

WHERE IS MR. RODGERS WHEN WE NEED HIM MOST?

Trump's Christmas Carol

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ACT I

It's 4 a.m. at the Conway house. George, who's spooning Kellyanne, stirs when her cell phone begins to rattle atop her mid-century nightstand. Kellyanne fumbles about to tackle the device before it wakens George. Once the phone is in her clutches, Kellyanne positions her glasses, reads her boss's just-sent text . . . and sighs. Her phone-lit face reveals unmistakable annoyance, a scowl she'll effectively mask hours later when she cheerfully greets her boss, The President of the United States.

Keenly aware of his wife's exasperation, George inquires: "What's Donald Duck quacking about now, Hon?" employing his most recent moniker for his least favorite being.

"He's lashing out at yet another disrespectful critic, and he's out to even the score. You know, he's been under such stress lately and has had to suffer unreasonably harsh treatment the likes of which no other recent president has had to endure. Threatened with impeachment for maneuvering to win the next election—which is what the country wants, after all. Right? Digging up dirt on his opponent. Everyone does it. Always have; always will. So, tell me, George, where's the impeachable offense?"

"I know he's under stress, Kellyanne, but that doesn't give him the right to act like an enfant terrible. How you baby him! The guy's got to grow up and behave himself. Acting humanely still means something, even to Republicans."

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While Kellyanne privately frowned on how the President often acted, her mama bear instincts would reflexively kick in leading her to protectively defend the President whenever he was criticized or felt slighted. She'd jump into the fray with both hands swinging. Trump loved that about her—he loved her feistiness, and he thought the world of her. But working for a man George despised—a man he'd declared in print to be 'unfit for office'—had become a bone of contention between the two of late, though they'd generally found ways to be more or less civil about the matter.

Kellyanne outlines her “calling” for George: the indispensable role she plays in the President's life: “He needs me. He needs me to monitor he's every tweet so I can explain—or more precisely—explain away what he'd just said without fully realizing the implications of the statement. He needs someone who's unwaveringly faithful. Someone who has his back. Someone who supports and protects him, given how injured he can feel on an hour-by-hour basis. He also needs someone who can hold him together. The alternative is unthinkable. The guy could go off the deep end at any moment. Who knows what he might do if pushed to the brink. He's just . . . shall we say . . . that sensitive.”

“Not toward others, that's for sure,” quips George, “boy can he dish it out.”

“When did you forget Reagan's Eleventh Commandment, George: ‘Thou shall not speak ill of any fellow Republican.’ You incessantly criticize the man who presently defines what it means to be Republican—the man who—need I remind you—figuratively, signs my checks. Trump was right when he called you the ‘husband from hell.’ It's not easy remaining on The President's good side when your husband is badmouthing him on a daily basis. Do you have an idea what that's like for me, speaking of a lack of sensitivity? Listen, I'm not blind to his antics, I'm just true to the cause. It's been 40 years since we had a great conservative at the helm.

We've got the Presidency now and we have to do everything in our power to hold on to it, no matter what."

George appreciates that his wife sees it as her duty to contain the man whose job it is (or was) to protect the free world, but it rankles him nevertheless. He responds to Kellyanne by admitting: "I know my speaking out is hard on you . . . and on us as a couple. I'm loyal to you in ways that count, though few seem to understand how we stay together given our differences. I know deep down you also see Trump's behavior as unacceptable, but I alone get to express that view, while you can't say anything of the sort. I do you that favor—I privately speak for both you and I— which, in turn, permits you to appear unwaveringly allegiant. As a result, the President trusts you as he trusts no other, in spite of what your harebrained husband is presently spouting out about. It's our magnificent balancing act, agreeing to disagree. That's what people don't get."

Act II

When Kellyanne arrives at the Oval Office, six hours later, she finds the President in yet another of his famous funks. He's fuming about how unfair it was of "Shifty Schiff" to mockingly misrepresent his call with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskiy.

"To call what I did a 'shakedown,' to erroneously quote me as saying: *'I'm going to say this only seven times, so you better listen good. I want you to make up dirt on my political opponent. Understand? Lots of it, on this and on that.'* 'You better listen good?' Outrageous! A complete smear job! What gives him the right to mischaracterize me? He's a God damned liar! The call was perfect, I tell you, perfect. What he calls subtext I call bullshit."

