

Start - PAIGE. So you, me and a temp? In this part of your... not good at ~~success~~ thing?

DAVE. No, I was just thinking—for today, anyway—we should keep things small. Just 'cause Ned is... Have you ever met Ned?

PAIGE. No.

DAVE. Okay, so Ned is—just so you know—Ned's not comfortable... having a lot of people around.

PAIGE. What does that mean?

DAVE. He's just a... quiet guy, who likes things to be... quiet. He just kinda... works best by himself, mostly.

PAIGE. This is the man who just became Governor.

DAVE. Yes, but, trust me, he's perfect for the job: he's incredibly smart, and he understands government better than anyone I've ever met. Believe me, once you get to know him, you're gonna love him.

PAIGE. I'm gonna love him? (*Remembering*) Oh god. Now I remember; now I remember why we didn't work well together: you're the guy who admires the guy. You're the guy who says, "Hey—our candidate? —I like him, I'd vote for him, so let's not worry about how the campaign is going, or what the polls are saying, or what a disaster his swearing-in ceremony was—"

DAVE. Okay, we weren't gonna—

PAIGE. No, we're talking about the swearing-in, Dave—

DAVE. It was five minutes, on local television, at eight o'clock in the morning. Who even saw it?

PAIGE. The swearing-in?

DAVE. Yes!

PAIGE. It's online.

DAVE. Right, sure, but who's gonna—?

PAIGE. I've watched it, like, nine times. I shared it on Facebook.

DAVE. What?! Why would you—?

PAIGE. 'Cause it's that kind of video, Dave—the kind you have to watch.

DAVE. Ned taking the oath of office?

PAIGE. Yes! — Dave— Ned Newley taking the oath of office is the most amazingly, excruciatingly painful five minutes of live television I have ever seen. This is a man who just became Governor,

In his first appearance on TV, and all he has to do is repeat back what the judge says—

DAVE. Yeah—

PAIGE. Just repeat the words—

DAVE. Okay, I don't need to—

PAIGE. But instead—

DAVE. I don't need to *relive* this—

PAIGE. He just stands there, with this look of fear in his eyes—this look of absolute terror frozen on his face—

DAVE. Paige? —

PAIGE. And does nothing, for five minutes, but tremble, uncontrollably, from head to toe. (*DAVE has given up on interjections.*) I mean, it is impressive, Dave.

DAVE. See, I didn't... get that much enjoyment out of it.

PAIGE. Honestly, in the history of politicians failing on TV, you can't do better than Ned Newley being sworn-in. If he *was* sworn-in. I mean, can he claim to have taken an oath if he didn't say anything?

DAVE. He said *something*—

PAIGE. He didn't say anything. He was just making noises.

DAVE. No, at the end, when he's supposed to say "so help me god," I definitely heard the words "help me."

PAIGE. I'm not sure that makes him the Governor.

DAVE. Ned's just not comfortable in front of... people. And cameras.

PAIGE. So politics was a good career choice.

DAVE. No, listen: Ned was an amazing Lieutenant Governor.

PAIGE. Because Lieutenant Governors don't do anything.

DAVE. No, that's the point; Ned did everything. (*Referencing the portrait*) Larry Clarke is genuinely as vacant as he looks. Every good idea he had came from Ned: his education policy, his energy plan, his annual budgets—it was all Ned. Ned Newley's basically been running this state since Larry was elected. I'm telling you: he's ready to be Governor—

PAIGE. Is he?—

DAVE. Yes—

PAIGE. Then you have to get him back on television today. End

and shook their hands, would make you think, "I'd vote for her."  
 LOUISE's attire is perfectly appropriate for an office temp. Every-  
 thing about her appearance would make any office manager think,  
 "Oh, she'll be fine." ... for the first five minutes.)

Start LOUISE. Hey there! Hi! How are you!

DAVE. (A little thrown to find someone standing immediately outside the door.) Uh...

LOUISE. My name's Louise. Louise Peakes.

DAVE. Oh! Miss Peakes, yes—from the temp agency.

LOUISE. And you are?

DAVE. Dave Riley.

LOUISE. Dave Riley; it's nice to meet you, Dave.

DAVE. Human Resources called to say you were coming.

LOUISE. I'm happy to help out; I hear you guys are a little short-staffed. (To PAIGE:) Hi there! Louise Peakes.

