

GASLIT
EPISODE 1 - "WILLPOWER"

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Based on the Slate podcast "Slow Burn"

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INT. BLACK VOID - UNKNOWN

Candlelight flickers across the mustache of G. GORDON LIDDY (43, has probably killed for sport). He stares at us with the unblinking intensity of a shark just before the fatal bite.

LIDDY

Let me be clear. To truly grasp man's struggle for power, we must begin in the prehistoric sea. That dark and merciless void. It was eons before the strongest among us slithered out of the muck to discover that the Lessons of Darkness would continue on land. Futility. Toil. The mass of men spend their days plowing stones, only to be forgotten before they expire. But there are a chosen few who know that true immortality rests in the power of a pure and mighty will. For history isn't written by the feeble masses; the pissants, the commies, the queers and the women. It is written and rewritten by soldiers carrying the banner of kings. That is what it means to be strong. That is what it means to be American. That is what it means... to be Nixon.

REVEAL that he's holding his hand in a candle flame. He doesn't break our gaze as his skin CRACKLES and POPS.

LOCAL NEWS ANCHOR (V.O.)

Last weekend, Washington's elite emerged for the Rose Garden wedding of the First Daughter...

CLOSE ON A TV SCREEN

LOCAL NEWS FOOTAGE of a lavish White House wedding plays.

LOCAL NEWS ANCHOR (V.O.)

But in a galaxy of stars, it was hard to outshine the most outspoken woman in Washington: Martha Beall Mitchell, wife of Nixon campaign chair John Mitchell.

The news CUTS TO Footage of the inimitable MARTHA MITCHELL (52), in an ostentatious dress and bouffant hairdo.

REPORTER (ON TV)
Mrs. Mitchell, what do you say to those who are critical of such a spectacle when the nation is emerging from a recession?

MARTHA (ON TV)
Don't be ridiculous, sweetie. We mean to inspire and delight. My dress alone is a shining tribute to our American free market system...

Slowly PULL OUT TO REVEAL that the TV is playing in a--

INT. CRAMPED BEDROOM - MORNING

SHAUNICE (20's), watches TV naked in bed, smoking a joint.

MARTHA (ON TV)
Besides, would y'all rather the poor girl get married at the YMCA? You gotta share the shower there, y'know...

SHAUNICE
 (laughing)
 I don't care what anybody says, I dig on this white lady.
 (aside)
 Hey, pretty boy. Between Pat Nixon and Martha Mitchell, who would you rather go with?

Reveal JOHN DEAN (32, blonde, very pretty indeed) fussing with a wall-mounted steam press in his briefs.

DEAN
 Huh?

SHAUNICE
 Who would you rather take to bed? Martha or Pat?

DEAN
 Is instant death an option?

SHAUNICE
 Instant death is not an option.

DEAN
 Then whichever one of them can fix this stupid thing.

She rolls over and punches the steamer into action.

SHAUNICE

Call me Martha, sugar. Now why don't you tell your boss that lunch is gonna go a little *long* today?
(rubbing his crotch)
We could do the thing again. No charge.

DEAN

I wish I could. But my boss isn't the type who understands the finer points of the long lunch.

SHAUNICE

Oh yeah? Who you work for?

DEAN

That's unfortunately on a need-to-know basis.

Dean throws a furtive glance toward the TV, where footage of Nixon plays. Shaunice's eyes go wide.

SHAUNICE

Hold up. You work for Nixon?

DEAN

I didn't say that.

SHAUNICE

You do! I knew you was big time the moment you came in. I said to my girl, "*That one there, he big-time plus.*"

DEAN

I bet you probably hate me now, huh?

SHAUNICE

Why would I hate you? Nixon's no worse than the rest of 'em.

DEAN

(lighting up)
Gosh. Y'know, that's so refreshing to hear. That's exactly what I keep telling people--

SHAUNICE

(doesn't care)
So, how close are you to him?

DEAN

Huh?

SHAUNICE

To the President. How close are the two of you?

DEAN

Well, um, I guess you could say we're fairly familiar.

SHAUNICE

Ooh. *Familiar*. That's sexy. And who's your direct report?

DEAN

I'm sorry?

SHAUNICE

Who do you report to in the White House? Haldeman? Ehrlichman? Colson? Stans? Romney? Young? Schultz? Hodgson? Richardson?

Dean sits there, stunned.

DEAN

Wow. You sure know a lot of people.

SHAUNICE

Networking's an investment in myself.

(taking the joint back)

At least you're at the Oval. You could be with Kissinger and Scowcroft at State, or those genetically impaired turkeys over at CREEP. That's the Committee to Re-elect the President--

DEAN

I know what CREEP stands for.

(then)

I actually, um, work under the Campaign Chair. John Mitchell.

SHAUNICE

Ooh, Johnny cheeks! Tell him Shaunice says hey.

DEAN

You're kidding. You know John Mitchell?

SHAUNICE

I ain't said that. But I ain't not said it either.

(throwing it away)

Sure hope he's keeping up with all the spring cleaning over there.

DEAN

Spring cleaning? As in... he's sacking people?

SHAUNICE

That's really on a need-to-know basis. Let's just say he ain't feather dusting.

(taking a cool drag)

But don't worry, you'll be fine. You and Nixon are *familiar*. Right?

A little BEEPING SOUND goes off, startling Dean. He takes his slacks out of the steamer, wincing at the heat.

DEAN

I gotta go.

EXT. BROWNSTONE - MORNING

CREDITS ROLL as Dean bursts out the door of a nondescript DC brothel and hops into a PORSCHE parked across the street. He fixes his tie in the mirror and checks his hair.

DEAN

They cannot sack you. You are wanted. You are essential. *You cannot be sacked.*

EXT. WASHINGTON DC - VARIOUS

The Porsche rockets across town, giving us a taste of 1972 Washington DC, and boy does it taste like shit: Junkies huddle over subway grates. A bum pops a squat in the middle of a sidewalk clutching a wad of crumpled *Washington Post* newspapers. CONTINUE TO--

INT. DEAN'S OFFICE - MOMENTS LATER

Dean's semi-shitty office building, where he steps off the elevator and is swamped by his SECRETARY and INTERNS.

DEAN'S SECRETARY

Mr. Dean. Long lunch today?

DEAN

ERA protest on tenth. Any messages?

The Secretary hands him a stack of missed call receipts.

DEAN'S SECRETARY

Howard from Treasury asked if you've had a chance to review those briefs. A woman named Maureen called to confirm dinner Friday. Oh, and Mitchell wants you to stop by his office when you get a chance-

DEAN

John Mitchell? Did he say what for?

DEAN'S SECRETARY

I didn't ask. Is something wrong?

Dean goes to a mirror and fixes his tie, primps himself.

DEAN

It's ok. I'm sure it's nothing. I'm going to be fine. We're all going to be fine.

The Interns and his Secretary look at him, confused.

MITCHELL (PRE-LAP)

Jesus foot-fucking Christ. What a disaster...

INT. MITCHELL'S OFFICE

JOHN MITCHELL (57, pissed) thumbs through a pile of phone bills. Campaign Manager JEB MAGRUDER (40's, beta) looks on.

MITCHELL

A three hundred dollar phone call? Who in the hell's she talking to in Chicago at two AM?

MAGRUDER

Lenny Aronson at *The Trib*? That'd be my guess. Known subversive. Leftist.

MITCHELL

Cocksucker.

MAGRUDER

Not sure about that, sir. But I can pull his file if you'd like.

MITCHELL

I meant it more as a general-- Fuck
it, pull his cocksucking file.

(into intercom)

Betty, any luck getting my wife on
the phone?

MITCHELL'S SECRETARY (ON THE INTERCOM)

*She isn't answering. Sir, I have
John Dean here for you--*

MITCHELL (INTO THE INTERCOM)

Oh, yes. Send the fucker in.

Mitchell gestures to the door. Magruder opens it.

MITCHELL (CONT'D)

Dean, you flaxen-haired
sonuvabitch. How you doing, son?

DEAN

Good. My, uh, secretary said you
wanted to see me about something?

MITCHELL

Yes, yes. Take a seat. Jeb?

MAGRUDER

As you know, John, we've been
gearing up for what promises to be
a grueling re-election campaign...

DEAN

Really? Nixon's got twelve points
on McGovern. How grueling could it
be?

Dean chuckles. They look at him straight-faced.

MITCHELL

Is that some kind of joke? I think
he's making a joke.

MAGRUDER

This is no laughing matter, Dean.

DEAN

Of course. I'm sorry. Go on.

MAGRUDER

As such, we are currently re-
evaluating select personnel.

MITCHELL

Lemme ask you a question. Where do you see yourself in a year?

DEAN

(shifting uncomfortably)

Well, um, let me start by saying I've valued the opportunity to help implement the President's vision. Any role which would facilitate that relationship going forward would be sufficient, and I'd urge you to consider my loyalty when considering my continued service.