With that, the President launches into his litany of grips about how poorly he's been treated by vindictive Democrats, by nose-in-the-air elites, and by the holier-than-thou Press. "Tell me, Kellyanne, why does everyone keep picking on me? Why don't they acknowledge, once and for all, that I'm the best President this country has ever had? Will ever have! We've *never* had it so good. Thank God for the good folks who do support me! Thank God for you and Hannity."

Kellyanne believes Trump is right to be upset with Schiff. But she knows there are plenty of times his explosive tweets are precipitous, poorly thought out, based on misleading information or his misunderstanding of the situation. Trump acts before he thinks—he tweets without first consulting his advisors, which leaves them scrambling to clean up the mess. Everyone, friend or foe, knows this to be so. Many have tried to provide Trump with "helpful feedback" about his misguided behavior; many have tried to rein in the unbridled expression of his ire. But those who dared try often paid a dear price. Trump never signaled he was open to hearing feedback that called his behavior into question. He's not the kind who believes in "constructive" criticism. As far as he's concerned, criticism is criticism, and criticism means attack, and attack calls for counter-attack. Plain and simple. Anyone who planned to work for the President would have to realize they were required to work within the framework created by such thinking.

Now . . . if anyone was in a position to whisper in Trump's ear it was Kellyanne Conway. But while her relationship with the President seemed rock solid, the President might still send her packing, as he'd done many before her, if he interpreted her corrective feedback as a betrayal. Kellyanne worked hard to never get on the President's bad side. She thought it a fool's errand to try and talk sense to a man who exclusively believed in his own assessments about every matter under the sun and who considered his behavior beyond reproach. As far as Trump was

concerned, his success in life was all the validation he needed—it provided a big stamp of approval that proved he was right and others wrong. As for his failures, those never seem to factor into the equation.

Like many of his other advisors, Kellyanne felt it would take a special someone to approach Trump about his behavior—someone over whom Trump held no sway, someone he could not intimate, someone who could withstand being publicly ridiculed—Trump’s signature maneuver. It would take a miracle for someone to materialize and, once and for all, get through to the Commander-in-Chief. What we need now, thought Kellyanne, isn’t a dragon slayer but a dragon charmer. But where on earth could such a man or woman be found?

Act III.

In the wee hours of the following morning, the President is tossing and turning in bed, plagued by the pending impeachment hearing that won’t go away no matter how hard he tries to stymie the proceedings. The President makes his way back to the Oval Office to have a chat with his old “friend,” Andrew Jackson, or—more precisely— with that past president’s portrait, which Trump made sure to have moved to the Oval Office shortly after he became President. Trump sees Jackson as a kindred spirit and he converses with Jackson’s portrait hoping to conjure up Jackson’s spirit to help him think through what he must do to bring an end to the insane and divisive efforts of mean-spirited Democrats, who collectively have it in for him.

“You know, Andy”—Trump’s that way, assuming familiarity—“You and I are cut from the same cloth. We’re stars, champions of the common man. We’re both popular—though me more than you. Both of us are mischief makers, and we’re both dedicated to protecting our honor and settling scores. You’d duel to the death with anyone who dishonored you. Killed a few in your day, I hear. When you were captured during the Revolutionary War, you told an English

General who ordered you to shine his boot to “go f**k himself” in so many words—which earned you two nasty scars you proudly wore till the day you died. Hey! Did I ever tell you about the time I punched my second-grade music teacher in the face—blackened his eye—just because the guy didn’t know the first thing about music. How bad am I, huh?

I am the one who intimidates, not the one who’s intimidated. I’m the one who demands respect. Remember, back in 2011, when Obama dared to tease me—to shame me—at the Correspondence’s Dinner? Boy did I show him—now who’s laughing, Mr. *Ex*-President? You know, Andy, I—like you—am cocky, headstrong, and determined. Make no bones about it, I am who I am—an irreverent wise guy, and an angry one at that!”

“So, Old Hickory,” what do you suggest I do about these jokers on the Hill with their impeachment nonsense? I’ve already called upon Shifty Schiff to resign. His behavior was disgraceful. No one has ever acted in a less professional manner. So, what would you do if you were me? You said your only regret upon leaving office was that you hadn’t shot Henry Clay nor hung John C. Calhoun. These days they don’t allow us to do such things, or to even talk that way. It’s a crying shame what this country has become!”

