

IN THE JUSTICE DEPARTMENT

a play by Ken Kaye

Characters

Tom Stern, TV news anchorman (pre-recorded)

Richard Graham, 47, Attorney General of the U.S.

Anne Graham, 43, his wife (partially pre-recorded)

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:

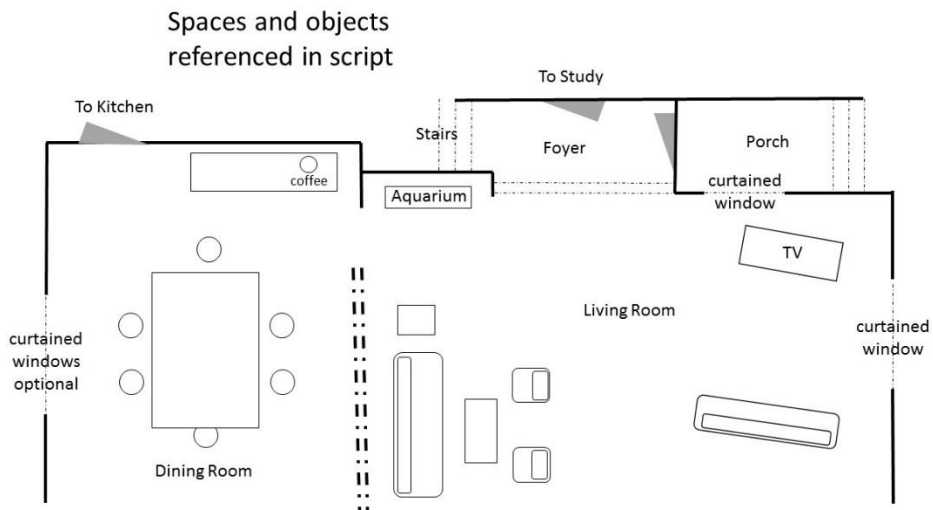
August. The Grahams' suburban home in Arlington, Virginia. We see the living and dining rooms of a spacious home, furnished in good taste without ostentation. (Both rooms fully visible to the audience, though in "real life" they are separate adjacent rooms.)

Scene 1: Noon

Scene 2: Evening

Scene 3: Midnight

Scene 4: Early the next morning



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Scene 1. *From blackout, first a lighted aquarium glows, upstage center. Second, a large floor-standing television screen begins to glow in the living room, house right. Noonday light then comes up. An electric coffee pot is on the dining room credenza, house left. Across the foyer, upstage, we see a bit of Richard's study through an open door. On the screen, we see Tom reading the news (we hear only a low murmur). Anne stands in the living room, watching. She is Wellesley-educated, efficient, dressed fashionably, nearly always smoking or holding a cigarette, with an ashtray in her hand or nearby. The volume comes up:*

TOM

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

Richard appears behind an array of microphones.

RICHARD ON VIDEO

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.

Richard emerges from his study, setting a briefcase near the front door and coming down to refill his insulated coffee mug in the dining room. The news stops him in the living room:

TOM

The new allegations revive Governor Peterson's claims, before and during his bribery trial, that he was the victim of a campaign engineered by the White House to put him out of contention as a challenger to the President. Attorney General Graham, one of the President's oldest friends, was his campaign manager five years ago, and a key strategist in last year's re-election.

Liz runs in from the kitchen, smartphone in hand. She is wearing jeans and a Black Power t-shirt.

RICHARD

They've already got their target in the cross-hairs!

ANNE

What target? You?

LIZ

Daddy, did you bug Dan Peterson's office so you could put him out of contention in the election?

Scene 1

RICHARD

Bull's eye!

He shuts off the TV.

ANNE

You told me you had nothing to do with that.

RICHARD

Which is true. It's absolute bullshit. Some Arizona group could have bugged his office – it isn't even a federal matter.

Liz goes back to the dining room and sits, beginning to search or text.

ANNE

Well, just so you know: in case there's more to it than you're admitting, I won't be by your side when you go back in front of those cameras to resign. That scenario makes me sick. The loyal wives standing by their man in disgrace.

