

1. Electile Dysfunction

“A wise man does not try to hurry history.”

- - Adlai Stevenson,

September 9, 1952

The vice president of the United States rides in the back of the black Cadillac limousine, its tires hissing over the rain-slick streets, the only sound he hears except for the soft sobbing of his children. His campaign is now over, and the stark simplicity of losing comes to him as he looks out through the armored glass onto the empty streets of downtown Nashville: Lose and they call you unable to take advantage of your incumbency, unable to connect with the American people, unable to get credit for a booming economy. Win and they call you Mr. President. Which they will not be calling Al Gore. Not now. Maybe not ever.

He has the same trouble getting his mind around his popular vote victory as everyone else this night: Getting more votes than the other guy is usually the point of campaigning. You get more votes and you not only win but there is also a bonus: Winning makes everything you did during the campaign look like an act of genius. Victory is the great answerer of questions. Win and the questions don't even get asked. Lose and they never stop. Should he have embraced Bill

Clinton, championed working families, picked Joe Lieberman, kissed Tipper like that? Win and nobody cares. Nobody is asking George W. Bush where he went wrong with his Social Security privatization plan or his giant tax cut. No Sunday papers will be analyzing his bonehead mistakes or syntactic bobbles. And that's because Bush is now clad in the Kevlar of victory: Nobody asks winners where they went wrong. But where did Al Gore go wrong? Well, he came back from a 17-point deficit in the polls to get several hundred thousand votes more than his opponent on Election Day and so he went wrong...where, exactly? Florida. He did not win Florida. Though Gore does not know how he lost it and by so many votes at that. Something like 50,000 last time he turned away from the TV at his hotel where the CBS anchorman was speaking in pure stream-of-Rather: "Let's give a tip of the Stetson to the loser, Vice President Al Gore, and at the same time, a big tip and a hip, hip, hurrah and a great big Texas 'howdy' to the new president of the United States. Sip it. Savor it. Cup it. Photostat it. Underline it in red. Press it in a book. Put it in an album. Hang it on the wall. George Bush is the next president of the United States."

Al Gore has not slept in nearly four days and he would be the first to admit his judgment is not at its knife-edge best. But, as he turned away from the TV set, even he knew it would inappropriate to kick the fucker in.

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In the back of the limousine, Gore has his concession speech in a red cardboard folder on his lap, a scarlet symbol of his failure. He had gone through it once quickly and done what he has probably not done in 24 years of giving political speeches: He has suggested no changes. The man known for managing every aspect of his campaign - - down to personally designing the swoosh in the logo - - now could not care less. He will go out and give it and be done.

The motorcade glides up in the inky, pre-dawn darkness to the back of the War Memorial Building, where two years earlier Gore had given his father's eulogy and where decades earlier his father had met his mother in a diner not a hundred yards away where she was making 25-cent tips to work her way through college. When his father had lost his Senate race in 1970, there had been no small amount of bitterness. Tennessee had defeated him, his father said, even though he had devoted his life to Tennessee. Now, the son also loses. Tennessee would have won him the presidency, but instead it has flung him into the abyss. Perhaps it was a predictable punishment: Trying to maintain a foot in two worlds, he is comfortable in neither. In Washington he has always been criticized for not playing the game, not being part of the social circuit, not building up a network of fanatically loyal staffers and aides. In Tennessee he has always been criticized for being too much a creature of Washington. When Bill Clinton had come down to Tennessee or Arkansas during his presidential campaigns and had taken on the NRA over gun control, the hunters believed him when he said he wasn't trying to take their guns away.