PAIGE. Paige Caldwell.

LOUISE. Paige, pleasure to meet you. (Committing their names to memory:) Paige, and... Steve.

DAVE. Dave.

(Three things about LOUISE and mistakes: 1. She makes a lot of them; 2. She's always good-natured about it—often recognizing her error, sometimes even chuckling about it; and 3. She sees no significance in mistakes. To her, they indicate no flaw, no need for embarrassment or decrease in self-confidence. "I don't know what I'm doing," she will later say, "but that doesn't mean I'm not a valuable employee." This is her guiding philosophy.)

LOUISE. Dave, right—sorry. I'm not always great with names, right off the bat, but I've got it now— Dave. So, what can I do for you?; what's the job? I think they told me I'm the... Assistant Executive Governor? (To PAIGE, with a smile—knowing that sounds off.) That can't be right.

DAVE. It's, uh... actually, you'd be the Governor's Executive Assistant.

LOUISE. (A friendly aside to PAIGE, in a way that suggests they share these amusing observations all the time:) See, these titles always have too many words. (To DAVE:) What is it? Executive Governor... ?

DAVE. Executive Assistant—

LOUISE. Executive Assistant Governor.

DAVE. No, it's not a... (Actually finding this funny:) You're not a Governor.

LOUISE. I'm an Assistant Governor.

DAVE. No, you're, uh—

LOUISE. Look, let's not worry about my job title, okay? I'm just a temp; you just tell me what you need me to do, and I'll get to work.

DAVE. Right, great; thanks. What I mostly need you to do is sit out in the Reception area— (Indicates the Reception door.)

LOUISE. Perfect.

DAVE. You have a desk out there—

LOUISE. Excellent—

DAVE. And answer the phones, greet people when they come in—

LOUISE. (Looking at the phone on the desk:) And the phone system here—this looks pretty straightforward.

DAVE. Yeah, they're pretty standard phones.

LOUISE. Has the usual buttons. You can probably put people on hold, and... transfer calls.

DAVE. (Still trying to exist in a realm where this isn't an odd conversation:) Yeah, it's pretty, it's pretty standard.

LOUISE. (Again, with zero embarrassment about her shortcomings:) Okay—just to let you know—phones are not my strongest area. But I will figure it out, no worries. That's what I've learned, being a temp: you're always finding yourself in a new situation, in a job you've never done before, that you don't know how to do. But then you realize that, hey, that's okay, you know?

DAVE. (He's not sure that is okay:) Uh, sure, but... just to be clear—you have done this kind of job before.

LOUISE. (This is all 100% positive:) Very likely not, but listen: this is what I do. Every day I'm in a new office. And they say, okay, here's the job, and I say, okay, first time doing this, and by the end of the day, they're like, okay, good news, we don't need you here tomorrow—and I'm off to the next place. I have more experience than anyone at working somewhere I have no experience. So don't you worry about me, I'm gonna be at my desk, figuring out that phone. (Heading to the Reception door:) And let me know if you need anything else, okay? Coffee?

— End

Start - (Eventually, PAIGE is shown to the door, exits, and closes the door behind herself.)

NED. Oh god.

DAVE. You're fine.

NED. I'm just all...

DAVE. It's fine.

NED. This whole day has been...

DAVE. It has.

NED. Hasn't it?!

*(It has. This day-- what's already passed, and what's still to come-- is a nightmare for NED. But DAVE has a talent for keeping NED calm and gently encouraging him-- not pushing him-- to do what has to be done.)*

NED. *(Beat.)* I was hoping I could sneak in here. When no one was looking.

DAVE. It's your office, Ned; you don't have to sneak in.

NED. I just... I really want to get to work on the budget.

DAVE. Oh, good, that's good. Did you look at that proposal the General Assembly sent over?

NED. *(Producing papers from his briefcase.)* Oh yeah, I went through the whole thing. Good golly, Dave, those people are idiots.

DAVE. *(With a laugh.)* Yeah?

NED. Look at this, look: *(Having found the page, indicating numbers.)* They're completely ignoring the fact that there's a massive reduction in Federal funding for schools; our state's gonna get twenty-three million dollars less this year. Which is the equivalent of-- what?-- *(Doing this math in his head, very quickly.)* --uh... four hundred sixty full-time teaching salaries, right?