A beat.

MITCHELL

The fuck's that supposed to mean?

MAGRUDER

I believe he thinks you are going to sack him, sir.

MITCHELL

Why the Christ would I do that? We're headed into an election.

DEAN

So... I'm not being fired?

MITCHELL

Shit, no. You're being promoted.

DEAN

Promoted?

MAGRUDER

Don't repeat people, Dean. Ugly habit.

MITCHELL

I assume you are aware of the intelligence unit that was set up in the White House after this whole Pentagon Papers fiasco.

DEAN

You mean the Plumbers?

MAGRUDER

Bingo was his name-o.

MITCHELL

This CIA reject Howard Hunt runs the whole operation over there. They've graduated from rooting out leaks to rat-fucking the President's Democratic opposition.

MAGRUDER

There's a desire to enact a similar operation on our side of things.

DEAN

You want to set up an espionage unit... inside the Committee to Re-elect?

MITCHELL

That's the idea.

DEAN

But why would we risk that kind of legal exposure? The President's re-election is practically assured.

MITCHELL

It's not our job to ask why, Dean. If men like us asked why, we wouldn't have the pyramids. We were put here to *execute*. For the good of the republic.

DEAN

But don't you think it's also our job to advise the President openly and honestly?

Mitchell throws a look to Magruder and gets up. Pours two glasses of Scotch.

MITCHELL

Know what I told Jeb when I hired you away from DOJ? Tell 'im, Jeb.

MAGRUDER

You said, "That John Dean is a fucking snake."

MITCHELL

That's right. It was a compliment. Snakes are smart. Flexible. Subtle.

MAGRUDER

They breathe through their tongues.

MITCHELL

These liberal tryhards would like nothing more than to ass-rape our democracy into a Russian satellite state. Besides, you think they haven't tried dirty tricks of their own? Hell, if you believe that one, I know about 40,000 dead Kennedy voters who'd like to have a word with you.

MAGRUDER

(laughing)
In graveyards.

DEAN

I hear that, sir. And I don't want to speak out of line here -- but shouldn't we at least try and hold ourselves to a higher code of behavior rather than, um -- and again, I don't mean this to sound insubordinate -- the lowest possible standard we can imagine?

Silence as Magruder exchanges looks with Mitchell, who sighs.

MITCHELL

Welp. Can't blame us for trying. I'm sure the President'll understand.

DEAN

The President?

MITCHELL

Yep. Chief of Staff Haldeman told me Dick asked for you himself.

DEAN

Wait. You're saying -- Nixon asked for me? Personally?

MAGRUDER

To be clear, the President would never involve himself in any illegal activity. But yes.

MITCHELL

(pressing the intercom)
Betty, could you get Bob Haldeman on the phone?

Mitchell goes to pick up the phone, when Dean pushes down the receiver, stops him.

DEAN

This position... how long would it last?

MITCHELL

Just through the election.

DEAN

And after?

MITCHELL

We don't need good boys right now, Dean. We need snakes. The only question is, how far are you willing to push yourself for Dick Nixon?

Dean looks at them both. Then picks up the Scotch, downs it. Mitchell smiles wide, when the intercom buzzes again.

MITCHELL (INTO THE INTERCOM) (CONT'D)

It's ok, Betty. Tell Haldeman it was a false alarm.

MITCHELL'S SECRETARY (ON THE INTERCOM)

It's not Haldeman, sir. I've got your wife on line two.

MITCHELL

Oh for the love of shit-- Get out. Get the fuck out of my office. Now!

He waves Jeb and Dean out the door and picks up the phone.

MITCHELL (INTO PHONE) (CONT'D)

Marshmallow? Are you there?

INT. PENTHOUSE APARTMENT - SPLIT SCREEN

Martha Mitchell, in curlers, paces around the Mitchell's TWO-STORY PENTHOUSE, which is in the middle of a huge renovation. WORKERS bob and weave under her extra-long phone cord.

MARTHA (INTO PHONE)

As God as my witness, John, this is the last straw. THE LAST STRAW.

MITCHELL (INTO PHONE)

Slow down, bunny. What's going on?

MARTHA (INTO PHONE)
 It's Pat Nixon. That scheming harpy's rounded up some sluts from West Virginia to sing songs of the Old Republic on Friday. Friday, John! The night of my fundraiser to benefit her husband's campaign!

MITCHELL (INTO PHONE)
 I'm sure it's just a mistake.

MARTHA (INTO PHONE)
 A mistake? The Bay of Pigs was a mistake. This is an encroachment.

INT. OFFICE HALLWAY - SIMULTANEOUS

Dean presses the button for the elevator, when--

MAGRUDER
 Dean, wait a sec. I almost forgot.

Magruder runs up and hands him a business card.

MAGRUDER (CONT'D)
 It's the number of a trusted contact, former FBI. Someone who can get his hands dirty so you don't have to.

DEAN
 Thanks.

MAGRUDER
 Hey, uh, listen, you ever need anything, my door's always open.
 (leaning in, whispering)
 Between you and me, Mitchell's spread a little thin. *You know, with the wife.*

DEAN
 Right. Good to know.

MAGRUDER
 Don't get me wrong, I have absolute faith in the guy. And I'm loyal as the day is long. But -- *the wife. Not a good situation.* Especially with all the vultures circling around these parts. You know?

He gives Dean a knowing look.

INT. PENTHOUSE - SIMULTANEOUS

Martha lights a Capri and eyes her buttoned-up Security Man, JAMES MCCORD (43), patting down workers by the door.

MARTHA (INTO PHONE)

I'm telling you, Pat's got eyes everywhere. She's already mobilized the Cabinet wives against me. She's like Himmler in taffeta.

MITCHELL (INTO PHONE)

She's just trying to unnerve you, dear. Remember, if you boil over, you let her win.

MARTHA

Who's boiling over? I'm an ambrosia salad. I'm gonna throw such a perfect party, Pat Nixon's gonna eat her words. Right after I make her eat her wig.

MITCHELL

Very poetic. Now, about the phone bill--

MARTHA

What about it?

MITCHELL

I thought we agreed, no more talking to reporters--

MARTHA (INTO PHONE)

Lenny's my friend. It's not like anyone else around here is making conversation.

(looks to McCord, hushed)

Speaking of which, I don't like this new bodyguard one bit...

MITCHELL (INTO PHONE)

Darling. Quit changing the subject.

MARTHA (INTO PHONE)

Fine. You want to lock me in a tower? You want me to close myself off to my public? If silence is what you desire, then you shall have it.

MITCHELL (INTO PHONE)

Wonderful. Thank you.

MARTHA (INTO PHONE)
Just this one last piece and that's
it...

MITCHELL (INTO PHONE)
Piece? What piece?

MARTHA (INTO PHONE)
It's nothing. A girl from *Ladies
Home Journal* is coming over to
discuss the renovation. I swear, if
you would just embrace the tiniest
bit of celebrity--

MITCHELL (INTO PHONE)
Martha, no. I forbid it.

She slides the glass door open.

MARTHA (INTO PHONE)
What's that, pumpkin? There's noise
on the line. You're breaking up.

MITCHELL (INTO PHONE)
Martha. Are you taking the phone on
the balcony again? Don't you take
that phone on the balcony--

MARTHA (INTO PHONE)
I can't hear you. Anyway, I think I
hear the door... Wish me luck, I'm
off to face the firing squad!

She leaves the phone on a chair and retreats back inside.

MITCHELL (INTO PHONE)
Martha?!

INT. LIDDY'S STUDY - AFTERNOON

CLOSE ON a TINY REVOLUTIONARY WAR SOLDIER spearing a REDCOAT
with his BAYONET. A BANDAGED HAND reaches in and paints a
trickle of blood on the Redcoat's mouth.

REVEAL Gordon Liddy, surrounded by a recreation of Bunker
Hill. The study's phone RINGS. He picks it up.

LIDDY (INTO PHONE)
Go for Liddy.

INT. DEAN'S OFFICE - SPLIT SCREEN

DEAN (INTO PHONE)
Mr. Liddy. Hello. This is John
Dean, junior counsel to the
President.

LIDDY
Dean! I've been expecting your
call. How goes it over there?

DEAN
Never a dull moment. Listen, I know
you've been briefed on our
operation, but I wanted to--

LIDDY (INTO PHONE)
Whoa, whoa. Let me stop you right
there, amigo. You shouldn't discuss
sensitive material over an
unsecured line.

DEAN
Of course. I wasn't going to--

LIDDY
Also, I hope you don't mind, but I
looked in on you a little bit...

Liddy thumbs through a FILE FOLDER on his desk.

LIDDY (INTO PHONE) (CONT'D)
I take it you were fired from your
job at Welch & Morgan for unethical
conduct. Correct?

DEAN (INTO PHONE)
That was years ago--

LIDDY (INTO PHONE)
You also overstated your earnings
at that time. Perhaps to impress
your wife, or her father, Senator
Hennings?