Anne looks at her phone as it 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? But if they could tie me to it some way, tie a 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 defend 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 until Lizzie goes back to Providence.

Anne starts 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".

He goes to the dining room to refill his mug for the car..

LIZ

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 phone)* Now, even less than you do.

Scene 1

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.

Why the costume? Is your cause Black Power or Burn the Bra?

LIZ

It's not a costume, Dad. Maybe it's a statement.

RICHARD

To whom? Me? Your mother? Or the gardener?

LIZ

Yeah, right, I'm flirting with the gardener.

RICHARD

Horrors!

LIZ

You're shocked!

RICHARD

Why do you try to shock me? 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. But 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 in an apartment.

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?

Scene 1

RICHARD

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

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

LIZ

Forget it.

RICHARD

I've got to go. Tell your mother I'll try to be home by six.

Liz resumes working with her phone.

Richard goes through living room to front door, meets Anne coming downstairs.

ANNE

Are you going to grace your mother with your presence at dinner?

RICHARD

I just told Liz: Yes. Better make it seven, though, in case ...

He gestures toward the TV, implying the aforementioned "bullshit", and exits.

Anne continues to dining room.

ANNE

Grandma went down for a nap as soon as she arrived. Will you give her lunch? Willard left it ready in the kitchen.

LIZ

Why can't you?

ANNE

Not that I need your permission, but – I have an appointment.

LIZ

Not that I should need your permission, but I need you to co-sign this for me to rent an apartment off campus.

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 wish you'd have a roommate. Seriously. Living alone makes you vulnerable. Someone follows you home ...? When I see you dressing like that ...

LIZ

News flash, Mom: there's nothing provocative ...

Scene 1

ANNE

Lizzie, your nipples actually show through that top. I don't like you appearing to be so – available.

LIZ

Oh! God forbid we fail to keep up appearances! Mom, the General already hassled me enough for both of you, okay? Can we cut the bullshit?

ANNE

You really think all I care about is appearances?

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.

LIZ

Actually it has to be notarized.

Mildly annoyed, Anne tucks the paper in her purse and exits through kitchen door. Liz sits down at the table, texts something to someone. Shortly, Rose comes downstairs and finds her way (skillfully using her cane) into the dining room. Liz has stopped texting and remains still, watching her.

ROSE

Well, Lizzie! Have you had a good summer?

LIZ

How did you know it was me, Grandma?

ROSE

You were so quiet. Richard or Anne would have stood up right away..

LIZ

Hugs her grandmother affectionately, who pats Liz's back confirming the absence of anything under the t-shirt.

Welcome to Arlington, Grandma! Would you, uh, would you like lunch now? I waited for you.

ROSE

Wonderful, starting with a cup of that coffee, please. *(sits)*

LIZ

Cream and sugar?

Scene 1

ROSE

Please. Even after all these years, I can't get used to your Daddy being such an important man. He was so sweet to meet me at the plane this morning. Then on our way here, the driver answered the telephone, and it was the President.

LIZ

You're special! I have to take the bus – and drag my luggage three blocks.

ROSE

Richard wasn't happy about having to go to the White House this afternoon. He had to call his office and change a lot of appointments.

LIZ

Really. Were they talking about the Peterson thing?

ROSE

I don't know what that is.

LIZ

Some accusation Dad had to deny on the 12 o'clock news. While you were napping.

ROSE

When do you go back to Brown?

LIZ

Two weeks. There, can you do without a saucer? We're pretty informal around here.

ROSE

I see that.

LIZ

Huh? 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.

Scene 1

ROSE

Those were black and white pictures. Your grandfather was color blind, so he didn't care. -- Well, tell me about summer. You were doing research for a professor, Dad said?

LIZ

They call it that. 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, aren't you?

ROSE

I thought a few weeks, if it won't disrupt anyone's plans.

LIZ

Then I ought to warn you, Grandma, this is a real no-bullshit house. You know what I mean?

ROSE

No -- not exactly.

LIZ

We don't pretend feelings we don't have. We don't hide what we think. -- 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 just never have been that way.

