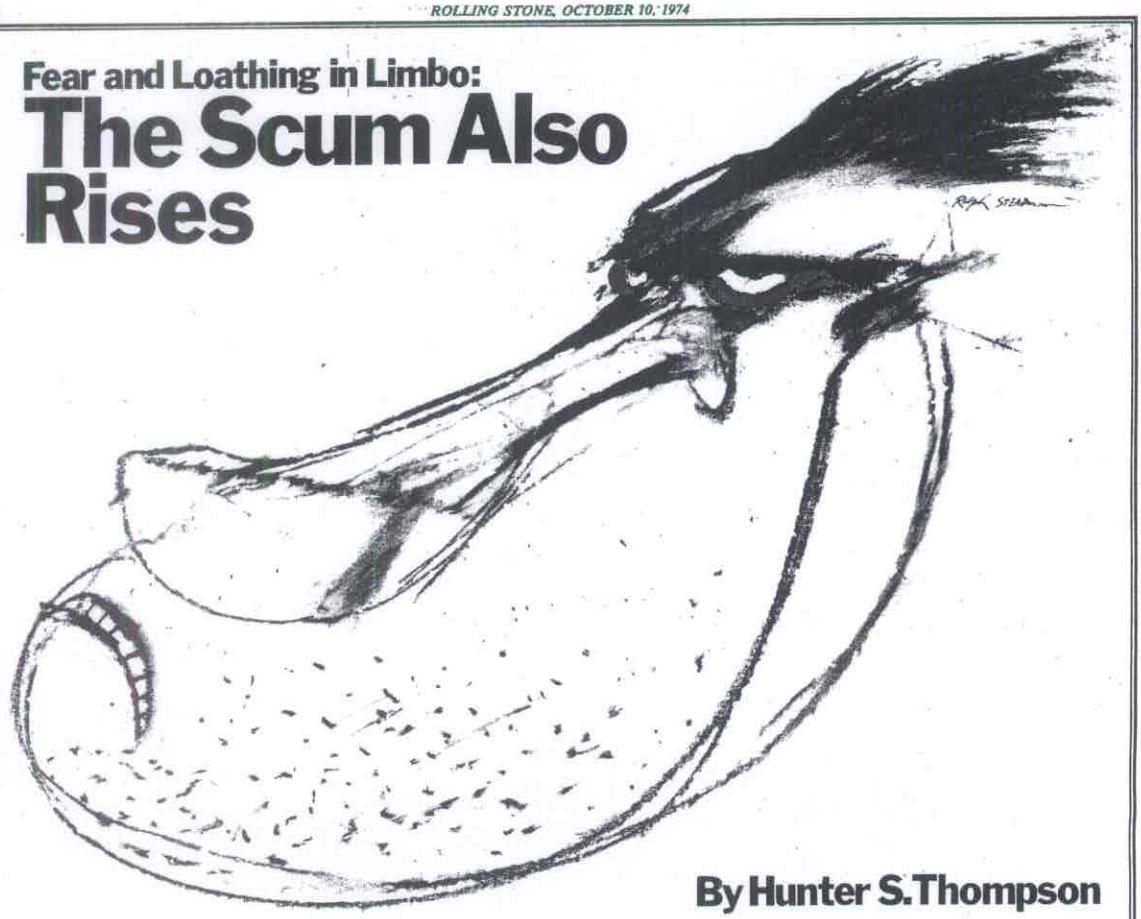
Fear and Loathing in Limbo:

The Scum Also Rises



By Hunter S. Thompson

. . . before I could come to any conclusion it occurred to me that my speech or my silence, indeed any action of mine, would be a mere futility. What did it matter what anyone knew or ignored? What did it matter who was manager? One gets sometimes such a flash of insight. The essentials of this affair lay deep under the surface, beyond my reach, and beyond my power of meddling.

—Joseph Conrad
Heart Of Darkness

Well . . . this is going to be difficult. That sold-out knucklehead refugee from a 1969 "Mister Clean" TV commercial has just done what only the most cynical and paranoid kind of malcontent ever connected with national politics would have dared to predict. . . .

If I followed my better instincts right now, I would put this typewriter in the Volvo and drive to the home of the nearest politician—*any* politician—and hurl the goddamn machine through his front window . . . flush the bugger out with an act of lunatic violence then soak him down with mace and run him naked down Main Street in Aspen with a bell around his neck and black lumps all over his body from the jolts of a high-powered "Bull Buster" cattle prod.

But old age has either mellowed me or broken my spirit to the point where I will probably not do that—at least not today, because that blundering dupe in the White House has just plunged me into a deep and vicious hole.

About five hours after I'd sent the final draft of a massive article on The Demise of Richard Nixon off on the mojo wire and into the cold maw of the typesetter in San Francisco, Gerald Ford called a press conference in Washington to announce that he had just granted a "full, free and absolute" presidential pardon, covering any and all crimes Richard Nixon may or may not have committed during the entire five and a half years of his presidency.

Ford sprung his decision with no advance warning at 10:40 on a peaceful Sunday morning in Washington, after emerging from a church service with such a powerful desire to dispense mercy that he rushed back to the White House—a short hump across Lafayette Park—and summoned a weary Sunday-morning skeleton crew of correspondents and cameramen to inform them, speaking in curiously zombielike tones, that he could no longer tolerate the idea of ex-President Nixon suffering in grief-crazed solitude out there on the beach in San Clemente, and that his conscience now compelled him to end both the suffering of Nixon and the national *angst* it was causing by means of a presidential edict of such king-sized breadth and scope as to scourge the poison of "Watergate" from our national consciousness forever.

Or at least that's how it sounded to me, when I was jolted out of a sweat-soaked coma on Sunday morning by a frantic telephone call from Dick Tuck. "Ford *pardoned* the bastard!" he screamed. "I warned you, didn't I? I buried him twice, and he came back from the dead both times. . . . Now he's done it again; he's running around loose on some private golf course in Palm Desert."

I fell back on the bed, moaning heavily. No, I thought. I didn't *hear* that. Ford had gone out of his way, during his first White House press conference, to impress both the Washington press corps and the national TV audience with his carefully considered refusal to interfere in any way with Special Prosecutor Leon Jaworski's legal duty to proceed on the basis of evidence and "prosecute any and all individuals." Given the context of the question, Ford's reply was widely interpreted as a signal to Jaworski that the former president should not be given any special treatment. . . . And it also meshed with Ford's answer to a question in the course of his confirmation hearings in the Senate a few months earlier, when he'd said, "I don't think the public would stand for it," when asked if an appointed vice-president would have the power to pardon the president who'd appointed him, if the president were removed from office under criminal circumstances.

I recalled these things Ford had said, but I was not so sure I'd heard Dick Tuck correctly—or if I'd really heard him at all. I held my right hand up in front of my eyes, trying to remember if I'd eaten anything the night before that could cause hallucinations. If so, my hand would appear to be transparent, and I would be able to see all the bones and blood vessels very clearly.

But my hand was not transparent. I moaned again, bringing Sandy in from the kitchen to find out what was wrong. "Did Tuck just call?" I asked.

She nodded: "He was almost hysterical. Ford just gave Nixon a full pardon."

I sat up quickly, groping around on the bed for something to smash. "No!" I shouted. "That's impossible!"

She shook her head. "I heard it on the radio, too."

I stared at my hands again, feeling anger behind my eyes and noise coming up in my throat: "That stupid, lying bastard! Jesus! Who votes for these treacherous scumbags! You can't even trust the dumb ones! Look at Ford! He's too goddamn stupid to arrange a deal like that! Hell, he's almost too stupid to lie."

Sandy shrugged. "He gave Nixon all the tapes, too."

"Holy shit!" I leaped out of bed and went quickly to the phone. "What's Goodwin's number in Washington? That bonehead Rotarian sonofabitch made a deal? Maybe Dick knows something."

But it was 24 hours later when I finally got hold of Goodwin, and by that time I had made a huge chart full of dates, names and personal connections—all linked and cross-linked by a maze of arrows and lines. The three names on the list with far more connections than any others were Laird, Kissinger and Rockefeller. I had spent all night working feverishly on the chart, and now I was asking Goodwin to have a researcher check it all out.

"Well," he replied. "A lot of people in Washington are thinking along those same lines today. No doubt there was some kind of arrangement, but—" He paused. "Aren't we pretty damn close to the deadline? Jesus Christ, you'll never be able to check all that stuff before—"

"Mother of babbling god!" I muttered. The word "deadline" caused my brain to seize up momentarily. Deadline? Yes. Tomorrow morning, about 15 more hours. . . . With about 90% of my story already set in type, one of the threads that ran all the way through it was my belief that nothing short of a nuclear war could prevent Richard Nixon's conviction. The only thing wrong with that argument was its tripod construction, and one of the three main pillars was my assumption that Gerald Ford had not been lying when he'd said more than once, for the record, that he had no intention of considering a presidential pardon for Richard Nixon "until the legal process has run its course."

Cazart! I hung up the phone and tossed my chart across the room. That rotten, sadistic little thief had done it again. Just one month earlier he had sandbagged me by resigning so close to the deadline that I almost had a nervous breakdown while failing completely. . . . And now he was doing it again, with this goddamn presidential pardon, leaving me with less than 24 hours to revise completely a 15,000 word story that was already set in type.

It was absolutely impossible, no hope at all—except to lash as many last-minute pages as possible into the mojo and hope for the best. Maybe somebody in San Francisco would have time, when the deadline crunch came, to knit the two versions together. . . . But there was no way at all to be sure, so this will be an interesting article to read when it comes off the press. . . .

Indeed . . . cast your bread on the waters . . . why not?

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I was brooding on this and cursing Nixon, more out of habit than logic, for his eerie ability to make life difficult for me. . . . when it suddenly occurred to me that the villain this time was not Nixon, but Gerald Ford. He was the one who decided to pardon Nixon (for reasons we can hopefully deal with later) on August 30th, when he instructed his White House counsel, Philip Buchen, to work out the legal details and consult with Nixon's new defense lawyer, John Miller, one-time campaign aide to Robert Kennedy.

Incredibly, Miller informed Buchen that he would have to make sure a presidential pardon was "acceptable" to Nixon; and 24 hours later he came back with word that the ex-president, whose condition had been publicly described by anonymous "friends" that week as almost terminally "disturbed and depressed" at the prospect of his imminent indictment by Jaworski's grand jury—had been able to get a grip on himself long enough to decide that he would not be offended by the offer of a full presidential pardon—just as long as the offer also granted Nixon sole ownership and control of *all* the White House tapes.

Ford quickly agreed, a concession that could mean $5 million or more to Nixon: He can milk them for the bulk of his presidential memoirs, for which his new agent claims already to have been offered a $2 million advance, and after that he has the legal right either to destroy the tapes or sell them to the highest bidder.

Arrangements for the presidential pardon were not completed until Friday, September 6th—and only then after President Ford sent his personal emissary, Benton L. Becker, out to San Clemente to make sure things went smoothly. Becker, a vaguely sinister Washington attorney who is currently under investigation by the IRS for alleged tax evasion, describes himself as an "unpaid legal adviser" to President Ford and also a personal friend.