He was a Bubba if there ever was one, and they could see him in the early morning mists, standing behind a duck blind with a 12-gauge in his hands. When Gore said he didn't want to take their guns away, hell, they figured he was keeping a list of gun owners on that dorky Palm Pilot he kept strapped to his hip just waiting for the confiscation program to begin. Connecting with people, that is what everyone said it was about. Bill Clinton owned the franchise, George W. Bush was darn good at it and Al Gore was a lummoX, that is what people said. Except Gore had gotten more people to vote for him than Bush, hadn't he? So how were the critics going to explain that? And if he had been about to give his victory speech instead of a concession - - a victory speech he had tweaked and re-tweaked - - people would have learned the essential difference between the two candidates. Gore had looked upon the entire presidential campaign as a job interview. Bush had looked upon it as a date.

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The lead limousine in the motorcade comes to a halt. There are always two limousines, always identical. They change places in underpasses and tunnels to throw off potential assassins. So sometimes Gore arrives first and sometimes he arrives second. Tonight he is first. A Secret Service agent pulls open his door - - it is so heavily armored it takes a strong person to do so - - and the vice president steps out into the cool dampness. He and the limousine are inside a gaily striped canvas tent, another security precaution meant to hide from snipers the exact instant of his exit from the car. This is one of the

moments the Secret Service agents like least. They don't want him lingering. They want him to go either to the holding room or to the event site in War Memorial Plaza, about a two-minute walk down a passageway, where a lonely lectern covered with a garbage bag stands in the rain and from which he will give his concession speech.

Gore usually goes to a holding room. It gives him one last chance to go over the speech and to get last-minute instructions and information from his staff, which is stretched out behind him in the motorcade. This particular motorcade is so long that the tail end of it is still pulling up as Gore's car comes to a halt. He exits and immediately heads for the lectern. He doesn't want to read the speech again - - it will be on the Teleprompter anyway. He doesn't need any instructions on how to concede - - even though in 24 years, he has never had to give a concession speech in a general election. And, his shirt still wet with the tears of his daughters, he doesn't need any more rooms with filled with the people he feels he has let down. More importantly, the people in the War Memorial Plaza have been standing in the rain for hours waiting for him, and they deserve to have this long nightmare of an evening brought to an end.

Gore turns from the car and heads quickly down the passageway, a Secret Service agent preceding him. The back of the War Memorial Building is lower than the front, so when you enter from the back, you go through a passage, walk up a set of stairs and then are at ground level. Gore will then walk out through the tall pillars to the stage and up to the lectern, where he will

put a dagger through the heart of his campaign. He is taking long, determined strides - - the agents have learned to hurry in order not to be run over by him - - his wife, his daughters, his son trailing him in the narrow passageway.

There is a small commotion behind him and he feels the presence of someone coming up quickly upon him before he turns and sees a slightly winded David Morehouse, his trip director. Gore does not stop walking.

“Sir,” Morehouse says, trying to match him stride for stride, “we need to go to hold.”

Gore gives him a look that could toast bread. “I’m not going to hold,” he says. He picks up his pace.

Morehouse has been having trouble with a stiff knee and now he is hobbling after the vice president. The steps that will lead up and out to the War Memorial Plaza are only a few yards away.

“Sir, we need to go to hold!” Morehouse says, praying the vice president does not ask him why. In point of fact, Morehouse does not know why. He just knows that moments ago his cell phone rang with a frantic call saying that the vice president should not, could not, must not, go out to the plaza and concede defeat.

Over his shoulder, Gore now explains to Morehouse why there will be no delay. “I just talked to the governor,” Gore says. He already conceded to Bush in a telephone call a few minutes ago back at the hotel. Bush is waiting for Gore to concede publicly so Bush can go out in Austin and declare victory. That’s the

way it's done. "He's waiting on me, and I'm going straight to the stage," Gore says.

With Gore now almost at the bottom of the steps and Morehouse running out of any option he can think of, he limps quickly in front of Gore and blocks his way. Just blocks it. Just like that. Morehouse is six-foot-one and solidly built, and now he is blocking the path of the vice president of the United States.

Gore is six-feet-two and a weight lifter, but if it is still possible to have something beneath your dignity after running for president for 18 months, then wrestling one of your own aides to the ground is beneath his dignity.

