John. I like you.
You're gentle. I like gentle people.
Me? I'm hard-hard and tough. An
asshole.

(shakes his head,
disparagingly)

I have no use for assholes. Need to be
gentle to suit me. Like you. Like you.

John smiles, amused at Connell.

Connell removes a crumpled pack of cigarettes from his coat
pocket. He removes a bent cigarette.

CONNELL

(off John's look)

You know what they say about old
habits.

Connell starts to light the cigarette. He holds the match
up, but it never reaches the tip of the bent cigarette. He
puffs nonetheless, satisfied.

CONNELL

Yes, I'm hard. But, you want to know
something? I've got a weakness. You'd
never guess that, would you? Well, I
have. Want to know what it is?

John nods.

CONNELL

The Star Spangled Banner.
(looks directly at
John)

Crazy, huh?
(looks back at his
glass)

Well, maybe it is. But, play The Star
Spangled Banner.
(thumps his chest)

It always gets me right here. You know
what I mean?

John's face has become serious.

JOHN

Yeah. Reminds me of baseball.
(points to the back of
his neck)

Gets me right back here.

Connell speculates about this, his head cocked.

CONNELL
 Back there, huh?
 (shrugs, dismissing
 it)

John smiles at him.

Connell tries to light his bent cigarette again, with the same result.

John watches, entertained.

CONNELL
 You ever in the service, John?

John starts to answer, but Connell pushes right ahead.

CONNELL
 You probably didn't go for that stuff.

Connell pours John's drink into his own glass.

CONNELL
 I did. Couldn't wait to go. Know what my best friend did when I joined up? He joined up, too. Dos compadres.

John is intensely interested in where this story is going.

CONNELL
 Went through boot together. Got assigned to the same outfit.

Connell lifts his glass to his lips, and without drinking, lowers it.

CONNELL
 (lowers voice)
 He was killed, John. Land mine. Died in my arms.

Without glancing at John, Connell drains his drink.

CONNELL
 Me? Came home without a scratch. Except for my ulcers.
 (touches gut)
 Should be drinking milk.
 This stuff's poison.
 (to BARTENDER)
 Hey, Tubby.

TUBBY (O.S.)
 Yes, Mr. Connell?

CONNELL
 (holds up glass)
 Whaddya say?

TUBBY (O.S.)
 Comin' right up.

Connell looks around guardedly, to make sure no one is close enough to be listening.

CONNELL
 Yessir, I'm a sucker for this country.
 (a little worked up)
 I'm a sucker for The Star Spangled
Banner—and I'm a sucker for this
 country.
 (jabs table with index
 finger)
 I like what we got here. I like it just
 fine. A guy can say what he wants—and
 do what he wants—without having a gun
 put to his head.

Connell leans back and nods, satisfied he's made his point.

CONNELL
 Now, that's all right, isn't it?

JOHN
 You bet.

CONNELL
 You bet. And we don't want anybody
 coming around changing it, do we?

JOHN
 No, sir.

CONNELL
 No, sir. And when they do, I get mad.
 And right now, John, I'm pissed.

John looks at him, puzzled.

CONNELL
 Tearing down this country sucks.

JOHN
 It does.

CONNELL
 And you'd feel pretty damned bad if you
 found yourself right in the middle of
 it, wouldn't you?

John glances up sharply.

CONNELL

And you, of course you wouldn't know it because you're a gentle man. A kind man. But, that's what they're doing.

(leans in to make point)

You're mixed up with some bad company, my friend.

John's momentary resentment vanishes, replaced by confusion.

JOHN

Are you talking about Norton?

CONNELL

I'm not talking about the Pope's pet poodle.

Connell again makes an effort to light his bent cigarette—and is unsuccessful again.

JOHN

I think you're wrong, Connell. He's done nothing but help me and the Fourth Turning movement.

CONNELL

(sarcastically)

Sure.

(suddenly)

Man, you're really sold on the stuff you've been hawking, aren't you?

JOHN

Absolutely.

CONNELL

Absolutely. I don't blame you. So am I.

(sincerely)

Because it could only happen in the good old U.S. of A.

John smiles, pleased to hear Connell say this.

CONNELL

Let me give you a hypothetical, John. Suppose a certain high-powered media mogul, who shall go nameless, was trying to use something good to muscle his way into the White House. So he could run things the way he wanted them run. What would you say about that?

JOHN

Nobody's going to do that, Connell. That's the whole point of the Fourth Turning. We're trying to help people, not exploit them. We're trying to change things for good, not continue with business as usual.

CONNELL

Really? Then tell me why all those politicians, labor leaders, lobbyists, and all the other wolves are up at Norton's house right now. They're up there John because they're going to use us sheep to get where they want to go.

(snorts)

Wait till you get a look at that speech you're making tonight. That'll make a believer out of you.

JOHN

That alcohol has scrambled your brains, Connell. Ann writes those speeches and nobody can make her write that kind of stuff.

CONNELL

They can't, huh? A fat contract makes a pretty good convincer.

John's jaw stiffens.

CONNELL

A mink coat and a diamond bracelet can change anybody's point of view.

John glares at Connell, his rage mounting.

Connell continues his rant, unaware of John's wrath.

CONNELL

Everybody knows she needs the money. She'd double-cross her own mother for a fistful of Russian rubles.

John reaches across and grabs the startled Connell violently by his shirt front.

JOHN

Shut up, Connell. If you weren't drunk, I'd—

Just then, Beany rushes up to Connell.

BEANY

(holds out envelope)

Hey, Boss. Here's the speech.

Suddenly, Beany sees what's happening, and stares open-mouthed.

BEANY

Hey! Cool your jets, guys.

John releases Connell and pushes him back in his seat. He stands and snatches the envelope from Beany.

CONNELL

Go ahead and read it, John. Then we'll see whose brains are scrambled.

John glares at Connell, turns on his heel, and leaves.

CONNELL

(to John's back)

Just be careful, John. Watch who you trust.

Beany chases after John.

CONNELL

(over shoulder)

Tubby?

TUBBY (O.S.)

Yes, sir.

CONNELL

Better bring me a glass of milk.

EXT. CÉSAR CHÁVEZ ELEMENTARY SCHOOL - DAY

John and the Coach walk the shabby baseball field. The sky drizzles.

JOHN

I can't believe Ann would do something like that?

COACH

Depends how badly she needs it.

JOHN

Norton would do it.