They first met in 1969, Becker says, when he volunteered to help then Congressman Ford in his ill-advised campaign to persuade the House of Representatives to impeach U.S. Supreme Court Justice William O. Douglas. That effort failed miserably, and Ford now seems embarrassed at the memory of it, but he still defends Becker as "a man of the highest professional ethics."

There is some disagreement on this. According to *The Washington Post*, "Justice Department sources said they were astounded when they learned that Becker had been used by the White House to negotiate with the former president. 'My God, doesn't Ford know about this case?' said one source. 'The guy's under investigation.' "

Which is not necessarily a bad sign, in this day and age. Most of my friends have been "under investigation" at one time or another in the past ten years or so, and my own FBI file dates back at least to 1958, when I refused to accept a security clearance from the Air Force, on the grounds that I didn't honestly consider myself a good security risk because I disagreed strongly with the slogan: "My Country, Right or Wrong."

My clearance was not granted, but I was never hassled about it—and instead of being sent to a top-secret radar installation near the Arctic Circle, I was passed over for promotion and placed in a job as sports editor of a base newspaper on the Gulf Coast of Florida.

Ah . . . but we seem to be wandering here. . . . I was talking about Benton Becker and his delicate task of negotiating the details of a full presidential pardon for Richard Nixon, whose tragic mental condition was even then being slandered almost daily, at this stage of the pardon by unnamed friends and advisers. At this point in the pardon negotiations, both Ford and Nixon had learned that Jaworski's grand jury planned to indict the ex-president on as many as ten counts—an ugly prospect that led Ford to suggest that Nixon might temper the grand jury's aggressive attitude by "volunteering" to admit at least some small measure of guilt for his role in the Watergate cover-up, in exchange for the pardon that would give him total immunity from prosecution anyway, regardless of what he admitted.

This suggestion almost torpedoed the negotiations. Nixon "angrily rejected" it, says one of Ford's White House advisers, and Becker was hard-pressed to keep the deal on its rails. By Friday evening, however, Nixon's mood had improved to the point where he agreed to accept both the pardon and the tapes. Becker was elated; he flew back to Washington and reported to Ford that his mission had been 100% successful. The new president received the news gratefully, and scheduled a short-notice press conference on Sunday to lay the fine news on his public.

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Yeah . . . I know: There is something just a little bit weird about that story, but I don't have any time to check on it right now. All the details, however, have appeared in one form or another in either *The Washington Post* or *The Washington Star-News*.

I cite those sources only because the story makes no sense at all, on its face. . . . But then none of the other stories in the New York or Washington papers on the Monday after the announcement of the Ford/Nixon treaty made much sense, either . . . primarily because Sunday is a very hard day to find anybody in Washington who doesn't want to be found; which includes just about everybody with good sense except the kind of man who calls a press conference at 10:30 on Sunday morning and drones out a stone-faced announcement that he knows will have half the nation howling with rage before nightfall. . . . But by nightfall, Ford's version of the pardon was spread all over the country on the wires, while enraged editors at the *Times*, the *Post* and the *Star* were still trying to pry their hotrod investigative reporters out of weekend cabins in the Virginia mountains and beach-houses on the Maryland shore.

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I have very dim memories of Tuck's call. Less than five hours earlier, I had passed out very suddenly in the bathtub, after something like 133 hours of non-stop work on a thing I'd been dragging around with me for two months and revising in ragged notebooks and on rented typewriters in hotels from Key Biscayne to Laguna Beach, bouncing in and out of Washington to check the pressure and keep a fix on the timetable, then off again to Chicago or Colorado . . . before heading back to Washington again, where the pressure valves finally blew all at once in early August, catching me in a state of hysterical exhaustion and screeching helplessly for speed when Nixon suddenly caved in and quit, ambushing me on the brink of a deadline and wasted beyond the help of anything but the most extreme kind of chemo-therapy.

It takes about a month to recover physically from a collapse of that magnitude, and at least a year to shake the memory. The only thing I can think of that compares to it is that long, long moment of indescribably intense sadness that comes just before drowning at sea, those last few seconds on the cusp when the body is still struggling but the mind has given up . . . a sense of absolute failure and a very clear understanding of it that makes the last few seconds before blackout seem almost peaceful. Getting rescued at that point is far more painful than drowning: Recovery brings back terrifying memories of struggling wildly for breath. . . .

This is precisely the feeling I had when Tuck woke me up that morning to say that Ford had just granted Nixon "full, free and absolute" pardon. I had just written a long, sporadically rational brief, of sorts—explaining how Nixon had backed himself into a corner and why it was inevitable that he would soon be indicted and convicted on a felony "obstruction of justice" charge, and then Ford would pardon him, for a lot of reasons I couldn't agree with, but which Ford had already stated so firmly that there didn't seem to be much point in arguing about it. The logic of sentencing Nixon to a year in the same cell with John Dean was hard to argue with on either legal or ethical grounds, but I understood politics well enough by then to realize that Nixon would have to plead guilty to something like the rape/murder of a Republican senator's son before Gerald Ford would even consider letting him spend any time in jail.

I had accepted this, more or less. Just as I had more or less accepted—after 18 months of total involvement in the struggle to get rid of Nixon—the idea that Gerald Ford could do just about anything he felt like doing, as long as he left me alone. My interest in national politics withered drastically within hours after Nixon resigned.

After five and a half years of watching a gang of fascist thugs treating the White House and the whole machinery of the federal government like a conquered empire to be used like the spoils of war for any purpose that served either the needs or whims of the victors, the prospect of some harmless, half-bright jock like Gerry Ford running a cautious, caretaker-style government for two or even six years was almost a welcome relief. Not even the ominous sight of Vice President Nelson Rockefeller hovering a heartbeat away from the presidency had much effect on my head.

After more than ten years of civil war with the White House and all the swine who either lived or worked there, I was ready to give the benefit of the doubt to almost any president who acted half human and had enough sense not to walk around in public wearing a swastika armband.

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This is more or less what I wrote, I think, after Nixon resigned and I was faced with the obligation to fill enough space to justify all those expenses I ran up while chasing Nixon around the country and watching him sink deeper and deeper in the quicksand of his own excrement. In the early stages of the Deathwatch, there was a definite high in watching the Congress reluctantly gearing up for a titanic battle with Richard Nixon and his private army of fixers who had taken over the whole executive branch of the government by the time he sailed triumphantly into his second term.

By the middle of last summer, the showdown had become inevitable and when Nixon looked at the balance sheet in August and saw both the legislative and judicial branches of the federal government joining forces against him, he knew he was finished.

On August 9th, he quit and was gone from Washington 12 hours later in a cloud of disgrace. He was finished: There was no doubt about it. Even his ranking staffers were muttering about his dangerously irrational state of mind toward the end, and his farewell speech to the Cabinet and White House staff was so clearly deranged that even I felt sorry for him. . . . And when the helicopter whisked him off to exile in California, an almost visible shudder of relief swept through the crowd on the White House lawn that had gathered for the sad spectacle of his departure.

Nixon was about 30,000 feet over St. Louis in Air Force One when his chosen successor, Gerald Ford, took the oath. Ford had been selected, by Nixon, to replace Spiro Agnew, convicted several months earlier of tax fraud and extortion . . . and Nixon himself,

before quitting, had tacitly admitted his guilt in a felony conspiracy to obstruct justice.

I left Washington the day after Ford was sworn in, too tired to feel anything but a manic sense of relief as I staggered through the lobby at National Airport with about 200 pounds of transcripts of the Senate Watergate and House Judiciary Committee Hearings that had been rendered obsolete as evidence by Nixon's forced resignation two days earlier. I was not quite sure why I wanted them, but evidence of any kind is always reassuring to have, and I felt that after two or three months of sleep I might be able to use them in some way.

Now, almost exactly four weeks later, that suitcase full of transcripts is still lying open beside my desk . . . and now that Gerald Ford has granted Nixon a presidential pardon so sweeping that he will never have to stand trial for anything, those books of evidence that would have guaranteed his impeachment if he hadn't resigned are beginning to pique my interest. . . .

Honky Tonk Tunes and a Long-Remembered Dream....Constant Haggling, Useless Briefings and a Howling Voice at the Door

American politics will never be the same again.

—Senator George McGovern
Acceptance Speech
July 13th, 1972
Miami, Florida

Another hot, heavy rain in Washington, at 4:33 on a wet Wednesday morning, falling like balls of sweat against my window. . . . Twelve feet wide and six feet tall, the high yellow eye of the National Affairs Suite looking out across the rotting roofs of our nation's capital at least a mile away through the haze and the rain to the fine white marble spire of the Washington Monument and the dark dome of the Capitol. . . . Hillbilly music howling out of the radio across the room from the typewriter.

. . . And when it's midnight in Dallas, I'll be somewhere on a big jet plane. . . . If I could only understand you, maybe I could cope with the loneliness I feel. . . .

Honky-tonk tunes and a quart of Wild Turkey on the sideboard, ripped to the tits on whatever it was in that bag I bought tonight from the bull fruit in Georgetown, looking down from the desk at yesterday's huge *Washington Post* headline:

PRESIDENT ADMITS WITHHOLDING DATA
TAPES SHOW HE APPROVED COVER-UP

Every half-hour on the half-hour, WXRA — the truckers' station over in Alexandria — keeps babbling more and more hideous news of "rapidly dissolving" support in the House and the Senate. All ten members of the House Judiciary Committee who voted *against* the articles of impeachment on national TV last week have now reversed themselves, for the record, and said they plan to vote *for* impeachment when — or if — it comes to a vote in the House on August 19th. Even Barry Goldwater has leaked (and then denied) a UPI report that he thinks Nixon should resign, for the good of the country . . . and also for the good of Goldwater and everybody else in the Republican party, such as it is.

Indeed. The rats are deserting the ship at high speed. Even the dingbat senator from Colorado, Peter Dominick — the GOP claghorn who nominated Nixon for the Nobel Peace Prize less than two years ago — has called the president's 11th-hour admission of complicity in the Watergate cover-up "sorrowful news."

We will not have Richard Nixon to kick around much longer—which is not especially "sorrowful news" to a lot of people, except that the purging of the cheap little bastard is going to have to take place here in Washington and will take up the rest of our summer.

One day at a time, Sweet Jesus. . . . That's all I'm askin' from you. . . .

And now the Compton Brothers with a song about ". . . when the wine ran out and the jukebox ran out of tunes . . ."

Jesus, we need more ice and whiskey here. Fill the bag with water and suck down the dregs. The rain is still lashing my window, the dawn sky is still black and this room is damp and cold. Where is the goddamn heat switch? Why is my bed covered with newspaper clips and U.S. Government Printing Office evidence books from the Nixon impeachment hearings?

Ah . . . madness, madness. On a day like this, not even the prospect of Richard Nixon's downfall can work up the blood. This is stone, flat-out fucking weather.

On another day like this, a long time ago, I was humming across the bridge out of Louisville, Kentucky, in an old Chevy with three or four good ole boys who worked with me at a furniture factory in Jeffersonville, Indiana. . . . The tires were hissing on the wet asphalt, the windshield wipers were lashing back and forth in the early morning rain and we were hunkered down in the car with our lunch bags and moaning along with a mean country tune on the radio when somebody said:

"Jesus Christ: Why are we going to *work* on a day like this? We must be *goddamn crazy*. This is the kind of day when you want to be belly-to-belly with a good woman, in a warm bed under a tin roof with the rain beating down and a bottle of good whiskey right next to the bed."