DEAN (INTO PHONE)
Ex-wife. What's your point?

LIDDY (INTO PHONE)
Only that I like to have absolute
clarity about the people I'm
working with before I take a job.

DEAN (INTO PHONE)

Under.

LIDDY (INTO PHONE)

Excuse me?

DEAN (INTO PHONE)

You'll be working under me. If I decide to hire you.

(then)

Now, I've had a long day, so you'll have to forgive me if I cut to the chase. You pulled my file? So what. I can put in a call to Angelo Lano over at the Bureau right now and have him send me everything they have on you. Every disciplinary report, every indictable offense, every time you jerked off in a sock and threw it in with the laundry.

LIDDY (INTO PHONE)

Sir, I don't do that to socks.

DEAN (INTO PHONE)

Point being that if you want to call my reputation into question, I can answer that call. But you might not like what I have to say.

Silence on the other end. Then Liddy BURSTS INTO LAUGHTER.

LIDDY (INTO PHONE)

Goddammit, Dean. I heard you were smart, but nobody told me you were a sonuvabitch! Wow! I love it.

(then)

Tell ya what, how 'bout I pop in next week and present a few ideas to the team?

DEAN (INTO PHONE)

Well. I don't know if we need a formal pitch that quickly.

LIDDY (INTO PHONE)

Come on, when you get my engine going, there's no stopping me. I'm a brutal machine, compadre.

DEAN

I mean, if you really think you can have something ready--

LIDDY

Sure, I can. And listen, sorry about razzing you up. Just doing my due diligence...

DEAN (INTO PHONE)

Of course. I should have expected as much from a fellow lawyer.

LIDDY (INTO PHONE)

That reminds me. How many hamburger patties do you buy for a law school barbecue? None. The fuckers'll eat each other alive.

(laughing riotously)

See you next week. Buh-bye, now.

Dean chuckles and hangs up, a little rattled. But relieved.

INT. LIDDY'S STUDY - SIMULTANEOUS

Liddy nods, smiling to himself.

LIDDY

Nice guy.

LIDDY'S WIFE (O.S.)

Gordon! Casserole's ready!

He closes his files and exits the study. Over his desk, we see a FRAMED PORTRAIT OF ADOLF HITLER.

INT. PENTHOUSE APARTMENT - SITTING ROOM - AFTERNOON

A GIANT PORTRAIT OF JOHN MITCHELL hangs over the couch. Flashbulbs light up the room as Martha, in a dress and pearls, poses for a *Ladies Home Journal* PHOTOGRAPHER.

PHOTOGRAPHER

Give me the cover, Martha. Love it. You're filling me up! I'm full!

The MAID ferries Martha a cup of tea. Reveal WINZOLA "WINNIE" MCLENDON (mid-30's), a too-good-for-this-crap *Ladies Home Journal* reporter, sitting across from her.

MARTHA

Lupè dear. Would you get Ms. McLendon a cup please, *por favor*?

WINNIE MCLENDON

Oh, no thank you. I'm alright.

MARTHA

Don't be silly. And those cookies,
Lupè! The tiny ones.

(to Winnie)

Where were we? Have I shown you my
vases yet? They're Chinese.

WINNIE MCLENDON

I was just asking if there's any
truth to the talk that your ease
with the press has soured your
relationship with the President.

MARTHA

A vicious rumor. I was the one who
introduced him to my husband--

WINNIE MCLENDON

Still, isn't there concern that
you're overshadowing Nixon a bit?

MARTHA

My word, you make me sound like an
old oak tree! Would you go asking
Kissinger such a question?

WINNIE MCLENDON

Henry Kissinger doesn't have a 76
percent name recognition among
American families.

MARTHA

Now you're making me blush.

PHOTOGRAPHER

Basta! Let's get the vases in the
frame. And the portrait!

MARTHA

Wouldn't be the first time I've had
to look glamorous under my husband.

The Photographer GIGGLES. An annoyed Winnie gets more firm.

WINNIE MCLENDON

Mrs. Mitchell, two months ago you
came out against the Vietnam war, a
war which your husband's
administration has been escalating
since day one. I'm sorry if you
expected a puff piece about your
vases, but the least you could do
is quit preening for five minutes
and answer my question.

Awkward silence. Lupè arrives with a tray of cookies. Realizing she's gotten a little heated, Winnie takes one.

MARTHA

Winnie, may I call you Winnie? You want to know *why* I made those comments against the war? It wasn't for a cheap headline. It was because my own boy is fighting in that godforsaken jungle. Covered in mud and leeches, surrounded by men who want to take his life. Do you have any idea what that's like? Constantly worried that he's not going to live to see another day?

She looks at Winnie, who tries to stay professional but wavers for just a moment. Martha cocks her head.

MARTHA (CONT'D)

I see.

(then)

Who is it for you?

WINNIE MCLENDON

My little brother. He's, um...

She sets her jaw, looking away. Martha puts her hand on hers.

MARTHA

It's all right, dear. We are empathetic creatures. Some people see that as weakness and would like nothing more than to silence us. But I made the decision long ago that I'm gonna say what I feel when I feel it. If that doesn't conform to the President's message, then so be it. And if it gets me banned from Air Force One, then I'll gladly fly commercial. But I'm not in the business of bottling myself up. Never have been.

A moment of silence. Then--

WINNIE MCLENDON

You were banned from Air Force One?

Martha smiles.

MARTHA

Oh, you're good. I need to have you over more often.

Their laughter is interrupted by the FRONT DOOR OPENING.

MITCHELL (O.S.)
Martha. Where are you?!

Martha motions for Winnie to hide her pad.

MARTHA
 We're in the sitting room, cupcake!

Mitchell enters. Sees the Photographer. The lights. Groans.

MARTHA (CONT'D)
 This is Winnie, the girl from the
 ladies' magazine--

MITCHELL
 McCord! Where's McCord?
 (McCord enters)
 Would you kindly escort these
 people the fuck out of my home?

McCord dutifully hustles Winnie and the Photographer out.

MARTHA
Honey. Have you gone absolutely
 insane?

MITCHELL
 I told you no more reporters.

MARTHA
 You can't stop me from telling my
 story. I refuse to live in bondage!

Martha waves goodbye as McCord slams the door on Winnie.

MARTHA (CONT'D)
 How dare you! I moved my fundraiser
 for you. The catering. The flowers.
 All because you don't have the
 plums to stand up to your boss's
 wife.

MITCHELL
 At least Pat Nixon knows how to
 support her husband.

MARTHA
 Ha! That's not what I've heard.

MITCHELL
 The hell's *that* supposed to mean?

MARTHA

Let's just say that if she stopped talking behind my back, she might find a more fruitful use for that mouth of hers.

MITCHELL

Are you seriously implying that the First Lady doesn't blow her husband enough?

MARTHA

What?! No. You're disgusting.

(beat)

She wouldn't know where to start.

Mitchell knows that tone. He betrays the barest smile. Martha comes flouncing over.

MARTHA (CONT'D)

But I do, don't I? Your baby knows right where to start.

MITCHELL

Stop. I'm really angry this time.

MARTHA

I'm sorry, gummy bear. What can I do to make it better?

She rubs against him and pouts. Mitchell turns to McCord.

MITCHELL

That's, um, good for today, son.
You can stand down now.

McCord nods and heads for the door as Mitchell gives in, wrapping his arms around Martha's waist.

MITCHELL (CONT'D)

You can't talk your way out of this one. You've got to be punished.

Martha yelps as Mitchell slides off his belt and they both tumble onto the couch.

INT. OFFICE WAITING ROOM - MORNING

A ruby red sun rises over the Capitol. Liddy taps his foot anxiously, a giant ART PORTFOLIO leaning on the wall beside him. Dean exits his office.

DEAN

Sorry to make you wait, Gordon.
Shall we walk?

INT. EXECUTIVE OFFICE BUILDING - VARIOUS

Liddy and Dean ride an elevator with a RANDOM OFFICE DRONE.

DEAN

These pitches always wind me up.
You nervous?

LIDDY

Oh, I don't experience human
neurosis. I actually feed off these
moments. There's a wild and manic
energy to them, an animal energy...

The Office Drone subtly edges away. Dean clocks the bandage
around Liddy's hand.

DEAN

Ouch. What happened there?

LIDDY

I was sourcing potential recruits
for our operation. Cubans. I needed
to show them I was impervious to
pain, what the Spanish call *macho*.
So I placed my hand in the short
flame of a candle and held it there
until the room smelled of roasting
meat. Only then were they willing
to call me their *jefe*.

Dean chuckles, thinking it's a joke, but Liddy is stonefaced.
DING! The elevator opens and the Office Drone flees.

LIDDY (CONT'D)

(clapping Dean's shoulder)
You can call me Ahab, brother.
'Cause I'm about to catch us the
big fish.