COACH

Deep down, we've always known that.

JOHN

It never fails. I try to do something, I try to help people, and it bites me in the butt. Every time. Why do I bother?

COACH

Because you care. About people. You want to save them all.

John removes the envelope from his pocket.

JOHN

What am I going to do about this? I don't know which way to go.

COACH

Think back, John. Omaha. The College World Series. Bottom of the ninth. Against Texas. Game's on the line. You been in control all game. Suddenly, they get to you. Why? Because you started second-guessing. Crossed yourself up. Same thing here. Go with your best pitch. Don't think about it. Your gut will tell you what's right.

INT. NORTON ESTATE - STUDY - DAY

Rain drums against the floor-to-ceiling windows. Norton sits at the head of the conference table, talking on the phone.

A number of FACELESS PEOPLE sit in shadows around the table with their backs to us, watching Norton.

NORTON (ON PHONE)

Yes, Willson? You've got everything set? Fine. Has Willoughby been taken care of? Good. How many people do you expect tonight?

A pleased expression crosses Norton's face.

NORTON

That's excellent. Now, listen, Willson. As soon as Willoughby introduces me, I want you to start the demonstration. Make it big and loud and impressive, you understand?

Norton smiles and hangs up.

Sheldon leans in at Norton's left hand.

SHELDON

You don't have to worry about anything, D.B. My boys are there. They'll take care of everything.

Norton reaches to his right and pats Ann's hand. She wears the mink coat and diamond bracelet.

Ann withdraws her hand and crosses it over her other hand, without reacting to Norton's gesture of affection. She looks around the room at the faces staring at her and Norton.

The MEN and WOMEN around the table are an impressive collection of distinguished and powerful-looking people. Some smoke cigars, some sip champagne, some nibble on caviar.

INT. NORTON ESTATE - FOYER - SAME TIME

ROMERO, the butler, opens the front door to reveal John, sheltered from the raging storm outside.

ROMERO

Mr. Willoughby.

JOHN

Where are they?

ROMERO

(hesitates, then
gestures)

In the study, sir.

John strides past Romero, dripping water. As he comes into sight of the open door of the study, he stops.

BACK TO STUDY

Norton is standing, addressing the group.

NORTON

Well, ladies and gentlemen, I think we're about ready to throw that great big bombshell—

SHELDON

I think we all agree it's about time.

NORTON

Even a conservative estimate shows we can count on anywhere between ten and twenty million Fourth Turning votes. Now, add to that the labor vote Mr. Bennett will deliver . . .

Norton indicates RUPERT BENNETT, who nods, importantly.

NORTON

. . . and the votes controlled by Mr. Hammett, Mr. Ryan, and the rest of you in your own states—
(emphatically)
—and nothing can stop us!

Ann looks distracted, distressed. Whatever she's heard before, and now, has caused her considerable anxiety.

RADFORD HAMMETT leans into the table.

HAMMETT

As I said before, I'm with you D.B., if you can deliver the votes of all those fools who believe in this clown Willoughby.

NORTON

Take it to the bank, Hammett.

MICHAEL RYAN puffs his cigar and raps the table with his knuckles.

RYAN

You take care of me and I take care of you.

NORTON

As I told you all, everybody in this room will be rewarded. My arrangement with each of you stands.

RACHEL BARRINGTON stands to address the table.

BARRINGTON

You know I'm with you, Mr. Norton. But, I have to tell you, it's a pretty gutsy thing we're attempting.

NORTON

These are daring times, Rachel. Daring times. We're coming into a new order of things. There's been too much talk and not enough action in this land.

Ann glances up at Norton, a startled look in her eyes.

NORTON

Too many concessions have been made. What the American people need is an iron hand.

RYAN

A velvet fist.

HAMMETT

Discipline.

BARRINGTON

Control.

SHELDON

A strong leader who isn't afraid to do what's necessary.

THE GROUP

Hear, hear.

NORTON

The American people are children. They need to be told what to do.

(glances at Ann)

And, sometimes, they need to be spanked.

Ann is completely seized by panic. She can't seem to move.

NORTON

When the Fourth Turning arrives to change it all—and with the help of Mr. John Willoughby—we won't spare the rod!

The group bursts into applause.

Although Ann attempts to applaud, it is feeble.

OUTSIDE STUDY - SAME TIME

Through the open study door, Ann is visible, lost in troubled thought. Norton still stands, chest puffed out, chin jutting into the air.

INSIDE STUDY - SAME TIME

Norton lifts his champagne glass in toast.

NORTON

And now, may I offer a little toast to Miss Ann Mitchell—the brilliant and beautiful lady responsible for all this.

The group rises in a standing ovation.

OUTSIDE STUDY - SAME TIME

John's mouth twists in a bitter grimace.

JOHN

(to himself)

Nice bracelet.

John shoves open the study door. He scans the group as he strides toward Norton. Everyone stares at him.

NORTON

(concerned)

John, why aren't you at the convention?

John continues walking. He stops next to Ann.

Ann shrinks back, trying to disappear inside her fur coat.

NORTON

Is anything wrong?

JOHN

Oh, no. Nothing's wrong. Everything's Jake. So, there's going to be a new order of things? Everybody is going to cut himself a nice, fat slice of what we've got going.

(turns to Norton)

There's one problem, Norton. If you or anybody else thinks he's going to use me, or the Fourth Turning movement, or all those people out there, for their own gain, they're going to have to do it over my dead body.

John stares at the diamond bracelet. Ann, self-conscious, pulls the sleeve of her coat down to cover it.

NORTON

Now, hold on a minute, Willoughby. That's awful big talk. I put you on the map. I started all those Fourth Turning Clubs with my own money. I'll decide how they'll be used.

JOHN

No, you won't. You're through deciding anything.

Norton can't believe his ears. A buzz circles the table.

JOHN

And, what's more, I'm going down to that convention and I'm going to tell those people exactly what you and all your cronies here have planned for them.

John pulls the envelope out of his pocket, removes the speech, and begins tearing it into small pieces.

JOHN

And I'll say it in my own words this time.

John flings the torn paper toward Ann and turns to leave.

RYAN
Stop him, somebody.

BARRINGTON
He'll ruin us.

As John reaches the study door, Sheldon steps in front of him. He places his hand on John's chest.

SHELDON
My uncle isn't through with you, yet.

John grabs Sheldon's hand and slowly removes it. The stare between them is cold as ice.

As Norton approaches, John turns to face him.