Let me be there in your mornin', let me be there in your night. . . . Let me be there when you need me . . . and make it right.

Ah, this haunting, honky music. . . . I am running a serious out-of-control fever for that long-remembered dream of a tin-roof, hard-rain, belly-to-belly day with a big iron bolt on the door and locked away in a deep warm bed from every connection to the outside world except a $14.95 tin radio wailing tunes like "I Smell a Rat" and "The Wild Side of Life."

This is not your ideal flying weather. Both National and Dulles airports are "closed for the rest of the morning," they say. . . . But despite all that I find myself on the phone demanding plane reservations back to Colorado. Fuck the weather . . .

Whoever answered the phone at United Airlines said the weather was "expected to be clear" by early afternoon and there were plenty of seats open for the 4:40 flight to Denver.

"Wonderful," I said, "but I want a first-class seat in the *smokers'* section."

"I'll check," she said, and moments later she was back with bad news: "The smoking seats are all taken, sir, but if it makes no difference to you—"

"It does," I said. "I *must* smoke. I insist on it."

She checked again and this time the news was better: "I think we can open a smoking seat for you, sir. Could I have your name?"

"Nader," I said. "R. Nader."

"How do you spell that?"

I spelled it for her, then set my alarm for two and fell asleep on the couch, still wearing my wet swimming trunks. After two months on the Nixon Impeachment Trail, my nerves were worn raw from the constant haggling and frustrated hostility of all those useless, early morning White House press briefings and long, sweaty afternoons pacing aimlessly around the corridors of the Rayburn Office Building on Capitol Hill, waiting for crumbs of wisdom from any two or three of those 38 luckless congressmen on the House Judiciary Committee hearing evidence on the possible impeachment of Richard Nixon.

It was an eerie spectacle: The whole Nixonian empire — seemingly invincible less than two years ago — was falling apart of its own foul weight right in front of our eyes. There was no denying the vast and historic proportions of the story, but covering it on a day-to-day basis was such a dull and degrading experience that it was hard to keep a focus on what was really happening. It was essentially a lawyer's story, not a journalist's.

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I never made that plane. Sometime around noon I was jolted awake by a pounding on my door and a voice shouting, "Wake up, goddamnit, the whole town's gone crazy—the sonofabitch has caved in—he's quitting."

"No!" I thought. "Not now! I'm too weak to handle it." These goddamn rumors had kept me racing frantically around Washington day and night for almost a week—and when the shitrain finally began, I was helpless. My eyes were swollen shut with chlorine poisoning and when I tried to get out of bed to open the door, I almost snapped both ankles. I had fallen asleep wearing rubber-soled basketball shoes, which had wedged themselves between the sheets at the foot of the bed so firmly that my first thought was that somebody had strapped me down on the bed.

The howling voice at my door was Craig Vetter, another ROLLING STONE writer who had been in town for two weeks trying to make some kind of connection with Nixon's priest. . . . But the priest was finished now and the town was going wild. A *Washington Post* reporter said he had never seen the newsroom so frantic—not even when John Kennedy was murdered or during the Cuban missile crisis. The prevailing rumors on Capitol Hill had Nixon either addressing a joint session of Congress at 4:30 that afternoon or preparing a final statement for delivery at 7:00 on all three networks . . . but a call to the White House pressroom spiked both these rumors, although the place was filling up with reporters who'd picked up an entirely different rumor: That either Ziegler or Nixon himself would soon appear in the pressroom to make a statement of some kind.

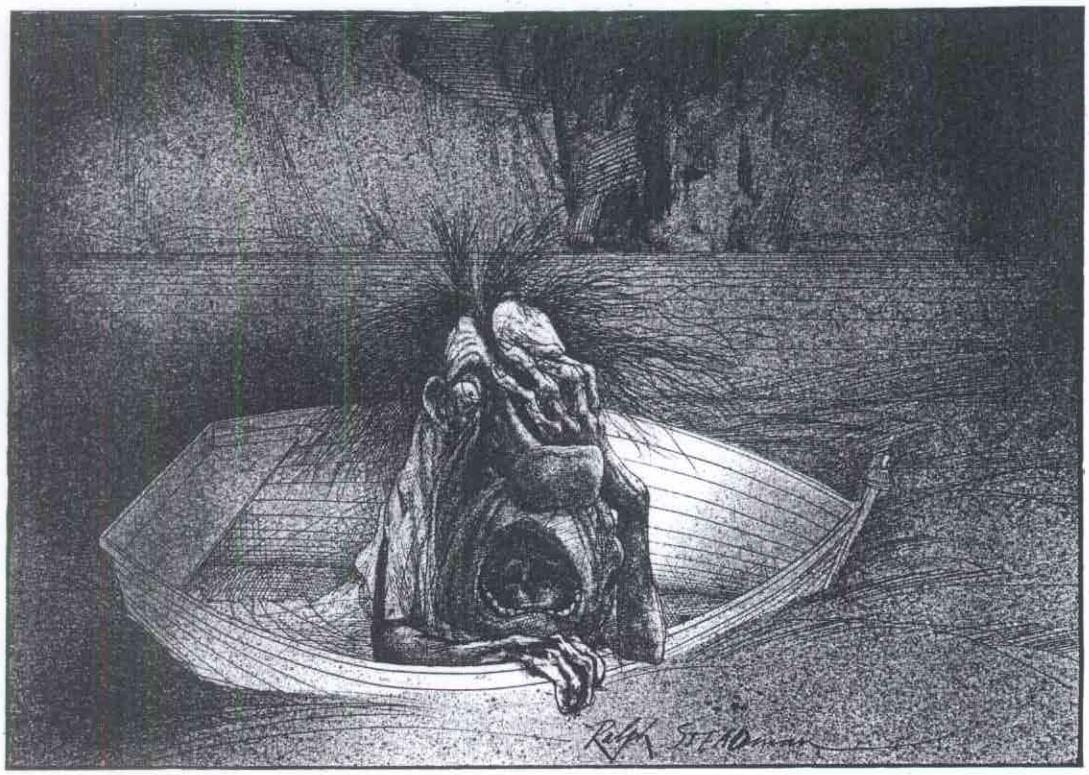
Six more calls from the National Affairs Suite churned up at least six more impossible rumors. Every switchboard in town that had any connection with either journalism or politics was jammed and useless. Later that night, even the main White House switchboard jammed up for the first time most reporters could remember, and for the next two days almost everybody who worked in the White House—even private secretaries —kept their home phones off the hook because of the chaos.

It was about 1:30 on Wednesday afternoon when I got through to Marty Nolan in the White House pressroom. We compared rumors and killed both lists very quickly. "This is all crazy bullshit," said Nolan. "We're just being jerked around. He's not going to do anything serious today, but just on the chance that he might, I don't dare leave this goddamn dungeon."

I had been on the verge of going down there, but after arranging with Nolan and about six other people in strategic positions in different parts of town to call me instantly if anything started to happen, I decided that the best thing to do was to take both the TV set and the FM radio down to a table by the pool and have all my calls transferred down to the lifeguard's telephone. . . . Which turned out to be the best of all possible solutions: Vetter and I set up a totally efficient communications post beside the pool, and for the next 48 hours we were able to monitor the whole craziness from our table beside the pool.

The Suck-Tide Reaches San Clemente.... Ziegler Brings the News to the Boss.... General Haig and the Bag of Dimes.... The Sybaritic Priest and the Mentally-Retarded Rabbi... More Talk of the 'Suicide Option'

Well . . . the goddamn thing is over now; it ended on Thursday afternoon with all the grace and mean-



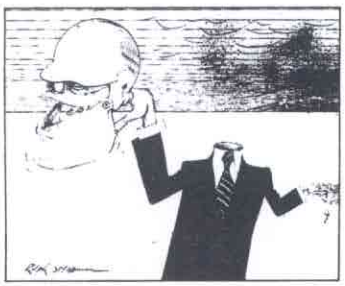
ing of a Coke bottle thrown off a third-floor fire escape on the Bowery—exploding on the sidewalk and scaring the shit out of everybody in range, from the ones who got righteously ripped full of glass splinters to the swarm of "innocent bystanders" who still don't know what happened. . . .

. . . .And probably never will; there is a weird, unsettled, painfully incomplete quality about the whole thing. All over Washington tonight is the stench of a massive psychic battle that *nobody* really won. Richard Nixon has been broken, whipped and castrated all at once, but even for me there is no real crank or elation in having been a front-row spectator at the final scenes, the Deathwatch, the first time in American history that a president has been chased out of the White House and cast down in the ditch with all the other geeks and common criminals. . . .

Looking back on the final few months of his presidency, it is easy to see that Nixon was doomed all along—or at least from that moment when Archibald Cox first decided to force a showdown on the "executive privilege" question by sending a U.S. marshal over to the White House with a subpoena for some of the Oval Office tapes.

Nixon naturally defied that subpoena, but not even the crazed firing of Cox, Richardson and Ruckelshaus could make it go away. And when Jaworski challenged Nixon's right to defy that subpoena in the U.S. Supreme Court, the wheels of doom began rolling. And from that point on, it was clear to all the principals except Nixon himself that the Unthinkable was suddenly inevitable; it was only a matter of time. . . . And it was just about then that Richard Nixon began losing his grip on reality.

Within hours after Jaworski and Nixon's "Watergate lawyer" James St. Clair had argued the case in a special session of the Court, I talked to Pat Buchanan and was surprised to hear that Nixon and his wizards in the White House were confident that the verdict would be 5-3 in their favor. Even Buchanan, who thinks rationally about 79% of the time, apparently believed—less than two weeks before the Court ruled unanimously *against* Nixon—that five of the eight justices who would have to rule on that question



would see no legal objection to ratifying Nixon's demented idea that anything discussed in the president's official office—even a patently criminal conspiracy—was the president's personal property, if he chose to have it recorded on his personal tape-recording machinery.

The possibility that even some of the justices The Boss himself had appointed to the Court might not cheerfully endorse a concept of presidential immunity that mocked both the U.S. Constitution and the Magna Carta had apparently been considered for a moment and then written off as too farfetched and crazy even to worry about by all of Nixon's personal strategists.

It is still a little difficult to believe, in fact, that some of the closest advisers to the president of a constitutional democracy in the year nineteen hundred and seventy-four might actually expect the highest court in *any* constitutional democracy to crank up what is probably the most discredited precedent in the history of Anglo-American jurisprudence—the "divine right of kings"—in order to legalize the notion that a president of the United States or any other would-be democracy is above and beyond "the law."

That Nixon and his personal Gestapo actually believed this could happen is a measure of the insanity quotient of the people Nixon took down in the bunker with him when he knew the time had come to get serious.

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But even as they raved, you could hear a hollow kind of paranoid uncertainty in their voices, as if they could already feel the ebb tide sucking around their ankles — just as Nixon must have felt it when he walked alone on the beach at San Clemente a few weeks earlier, trudging slowly along in the surf with his pantlegs rolled up while he waited in angry solitude for the results of the Supreme Court vote on his claim of "executive privilege." That rush of sucking water around his ankles must have almost pulled him out to sea when Ziegler called down from the big dune in front of La Casa Pacifica: "Mister President! Mister President! We just got the news! The vote was unanimous — eight to zero."