DAVE. Uh, sure.

NED. You overlook a detail like that, suddenly-- *(An even quicker calculation.)* --eighteen thousand, four hundred of our students don't have a teacher.

DAVE. Is that right?

NED. Yeah! This is their education plan. And meanwhile, look... *(Finding a number on a different page.)* They're almost doubling-- doubling-- government subsidies for all these dairy farms.

DAVE. Uh-huh.

NED. If I sign this budget... we'll end up with a state full of uneducated children, and... really rich cows.

DAVE. *(Beat.)* I don't think the money goes to the cows.

NED. The whole thing is a mess, Dave.

DAVE. I see that.

NED. I need to work on this.

DAVE. I agree.

NED. I need to *just* work on this, and not do anything else, like public speaking or appearing on television ever again in my life, okay?

DAVE. Ned--

NED. You're supposed to say "yes," Dave--

DAVE. Well, no--

NED. As my Chief of Staff, you're supposed to say "yes" to whatever I ask.

DAVE. I don't think that's the job description.

NED. Can I make it the job description?

DAVE. I want you to work on the budget, Ned.

NED. Okay, good.

DAVE. I want you to work on all the important stuff--policy, and legislation, and, you know, doing your job, but... do you remember last night, when we first realized you might actually become Governor?

NED. And I started to cry?

DAVE. Right, and we said, okay, if this happens, you and I are gonna need to spend more time thinking about... politics.

*(NED reacts in pain. DAVE is sincerely empathetic to NED's view of politics.)*

DAVE. Look, I know that campaigning, *(Each of these suggestions causes NED physical pain.)* and giving speeches, *(Pain.)* and... working the crowd--

NED. *(The most painful of all!)* Oh god!

DAVE. I know you hate that stuff.

NED. It's not just that I *hate* it, it's... I can't *do* that, Dave; I'm not built that way.

End

totally unprepared for elected office. And this morning, at a gloriously horrible swearing-in ceremony, America found that man: Ned Newley.

Start — DAVE. Okay, but... wait. That's... not at all who Ned is. Ned knows more about government than anybody.

ARTHUR. Yes, but he doesn't look like he does. Politics is a visual medium, Dave. People vote for *idiots* who look like leaders. But Ned's a new phenomenon: a *leader*. Who looks like an idiot.

DAVE. So you're saying... he should try to look stupid.

ARTHUR. I'm not saying he should *try*. But if, you know, it comes naturally... (He's still not getting it.) Dave, I don't think you appreciate the gift you've been given here. If the most *competent* candidate is the one who loses, if "experience" is a dirty word, then what are we supposed to do? Look for the worst candidate we can find? Well, guess what, Dave? We found him! So why fight this? Why not embrace it? why not say to the world: *yes— (Going to NED, tenderly:)* — That man you saw at the swearing-in? The one who looked lost and confused? That's your new Governor. (ARTHUR is looking at NED closely, as if reading his face for inspiration. His descriptions are gentle, non-judgemental, even positive.) A very simple man. Maybe... a touch slow.

DAVE. No—

ARTHUR. Not a deep thinker; not a big talker—

NED. (I'm not a big talker.)

ARTHUR. (Amending his statement:) Not a talker at all. Doesn't understand that bill he's supporting, or the law he just signed—

DAVE. That is—no, we're not—

ARTHUR. Isn't gonna give big speeches. Isn't gonna give any speeches—

DAVE. (More forcefully:) We are not doing this, Mr. Vance—

NED. Wait, what was that about not giving speeches?

ARTHUR. (Finishing his description:) Just a humble guy who comes to work every day, and tries to do his job.

NED. That sounds nice.

DAVE. Ned, don't... don't listen to this—

ARTHUR. (To NED:) Do you know the most common word voters use today to describe their ideal candidate?

PAIGE. Real.

ARTHUR. (Amazed at PAIGE's speed and knowledge:) Yes! My God, she's good.

PAIGE. It's the one word I hear in every campaign. People say they're looking for someone who's real.