NORTON
Listen to me, John. Just calm down a moment. Let me remind you of something. I made you and I can break you.

John shoots Ann a "Thanks a lot" look.

NORTON
You've got a lot of nerve making accusations. The people in this room and I know a whole lot better than you what's good for the common man in this country. Regardless of what "teachers" like you think.

John reacts to Norton's demeaning tone.

NORTON
Get off that righteous horse of yours and come to your senses. You're the fake. We believe in what we're doing. You're the only one here doing it just for the money.

This is tearing Ann apart. She can't stand to see John ripped apart like this.

NORTON
You're the people's hero, Willoughby. The one who's supposed to jump off bridges for what he believes in. Or, so he says.

John begins to back away. Norton follows, jabbing at him with his finger.

NORTON

What do you suppose your precious "common man" will say when they find out you never had any intention of following through. That you took money to say and do all those things.

(points at Ann)

And that she made you up. Made it all up.

JOHN

(browbeaten)

It was for the kids. It was always for the kids.

NORTON

With the media we control, we can kill the Fourth Turning movement. And, we'll do it. The moment you step out of line. Now, if you still want to go to that convention and blow the whistle, you go right ahead.

John looks trapped, outmatched.

NORTON

And I'll promise you this, John Willoughby. If I can't use the Gray Champion, I'll kill him.

Norton turns away from John and returns to the head of the table. John stares at him, unbelieving.

JOHN

You'd ruin it all just because it doesn't get you what you want?

NORTON

You bet your life.

John seems suddenly energized, like something has taken hold of him he has no control over.

JOHN

You sit there, back of your big attitudes, and consider deliberately killing an idea that's made millions of people happier. An idea that's brought thousands of them here from all over the country. To be a part of something good, something that makes a difference.

Ann's eyes light up as John warms to his topic.

JOHN

Your kind is as old as history. If you can't wrap your dirty fingers around a decent idea and twist it and squeeze it and stuff it into your own pocket, you cut it down. Like dogs, if you can't eat something, you bury it. If it's not yours, you piss on it.

John moves back into the room, closer to the people sitting around the table. He has their complete attention.

JOHN

This is an idea whose time has come, folks. People are finally finding out the guy next door isn't half bad. A thing like that has got a chance of spreading till it touches every person in the world. It could change everything, and you talk about killing it.

The entire room listens to him, unmoved.

JOHN

When this fire dies down, what's going to be left? More misery, more hate, more distrust. It may be the one thing that can save this country. And you tell me you'll snuff it out if it doesn't suit your purposes.

Ann removes the diamond bracelet and drops it in her mink coat pocket. She sloughs off the coat like dead skin.

Norton watches her.

JOHN

Well, you go ahead and try. You couldn't do it in a million years. Not with all your power, all your media, all your ego. Because it's bigger than whether I'm a fake. It's bigger than your ambitions. And it's bigger than all the bracelets and fur coats in the world.

Ann stands, kicking the mink coat to the floor.

ANN

You bet it is.

John shoots a doubtful look at Ann.

JOHN

And that's exactly what I'm going down there to tell those people.

As John reaches the door, Sheldon blocks his way again. He grabs John by the coat lapels.

John gives Sheldon a "Not this again" look.

SHELDON

I wouldn't make any promises I couldn't keep. You're no better than the lint in my Uncle's navel. You're no better-

With a suddenness that startles Sheldon, John steps back and pops Sheldon on the jaw.

Sheldon's knees buckle and he goes down.

John storms out the door.

Several people rush to Sheldon's aid.

Norton stares at the empty door.

Ann glances over at Norton, then runs to the door to follow John.

EXT. NORTON ESTATE - FRONT DOOR - CONTINUOUS

As John exits, he passes half a dozen members of Sheldon's MOTORCYCLE TROOPS who wait to escort Norton to the convention.

INT. NORTON ESTATE - STUDY - CONTINUOUS

Norton glares around the room. His face hardens.

NORTON

Make some calls. Now!

RYAN

I always told you, D.B., you're playing with dynamite.

NORTON

(to Sheldon)

Don't let that girl get away.

Sheldon struggles to his feet and staggers out the door.

BARRINGTON

If he follows through, he'll ruin us all.

NORTON

I'll stop him. I'll stop him cold.
Don't worry, I've been ready for this.

EXT. NORTON ESTATE - CIRCULAR DRIVEWAY - CONTINUOUS

As John walks down the driveway toward the waiting taxi, Ann catches up with him. She grabs John by the arm and spins him around.

ANN

John. Oh, John, please listen to me.
Just listen to me. I can explain
everything.

JOHN

(hard, skeptical)
I'm listening.

ANN

I didn't know what they were going to
do. I didn't know. You have to believe
me.

John gets into the taxi and slams the door.

JOHN

Raley Field, driver. I'm in a hurry.

Ann runs beside the cab as it starts off.

ANN

John, you have to believe me. I
wouldn't do anything to hurt you.

Several TROOPERS grab Ann.

Sheldon limps up behind them.

SHELDON

My uncle isn't done with you, either.

Ann struggles to break free, then stops trying.

INT. NORTON ESTATE - STUDY - CONTINUOUS

Norton is on the phone. The others pace the room, concerned.

NORTON

(into phone)
Listen to me, Mayor. If you want that
job back, you'll do as I say. I want
them arrested. You tell the Chief to
arrest Connell and Leach, too. We've
got the girl here.

RYAN

D.B., the Bee on line two.

Norton gestures for Ryan to hold the line.

NORTON

(into phone)

I don't care what you charge them with.
Just keep them in jail overnight.

EXT. RALEY FIELD - ENTRANCE - NIGHT

A huge banner hangs above the entrance. It reads: "Welcome to the Fourth Turning Convention."

The drizzle has turned into showers.

PEOPLE approach from all directions and file through the gates.

INT. RALEY FIELD - PRESS BOX - SAME TIME

On the field below, a portable stage sits at second base. The free-standing podium is festooned with microphones from all the major national and international broadcast companies.

A FOLK TRIO stands at the podium. They sing "Turn, Turn, Turn." They finish to thunderous applause. The trio bows and exits.

A BRASS BAND, sitting at the rear of the stage, begins to play, "My Country 'Tis of Thee."

INT. SKYBOX - SAME TIME

Ethan Devlin, Crew Cut, and several ASSISTANTS watch the spectacle below them.

DEVLIN

Stranger than fishin'.