Dean's face washes over with a look of quiet horror.

INT. CONFERENCE ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Mitchell folds his hands over his big belly, watching Liddy
fumble with some OVERSIZED CARDS on an EASEL.

LIDDY

Greetings, gentlemen. As you know, our President faces a daunting campaign season. For that reason, I've devised a plan for covert operations the likes of which our electoral system has never seen. I present you, Operation Gemstone.

Dean throws a nervous glance to Mitchell and Magruder.

LIDDY (CONT'D)

The Gemstone. Brilliant, sparkling. Impervious. I have devised an integrated strategy meant to function seamlessly in enemy *territoire*. Phase one...

He removes a card to reveal the words OPERATION QUARTZ.

LIDDY (CONT'D)

Operation Quartz. A covert manipulation of--

MAGRUDER

That's a mineral.

LIDDY

Excuse me?

MAGRUDER

Quartz is a mineral, not a gemstone. For future reference.

Liddy tries to swallow his annoyance. Dean coughs.

LIDDY

Like I was saying-- Operation Quartz. A covert manipulation of the Democrats' outer circle. We will round up a number of their fringe activist leaders and export them to black sites in Mexico.

MITCHELL

Export? As in... *kidnap*?

LIDDY

'Forced rendition' is the preferred term. They will be held in captivity until the election's end. Each capture will slice a viper from Medusa's crown. Their leaderless ranks will wither away.

Dean shrinks in his seat as Liddy turns another card.

LIDDY (CONT'D)

Next up, Operation Ruby. The blood red gem of a duplicitous woman. The Democrats are weak. Their women, cold. We will hire ten escorts, each trained in the erotic arts. They will perform their duty aboard two yachts outfitted with cutting edge surveillance equipment--

MAGRUDER

You want to... film Democratic officials with whores?

LIDDY

Call it a passion play for opposition leverage.

MITCHELL

Just out of curiosity. How many gemstones are we dealing with here?

LIDDY

Seven.

MITCHELL

(stunned)

Seven.

Liddy flips to the next card, OPERATION SAPPHIRE.

INT. CONFERENCE ROOM - LATER

PAN AROUND the conference room to reveal a sweaty Mitchell, nodding off in his chair. Dean and Magruder look on, stunned, as Liddy wraps up his pitch.

LIDDY

...*ipso facto*, by sabotaging the air conditioner system at the Democratic National Convention, we will leave the attendees at the mercy of the one hundred degree Florida heat. Picture if you will, a stadium full of smug liberals, sweating like race horses, on national television.

Magruder slides a note card to Dean that simply reads 'WHAT.'

LIDDY (CONT'D)

In conclusion, gentlemen, for only a million dollars, we can secure a second Nixon term. And a brighter future for our precious nation.

MAGRUDER

A million? But that's five hundred thousand over budget.

LIDDY

With all due respect, I've brought you vision. Vision costs money.

MAGRUDER

With all due respect, you've brought us a fucking charm bracelet-

MITCHELL

Enough. Thanks, Gordon. You've gone above and beyond. Truly.

Liddy throws a shit-eating grin to Magruder. Dean puts his face in his hands.

INT. LIMO - NIGHT

An angry Mitchell rides in a limo with Martha.

MITCHELL

I swear to God, Martha, you've never seen such an abortion. It was like this Liddy dullard was taking an actual shit on my conference room table. I had to send the simple bastard back to square one.

As the limo turns into the White House drive, Martha stares despondently out the window.

MITCHELL (CONT'D)

And Dean, that dick-kissing numb nuts. Guy's like a goddamn pilot fish...

MARTHA

A what?

MITCHELL

Little fish that follow the sharks around, picking food out of their teeth. He's just looking to land the biggest shark he can find.

MARTHA

I'm sorry, honey. It all sounds very stressful.

MITCHELL

As if that isn't enough, I got Dick calling me because Kissinger's up his ass again. I'm gonna need farmer's gloves to dig him outta there. Up to the shoulder, you know.

(shaking his head)

To think -- before I got into politics, I actually thought they were playing chess out here. Turns out they're just playing high card with their dicks out. I should've stayed in New York. I'd have made partner by now...

MARTHA

We'd still have our house in Rye.

MITCHELL

I'd probably be out there mowing the lawn right now.

MARTHA

Twice a week like a madman.

(smiling warmly)

Do you remember that cottage we used to rent down by the water in Montauk? We'd drink a whole bottle of blackberry wine and watch the moon rise over the waves...

MITCHELL

Those were some great nights.

MARTHA

(turning to him)

Oh, John. I have an idea. Let's skip this party and catch a flight somewhere. Montauk. China. India. I don't care, as long as we're together. What do you think?

She squeezes his hand, hope filling her eyes.

MITCHELL

I think you look so lovely tonight, it'd be a shame not to show you off.

He kisses her forehead. Martha's smile fades.

INT. WHITE HOUSE - EAST ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Hundreds of HIGH-CLASS GUESTS in formal attire stream into the East Room theater. The Mitchells are shown their seats, when Martha turns to the Usher.

MARTHA

Excuse me, there must be some mistake. We should be up front.

USHER

I'm sorry ma'am, the First Lady made the seating chart herself.

Martha stews. John puts a calming hand on her shoulder.

SECRET SERVICE AGENT (O.S.)

Mr. Mitchell?

He turns to see a SECRET SERVICE AGENT approaching.

SECRET SERVICE AGENT (CONT'D)

The President would like a word with you. He says it's urgent.

John looks to Martha.

MARTHA

Better not keep Caesar waiting.

INT. PALM RESTAURANT - SIMULTANEOUS

The Palm Restaurant and Grille bustles with Washington's young elite. MAUREEN "MO" KANE (27, platinum hair) waits beside the host stand, annoyed and checking the time. She's about to get up and leave, when--

DEAN (O.S.)

Maureen?

She turns to see Dean standing behind her in a tan suit.

DEAN (CONT'D)

John Dean. Sorry I'm late. Things have been nuts at work--

MO

(shaking his hand)
It's Mo.

(MORE)

MO (CONT'D)

I use Maureen sometimes, you know -- because everybody has a quip. But I prefer Mo.

DEAN

Oh. Like the Stooges.

He chuckles. She gives him a tight smile. Dean clears his throat and hands his keys to the HOST.

DEAN (CONT'D)

Give those to the valet? It's the burgundy Porsche out front.

Mo takes a deep breath. This is gonna be a long night.

INT. COUNTRY HOME - SIMULTANEOUS

A quaint country home in Maryland. FRANCES LIDDY (plump, 44) tells a story to HOWARD HUNT and his wife DOLORES (both early-50's) at the dinner table. Gordon despondently picks at his food, in a depressed daze.

FRANCES

...and after Jerry got Lyme disease, the boys were in a rut, so Gordon volunteered to coach the team.

HUNT

Ruh-roh. Sounds like trouble.

FRANCES

You'd think so, but the kids loved him. He taught them how to do a military salute, didn'tcha hon?

LIDDY

Huh?

Howard and Frances exchange a look.

HUNT

Tough week at work there, Gordo?

FRANCES

(quiet, to Hunt)
He's been like this since Tuesday.
Listless. Blue.

HUNT

Back at the Agency, we used to call it mission fatigue.

(MORE)

HUNT (CONT'D)
 (down table, to Liddy)
 Hey there, bud. How's about me and
 you take a little trip down to the
 basement? I can show you my new
 circulars. Whaddya say?

A pouty Liddy turns to Frances.

INT. WHITE HOUSE - EAST ROOM - SIMULTANEOUS

The famed concert pianist VAN CLIBURN wraps up a Schuman
 piece and the AUDIENCE APPLAUDS. Reveal Martha sitting in the
 back, John's chair still EMPTY beside her.

WHITE HOUSE HOST
 And now ladies and gentlemen, the
 President and Mrs. Nixon present
 the Ray Coniff Singers!

Eight YOUNG WOMEN in blue gowns file onstage to perform, when
 one of them steps up to the mic unexpectedly.

PROTESTING SINGER (INTO MIC)
 President Nixon, please stop
 bombing human beings, animals and
 vegetation...

The audience gasps as the Girl calmly holds up a fringe cloth
 with handwritten letters -- '*Stop the Killing.*'

PROTESTING SINGER (INTO MIC) (CONT'D)
 You go to church on Sundays. If
 Jesus were here tonight, you would
 not drop another bomb!

The audience BOOS as she's dragged offstage by security. RAY
 CONNIFF (50's) steps up to the mic.

RAY CONNIFF (INTO MIC)
 Sorry about that, folks. Susan's
 always had trouble finding a date
 and now I know why!

Everybody laughs, except for Martha. She momentarily locks
 eyes with the Protesting Girl, when Mitchell returns.

MITCHELL
 (quietly)
 You catch that? I think her tit
 fell out of her dress.