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.

Scene 1

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 sweetness and harmony between the Attorney General and his charming wife.

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. (*Takes a second to finish sending the interrupted text.*) I'll be right back with our lunch.

Exits to kitchen.

ROSE

What on earth was that child talking about?

End of Scene

Scene 2. Evening. Rose is in the living room, listening to the TV (low murmur at first). Anne comes from the kitchen with a lit cigarette. She confirms that the dining room table has been set for dinner, puffs and then extinguishes her cigarette in an ashtray on the credenza, then continues to the living room.

TOM

The Equal Rights Amendment failed in two more states today, ...

ANNE

I'm back.

ROSE

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

ANNE

Has Liz been entertaining you?

ROSE

Yes. Indeed. 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. Scares the hell out of strangers, 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

Well, I guess I won’t worry about her if you’re not worried.

ANNE

Oh, I wouldn’t say that. I only stopped worrying because ... what good does it do? I keep hoping for some grown-up vestige of that sweet little girl, remember her? Probably too much to hope for. I suppose we’ll always be oil and water. I love her but I don’t like her.

ROSE

Oh, you don’t mean that. Can I help you with dinner?

Scene 2

Surprised by both those sentences, Anne stares at Rose for a couple of beats.

ANNE

There's not much for me to do, actually. Willard did it while I was out. Why don't you just sit?

Exit to kitchen. Rose rises and explores the room..

ROSE

I'd forgotten this. His father's chair. (*Sits down, thoughtfully.*)

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

ROSE

Richard?

RICHARD

Hello, Mother.

ROSE

How was your day?

RICHARD

Have they said anything about the Peterson business yet?

ROSE

Not that I'm aware of, Richard. Is that what you were discussing 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. They have to be 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 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?

Rose exits to kitchen. Richard turns on the TV.

TOM

There were conflicting statements this afternoon regarding the means used to persuade an Arizona highway contractor to confess to 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. However, 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, phone in hand, wearing a t-shirt with the word "Cocaine" imitating the Coca-Cola logo. Apparently now wearing a bra.

Scene 2

LIZ

Talking to someone?

RICHARD

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.

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. –

So, the FBI Director guy 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. 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 phone away, sitting down*) Are you mixed up in that Peterson business?

RICHARD

No. I'm not "mixed up" in anything. You sound like a gangster movie. (*Indicating the television*) They 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 campaigns.

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 his office to see if they could come up with any dirt on him? I could have your room bugged, too. And your car. Hidden cameras, the works. Secret files on all your friends.

LIZ

Okay, you don't have to be sarcastic. All I did was ask a question. (*pause*) Wouldn't you be pleased 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.

Scene 2

LIZ

No, I don't! I'm a senior, Dad. I take the LSAT next month. I don't have all As, but ... As and Bs.

RICHARD

That's all you'll need, as long as you meet their LSAT criterion.

LIZ

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

RICHARD

Don't worry about various schools, you'll go to Harvard.

LIZ

No, they accept only one out of seven, I'm not ...

RICHARD

Don't be silly. You just qualify on the LSAT, I'll take care of the rest.

LIZ

You'll pay for it?

RICHARD

Of course. And 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 you've said to me in years. Maybe the nicest thing anyone's said to me lately. *(Sits down beside her, pouring his usual 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. The truth is, I love the law but I don't like lawyers much, the legal

Scene 2

“profession”. The legal profession in the United States is responsible for distorting people’s whole understanding of what the law is all about; and with that, the obfuscation 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?

She nods, 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

About the degeneration of youth.

RICHARD

No, and now you’re being sarcastic. (*Restlessly, sits on couch.*) 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. It’s 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.

Anne and Rose enter dining room from kitchen. Anne seats Rose.

RICHARD

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

ANNE

(calls) Le dîner est servi, si vous plaît.

She makes another trip to kitchen for platters that will be passed at 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 can be found blameless under the law even when you violate all ten Commandments.

ANNE

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

LIZ

Where does Peterson fit in that dismal picture?

