

REPUTATION

a play by Ken Kaye

What is to be feared is not the immorality of the great but the fact that their immorality is so often what enables them to achieve greatness. --Tocqueville

Characters

Tom Stern, TV news anchorman (pre-recorded)

Richard Graham, 47, Attorney General of the United States

Anne Graham, 46, Richard's wife

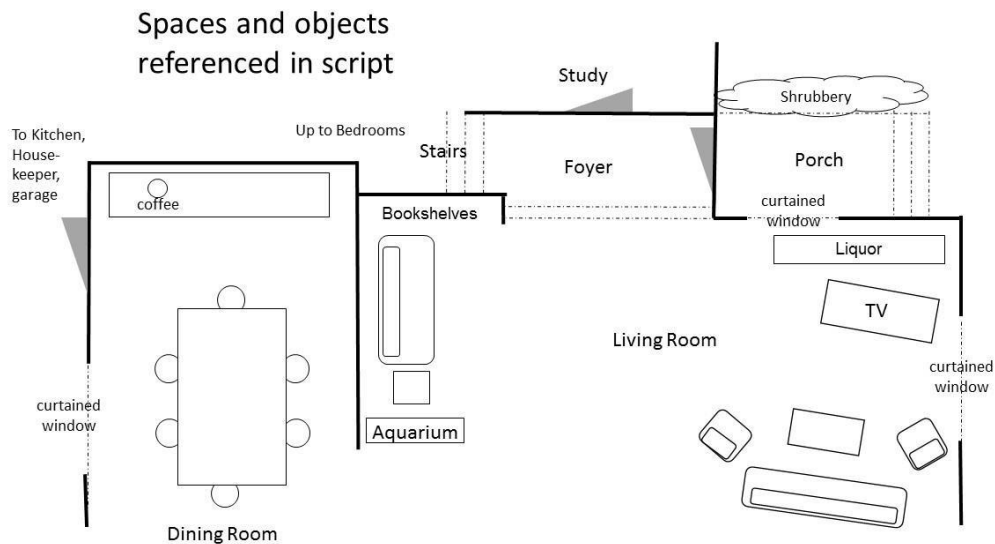
Liz Graham, 20, his daughter

Rose Graham, 70, his mother, blind since her youth.

Cassandra Glass, 33, TV reporter (partially pre-recorded)

Time and Place:

August of the present time. The Grahams' suburban home in Arlington, Virginia. We see the separate living and dining rooms of a spacious home, well-furnished without ostentation.



Act I, Scene 1. Tuesday Morning. *From blackout, first a lighted aquarium glows, center stage. Second, a large floor-standing television screen begins to glow in the living room, house right. Mid-morning light then comes up. An electric coffee pot is on the dining room sideboard. Across the foyer, upstage, we see into Richard's study through an open door. Liz stands in the living room, smartphone in hand, watching the screen where Tom is reading the news (at first inaudible).*

After a beat, the volume comes up:

TOM

At his weekly press conference this morning, Attorney General Richard Graham said the Justice Department would investigate the allegations made by Governor Peterson's attorneys.

As Richard appears behind an array of microphones, Anne enters from upstairs. She is Wellesley-educated, efficient, dressed fashionably, cell phone in one hand and a cigarette in the other, which she extinguishes in an ashtray atop the TV.

RICHARD

This is the first we've heard about the matter. I have no other information at the moment, except that accusations in the past of illegal surveillance by the FBI have proved to be false.

ANNE

There he is. What was he talking about?

LIZ

That Governor from Arizona? Peterson?

ANNE

Dan Peterson.

LIZ

Something about he was convicted of bribery? Claims he was "framed" by the White House to put him out of contention as a challenger to the President. *(She switches off the TV with the remote and makes a point of waving away Anne's cigarette smoke)*

ANNE

So that's why Himself just texted me that he suddenly got called to the White House and can't meet your grandmother's plane. I need you to pick her up, okay?

LIZ

The President was re-elected almost a year ago, why are they still bringing up accusations from --

ANNE

Who knows. Did you hear me?

LIZ

Meet Grandma at the airport. When?

ANNE

It lands in ... 35 minutes.

LIZ

How do I pick her up? I can't get out to her plane like he does.

ANNE

The airline people escort her down to Baggage Claim.

LIZ

So we'll go together: You drive, and I'll run in and find her.

ANNE

No. I have an appointment. I'll get you an Uber, they'll wait while you go in.

LIZ

Dad could just send his driver.

ANNE

Apparently that didn't occur to him.

LIZ

What kind of appointment have you got?

ANNE

One I can't cancel without paying for it. And I don't want to cancel. I've been the perfect daughter-in-law for as long as I could bear it. It's all I can do to get through each day in this house without --

LIZ

Grandma's not so bad. I don't know why you always --

ANNE

And you're who she's coming to see, she'll be thrilled.

LIZ

What do you mean, coming to see me?

ANNE

Your father told her you were here for a few weeks, and came up with the idea this would be a wonderful time for a visit. Without consulting me.

LIZ

Oh. (*beat*) Fine, get the Uber.

ANNE

I'll text you the flight number. Better run up and put on a bra.

LIZ

She's blind, Mom.

ANNE

Lizzie, I don't like you appearing to the world the way your nipples show through that top.

LIZ

I'm doing you a favor, Mom.

ANNE

You're doing your father a favor. Do me one and change your shirt.

LIZ

Speaking of favors, I need you to co-sign for my apartment. (*pulls form out of her pocket*)

ANNE

I'm not sure I like the idea of your own apartment, without roommates. And I don't like to be rushed.

*Anne exits to the kitchen, Liz sits down to consult her cell. **Blackout. End of Scene 1***

Scene 2. Two hours later. *Liz leads Rose in through the kitchen. A cold buffet has been laid on the sideboard. She carries Rose's suitcase through to the foyer as Rose finds her way (skillfully using her cane) through to the living room.*

LIZ

Would you, uh, would you like lunch now or do you want to ...

ROSE

Wonderful, starting with a cup of that coffee, please. *(returns to table and sits)*

LIZ

Cream and sugar? *(her cell dings)*

ROSE

Please. You were so sweet to come with Richard's driver to pick me up.

LIZ

That wasn't his –

ROSE

Even after all these years, I can't get used to your Daddy being such an important man. Imagine being called to the White House.

LIZ

Really. *(checking the text message)* Did you hear about the Peterson thing this morning?

ROSE

I don't know what that is.

LIZ

Some accusation Dad had to deny on the morning news. I guess you were already in the air.

ROSE

"Anyone may accuse," your grandfather liked to say.

LIZ

Really? What did he mean?

ROSE

I'm not sure. I guess, something like "innocent until proven guilty?" When do you go back to Brown?

LIZ

Two weeks. Are you OK with a mug, no saucer? We tend to be informal around here. *(replies to the message)*

ROSE

So I saw.

LIZ

Huh?

ROSE

Tee-shirt, no bra?
When you hugged me.

LIZ

Oh. Right. That outfit you're wearing looks nice, Grandma.

ROSE

Thank you. Your Aunt Charlotte tells me what I can wear with what.

LIZ

I see.

ROSE

You should have seen me when I was your age. I wouldn't let anyone tell me ... I dressed strictly by touch!

LIZ

I've seen pictures of you. You were pretty.

ROSE

Those must have been black and white pictures. Your grandfather was color blind, fortunately.

Well, tell me about summer. You were doing research for a professor, Dad said?

LIZ

They call it research. Actually I was keying data.

ROSE

That sounds technical.

LIZ

Nah, just a way to stay in Providence for eight weeks because my boyfriend lives there ...

ROSE

Boyfriend ... serious?

LIZ

He is, I think. Me, not sure.

Grandma, you're going to be here a month? Then I ought to warn you, we're very frank in this house. No bullshit. You know what I mean?

ROSE

No, not exactly.

LIZ

We don't pretend to be like, all sweetness and light. We don't hide our feelings. You don't know what I'm talking about, do you? I'm not into bullshitting my parents and they're not into bullshitting me. We tend to tell it like it is.

ROSE

Is there a nicer word you can use?

LIZ

No, that's the point! You have to call it what it is! If I stay out all night, I don't pretend I was sleeping over at a girlfriend's. When they aren't speaking to each other, they don't pretend they are. We don't put on a show for the help, either. I'm saying this because in the past, I think, our relationship with you has been more than half bullshit. I'm sure you agree it's more respectful of you if we're completely honest.

ROSE

No, I don't agree.

LIZ

I don't think you'll have a choice this time. You're going to find out all is not unison and harmony between the Attorney General and his charming wife.

(notices something missing from the buffet) Hm.

ROSE

Dear, every marriage has its occasional differences. Your parents are the most harmonious couple I know.

LIZ

Really? You must know some real winners. Be right back.

Exits to kitchen.

ROSE

Thank you for the warning. I guess.

Blackout. End of Scene

Scene 3. Late afternoon. Rose is in the living room, listening to the TV. Her luggage has been taken upstairs. Anne comes from the kitchen with a lit cigarette. She confirms that the dining room table has been set for dinner, extinguishes her cigarette in an ashtray on the sideboard, then continues to the living room.

TOM

Cassandra Glass broke the story of alleged Justice Department involvement in an unconstitutional search and seizure connected with the trial in Arizona that led to --

ANNE

(making an effort) Welcome to Arlington, Rose!

ROSE

(uses remote to turn off TV) Hello, dear.

ANNE

Your flight was no problem, I understand?

ROSE

Oh, no problem at all. Richard's office arranged the red carpet treatment at both ends. You know he sent his driver for me, with Lizzie!

ANNE

That wasn't his ... Was that a nice surprise for you? It's been a while since you --

ROSE

She told me this is a "no bull" family, marriage is an obsolete institution, and there's no such thing as a fifteen-year-old virgin in the United States.

ANNE

You mustn't let Lizzie frighten you, she's like a good watchdog. Scary, but her bark is worse than her bite.

ROSE

I knew she was exaggerating. Then she isn't -- promiscuous?

ANNE

She has a boyfriend who I choose to believe is a nice young man, and she's on the pill, so ...

ROSE

Aren't you worried that --

ANNE

What good does that do? I keep looking for some grown-up vestige of our sweet little girl, remember her? Probably too much to hope for. I suppose we'll always be oil and water.

ROSE

Oh, you don't mean that. *(beat)* Can I help you with dinner?

ANNE

(Can't imagine how Rose would help) There's not much for me to do, actually. Willard got it all together this morning. Why don't you just sit?

Exit to kitchen.

ROSE

(Rises and explores the room) I'd forgotten this. His father's chair. *(Sits down, thoughtfully.)*

Richard enters the front door with briefcase, tries to slip into his study.

Richard?

RICHARD

Hello, Mother.

ROSE

How was your meeting with the President?

RICHARD

He sent you his regards.

ROSE

He didn't.

RICHARD

He did, he said, "Tell your Mom Bob says hi."

ROSE

Are you teasing me? He is a sweet man, to remember me. Why don't you sit down? I was recalling how your father always stretched out in that chair for a half hour when he got home.

I see you have an aquarium.

RICHARD

Um hm.

ROSE

Like you had as a boy. Are there a lot of fish?

RICHARD

Only two. They're Siamese fighting fish. Kept apart by a glass partition, or they kill each other.