EXT. RALEY FIELD - STADIUM SEATS - SAME TIME

The PEOPLE seated in the grandstands begin to sing.

The song sweeps around the stadium like a wave.

As more PEOPLE enter the park and walk down the aisles to their seats, they also join in the song.

PEOPLE continue to sing, their heads held high, their eyes sparkling.

In the field-level box seats behind home plate, Bert, Ernie, Elaine, Mary, George, Harry—all the PEOPLE FROM DAVIS huddle together and sing.

The song finally comes to a rousing climax. And, almost immediately, people begin cheering and whistling as they see John approaching the stage from the home team dugout.

John steps onto the stage and strides to the podium. The ovation is thunderous. John nods and smiles, acknowledging their salute.

JOHN

Thank you, thank you. Ladies and gentlemen. Thank you. Now, listen—

Before he can go any further, the band starts to play, "God Bless America." Immediately, the large assembly begins to sing again.

Realizing it's hopeless to stop them, John steps back and sings along. His lips form the words. His expression is solemn.

As we move around the stadium, PEOPLE of all ethnicities and from various walks of life sing together in harmony.

Finally, the song ends. An enthusiastic cheer rumbles around the stadium.

John steps to the podium again. But, the noise is deafening. Instead of trying to get their attention, he steps back again and gestures for PASTOR ROGERS to step to the podium.

The Pastor raises his hands and smiles. The crowd slowly quiets.

PASTOR ROGERS

Quiet, please. Quiet, please. Thank you, ladies and gentlemen. Let us have a moment of silent prayer for those in this city, this country, and around the world who are less fortunate than we are. Rise, please. Everybody rise. And say a few words to whatever greater power you believe in on behalf of the homeless, the hungry, and the tyrannized.

John and the Pastor bow their heads.

As far as the eye can see, heads are bowed in prayer. The reflection on wet umbrellas creates a strange and mystic light.

Even the PHOTOGRAPHERS, VIDEOGRAPHERS, and REPORTERS in the press section are quiet.

EXT. RALEY FIELD - ENTRANCE - CONTINUOUS

A stream of Sacramento Bee newspaper trucks pulls up, filled with DELIVERY BOYS and GIRLS. They immediately jump out of the trucks.

At every entrance to the park, another convoy of trucks arrives, filled with delivery kids.

Sound trucks pull up right behind the news trucks. Large speakers magically elevate at the top of each truck.

SOUND TRUCK

Attention! Attention delegates and guests! Do not be fooled. The Gray Champion and the Fourth Turning movement are not what they appear.

INT. RALEY FIELD - AISLES - CONTINUOUS

Delivery boys and girls flow down every aisle like ants.

The audience has been jolted out of their reverie by the sound truck.

The delivery kids hand stacks of newspapers to the person at the end of each aisle to pass along to the rest of the row.

The front page of the newspaper is one headline. It reads: "Fake!" The sub-headline reads: "Willoughby and Movement a Fraud."

Above the stadium, an airplane flies through the overcast. Its sides light up with a neon sign. It reads: "Fourth Turning Movement a Racket."

The audience is baffled. They peer, unbelieving, at the newspaper and the airplane banner.

SOUND TRUCK (O.S.)

The Gray Champion—John Willoughby—is not to be believed, or trusted.

INT. SKYBOX - TV BOOTH - CONTINUOUS

In a row of sky boxes above the stadium, each of the major networks has set up their own portable studio.

The NETWORK ANCHORS sit at their desks, or stand in front of a chromakey screen.

CNN ANCHOR

There are literally thousands of kids.
Like locusts . . .

NBC ANCHOR

. . . delivering newspapers proclaiming
the Fourth Turning movement and, thus,
this convention
. . .

CBS ANCHOR

. . . a hoax. The entire crowd and, I
must confess, myself along with them
. . .

ABC ANCHOR

. . . are a little confused by this
unexpected development.

Each person from Davis opens the paper and reads the article
inside.

BERT

(reads)

"The Federal Trade Commission and the
Governors of every state, . . ."

ERNIE

(reads)

". . . have called for an
investigation. The charges allege
. . ."

HARRY

(reads)

". . . fraud and misappropriation of
funds."

EXT./INT. RALEY FIELD - UNDERGROUND GARAGE - CONTINUOUS

Sirens precede Sheldon's motorcycle troops as they lead
Norton's limousine and a cavalcade of other vehicles into
the underground garage and up a ramp to the tunnel
encircling the stadium.

The door to the limousine flies open and Norton steps out.
He stands there a moment.

The other vehicles stop and HARD-LOOKING MEN in rain
slickers and snap-brim hats clamber out of each one.

Willson and Sheldon appear at Norton's side. Sheldon
gestures for the men to split up and move down both sides of
the perimeter tunnel.

SHELDON

Let's go, let's go! Step on it! You all
know your places, now get going! Wait
for my signal!

The hard-looking men move out at a trot.

Sheldon escorts Norton to the entrance onto the field behind home plate. Two of Sheldon's troopers slide open the door.

INT. RALEY FIELD - STAGE - CONTINUOUS

John stands at the podium. He's trying to make himself heard over thousands of VOICES, all speaking at once.

JOHN

Ladies and gentlemen, please. This is exactly what I came down here to tell you tonight. Please, if you'll all just be quiet for a few minutes, I can explain this whole thing.

(holds up paper)

This is a stunt engineered by a man named D.B. Norton to discredit-

Norton strides onto the field. Sheldon and his troopers motion to the crowd to get their attention and silence.

NORTON

Don't listen to that man! He's a phony!

All eyes turn toward Norton as he moves toward the stage.

John stares at Norton and his entourage, too flustered to say or do anything.

Troopers clear the way, as Norton charges up the stairs and proceeds toward the podium.

Two troopers push John away from the podium.

NORTON

Wait a minute. Everybody wait just a minute. Ladies and gentlemen, my name is D.B. Norton. I think you all know who I am.

(points at the crowd)

I'm here to tell you you've all been taken for a lot of suckers.

(points at himself)

And I'm the biggest of the lot.

(points at John)

I spent a fortune backing this man in what I believed to be a sincere and worthy cause, just as you all did. And now, I find out it's been nothing but a cheap con game. Cooked up by Mr. John Willoughby and two of my employees, for the sole purpose of embezzling the dues collected by Fourth Turning Clubs all over the country.

John breaks away from the troopers, reaches the podium, and grabs the microphone.

