Eleanor Roosevelt woke up and gave up.

Hillary Clinton and Abraham Lincoln were still chuckling on the balcony together in the brisk New Hampshire snow, which flew about the old hotel like paper.

Eleanor made herself a pot of coffee. Cup and pot in hand, she joined them in the storm, which seemed to worry neither. They were sipping coffee, too, it apparently still hot despite the intervening hour.

They smiled to include her. She refilled their cups and placed the pot on a cold chair, rimed white beside her. She hadn’t often spoken to Lincoln. When she was First Lady, her office had been the quaint Lincoln bedroom,
which in his life had been a sitting place
for cabinet meetings, and not where he slept.

One of her secretaries had seen him, though,
on the bed putting on his boots, and run
out shrieking, so Eleanor figured he must
have adjusted to the new bed sometime, although
it was an odd, elaborate thing that looked
doll-housy, like most of the White House,
and she always had suspected he’d good taste.
She’d never herself seen him in that room,
although he used to bump around a lot, and
her Scottie, Fala, often barked at him.

The White House always seemed so full, she
thought, of dogs barking at ghosts. He seemed
amenable to questions, so: ‘Was it you,’
she asked, ‘who made all that odd noise
when I was writing letters?’ ‘Yes, of course,
but I was never aware of others in a space
as much as they were aware of me,’ he said,
‘I compensated for that with great compassion
for those that clearly suffered. I would place baby birds back in their nests. I would have given suffrage to the slaves. John Booth heard me say so in a speech, and killed me.’ It seemed quite true and simple. Hillary, so thrilled by his company that she’d kept her crazy campaign smile until then, was immediately still and calmly candid: ‘I have lost New Hampshire here to Sanders, and it meant more to me than a primary state, because it was a symbol. A Goldwater girl, I changed to back McCarthy. When he almost won New Hampshire, it was such a promise to me of transition. Now I mistrust my own position. Eleanor has warned me that a saint can stoop to murder: I was so giddy when we took Gaddafi out, I found myself drunk with death. Did you ever feel that about Confederate dead?’ He thought about it very slowly, cradling coffee.
The snow had stopped about them, noisily like a choir turning pages. He quoted,

“‘He is trampling out the vintage where the grapes of wrath are stored.’” As you thought in a speech, Mrs. Clinton, my life after the war would have been wrathless, except I think they’d have seen my suffrage for their slaves as the worst revenge of all. I have often stared from that Whitehouse window across to where the battlefield had been. That was one of the noises you heard sometimes, in the daytime, Mrs. Roosevelt. Yes: there is a grandeur in having killed, if those around you think it gives you dignity. A once-poor man like me or an over-advised woman, always must learn to resist it by much long reflection. But I did not mean that you ignore the counsel of those like Mrs. Roosevelt’: teasingly.