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 Bandelli's confession was induced by playing him a recording they'd obtained without a warrant, well – so far as the law is concerned, Peterson may be right.

LIZ

I don't see that.

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

Ahem.

LIZ

So his office was bugged?

RICHARD

How should I know?

ANNE

What happened today?

RICHARD

Something happens every day. 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

It certainly smells good, Anne. Are you going to say Grace, Richard?

RICHARD

I certainly am, Mother.

They clasp hands around the table.

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 pulls her phone 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, our "friends" in the media are insinuating that they 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

It's all right! If I don't mind discussing it with her, what do you care?

His cell phone dings with a text message, which he reads, Exit Anne to kitchen, angrily. Richard's phone now rings.

RICHARD

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

He goes to living room, turning on TV.

TOM

As he was leaving 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 registers disgust.

and that Bandelli had been shown a transcript of that conversation before he confessed to the bribery charges.

Head shots on the screen: labeled "Bandelli" and "Governor" with dollar signs between them?

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 ...

Anne enters, having heard the foregoing in the kitchen. Screen shows something like this:



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

ANNE

Richard? What's happening ...

TOM

Governor Peterson mentioned Graham specifically in charging the administration with abuse of executive powers for political advantage. 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.

Richard turns off the TV. As he contends with "Bill" (White House chief of staff), Anne and Liz both react to messages or notifications on their phones: Anne reading something, Liz texting someone.

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? ... 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? Bill, then I should talk with the President before he talks to Arthur. ... 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 phone in his pocket uncertainly, pensively.*)

Doorbell rings. Anne starts up to foyer,

Hold it!

Richard parts the curtain; Cassandra is on the porch. She turns and sees him, is about to say something when he closes the curtain.

Don't open the door, you understand?

He pulls out phone, dials. Anne freezes; Rose listening from dining room.

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 meets him in the foyer as she returns from upstairs.

Go ahead and eat without me. Go on!

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, sit down, both of you, please. I want to explain this to you.

(to Liz) Help Grandma come over here, too.

(to Anne) Let's keep our cool, eh? Will you please sit down?

*Anne remains standing. Liz and Rose sit.
Richard peeks through the porch window
curtain.*

All right. She's gone. 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. 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. What I've just told you must be absolutely confidential. If you talk to anyone, 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 a second, 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) “For the record,” he doesn’t know anything about it.

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 rat out 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 to make a call.

Richard goes into his study and closes the door. Liz follows him with her eyes, perturbed, then turns the TV back on. Anne lights a cigarette, pacing the foyer like a caged tiger. She kicks the study door.

TOM

Breaking news: Reliable sources at the FBI have revealed the name of the “source” from whom the Bureau received the transcript of a 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. 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. Mr. Graham was, of course, the President’s official campaign manager five years ago, and unofficially managed the re-election campaign last year from his office in the Justice Department. 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. Now back to New York.

TOM

In other sports, ...

Anne turns off the TV

ROSE

How can they be so malicious? Surely that’s libel! Richard would never approve of dirty tricks!

ANNE

Wouldn’t he?

She goes to the study and opens the door.

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 ...

Liz observes their ensuing dialogue uncomfortably. At some point she meaningfully waves Anne’s smoke away. Rose sits rigidly, so that we cannot tell if she is tuned in to Richard and Anne or to her own thoughts.

RICHARD

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

He said what? ... I see. Will you 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.

Scene 2

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. Even 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

(backing out of his way as he storms out of his study) 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 dress you wore to the British Embassy the night before.

Scene 2

ANNE

You project it all onto me, don't you? 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.

She exits upstairs. Liz intercepts Richard before he can disappear into his study.

LIZ

Is it true, Daddy?

RICHARD

What? They didn't say anything different from what I told you, did they?

LIZ

I think they did. They're saying you personally ordered an illegal wiretap against the President's opponent, used it to extort a confession from the guy that 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

"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 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. What's being exposed – and not for the first time, either, but people have short memories – 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. That means 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!

Scene 2

Liz flees, upstairs. Ignoring Rose, who hasn't moved from the couch, 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:

What the hell do you want?