JOHN

That's a lie!

Norton wrestles the mic away from John.

NORTON

It's not a lie. Nickels and dimes. From hard-working men and women like you. To line his own pockets. It's all there. In the newspaper.

JOHN

That's not true. Listen, don't believe what he says—

SPECTATORS leave their seats. They move down the aisles and stream onto the field, surrounding the stage.

NORTON

Furthermore, this man had no intention of jumping off the bridge tonight, or any other night.

(turns to John)

Do you deny that?

JOHN

That's got nothing to do with it.

NORTON

Can you deny it?

John looks away.

NORTON

Tell them. Tell them it was all a ploy. To get sympathy to get more donations. Admit it.

JOHN

We wanted more donations, but not for what—

The crowd around the stage grows larger by the second.

NORTON

And what about those speeches? You never wrote any of those, did you? No, because a reporter named Ann Mitchell did. One of my reporters. She created you. And you went along with it. All because of the money.

JOHN

(weakly, almost
pleading)

No, no. The money was for the kids.

NORTON

It's right there inside your newspaper,
ladies and gentlemen. A signed
confession by Miss Mitchell that she
was the one who wrote everything, the
one who made it all up.

JOHN

Listen, folks, it's a fact I didn't
write any of those speeches, but this
whole thing started—

The people from Davis push their way to the front of the
crowd below the podium.

NORTON

There, you see. He admits it. You're a
fake, Willoughby. Your whole movement
is a fraud. And, for what you've done
to all these good people, they ought to
run you out of town on a rail.

Finished, Norton strides off the stage, moving in the wake
of the path cleared through the crowd by the troopers.

Suddenly, it's very quiet. Everyone stares at John, silent
and stunned, waiting for him to say something, anything.

ERNIE

Speak up, John. We believe you.

INT. ELECTRICAL ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Willson and several troopers huddle around the control panels for
the public address system. At Willson's direction, one of the
troopers opens one of the panels to reveal several cables.

BACK TO STAGE

John steps up to the podium.

JOHN

Please listen, everyone. Now that he's
through spreading his lies, I've got a
couple of things I'd like to tell you
about—

BACK TO ELECTRICAL ROOM

One of the troopers cuts the cables.

BACK TO STAGE

John speaks, but nothing comes through the PA system. John realizes the system is dead. He looks around, helplessly.

Sheldon appears at the edge of the crowd, shadowed by a pack of the hard-looking men.

SHELDON

(to thugs)

Let's break up this little tea party.

The heads of Sheldon's troopers and men suddenly appear throughout the crowd. They jostle those around them.

INT. SKYBOX - TV BOOTH - SAME TIME

Each of the network anchors stand, straining to see what's happening down on the field.

CNN ANCHOR

I apologize, but we can't hear . . .

NBC ANCHOR

. . . anything anymore. It appears something . . .

CBS ANCHOR

. . . has happened to the public address system. John Willoughby . . .

ABC ANCHOR

. . . is trying to speak, but the crowd can't hear him. This doesn't look good.

BACK TO STAGE

John walks to the edge of the stage and waves his arms to get everyone to quiet down.

JOHN

The microphone's not working! Ladies and gentlemen! Look, this thing's bigger than me, or whether or not I've misled you.

John looks down at Harry, the tomato farmer from Davis.

JOHN

Look, Harry, you believe me, don't you?

HARRY

(sarcastic)

Sure, I believe you. Walking my legs off digging up five thousand signatures for a phony.

Harry tears up the petition he was holding in his hand.

HARRY

Well, there you are, John. Five thousand names asking you not to jump off any bridge.

Harry turns to leave. Bert, disheartened, stops Harry.

BERT

It makes no difference, Harry. The idea's still good. We don't have to give up the idea.

HARRY

Yeah, well, you can have it.

Harry pushes his way through the crowd, followed by most of the group from Davis. All except Bert, Elaine, and Ernie.

John looks helplessly at the crowd. He pleads with his eyes, with every fiber in his body, for these people to believe him and not let Norton win. Dejected, he bows his head.

More of Sheldon's troopers appear at the fringes of the crowd. They carry wicker baskets filled with rotten fruit.

Sheldon signals and his troopers begin pelting John with rotten peaches, pears, and apples.

John just stands there. Taking the hits.

The members of the brass band pack their instruments and run for cover.

INT. SKYBOX - TV BOOTH - SAME TIME

The news anchors stand in a row, pressed against the glass of the skybox.

From their vantage, they see the crowd follow the lead of the troopers.

CNN ANCHOR

It's turned ugly. The crowd . . .

NBC ANCHOR

. . . is bombarding Willoughby and the stage . . .

CBS ANCHOR

. . . with what looks like produce. If they don't get this under control . . .

ABC ANCHOR

. . . somebody is going to get hurt.

The crowd has turned into an angry, betrayed mob. They jeer and continue to shell the stage.

John lifts his eyes and scans the stadium. Everyone is standing and yelling. He looks skyward and opens his arms.

EXT./INT. SACRAMENTO - DOWNTOWN POLICE STATION - SAME TIME

Ann, the Coach, and Connell sit in hard plastic chairs against a wall, surrounded by POLICE OFFICERS. A SERGEANT sits at his desk. A dusty TV dangles from the roof in the corner of the room.

Ann's face is haggard and desperate as she watches the broadcast.

ABC ANCHOR (ON TV)

And, I'm afraid it might be The Gray Champion. His biggest fans have become an out-of-control mob.

Ann can't stand it any longer. She leaps to her feet and crosses to the Sergeant's desk.

ANN

You've got to let me go.

SERGEANT

Sorry, lady, my orders are to keep you here.

ANN

They're crucifying him. And it's all my fault. I can help him. I have to help him. Don't you understand?

Two of the officers grab her by the arms.

SERGEANT

Just following orders, ma'am.

The Coach and Connell step in behind Ann.

COACH

Orders from who? Norton? Can't you see it's a frame-up? Can't you see he's behind this whole thing? He's been pulling the strings from the get-go.

CONNELL

You're all going to pay for this. Just wait till I get out of here. You can't jail three innocent people just because they know somebody.

SERGEANT

That's how most people get here, pal.

Ann struggles desperately to get free.

Just then, her mother hurries in.

MRS. MITCHELL

Annie, my poor, poor baby. What have you gotten yourself into?

ANN

Oh, Mom. They won't let me go. They won't let me help John.