INT. PALM RESTAURANT - SIMULTANEOUS

Moe snorts with laughter as Dean tells her a story.

DEAN

You have to picture me. Thirteen years old, coke-bottle glasses, chained to the door of County Animal Control, screaming, "*No more pets have to die!*"

MO

Oh, no.

DEAN

And after about twenty minutes, I realize I got the address wrong. I'd chained myself to the dentist's office next door.

Mo cracks up, barely keeping it together.

MO

When Barry was talking up his buddy from the Justice Department, I never thought I'd find myself on a blind date with an activist.

DEAN

Failed activist. The cop who sawed through the cuffs said I was the ballsiest, dumbest little bastard he'd ever met. I'd make a better lawyer.

MO

And whala. Here you are.

DEAN

But enough about me, I want to know how a stewardess from LA wastes her Earth-bound hours looking for a man in this town.

MO

Actually, I have a lot of friends here. I guess you could say I'm kind of doing research...

DEAN

Research? For what?

MO

(suddenly shy)

Never mind. I shouldn't have said anything. You'll think it's stupid.

DEAN

No, go on.

MO

Well. I've been thinking of doing some writing...

DEAN

You want to be a journalist?

MO

I'm actually more into novels. Romantic novels to be specific.

DEAN

Romantic novels.

MO

Nothing too smutty.

DEAN

Are you saying I could be the hero of a tasteful romantic novel? Can you call my character Jack? I've always liked that name. Jack Dean, gentleman lover.

MO

Now you're just making fun of me.

DEAN

No, it's fantastic. Really. But why come to DC? Don't you have plenty of inspiration in LA?

MO

You'd think so. But everything's so ephemeral there. All anybody wants is a good party. I dated Jacques Bergerac for the better part of a year. He took me to a barbecue once where they'd rented circus animals. That's all I remember about the entire relationship. Camels.

(then)

California's a dream as long as you don't go too deep.

DEAN

If you've come to DC for depth, I have bad news for you...

MO

I know it sounds naive, but I actually find this place thrilling. People come here to make a difference in the world.

(off Dean's look)

Don't get me wrong, I know there's compromises. Heck, you probably know that better than anyone...

DEAN

What do you mean by that?

MO

It's just -- you seem like a good person. It must be difficult, working for... a man like that.

DEAN

A man like what? A man like Richard Nixon? Is that what you were going to say?

MO

Well, he is kind of a liar, don't you think?

DEAN

And you think LBJ was some kind of Boy Scout?

MO

No. But Nixon. I mean, he really takes it to a whole other level.

DEAN

How so?

MO

For one thing, all that stuff about ending the war--

DEAN

He's drawn down troop levels by two-thirds since he's been in office.

MO

I saw on the news that he's actually increased bombings.

DEAN

Oh yeah? Did the news also mention he started Title IX or established the Environmental Protection Agency?

MO

Wow. You've really talked yourself into this, haven't you?

Dean is silenced for a beat. Knows she's right. He recovers.

DEAN

And what about you?

MO

I'm sorry?

DEAN

Oh, come on. Cut the act. At the end of the day, you're just like all your liberal friends. You all play like you want the guy who's trying to save the world when all you really want is the guy who's going to pick up the check.

Mo is speechless as the WAITER rolls up with a DESSERT CART.

WAITER

We're out of Baked Alaska.

PRE-LAP the sound of wood creaking as--

INT. COUNTRY HOME - BASEMENT - SIMULTANEOUS

Liddy and Hunt descend into Hunt's basement.

HUNT

Smell that? Sawdust. Machine oil. It's why I write down here. My father worked with his hands...

Liddy examines several galley covers of spy novels on the wall, then nods to Hunt, who switches on the CIRCULAR SAW.

HUNT (CONT'D)

What happened? Tell me everything.

LIDDY

Mitchell hated it. The ingrate.

HUNT
You're kidding. Even Sapphire?

LIDDY
(shaking his head)
I presented that man the Temple at Delphi but all he wants is a hot dog stand on wheels.

HUNT
Relax. Mitchell's a businessman. He only sees the bottom-line. Artists like you represent risk to him...

As Liddy listens, his bandaged hand inches closer to the circular saw. Hunt clocks this and touches his hand.

HUNT (CONT'D)
Gordon. We already know you're *macho*. That's not what you have to prove to these men.

LIDDY
What, then?

HUNT
Hone your vision. Collaborate. Involve them in the process.
(then)
People are all the same. They'll give you the world if you just make them feel seen.

EXT. PALM RESTAURANT - VALET STAND

Mo avoids eye contact with Dean as they wait at the valet stand. After a few moments, her VW Bug putters up. Dean goes to pay the Valet, but Mo stops him and pays herself.

MO
You wanna know the problem with guys like you? You call me naive and say I'm going after your money. Well you can keep it. You can't shame me for wanting a powerful man. And if you think that's just about money, then you're somehow dumber than you look.

She gets in and drives away, leaving Dean standing there.

INT. WINNIE MCCLENDON'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

A darkened suburban bedroom. Winnie McLendon lies asleep with her HUSBAND and TODDLER, when the PHONE RINGS.

WINNIE (INTO PHONE)

Hello?

MARTHA (O.S.)

Winnie, honey. You'll never believe the night I've had...

WINNIE (INTO PHONE)

Martha?

INT. PENTHOUSE APARTMENT - SPLIT SCREEN

Martha huddles under her husband's portrait on the phone.

MARTHA (INTO PHONE)

I witnessed the most amazing thing. A woman protesting Nixon in the East Room. Can you believe that?

WINNIE (INTO PHONE)

H- how'd you get this number?

MARTHA (INTO PHONE)

They dragged her away, but she stayed as cool as a summer rain. Just goes to show, people can take only so much abuse before they act.

WINNIE (INTO PHONE)

Listen. Can we maybe talk about this tomorrow--?

MARTHA (INTO PHONE)

(ignoring her)

'Course, John couldn't stop talking about this feud the President's got goin' with Henry. I swear, someone should lock those two in a cage...

Winnie suddenly sits up in bed.

WINNIE (INTO PHONE)

Henry? As in Henry Kissinger?

Martha grins.

MARTHA (INTO PHONE)

Oh... I really shouldn't say.

But she will.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. TOWNHOUSE - VARIOUS - MORNING

Morning light streams through modernist window blinds. John Dean wakes up and does his morning Patrick Bateman routine: He grooms himself, rides a stationary bike, presses his suit in a home steamer, tweezes his eyebrows.

INT. TOWNHOUSE - KITCHEN

He eats a bowl of Grapenuts, when the MORNING NEWS cuts to a commercial for Eastern Airlines. He focuses on a STEWARDESS who looks like Mo. For a split second, he even sees her face.

INT. DEAN'S OFFICE - LATER

Dean enters his office and goes to his Secretary.

DEAN

Linda, could you call Harry Welch at the FAA and ask him for information on a registered flight attendant named Maureen Kane?

(remembering)

Oh, and Liddy should be here in a few minutes for the meeting. Tell him I'm wrapping up a call.

DEAN'S SECRETARY

But sir, Liddy's already here. He arrived over a half hour ago. He's in Mitchell's office now.

INT. OFFICE HALLWAY - MOMENTS LATER

DING! Elevator doors open and Dean rushes frantically toward Mitchell's office, only to hear YELLING coming from inside.

MITCHELL'S SECRETARY

Excuse me, Mr. Dean, he's not--

Dean pushes past her, flinging the door open to find--

INT. MITCHELL'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

Mitchell LAUGHING riotously with Liddy.

LIDDY
(turning)
Speak of the devil and he will
appear!

MITCHELL
Dean. What's wrong, son? You look
like you just got caught butt-
humping your sister.

Dean breathes heavy, quickly assessing the situation. Papers
on Mitchell's desk, half-empty Scotch glasses on the desk.

DEAN
Are you two... celebrating
something?

MITCHELL
Sharp as a tack. Tell 'im Liddy.

LIDDY
I ran into Mr. Mitchell this
morning on the way into the office.
I had a few rough ideas for pared-
down operations. Sketches, really--

MITCHELL
Stop beating yourself up. They just
needed a little finessing.

LIDDY
Mr. Mitchell helped me come up with
a whole new operation plan. The man
really knows his trade craft.

DEAN
That's great to hear. But are you
sure it's wise to be discussing
illicit activities in the office of
the President's Campaign Chair?

MITCHELL
Of course, good thinking Dean.

Mitchell stands up and shakes hands with Liddy.

MITCHELL (CONT'D)
Fabulous work, Gordo. Go talk with
Jeb, he'll get you set up with
logistics.

Liddy happily nods and exits. Dean goes to follow, when--

MITCHELL (CONT'D)

(stopping him)

I don't know what you said to that chowderhead to get him to drop the James Bond act, but it worked. Tell you what, my wife is throwing a little party Saturday. Why don't you come on by? Call it a reward for all your hard work.

Dean brightens.