ROSE

Goodness. I thought people kept tropical fish for their tranquility.

RICHARD

They're wonderful for my tranquility. On a particularly bad day, I come home, pull out the partition, and watch them tear each other to pieces. They float to the surface, tranquil as water lilies; and they're easily replaced.

ROSE

I'll go and tell Anne you're home.

RICHARD

No, there's no ... okay, why don't you do that?

He turns on the TV. Rose goes to kitchen.

TOM

There were conflicting statements this afternoon regarding the means used to persuade an Arizona highway contractor to confess having bribed former Governor Dan Peterson. In Washington, FBI Director Arthur Grey reiterated his denial ...

RICHARD

What the hell?

TOM

... that Peterson had been under surveillance by the Justice Department. But the Phoenix Gazette reported that prosecutors played a recording of the transaction to contractor Albert Bandelli on February 27 last year: the same day Bandelli signed the confession which led to his and Governor Peterson's conviction on the bribery charge.

RICHARD

What about the \$50,000 Peterson deposited in his sister's bank account, which happened to match the serial numbers of the bills Bandelli had withdrawn from his bank? You don't bother to mention that, do you, asshole?

He shuts it off, removes his jacket. Liz comes downstairs, cell in hand. Her t-shirt has the word "Cocaine" imitating the Coca-Cola logo.

LIZ

Talking to someone?

RICHARD

I don't like that shirt.

LIZ

(reacting to something on her cell) I don't get it. How can it help Governor Peterson, to claim he was recorded when that guy bribed him?

RICHARD

Lizzie, at this moment I don't know any more about the matter than you do.

(nodding at her cell) Now, even less than you do. *(During the subsequent dialogue, he'll keep glancing at the TV.)*

LIZ

But if he's admitting he took a bribe, how can he appeal his conviction?

RICHARD

(sighs) If his lawyers could prove a secret wiretap was used to intimidate a star witness ...

LIZ

But then he's admitting he's guilty!

RICHARD

He wouldn't have to admit anything. Don't worry, the FBI isn't in the business of bugging governors' offices. On the other hand, do you know wearing that shirt could get you stopped and searched?

LIZ

I have diplomatic immunity.

RICHARD

Wrong. That's for foreign ambassadors.

LIZ

Why couldn't you have been an ambassador?

RICHARD

So you could live in Moscow?

LIZ

How about Morocco? *(Pulls the neck of her t-shirt over her nose.)*

RICHARD

They'd love you in Morocco. I don't like that shirt.

LIZ

No one's asking you to wear it. It's a joke, Dad – lighten up.

RICHARD

For your grandmother's sake, go change it, will you?

He glances at the blank TV screen from time to time.

LIZ

For Grandma's sake!? If she tries to read it, I'll slap her hand. –

RICHARD

(can't help smiling) Touché, but what's the message? Because if you're trying to show me you're mature enough to have your own apartment, you're having the opposite effect.

LIZ

I didn't even bring it up. Since you did, I have to mail the lease today. You just co-sign right here.

RICHARD

I'm not comfortable with a 20-year-old living alone.

LIZ

I am.

RICHARD

I was out of law school before I had my own apartment.

LIZ

Bet it wasn't easy getting it on with the lady law students in the dorm, was it?

RICHARD

It wasn't easy getting it on with them, at all!

(Rewarded with a smile from Liz.) Why should it be easy?

LIZ

Forget it.

So, the FBI dude says they had nothing to do with wiretapping that governor? Is he lying? You must know, don't you?

RICHARD

No dirty secrets, just confusion. *(beat)*

Since when are you interested in the problems of the Justice Department?

LIZ

Maybe I'll go to law school, follow the family tradition.

RICHARD

You won't get in, dressed like that.

LIZ

I'm not stupid.

RICHARD

What kind of grades did you make last year?

LIZ

Funny you never asked me that until I mentioned law school.

RICHARD

Well, ...

LIZ

Why don't you answer my question, Dad? *(Putting her cell down, sitting)* Are you mixed up in that Peterson business?

RICHARD

I'm not "mixed up" in anything. You sound like a gangster movie.
They (*indicating the television*) do manage to make it sound like I had something to do with it, don't they?

LIZ

Didn't you? He was the enemy.

RICHARD

Not my enemy.

LIZ

You managed Bob's campaign the first time, and I know you pretty much ran the second one, too.

RICHARD

Don't call him Bob. He is the President. As you know.

LIZ

And polls showed him failing re-election if Peterson ran.

RICHARD

So I what, had the FBI bug Peterson's office to see if they could come up with any dirt on him? Constitution quiz: which amendment prevents that?

LIZ

The fifth?

RICHARD

The fourth.

LIZ

Wouldn't you like to have another lawyer in the family?

RICHARD

I'd be surprised, more than anything. But you've got a couple years yet to decide.

LIZ

No, I don't! I'm a senior, Dad. I take the L-SAT next month. I don't have all A's, but ... A's and B's.

RICHARD

That's all you'll need, as long as you meet their criterion on the L-SAT.

LIZ

Yeah, so I was looking at what various schools require, and I ...

RICHARD

Don't worry about various schools, just apply to Harvard and Yale.

LIZ

No, they accept like one out of eight, I'm not ...

RICHARD

Don't be silly. You just qualify on the L-SAT, you'll get in, I guarantee. Even if I weren't an alumnus.

Liz looks skeptical.

Of course! Every law school in the country's going to want my daughter, Harvard most fervently.

LIZ

Oh. (*ambivalent*)

RICHARD

Trust me on that.

LIZ

What are you going to do after you graduate?

RICHARD

(*looking at the blank TV screen*) Could be sooner than we thought.

LIZ

We could go into practice together.

RICHARD

(*suddenly stares at her*) That is the nicest thing anyone's said to me lately.

(*Sits down beside her, pouring his before-dinner Scotch*) I've never practiced law. A law professor isn't really a lawyer. And then I've worked in politics for twenty years.

LIZ

Yeah, that's not me.

RICHARD

Truth is, I don't like lawyers much, the legal "profession". The legal profession in the United States is responsible for distorting people's whole understanding of what the law is for; and with that, the end of moral responsibility.

LIZ

I thought that was the fault of rock 'n roll and girls who don't wear bras.

RICHARD

Contributing factors. – Hey, would you like a drink?

LIZ

Yeah?

RICHARD

Scotch?

He goes to the liquor cabinet for another glass.

LIZ

Wow, what did I do, what did I say?

RICHARD

It must be that shirt. When I “graduate”, as you put it, I’m going to write a book. Not a law book; a best-seller type of book, about –

LIZ

“My Eight Years Inside the Beltway”

RICHARD

No, about the law. What it is and what it is not.

LIZ

And what it’s not is – ?

RICHARD

It’s not a substitute for morality. It’s just a set of procedures for resolving conflicts, and for recourse when our lives or property are threatened.

Absolutely necessary, but far from sufficient. The human race would have extinguished itself a million years ago if we depended on the law to keep every man from robbing and killing his neighbor.

LIZ

There’s a social contract.

RICHARD

Exactly. But the direction we’re going, people think it’s acceptable to do anything they can get away with ...

LIZ

Some people.

RICHARD

I’m talking about everybody from CEOs and governors on down, using any technicality their lawyers can think of.

Anne enters dining room with salad, followed by Rose, whom she helps to the table.

ANNE

Dinner is served, monsieur, mademoiselle. (*back to kitchen for a platter to place on the table*)

Richard and Liz move toward the table as he continues.

RICHARD

You could behave morally and still be found guilty of a crime, or liable for damages in a lawsuit. And conversely, you could violate all ten Commandments and still be found blameless under the law.

ANNE

Oh, Richard Graham on lawyers. I've heard that speech a few times.

LIZ

Where does Peterson fit on that spectrum?

RICHARD

He'll get off scot free, if they violated his rights. That's an example, one of those technical issues. No transcript was introduced against him, but if they induced Bandelli's confession by playing him a recording they'd obtained without a warrant, well – so far as the law is concerned, Peterson may be right.

LIZ

That's ridiculous!

RICHARD

I'd be right there, as Attorney General, suing the State of Arizona on behalf of its own crooked Governor's civil rights, to reverse his conviction. But that doesn't mean he isn't a crook! That doesn't make the son-of-a-bitch a goddamn hero!

ROSE

(Clears her throat.)

LIZ

So his office was bugged?

RICHARD

How should I know?

ANNE

What happened today?

RICHARD

No more than any other day. But our daughter wants to be a lawyer, that's what started me off.

Anne helps Rose to a salad course. The others start to serve themselves.

ROSE

I remember your balsamic dressing, Anne. Are you going to say Grace, Richard?

RICHARD

I certainly am, Mother. Dear Lord, we thank you for Rose's safe travel, for Elizabeth being home with us, and for all your gifts. We ask your blessing on the President and our service to his administration, in Jesus's name, amen.

ROSE

Amen.

Liz has pulled her cell from her pocket, stills its vibration and sees a news bulletin.

LIZ

I hope He's paying special attention to the Justice Department.

ROSE

Oh, now, ...

ANNE

Lizzie – drop it!

LIZ

(based on what she's just seen) Daddy, could the FBI have bugged Governor Peterson's office and everything without you knowing about it?

RICHARD

They didn't. But you're right, that's what our friends in the so-called press are insinuating: that the Justice Department secretly recorded him and therefore the President and I must have ordered it personally. They can't imagine the FBI might have done it on their own.

LIZ

But if they did, if you didn't know about it, could you be held responsible?

ANNE

Lizzie, stop, will you?

LIZ

I'm trying to learn –

ANNE

Stop!

RICHARD

I'm discussing it with her, what do you care?

LIZ

Omigod. Here's a piece on Politico titled, "Is Richard Graham Above the Law?" Shit – Sorry, Grandma – "What Would it Take to Jail an Attorney General?"

Now Richard's cell dings with a text message, which he reads. He is heading to the TV when his phone rings.

ROSE

How can they be so malicious? Surely that's libel! Your father would never approve of dirty tricks!

ANNE

Wouldn't he?

RICHARD

(to caller) Hold on a second. Yeah, I'm turning it on.

TOM

As he left his office, moments ago, FBI Director Arthur Grey startlingly reversed himself and told reporters that Arizona contractor Albert Bandelli was being recorded when he bribed the governor of that state...

RICHARD

Shit!

TOM

...and that Bandelli had been shown a transcript of that conversation before he confessed to the bribery charges. Grey said the transcript had been turned over to the FBI by an anonymous source, and he had then ordered it passed on to Arizona law enforcement officials. The Director would not comment on the identity of the source, but ...



... Attorney General Richard Graham's office, usually most accessible to the press, is refusing all requests for comment or interviews.



Richard shuts off TV.

ANNE

(Has followed him to living room) Richard? What's happening ...

LIZ

(still at table with Rose) "Governor Peterson mentioned Graham specifically in charging the administration with abuse of executive powers for political advantage. The Attorney General was the President's campaign manager five years ago and a close friend. Chief White House advisors won't comment on whether the Peterson matter was among the topics discussed when Graham met with the President this afternoon." *(moving to where she can see Richard)*

RICHARD

Bill, what the hell? What is Grey doing!? ... What kind of bonehead play is he ... No, of course I didn't. None of you got with him after our meeting? ... What about the President? ... Are you sure? ...