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

ROSE

Richard? Richard?

End of Scene 2

Scene 3: Midnight. 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 has been outside the house since early evening. 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 ...

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

Scene 3

RICHARD

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

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

Scene 3

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? Should I help you get ready for bed?

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! That's all! (*Throws himself on a couch*) And you, my darling, are the very picture 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

Scene 3

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

You never are.

RICHARD

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

ANNE

That was never what I wanted, you snotty bastard! 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! You're the one who's drunk!

ANNE

I've never been more sober! It's this day — it broke down something that kept me from facing the facts about my husband.

RICHARD

Go ahead: Kick him now he's down.

ANNE

I thought I was leaving you because we no longer had anything but Georgetown parties to keep us together. We used to have fun together—and I don't only

Scene 3

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 abandon me like rats off a sinking ship.

ANNE

Let me go!

Scene 3

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)*
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 makes a wordless gesture as if to say "whatever".

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. Once we actually hitchhiked to France, 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.

Scene 3

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!

*Anne looks at her, more hurt than angry.
Richard emerges from his study with more
to say to Anne, from the foyer.*

RICHARD

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

Liz runs upstairs.

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

*Anne pushes past him and runs upstairs.
He takes a new bottle from sideboard,
pours a drink.*

(to himself) 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; the 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! This is Richard Graham, who the hell are you?

(Hangs up.)

They knew I'd be smart enough to call after midnight on the private line, the bastards have got a fucking fortress 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. Bastards told him not to. 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. *(gets an idea)* Hmm. What's her name?

Speed-dials a number on his phone.

Scene 3

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*) Sit down. Wait a minute.

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

Scene 3

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 to you –

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 be an accessory to a civil rights 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

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?

Scene 3

RICHARD

I have wanted to do that all day, I told the President this afternoon 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 was that?

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 whether I did or not.

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.

Scene 3

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 the Justice Department had been used 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.

Scene 3

Liz stands aside to let her pass.

RICHARD

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

Rises and hands her the recorder and her phone. Cassandra closes front door as she leaves.

What's your problem? 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.
(First such act ever in their relationship.)*

RICHARD

Don't talk to me like that!

LIZ

Oww!

*Both speechless for a beat; Liz frightened.
Richard shocked, reacts to his own 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, reaches as though to help her up*) I didn't mean to grab you so hard. Are you okay?

LIZ

Get away from me!

Scene 3

RICHARD

(realizing that she's really hurt, kneels beside her wanting to embrace her but restraining himself) Lizzie, my God, it was an accident, I ...

LIZ

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

RICHARD

I won't.

LIZ

I want to sit down.

She goes to the couch, he follows and sits beside her.

RICHARD

Can I hug you?

LIZ

No!

RICHARD

Lizzie, 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 I'm being sacrificed to the press in order to stop them uncovering a whole lot more, some things that involve me and some that don't.

Scene 3

(pause) I'm sorry, Sweetie. I can't believe I even 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. 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 acknowledged it. Of course you are.

LIZ

Are you and Mother really breaking up?

RICHARD

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

Scene 3

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 telling 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.

RICHARD

Who do I work my ass off for, a hundred hours a week? I show my love for you 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 on television and in the papers.

LIZ

I know but, it seems it's not 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 such hot shit – 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, in a way you seemed more like a Dad than the thousand times you've kissed me goodnight and turned away to phone 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*)

Scene 3

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.***

Scene 4

Scene 4. Dawn. Throughout this last scene, muffled, angry voices can be heard in the distance. As sunlight slowly increases through the windows, we see Richard asleep on the couch, covered with a blanket or bedspread.

ROSE

(*offstage*) Richard? Richard?

Rose 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

The 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?!

Scene 4

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! (*goes to the phone, which he picks up and dials*) 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 middle of the night, proves her husband's a madman.

Shit! I told Bob to let me deal with the situation myself. Say the FBI got an anonymous tip. 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 be asking you if she'd left a note? Where did she go?

ROSE

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

Scene 4

RICHARD

Didn't you ask her?