Gore stops short and glares at Morehouse. Both of them can now hear the crowd noise from the plaza.

The words tumble from Morehouse's lips. He isn't even sure what he is saying, but it goes, "Sir you need to get to the hold for five minutes Daley has to talk to you it's going to be fine it's going to be fine." And he sticks out his left hand like a traffic cop, motioning Gore to the holding room. Morehouse cannot quite believe what he is doing. "It is the worst day of his life, and I am standing in front of him telling him what he has to do," Morehouse says later.

Gore is annoyed, Gore is irritated, Gore is...and then he figures, well, it's been that kind of day, and he shrugs and walks toward the holding room. It is 3:17 a.m., and he is thinking this had better be worth it.

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The worst day of Al Gore's political life begins at 12:46 a.m. on Election Day. A brilliant half-moon hangs over Miami as if it had been cut from yellow construction paper and pasted on a black satin sky. A warm breeze heavy with the iodine smell of the ocean blows over the sand dunes and ruffles the hair of Al Gore. He has gone without sleep for nearly three days now, but he cannot rest. "Be not weary in well-doing," he told the parishioners of the New Jerusalem Gospel Church in Flint, Michigan, a few hours earlier, quoting the Apostle Paul. "You shall reap if you faint not." Gore is fainting not. The couch in his cabin aboard Air Force Two pulls out into a bed, the only bed on the plane - he and Tipper, who are all hugs and kissy-faces even when the cameras are not around, sometimes climb into their jammies, pop out to say good night to the staff and retire to it - - and when the bed is not in use, staff members curl up on the carpeted floor around it and try to catch some sleep. But now nobody is sleeping. Gore knows Florida will make or break him. Two days ago, he gave an interview to WFLA, the NBC-affiliate in Tampa, and said, "The last formal campaign stop of Campaign 2000 - - after my opponent has gone to bed - - is in central Florida because I know that's where the future is going to be written." Gore cannot stay out of George W. Bush's face; he cannot resist comparing his own last "day" of campaigning - - a murderous 30-hour visit to 15 cities in 11 states without stopping - - to Bush's habit of turning in early with the pillow he always carries with him when he travels.

Gore is now totally wired. He seems to vibrate rather than speak. In Philadelphia two days ago, he went to the Morris Brown AME Church and told

the parishioners, “There’s an old African proverb that says, ‘When you pray, move your feet.’ Tuesday is the day to move your feet! You’ll be able to say that we had a race so close, that I, personally, made a difference.” As the crowd roars its approval, Gore’s long motorcade sits idling outside the church. Unbeknownst to the vice president, Eli Attie, his chief speechwriter, has crawled aboard a van in the rear to write Gore’s concession speech.

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At 33, Attie is already a master of disaster. After graduating from Harvard in 1989, he went to work for New York Mayor David Dinkins. In 1993, when Dinkins lost reelection to Rudy Giuliani after a bruising and divisive campaign, it was Attie who wrote the concession speech, considered by some to be the most moving speech of Dinkins’s career. “Mayors come and go,” Attie wrote, “but the life of the city must endure. Never forget that this city is about dignity; it is about decency.” Attie then went to work for House Speaker Richard Gephardt, and when the Democrats lost both houses of Congress in 1994, it was Attie who wrote the speech after which Gephardt turned over the speaker’s gavel to Republican Newt Gingrich. “We may not all agree with today’s changing of the guard,” Attie wrote. “We may not all like it, but we enact the people’s will with dignity and honor and pride. In that endeavor, Mr. Speaker, there can be no losers, and there can be no defeat.” No doubt about it, Attie knew how to do failure, although there were some in politics who liked to say, “Show me a good

loser and I will show you a loser.” When Gore’s father had lost his Senate seat after a tough and bitter race - - Al Jr., who was opposed to the war in Vietnam, had enlisted in the army in vain to soften the effect of his father’s anti-war stance - - in his concession speech he quoted the poet Edwin Markham: “Defeat may serve as well as victory to shake the soul and let the glory out.” The words had always stuck in young Al’s memory.