ARTHUR. Someone. Who's. Real. And then this morning, I saw you—a man untarnished by artifice, or political skill, or... personality. And I thought, my God, this is the guy. Let me work with that man, and I will not only stop him from being thrown out of office, I will not only put an end to all this Special Election nonsense, I will transform Ned Newley into the most popular politician in the United States of America. How do you like the sound of that? (NED looks a little panicked. To DAVE, uncertain:) Is that his happy face?

DAVE. No.

ARTHUR. Does he have a happy face?

DAVE. (Finally putting an end to this:) Mr. Vance—look, I get it. What Ned is—what he *actually* is—knowledgeable, sincere—that's not popular. But that just means what is popular... is really scary. So... if you think you can help people choose Ned for the reasons they should chose him—great. But if your whole plan is selling Ned as an idiot... maybe that's what voters want to hear, but—

NED. Do you think it'll work?

DAVE. Exactly. It's not even gonna work—

NED. No, I'm asking Mr. Vance. (He crosses to ARTHUR.) Do you think it'll work? Do you think people will believe I'm... not that bright?

ARTHUR. There is not a doubt in my mind.

NED. (Confused by this:) But if they think I'm stupid... will they still support my ideas?

ARTHUR. This is what we've learned, Ned: if they *like* you, they'll support whatever comes out of your mouth. And they already like you; Paige?

PAIGE. When asked if they would invite you to their backyard barbecue, 64% of respondents said yes, provided you stayed clear of the open flames.

DAVE. Ned, you can't agree to this. — End

Start - RACHEL. A. C.'s gonna set everything up. You have an idea where you'd like us to sit?

DAVE. We were thinking—the two of you here, on the sofa?

RACHEL. Does that work for you, A. C.?

(A. C. grunts.)

A. C. doesn't talk much. So, Dave Riley— (As she talks to DAVE, she can't help but look around the Governor's office—her first time in it.) The new Governor's Chief of Staff. A man I somehow have never met before. What's your deal, what's your story?

DAVE. (The slightest hesitation, just at the directness of the question:) Oh—well—

RACHEL. (Misinterpreting DAVE's hesitation:) And I'm just asking that—that's just personal curiosity; I'm not asking that as a reporter, okay? I'm not trying to break any rules. I'm completely clear about the whole "not asking any questions" thing. I got the memo.

DAVE. What memo?

RACHEL. The figurative memo. The message. I got the message. About not asking any probing questions. You look like you have no idea what I'm talking about.

DAVE. I think I have no idea what you're talking about.

RACHEL. The rules—clearly laid out to me about this interview. That it's—actually—not an interview, that I'm not here as a reporter; I'm just here because my boss, the head of our news division, is pals with Arthur Vance. They go golfing together—is that what it is, golfing?

(Realizing:)

RACHEL. Sorry, that was— (She laughs or smiles.) That was totally a question. That's just... me; even when I'm not being a reporter, I sound like a reporter. The way you probably sound like a politician even when you're not being a politician.

DAVE. Oh! Um...

RACHEL. Actually you don't sound much like a politician.

DAVE. Are you saying someone told you you couldn't ask any questions?

RACHEL. (Thinking it silly that he'd go that route:) Oh, look, you don't have to pretend that... I'm sorry I mentioned it—was I not supposed to mention it?

DAVE. No!

RACHEL. (Surprised he'd take offense at that:) Okay, I don't exactly know the etiquette of—

DAVE. No, I meant, no, you weren't not supposed to—

RACHEL. (Not having heard that:) I'm just telling you—I don't know why I'm telling you—I'm just... I'm not a big fan of people in the news business being pals with the people we're supposed to cover, okay? And these arrangements, where you do us a favor, like offering an exclusive interview with the Governor, and we do you a favor, like promising the reporter won't ask any tough questions. Just "how does it feel?" kinda stuff. Since, apparently, our new Governor is not very bright. Is that true, by the way—is Ned Newley not very bright? (Realizing) Shit, I did it again. Honestly, it's involuntary—it just comes out—but I really don't want to get fired today, so... No more questions. Eight years I've been covering politics in this state, this is my first time setting foot in the Governor's office, but I will just sit here and... smile pretty for the camera. Right, A. C.?

(A. C., shirring her cynicism about the situation, grunts.)

A. C. doesn't talk much. Unlike me, who... (Aware she's been venting, she stops herself from saying anything more than a simple:) Sorry.

DAVE. No, I'm... I'm sorry to hear all that.