Just then, Trump—who thought he was alone—is startled by a voice coming from his left side. He turns to see a ghostly presence that would have alarmed him were it not for the fact the apparition is instantaneously recognizable given the man’s red cardigan, sneakers, and calm, kind and caring demeanor. It’s impossible to mistake the likeness of Mr. Rodgers.

“What the dickens!” cries the President, “How did you get in here? What do you want? Oh, and . . . by the way . . . No! I was not talking to that picture, just to set the record straight. That’s fake news!”

I understand you’re having some feelings you don’t know quite how to deal with,” states

Rodgers. “You know, we all have feelings like that. Sometimes we feel sad or mad. Maybe you and I can talk about what’s bothering you. Would you like that? I bet it would help. I always feel better when I talk about my feelings. That way, I don’t let them get the better of me. How about you?”

“Me? Talk to you? About my feelings? Are you kidding? Do you know who you’re talking to? Oh, and . . . by the way . . . aren’t you dead?”

“I’m not gone, Mr. President. I am right here in your heart. Tell me, Mr. President. Oh . . . would it be okay if I called you Donald?”

“Absolutely not!”

“Okay then. Tell me, Mr. President, do you remember having had a teddy bear or a blankie when you were young? That would be a good place to start. It might get us back to a time you were a wee lad.”

“I was never that young. My memories start when I was seven.”

“Oh, my . . . that’s too bad. Do you think you can remember a time when you were filled with happiness to see a special friend or a time when you did something very nice for your Mommy or Daddy? Surely, you were once a good boy. Everyone is a good boy or girl.”

“Good is for sissies. Are you a sissy, Mr. Rodgers? Because you sure seem like one. I’m a man’s man and you . . . well . . . let’s just say you seem a bit soft and leave it at that. I just want to know who I’m dealing with here. Are you for real?”

“You seem so mad all the time, Mr. President, and you always seem to show you’re mad in ways that hurt other people and yourself as well. I myself was a fat boy, and everyone made fun of me. Did anybody make fun of you when you were little, Mr. President?”

“I would *never* let that happen! Didn’t you fight back when they made fun of you? I would have. It’s a point of honor”

“Well, maybe over time you got to be so mad in the way you are now. You know how springs can be so tightly wound that they unleash explosive energy when released. You’re like that, ready to spring at the first sign of disagreement, or disrespect—whether real or imagined. But I suspect you weren’t always that way, were you? I think you were once a pretty nice boy—sugar and spice and all that stuff.”

“What in the hell are you talking about, Rodgers? I was frogs, and snails and puppy dogs tails. I think you got your genders mixed up. Are you gay or what?”

“Still, I’m quite sure you were once a good boy who, when hurt, felt hurt. Now . . . *all* you seem is angry. Acting out one’s anger can make matters worse, don’t you think?”

“Well . . . yeah . . . I guess, at times. . . . Wait a darn minute, you can’t waltz in here and get all shrinky with me. I’m not falling for that shit.”

“I don’t have a bone to pick with you, Mr. President, I accept you as you are. I’m just concerned because you seem so full of piss and vinegar; you never seem happy, or calm or relaxed or settled. Tell me if I’m wrong. But I think you could stand to feel a bit more peace within, don’t you think? Especially given the season?”

“You know what really gets to me about you, Mr., Rodgers, you seem so damned . . . Christian. So turn-the-other-cheek like. You know, you’re an oddball. Don’t people make fun of you? Don’t people take advantage of you? Don’t tell me that you yourself never get good and angry . . . “

“Of course I get angry . . . all the time. But I take great pride in my restraint . . . as much

as you seem to take in your lack of restraint. Look at me . . . look really closely . . . There! Do you see something in me that you feel is missing in you? You always seem at war with the world. That has *got* to take a toll on you? Tell me it doesn't. My God, you're all pretzelled up inside, don't you think."

"Well..... "

"I'm not arguing that you shouldn't protect yourself at times. But there's a time and a place, you know."

"Yeah . . .well"

Epilogue

With that, we must take leave, wishing to respect this intimate moment between two men of great stature who are deeply engaged in a serious talk about how to be in the world. Given that Trump is beginning to waver, there's hope. My bet is riding on Mr. Rodgers' ability to get the President to face his feelings so he might then be less inclined to attack others at the drop of a hat.

As the President is so fond of saying: "Who knows, we'll see."