Now, Attie climbed into the empty van marked Staff One in the motorcade, sprawled out on the back seat and opened up his Dell laptop. Writing a concession speech was a ritual of his. “I wanted to have it in my pocket and not dwell on it,” he said later. “It’s a superstition. If you have it, you won’t need it.” After Gore was done speaking in the church, Attie headed for the airport and took a commercial flight to Nashville, while Gore continued flying around the country. At Gore headquarters, Attie would write a victory speech, and an array of odd variants. “Some people were discussing what our strategy would be if Gore won the electoral vote and lost the popular vote,” Attie said. “And then there was one scenario for winning the electoral and losing Tennessee. In the end, I had five different speeches written. It got very weird. I even had one he could deliver if the outcome was unknown. A bunch of people thought that was possible. So I drafted something that said this was a well-fought and a great campaign, but we don’t know the outcome.” Attie kept all of the speeches on the hard drive of his laptop. Victory was Option A, concession was Option B, and a “hung jury” as Attie put it, was Option C1. He decided to show none of them to Gore.

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Perhaps the first premonition that things might not go exactly as planned in Florida occurs when the Gore campaign assembles a huge crowd on South Beach in Miami for a midnight rally to kick off Election Day. There is not a lot a candidate can do on Election Day because the time, energy and money it takes to assemble crowds to hear his speeches could better be spent getting voters to the polls. At best, the candidate is irrelevant on the last day of his campaign. At worst, he can screw things up. Which is why Gore has scheduled this very early morning speech to be followed by a cancer forum at a treatment center in Tampa at 4 a.m. - - Gore insists that the last event be “substantive,” and his staff agrees because what else are you going to do with him at 4 a.m. anyway? - - after which Gore will go back to Tennessee to vote and that will be that. But for his last speech, his advance people want to show off their stuff, and they have put together a crowd they estimate at anywhere from 30,000 to 50,000. So figure about half that. The crowd has gathered and night has fallen when some guy from the fire marshal’s office appears and tells them they can’t have that many people assembled in one place. And the Gore advance people are like: “What, you’re kidding, right? The fucking sand is going to catch fire? The seaweed is going to burst into flame?” But in the end they move most of the people down the beach behind barriers and let only a few thousand stand in front of the stage. It is still an impressive crowd, and Gore is so glassy-eyed

anyway he is already seeing double and triple. Punchy from lack of sleep and a combination of adrenaline, caffeine and the Cepacols he keeps sucking to soothe his speech-ravaged throat, he is liable to do or say just about anything at this point. Which has Bill Daley, his campaign chairman, a little worried.

Early in the year, at a time when the media had decided that Florida was safely a Bush state - - because, after all, Bush's brother, Jeb, was the governor - - and that the campaign would really be decided in a battleground swath of states stretching from Pennsylvania to Missouri, Gore's strategists cooked up a plan to concede Georgia and North Carolina and instead concentrate on Florida. Gore personally approved the gamble. While some in the campaign considered it foolish, the payoff was considerable: 25 electoral votes out of the 270 needed to win. "It cost us a lot of money," Daley said later. "I mean, we went toe-to-toe and they outspent us two-to-one, but we spent a ton of money, maybe \$11 million, \$12 million just in Florida." Now, as the first minutes of the last day of his campaign tick by, Gore is happy with the strategy. The Bush campaign has tried to sucker him into spending a lot of time in California in the last weeks - - some polls have shown the race closing dramatically there - - but Gore refuses to take the bait, visiting California only to scoop up money in Hollywood and Silicon Valley. "Some people got weak and thought we had to go there to campaign, but we were comfortable with our strategy," Daley said.