LIZ

Who is Bill?

ANNE

Stillman. White House Chief of Staff.

RICHARD

Listen. If Grey thinks he can keep the Bureau out of this while the rest of us go down in flames, he's – look, I'll get him at home and call you right back. ... What? Why should you call him? I should talk with the President before he talks to Arthur. ...

Anne and Liz both receiving and perhaps replying to messages or notifications on their cells.

He is the President, yes. But tell him to call me right away, will you? Ask him to please call me. And Bill, let's not react too hastily, eh? We have to be very careful – Bill? Bill? (*Puts cell in his pocket uncertainly, pensively.*)

Doorbell rings. Anne starts up to foyer.

Hold it!

Richard parts the curtain; Cassandra is on the porch. As she turns and sees him, he closes the curtain.

Don't open the door, you understand?

He pulls out cell, dials. Anne freezes; Rose listening from dining room, Liz center stage.

This is Attorney General Graham. We're being bothered by a reporter out here, and there may be more coming. You know the house, don't you? Thanks.

Doorbell sounds again..

LIZ

Daddy? Who's at the door?

Anne goes to the window facing the street.

RICHARD

No one. A reporter. Don't open it. Go on and have dinner. I'm waiting for a call, I'll join you in a minute.

ANNE

Richard, there are trucks in front of the house. Television trucks, God damn it.

RICHARD

You think I invited them? Calm down, will you? I've already called the police. We're not going to be bothered at home.

ANNE

I need to talk with you alone.

RICHARD

Not now, for Christ sake.

Doorbell rings once more.

All right, back to the table, both of you, please. I want to explain this to you. And to Grandma, too.

He peeks through the porch window curtain.

Let's keep our cool, eh? All right. She's gone. (*to Anne*) Will you please sit down?

Liz sits at the table. Anne remains standing.

Listen to me, all of you. (*to Liz*) Put your phone away for a goddamn minute.

We've been through crises before. This one's going to look worse than it really is for awhile, okay? It looks like we used the FBI illegally, which of course we did not.

ANNE

Didn't you?

RICHARD

But the truth, which has nothing to do with the Bureau or with the Justice Department at all, would embarrass the President politically. So we may choose not to explain where that transcript actually came from. We may just tough it out and let the accusations die for lack of proof. That's all you need to know.

LIZ

More than I want to know.

RICHARD

What I've just told you must be absolutely confidential. If you have to talk to a friend, say you don't know anything about it but ... just what I said this morning, "reports in the past of illegal surveillance by the FBI have proved false." We're going to sit tight here in the house tonight, and in the morning we'll see where we stand.

ANNE

(After glaring at him, unbelieving) Don't include me in that "we".

RICHARD

All of us! No one goes out, no one comes in!

LIZ

I don't get it. So you're saying his office was bugged? Who by?

RICHARD

For the record, we don't know anything about any bugging, or any transcript. None of that happened at the federal level – if there was any bugging. Bandelli confessed in hope of getting a deal by turning state's evidence; which he got. Later he made up the transcript business to claim he'd been coerced.

LIZ

But the truth is – ?

RICHARD

(Choosing his words carefully) The truth is –I'm telling you this in strictest confidence – the truth is that Peterson's office was bugged by the state party in Arizona. We got it done privately.

ANNE

(to Liz) "We." I knew it. He doesn't know anything about it, "for the record."

RICHARD

When they heard the recording of Bandelli and Peterson, they, um, sent it to – well, they sent it to me – by way of the party, not the government – and we had to decide what to do. I think we made the right decision, showing it to Bandelli. He practically begged us for a deal then, to give evidence against the Governor. But we didn't want the thing to get out, in order to prevent this from happening. That's all. That's the whole story.

ROSE

Well, that's a perfectly good explanation.

LIZ

So it's true: You used an illegal wiretap to convict Peterson.

RICHARD

No! The transcript was never introduced as evidence. They didn't need it. They had Bandelli's own testimony, plus the serial numbers on the bills!

LIZ

But they wouldn't have got him to testify if your guys hadn't confronted him with the transcript?

RICHARD

I would have been violating the law if I had withheld that evidence from the investigators.

ANNE

Richard, come in the study, please. (*controlling herself with difficulty*) We need to talk for a minute.

RICHARD

I've got another call to make.

Goes to his study but closes the door. Liz and Rose are left at the table, perturbed. Anne lights a cigarette, pacing the foyer like a caged tiger. She kicks the study door.

Blackout. End of Scene

Scene 4. Hours later, dark outside. The dining room is no longer illuminated. Richard and Anne in the living room, his phone to his ear.

TOM

Breaking news: Reliable sources at the FBI have revealed the name of the “source” from whom the Bureau received a transcript of the conversation between Arizona’s governor and the highway contractor who later confessed to bribing him. The source is said to be the Attorney General himself. Our reporter, Cassandra Glass is in Arlington at the Graham home with more on the story.

CASSANDRA

(On TV, in front of house exterior) Thank you, Tom. A crowd is beginning to gather here across the street from the home where Attorney General Richard Graham has sequestered himself with his family. Governor Peterson – as you’ll recall, Tom – had been regarded as the President’s strongest challenger until his indictment on bribery charges. So the Attorney General’s apparent personal involvement revives rumors in Washington: Opponents of the President claim that his campaign committee financed political espionage and sabotage missions, by Justice Department personnel under Mr. Graham’s direction.

Anne turns off the TV

ANNE

Are you on hold? Richard! I refuse to be in the center ring of a media circus while the rest of Washington or the whole goddamn country is ...

He makes a point of waving her cigarette smoke away.

RICHARD

(into the phone) He’s got to come to the phone.

He said what? ... I see. Then please, ask him to call me as soon as possible. Thank you. ... *(hangs up.)* “He’s watching the news and suggests I do likewise.” No way did Bob say that. Bet they didn’t even tell him I was calling.

ANNE

Did you hear what I said?

RICHARD

I heard, and I understand.

ANNE

Do you?

RICHARD

(Sigh) It’s not what you contracted for when you married me for better or – best. You were prepared to be a charming hostess, attractive companion, an adornment to my career, so they say. A good bridge partner. But you’re worthless in a crisis. I’ve always known if I came through okay, there you’d be afterward, business as usual, but if I

went down, I'd go down alone. Devotion has no meaning to you.

ANNE

Then why did I stay with you all these years?

RICHARD

Because I always came through a winner.

ANNE

You made a big mistake, marrying me. You should have got a dog instead.

RICHARD

Instead of a bitch?

ANNE

You bastard.

RICHARD

You know what? I don't share your contempt for loyalty and selflessness. If you loved me, you'd feel those instincts. You can flatter yourself with any explanation you like; I've never thought you capable of that kind of love.

ANNE

There was a time I'd have died for you. You killed that. All you wanted was an adornment. A hostess. An escort.

RICHARD

Bullshit. You open the paper to the society page as soon as you wake up, to read what gown you wore to the British Embassy the night before.

ANNE

You project it all onto me, like I'm the one who's contemptuous of others? I'm the one who's incapable of feeling anything? Dr. Kaufman doesn't think so.

RICHARD

Fuck your Dr. Kaufman! I'll do without his services this evening, thank you.

ANNE

I've said what I had to say. (*starts out of the room, stops*)

There was a time when you'd have told me what's really going on – even if you denied it publicly. You wouldn't trust me with it, now.

RICHARD

(*after a beat*) Of course I would.

No surprise, they've already got their target in the cross-hairs!

ANNE

You. Because you personally ordered the bugging of Dan Peterson's office so you could put him out of contention in the election.

RICHARD

Bull's eye!

ANNE

This morning you told me you had nothing to do with that, it was “absolute bullshit.”

RICHARD

That's true, in a sense. They're making assumptions, but it was actually a private contractor in Arizona who bugged his office – I didn't use anyone in the Justice Department, and it isn't even a federal matter.

ANNE

Well, just so you know: I won't be by your side when you go in front of those cameras to resign. That scenario makes me sick. The loyal wife standing by her man in disgrace.

She receives a text or incoming call, which she rejects.

RICHARD

So you already have me resigning? I said, there's nothing to it. They'd love to manufacture a scandal, wouldn't they?

ANNE

This is why my Dad never went into politics!

RICHARD

What are you talking about, he was up to his neck in politics.

ANNE

Never as an office-seeker. And he was independent: donated to candidates of both parties—not expecting anything in return.

RICHARD

He never did anything in his life without expecting something in return.

ANNE

Only that if an issue mattered to him, he could count on them to take his call. He knew where to draw the line! He used to say “Our greatest asset is our reputation.” When he died, his reputation was in perfect health.

RICHARD

He didn't live in the age of instant information—and disinformation.

ANNE

The point is, he guarded his reputation, and I have the right to protect mine— not only my husband's.

RICHARD

Bully for you. But don't worry, if they could tie me to that some way, tie a

Act I, Scene 4

noose around my neck like they're trying to do, don't worry, I know better than to imagine I could count on you to stand by me. Even before you –

ANNE

(sotto voce) You haven't told your mother yet, have you? About us.

RICHARD

Of course not. And don't you say anything, not so much as a hint. You agreed, Anne – not to decide anything yet.

Anne starts to go upstairs.

Don't even think about it! *(calls after her)* You want an easy separation? Then however inconvenient this so-called news may be, you'll damn well play your so-called "part".

ANNE

(stopping in the foyer) And then wait till the next day to file for divorce? Don't be a fool.

They stare each other down.

Blackout. End of Act I.

Act II, Scene 1. Wednesday morning. Anne at the dining room table, reading the news on her cell or tablet. Rose is sitting in the living room reading a book in Braille, which might be her Bible. Liz comes downstairs dressed for a run, with earbuds.

LIZ

Good morning, Grandma. *(passing through to dining room)*

ROSE

Good morning, dear. Did you sleep well?

ANNE

Where do you think you're going?

LIZ

For a run.

ANNE

Please don't. They'll chase after you with a camera truck.

LIZ

Going out the back. Through the hedge, over the fence. Like Peter Rabbit.

ANNE

Didn't he go under the fence?

LIZ

Whatever.

ANNE

We don't know who lives there.

LIZ

Mr. MacGregor.

ANNE

(a wistful memory) Of course! Be careful.

LIZ

Mom, I really need you to co-sign this so I can send it off tomorrow.

ANNE

Did you ask the Attorney General?

LIZ

"I was out of law school before I had my own apartment."

ANNE

My concern is, I just want you to have a roommate. Seriously. Living alone makes you vulnerable. Someone follows you home ...?

LIZ

Mom, the General already hassled me enough for both of you, okay? Can we cut the bullshit?

ANNE

Caring about your safety is bullshit?

LIZ

No, Mom. I know you care about me. I wish you could trust me is all.

ANNE

(Sighs, starts to sign the form) Yeah, me too.

Her phone rings. The caller name surprises her.

LIZ

Actually it has to be notarized.

ANNE

Well that'll have to wait, won't it? I'm not crawling under the fence. *(tucks the paper in her purse)*

Liz exits through kitchen door.

Hello? ... Yes, I know who you are. ... No, I wouldn't.

No, don't call another time. If I ever want to, I have your number now.

Richard comes out of his study with a coffee mug to refill.

ROSE

Good morning, Richard.

RICHARD

Good morning, Mother. Did you sleep well? *(doesn't stop, heading to dining room)*

ROSE

Very well.