INT. OFFICE KITCHEN AREA - CONTINUOUS

Magruder struggles to fix a broken coffee maker, when Liddy swaggers up behind him and grabs his waist.

MAGRUDER

(jumping)

Ah! What the hell, man?!

LIDDY

Ahoy. Mitchell sent me down to inform you that he's approved my plan. Now, before you fill your diaper, you'll be relieved to know that I've cut down the budget to half a million.

MAGRUDER

That's fantastic. But you're gonna have to make do with two-hundred.

LIDDY

Excuse me?

Magruder presses a button. The coffee maker hums to life.

MAGRUDER

Two-hundred thousand. That's all we've got.

LIDDY

But, Mitchell just said--

MAGRUDER

Mitchell doesn't control the purse strings around here, I do.

(rubbing it in, sotto)

You made a miscalculation, friend.

(MORE)

MAGRUDER (CONT'D)

You thought you had to feed the barking dog, but you forgot about the quiet one, curled up in the corner.

LIDDY

You think this is a game?! This operation requires untraceable foreign contractors. I need at least five Cubans--

MAGRUDER

Then I guess you're just going to have to make do with fewer Cubans.

LIDDY

Motherfucker!

Liddy LUNGES at him and puts him in a headlock.

MAGRUDER

AH! Let go of me, you psycho!

LIDDY

(whispering in his ear)
You business school weasels think you own the world. But you don't. The natural world rejects you. Soon there will be a mighty reckoning.

Magruder squirms free and escapes down the hallway.

INT. OFFICE BATHROOM - MOMENTS LATER

BOOM! Liddy bursts into the bathroom and goes to the sink, where he tries to scrub a COFFEE STAIN off his jacket.

LIDDY

Bean counting Ivy League scum... fewer Cubans... my white ass.

He spins and KARATE KICKS the towel dispenser, only to see James McCord standing right there.

MCCORD

Rough day?

Liddy clears his throat, embarrassed. McCord walks over and squares off at the urinal.

LIDDY

Never thought I'd encounter a
bureaucracy more stocked with
vipers than the FBI. A thousand
petty tyrannies...

MCCORD

You're a Bureau man?

LIDDY

Twenty-five years. You?

MCCORD

CIA. But I always had a thing for
Hoover. They don't make 'em like
him anymore.

LIDDY

(holding out his hand)
Liddy. Special counsel.

MCCORD

Jim McCord. Security.

They shake hands as--

AIRLINE ANNOUNCER (PRE-LAP)

Now boarding Flight 119 to L.A....

INT. CAPITOL AIRPORT - CONTINUOUS

Dean enters a busy AIRPORT TERMINAL and spots Mo over by the
TICKET COUNTER with her roller bag.

DEAN

MO! Wait!

Mo looks at Dean in disbelief as he runs over to her.

MO

What are you doing here?
How did you find me?

DEAN

I'm sorry. I just... I wanted to
apologize for the other night.

MO

(turning to go)
It's fine. Don't worry about it.

DEAN

Wait. There's something else. I was just invited to a party, okay? And - and it's going to be an extremely important night in my career--

MO

Congratulations.

DEAN

But see, when I got the invitation, all I could think about was you. I know we got off on the wrong foot, but if you give me one more night, I promise I can make it up to you.

She looks him over skeptically.

MO

You just can't tell the truth, can you? Not even for one moment.

(off his silence)

Who is it?

DEAN

Excuse me?

MO

Who's going to be at this party that you want to impress? Some other lawyer? A Senator, maybe?

(off his silence)

Bullshit me one more time and this conversation is over.

Dean looks at her for a beat, then hangs his head, mutters.

DEAN

Bob Haldeman. The President's chief of staff. Him and John Ehrlichman control access to Nixon. They call them the Berlin Wall.

(nervous gulp)

I heard he, um... likes blondes.

MO

Unbelievable.

She turns to go.

DEAN

Wait. Where are you going? I told the truth.

MO

And now I'm telling you to fuck off.

DEAN

Look, I'm sorry. We don't even have to talk to Haldeman, okay? We can just sit in the corner all night making fun of everyone and drinking John Mitchell's Scotch--

Mo stops in her tracks and turns.

MO

Did you just say John Mitchell? As in Martha Mitchell's husband?

DEAN

Yeah. Why? You like her?

MO

Are you kidding? She's insane, I love her.

DEAN

Oh, great. Pat Nixon should be there too--

MO

Who gives a shit about Pat Nixon?

DEAN

Fine. Just Martha, then.
(nervous gulp)
So... pick you up at eight?

She crosses her arms. Shakes her head.

DEAN (CONT'D)

Come on. Call it research for your romantic novel. It'll be a tax write off. A *tasteful* tax write off.

Mo betrays the slightest grin.

INT. SUBURBAN GARAGE - EVENING

The guttural sounds of Buddhist monks chanting a Japanese *shomyo* blasts out of RECORD SPEAKERS as a naked and sweaty Liddy practices aikido in his garage.

He picks up a notepad with a written list titled "*Potential Bugging Targets*," under which he's scrawled "*Brookings Institution*" and "*McGovern HQ*." He thinks, then jots down another target -- "*Democratic National Committee*."

EXT. WASHINGTON DC DUPLEX - PORCH - MOMENTS LATER

Dean nervously knocks on a door. A YOUNGISH WOMAN (20's) answers, wearing a t-shirt that reads '*Lick Dick in '72.*'

DEAN
Funny shirt.

YOUNGISH WOMAN
Thanks. I made it for you.
(yelling upstairs)
MO! He's here!

Mo descends the stairs in a pale blue gown and black sable coat. Dean is stunned.

DEAN
Wow. You look... wow.

MO
(blushing)
Anything for Martha Mitchell.

INT. PENTHOUSE APARTMENT - NIGHT

Martha's fundraiser is in full swing. A JAZZ QUARTET plays as Martha chats up the guests, including RNC CHAIR GEORGE H.W. BUSH (48) and CONGRESSMAN DONALD RUMSFELD (40).

BUSH
Did you hear the latest from Ailes? He wants to run a news station out of the West Wing. All news. All hours. Calls it Nixon TV.

RUMSFELD
Nixon TV? Jesus. Guy's a loon.

MARTHA
I think it's brilliant.
(they both turn)
Come now, Rummy. You saw how CBS handled the riots. Broadcast news could use a reminder that real Americans still want the truth.

Bush and Rumsfeld both look at her. Martha realizes that she's broken character and gives them a shy smile.

MARTHA (CONT'D)

That's what John says, anyway.

OVER BY THE ENTRYWAY

Mo enters the party with Dean and gawks at the decor, the portrait of Mitchell lording over it all.

MO

Jeez. Republicans don't hold back.

A GASP ripples over the crowd and they both turn to see a NANNY descending the stairs with a YOUNG GIRL (11) in a poofy dress. Martha sees the Girl and her eyes light up.

MARTHA

Marty, honey! Get down here!

Dean nudges Mo and motions to the Girl.

DEAN

Who's that?

MO

The Mitchells' daughter. Don't you read *People*?

Martha spins a miserable-looking Marty for the guests.

MARTHA

Turn around and show everyone your dress, cupcake.

DEAN (O.S.)

Excuse me. Mrs. Mitchell?

Martha turns to see Dean and Mo behind her.

DEAN (CONT'D)

My name's John Dean. I work with your husband--

MARTHA

Mr. Dean, of course! John speaks very highly of you. It's nice to finally make your acquaintance.

(to Marty)

Say hello to Mr. Dean, buttercup.

Marty averts her eyes and mutters a barely audible 'Hello.'

MARTHA (CONT'D)

You'll have to excuse her, she's a tad sheepish around people.

(re: Mo)

And who's this vision in blue?

MO

Maureen Kane, ma'am. Honor to meet you. I'm a huge fan.

MARTHA

My, you two must be the handsomest couple since Napoleon and Josephine.

DEAN

Oh. We're not exactly a--

Mo loops her arm in Dean's, interrupting him.

MO

Thank you. So much.

Dean looks at Mo, surprised. Lupè arrives and whispers something to Martha.

MARTHA

Would y'all excuse me for a moment?
I must take a call.

She steps away. Dean turns to Mo.

DEAN

So we're a couple now?

MO

One night special. Don't blow it.

IN THE KITCHEN

Martha picks up the phone.

MARTHA (INTO PHONE)

Secretary Kissinger, how are you?

(then)

Unfortunately, my husband is occupied at the moment. May I help you with something?

(then)

Could you repeat that? The line's a bit staticky... I can't hear you.

Martha opens the balcony door and puts the phone outside.

OVER BY THE WET BAR

Mo spots a MAN (34, military haircut) being mobbed by PARTYGOERS.

MO
Who's buzz cut over there?

DEAN
Guess.

MO
(eyes lighting up)
The Berlin Wall.