ROSE

I didn't know she was leaving!

RICHARD

How did you not know? Why are you even 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 backed out of the driveway, barely avoiding a collision with our DC mobile unit. Cassandra?

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

VOICE OF CASSANDRA

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

TOM

Thank you, Cassandra – please stand by as we cut to Washington National Airport where Mrs. Graham is answering some reporters' questions.

Anne appears on TV in front of a cluster of microphones, apparently facing reporters.

ANNE

No, my leaving Richard had absolutely nothing to do with the allegations about him. It was a shame that our marital problems happened to come to a head at this time, therefore I don't intend to make any further statements. I don't think the Attorney General's private life should be of any interest to the press.

A REPORTER'S VOICE

Is there another woman involved?

Scene 4

ANNE

Not likely.

Sound of laughter from reporters, which seems to put her at ease. She combs her fingers through her hair, smiles.

ANOTHER REPORTER'S VOICE

Another man, Mrs. Graham?

ANNE

Not yet!

More laughter; TV cuts to Cassandra. Richard, Rose, and Liz are transfixed by the news.

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 had an effect upon the popular sentiment against her husband?

CASSANDRA

No, Tom, I don't think so. People were incensed yesterday when it came out that he had obviously orchestrated the bugging of Governor Peterson, and probably others.

RICHARD

"Obviously orchestrated!?!"

CASSANDRA

Most of these people did not learn until seeing it just now on our monitor, about Mrs. Graham's midnight escape. Despite the generally hostile feeling toward the Attorney General, I must say we are experiencing a rather festive atmosphere.

Richard's telephone rings, followed a moment later by Liz's.

TOM

Thank you, Cassandra. In related news, the *Washington Post* reported this morning that the House Judiciary Committee intends 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

Scene 4

the now-famous wiretapping of Arizona Governor Dan Peterson accepting a bribe in February of last year.

RICHARD

SHIT!

Liz checking her phone. Richard looks at his now, leaving Rose to grope for the remote on the coffee table and turn off the TV.

RICHARD

Get out of my way!

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

Yes, Bill. ... Why didn't he call me himself? I've been trying to get through to him since yesterday afternoon. I don't want to talk to you about it. 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. We'll sit down and work out our strategy, I can be there in – *(looks at his watch)* – what? I don't understand. ... *(Very long pause)* 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 tone)* 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. ... Okay. ... 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.

Scene 4

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

You have never cared 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, I'll likely be convicted of conspiracy. So how would they not go down with me? 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. They have no intention of getting me off the hook. They'd leave me twisting in the wind.
Huh, uh!

Liz runs upstairs.

ROSE

What would your father do?

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 things about him, libelous things.

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 of money, 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.

Scene 4

RICHARD

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

ROSE

What – what are you going to do?

RICHARD

(As much to himself as to her) I'm gonna fight, is what. Bob and I go back a long way. These tight-ass punks he's surrounded himself with, I'm not gonna let them brainwash him into a suicide move. We're gonna fight this thing, deny it right down the line. And there's a lot of people – a lot of people we can destroy right now before they destroy us. 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 deny there was any deal!

(Mainly to himself again) Number two, 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. Number three, I have a reputation to uphold, not just my own, but the office. I'm not a crook. This administration has done more for justice, for civil rights, for the rights of the individual ...

Scene 4

(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 – I'm not going to let that negate everything we've accomplished, walk out on the lawn and say, "Sorry folks, the Attorney General of the United States for the last five years has been a small-time political grafter"? 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, wearing a skirt and blouse as if for a job interview. 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 of what can happen to all of us if you don't cooperate with the President. 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?

Scene 4

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 public shame!

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.

Volume comes up, Liz sits.

TOM

With me here in New York is Anne Graham, wife of the besieged Attorney General. Welcome, Anne.

ANNE

Thank you, Tom. Thank you for having me..

TOM

When you left your husband last night, Anne, we understand it wasn't just to escape the angry crowds surrounding your home.

ANNE

That's right, Tom.