ANNE

I thought you'd left an hour ago.

RICHARD

Nope.

ANNE

Weren't you going to the White House?

RICHARD

Not yet. I had my driver pull around back ...

ANNE

Should I ask Willard to bring him out some breakfast?

RICHARD

Hell, no! ... Well, you know what? I'll bring him a cup of coffee.

ANNE

This is a new side of the Attorney General.

RICHARD

Not at all. I take care of my people.

ANNE

No comment.

He exits through the kitchen. Anne speed-dials:

(to voicemail) Hi, it's Anne Graham. I'm not going to be able to make our session, due to being under siege. Richard is ... Oh, hi, thank you for picking up. ...

Not very well, frankly. He's not telling me any ...

The way they're personalizing it this time is ...

Yeah, and you're only seeing a reporter and our house. You don't see all the busybodies across the street with nothing better to...

(conscious of Rose just around the corner) Just a minute, let me go to another room.

Hold on, please. *(Moves through living room and exits upstairs.)*

Richard returns, fills his own mug and heads back to the study.

ROSE

I hope you're not staying home on my account, Richard.

RICHARD

What? Oh, no – just going in a bit later.

ROSE

To the White House?

RICHARD

Most likely. As soon as my boss's handlers fit me on his very, very busy schedule.

ROSE

Your job has so much pressure. I can only imagine. You know you're in my prayers every morning, darling.

RICHARD

Could you pray for rain right now? A deluge?

ROSE

I know you're teasing me. But why a deluge?

RICHARD

Bring down thunder and lightning on those – people –outside.

ROSE

I'll do that for you – after Lizzie gets back from her run?

RICHARD

She went out?! I said ...

ROSE

She went out the back. Don't be angry, darling – it is hard for a young person to be cooped up in the house. When you came home that summer after your first year of college – the whole town wasn't large enough to contain your energy.

RICHARD

(shakes his head at her irrelevance) I've got to go now.

ROSE

Richard, do you think Anne may have anemia? She seems tired.

RICHARD

She's fine. *(retreating to his study)*

ROSE

You both sound a little testy with each other.

Any good marriage can have an occasional bumpy patch, you know.

RICHARD

That's right, Mother – nothing to be concerned about. *(quietly closing his door)*

ROSE

Especially when the husband has such ... a stressful job.

Richard?

Blackout. End of Scene.

Act II, Scene 2. Mid-afternoon. *Anne at the dining room table, reading something on her phone or laptop. She hears Richard come out of his study, go to liquor cabinet for an early drink.*

ANNE

You're still here.

RICHARD

They call it "working from home"

ANNE

What's going on.

RICHARD

Where's my mother?

ANNE

Upstairs, for a nap, she said. What's going on?

RICHARD

Bill is trying to muscle me out of Bob's circle, that's what. Obviously doesn't see this crisis as a threat to the Administration, only an opportunity to discredit me and displace me. Which is never going to happen.

ANNE

Wasn't it JFK who said every crisis is an opportunity, or something like that?

RICHARD

He said the Chinese character for crisis consists of the character for danger combined with the character for opportunity. Turned out that wasn't true, but it gets quoted all the time.

You're right, that's what Bill is thinking. Wrong: There is no upside here. Only a huge downside, as much for him, and Rogers – and Bob – as for me. Surely Bob sees that already.

Without replying, she returns to the dining room. He thinks of returning to his inner sanctum, then decides to follow her.

You asked me what was going on.

ANNE

And you told me.

RICHARD

That's all you have to say.

ANNE

"Sorry for your loss"?

They glare at each other, she exits to the kitchen and he passes back through the living room.

Restless, he starts to turn on the TV.

LIZ

(coming from upstairs) Is it true, Daddy?

He puts down the remote.

RICHARD

What? They aren't saying anything different from what I told you, did they?

LIZ

I think they did. They're saying you abused your office. Personally ordered an illegal wiretap against the President's opponent, used it to extort a confession from that guy who bribed him, and never revealed the fact to Peterson or his lawyers during the trial?

RICHARD

It was unnecessary to use that evidence in the trial. There was enough to convict him without it.

LIZ

(like a reporter) Mr. Attorney General, how can you justify abusing your office?

RICHARD

I have no trouble with myself. It's my family that's a pain in the ass.

LIZ

All that bullshit yesterday about right and wrong versus legal technicalities –

RICHARD

That wasn't bullshit! Look, baby, the world isn't as straightforward as these characters make it out to be. The press and the opposition are falling all over each other in a self-righteous campaign to – to do what? To expose discrepancies between the naïve fantasy of what goes on in Washington and the way things really work.

LIZ

It's good to expose that.

RICHARD

They'd have you believe our Administration invented politics! That's the bullshit. People have short memories. All that's being "exposed" is the game of hardball we inherited. It's power. Whoever's in power use their power as well as they can to make changes and to run things the way they believe things should be run. Whoever's out of power use every means at their disposal to make the ones who are in power look bad: incompetent, crooked, immoral. It's as old as our form of government. It is our form of government!

LIZ

It's not supposed to be!

RICHARD

Lizzie, don't you know this President and I are the defenders of justice and civil rights? It's our opponents who are the enemies. We've done more to protect the rights of the individual against government interference than the last four administrations put together. But that's not enough. To stay in power we also have to protect the voters' confidence in our administration — against their (a nod at the TV or the press outside) attempts to make us look like evil bastards. We can't sit around waiting for the other party to attack. We have to know what they're up to.

LIZ

And if you get an enemy sent to jail by dirty tricks – that doesn't bother you?

RICHARD

What are you talking about? The fifty grand Bandelli took out of his bank went into five different accounts under Peterson's sister's name. Do you hear any reporters asking "why does she have five accounts?" Because this was not a one time thing. He's been corrupt for years. I didn't make that transcript up.

You want to hear the goddamn smoking gun?

He rushes into study, opens desk drawer, returns.

Here! Here it is! Peterson was up to his ears in kickbacks since he was in junior high. We knew it, and he knew we knew it, and no one had been able to prove anything against him until this came along.

Liz regards the thumb drive as though it's about to explode.

Real world, baby. There's no such thing as an innocent man in politics. You think they aren't spying on me? I've had guys go over every square inch of this house. They've taken the alarm system apart, the lamps, everything. And I still can't be one hundred per cent sure someone isn't listening to this conversation we're having right now. Doesn't that excite you?

LIZ

No it doesn't!

Liz flees, upstairs. Richard turns on the screen and finds Tom silently looking up at him. Richard returns his hostile glare. After 3 or 4 seconds, he shouts:

RICHARD

What the hell do you want?

Tom continues to stare at Richard in silence. Finally he looks down to the news script in his hand.

Blackout. End of Scene.

Scene 3: Early Evening. The bottle of Scotch on the coffee table is nearly empty. Anne is smoking. She and Richard are standing, Rose is seated, all three holding drinks. Richard is in shirtsleeves with his tie and collar loosened.

TOM

The eyes of the nation this evening were on the comfortable home in Arlington, Virginia where Attorney General Richard Graham is believed to be preparing his statement of resignation. Cassandra Glass, who broke this story, is there. Cassandra?

RICHARD

Believed by whom to be preparing his resignation? Like hell I will.

CASSANDRA

(On the now-dark suburban street) Thank you, Tom. No one has entered or left the Graham home this evening, and it might be just an ordinary night on this quiet street.

RICHARD

Then why don't you get your ass home, bitch?

ANNE

Are we all bitches?

CASSANDRA

The reason we're still here is the tense deliberation we know must be taking place inside that house.

RICHARD¹

Does the President of the United States believe him to be preparing his resignation?

CASSANDRA

A crowd has been gathering here since late this afternoon and there are now a few hundred people, ...

RICHARD

The President of the United States would like him to say "mea culpa" ...

CASSANDRA

including one family in a camper from as far away as Pennsylvania, who have come to be part of this vigil ...

RICHARD

... like the President and his aides are "shocked, shocked" about surveillance on his political opponents.

¹ Richard should partly speak over Cassandra's voice through this "dialogue".

CASSANDRA

We see signs calling for the Attorney General's resignation ...

*(Placard behind her says "Attorney Criminal
Graham OUT")*

RICHARD

But does the President have the balls to take his Attorney General's call?

CASSANDRA

... and some of the folks are laughing and clowning around, but most are quiet, even sad.

RICHARD

They've only been friends for twenty years ...

CASSANDRA

Neighbors are thinking about the Graham family: his lovely wife, his daughter, his Mother who happens to be blind, isolating themselves in there to support him.

RICHARD

And the son-of-a-bitch won't pick up the phone himself to ask me to take the rap for him!

CASSANDRA

No American can help feeling sympathy for Mr. Graham's family as they stand loyally by him, and no matter what may come to be proved against him we cannot help feeling the tragedy of a man who ...

RICHARD

Jesus, what crap!

He turns off the TV.

Cue the vultures: circling. Circling.

ROSE

If you'll excuse me, I'll be off to bed.

RICHARD

Everybody's excused tonight! Everybody but the fucking Attorney General.

ROSE

Language, dear. You should go to bed, too – you're taking it all too hard. Tomorrow, I know, the President will clear your good name. No one believes all those lies, Richard. You know enough to ignore such nonsense. When your father was accused of –

ANNE

Rose, let's not go there tonight, okay? Do you need any help?

ROSE

No need, I know where everything is, and I'll ask Lizzie for help if I need any. Good night, dear, God bless you. God bless you, Richard.

She kisses Anne and Richard, exits.

ANNE

She's not only blind, she's deaf.

Anne removes her shoes, a pair of low pumps that will be left behind when she leaves the scene.

RICHARD

She's loyal! Believes in me! *(Throws himself on a couch)* And you, my darling, sneer at the very idea of a loyal wife standing by her husband through thick and thin.

ANNE

There hasn't been any thick. Only thin.

RICHARD

It's going to get thinner.

ANNE

I'm not feeling sorry for myself, Richard. I'm sorry for you. I wish I could do whatever all those "sympathetic Americans" are sympathizing with me for. "My darling husband I believe in you and I know you're right no matter what you do." But I told you. I can't. Sorry.

RICHARD

At least you're honest with me, that's a sort of loyalty –

ANNE

No I'm not! That was the first honest thing I've said to you in years. The second, after "I'm leaving you."

RICHARD

(Sighs, pouring the last of the Scotch into his glass.) Must you stand with your back to me?

ANNE

(Turning part way toward him) It frightens me to look at you. I'm not used to seeing you helpless and awkward and – really desperate. I look at you and I can't help but think you're full of shit and you probably did everything they're accusing you of, all they're insinuating and more.

RICHARD

I'm not ashamed of anything I've done.

ANNE

When are you ever?

RICHARD

I gave you what you wanted – a prominent husband, a glamorous social life, –

ANNE

So snotty! That was never what I wanted! I grew up with a social life that bored me to tears. Washington society is the only life I have now, but it's not what I ... Running with you on the beach in Cornwall, I thought that was our marriage. That bed and breakfast in the Dordogne, where we ... (*chokes*)

RICHARD

You are feeling sorry for yourself.

ANNE

(*Controlling her tears*) If I am, it's not because of what your downfall will do to my social life.

RICHARD

This crap has nothing to do with our marriage.