RACHEL. (Not having patience for the bullshit:) Look, you pretending to be innocent and sympathetic isn't really... (Seeing something in his face:) Wait, you are pretending, aren't you?

DAVE. (Beat.) I don't think I'm pretending.

RACHEL. Are you saying you weren't told about this arrangement? You didn't know this wasn't a real interview? Arthur Vance didn't share that fact with the Governor's Chief of Staff?

DAVE. He did not.

RACHEL. Well that's an awesome little scoop for me to put in the story that I'm not allowed to write. (She's genuinely angry now.) I'll just file that under "leads I Can't Pursue," along with "Why would Arthur Vance fly here from Boston to work for a new Governor nobody's ever heard of?", and "Why is he claiming Ned Newley's not smart, when he's been our State Treasurer for—?" Wait, why are you...? Why are you looking at me like that?

DAVE. Like what?

End

A. C. (In response, grunting, perhaps:) (Right, but this time you're wearing a jacket.)

DAVE. Okay—clearly you two are gonna be just fine.

(DAVE exits through the Hallway door. There is a brief silence, as A. C. works—attaching NED's mic, testing the mic, etc.—while NED observes him. The silence soon makes NED comfortable enough to speak.)

Start NED. I'm not sure I'm even gonna need this mic. (Beat. A. C. says nothing.) I mean, even when there's not a camera, I'm not great at talking. (Beat.) Which is... maybe something you and I have in common.

A. C. (Beat.) Uh-huh.

NED. (Encouraged by getting a response:) But you see people talk on camera every day. You probably think it's ridiculous for me to be nervous about being on TV.

A. C. (With a shrug—meaning "I wouldn't exactly say that":) Well...

NED. What. What does that mean?

A. C. (The shrug.) I'm just saying...

NED. What? That I should be nervous?

A. C. (The shrug.) Well...

NED. What does that mean?

A. C. (The shrug.) I'm just saying...

NED. No you're not, you're not saying anything.

A. C. The last time you went on TV... (The shrug.)

NED. I looked like an ass.

A. C. Yeah. But look, the truth is... most people who go on TV make asses of themselves.

NED. Do they?

A. C. Oh yeah. God yeah—

NED. Okay. I'm not sure this is helping—?

A. C. Especially politicians—

NED. Yeah, definitely not helping—

A. C. But, you know, most politicians are asses to begin with. (Realizing who he's saying this to:) Ha! See? This is why I don't talk to people.

NED. No, I wouldn't disagree with that. There's an awful lot of idiots in politics. Though I don't know why that is.

A. C. Because no sane, intelligent person would want to work in government? (Realizing:) Okay, I'm gonna— (Gesture meaning "zip it.")

NED. Why would you say that?

A. C. Nah, forget it.

NED. No, tell me. Why would no intelligent person want to work in government?

A. C. Because... what is government? What does it do? Right? What good, honest purpose does it serve? I suppose it... has to exist, and always will exist, but... Government, politics, what does that have to do with... I'm sorry, but... real life? It has nothing to do with my life. I pay my taxes I bitch about it, but I pay, and then all that money gets spent on... whatever—whatever politicians spend money on, when they're not busy trashing other politicians, or looking into my TV camera and lying every time they open their mouths. Right? (Beat.) Why should I pay attention to that? Why should I care? Life is crowded enough as it is. I've got a brother who's out of work, needs help paying his rent. I've got a friend who's been in and out of the hospital. And my wife and I... just want to make it to the weekend so we can spend time with our two boys, who are... awesome, and... important. That's real life. Government is... over there. Making a lot of noise. If you listen to it. But... why listen to it?

NED. (Beat.) I'm sorry about your friend in the hospital.

A. C. (Feeling a little awkward:) Thanks. I don't know why I brought her up.

NED. Well—real life, like you said.

A. C. Yeah.

NED. What kind of work is your brother in?

A. C. He was teaching high school, in Fairview. Got laid off.

NED. Was that... a public school?

A. C. (With earned cynicism, as he's talking to a politician:) You gonna get him a job, Governor?

NED. I'm honestly just wondering.

A. C. I don't know why I told you all that.

NED. I asked you a question. And you answered it. That's what Dave keeps telling me about this interview with Rachel: it's just a conversation.

End