TOM

Now let me explain to our viewers that we won't ask you to comment on your reasons for deciding to dump the Attorney General. I'll just ask you to fill us in on what's likely to be going on in that house in Arlington, and perhaps comment on developments as they occur.

ANNE

That's right, Tom. Look, it was just a coincidence that I finally got fed up last night and left. What clinched it for me was that B.S. – am I allowed to say B.S.? – about the fifty thousand dollar deposit of numbered bills. As if agents of the Justice Department wouldn't be able to make that happen!

TOM

Let's go to Cassandra Glass in front of your house.

CASSANDRA

Thank you, Tom; welcome, Anne. The crowd here is beginning to turn into an angry mob. Effigies of the Attorney General have been hung from several of the neighbors' trees, there's a banner calling him the Entrapment General, and only the valiant efforts of the Arlington police have prevented the crowd from storming onto the Graham lawn and perhaps breaking into the house. Chants are going up against police protection for the privileged, and it really is turning ugly.

Anne, can I ask you whether so far as you know, the Attorney General has been truthful and forthcoming in his account of the Peterson 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 classified wireless wiretapping and other chicanery – as you call it. Anyway, I didn't know anything about it.

CASSANDRA

What did he 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 verify 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 conveniently happened to arrive just when the scandal broke. She worships Richard.

TOM

So, they have a close relationship, Anne?

Scene 4

ANNE

Perhaps we'd better not go into that. 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. I'd hate to call her a spoiled brat with anger issues whose only concern is her freedom. How all this will affect their relationship only a good child psychologist could say.

RICHARD

Well, that just about takes care of everybody, doesn't it?

CASSANDRA

Would you say his unsatisfactory relationships with women are at the root of Richard's arrogance and abuse of power?

ANNE

Well, I'm no shrink, Cassandra.

RICHARD

Turn that shit off!

No one moves; he turns it off himself.

It's unbelievable! 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.

Rose withdraws into a distant, inaccessible state: robot-like.

LIZ

She didn't look that nervous to me.

Richard paces, Liz watching him with concern.

RICHARD

(To Rose) 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

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. 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 doesn't have to know who has 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. But we hammered away at their weak spots, we psych'd 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'd.

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. 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

Blackmail.

RICHARD

Compromising certain 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. The noblest principles in

Scene 4

the world are no virtue without the power to carry them out. So we used what power we had. 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. And you know what? 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. Think of Lenin! 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. 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!

LIZ

Daddy –

RICHARD

Shut up, both of you. Leave me alone.

He charges into study and back out at once.

LIZ

Daddy, listen to me. Don't add more blackmail to your crimes. You can stop fighting dirty. You're guilty, aren't you? 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!

Scene 4

LIZ

So what, if the last President did it? What if George Washington did it? That doesn't make it right. Are those the principles you're so proud to have fought for?

RICHARD

You don't know anything about it.

LIZ

I know enough. I know right from wrong, and I know it's not too late for you to come out 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 that 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 your power. The only kind 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? You're right, it wouldn't be the worst thing. Guys like yourself, probably some of your Harvard classmates in there – it won't kill you. But use it to tell the world what you've told me, how the whole system has to – I don't necessarily buy it, but I'd respect you for saying it and I wouldn't respect you for taking a deal to keep your mouth shut.

Daddy, do you remember when I was in seventh grade, and 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? Remember what you and Mom made me do? Back to every single store, and you made me ask for the manager, tell him what I'd done, return the clothes. Do you remember? I do. The look on their faces, and the humiliation, crying, the silence while they waited for me to find my tongue. 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 want my children with me in my last years.

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 Scene 3.
Richard returns, putting on his suit jacket.*

ROSE

(On her knees) Dear Jesus, hear this blind old woman who has loved You as well as she knew how. 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 divine guidance, show him the way. Lord, I'm ready to die, take me now, but help Richard ... *(her lips continue moving)*

The TV has come on autonomously during Rose's prayer, 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 about Harvard?

Scene 4

LIZ

Forget Harvard.

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 toward the camera. Stage 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.

Blackout. End of Play.