ANNE

It has everything to do with who I was married to.

RICHARD

It's about you being worse than no damn help in a crisis. You're a positive liability. A week from now, when all this has blown over, you won't see this "insight" as truth any more. Your satisfaction with our marriage waxes and wanes, like the Gallup poll – Jesus Christ!

ANNE

It's this day — it broke down something that kept me from facing the facts about my husband.

RICHARD

So now you can kick him while he's down. Go ahead.

ANNE

I thought I was giving up only because we no longer had anything but Georgetown parties to keep us together. We used to have fun together—and I don't only mean in bed. With Lizzie, at the shore—remember? Do you realize it's over two years since we went down to the shore house at the same time?

RICHARD

We're older. We're busier.

ANNE

I'm not.

RICHARD

I haven't noticed you expressing any desire along those lines lately.

ANNE

There wouldn't have been any response if I had.

RICHARD

Is that an indictment of me, or of you? Goddamnit, I'm not the cause of your problems, sexual or otherwise.

ANNE

Well, you sure as hell aren't the cure.

RICHARD

I gave you exactly what I contracted for.

ANNE

Life is not a GODDAMN CONTRACT!

RICHARD

Marriage is.

ANNE

Then it's a contract that can be broken now.

RICHARD

Don't you threaten me! *(he charges, grabs her arm, hard)* Don't even think about leaving me right now!

ANNE

You're hurting me!

RICHARD

I won't be humiliated by you or any other woman—or man. Or any fucking President of the United States, either, understand? I haven't worked my tail off to put him in office, only to have you all abandon me like rats off a sinking ship.

ANNE

Let me go!

Richard releases her, goes into his study and slams the door. She sits down, fighting tears, starts to check her messages. Liz comes from upstairs.

LIZ

I thought I heard a scream.

ANNE

I'm leaving your father.

LIZ

That's not news. But nice timing, Mom! *(pause)*

I've told you both, you're not good together. If you stayed together because of me, I'm sorry. but that's not my fault.

ANNE

We didn't.

LIZ

Good. Because I stopped wanting you to, over a year ago. Why do you think I didn't come home at all, last summer? (*pauses -- Anne crying*)
But I thought you both agreed to wait until I go back to Providence.

ANNE

I can't stand this – scandal.

LIZ

It's not a scandal, it's speculation.

ANNE

(*wordless gesture saying "Whatever"*)

LIZ

You loved being in the public eye as long as it was positive.

ANNE

What if I did? Am I a bad person if I want a husband who's respected?

LIZ

No, but ... yes! People get divorced because, I don't know, love dies? But you don't leave someone when they get in trouble! Or because his reputation is ... in doubt.

ANNE

How about when he lies? You know, Lizzie, I was happy with your father when he wasn't famous. Just an assistant professor, writing his first book. Twenty, twenty-one years ago, we lived in England for half a year? He was doing his research at the British Library, I was taking courses in Renaissance art? Every weekend we'd get out of London, take the train out to some country town.

LIZ

You hitchhiked to France.

ANNE

We were free and crazy in love with each other and – you were conceived in that love, we've told you about that idyllic little B&B in the south of France, I thought that would be our life, but I just went with the flow, and ...

LIZ

You know what? Don't ask my permission! I'm not defending Dad, but ... I'm sick of you trying to make me take your side. He never does that, you know? No matter how much of a bitch you are, he doesn't come whining to me about it. Like you do.

ANNE

Is that all you think of me? I'm a bitch?

LIZ

No! I'm sorry I used that word. You're my mother. I wish I had more respect for both of you, but – Aaargh!

Blackout. End of Scene

Act III, Scene 1. Midnight. Richard emerges from his study with an empty glass in his hand. He calls up the stairs.

RICHARD

You know what? Bullshit! You wanted fame, baby, you got fame now.

In the living room, he takes a new bottle from the sideboard and pours a drink.

I wanted love, and all I got was – what? “The lovely wife of the Attorney General announced today that she isn’t having any fun.”

Lovely wife of the former Attorney General. Got to keep my cool. I gotta stay one step ahead of Stillman, and Rogers – and Grey, the bastard. All three of those bastards set this whole thing up to cut me out. And he swallowed it hook, line, and sinker. He always was a sucker. Bob, you pussy, I always played straight with you, you stupid son-of-a-bitch! Can’t you see? Your boys are working for somebody else; CIA, probably. The FBI? Shit, the FBI is supposed to work for me.

(Dials his phone)

Wake up, Bob, you pussy. Hello, who’s this? Let me speak to the President. The fucking President! Richard Graham, who the hell are you?

(Hangs up.)

Bastards put up a fucking wall around him. What if Putin needs to get through, you assholes! We could have a global crisis while you’re “protecting” the poor sap from listening to me instead of you.

Grey should have been able to keep the lid on this. What’s that noise. Who’s out there?

He peeks out the window that faces the street.

Son-of-a-bitch mob would tear the house down if the cops weren’t there. There’s that news bitch interviewing some asshole neighbor, putting words into his mouth. I wonder who she’s really working for. Incredible, how they twist it any way they want it. *(thinks)* Gotta shut her down. Hmm. What’s her name?

Speed-dials a number on his phone.

It’s me. Have you still got eyes and ears out there in the crowd? ... Good, are you in touch with him? I need him to hand a note to the NBS girl, Cassandra something: “Come to the door alone, off the record. Richard Graham.” And tell the cop to let her through. ... right. ... thanks.

He picks up his father’s picture from the mantle.

Father. The Honorable Frederick Graham. Peterson is small potatoes next to you, isn’t he? Does Mom know the truth about you? You’re having a good laugh now, aren’t you, you bastard?

Opens the front door part way and proceeds to straighten up the living room a bit.

This one’s a shark. Smelling blood. She’ll stop at nothing to get the story she wants. And what she wants is my ass! *(Smiles)* Richard, my boy, it’s your life on the line, boy, don’t blow it. Now if I wanted some ass – not that this ice- cold bitch could turn me on. But she didn’t get where she is without balling the right people at the right time. Damn! Somebody told me something about her and – who?

Hearing Cassandra knock on the half- open door,

he sits in his armchair.

Come on in.

He waves her into the living room and stands.

Hello, nice to see you again; we've met before, haven't we?

CASSANDRA

Only at press conferences, Mr. Graham.

RICHARD

Thought you probably could use a drink after standing out there all day and night.

CASSANDRA

Nothing, thank you.

RICHARD

(showing her the bottle) Single malt?

CASSANDRA

I'll join you.

RICHARD

(fetching a glass from sideboard) Have a seat. Wait a minute.

*He takes her purse, opens it and removes her cell
and a professional recorder, which he puts on a
shelf or mantelpiece.*

CASSANDRA

It's not loaded, officer.

RICHARD

Have you got a smaller one that is?

He frisks her.

CASSANDRA

Feel anything?

RICHARD

Nothing. Sit down. This conversation is completely off the record. No "usually reliable sources," not a word. It isn't even taking place. If that isn't acceptable—

CASSANDRA

I guessed that. But you didn't invite me for companionship.

RICHARD

I did! I couldn't let a charming lady spend the night on my doorstep.

CASSANDRA

As charming as you are, sir, I need something I can use. Nothing you'd say off the record is any use to me.

RICHARD

I feel misunderstood. There are some things I can share with you in background that will give you a better understanding of this Peterson business. Keep you and your colleagues from making fools of yourselves by barking up the wrong tree.

CASSANDRA

Making fools of ourselves?

RICHARD

And doing an injustice to the President – and me.

CASSANDRA

Well, Mr. Graham, I'm all ears.

RICHARD

Fact? Peterson is a crook. He was a crook when he was in office, he's still a crook, he was a crook before you were born. Bandelli bribed Peterson blatantly, without even trying to use money that couldn't be traced. As you well know, but none of you've bothered to mention today.

CASSANDRA

We don't ...

RICHARD

Fact number two? Private business interests in Arizona had bugged Peterson's office, illegally to be sure, but we didn't know about it until months later, when Bandelli had already been indicted, and the state's attorney was about to indict Peterson.

CASSANDRA

Ah, ...

RICHARD

Now. Drumroll, for the great revelation: Suppose the President's campaign headquarters got an audio file in its mail, someone listened to it and wrote me a memo about it. I listened to it myself. Incontrovertible evidence of a Governor taking a bribe. I was then damned, no matter what I did, wasn't I?

CASSANDRA

I don't quite ...

RICHARD

Should never have listened to the goddamned thing. To ignore it would be to withhold evidence relevant to a criminal proceeding – even though it was inadmissible. To turn it over would make me accessory to a fourth amendment violation, and, of course, eventually subject myself and the President to the vilification and unfounded accusations we are presently enjoying.

I'm curious, what would you have done?

CASSANDRA

I would have published the transcript.

RICHARD

Like the good reporter you are. But I – off the record, remember – I turned it over to the prosecutors. They couldn't use it in court, but they could – and did– use it in negotiating a confession from Bandelli. Until today, I honestly didn't know any more details about the case than what I could remember from the news coverage at the time – but everyone assures me there was nothing tricky or shady about how they handled it, just standard plea bargaining in exchange for a confession that would help the Arizona law enforcement people get the whole story, so far as Peterson and everyone else involved.

CASSANDRA

Wasn't Peterson in fact the one you were out to get?

RICHARD

We weren't "out to get" anybody! Peterson is and was a crooked son-of-a-bitch. I was delighted to see him caught by the balls, red handed, and the President was even more delighted. No need to deny that. But don't you see it was just a lucky thing for us that he happened to be so stupid?

CASSANDRA

Actually, ...

RICHARD

Fact number three? There is no secret espionage squad, nor has the Federal Bureau of Investigation or any other branch of government been used by the present administration to subvert the political process in any way, at any time, by anybody, so far as I am aware.

CASSANDRA

Bottom line, though ...

RICHARD

The bottom line is fact number four! This administration has done more to protect individual privacy, more to advance the basic freedoms – including, pardon the expression, freedom of the press – than the previous five or six administrations put together.

CASSANDRA

Sir, excuse me, the first three may be facts, but the last is an opinion.

RICHARD

It is a fact – in my opinion. And the fifth and last fact is that the President is getting damned pissed off at this little campaign of insinuation you and your colleagues are waging. You're endangering your network's good relations with his administration.

CASSANDRA

It's not our job to have good relations with the President, Mr. Graham. It's part of his job to have good relations with us.

RICHARD

Fair point! That's why I asked you to come in.

CASSANDRA

What you've just told me is enlightening—if it's true—but I'm puzzled. If true, why would you cover it up?

RICHARD

Why publicize it?

CASSANDRA

And then, once it came to light despite your denial, why not explain it publicly, why not say what you just told me?

RICHARD

I have wanted to do that all day, I told the President yesterday that if we didn't reveal all the facts ourselves, immediately, then exactly what has happened would happen. The President chose to stonewall it.

CASSANDRA

Why?

RICHARD

We now leave the realm of facts and truly enter that of speculation. I don't know. I think he feels honor bound to protect those who originally recorded it and gave it to us.

CASSANDRA

Who would that be?

RICHARD

I, um, don't know. Maybe the President has an idea about who might have been involved. I doubt he's asked anyone directly. He doesn't want to know, and frankly neither do I. We are not about to embarrass anybody for doing something they believed was patriotic and loyal.