‘Oh, Eleanor doesn’t advise me,’ said Hillary, ‘she heckles me.’ And the two First
Ladies exchanged a conspiracy of eyes. He felt like a young intruder there, in spite of Hillary’s hour of attention. He said, ‘I am never quite easy with women, but my wife and I shared the loss of all but one of our sons and we even endured seances together. I am surprised, Mrs. Clinton, that it was not my attitude to money you saw as my most attractive feature. You remember that I began Federal Income Tax, started banks to enrich the common currency, and built railways to promote employment, break up the bitter distances. It was to me all part of the living Rights of Man, which always flutter not like tall flags but like lost little wings in need of constant rescue.’ ‘That doesn’t sound, dear, like your campaign speech, but Sanders’, said Eleanor, sourly, but saw that her lively young friend was spacing out on death again: ‘Is it,’ she asked gently, ‘that execution?’ Hillary
nodded: ‘Bill always made a point of showing
he supported the death penalty: so much so
that he went to the execution of a black
man he wouldn’t pardon. Eleanor, that man
was so retarded he told the guards he’d leave
the dessert from his last meal for next day.
You know we brought in laws to reduce
welfare, put more blacks in jail. I’d say
the kids in the gangs were “super predators”. I
went along with everything Bill did,
not just about his women, Mr. Lincoln.
I am funded by private prisons. Private prisons.’
He guessed that she had talked herself to tears,
by trying to avoid them. He did not know
how best to comfort, except that his words
enlarged always beyond his intention. He
said, ‘The grapes of wrath aside, Mrs. Clinton,
I was not a religious man, but knew the Bible
back to front and sideways - those two things
do often go together - and I’m thinking now
of the parable of the vineyard: the last worker
earning as much as the first one who came in.
They will say you steal your campaign from Sanders
but in the last it will not be election
that concerns you but the mercy you regain.
Let your husband suffer his slow death by numbers.
Let your husband on his own endure that pain.’
Eleanor saw that her friend had lost
the movements of a little-marching-girl, the
drilled expansive gestures, and relaxed
in her bright pastel coat as the snowfall
restarted around them like crushed gems
falling out of the blackness, where no one
felt cold. Hillary became genuinely eager
to talk of the Thirteenth Amendment: ‘You
used so much trickery, coercion, mastery
of numbers yourself to outlaw slavery. Surely
that shows some artfulness required at
all time to do good?’ For some reason, Eleanor
remembered Hillary’s holidays with Bill in
the Dominican Republic with the Kissingers
at the home of de la Renta. She herself enjoyed
Oscar’s first perfume with its muskless
spicy breeze from flowers, its utter
union of the inner and the outer. Kissinger,
she thought, had not been good, however,
for Hillary. She said, ‘The bombing of Cambodia
did not deserve a Nobel Peace Prize, dear.’
Drinking his own reflection, in the coffee
still warm in the snowlight, Lincoln said,
‘On the subject of the vineyard, of course,
it took me a while to come to a total
conviction to outlaw all slavery, then
to not only that emancipation but to suffrage.
Still I reached that. And in truth, you know, I
always knew I would. I was a wrestler
in my youth. The arms and legs I twisted
for the Thirteenth Amendment, Mrs. Clinton,
were more a wrestling match than great deception.
I made no one a fool. The only deadmen
were on the battlefield, and then too many,
and for not one of them I shouted glory. Mrs.
Roosevelt is right about the late Gaddafi.
Your husband taught you somehow it is manly
to enjoy death and that has never left you.’
Hillary said to no one, ‘I am a Christian’,
in a tone implying listlessly that the condition
was neither a curse nor a recommendation.
Eleanor held her hand, which was becoming
chill at last in the New Hampshire midnight.
In this lost light, it seemed to Eleanor:
‘A blessing that you did take credit
for the Iran peace, although when there
you didn’t want to meet them. All the work
was largely done by Kerry, but it shows
improving values that you did relent.’
She added, ‘We should go in soon. I believe
Mr. Lincoln is quite tired.’ He smiled:
‘I am usually an early riser, but will stay
up longer if the future of my country
is at issue as it seems to be here now.’

Eleanor enquired, to snap the tension:

‘Has anyone of us seen that demon cat that appears in the White House basement?

It was supposed to herald the Wall Street Crash at the start of the Great Depression, and also the Kennedy Assassination. It starts off as a kitten and then grows to a springing demon.’ They shook their heads. ‘Me, neither’, she laughed, ‘You know one thing wrong with Franklin was that he believed them when they told him too early that the Depression was over. He should have kept working on it longer: the same mistake they’re making today.’ Lincoln nodded:

‘Good news does seem married to delay. Dear Mrs. Clinton, you should reveal your speeches to Goldman Sachs and quietly take blame for years of posturing manipulation.’ Lincoln, Hillary thought, could sound like Social Media, in delayed New Hampshire coldness. She
resolved again to avoid the White House basement.

Eleanor carried the coffee pot inside. It
was still hot to her touch. She did not
question, but she left them both outside
a little longer in a small communion.

Hillary was telling him how Bill had
incorporated the Confederate Flag in
the flag of Arkansas and Lincoln
still managed to sound soothing.

The phrase, ‘Now he belongs to the ages’, said
when Lincoln died came to Eleanor’s tongue,
as the last of the coffee touched it. It was
good they all loved coffee so much,
she thought. She had heard the demon cat
was invented by nightwatchmen, who
wanted a night off, but that -
the right of a worker to have rest -
seemed to her to be a valid reason.