Some weeks before Election Day, however, Daley hears why Bush has spent so much time in California (which Bush will lose by 12 percentage points to Gore) and so much time in New Jersey (which he will lose by 16 percentage

points). “There is some reason to think Bush has gone to New Jersey and California to pump up his popular vote, knowing he may lose the electoral vote,” Daley says later. “Bush has given word that if that happens, he will try to get Gore electors to switch and go with him. We are game-planning that now.” Nobody is taking this too seriously, however. This is just end-of-the-campaign, cover-all-the-bases stuff. A split between the popular and electoral vote is history-book stuff. And Bush’s campaign guru, Karl Rove, is publicly predicting that Bush will win the popular vote by 6 percentage points and will get 320 electoral votes. The Gore campaign is not too terrified at this prediction, however. Rove had predicted that Bush would win the New Hampshire primary; instead John McCain shellacked him by 19 percentage points. Gore will stick to his game plan. He will end his general campaign in the same place he ended his primary campaign: Florida. Some 36 hours before he hears the word “chad” for the first time, Gore already knows he will live or die in the Sunshine State.

Now the celebrities are assembled on stage in front of a sand dune on South Beach. Everything is black except the moon high up above and the brilliantly lit stage. The celebrities are standing on risers, and the risers are crowded with Stevie Wonder, Ben Affleck, Glenn Close, Robert De Niro and Jon Bon Jovi, among others. Gore’s motorcade pulls up on Ocean Avenue and he and his press corps wade through the sand, ignoring the boxes of multi-colored flip-flops that have been provided for their convenience. They are too tired to take off their shoes and socks anyway. Affleck, wearing an unbuttoned blue shirt over a white T-shirt, is speaking to the crowd. The klieg lights make

the sand in front of the stage glow an intense white. Behind the stage, you can see boats cruising slowly by on the ocean with colored lights in their rigging.

“George Bush is a nice guy, but I’ve got friends like that and I would never lend them my car, let alone vote for them!” Affleck says, reading off a notecard. A woman in gold slacks and a black tube top with a bare midriff and a diamond navel ring dances in the rear of the crowd to music only she can hear. “I’ve been in a working family and now I’m in another tax bracket and I’m here to tell Governor Bush, thanks, but we don’t need the money,” Affleck says. “George Bush is asleep right now and Al Gore hasn’t gotten started yet!” Affleck is probably correct: George Bush is just about to fall asleep in Austin. He has spent a 16-hour day visiting Iowa, Wisconsin, Arkansas and Tennessee. In Chattanooga, he tells an airport crowd, “My opponent vows to carry his home state. He may win Washington, D.C., but he’s not going to win Tennessee!” (And Gore will not, with cataclysmic results. The last person to win the presidency without winning his home state was Woodrow Wilson in 1916. The last presidential contender to lose his home state was George McGovern in 1972. Losing at home just doesn’t happen. Unless people at home can’t remember the last time they saw you.) Bush will get four to five hours of sleep, arise at 6:30 a.m. on Election Day, feed his two cats and his dog, make coffee for Laura and then call his parents and tell them not to worry. “I trust the people,” he tells a small group of reporters who have been assembled in the governor’s mansion to hear his words. “I trust their will. I trust their wisdom.”

Aides begin to usher the reporters out. "Don't take any of the silverware and don't knock over the chandelier," Bush calls after them.

When Gore takes the stage in Miami, he is gravel-throated, intense, almost passionate. He has always been a late-bloomer. In all his general election campaigns - - four for the House, two for the Senate, two for vice president - - he has gotten better as he goes along and has gotten good only at the end. In his very first race for Congress in 1976, he showed an energy level that was downright scary. "He was famous in the campaign for climbing telephone poles to shake hands with linemen," former U.S. Representative Jim Cooper (D-Tenn.) said. "He covered every possible base." Now Gore tells the crowd: "It's after midnight in Miami! The moon is over Miami! I am getting a very powerful message from your cheers, from your faces, from the feeling in your hearts: We are going to carry Florida." Gore is jacketless. He is wearing a white shirt with the sleeves rolled up and a red tie. "I want to fight for you and your families and your future and your communities, not the wealthy, not the well-connected. Are you with me?" The crowd shouts its approval. "I won't always be the most exciting politician. But I will work hard for you every day, and I'll never let you down. And I'll fight for you with all my heart, and we'll win these battles together."