CASSANDRA

And criminal?

RICHARD

I would say overzealous. The only one hurt by it, if anyone was, was Peterson. The criminal.

CASSANDRA

Sir, let me get to my bottom line, if you will: "What did the President know and when did he know it?"

RICHARD

You know, it would be the easy way out for the President to say, “ I’ve just learned blah blah blah,” and pass the buck to me and say he didn’t know a goddamn thing about it until this morning.

CASSANDRA

But you told him about it at the time?

RICHARD

I don’t remember when I may have told him.

CASSANDRA

Off the record?

RICHARD

I’m just telling you someone sent the thing to me anonymously and I passed it on to the appropriate authorities. I’m not saying if or when I discussed it with anybody. The point is, you’ve got to admire the President’s courage and integrity, tolerating all you people’s nonsensical speculations about secret surveillance of opponents and so forth, because all the facts are not public and he doesn’t want to compromise whistle-blowing citizens.

CASSANDRA

Somehow that doesn’t sound like my image of the President.

RICHARD

Because your image of the goddamned President is an image you people created!

CASSANDRA

You think the press is conspiring against the Administration?

RICHARD

You know you are. All of you have been sticking it to us for five years. (*Laughs*) And you’d love to add paranoia to your litany, too, wouldn’t you?

CASSANDRA

Does – does the President believe the press is out to get him?

RICHARD

The President lies awake all night, trembling in fear of what the morning papers will say about him. He is mortified by each of your broadcasts, Miss –

CASSANDRA

Glass.

RICHARD

I know your name, I was only hesitating over whether I might call you Cassandra.

CASSANDRA

Please do.

RICHARD

Yes, Cassandra, the President is decimated by your treatment of him.

Cassandra laughs.

He writhes on the floor in agony with each new revelation of his incompetence, his weakness of character, of the bloody fools he assembled in his Cabinet. All of us live in dread of the next distortion, insinuation, or ironic remark you will produce.

Moves to sit beside her, very close.

You're doing a great job of undermining the public's confidence in government, Cassandra, all of you are.

CASSANDRA

(No longer amused, now uncomfortable.) You flatter me, sir. But you also make me doubt whether anything you've told me was true.

RICHARD

(Takes her hand) I apologize for the sarcasm. Sincerely, you are doing your job. The Peterson business does look circumstantially like it might have been a vendetta. Which would be outrageous, if I had used the FBI or anyone in the Justice Department as a political hatchet. But you be the judge; I've given you the facts.

CASSANDRA

Then let me quote you on them. At least on the fact that someone sent you the file anonymously, and you passed it on to the Arizona prosecutor.

RICHARD

No. You agreed: off the record.

CASSANDRA

I need a quote.

RICHARD

You learned from "an anonymous source in the Justice Department" that the recording came from private individuals in Arizona.

CASSANDRA

(Puts down her drink and tries to pry his hand off the top of hers) Mr. Graham, I wonder why you choose me to receive these unverifiable "facts".

RICHARD

(Places his other hand firmly on top of hers, making a stack of four) Miss Glass, that is just one more thing I do not really know. I suppose – I'm sure I'm not the first man to say this to you – in a funny way I feel I know you.

LIZ

(Emerges from the unseen stairway, startling them) Daddy?

RICHARD

Miss Glass, Miss Graham.

CASSANDRA

Hello. (*Gathers herself, picks up purse.*) Mr. Graham, thank you for the drink. Good night.

Liz stands aside to let her pass.

RICHARD

Wait a minute. Don't forget your mighty sword.

Rises and hands Cassandra the recorder and her cell. She leaves.

Why that look? She was interviewing me.

LIZ

Looked like an "in-depth" interview. – Did you give her the file?

RICHARD

Sssh! (*Peeks out window onto porch.*) No. Got it right here. (*Pats shirt pocket.*) She wanted it, but she didn't get it. Lucky thing you came in when you did, she was just saying she would do "anything" to get the story.

LIZ

Yeah, well, I heard you tell her as a "fact" you didn't order the wiretap. You told me for a fact you did, so one way or the other you're a fucking liar.

Richard grabs her violently by the upper arm, wrenching her close to his face.

RICHARD

Don't talk to me like that!

LIZ

Oww!

Both speechless for a beat; Liz frightened. Richard shocked, reacts to his unprecedented violence by suddenly thrusting her away, inadvertently knocking her over something (coffee table?) to the floor.

Oww! (*crying*)

RICHARD

(*stunned, doesn't move at first*) Oh Jesus, what have I done? I didn't mean to ... (*bends toward her, to help her up*) I didn't mean to grab you so hard. Are you okay?

LIZ

Get away from me!

Richard backs off. Long silence. Seeing how hurt she is, he kneels, wanting to embrace her but restraining himself.

RICHARD

Liz, my God, it was an accident, I ...

LIZ

(sitting up, rubbing her arm) Just don't touch me now. *(She stands up.)*

RICHARD

I won't.

LIZ

I want to sit down.

RICHARD

Can I sit beside you?

LIZ

(Goes to the couch) Okay, just ...

RICHARD

(Follows and sits beside her) Can I hug you?

LIZ

No. *(long silence)* Not yet.

RICHARD

Liz, I'm sorry, I'm – good Lord– I'm a mess. Overdid the Scotch – no excuse for hurting you. Please – forgive me?

Liz nods, weeping softly. Tentatively he reaches out to stroke her hair gently, a tender way that she liked as a child.

LIZ

(after a long pause) What are you going to do, Daddy?

RICHARD

About what?

LIZ

It's really bad, isn't it? I mean the stuff that's gotten out isn't the worst of it?

RICHARD

(deep breath) That's right, Sweetie.

LIZ

(rubbing her arm) Can you tell me?

RICHARD

I don't know what's happening. I think the boys in the White House are sacrificing me in order to stop the media uncovering a whole lot more, some things that involve me and some that don't.

(pause) I'm so sorry, Sweetie. I couldn't believe I wrenched you like that, and then I was like, trying to take it back, and *(gestures how his release led to her falling)*

LIZ

I can't believe I called you – what I did.

RICHARD

A liar.

LIZ

Yeah.

RICHARD

I told you the truth. Her, not exactly.

LIZ

I'm trying to see how you, what the ... It's like you have all those principles and you're like the "General" in charge of law enforcement, then you ... put politics above ...

RICHARD

(pensive) I know.

LIZ

Daddy? I love you.

RICHARD

What?

LIZ

I just wanted to tell you, in case you didn't know.

RICHARD

Of course I know. I love you too, Lizzie.

LIZ

Seems like a long time since we said it.

RICHARD

Thank you for saying it now, when I least deserve it. I'm – kind of a mess.

LIZ

You're human.

RICHARD

The way you say that, like a grown-up woman.

LIZ

I am a grown-up woman. Hadn't you noticed?

RICHARD

I guess I hadn't – taken it in. Of course you are.

LIZ

Are you and Mother really breaking up?

RICHARD

What are you talking about? ... Well – nothing's decided.

LIZ

When you aren't fighting, do you still – have – a love life?

RICHARD

That's private.

LIZ

I heard her lock the bedroom door.

RICHARD

This happens to be an extraordinary night. I have bigger problems to contend with right now than my lousy marriage.

LIZ

I know that. I hate that there's a crowd of people outside laughing at my father.

RICHARD

Is that what they're doing? Cue laughing hyenas, following the vultures!

LIZ

I feel like going out and tell them to fuck off.

RICHARD

Don't.

LIZ

Don't worry. I know you've got a lot on your mind, Daddy. I just wanted to talk. I'm sorry I brought up Mother. Are you going to resign?

RICHARD

I think I'd rather talk about your mother than that, as a matter of fact.

LIZ

You're still in love with her?

RICHARD

Of course I am. She's a damn good woman.

LIZ

But not much help in a crisis?

RICHARD

Well – that's true, but when everything's going along normally, she's great.

LIZ

You don't show her you love her.

RICHARD

How do you know?

LIZ

You don't show either of us very often.

RICHARD

Who do I work my ass off for, a hundred hours a week? I show my love by giving you a husband and father you can look up to, be proud of; that's why it upsets me to have you hear it all – (*voice breaks*) twisted around.

LIZ

I know but, it seems it's not all that "twisted around."

RICHARD

Believe me, baby, no one could have accomplished all the things we've accomplished in this administration without bending a few rules. But you don't hear about our accomplishments, only whining about our imperfections.

LIZ

That's not ...

RICHARD

And frankly, I don't care what the public thinks, but I do care (*voice breaks*) what you and your mother think.

LIZ

You think I care what other people think?! (*Jumps up to face him.*)

I don't want them laughing or attacking you, because it's not fair – they don't know you. I just want to know what you're thinking and how you feel. Maybe Mother cares about your image, I don't. I used to think you being the Attorney General was awesome – but no longer. It doesn't impress me. I wish you would resign.

RICHARD

I can't ...

LIZ

Get a normal job, be a normal person. You know what I thought when you were so angry at the President this evening and he wouldn't talk to you? I thought: my father's a vulnerable man. And just now, even, losing your temper, you seemed, in a way, more like a Dad than the thousand times you've kissed me goodnight and turned away to call up one of your assistants.

RICHARD

You know I was out of my head there (*her arm*), I was seeing things, don't – (*near tears*)

LIZ

(smiles and sits on the arm of the couch, near him) Makes a nice change from all the careful, analytical reasoning you're so famous for.

(She touches him tenderly, perhaps on the shoulder. He looks almost dead.)

RICHARD

I'm beat, Sweetie *(choking)*. Forgive me?

LIZ

It's all right, Daddy. Yes.

Lights fade, End of Scene.

Act III, Scene 2. Dawn. Throughout this final scene, distant crowd voices can be heard from the street. As sunlight slowly increases through the windows, we see Richard asleep on the couch, covered with a blanket.

ROSE

(offstage) Richard? Richard? *(enters from the stairs, in a robe over her nightdress)*
Richard? Are you down here?

RICHARD

I'm right here, Mother. What's the matter? What time is it?

ROSE

I was worried, I thought you'd – when they said Anne had left, I –

RICHARD

Who said what?

ROSE

That Anne left. The woman on the news. Where did she go?

RICHARD

I don't know what you're talking about. Anne is upstairs, asleep. It's early morning, Mother. I was up late, I guess I fell asleep on the couch.

ROSE

No. She isn't. I went in your room. Your bed is made. You didn't know she left?

RICHARD

What woman on the news?

He runs upstairs.

ROSE

(Thinking aloud) The strain was very great for her – it's nothing to be concerned about – she couldn't sleep. She must have gone to your place on the shore.

Richard returns, crosses through both rooms and looks in the kitchen.

RICHARD

Anne?!

ROSE

I know what happened, dear. She couldn't sleep and drove out to the shore. The strain was too great for her, Richard, Anne is a private sort of person. Those reporters –

RICHARD

Did she say something about going to the shore?

ROSE

No. I – I just imagined.

RICHARD

Don't imagine! Get out of the way! (*finds his phone, which he picks up and starts to call Anne*) What's the difference where she went? (*hangs up*) She left, that's the point. Breaking news! National headline: "Cabinet wife sneaks off in middle of night."

ROSE

She'll be calling us now, to explain!

RICHARD

(*muttering to himself*) Trying to humiliate me. Had to sneak out in the night, proves her husband's a madman.