Nixon whoops with delight: He stops in his water-filled tracks and hurls out both arms in the twin-victory sign. "Wonderful!" he shouts. "I *knew* we'd win it, Ron! Even without that clown Renchburg. It wasn't for nothing that I appointed those other dumb farts to the Court!"

Ziegler stares down at him, at this doomed scarecrow of a president down there on the edge of the surf. Why is he grinning? Why does he seem so happy at this terrible news?

"No!" Ziegler shouts. "That is not what I meant. That is not what I meant at all!" He hesitates, choking back a sob. "The vote was eight to zero, Mister President — *against* you."

"What?" The scarecrow on the beach goes limp. His arms collapse, his hands flap crazily around the pockets of his wet pants. "Those dirty bastards!" he screams. "We'll break their balls!"

"Yes *sir*!" Ziegler shouts. "They'll wish they'd never been born!" He jerks a notebook out of his inside coat pocket and jots: "Break their balls."

By this time the wet president is climbing the dune in front of him. "What happened?" Nixon snarls. "Did somebody get to Burger?"

Ziegler nods. "What else? Probably it was Edward Bennett Williams."

"Of course," says Nixon. "We should never have left that dumb sonofabitch back there in Washington by himself. We know he'll do business: That's why we put him there." He kicks savagely at a lone ice plant in the sand. "Goddamnit! Where was Colson? Burger was *his* assignment, right?"

Ziegler winces. "Colson's in jail, sir. Don't you remember?"

Nixon stares blankly, then recovers. "Colson? In jail? What did he do?" He picks up a kelp head and lashes it against his shin. "Never mind, I remember now — but what about Ehrlichman? He can jerk Burger and those other clowns around like a goddamn Punch and Judy show!"

Ziegler stares out to sea for a moment, his eyes cloud over. "Well, sir . . . John's not much good to us anymore. He's going to prison."

Nixon stiffens, dropping the kelp head in the sand. "Holy shit, Ron! Why should John go to prison? He's one of the finest public servants I've ever had the privilege of knowing!"

Ziegler is weeping openly now, his emaciated body is wracked by deep sobs. "I *don't know*, sir. I can't explain it." He stares out to sea again, fighting to gain control of himself. "These are terrible times, Mister President. Our enemies are closing in. While you were out there on the beach, the Avis agency in Laguna called and canceled our credit. *They took my car*, Mister President! My gold Cadillac convertible! I was on the phone with Buzhardt — about the Supreme Court business, you know — when I looked out the window and saw this little nigger in an Avis uniform driving my car out the gate. The guards said he had a writ of seizure, signed by the local sheriff."

"My God!" Nixon exclaims. "We'll break his balls! Where's a telephone? I'll call Haldeman."

"It's no use, sir," Ziegler replies. "We can't make any outgoing calls until we pay the phone company $33,000. They sent a man down to fix the lines so we can only take incoming calls — for the next 86 hours, and then we'll be cut off entirely. If you want to call Washington, we'll have to walk to the San Clemente Inn and use a pay phone. I think General Haig has a bag of dimes in his room."

Nixon stiffens again; his brain is mired in deep thought. Then his eyes light up and he grabs Ziegler by the arm, dragging him toward the house. "Come on, Ron," he snaps, "I have an idea."

Ziegler stumbles along behind the president: He feels the energy flowing into him—The Boss is on the move.

Nixon is talking as he runs: "I think I've isolated our problem, Ron. We need credit, right? OK, where's that Jew?"

"Jew?"

"You know who I mean, goddamnit—that rabbi. They can always get credit, can't they? A rabbi? We'll send some of the Secret Service boys up there to Laguna to round him up. He's probably in the bar up there on top of the Surf and Sand; that's where he hangs out." Nixon laughs wildly now. "Shit, *nobody* questions a rabbi's credit! You tell the SS boys to pick him up and throw a real scare into him, then bring him down here and I'll *stroke* him."

Now Ziegler is laughing. His eyes are bright and he is writing fast in his notebook. "It's a wonderful idea, sir, just wonderful! First we stonewall the bastards, then we outflank them with a Jew!"

Nixon nods happily. "They'll never know what hit 'em, Ron. You know what I've always said: 'When the going gets tough, the tough get going.' "

"That's right, sir. I remember when Coach Lombardi—"

Nixon cuts him off with a sudden clap of his wet hands; the sound causes two Secret Service agents in the nearby shrubbery to go for their guns. "Hold on, Ron! Just hold it right there! You know who taught Coach Lombardi everything he knew?" He smiles deeply. "Me! The President!"

Ziegler wrings his hands, his eyeballs bulge, his face is twisted with reverence. "I *remember* that, sir —I remember!"

"*Good*, Ron, good! Only losers forget. . . . And you know what Coach Lombardi said about *that*." Nixon seizes his press secretary by both elbows and comes up close to his face: His breath is foul, his eyeballs are bloodshot, his pupils are dangerously dilated, his words come in short, high-pitched barks like a rabid hyena: "You show me a good loser, Ron —and I'll show you a *loser*."

Ziegler is overwhelmed: His eyes are so wide that he can't even blink; his body is rigid but his soul is on fire. His face is a mask of pure zeal: Ron Ziegler —left-hand man to a doomed and criminal president, the political flip side of every burned-out acid freak who voted for Goldwater and then switched to Tim Leary until the pain got too bad and the divine light of either Jesus or Maharaj Ji lured him off in the wake of another Perfect Master.

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Ah, poor Ron. I knew him well enough. It was Ziegler, in fact, who tipped me off many months ago that Nixon was finished. This was back in July, in that lull before the storm when the wizards in Washington were beginning to nod glumly at each other whenever somebody suggested that the impeachment drive seemed to be faltering and that maybe Nixon was bottoming out, that in fact he had already bounced off the bottom and was preparing to take the offensive once again.

These were the salad days of early summer, before the fateful Supreme Court decision, when Nixon's Goebbels—ex-White House "communications director" Ken Clawson—was creating a false dawn over the White House by momentarily halting Nixon's year-long slide in the public opinion polls with a daily drumbeat of heavy, headline-grabbing attacks on "professional Nixon-haters" in the press, and "unprincipled, knee-jerk liberals in Congress." At that point in time, most of Nixon's traditional allies were beginning to hear the death shrieks of the banshee floating over the White House lawns at night, and even Billy Graham had deserted him. So Clawson, in a stroke of cheap genius, put a sybaritic Jesuit priest and a mentally retarded rabbi on the payroll and sent them forth to do battle with the forces of Evil.

Father John McLaughlin, the Jesuit, wallowed joyfully in his role as "Nixon's priest" for a month or so, but his star faded fast when it was learned he was pulling down more than $25,000 a year for his efforts and living in a luxury apartment at the Watergate. His superiors in the church were horrified, but McLaughlin gave them the back of his hand and, instead, merely cranked up his speechmaking act. In the end, however, not even Clawson could live with the insistent rumor that the Good Jesuit Father was planning to marry his girlfriend. This was too much, they say, for the rigid sensibilities of General Haig, the White House chief of staff, whose brother was a legitimate priest in Baltimore. McLaughlin disappeared very suddenly, after six giddy weeks on the national stage, and nothing has been heard of him since.

But Clawson was ready for that. No sooner had the priest been deep-sixed than he unveiled another holy man—the Rabbi Baruch Korff, a genuine dingbat with barely enough sense to tie his own shoes, but who eagerly lent his name and his flaky presence to anything Clawson aimed him at. Under the banner of something called the "National Citizens' Committee for Fairness to the President," he "organized" rallies, dinner parties and press conferences all over the country. One of his main financial backers was Hamilton Fish Sr., a notorious fascist and the father of New York Congressman Hamilton Fish Jr., one of the Republican swing votes on the House Judiciary Committee who quietly voted for impeachment.

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Only a month ago, the storms of destiny seemed to be subsiding for President Nixon. Among the Knowledgeable in Washington, the conviction was growing that the impeachment campaign against him had spent its moment. . . . [But] it is now clear that the Knowledgeable were wrong, that they mistook a break in the clouds for lasting sunshine. . . .

—R.W. Apple Jr.
The New York Times
July 28th, 1974

In fact, however, Nixon was already doomed by the time the Rodino committee got around to voting. The unanimous Supreme Court vote on the question of "executive privilege" with regard to the 64 disputed tapes was the beginning of the end. Nixon had known all along that the release of those tapes would finish him—but he had consistently lied about their contents: not only to the press and the public, but also to his wife and his daughters and all the hardcore loyalists on his staff. He lied about the tapes to Barry Goldwater and Gerry Ford, to Hugh Scott and John Rhodes, to Al Haig and Pat Buchanan and even to his own attorney, James St. Clair—who was stupid enough, like the others, to have believed him when he swore that the tapes he refused to let anybody listen to would finally prove his innocence.

Both of his lawyers, in fact, had done everything in their power to *avoid* hearing the goddamn things. It finally required a direct order from Judge Sirica, on two separate occasions, to compel Buzhardt and St. Clair to listen to the tapes. Buzhardt was first, and within hours after hearing the fatal conversation with Haldeman of June 23rd, 1972, he was rushed to the intensive care ward of a private hospital in Virginia with a serious "heart attack" that rendered him incommunicado for almost two months.

I was sitting in a bar called the Class Reunion, about two blocks from the White House, when I heard the tragic news. . . . And I recall saying to *Boston Globe* correspondent Marty Nolan: "We'll never see Buzhardt again. They can't afford to let him live. If he survives whatever Ziegler put in his coffee when he was listening to those tapes, Haldeman will go out there and stick a hatpin up his nose while he's wasted on Demerol, jam it straight into his brain when the nurse gets out of the room. Take my word for it, Marty. I know how these people operate. Buzhardt will never leave that hospital alive."

Nolan nodded, oblivious to Buzhardt's grim fate. At that point, almost every journalist in Washington assigned to the Nixon Deathwatch had been averaging about two hours sleep a night since the beginning of summer. Many were weak and confused, succumbing to drink or drugs whenever possible. Others seemed to hover from day to day on the brink of terminal fatigue. Radio and TV reporters in the White House press room were reduced to tearing articles out of the nearest newspaper and reading them verbatim straight over the air—while the newspaper and magazine people would tape the live broadcasts and then transcribe them word for word under their own bylines. By the end of July, the prospect of having to cover an impeachment debate in the House and then a trial in the Senate for three or four months without relief was almost unbearable. As August began and Nixon still showed no signs of giving up, there was more and more talk of "the suicide option."

Last Breakfast at the White House.... The Scumbag is Passed to a New Generation.... Cold Turkey Swoops Down & Panic for Watergate Junkies

Sometime around dawn on the Friday morning of Richard Milhous Nixon's last breakfast in the White House I put on my swimming trunks and a red rain parka, laced my head with some gray Argentine snuff, and took an elevator down to the big pool below my window in the National Affairs Suite at the Washington Hilton. It was still raining, so I carried my portable TV set, a notebook and four bottles of Bass Ale in a waterproof canvas bag.

The lower lobby was empty, except for the night watchman—a meaty black gentleman whose main duty was to keep people like me out of the pool at night, but we had long since come to a friendly understanding on this subject. It was against the rules to swim when the pool was closed but there was no rule to prevent a Doctor of Divinity from going out there to meditate on the end of the diving board.