All of which is fine, all of which is the standard stump speech. His aides no longer even hear the speech - - it is like living near the ocean and not hearing the waves - - but any break in the rhythm, any slight misstep, is instantly apparent to them. Which is why, when Gore begins to veer off, the staff

members standing along the fringes of the stage area beneath the palm trees stop talking amongst themselves and fall silent. “You know,” Gore says, “Robert Kennedy always closed his speeches by quoting George Bernard Shaw: ‘Some people see things as they are and ask why. I see things that never were and ask why not.’ ”

And Bill Daley thinks, “Whoa! Where did that come from?” When you get right down to it, Gore does not need to compare himself to Robert Kennedy in the closing hours of this campaign, not with his journalistic wolf pack still searching for a new lead for their stories. And, more importantly, you don’t need to bring up the Kennedys in Miami, because pretty soon that leads to the Bay of Pigs, and that leads to Fidel, and that leads to Elian Gonzalez and let’s just not go there, OK? “Stop this! Stop it! Stop it!” Daley tells an aide near the stage, and either Gore hears him or just finally wakes up, because he brings the speech to an abrupt end. Later, back aboard Air Force Two, Gore says to Daley, “I just don’t think I quite got there.” And Daley replies, “No, I don’t think you did. They loved you, but I don’t think you quite got there.” Which is just as well. Nobody is looking for spell-binding oratory this early in the morning. You just want to keep the crowds conscious enough to go and vote when the polls open.

It is nearly 4 a.m. by the time Gore gets to the cancer center and research institute in Tampa. About a half-dozen nurses are sitting around a table in the cafeteria, waiting for him. He arrives and says, “We had 25,000 people in Miami at midnight. I’m one of the millions of Americans who love

nurses.” Daley, hungry, turns away - - how much trouble can Gore get into with six nurses at 4 a.m.? He is not Bill Clinton, after all - - and wanders off to the food service area to see if he can get some fried eggs, which he can't. He then takes a piece of paper out of his pocket that has his hand-scrawled recipe for victory. A win in California and Florida and all the other states Daley can count on would bring Gore to 262 electoral votes. “We only need eight more from the little states,” he says. “We deny Bush Florida and I think we win.” Gore finally finishes with the nurses at 5:30 a.m. and stands up to shake their hands. One whispers to her friend, “I’ve had to pee since 3:30” and bolts. Gore gets back to Air Force Two, throws around a football with the staff on the tarmac for a few minutes and then they finally manage to load him on the plane.

When Gore lands in Nashville, a helicopter is waiting to take him and Tipper to Carthage to vote. Everybody else on the staff will go to Carthage by motorcade, but everyone with enough authority and half a brain decides to skip it. They don't need to see Al Gore vote. They figure he can manage it. So they head to the Loews Hotel in Nashville, Gore's headquarters hotel, which makes them all happy because it is modern and clean and has good beds. This is a real concern on the Gore campaign. Although Gore has stayed in a few good hotels during the course of his travels, he also has holed up in some real dumps. Although his rooms are usually nice no matter what the location, the staff and press have learned to check out their rooms carefully before settling in. At one hostelry in central Illinois, a reporter enters his room to find a cat sitting on the bed and then regrets shooing it out when he realizes it was

probably there to keep the mice at bay. Everyone now judges the hotels by whether they are “socks off” or “socks on” places, the latter being locations where the carpeting is so matted with crud that nobody wants to walk barefoot on it. The worst places are designated as “socks on in the shower” hotels. But the Loews is the lap of luxury, and some seek the arms of Morpheus, arms that have not embraced them in quite some time. David Morehouse, 40, a former director of strategic planning for drug policy under Clinton and a former deputy director of advance for the Clinton campaign, heads for his room and some sleep. He has slept as little as Gore and is as tired as he has ever been in his life. He gets to the ninth floor of Loews and falls into bed when he hears doors slamming up and down the corridor, and suddenly Secret Service agents are pounding on his door. He answers it, they walk in with a large dog, and Morehouse retreats beneath the covers while the dog checks for bombs under the bed.