Shit! I told Bob to let me deal with the situation myself. FBI got an anonymous tip—if I'd just said that in the first place. But he stalled, afraid it might implicate him, and then Stillman or Rogers stalled him longer, made it look like he has no confidence in me.

How stupid was I?! Now the lid's blown off the whole project!

ROSE

What project?

RICHARD

How the hell do they think he's going to get out of it now? We're all in the shit together, Mister President! You forgot where the buck stops, pal! –

Where'd Anne go?

ROSE

Perhaps she left a note?

RICHARD

If she had, would I be asking you, damn it, would I ask you if she'd left a note? Where did she go?

ROSE

Richard! (*crying*) I have no idea!

RICHARD

Didn't you ask her?

ROSE

I didn't know she was leaving!

RICHARD

How did you not know? Why are you here?

ROSE

All I know is they said on the news – she left about three o'clock – out of the garage suddenly, drove away fast.

Liz enters, running down the stairs. Barefoot, in nightwear.

LIZ

Daddy, you'd better – you'd better look at the news.

She switches TV on.

TOM

... Our team got a glimpse of Mrs. Graham as she almost collided with our DC mobile unit. Cassandra?

VOICE OF CASSANDRA

Here's the video, Tom – not sure exactly what sort of statement Anne Graham intended.

Video clip shows Anne in the driver's seat of a car backing down a floodlit driveway, stopping to change gear, then peeling out with her middle finger pressed to the window.

TOM

Thank you, Cassandra – please stand by. Mrs. Graham was recognized moments ago at Washington National Airport, where she began answering some of the questions we've been asking all day. This was just streamed live on Facebook by a traveler:

ANNE

(Appears on the screen responding to a cluster of women) No, my leaving Richard had absolutely nothing to do with the allegations about him. Our marriage had been a sham for some time.

A VOICE

Is there another woman involved?

ANNE

Not likely. *(Sound of laughter)*

ANOTHER VOICE

Another man?

ANNE

Not yet! *(More laughter)*

Richard, Rose, and Liz are transfixed. TV cuts to Cassandra.

CASSANDRA

This new development took the capital by surprise, as the Grahams were one of Washington's most popular couples. The crowd here in front of the Graham home has swelled to several hundred, whose mood has turned decidedly against the Attorney General. Banners and placards are calling for his arrest and the President's impeachment. Someone has been selling buttons that read "Shame, Graham" – here's one. *(She is wearing it.)*

TOM

Cassandra, would you say Mrs. Graham's leaving has intensified the popular sentiment against her husband?

CASSANDRA

Too early to tell, Tom. People were already incensed yesterday when it came out that he had obviously orchestrated the bugging of Governor Peterson, and probably others.

RICHARD

"Obviously orchestrated!?!"

TOM

We've now been able to reach Mrs. Graham on FaceTime. (*Similar handheld video with the same background as previous.*) Anne, can I ask you whether so far as you know, the Attorney General has been truthful and forthcoming in his account of that illegal wiretapping and associated chicanery?

ANNE

I wouldn't know about truthful. Forthcoming? Of course not! He's doing his job. It's not his job to expose the administration's chicanery – as you call it. Anyway, I didn't know anything about it.

TOM

Please stay with us; Cassandra Glass is in front of your house.

CASSANDRA

Welcome, Anne. The crowd here is beginning to turn into an angry mob. Effigies of your husband have been hung from several of the neighbors' trees, there's a banner calling him the Entrapment General, and chants are going up against police protection for the privileged. It really is turning ugly.

I have to ask you, Anne: What did Richard know and when did he know it?

ANNE

Why don't you ask him?

CASSANDRA

Well, I have, as a matter of fact. But he would only speak with me off the record and we're trying to fact check how much truth there was in his claims. If any.

TOM

Are we correct that the only people inside the house with your husband are your daughter and his mother?

ANNE

That is correct, Tom. Mother Graham conveniently happened to arrive just when the scandal broke. She worships Richard.

TOM

So, they have a close relationship, Anne?

ANNE

Let's just say I'm sure she'll stand by him all the way to the gallows.

TOM

And what about your daughter?

ANNE

Well, Tom, you know how unpredictable teenagers are. Her main concern is getting her own apartment. Can you blame her?

RICHARD

Well, that takes care of everybody, doesn't it? Turn that shit off!

No one moves; he turns it off himself.

Was that your mother? Was that vicious, backstabbing, lying bitch your –

ROSE

(Very controlled) Richard, stop talking that way! Anyone can see Anne has had some kind of a nervous breakdown. She needs care, and understanding. This has been a terribly stressful experience for her, as it has for all of us.

LIZ

She didn't look that nervous to me.

Richard's phone rings, followed by a text signal on Liz's.

RICHARD

Get out of my way!

He goes into the study, leaving the door ajar. Liz and Rose listen anxiously.

RICHARD

Yes, Bill. ... Why didn't he call me himself? I've been trying to get through to him since yesterday afternoon. We all need to hold to the same line on this. Absolute denial of any wrong ...

Let me speak to Bob – to the President. ...

He said what? What kind of game are you guys playing? This implicates all of us, not just me. Yes, I'll hold.

(to himself as much as to Rose and Liz) This can't be Bob's doing. He and I go back a long way. I'm not gonna let Stillman and Rogers brainwash him into throwing me under the – We're gonna fight this thing, deny it right down the line. And there's a lot of people – a lot of people we have things we can use against, to shut them up.

Liz's text message leads her to turn the TV back on.

TOM

Thank you, Cassandra. In related news, the Washington Post reported this morning that the House Judiciary Committee plans to launch an investigation into a new allegation that a number of people on the administration's so-called "enemies list" were illegally bugged by the FBI over a two-year period prior to the now-famous wiretapping of Arizona Governor Dan Peterson accepting a bribe in February of last

year.

RICHARD

SHIT! (*Comes back to turn off the TV*)

(*Stillman back on the phone*) Yeah, Bill. Look, I don't believe the opposition can nail us. The evidence isn't there, if we'll just have the guts to brazen this out. We need to sit down and work out our strategy, I can be there in – (*looks at his watch*) – what? I don't understand. ...

(*Very long pause*)

That won't fly, Bill. I acted for our Administration – for the good of the country – not for any personal gain. The whole team – you and Bob and Rogers and I have to be totally ...

Blanket denial by all of us, only way! Get the case thrown out on technicalities. Tough it out and let the accusations die for lack of proof! We knew what the price would be if we were caught. But they have to prove us guilty first, in court, and that won't be easy. ...

You can't do that to me, you bastard!!

(*Changing tone*) Look, Bill, I underestimated how far this thing would go. I made a mistake, okay? Wait, I'm sorry I lost my temper just now. For Christ's sake, Bill! ...

(*Begging*) You don't have all the facts. Let me bring them to you, okay? Please. ...

(*Choking back a sob*) This is my whole career you're telling me to throw away. My life! My father was a fucking judge for Christ's sake! What do you want me to do, kill myself? Where will that get you? I'll do it, you bastards, and then who will take the – ... no, I am not cracking up. (*Struggling to control himself*) No. ...

Yes. I understand. I'll consider it and call you back in one hour. Yes. Goodbye, Bill.

(*Hanging up*) YOU SON-OF-A- BIITTTCCCCHH!

ROSE

What did he say!?

RICHARD

Mother-fuckers.

He goes to the aquarium and removes the dividing glass.

Kill.

LIZ

Daddy??

RICHARD

My gladiators.

LIZ

(*Watching him rather than the fish*) Which one is you?

RICHARD

The one on the right side.

LIZ

Is he going to win?

RICHARD

They'll keep at it until they're both dead. *(pause)*
They're offering me a deal.

ROSE

The fish?

RICHARD

(With disgust) The White House. If I resign and take full responsibility, the President will *(choking on the word)* pardon – me.

ROSE

Pardon you?

RICHARD

Presidential pardon – saying I was “overzealous” in pursuing justice.

LIZ

You'll still be crucified by the press.

ROSE

We don't care what they say, Richard. We know you didn't do anything wrong, the President knows you –

RICHARD

That's not the question. The fact is *(talking to himself more than to either of them)*, if I were indicted in the Peterson thing, it would be for conspiracy. Meaning co-conspirators: we're in this together, whether they like it or not. So how do they think they wouldn't go down with me?

ROSE

What would your father do?

Liz runs upstairs.

RICHARD

(Laughs loudly, then shakes his head.) That crooked son-of-a-bitch?

ROSE

You're angry at the President, Richard, and I'm sure you have good reason. But please control yourself. I've never heard you talk that way before.

RICHARD

(Laughing bitterly) What would Father have done?

ROSE

Why are you laughing? At times, your father dealt with similar situations. His opponents said terrible, libelous things about him.

RICHARD

Not libelous. Father was the crookedest judge in Ohio.

ROSE

Richard!

RICHARD

I think he won the prize in 1980 for crookedest judge in the United States.

ROSE

You don't know what you're saying.

RICHARD

Yes, Mother, I do. He told me so himself. Sat me right down in this chair, the night before I went off to law school. You remember all those people who used to come to the house to discuss cases with him? Did you think those were scholarly discussions? And the ones who came to ask for his help in getting contracts with the county, or jobs with the state? Did you think that was part of a judge's job?

ROSE

Your father was very active in politics. All the important men in Ohio were his friends. He would put in a word to his friends on behalf of people he felt were deserving.

RICHARD

What made them deserving, Mother? They got to be deserving by paying Father – large sums, Mother, that they brought to the house in small bills. That's what made them deserving.

ROSE

I'm not listening to you, you don't know what you're saying.

RICHARD

Good. Don't listen to me. Get out of here, let me think.

ROSE

What – what are you going to do?

RICHARD

I'm sure as hell not gonna do is take the fault upon myself and trust them to grant a pardon. If we lose in the end, then Bob and I will both go down the tubes. I go? – he goes, too.

ROSE

To – jail?

RICHARD

This is the big leagues, Mother, we're playing hard ball.

ROSE

Hard ball?

RICHARD

(Replying to her) What we did, we did because we believed in our country, our party, our Administration, and ourselves. I'm not ashamed of fighting for my principles, and when you fight – in a dirty fight you fight dirty. But that doesn't make it any less illegal, and if they nail us, they nail us.

ROSE

Do what the President is asking you to do.

RICHARD

Bullshit.

ROSE

You said if you take responsibility for the whole thing yourself, he will pardon you?

RICHARD

He's not that stupid. Bill Stillman's even less stupid. They'll leave me twisting in the wind!

Anyway, even if I got off with a pardon, it will nullify everything we've accomplished. I'm not a crook. I have a reputation to uphold, not just my own, but the office! This Administration has done more for justice, for civil rights, for the rights of the individual ...

(To her) I'm proud of that, you understand? You should be proud of that!

ROSE

Richard, I am very proud of you, but –

RICHARD

We're talking about a minor bending of the rules, as against fifty worse things our opponents did. I'm supposed to walk out on the lawn and say, "Sorry folks, the Attorney General of the United States for the last five years took it on himself to brazenly violate the Fourth Amendment for political advantage"?

Jesus Christ, Mother, you of all people ...

ROSE

I'm thinking of you, Richard. Your family. You can't let your pride – it seems to me you have to trust the President. He's not going to go to jail and he won't let you go to jail.