The police release her and she throws herself into her mother's arms.

INT. RALEY FIELD - STAGE - NIGHT

John stands alone on the stage. He gazes down at the crowd at his feet.

JOHN

(mutters, to himself)

The idea is still good.

The crowd surges menacingly around the stage, prodded by Sheldon's troopers and the hard-looking men, pushing them from behind. The stage rocks and sways.

John just stands there, pathetic and helpless.

Organic missiles of all kinds fill the air around him.

Beany begins muscling his way through the crowd toward the stage.

William, the professor from Davis, grabs a particular squishy pomegranate from a basket.

John—his eyes glassy—makes one last effort to speak.

JOHN

(hoarsely)

Listen, please . . .

(weakly)

. . . you're the hope of the world—

The pomegranate smacks John in the forehead. It seems to stun him. He remains motionless, staring before him with sightless eyes. The red smear of the pomegranate trickles down his face.

In the middle of the crowd, Beany sees John get whacked and winces. Then, setting his jaw, he pushes people violently aside, trying to reach John.

John stares futilely before him.

Beany clambers onto the stage and rushes to John's side. Glancing sympathetically up at his face, Beany starts to lead John off the stage.

The crowd parts as John and Beany stumble down the stairs and move away from the stage.

John is oblivious to the jeering, shouting mob and the wet, soggy newspapers hurled at him.

John and Beany disappear into the home team's dugout.

INT. DOWNTOWN POLICE STATION - SAME TIME

Ann and her mother sit together. The Coach and Connell stand nearby. They all watch the broadcast as John leaves the field.

CNN ANCHOR (ON TV)

With their leader leaving in disgrace,
that certainly looks like the end of
the Fourth Turning movement.

The Sergeant hits the remote and kills the TV.

COACH

So much for good intentions.

CONNELL

Chalk another one up to the Pontius
Pilates of this world.

ANN

(sobbing)

I should have been there. I could have
helped him.

(desolately)

He was so alone.

Mrs. Mitchell draws Ann consolingly to her, and lays her daughter's head on her breast.

EXT. RALEY FIELD - PARKING LOT - NIGHT

Bert, Elaine, and Ernie stand next to their cars. They look stricken, shaken to the core.

ERNIE

A lot of us are going to be mighty
ashamed of ourselves after tonight.

ELAINE

We certainly didn't give that man much
of a chance.

EXT./INT. SACRAMENTO - SUTTER CLUB - NIGHT

Norton, Sheldon, Willson, Johnson, and the rest of Norton's henchmen celebrate their victory. They eat, drink, and are merry. More merry than they have a right to be. The looks on their faces reflect that.

EXT. SACRAMENTO - DOWNTOWN - NIGHT

John shuffles alone through the misty streets. He stares at his feet.

As he walks, FACES begin to appear, one-by-one, to taunt him.

Faker. ESTHER

Liar. HARRY

Imposter. MARY

Why don't you jump? WILLIAM

Get it over with. CLARENCE

(laughs, sneering)
Christmas Eve at midnight. OLIVIA

Like you promised you would. GEORGE

EXT. CITY PARK - BASEBALL FIELD - NIGHT

John stands alone on the mound.

REPRISE MONTAGE

Bert shakes John's hand.

You're a wonderful man, John
Willoughby. BERT

Violet kisses John's hand.

May God bless you, my boy. VIOLET

At the TV station, Ann hugs John.

ANN

Now, get in there and pitch.

The Coach holds a hardball.

COACH

Trust your guts, John.

Norton harangues John in the study.

NORTON

What do you suppose your precious kids
and the "common man" will say when they
find out you were scamming them all
along to line your own pockets?

The face of Olivia sneers at John.

OLIVIA

Christmas Eve at midnight. Like you
promised.

EXT. SACRAMENTO - SKYLINE - NIGHT

The fog blankets the cityscape. A hard rain begins to fall.
The plaintive voices of CHILDREN sing, "O Holy Night."

EXT. NORTON ESTATE - CIRCULAR DRIVEWAY - NIGHT

A group of CAROLERS—men, women, and children—sing to a dark
house.

INT. NORTON ESTATE - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

In the dimly lit room, the lonely figure of D.B. Norton
stands near a window, staring meditatively out at the
carolers. The voices are faintly heard.

Norton peers into the sky, enveloped by disturbing thoughts.
After a moment, he takes out his watch and glances at it.
Then, as if annoyed by his own apprehensive curiosity, he
shoves it violently back into his pocket.

He crosses, determinedly, to a humidor, takes a cigar, and
shoves it in his mouth. Just as he is about to light it, he
becomes aware again of the faint singing. He cocks his head,
listening.

Norton drops the match and unlighted cigar to the floor and
starts toward the door.

Just then, Romero the butler, comes through the door.

ROMERO

It's nearly midnight, sir. Almost
Christmas.

NORTON

Oh, Christmas. Yes, it's almost
Christmas.

Norton hands Romero a fifty-dollar bill and nods toward the carolers.

Romero takes the money, bows slightly, and leaves.

Norton stares out the window as Romero and a MAID appear outside with a tray of hot drinks. Romero hands the lead caroler the money and the maid serves the drinks.

Faintly, we can hear the voices of the carolers say, "Thank you, sir. Merry Christmas. Happy Holidays."

Norton's mouth turns down, unhappily. It is far from a "merry" Christmas. It is a very lonely, conscience-stricken one.

INT. DOWNTOWN POLICE STATION - NIGHT

The Sergeant and another BEAT COP play dominoes. Their game has been interrupted by a phone call.

SERGEANT

(into phone)

Who? Willoughby? I thought they ran him
out of town.

BEAT COP

Her again?

The Sergeant nods.

BEAT COP

She's been calling all night.

SERGEANT

(into phone)

Sure, sure, I know. Yeah. At midnight,
huh? Okay, lady, we'll have the place
surrounded with nets.

The Sergeant hangs up the phone, twirls his index finger at his temple, shrugs, and plays a domino.

EXT. TOWER BRIDGE - NIGHT

John gazes into the river. Tears stream shamelessly down his cheeks.

John lifts his eyes skyward, staring profoundly, a curious expression crosses his face.

INT. ANN'S HOME - BEDROOM - NIGHT

Ann lies in bed, looking like death warmed over. Her hand still rests on the phone.

A DOCTOR sits by her side. Her mother stands at the foot of the bed. They watch her, concerned.