Bill Daley showers at the Loews and looks longingly at the bed but does not get in it. He heads down to his office at campaign headquarters and immediately gets on the phone. The early news is not bad. There is a big turnout in Michigan, and John Sweeney, president of the AFL-CIO, tells Daley he feels good about Pennsylvania. Daley calls his field people in the major states. The mood is upbeat. The last poll the Gore campaign took was Friday, four days earlier, and pollster Stan Greenberg said it was dead even, which surprised nobody. Every morning it was the same story. Daley would call Greenberg at 5 o'clock and ask for the results of the previous night's tracking

poll, and every morning Greenberg would say, "Even." It drove Daley nuts. "Stan, please, find a new group of people to poll," Daley would beg. But no matter what Gore did, no matter what Bush did, the numbers would not budge. "All this flying around, all this campaigning," Daley says to me. "I am not sure it really does anything."

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At campaign headquarters, in the giant, white chamber known as the Boiler Room, Michael Whouley, 42, a senior strategist, sits on a couch watching four television sets and going over the data. A special, magnetic keypass is required to gain entry to the Boiler Room, which has a locked door at each end. At 12:44 p.m., Whouley gets a memo from Monica Dixon, a Gore strategist, titled "General Observations from the first round of exit polls." The news is about what Whouley expects it to be: Gore is losing among white Catholics and is even with independents. About 45 minutes later, Whouley starts getting some projections: Gore is up in Florida, but down in New Mexico, Wisconsin, Iowa, Missouri, Tennessee and Oregon. The chilling news, however, is that Gore is up only half a percentage point in Pennsylvania. Whouley cannot afford to worry only about Florida. If Gore wins Florida but loses Pennsylvania or Michigan, he will be dead meat. For weeks Whouley had been telling his people that the election is going to be very, very close - - the closest

since 1960, he predicts. “We are barely going to make it in the electoral college,” Whouley tells them. Which is why three weeks before Election Day, Whouley assembles legal advisers and tells them to start studying the laws governing recounts in a number of key states. He also says an electoral college deadlock is possible, and plans should be drawn up to protect Gore electors from poaching by the Bush campaign. Now, Whouley is getting exit-poll results, turnout results, and reports from precincts where Gore should be doing well. He has his own number-cruncher, who has his own magic software program: he can plug in the numbers and it will project the outcome. And nothing from the early numbers is changing Whouley’s mind: For Gore to win, he has to carry the trifecta of Florida, Pennsylvania and Michigan. Whouley even has buttons made up for the Boiler Room gang showing a gray map of the United States with those three states in blue and the words: “Gore/Lieberman. Winning The Trifecta. Nov. 7, 2000.” The buttons are never handed out.

But Whouley is in a unique position on Election Day. Unlike others who have to sit around helplessly as they watch the numbers come in, Whouley can affect the numbers. Off to the side of the Boiler Room is an old supply closet into which eight desks have been crammed. Whouley goes there to make his phone calls and, to use his term, “move resources.” Pennsylvania looks weak? Whouley can direct one of his phone banks to start telephoning voters in Pennsylvania. He can cause a million calls to go out, he figures. He can also pick up a phone, which he now does, find Jesse Jackson in Racine, Wisconsin, and ask him to get on a plane and go to Philadelphia to increase

black turnout. Jackson does this without hesitation, even though he had been in Miami for the midnight rally, has been campaigning in Wisconsin and is as seriously sleep-deprived as everyone else in the Gore campaign. ("The stakes were high, the lines were clear, the votes were essential," Jackson tells me later. "I have gone to 250 cities in the course of the campaign. I have never traveled this many miles before, frankly.")