"Mornin', Doc," said the watchman. "Up a little early, ain't you? Especially on a nasty day like this."

"Nasty?" I replied. "What are you—some kind of goddamn Uncle Tom Republican? Don't you know who's leaving town today?"

He looked puzzled for a moment, then his face cracked into a grin. "You're right, by god! I almost forgot. We finally got rid of that man, didn't we, Doc?" He nodded happily. "Yes sir, we finally got rid of him."

I reached into my bag and opened two Bass Ales. "This is a time for celebration," I said, handing him one of the bottles. I held mine out in front of me: "To Richard Nixon," I said, "may he choke on the money he stole."

The watchman glanced furtively over his shoulder before lifting his ale for the toast. The clink of the two bottles coming together echoed briefly in the vast, deserted lobby.

"See you later," I said. "I have to meditate for a while, then hustle down to the White House to make sure he really leaves. I won't believe it until I see it with my own eyes."

The flat surface of the pool was pocked with millions of tiny raindrops beating steadily down on the water. There was a chain lock on the gate, so I climbed over the fence and walked down to the deep end, where I located a dry spot under a tree near the diving board. *The CBS Morning News* would be on in about 20 minutes; I turned on the TV set, adjusted the aerial and turned the screen so I could see it from the pool about 20 feet away. It was a system I'd worked out last summer at the Senate Watergate hearings: After every two laps, I could look over the edge of the pool and check the screen to see if Hughes Rudd's face had appeared yet. When it did, I would climb out of the water and lie down on the grass in front of the set—turn up the sound, light a cigarette, open a fresh Bass Ale and take notes while I watched the tiny screen for a general outline of whatever action Sam Ervin's Roman circus might be expected to generate that day.

I stayed out there by the pool for almost two hours, sliding in and out of the water to run a few laps and then back out to stretch out on the grass to make a note now and then on the news. Not much was happening, except for a few kinky interviews down by the White House gate with people who claimed to have been on the Deathwatch for three days and nights without sleeping. . . . But very few of them could even begin to explain why they were doing it. At least half the crowd around the White House during those last few days looked like people who spend every weekend prowling the Demolition Derby circuit.

The only other action on the news that Friday morning was an occasional rerun of Nixon's official resignation speech from the night before. I had watched it with Vetter in the Watergate bar. It seemed like a good place to be on that night, because I had also been there on the night of June 17th, 1972 —while the Watergate burglary was happening five floors above my head.

But after I'd watched Nixon's speech for the third time, a strange feeling of nervousness began working on me and I decided to get out of town as soon as possible. The movie was over—or at least it would be over in two or three hours. Nixon was leaving at 10:00, and Ford would be sworn in at noon. I wanted to be there on the White House lawn when Nixon was lifted off. That would be the end of *my* movie.

It was still raining when I left and the pool was still empty. I put the TV set back in the canvas bag and climbed over the gate by the lifeguard shack. Then I stopped and looked back for a moment, knowing I would never come back to this place, and if I did it would not be the same. The pool would be the same, and it would be easy enough to pick up a case of Bass Ale or a battery TV set. . . . And I could even come down here on rainy summer mornings and watch the morning news. . . .

But there would not be this kind of morning anymore, because the main ingredient for that mix was no longer available in Washington; and if you asked any of the people who were known to have a real taste for it, the hard-core Nixon aficionados, they all understood that it would not be available again for a hell of a long time and probably never.

Nobody even talks about substitutes or something almost exactly the same. The mold disappeared about three minutes after they made that evil bastard . . . and although there was never any doubt about who stole it, nobody had any proof.

No . . . even with the pool and the ale and grass and the portable TV set, the morning news will not be the same without the foul specter of Richard Nixon glaring out of the tube. But the war is over now and he lost. . . . Gone but not forgotten, missed but not mourned; we will not see another one like him for quite a while. He was dishonest to a fault, the truth was not in him, and if it can be said that he resembled any other living animal in this world, it could only have been the hyena.

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I took a cab down to the White House and pushed through the sullen mob on the sidewalk to the guardhouse window. The cop inside glanced at my card, then looked up — fixing me with a heavy-lidded

Quaalude stare for just an instant, then nodded and pushed his buzzer to open the gate. The pressroom in the West Wing was empty, so I walked outside to the Rose Garden, where a big olive-drab helicopter was perched on the lawn, about 100 feet out from the stairs. The rain had stopped and a long red carpet was laid out on the wet grass from the White House door to the helicopter. I eased through the crowd of photographers and walked out, looking back at the White House, where Nixon was giving his final address to a shocked crowd of White House staffers. I examined the aircraft very closely, and I was just about to climb into it when I heard a loud rumbling behind me; I turned around just in time to see Richard and Pat coming toward me, trailing their daughters and followed closely by Gerald Ford and Betty. Their faces were grim and they were walking very slowly; Nixon had a glazed smile on his face, not looking at anybody around him, and walked like a wooden Indian full of Thorazine.

His face was a greasy death mask. I stepped back out of his way and nodded hello but he didn't seem to recognize me. I lit a cigarette and watched him climb the steps to the door of the helicopter. . . . Then he spun around very suddenly and threw his arms straight up in the famous twin-victory signal; his eyes were still glazed, but he seemed to be looking over the heads of the crowd at the White House.

Nobody was talking. A swarm of photographers rushed the plane as Nixon raised his arms—but his body had spun around too fast for his feet, and as his arms went up I saw him losing his balance. The grimace on his face went slack, then he bounced off the door and stumbled into the cockpit. Pat and Ziegler were already inside; Ed Cox and Tricia went in quickly without looking back, and a Marine in dress blues shut the door and jumped away as the big rotor blades began turning and the engine cranked up to a dull, whining roar.

I was so close that the noise hurt my ears. The rotor blades were invisible now, but the wind was getting heavier; I could feel it pressing my eyeballs back into their sockets. For an instant I thought I could see Richard Nixon's face pressed up to the window. Was he smiling? Was it Nixon? I couldn't be sure. And now it made no difference.

The wind blast from the rotors was blowing people off-balance now; photographers were clutching their equipment against their bodies and Gerald Ford was leading his wife back toward the White House with a stony scowl on his face.

I was still very close to the helicopter, watching the tires. As the beast began rising, the tires became suddenly fat; there was no more weight on them. . . . The helicopter went straight up and hovered for a moment, then swooped down toward the Washington Monument and then angled up into the fog. Richard Nixon was gone.

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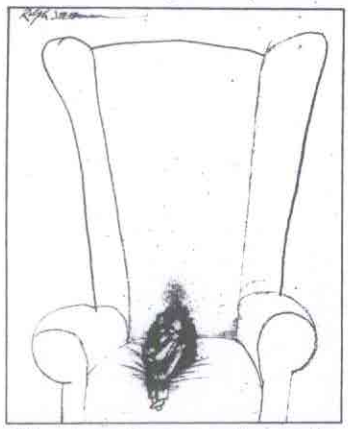
The end came so suddenly and with so little warning that it was almost as if a muffled explosion in the White House had sent up a mushroom cloud to announce that the scumbag had been passed to what



will have to pose for now as another generation. The main reaction to Richard Nixon's passing—especially among journalists who had been on the Deathwatch for two years—was a wild and wordless orgasm of long-awaited relief that tailed off almost instantly to a dull, post-coital sort of depression that still endures.

Within hours after Nixon's departure, every bar in downtown Washington normally frequented by reporters was a sinkhole of gloom. Several hours after Gerald Ford was sworn in, I found ex-Kennedy speechwriter Dick Goodwin in a bar not far from the ROLLING STONE office across the street from the White House. He was slumped in a booth by himself, staring blankly into his drink like a man who had just had his teeth ripped out by a savage bill collector.

"I feel totally drained," he said. "It's like the circus just left town. This is the end of the longest running continuous entertainment this city ever had." He waved his arm at the waitress for another drink. "It's the end of an era. Now I know how all those rock freaks felt when they heard the Beatles were breaking up."

I felt the same way. All I wanted to do was get the hell out of town as soon as possible. I had just come from the White House pressroom, where a smog-like sense of funk—or "smunk" as somebody over there might describe it—had settled on the room within minutes after Ford took the oath. The Deathwatch was finally over; the evil demon had been purged and the Good Guys had won—or at least the Bad Guys had lost, but that was not quite the same thing. Within hours after Richard Nixon left Washington, it was painfully clear that Frank Mankiewicz had spoken too soon when he'd predicted, just a few weeks before The Fall, that Washington would be "the Hollywood of the Seventies." Without Nixon to stir up its thin juices, the Washington of the Seventies could look forward to the same grim fate as Cinderella's gilded coach at the stroke of midnight. It would turn back into a pumpkin, and any-mysterious shoes left lying around on the deserted ballroom floors of the Watergate era would not interest a genial pragmatist like Gerald Ford. He would not have much time, for a while, to concern himself with anything but the slide into national bankruptcy that Nixon had left him to cope with . . . . And, despite all its menacing implications, the desperate plight of the national economy was not a story that called up the same kind of journalistic adrenaline that Washington and most of the country had been living on for so long that the prospect of giving it up caused a serious panic in the ranks of all the Watergate junkies who never even knew they were hooked until the cold turkey swooped into their closets.

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We all knew it was coming—the press, the Congress, the "public," all the backstage handlers in Washington and even Nixon's own henchmen—but we all had our own different timetables, and when his balloon suddenly burst on that fateful Monday in August, it happened so fast that none of us were ready to deal with it. The Nixon presidency never really had time to *crumble*, except in hazy retrospect. . . . In reality, it *disintegrated*, with all the speed and violence of some flimsy and long-abandoned gazebo suddenly blasted to splinters by chain lightning.

The bolts came so fast that it was hard to keep count. On the Wednesday morning after the House Judiciary Committee voted to recommend his impeachment, Richard Nixon was a beleaguered Republican president with powerful Republican (and Southern Democratic) allies in both the House and the Senate: His impeachment seemed almost certain, but the few people in Washington crass enough to bet money on a thing like this were still calling his chances of conviction in the Senate "just about even." This prognosis held for about 72 hours, which was time enough for almost everybody in Washington to start gearing down for an endless summer—a humid nightmare of booze, sweat and tension, of debate in the House, delay in the courts and finally a trial in the Senate that might drag on until Christmas.

It was an ugly prospect, even for those of us who openly welcomed the prospect of seeing Richard Nixon in the dock. On the last afternoon of the Judiciary hearings, I found myself leaning against a tree on the grass of the U.S. Capitol lawn, hopelessly stoned, staring up at the huge golden dome (while loud knots of tourists wearing Bermuda shorts and Instamatic cameras climbed the marble steps a hundred yards in front of me) and wondering, "What in the fuck am I doing here? What kind of sick and twisted life have I fallen into that would cause me to spend some of the best hours of my life in a cryptlike room full of cameras, hot lights and fearful politicans debating the guilt or innocence of Richard Milhous Nixon?"

The Politician and the Pawnbroker.... The New York Times Hits the Trenches, The Washington Post Opens a Multi-Pronged Panzer Offensive.... Lessons of a Crime Spree in Lexington.... A Compound Tangent Mushrooms Dangerously

Innocence? It is difficult even to type that word on the same page with Nixon's name. The man was *born* guilty—not in the traditional Vatican sense of "original sin," but in a darker and highly personalized sense that Nixon himself seems to have recognized from the very beginning.