ANN

They're laughing at me. They think I'm out of mind.

Impulsively, Ann picks up the receiver and starts dialing again.

DOCTOR

You're a sick girl, Ann. You'd better take it easy.

MRS. MITCHELL

Who are you calling at this hour, dear?

ANN

(into phone)

Hello, Mr. Connell? Have you heard from him? Have you—

INT. KSAC - CONNELL'S OFFICE - SAME TIME

Connell nurses a glass of milk.

CONNELL

(into phone)

I haven't heard a word, Ann. Beany and the boys are out looking. Don't worry, I'll call as soon as I hear something.

BACK TO ANN'S BEDROOM

Ann hangs up the phone, despairingly. Suddenly, she jumps out of bed and runs to a clothes closet, grabbing a coat and scarf.

MRS. MITCHELL

Ann!

DOCTOR

Ann, don't be foolish.

EXT. CÉSAR CHÁVEZ ELEMENTARY SCHOOL - NIGHT

Ann and the Coach approach the baseball field from opposite directions. They meet at the pitching mound.

They look at each other a long while, angry and disappointed.

COACH

I was looking for John. I thought he might be here.

ANN

Me, too.

COACH

You should have left him alone.

ANN

I fell in love with him.

The Coach toes the rubber.

ANN

You should have stayed out of it.

COACH

I love him like a son.

Ann kicks at the dirt on the mound.

COACH

I gave him some bad advice.

ANN

I gave him too many expectations.

COACH

Why is it that the good ones always get screwed?

ANN

Because they trust people.

COACH

It was a good idea.

ANN

It's still a good idea.

COACH

Just caught some bad breaks.

ANN

Any given day, it could go the other way.

COACH

He gave it his best shot, like he always has. One hundred and ten per cent.

ANN

And they knocked him out of the box.

COACH

It's a tough thing to handle. Getting
rocked like that.

ANN

He's tough. Had a good teacher.

COACH

He's got nothing to prove.

ANN

He doesn't owe anybody anything.

Ann and the Coach look up from the mound at the same time.

COACH

I think I know where he is.

ANN

I do, too.

COACH

I think I know what he's going to do.

ANN

(gasps)

Me, too.

EXT. TOWER BRIDGE - CENTER SPAN - NIGHT

The Tower Bridge clock reads: "11:30."

John approaches the door to the stairwell that leads to the top arch of the span. It's locked. He looks around until he finds what he's searching for. He grabs a chunk of concrete and slams it against the lock. He slams it and slams it until it snaps. He opens the door and begins to climb.

EXT./INT. CAR - NIGHT

Bert drives slowly through the thick fog and rain. Elaine sits in the front, Ernie sits in the back.

BERT

(glancing in the
rearview mirror)

Are they still with us?

Ernie twists around and looks out the back window.

INT. VAN - SAME TIME

Harry, Thomas, Violet—all the people from Davis—sit silently in the van, following the taillights of Bert's car.

BACK TO BERT'S CAR

Ernie turns back around toward the front.

ERNIE

Right behind us.

BERT

This is the craziest, looniest, wild goose chase I've ever been on.

ELAINE

Shut up, Bert. Ernie's right.

BERT

If he is, I'm a banana split.

ERNIE

John is gonna be on that bridge. Don't ask me how I know, I just know. And, you know as well as I do.

BERT

Once a liar, always a liar. Once a fraud, always a fraud. What makes you think he's going to follow through?

BERT'S WIFE

I don't think he was a fake—not with that face. And, anyway, what he stood for was real.

EXT. TOWER BRIDGE - WEST END - NIGHT

Ann and the Coach approach a car on the access road that leads to the Tower Bridge from the west. Connell steps out of the car.

ANN

Have you seen him?

CONNELL

You shouldn't have gotten out of bed, Ann.

COACH

No sign of him?

CONNELL

It's been thick as soup all night. He might have slipped by.

Ann stares at Connell a moment, then, impulsively, walks past him toward the bridge. She vanishes in the fog.

The Coach and Connell look at each other, then follow her into the mist.

EXT. TOWER BRIDGE - EAST END - CONTINUOUS

On the access road that approaches the Tower Bridge from the east, two limousines and one SUV pull up and park.

Norton, Hammett, Barrington, and Ryan exit from one limo, Sheldon and Willson from the other, and a handful of Sheldon's troopers from the SUV.

EXT. TOWER BRIDGE - CENTER SPAN - SAME TIME

The Coach and Connell catch up with Ann as she reaches the stairwell door.

Ann holds the broken lock in her hand. They glance at each other. Ann heads for the stairs.

COACH
(grabs her)
It's twenty flights, Ann.

CONNELL
You can't make it.

ANN
(pulls away)
Let me go.

Ann begins to climb. The Coach and Connell follow.

EXT. TOWER BRIDGE - CENTER SPAN - OBSERVATION TOWER - NIGHT

John stands on the platform at the top of the bridge that encircles the observation tower. He stares out at the city.

BACK TO EAST END OF BRIDGE

as Norton stares up at the top of the bridge, shrouded in mist. The rest of the men turn up their collars and pull down their hats against the drizzle and fog.

RYAN
Let's make this fast, I've got a tree to decorate.

Norton shoots Ryan a withering glance. Norton glances at Sheldon and taps his left breast pocket.

Sheldon nods, tapping his breast in return. Sheldon motions for some of his troopers to wait, then leads the others toward the center span.

BACK TO OBSERVATION TOWER PLATFORM

as John walks to the parapet and leans against it.

BACK TO EAST END OF BRIDGE

as Ernie's car and the van roll to a stop and park.

Everyone exits the cars. They huddle together for a moment, then head toward the center span.

BACK TO CENTER SPAN

as Sheldon and his troopers reach the stairwell door.

Norton and the rest huff and puff into frame.

Sheldon shows Norton the smashed lock.

Norton nods and the troopers clatter up the stairs.

BACK TO OBSERVATION TOWER PLATFORM

as Ann, the Coach, and Connell step out onto the platform, wheezing. They see nothing.

Suddenly, Ann's knees buckle. She braces herself against the door. The Coach and Connell grab her from either side. They walk to the edge of the parapet. Hesitant, they look down.

BACK TO CENTER SPAN

as Bert, Elaine, Ernie, and the others enter the stairwell and begin to climb.

BACK TO OBSERVATION TOWER PLATFORM

as the Coach, Ann, and Connell move clockwise along the parapet around to the east side of the platform.