Whouley has 70 surrogates he can call upon - - including Tipper, Hadassah Lieberman, the three Gore daughters and Clinton Cabinet secretaries - - to start doing live TV and radio shows at a moment's notice. Whouley has something else, too: bodies. While Republicans have more money than Democrats, the Republicans cannot match the army of people Whouley has to bang on doors. Whouley has always been a door-banger, a field-operation, street-level guy. Most young people going into political work today want to do "message" and "media strategy" and make TV commercials. Whouley does not disdain that part of modern politics, he just feels comfortable around people who also know how to get signatures on a petition or a voter to a polling place. He smokes, he drinks, and he uses bad language in a Boston Irish accent so thick you could skate on it in the wintertime. And today he is using it to be sure the bodies are out there for Al Gore: The NAACP is supplying bodies, mayors are lending bodies from their political organizations to Gore, and the AFL-CIO has maybe 100,000 people in targeted states all doing what is called "The Pull," what Jesse Jackson calls "getting souls to the polls," getting people to vote. Three weeks before Election Day, Whouley launches

what he calls his “No Excuses Tour” of targeted states. “Tell us what you need to win,” he says to the state operations. “You need bodies to get out the vote? You need a mailing to go out? You need Bill Clinton to tape a radio interview for a black station?” Virtually no request is denied. “If it sounded rational, we found the money for it,” Whouley says. Whouley also has two others things the Republicans don’t have: A candidate who will work himself past the point of exhaustion on Election Day and a president of the United States. Like many Gore operatives, Whouley has worked for Clinton. He was a key factor in Clinton’s second-place finish in New Hampshire in the 1992 primary, which was widely viewed as a great Clinton victory, considering the Gennifer Flowers scandal and draft-dodging accusations that became public there. And it is Clinton who calls Whouley in the supply closet at noon on Election Day. Whouley is not surprised. Clinton loves politics, Clinton breathes politics, and he is feeling a little left out of things. He is up in New York anticipating a victory for Hillary in her Senate race (a victory helped by the big turnout of Democrats for Gore), and now Clinton wants to feel he is still part of the action.

“What are the exits?” Clinton asks. “Is there anything I can do to help?”

Whouley is not sure if Clinton is just being polite, but he says, “Sir, I could use you.” Whouley is in his “balls-to-the-walls” mode and he would ask anything of anybody. In Colorado, a Gore organizer by the name of Mike Stratton has just carried a woman in his arms through a snowstorm to a polling place. That is the kind of behavior Whouley expects from people.

So Whouley mentions to Clinton there are some talk-radio shows that he could help with and a gospel station in Little Rock that would love to get him on the air. Clinton eagerly agrees.

About 6 p.m., Clinton calls back. "What do you think?" he asks Whouley.

Whouley doesn't know what to think. By now he is in what he calls "a well-organized but desperate frenzy." He is phoning around the country asking his people if they need more phone calls to go out, if they need a surrogate on radio or if they want Gore to call a mayor for them.

Gore calls him twice and asks the same thing as Clinton: "What do you think?"

Some states are breaking their way, Whouley tells him, but something strange is happening in Florida. It is so strange that the Gore campaign in Florida has put out a press release that says: "In Palm Beach County, a number of voters have experienced a problem with confusion over the arrows pointing at the Presidential candidates on the ballot. When ballots are placed in the slide for voting, Al Gore and Joe Lieberman are the second names on the ballot, but the third hole to punch." The release does not use the term "butterfly ballot." Hardly anyone has ever heard that term before. Many people soon will.

Later in the day, an aide pops her head into the supply closet to say, "The Big Guy is trying to get you," meaning Gore is on the phone.

"I'll have to call him back," Whouley says. "I'm looking at the Florida numbers."

But Whouley never does find the time to call Gore back. Florida is about to suffer from a massive episode of electile dysfunction.

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