Nixon's entire political career—and in fact his whole life—is a gloomy monument to the notion that not even pure schizophrenia or malignant psychosis can prevent a determined loser from rising to the top of the heap in this strange society we have built for ourselves in the name of "democracy" and "free enterprise." For most of his life, the mainspring of Richard Nixon's energy and ambition seems to have been a deep and unrecognized need to overcome, at all costs, that sense of having been *born guilty*—not for crimes or transgressions *already* committed, but for those he somehow sensed he was fated to commit as he grappled his way to the summit. If Nixon had been born Jewish, instead of Black Irish, he would probably have been a pawnbroker instead of a politician, not only because the suburbs of Los Angeles would never have elected a Jewish congressman in 1946, but because running a big-league pawnshop would have fueled him with the same kind of guilt-driven energy that most of our politicians—from the county assessor level all the way up to the White House—seem to thrive on.

On any given morning, both the politician and the pawnbroker can be sure that by sundown the inescapable realities of their calling will have forced them to do something they would rather not have to explain, not even to themselves. The details might vary, but the base line never changes: "I will feel more guilty tomorrow than I feel today, just as I feel more guilty today than I felt yesterday. . . . But of course I have no choice: *They* have made me what I am and by god, *they'll* pay for it."

So the cycle runs on. Both the politician and the pawnbroker are doomed to live like junkies, hooked on the mutant energy of their own unexplainable addictions.

In this baleful sense, Richard Nixon is definitely "one of us"—as *New York Times* columnist Tom Wicker wrote, in a very different context, back in the early Sixties. The phrase was Conrad's, from *Lord Jim*: "He was one of us . . ." —and when I read Wicker's piece more than a decade ago I remember feeling angry that *The New York Times* had the power to hire another one of these goddamn gothic Southern sots and turn him loose to stumble around Washington and spew out this kind of bullshit.

Anybody stupid enough to identify with Richard Nixon the same way Conrad's Marlow identified with

Lord Jim was beyond either help or any hope of credibility, I felt, and for the next seven or eight years I dismissed everything Wicker wrote as the mumblings of a hired fool. . . . And when Wicker's point of view began swinging very noticeably in the direction of my own, in the late 1960s, I was almost as disturbed—for entirely different reasons—as the *Times* editors in New York who also noticed the drift and swiftly deposed him from his heir-apparent role to James Reston as the new chief of the paper's Washington bureau.

The masthead of *The New York Times*'s Washington Bureau is a reliable weathervane for professional observers of the changing political climate. Control of the bureau is usually in the hands of somebody the magnates in New York believe is more or less on the same wavelength as the men in control of the government. Arthur Krock, for instance, got along fine with Eisenhower, but he couldn't handle the Kennedys and was replaced by Reston, a JFK partisan in 1960 and a "Roosevelt coalition" neopopulist who also got along well with Lyndon Johnson. But when Johnson quit in 1968 and the future looked very uncertain, Reston was promoted to a management job in New York and was succeeded by Wicker at about the same time Robert Kennedy was deciding to make his move for the presidency; but when Bobby was killed and McCarthy collapsed, the *Times* hedged its bet on Humphrey by deposing Wicker and replacing him with Max Frankel, a smooth and effective diplomat/journalist who could presumably get along with either Hubert *or* Nixon. . . . But not even Frankel could handle Four More Years, apparently, and the Nixon/Agnew landslide in 1972 forced the admittedly anti-Nixon *Times* into a stance of agonizing reappraisal. Frankel moved up to New York, and since the most obvious candidates for his job were relatively liberal young turks like Bob Semple, Anthony Lewis or Johnny Apple, who were clearly out of step with the mandate of vengeance that Nixon claimed by virtue of his shattering victory over McGovern, the *Times* management in New York made a fateful policy decision that would soon come back to haunt them:

On the theory that the best offense, at that point, was a good defense, they pulled in their editorial horns for the duration and sent an elderly, conservative mediocrity named Clifton Daniel down from the executive backwaters of New York to keep the aggressive Washington bureau under control. At almost the same time, they hired one of Nixon's top speechwriters, Bill Safire, and gave him a prominent ranking columnist's spot on the *Times* editorial pages. Both of these moves were thinly veiled concessions to the prospect of a revenge-hungry Nixon/Agnew juggernaut that had already telegraphed its intention to devote as much of its second (and final) term energies to their "enemies" in the "national media" as they had already successfully devoted in the first term to scuttling the U.S. Supreme Court.

It was clearly a management decision, safely rooted in the *Times* concept of itself as "a newspaper of record," not advocacy—and when you're in the business of recording history, you don't declare war on the people who're making it. "If you want to get along, go along." That is an ancient political axiom often attributed to Boss Tweed, the legendary "pol" and brute fixer who many journalists in Washington insist still sits on the editorial board of *The New York Times*.

Which is probably not true, if only because the *Times* got burned so badly by going along with Tweed's crude logic in the winter of 1972-73 that the whole Washington Bureau—except perhaps Clifton Daniel—is still reeling from the beating they took from *The Washington Post* on the Nixon/Watergate story. While the *Times* was getting down in the trenches and methodically constructing its own journalistic version of a Maginot line against the inevitable Nixon/Agnew offensive, the *Post* was working 25 hours a day on a multipronged panzer-style offensive that would soon become one of the most devastating scoops in the history of American journalism.

Rather than be cowed by Nixon and his army of power-crazed thugs, the *Post* elected to meet them head-on, hitting both flanks and the center all at once—and when the bloody dust began settling, just a few weeks ago, with both Agnew and Nixon having resigned in disgrace, *The Washington Post* had unquestionably replaced *The New York Times* as the nation's premiere political newspaper.

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To compensate for the loss of what is widely regarded as one of the fattest and heaviest jobs in journalism, the *Times* gave Wicker a column—his own chunk of turf, as it were—and that unexpected burst of freedom seemed to have an almost consciousness-expanding effect on his head. When I met him for the first time in Miami in that star-crossed political summer of 1972, he was writing one of the sanest columns on the market and he talked like a happy man.

We were sitting at a beach table near the surf, outside the Fontainebleau Hotel on Miami Beach, taking a break from the chaos of the Democratic Convention, and I took the opportunity to tell him about my reaction to his long-ago comment on Nixon.

"Yeah," he said. "I'm not sure what I was thinking when I wrote that, but—"

"No," I said, "You were right."

He stared at me, looking puzzled.

It was one of those days that we all hit once in a while when everything you mean to say sounds wrong when you hear it coming out of your mouth. I tried briefly to explain what I really meant, but even the explanation came out bent, so I decided to drop the subject. . . . What I had in mind, I think, was the idea that Nixon really *was* "one of us"—not in Conrad's sense of that term, or my own, but as an almost perfect expression of "the American way of life" that I'd been so harshly immersed in for the past eight or nine months of traveling constantly around the country to cover the presidential primaries.

Jesus! This idea seems just as tangled tonight as it did two years ago when I was trying to explain it to Wicker—so I think I'll let it drop, once again, and move on to something else. . . . But not without a final backward glance at the election results in November of '72, when Richard Nixon was re-elected to the White House by the largest margin of any president since George Washington. There is no way to erase that ominous fact from the record books—any more than Nixon will ever be able to erase from the history books the fact that he was the first American president to be driven out of the White House because of admittedly criminal behavior while in office.

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Looking back on that crippled conversation with Wicker in Miami, it occurs to me that maybe almost everybody in the country—except possibly Wicker—might have been spared what Gerald Ford called "our national nightmare" if Tom had been kept on as *The New York Times* Washington bureau chief in 1968, instead of being converted to a columnist. The social and political pressures of the job would have driven him half crazy, but his then emerging sense of outrage at the whole style and content of the Nixon administration might have been contagious enough, within the bureau, to encourage a more aggressive kind of coverage among the *Times* reporters he would have been assigning to look behind Nixon's facade.

As it turned out, however, those fascist bastards had to be given so much rope that they came close to hanging all the rest of us along with themselves, before *The Washington Post* finally filled the power vacuum created by *The New York Times*'s sluggish coverage of those four years when Nixon and his fixers were organizing vengeful plans like John Dean's list of "our enemies" to be harassed by the IRS, and the Tom Charles Huston "Domestic Intelligence Plan" that amounted to nothing less than the creation of a White House Gestapo.

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But the climate of those years was so grim that half the Washington press corps spent more time worrying about having their telephones tapped than they did about risking the wrath of Haldeman, Ehrlichman and Colson by poking at the weak seams of a Mafia-style administration that began cannibalizing the whole government just as soon as it came into power. Nixon's *capos* were never subtle; they swaggered into Washington like a conquering army, and the climate of fear they engendered apparently neutralized *The New York Times* along with all the other pockets of potential resistance. Nixon had to do everything but fall on his own sword before anybody in the Washington socio-political establishment was willing to take him on.

Like the black teenage burglars who are terrorizing chic Georgetown these days, Nixon conquered so easily that he soon lost any fear of being caught. Washington police have noted a strange pattern involving burglaries in Georgetown and other posh neighborhoods in the white ghetto of the city's northwest sector: A home that has been robbed once is far more likely to be hit again than a home that has never been hit at all. Once they spot an easy mark, the burglars get lazy and prefer to go back for seconds and even thirds, rather than challenge a new target.

The police seem surprised at this pattern but in fact it's fairly traditional among amateurs—or at least among the type I used to hang around with. About 15 years ago, when I was into that kind of thing, I drifted into Lexington, Kentucky, one evening with two friends who shared my tastes; we moved into an apartment across the street from a gas station which we broke into and robbed on three consecutive nights.

On the morning after the first hit, we stood transfixed at the apartment window, drinking beer and watching the local police "investigating" the robbery. . . . And I remember thinking, now that poor fool over there has probably never been hit before, and what he's thinking now is that his odds of being hit again anytime soon are almost off the board. Hell, how many gas stations have ever been robbed two nights in a row?

So we robbed it again that night, and the next morning we stood at the window drinking beer and watched all manner of hell break loose between the station owner and the cops around the gas pumps across the street. We couldn't hear what they were saying, but the proprietor was waving his arms crazily and screaming at the cops, as if he suspected *them* of doing it.

Christ, this is wonderful, I thought. If we hit the bugger again tonight he'll go stark raving mad tomorrow morning when the cops show up . . . which was true: On the next morning, after three consecutive robberies, the parking lot of that gas station was like a war zone, but this time the cops showed up with reinforcements. In addition to the two police cruisers, the lot filled up with chromeless, dust-covered Fords and crew-cut men wearing baggy brown suits and shoes with gum-rubber soles. While some of them spoke earnestly with the proprietor, others dusted the doorknobs, window latches and the cash register for fingerprints.

It was hard to know, from our window across the street, if we were watching the FBI, local detectives or insurance agency investigators at work. . . . But in any case I figured they'd have the whole station ringed with armed guards for the next few nights, so we decided to leave well enough alone.

About six in the evening, however, we stopped there and had the tank filled up with ethyl. There were about six bony-faced men hanging around the office, killing the time until dark by studying road maps and tire-pressure charts. They paid no attention to us until I tried to put a dime in the Coke machine.