Richard, I'm so frightened. What will happen to Anne?

RICHARD

Hah!

Liz comes downstairs, dressed as she would for a job interview, but still barefoot.

ROSE

Or to Lizzie? All right – to me! I don't care about your reputation!

RICHARD

Since when?

Liz puts the whiskey bottle in its cupboard, folds the spread Richard left on the couch and carries last night's glasses into the dining room.

ROSE

I don't want you to go to jail! I'm afraid, if you don't cooperate with the President, ...

RICHARD

Co-operate!? They have no intention of getting me off the hook. They're not stupid enough to think if I "resign" now and say the whole thing was on my orders without the President's knowledge, he can issue a pardon and that'll be the end of it? The opposition is going to let it pass? The press is going to forget about it? No – even Bob isn't that stupid. I'm their fall guy.

Huh, uh!

ROSE

Trust him. He must have information you don't have. Let's calm down. You won't do anything until you talk with him, will you? I'm sorry Richard, I'm getting so upset, I'm getting you upset – *(Crying)*

Richard paces the room, muttering incoherently. Liz picks up the ashtray in the dining room, brings it to the nearest wastebasket, which is in the living room. She tosses it in and picks up a second one nearby, throwing it in forcefully.

RICHARD

What are you doing?

LIZ

It's disgusting.

She clicks the remote and stands in front of the TV, which we don't hear immediately (perhaps a muted commercial).

ROSE

(moving closer to Richard) How long do you think I would last? What would become of me when you're in jail? Do you want to kill me? You're going to sacrifice your mother and your family to your own pride and stupidity!

RICHARD

Stupidity!?

ROSE

Yes, stupidity to think you could accomplish anything by going to jail when you don't have to. The humiliation!

RICHARD

People still respect a man who stands by his convictions. No one would take me seriously if I took the cheap way out, but they will if I fight to preserve what we've – That's what it's all about.

ROSE

Stupidity. And pride.

Richard paces, Liz watching him with concern.

RICHARD

You know what Father said? He said he wanted me to know how the game was really played, so I wouldn't fall for any idealistic crap at Harvard.

LIZ

She can't hear you. Look at her. She sees what she wants to see, hears what she wants to hear.

RICHARD

(to Rose) How do you think he paid for all that land in Colorado? You think he paid four servants on a judge's salary? His salary was 26,000 a year when he died. Not enough to live in that style, even twenty-five years ago. Graft put me through college and law school. I might as well paid my tuition in hundred dollar bills.

LIZ

Dad, you're rambling. You'd better sit down.

RICHARD

(to himself) What the hell am I gonna do?

LIZ

Let's think. When you said, they want you to say "the whole thing" was done on your orders – you mean bugging the Governor's office?

RICHARD

Peterson!? Peterson was only one target, Liz. That son-of-a-bitch! This wouldn't have come out if we hadn't come up with so much dirt on Peterson we had to indict him. Who wanted to go through that whole trial?

LIZ

So it was an ongoing operation. The "so-called enemies list."

RICHARD

My idea was, let Peterson know, after he takes the money, that there's a goddamn recording. He didn't have to know who had it. Just that it would come out if he runs for national office. We were using what we could to keep them at bay, just like they did ...

LIZ

Blackmail.

RICHARD

... to keep us out of power for sixteen years. Don't be naïve, baby! You think we invented dirty tricks?

LIZ

No, but ...

RICHARD

For sixteen years, they intercepted letters, planted spies in our meetings, bartenders at our parties. We couldn't get a goddamn Congressional committee to do anything about it. Because who controlled Congress all those years? Who owned the goddamn newspapers?

LIZ

All the newspapers?

RICHARD

But we took the election, by honest hard work and guts. Nobody thought we could do it. We hammered away at their weak spots, we psyched out every issue in every state, we got the nomination and we won. And we said goddamn it now the shoe is on the other foot. They're out, and we're gonna keep them out. And we used modern methods – we didn't need bartenders at their parties, for Christ's sake. We could have put a transmitter in an olive pit, if we wanted to – dropped it in their martinis.

You're not laughing? The point is, we played the same game that's always been played – only better. So well, that the other side goes crying to the press, and Congress. Why not? They still own the press, and television, and Congress, they've got it all, the Teamsters, the Mafia, the blacks and the ethnic voters.

LIZ

Hold on. You need to weigh ...

RICHARD

So now? Good old Bob, my old pal, wants me to take responsibility for this – “mea culpa” – and he, in his kindness and compassion, will pardon me, and then where will I be?

ROSE

(as from a great distance) Pardon.

RICHARD

Never. I will not stand in front of those cameras and say I, Richard Graham, I invented all these dirty tricks, I abused my power, I'm so ashamed, pardon me. Because I'm not ashamed.

Even if I'm tried and convicted, I'm willing to bet history will judge us to have been right.

ROSE

History can judge you better out of jail, than in.

RICHARD

Not true! History loves political prisoners, writing from jail. My God, think of Gandhi, Mao Tse Tung, Che Guevara! What freedom one has in jail – time to think and write without distraction!

ROSE

They were Communists.

RICHARD

It's nothing to do with Communism, it has to do with power – holding it, losing it, getting it back, and wielding it while you've got it. But don't worry, I'm not going to jail.

(to himself) Not when I threaten to use stuff on Stillman and Rogers, things nobody can hang on me. Next thing they know, they'll be the ones with shit on their faces. They forget what I can reveal about them. I'll threaten to leak all the crap I had no part in. They oughta know I would do it in a New York second, if I'm gonna be pilloried regardless. Can't throw me under the bus.

LIZ

Daddy, listen to me. Don't add more blackmail to your crimes. You can stop fighting dirty. You're guilty, aren't you? Say it! Of helping the President and his other cronies try for five years to turn the Presidency into a – I don't know, a dictatorship? Isn't that what it is when someone uses their power to put a stranglehold on the political process?

RICHARD

No, no! We merely compromised a few selected individuals' privacy rights. Not out of disregard for the law. Quite the contrary. This Administration is the savior of individuals' rights against infringement by the state.

LIZ

Okay, but ...

RICHARD

It's the enemies of freedom who are now trying so hard to make us look like hypocrites. Don't you see? In order to protect what we'd accomplished, to preserve and strengthen it, we had to stay in office. We had to try and get control of the Hill. That's the way it's always been. That's politics.

LIZ

Are those the principles you're so proud to have fought for?

RICHARD

I'm telling you what I've accomplished is what I'm proud of. The noblest principles in the world are no virtue without the power to carry them out. So we used what power we had. You're just learning what every Administration has to do. The previous ...

LIZ

I don't care if the previous President did it! What if George Washington did it? That doesn't make it right. I know enough. I know right from wrong, and I know it's not too late for you to man up and confess and take the consequences. But tell them everything!

Don't cover up for the President, don't cover up for yourself. Tell people what's been going on. Strictly factual, no excuses. You're always complaining about what's happening to our country. Here's something you can do for the country. You were wrong. Okay. Now start being right.

RICHARD

Only history can judge whether we were wrong or right.

LIZ

Bullshit.

Long pause, as they stare at one another.

You want my respect?

RICHARD

You make it sound easy. Clean. But I'm not so arrogant as to think I can be a hero, clean up the system single-handed. The system is bigger than one incident or one person. My old man was right, you know: To do any good you need power, and you don't get power by being good.

LIZ

You've lost power. All you've got left is the power to tell the truth. Grandma wants you to go on lying for the President and those guys for a Get Out of Jail Free card. Now you're talking about blackmailing them – for the same reason. But what you've told me is, all of you are guilty as hell, and basically the whole political system is corrupt.

RICHARD

It is.

LIZ

So make a clean breast of everything – your dirty tricks and theirs – without protecting anybody.

RICHARD

And I go to prison.

LIZ

One of those federal white-collar prisons? Guys like yourself. I'm sure there's some of your Harvard classmates in there – it won't kill you. But as you said, use it to tell the world what you've told me, how the whole system has to – not that I necessarily buy your argument, but I'd respect you for doing that and I wouldn't respect you for taking a deal to keep your mouth shut.

Daddy, remember when I was in seventh grade, Sandra McNeill and I had a shoplifting contest and Mom found all those skirts and blouses in my room that she knew I couldn't have paid for? You took me back to every store, made me tell the manager what I'd done, return the clothes? Do you remember? I do. The look on their faces while they waited for me to stop crying and find my tongue,

RICHARD

I didn't act impulsively, what I ordered to be done was part of a carefully reasoned plan in which all of us – Stillman and Rogers and the President, too – knew what we were doing.

LIZ

Not the point. Was that a lesson for me to remember, and you to forget?

RICHARD

If I could be sure it would do more good than harm.

LIZ

You can't be sure. You just have to have the balls to do it.

RICHARD

(Watching his fish) I've always wondered if they can see out as well as I can see in. Fight, you lazy bastards. What do you need rest for, you're going to die anyway.

ROSE

(Still a faraway voice) Lizzie, what you are asking your father to do sounds heroic to you. But when you live as long as I have, you'll learn that one man or woman can't change the world – and it's a tragic waste of a life to try.

LIZ

I've already lived longer than you, Grandma.

(to Richard) Whatever you decide.

Richard goes into his study.

ROSE

Your father is going to do what the President wants him to do, Lizzie.

LIZ

We'll see, won't we?

ROSE

You and I will have to stop reading the papers and listening to the television for awhile, but we'll have Richard at least. He isn't going to throw his life away.

LIZ

That's exactly what he will be doing if he listens to you.

ROSE

(Coming to life) You're only thinking of yourself. Think of him! You really want your father to go to jail? You drove your mother out, do you want to be rid of him, too? What about me? I don't want to visit my son in a penitentiary.

LIZ

I did not drive Mother out. They did it to each other. And this is more important than you, Grandma.

She steps into the pair of low pumps that her mother left on the floor in Act II. Richard returns, putting on his suit jacket.

ROSE

(On her knees) Dear Jesus, hear this blind old woman's prayer. We have all failed You in this family, Anne has had a nervous breakdown, Richard is on the edge of one. Elizabeth is a lost child who needs You, Lord. Give Richard Your guidance, show him the way. I'm ready to die, take me now, but help Richard ... *(her lips continue moving)*

The TV has come on autonomously, with Tom silently looking out at Richard. Shaken, Richard has grabbed the remote and flipped the channel to a shot of a news reporter speaking in front of the White House, the volume too low for us to hear the words. He switches channels quickly, landing on an inaudible replay of Cassandra's last report; then to Sesame Street; to a detergent commercial; perhaps a soap opera; and back to Tom, who is still looking right at him as though keeping a vigil.

After several more seconds of eying each other, the picture changes to a shot of the front door, from outside. He goes to the foyer.

Liz watches her father open the door slowly; simultaneously we see it open on the screens. Their eyes meet.

RICHARD

What I said about Harvard?

LIZ

So maybe I won't go to law school. We'll cross this bridge first..

He reaches his hand toward her, she joins him at the door and they go out, holding hands. On TV, they emerge from the house behind a bank of microphones. All lights dim until only the screen remains lit. Richard steps toward the microphones.

TOM

(Speaking slowly) Showing signs of a sleepless night, the Attorney General of the United States came out of his house this morning to face reporters.

Screen Off. End of Play.