DEAN
Listen, I meant what I said. We don't have to talk to him if you don't want--

MO
Walls are overrated. C'mon...

She grabs Dean's arm and tugs him along.

OVER BY THE OEURS D'OEUVRES

Haldeman talks with PAT BUCHANAN (30s, tubby wunderkind) and a group of other NIXON APPARATCHIKS.

BUCHANAN
... so now McGovern's got James Taylor and Barbra Streisand stumping for him. As if a coupla moderately fuckable Hollywood socialists are going to change any voter's mind...

MO (O.S.)
I'm a big Streisand fan. What's wrong with her?

They turn to see Mo walk up with Dean.

HALDEMAN
(to Mo)
Sorry. You are?

MO
Mo Kane. I think you know my date.

Haldeman looks to Dean, confused.

DEAN

John Dean, sir. I, uh, got a haircut.

HALDEMAN

That's right, Dean. Sorry I didn't recognize you. Must be the hair. Have you met Pat Buchanan?

DEAN

(shaking his hand)
No, but I've heard great things.

BUCHANAN

My apologies if I caused any offense with the Streisand thing.

MO

Don't apologize, you're right. If Americans took their voting advice from musicians, we'd all be naked and stoned in an ashram somewhere.

BUCHANAN

Doesn't sound so bad, actually.

MO

As long as you bring the dope!

BUCHANAN

(laughing)
Where'd you find this one, Dean?!
She's a riot!

Mo winks at Dean and continues the conversation as Dean turns to Haldeman and lowers his voice.

DEAN

By the way, Bob. I've been meaning to thank you. For delivering that message from POTUS on my behalf.

HALDEMAN

I'm sorry. Message?

DEAN

Mitchell told me about the President's request that I head up the, um, clandestine unit.

HALDEMAN

Sorry, Dean. But I've never spoken about you with the President. Or anyone else, for that matter.

Dean's face washes over with humiliation as he realizes he's been lied to. Haldeman pats him on the shoulder.

HALDEMAN (CONT'D)

Word of advice. You should learn to recognize a snake when you see one.

OVER BY THE COUCH

John Mitchell LAUGHS HIS ASS OFF as he gets his palm read by one of the GUEST'S WIVES. Magruder taps him on the shoulder.

MAGRUDER

Sir, Kissinger's office just called. He's been trying to reach you for the past hour.

MITCHELL

In regards to what?

Magruder slips him a copy of the new *Ladies Home Journal* with Martha on the cover - "*Martha Mitchell bares all: marriage, sex and Nixon's feud with the Secretary of State.*"

MITCHELL (CONT'D)

Where is she?

He spots Martha, who immediately RETREATS UPSTAIRS.

OVER BY THE OEURS D'OEUVRES

Mo clocks Dean standing alone and goes over to him.

MO

Where's Haldeman? What happened?

DEAN

It's nothing. We should go.

MO

But we just got here...

He looks at her. She sees he's in pain and relents, nods.

DEAN

I'll get our coats.

UPSTAIRS HALLWAY

Mitchell tries to open the bedroom door, but it's locked.

MITCHELL

Martha? Love of my life? Let me in, I need to have a word with you.

(MORE)

MITCHELL (CONT'D)

(lowering his voice)

God as my witness, I will cancel
the Diner's Club card if you don't
open this door right now--

Suddenly, the DOOR BURSTS OPEN. Martha yells in his face.

MARTHA

You want to flog me for the
amusement of your guests?! Go
ahead, humiliate me! You sadist!

She flounces into the bedroom. Sighing, Mitchell follows.

IN THE COAT ROOM

Dean rifles through a pile of coats when he hears SNIFFLING
and turns to see-- Marty, hiding in the closet, sobbing.

DEAN

Sorry. Didn't mean to bother you.
You okay?

MARTY

(sniffling)

I hate parties. I hate these
people. And this stupid dress.

DEAN

(sitting down)

For what it's worth, the dress
looks nice.

He takes out a stick of gum and tears it in half.

DEAN (CONT'D)

Doublemint?

IN MARTHA'S BEDROOM

Mitchell slams the door closed and approaches Martha, *Ladies
Home Journal* in hand.

MITCHELL

Kissinger? You had to bring
Kissinger into this?! As if I need
another enemy!

MARTHA

What are you afraid of? That
they'll force us to watch the next
concert from the kitchen?!

MITCHELL

So that's what this is all about?
Pat Nixon's goddamn seating chart?

MARTHA

It's not just a seating chart! You
left me to suffer that performance
alone.

MITCHELL

He's my boss, Martha.

MARTHA

He's your life! You'll roll right
over for him, any day or night, but
who rolls over for me?!

MITCHELL

Keep your voice down.

MARTHA

I'm sorry. I forgot that your love
affair with the President is a
secret. You know, you'd probably be
less uptight if you just dropped
the act and let him fuck you--

WHAP. John slaps her. She looks at him, STUNNED.

MITCHELL

(backing away)

Now, Martha. Let's take a breath--

WHAP! She slaps him right back.

MARTHA

Coward! My father would whup your
hide for that! Low-born borough
trash!

She throws a vase at his head, it shatters behind him.

INSIDE THE COAT ROOM

Dean and Marty both stare at the wall, chewing gum.

MARTY

They used to like each other. My
Mom and Dad. Before we moved here.
Now everything's terrible.

OUTSIDE THE COAT ROOM

Mo is about to enter when she hears Dean's voice and stops.

INSIDE THE COAT ROOM

DEAN

I'm not going to sugarcoat it. You're right. Everybody you meet here, they only care about themselves. Your Mom. Your Dad. All those people out there. They'll promise you the world if you just do what they tell you to do. You think that one day it'll end, but it never will because it's a shell game. You'll always lose and they'll always come out on top.

(beat)

How old are you?

MARTY

Eleven and a half.

DEAN

That's good. What you need is an exit strategy. You can petition for emancipation at sixteen.

(hands her business card)

Call me, I'll represent you pro-bono. I'd get started now, but I'm a little busy with the President.

MARTY

My Mom says he's dog shit.

DEAN

(shrugs, chuckling)

I wouldn't know, I've never met the guy.

OUT IN THE HALLWAY

Dean exits the room and Mo acts like she hasn't been listening.

DEAN (CONT'D)

You ready?

She nods, barely able to suppress her attraction to him.

ON THE STAIRS

Eavesdropping Partygoers crowd on the stairs, listening as the fight in the bedroom reaches a fevered pitch.

MARTHA (O.S.)
*You'll never stand up to them even
if it means betraying your family!*

IN THE BEDROOM

Martha throws an ashtray at Mitchell, hitting the wall.

MITCHELL
It's you I should be standing up
to, loud mouth bitch.

MARTHA
You wanna sew my lips shut?! Get
another wife if you want a silent
one. Marry that portrait I had made
for you, which you didn't thank me
for, by the way.

MITCHELL
That's because it makes me look
like a bloated corpse!

MARTHA
Truth in advertising!

She flings a FIRE POKER across the room and hits him in the
arm. He immediately falls to the ground in pain.

MARTHA (CONT'D)
Oh, no. Sugar bear, are you ok?!

She rushes to help him, but he pushes her away.

MITCHELL
You know what you don't get,
Martha? There's no conspiracy
against you. No collusion in the
shadows. People just don't like
you. That's why we can't fly Air
Force One. That's why we get
relegated to the cheap seats. And
those reporters you call in the
middle of the night? They're not
your friends either. They just
can't take their eyes off a good
show.

Martha's eyes well with tears. John stumbles out.

MARTHA
At least I can sell a ticket,
sweetheart! Nobody would be here if
it was your party!

INT. PORSCHE - NIGHT

Dean's Porsche rolls up to Mo's friend's duplex. Dean is distant and silent as he parks on the side of the street.

DEAN

(shaking his head)

I'm such a fool. Bob Haldeman sees my name on six memos a day and he has no idea who I am. I don't belong here. I'm nothing like those people. I'm not important.

MO

Hey. Listen to me. Important people are only as important as the rest of us make them. You don't have to give them that power.

DEAN

(sarcastic)

So I should quit? Is that it?

MO

I'm just saying... maybe it's a good thing you're not like those people. You're better than them.

DEAN

How would you know? You barely even know me.

MO

Maybe. But I know your dirty little secret.

She kisses him, whispers in his ear.

MO (CONT'D)

You're a good man, John Dean. And in the moments when you shut up, you actually know how to listen.

Dean goes to say something, but she stops him.

MO (CONT'D)

Sh. Listen.

She takes the keys out of the ignition and exits the car, dangling them behind her. Dean smiles and follows her inside.

INT. PENTHOUSE APARTMENT - TWILIGHT

A CREW OF SERVANTS clean up remnants of the party. Martha pours one last drink and steps out onto the balcony, where she finds James McCord smoking a cigarette.

MARTHA

Pardon. I didn't know anyone was out here.

MCCORD

It's okay. Just finishing up.