"It ain't workin'," one of them said. He shuffled over and pulled the whole front of the machine open, like a broken refrigerator, and lifted a Coke bottle out of the circular rack. I gave him the dime and he dropped it into his pocket.

"What's wrong with the machine?" I asked, remembering how hard it had been to rip the bastard open with a crowbar about 12 hours earlier to reach the money box.

"No concern of yours," he muttered, lighting up a Marvel and staring out at the pump where the attendant was making change for a ten-dollar bill after cleaning our windshield and checking the oil. "Don't worry," he said. "There's some folks gonna be a lot worse off than that there machine before this night's out tonight." He nodded. "This time we're *ready* for them sonsabitches."

And they were. I noticed a double-barreled shotgun standing in a corner by the rack full of oil cans. Two big coon hounds were asleep on the greasy linoleum floor, with their collar chains looped around the base of the chewing gum machine. I felt a quick flash of greed as I eyed the glass bulb filled with all those red, white, blue and green gum balls. We had looted the place of almost everything else, and I felt a pang of regret at having to leave the gum machine untouched: All those pennies just sitting there with nobody to fondle them. . . .

But in retrospect I think that moment was the beginning of wisdom for me. We had pushed our luck far enough with that place [*Continued on Page 49*]

[*Continued from Page 36*] and the world was full of colorful gum-ball machines. There was a weird and menacing edge in the man's voice that it took me a long time to forget.

We drove downtown and cruised around drinking warm beer for a while, then we robbed a crowded liquor store on Main Street by starting a fight with the clerks and then cleaning out the cash register while they struggled to defend themselves.

We got less than $200 out of that one, as I recall — about the same as we'd picked up from three hits on the gas station — and on the way out of town I remember thinking that maybe I could do something a little better in this life than robbing gas stations and liquor stores. After taking enough crazy risks to put all three of us in prison for at least five years, we had about $135 apiece to show for it and about half of that was already spent on gas, food, beer and hiring winos to buy whiskey for us because we were too young to get served and the winos were charging double for anything they bought for us.

That weekend crime spree in Lexington was my last haul, as they say; I even gave up shoplifting, which altered my lifestyle pretty severely for a while because it had taken me several years to master the kind of skill and mental attitude it takes to walk into a jewelry store and come out with six watches, or in the front door of a tavern and hassle the bartender with a false ID long enough to let a friend slip out the back door with a case of Old Forester. . . . But when I quit that gig, I quit it completely; and after 15 years on the wagon my skills are so hopelessly atrophied that now I can't even steal a newspaper from an open rack on the street.

Ah . . . mother of jabbering god, how in the hell did I get off on that tangent about teenage street crime? This is supposed to be a deep and serious political essay about Richard Nixon. . . .

Although maybe that wasn't such a tangent, after all. The original point, I think, had to do with street-punk mentality that caused Nixon to push his luck so far that it was finally almost impossible *not* to get himself busted. For a while he had the luck and arrogance of a half-smart amateur. From their base in the White House, Nixon and the L.A. account execs he brought with him treated the old-line Washington power structure with the same kind of contempt that young burglars casing Georgetown seem to have for the forts of the rich and powerful — or that I had for that poor bastard who owned the gas station in Lexington.

This is a very hard thing for professional cops, journalists or investigators to cope with. Like doctors and lawyers, most of the best minds in police work have been trained since puberty to think in terms of patterns and precedents: Anything original tends to have the same kind of effect on their investigative machinery as a casually mutilated punch-card fed into a computer. The immediate result is chaos and false conclusions. . . . But both cops and computers are programmed to know when they've been jammed by a wild card or a joker, and in both cases there are usually enough competent technicans standing by to locate the problem and get the machinery working again pretty quickly.

Right. . . . and now we have gone off on a dangerous compound tangent. And it has mushroomed into something unmanageable. . . . But before we zoom off in whatever direction might come next, it would be unfair not to mention that the *Times* was the first paper to break the Pentagon Papers story, a command decision that forced Nixon and his would-be enforcers to come out in the open with fangs bared, snarling threats to have everybody connected with the publication of the Pentagon Papers either lashed into jail or subpoenaed into so many courtrooms that all their minds would snap before they finally wound up in the poorhouse.

As it turned out, however, the *Times* management strapped on its collective balls and announced that they were prepared to go to the mat with Nixon on that one — a surprisingly tough stance that was almost instantly backed up by influential papers like the *Los Angeles Times*, *The Washington Post* and the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*. . . . And the appearance of that solid front, however shaky, caused serious turmoil in the White House. Spiro Agnew was pried loose from his kickback racket and sent out on the stump to stir up the Silent Majority against the "radic-libs" and "liberal elitists" of the "eastern media establishment" — the "nattering nabobs of negativism."

Jesus! Those were the days, eh?

STRANGE INTERLUDE: An Aborted Prediction, for the Record... Grim Dispatches from San Clemente: 'a Pitiful Basket Case, A Chronic Bed-Wetter'... The Millionaire Felon on the Federal Dole.... The Sudden News from Mister Ford

Won't you fly O eagle fly
You better run little cottontail run
I hope you both live long enough
To see the setting sun

—Marshall Tucker Band

September 6th, 1974

The headline in today's *Washington Post* says Richard Nixon is "lonely and depressed" down there in his exile hideout in San Clemente. He sucks eggs for breakfast and wanders back and forth on the beach, spitting frequently into the surf and brooding about some vicious Polak whose name he can't remember. . . . Some low-life friend of John Connally from Houston; the same white-haired little bugger who caused all that trouble with the Supreme Court, and now he has a runaway Grand Jury full of uppity niggers who—in Nixon's own words—"want to pick the carcass."

Indeed. . . . What the hell is a carcass good for anyway, except to pick at? Gnaw the skull, suck the bones, then soak the bastard with gasoline and toss a match on it.

Jesus! How much more of this cheapjack bullshit can we be expected to take from that stupid little gunsel? Who gives a fuck if he's lonely and depressed out there in San Clemente? If there were any such thing as true justice in this world, his rancid carcass would be somewhere down around Easter Island right now, in the belly of a hammerhead shark.

But, no—he is sitting out there in the imitation-leather-lined study of his oceanside estate, still guarded constantly by a detail of Secret Service agents and still communicating with the outside world through an otherwise unemployable $40,000-a-year mouthpiece named Ron Ziegler . . . and still tantalizing the national press with the same kind of shrewdly programmed leaks that served him so well in the last months of his doomed presidency. . . .

"He's terribly depressed, with much to be depressed about," says a friend. "Anyone would be depressed in his situation. I don't mean he's going off the deep end. I just mean that everything happened to him, seemingly all at once, and he doesn't know what to do about it."

Well . . . shucks. I'd be tempted to put my mind to the task of helping the poor bastard figure out "what to do about" this cruel nutcracker that he somehow stumb.'ed into . . . but I have a powerful suspicion that probably that gang of mean niggers in Washington has already solved Nixon's problem for him. They are going to indict the bastard and try to put him on trial.

Nixon knows this. He is not the kind of lawyer you'd want to hire for anything serious, but the reality of his situation vis-à-vis the Watergate grand jury is so bleak that even *he* has to grasp it . . . and this is the reason, I think, for the more or less daily front-page comments on his half-mad and pathetically crippled mental condition. He has devised another one of his famous fourth-down game breakers —the same kind of three-fisted brainstorm that climaxed with his decision to defuse the whole impeachment process by releasing his own version of "the tapes," or the time he figured out how to put a quick lid on the Watergate burglary investigation by blaming the whole thing on John Dean.

According to one Washington topsider, widely respected as an unimpeachable source and a shrewd judge of presidential character: "Dick Nixon is in a league all by himself when you're talking about style and grace under pressure. His instincts when the crunch comes are absolutely amazing."

Nobody will argue with that—although his strategy since leaving the White House has been marked by an unnatural focus on subtlety. The savage warrior of old now confronts us in the guise of a pitiful, frightened old pol—a whipped and broken man, totally at the mercy of his enemies and baffled by the firestorm of disasters that drove him out of the White House.

Which may even be partially true: He will probably go to his grave believing he was not *really* guilty of anything except underestimating the power of his enemies. . . . But the fact remains that Jaworski will very likely break the news of Nixon's formal indictment before this article appears on the newsstands, and when that happens there will be only one man in the country with the power to arbitrarily short-circuit the legal machinery that in theory could land Richard Nixon in the same cellblock with John Dean.

That man is Gerald Ford, but he will have a hard time justifying a blanket presidential pardon for an admitted felon without at least the *appearance* of a ground swell of public sympathy to back him up.

So we may as well get braced for a daily dose of extremely grim news out of San Clemente, once Nixon is formally indicted. We will hear reports that the ex-president frequently bursts into tears for no reason at all, that he utters heart-rending screams every night in his sleep, and the *Los Angeles Herald-Examiner* will quote an unnamed "prominent Beverly Hills psychiatrist" who will describe Nixon as a "pitiful basket case" and "a chronic bedwetter." And if Ford still seems reluctant to let Nixon go free, we will start seeing front-page "exclusive photos" of Nixon alone on the beach, staring soulfully at the sunset with tears drooling out of his eyes

It will be a carefully orchestrated public relations campaign in the classic Nixon tradition. Ziegler will hold daily press briefings and read finely crafted descriptions of the former president's pitiful condition from the typewriter of Ray Price, Nixon's former chief speechwriter at the White House. Both Price and Pat Buchanan, the left and right forks of Nixon's tongue ever since he decided to make his move on the White House back in 1965, showed up at the San Clemente fortress in early September, both insisting they had just come out to say hello and "check up on the old man." As it happened, however, they both appeared about the same time rumors began surfacing in New York about a $2-million advance that Nixon had been offered for his memoirs.

Neither Price nor Buchanan claimed to know anything definite about the book offer, but in New York Spiro Agnew's literary agent was telling everybody who asked that the Nixon deal could be closed momentarily for at least $2 million and maybe more.

That is a hell of a lot of money for *anybody's* memoirs—even people who might reasonably be expected to tell the truth. But even a ridiculously fraudulent version of his five and a half wretched years in the White House and his own twisted view of the scandal that finished him off would be an automatic best seller if the book-buying public could be conned somehow into believing Richard Nixon was actually the author.

Meanwhile, with either Price or Buchanan or both standing ready to write his memoirs for him, Nixon was pondering an offer from *Reader's Digest* to sign on as a "consulting editor" at a salary of $100,000 a year. . . . And Thursday of that week, President Ford made headlines by urging the Congress to appropriate $850,000 to cover Nixon's pension, living expenses and other costs of the painful transition from the White House to San Clemente. When the $850,000 runs out, he will have to scrimp until July 1st of next year, when he will pick up another $400,000 that will have to last him until July 1st, 1976. For as long as he lives, Richard Nixon will be on the federal dole for every $400,000 a year—$60,000 pension, $96,000 to cover his personal staff salaries, $40,000 for travel, $21,000 to cover his telephone bills and $100,000 for "miscellaneous."