As they move around the corner, Sheldon, his troopers, Norton, and the others emerge from the stairwell. They're all gasping for air. The fog billows across the platform.

Norton checks his watch. It reads: "11:55."

NORTON

Just as I suspected. Didn't have the guts.

WILLSON

Let's go. I'm freezing my backside off.

They all start to exit, when suddenly Norton stops. He puts his hand out, and they all stop to listen. They hear footsteps and move around to the east side of the tower and into the shadows, where they wait.

John materializes out of the mist. He steps to the parapet. Norton's huddled group watches, breathless. In the darkness, their eyes dominate.

Sheldon is for stepping forward, but Norton stops him with an extended hand, indicating for them to wait and see what happens.

John takes an envelope out of his inside coat pocket.

The eyes of Norton and the others are glued on John.

John stares at the envelope.

INSERT

On it is written: "To the Common Man."

BACK TO JOHN

John returns the envelope to his pocket. He steps up to the railing and braces himself against it.

NORTON (O.S.)
(restrained voice)
I wouldn't do that if I were you, John.

John turns sharply, startled. He stares blankly at them, as they emerge from the shadows.

NORTON
It'll do you no good.

John continues to stare at them, strangely.

NORTON
You'll be fish food, John. You'll have accomplished nothing.

JOHN
(in a sepulchral
voice)
I've taken care of that.
(removes the letter)
I've already mailed a copy of this to
the Bee.

Norton appears amazed that he's been checkmated. That John would have thought to do this.

NORTON
(placating)
John, why don't you forget this
foolishness?

Norton steps toward John with Sheldon on his heels.

JOHN

Stop right where you are, Mr. Norton,
if you don't want to go overboard with
me.

John's eyes have a wild, maniacal look in them.

Norton stares into John's eyes, and a terrified expression
covers his face.

JOHN

(throatily)

I'm glad you gentlemen are here. You've
killed the Gray Champion and the Fourth
Turning movement all right, but you're
going to see them born all over again.

Just then, the Coach and Connell move around from the west
side of the tower, cradling Ann. Her face is wet with fever
and exhaustion.

ANN

John!

Everyone, startled by the outcry, turns as Ann staggers to
John and throws her arms around him.

ANN

(muffled sobs)

Oh, John. Don't do this.

John stares down at her, blankly. She clutches him, her head
buried in his shoulder.

ANN

I won't let you. I love you too much.

Ann, wracked with sobs, lifts her eyes to John's.

ANN

Listen to me, John. We'll start all
over again. Just you and I. It isn't
too late. The idea is too good to die.

Suddenly, Ann becomes conscious of the others and turns to
look at them. Her eyes widen slowly. She looks back from
them to John and back again. Her face takes on an excited,
breathless look, as the reason for their being there becomes
clear to her.

ANN

(excitedly)

See, John. It isn't dead, or they
wouldn't be here. They've kept it
alive, by being afraid of it. That's
why they came here.

John continues to stand with his hands hanging at his sides, looking at her, while she clings to him desperately. As Ann speaks, John turns his face from her and stares at the men.

ANN

Sure, it should have been killed before. It was alive for all the wrong reasons.

John stares strangely at the group of men, as slowly, gradually, the curtain lifts from his clouded brain.

ANN

But, we can start clean now. It'll grow again, John. It'll grow big. And it'll be strong because it'll be alive for all the right reasons.

Ann's strength is ebbing fast. She clings to John more tenaciously.

ANN

If it's worth dying for, it's worth living for.

Ann peers into John's face, seeking some sign of his relenting—but finds none.

Bert, Elaine, Ernie, and the rest of the folks from Davis stumble out onto the platform. They gasp for air. When they see the scene before them, they stop, awed and confused.

Suddenly, Ann stares before her—as an inspiration comes to her. Her eyes light up with a rekindled fire.

Ann takes John's face in her two hands and turns it to her.

ANN

John, you don't have to die to keep the idea alive. Someone already died for that once. The first common man. And he's kept the idea alive for over two thousand years.

Everyone stares, transfixed, waiting breathlessly.

John remains grimly unmoved.

Far off, church bells chime.

ANN

That's why those bells are ringing,
John. They're calling to us—not to give
up—but to keep on fighting. To keep on
pitching. For what's good and right.
Don't you see? This is no time to throw
it all away.

Ann's strength suddenly abandons her. As her eyelids flutter
shut, she collapses limply at John's feet.

VIOLET

Mr. Willoughby . . .

John vaguely becomes aware of Bert's presence and glances
toward him.

ERNIE

Remember what you said about the spirit
of Christmas?

BERT

About keeping it alive all year long?

HARRY

It's still worth believing in.

CLARENCE

This world wouldn't be the same without
you.

ELAINE

What we're trying to say is—well—we
need you, John. There was a lot of us
didn't believe what that man Norton
said. We need you.

John listens to her, expressionless.

CLARENCE

We sort of decided we were going to
start up our own Fourth Turning Club
again, whether we found you or not.

MARY

And there were a lot of others that
were going to do the same thing.

The bewildered look in John's eyes has vanished. It's been
replaced by an expression of softness and understanding.

ESTHER

Only—only it'll be a lot easier with
you. Please—please come with us, John.

John remains standing, thoughtful.

Bert, Elaine, Ernie, and the others all look at John, pleading.

John stares at Bert's group, then shifts his eyes to Norton's pack. Then, looking back at Bert, his eyes light up and a warm smile appears on his face.

John, having decided on his course, picks Ann up in his arms. He strides toward the stairwell door.

Just then, Sheldon steps up and blocks the door.

SHELDON

We're not done here.

Sheldon reaches inside his coat. Connell leaps between them and punches Sheldon in the jaw. Sheldon drops like a rock.

Connell dusts his hands and pats John on the back.

As John walks toward Bert, Elaine, Ernie, and the others—their eyes brighten, hopeful and inspired. They follow John through the door into the stairwell.

The church bells chime loud and victorious.

The Coach and Connell lag behind.

Norton and his posse are left to glare after the man they created—the man who has defeated them.

THE COACH

For every one of him you kill, a new one will be born.

CONNELL

A change is coming. And we'll be ready for it.

The Coach and Connell step over Sheldon and enter the stairwell.

The fog evaporates, the rain stops, and a full moon breaks through the clouds.

Bells around the city announce the dawning of Christmas day.

FADE OUT:

THE END