MARTHA

(re: the cigarette)

You... wouldn't happen to have an extra-- would you?

MCCORD

Sorry. Last one.

(offering it to her)

But here... I been meaning to cut down anyway.

Martha nods and takes it, takes a drag.

MARTHA

I haven't shared a cigarette with a man since college. Always seemed like an invitation, you know...

MCCORD

No danger on that front.

He motions to his wedding band. She smiles.

MARTHA

How long have you been married?

MCCORD

Twelve years in April.

MARTHA

My Daddy always told me that marriage is 51% worth it.

MCCORD

Oh? What'd your Mom have to say about that?

MARTHA

I think she pegged it closer to 49.

McCord laughs. She passes the cigarette back to him.

MCCORD

I hope I'm not out of line here, Mrs. Mitchell. But I wanted to tell you that I read your *Ladies Home Journal* interview and I enjoyed it greatly. There aren't many honest people left in this town. I believe you're one of them.

Martha smiles, warmed by the compliment.

MARTHA

What's your name again?

MCCORD

McCord. James McCord.

She pats his hand.

MARTHA

I appreciate you, James McCord. Now go on back home to your wife.

She smiles warmly at him, then hands back the cigarette and steps inside.

INT. MCCORD'S STATION WAGON - MORNING

McCord pulls into the driveway of his SUBURBAN house to see a GREEN ARMY JEEP parked in his spot.

INT. JAMES MCCORD'S HOUSE - MOMENTS LATER

He enters to find his WIFE and CHILDREN waiting in the foyer.

MCCORD'S WIFE

(gets up, whispering)
He's in the sitting room. He's been here for an hour.

INT. MCCORD'S SITTING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Liddy peruses a dozen FRAMED WATERCOLOR PAINTINGS lining the wall. They're pastoral scenes of beauty and violence: Civil War battles, Hellenistic armies preparing for war, etc.

LIDDY

Magnificent work. Did you paint them all yourself?

MCCORD
 (entering the room)
 A hobby of mine.

Liddy points at one of the paintings: a young Roman surrounded by armed soldiers dipping his hand into a fire.

LIDDY
 Gaius Scaevola. Caught infiltrating an enemy camp for the glory of Rome. Just before his execution, he thrust his hand into a fire and told his captors--

MCCORD
"Watch. So that you may know how cheap the body is to men who have their eye on glory."

LIDDY
 A soldier.

MCCORD
 (nods)
 A soldier.

EXT. CAPITOL AIRPORT - MORNING

Dean gets Mo's bag out of the car.

DEAN
 Hope that was enough material for your novel.

MO
 Let's call it a decent start.

They embrace. He holds onto her.

DEAN
 Stay another week. I'll put you up at the Four Seasons. The National Opera's doing Stravinsky...

MO
 Absolutely not.

She hugs him and looks him in the eye.

MO (CONT'D)
 John. Whatever it is they're making you do... you don't have to do it.
 (MORE)

MO (CONT'D)
 You know that right? You have a
 choice. You always have a choice.

Dean nods, taking that in.

INT. PENTHOUSE APARTMENT - KITCHEN

Martha eats breakfast in silence with John and Marty. She stares out the window, wondering what her choices are, when--

MITCHELL
 Fetch me the sugar, darling?

Martha sighs and goes to the cabinets, where she finds TWO FIRST-CLASS PLANE TICKETS and a bottle of BLACKBERRY WINE. She looks to John. He grins.

MITCHELL (CONT'D)
 Marty, your mother and I are going
 to need you to be a good girl for a
 few days on your own. Ok, sweetie?

Marty looks up from her grapefruit.

MARTY
 I want to go to boarding school.

INT. DEAN'S OFFICE - DAY

Dean nervously types up a letter -- *"It is with a heavy heart that I inform you..." "... cannot perform in my present capacity..." "As such, I will be tendering my resignation..."*

Dean takes the letter out of the typewriter and signs it.

INT. OFFICE HALLWAY - DAY

He resolutely walks to Mitchell's office, LETTER IN HAND.

MITCHELL'S SECRETARY
 I'm sorry Mr. Dean, but Mr.
 Mitchell's--

Dean opens the door to reveal Mitchell's office is empty.

MITCHELL'S SECRETARY (CONT'D)
 -- not in today.

DEAN
 Where is he? I have something
 important for him.

MITCHELL'S SECRETARY

He's spending the week at the President's compound in Key Biscayne with Mrs. Mitchell.
 (re: the letter)
 You can leave it on his desk if you like.

Dean forces a smile. The phone rings and she answers it.

INT. MITCHELL'S OFFICE - MOMENTS LATER

Dean enters the office. He goes to put the resignation letter on Mitchell's desk, when he notices a bunch of SCATTERED PAPERS sitting around.

One of them is a MISSED CALL RECEIPT from Nixon: "*POTUS wants to meet with Dean. Impressed.*" A smile slowly washes over Dean's face. He's on Nixon's radar.

MITCHELL'S SECRETARY (O.S.)

Mr. Dean? You okay in there?

DEAN

Yes. I'm fine, thanks.

He stuffs the letter in his pocket, then swipes Mitchell's GOLD LETTER OPENER before walking out.

JACQUES COUSTEAU (ON TV) (PRELAP)

*For the tiny Naucrates Ductor
 species, salvation lies in the jaws
 of a powerful killer...*

INT. KEY BISCAYNE GUEST HOUSE - BEDROOM - DUSK

ON TV - a bunch of little STRIPED PILOT FISH busily pick chunks of food out of a tiger shark's teeth.

Martha dons a swim robe, when there's a knock at the door.

MARTHA

Just a second!

She adjusts her boobs in the mirror, then opens the door to find a NEW SECURITY GUY standing there. Her face falls.

MARTHA (CONT'D)

What happened to McCord?

NEW SECURITY GUY

He was put on a new assignment. Can I help you with something?

INT. KEY BISCAIYNE GUEST HOUSE - STAIRWAY - MOMENTS LATER

Martha rushes downstairs to talk to Mitchell, only to find him meeting poolside with Jeb Magruder and few OTHER MEN.

MAGRUDER (O.S.)

... DNC headquarters are on the fifth floor. Our men will enter and set the bugs at around midnight...

She hides behind the stairs, eavesdropping, as The Pixies' *Wave of Mutilation* rises on the soundtrack and we--

CUT TO:

EXT. WASHINGTON DC STREET - EVENING

James McCord waits with Howard Hunt on a dark street corner, sharing a cigarette near the POTOMAC RIVER.

LIDDY (V.O.)

The names of great men are etched in the halls of power... Napoleon. Alexander. Charlemagne. But who will tell our stories when we're gone? Who will sing our songs?

Liddy pulls up in his Jeep with two Cuban Burglars -- VIRGILIO GONZALEZ and EUGENIO MARTINEZ -- packed in the back.

LIDDY (V.O.)

For not all men who change the world are remembered. Most are lost to the ages. Like dying embers in a fire...

McCord and Hunt squeeze in.

INT. BROWNSTONE - INTERCUT

Several PROSTITUTES line up in front of Dean. One of them has platinum blonde hair just like Mo.

LIDDY (V.O.)

Some worship at the boot of power, powerless themselves against the tide of human frailty...

Dean looks at her guiltily, then selects TWO OTHERS.

INT. KEY BISCAYNE GUEST HOUSE - INTERCUT

Martha stands on the balcony, sipping from a bottle of BLACKBERRY WINE as John snores in a reclining chair.

LIDDY (V.O.)
Others are born to be forgotten,
reaching for a greatness they can
never fully grasp...

She notices a LONE FIGURE standing on another balcony in the distance. It's the unmistakable silhouette of RICHARD NIXON.

MARTHA
Dick! Hey Dick! It's Martha!

She waves her arms to get his attention, but he can't hear her over the CRASHING WAVES. He returns back inside.

LIDDY (V.O.)
But even when we perish, our legacy
will burn eternal. For make no
mistake: a triumphant will is what
binds us to those creatures who
crawled from the prehistoric sea.

INT. BROTHEL ROOM - INTERCUT

A prostitute cleans herself off in the sink. Dean lies in bed, fixated on a BURNING CANDLE.

LIDDY (V.O.)
It is a birthright that echoes
through the ages. Beyond even
death. And with it, we can alter
the course of human history.

INT. LIDDY'S JEEP - INTERCUT

Liddy's Camaro RUMBLES to a stop on the shoulder of a bridge.

LIDDY
There she is, *machos*! Our destiny!

Liddy gestures to a cluster of CURVED MODERNIST BUILDINGS across the Potomac. Virgilio turns to Eugenio, confused.

VIRGILIO
Que es eso?

EUGENIO
Es el Watergate.

INT. BROTHEL ROOM - INTERCUT

After a moment, Dean sticks his hand into the candle flame, only to immediately withdraw it, YELPING IN PAIN as we--

CUT TO BLACK.