Cont. P. 51

On top of his $300,000 annual expense account, Nixon's 24-hour-a-day Secret Service protection will cost the taxpayers between $500 and $1000 a day for as long as he lives—a conservative figure, considering the daily cost of things like helicopters, patrol boats, walkie-talkies and car telephones, along with salaries and living expenses for ten or 12 full-time agents. There is also the $40,000 a year Ron Ziegler still commands, as a ranking public servant. Add another $30,000 to $50,000 each for personal aides like Stephen Bull and Rose Mary Woods, plus all their living and travel expenses—and the cost of maintaining Richard Nixon in exile adds up to something like $750,000 a year . . . and these are merely the *expenses*. His personal income will presumably derive from things like the $2 million advance on his memoirs, his $100,000 a year stipend from *Reader's Digest*, and the $5000 a crack he can average, with no effort at all, on the year-round lecture circuit.

So . . . what we are looking at here is a millionaire ex-president and admitted felon; a congenital thief and pathological liar who spent 28 years on the public sugar tit and then quit just in time to avoid the axe. If he had fought to the bitter end, as he'd promised Julie he would "as long as even one senator believes in me," he risked losing about 95% of the $400,000 annual allowance he became qualified for under the "Former Presidents' Act" by resigning. . . . But a president who gets impeached, convicted and dragged out of the White House by U.S. marshals is not covered by the "Former Presidents' Act." If Nixon had fought to the end and lost—which had become absolutely inevitable by the time he resigned—he would have forfeited all but about $15,000 a year from the federal dole. . . . So, in retrospect, the reason he quit is as easy to see as the numbers on his personal balance sheet. The difference between resignation and being kicked out of office was about $385,000 a year for the rest of his life.

Most of this annual largesse will come, one way or another, out of the pockets of the taxpayers. *All* of the taxpayers. Even George and Eleanor McGovern will contribute a slice of their income to Richard Nixon's retirement fund. . . . And so will I, unless Jaworski can nail the bastard on enough felony counts to strip him not only of his right to vote, like Agnew, but also his key to the back door of the Federal Treasury—which is not very likely now that Ford has done everything but announce the date for when he will grant the pardon.

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The White House announced yesterday a negotiated agreement with Richard M. Nixon under which the former president and the U.S. government will have joint custody of White House tapes and presidential documents but with Mr. Nixon determining who shall have access to them.

In the letter of agreement making him the "sole legal owner of the papers and tapes until their future donation to the government," Mr. Nixon specifically asserted his legal title to "all literary rights" accompanying possession of the materials. Mr. Nixon has reportedly been told that a book of memoirs would be worth at least $2 million.

The Washington Post
September 9th, 1974

President Ford virtually made up his mind five days ago to grant a pardon to former-President Richard M. Nixon.

On Wednesday, presidential counsel Philip Buchen met with Herbert Miller, Nixon's attorney, at the White House and disclosed that Ford was considering executive clemency.

Would Nixon accept a pardon? Buchen asked.

Miller responded that he did not know, according to Buchen. But after checking with Nixon by telephone — the ex-president was at his home in San Clemente, California — Miller reported that a pardon was acceptable.

With that, the pardon was set, though Ford was unable to announce the pardon publicly until yesterday morning because it took several days to complete the arrangements.

The Washington Star-News
September 9th, 1974

Only ten days ago, in the first formal press conference of his administration, Mr. Ford had said that it would be "unwise and untimely" of him to make any commitment to a pardon until legal action was taken.

But the president was aware that political reaction was building in favor of prosecution of Mr. Nixon, a point dramatically confirmed by a Gallup Poll last week which showed that 56% of the American people thought that Mr. Nixon should be tried while only 37% opposed such action.

The Washington Post
September 9th, 1974

Powerful Men Brought Weeping to Their Knees... The Stinking Realities of Richard Nixon's Place in History....The Mushwit Son-In-Law and The Last Tape

THE EX-PRESIDENT'S GIFTS

To the Editor:

The letter of Sylvia Wallace (August 23rd), warning that "we may yet see a Nixon renascent," caused me such grave concern that I immediately consulted the ineffable wisdom of the *I Ching* for some clue to the future of Mr. Nixon. I was unerringly directed to the Po Hexagram and the learned commentaries thereon. The book confirmed my worst fears: "Its strong subject, notwithstanding the attempts against him, survives and acquires fresh vigor. The people again cherish their sovereign and the plotters have wrought to their own overthrow."

The "legal steps" that your correspondent suggests to prevent Nixon's rebirth could prove woefully ineffective. I suggest that, after hanging, the body be drawn, quartered and burned and the ashes buried in an unmarked grave in a distant field guarded by an elite corps, lest his hard-core followers come and steal the remains and proclaim: He is risen!

Please! If Mr. Nixon regains popular favor, it will not be through any "revisionism" or reworking of the facts supporting the charges of guilt. It will probably be that coming events will force a careful re-evaluation of his contributions to the nation and crystallize an awareness of the misfortune suffered by the nation in the loss of his special gifts in these critical times. We may come to feel like the shepherd who had no sooner been conned by some pointy-eared gentleman into getting rid of his mean, tough sheep dog because of its fleas than the wolves reappeared on the scene.

Theoddre P. Daly
Somers, New York
Letters to the Editor
The New York Times
September 4th, 1974

A prominent San Clemente supporter of Mr. Nixon since he went to Congress in 1946, who asked not to be identified, said he had heard that the Lincoln Club of Orange County, made up largely of wealthy industrialists who contributed millions of dollars to Republican campaign coffers, including Mr. Nixon's, had invited the former president to become a member of the select and influential group.

"You won't find Mr. Nixon living the life of a recluse," the Republican informant said, "Now that he is clear of any criminal prosecution, don't be surprised if he comes back into California politics. I think he should. I'd like to see him run for Senator John V. Tunney's seat in 1976."

The New York Times
September 9th, 1974

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We are still too mired in it now to fit all the pieces together and understand what really happened in these last two frenzied years . . . or to grasp that the Real Meaning of what our new president calls the "national nightmare" and what historians will forever refer to as "Watergate" will probably emerge not so much from the day-to-day events of The Crisis, or even from its traumatic resolution—but more from what the survivors will eventually understand *was prevented from happening*.

I was out there on the crowded concrete floor of the Miami Beach Convention Center in August of 1972 when that howling mob of Republican delegates confirmed Richard Nixon's lust for another term in the White House with their constant, thunderous chant of "FOUR MORE YEARS! FOUR MORE YEARS! FOUR MORE YEARS!"

It was bad enough, just listening to that demagogic swill—but I doubt if there were more than a dozen people in Miami that week who really understood what that cheap, demented little fascist punk had in mind for his Four More Years. It involved the systematic destruction of everything this country claims to stand for, except the rights of the rich to put saddles on the backs of the poor and use public funds to build jails for anybody who complained about it.

The tip of the iceberg began emerging about six months after Nixon took his second oath of office, when Senator Sam Ervin took his initially harmless-looking "Watergate Committee" act on national TV. It didn't catch on, at first; the networks were deluged with letters from angry housewives, cursing Ervin for depriving them of their daily soap operas—but after two or three weeks the Senate Watergate hearings were the hottest thing on television.

Here, by god, was a *real* soap opera: tragedy, treachery, weird humor and the constant suspense of never knowing who was lying and who was telling the truth. . . . Which hardly mattered to the vast audience of political innocents who soon found themselves as hooked on the all-day hearings as they'd previously been on the soaps and the quiz shows. Even Hollywood scriptwriters and apolitical actors were fascinated by the dramatic pace and structure of the hearings.

The massive complexities of the evidence, the raw drama of the daily confrontations and the deceptively elfin humor of "Senator Sam" came together in a multileveled plot that offered something to almost everybody—from bleeding hearts and Perry Mason fans to S&M freaks and the millions of closet Hell's Angels whose sole interest in watching the hearings was the spectacle of seeing once-powerful men brought weeping to their knees.

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Consider John Mitchell, for instance—a millionaire Wall Street lawyer and close friend of the president, an arrogant, triple-chinned Roman who was Nixon's campaign manager in '68 and attorney general of the United States for four years until his old buddy put him in charge of the Committee to Re-elect the President in 1972. . . . Here was a 61-year-old man with more money than he could count and so much power that he saw nothing unusual in treating the FBI, the Secret Service and every federal judge in the country like serfs in his private police force . . . who could summon limousines, helicopters or even Air Force One to take him anywhere he wanted to go by merely touching a buzzer on his desk. . . .

And suddenly, at the very pinnacle of his power, he casually puts his initials on a memo proposing one of at least a dozen or so routine election-year bits of "undercover work"—and several months later while having breakfast in the Polo Lounge of the Beverly Hills Hotel, he gets a phone call from some yo-yo named Liddy, whom he barely knows, saying that four Cubans he's never even met have just been caught in the act of burglarizing the office of the Democratic National Committee located in an office building about 200 yards across the plaza below his own balcony in the Watergate apartments. . . .

Which seems like a bad joke, at first, but when he gets back to Washington and drops by the White House to see his old buddy, he senses that something is wrong. Both Haldeman and Ehrlichman are in the Oval Office with Nixon; the president greets him with a nervous smile but the other two say nothing. The air reeks of tension. What the hell is going on here? Mitchell starts to sit down on the couch and call for a drink but Nixon cuts him off: "We're working on something, John. I'll call you at home later on, from a pay phone."

Mitchell stares at him, then picks up his briefcase and quickly says goodbye. Jesus Christ! What *is* this? On the way out to the limousine in the White House driveway, he sees Steve Bull's secretary reading a late edition of *The Washington Star-News* and idly snatches it out of her hands as he walks by. . . . Moments later, as the big Cadillac rolls out into traffic on Pennsylvania Avenue, he glances at the front page and is startled by a large photo of his wife; she is packing a suitcase in the bedroom of their Watergate

apartment. And next to the photo is a headline saying something like "Martha on the Rampage Again, Denounces 'Dirty Business' at White House."

"Good God!" he mutters. The Secret Service man in the front seat glances back at him for a moment, then looks away. Mitchell scans the story on Martha: She has freaked out again. Where does she keep getting that goddamn speed? he wonders; her eyes in the photo are the size of marbles. According to the story, she called UPI reporter Helen Thomas at four in the morning, cursing incoherently about "Mister President" and saying she has to get out of Washington at once, go back to the apartment in New York for a few days of rest.

Wonderful, Mitchell thinks. The last thing I need right now is to have her screaming around the apartment all night with a head full of booze and speed. Mitchell hates speed. In the good old days, Martha would just drink herself into a stupor and pass out. . . . But when they moved down to Washington she began gobbling a pill here and there, just to stay awake at parties, and that's when the trouble started. . . .

Then his eyes shift up to the lead story and he suddenly feels his balls contract violently, crawling straight up into his belly. "WATERGATE BURGLARY CONNECTED TO WHITE HOUSE," says the headline, and in the first graph of the story he sees the name of E. Howard Hunt, which he recognizes instantly—and a few graphs lower, goddamnit, is Gordon Liddy's name.

No need to read any further. Suddenly it all makes sense. He hears himself moan and sees the agent glance back at him again, saying nothing. He pulls the paper up in front of his face, but he is no longer reading. His finely tuned lawyer's mind is already racing, flashing back over all the connections: phone calls to Hunt, arguments with Liddy, secret meetings in Key Biscayne, Larry O'Brien, Cuban burglars with CIA connections, Howard Hughes. . . .

He is fucked. It has taken less than 30 seconds for his brain to connect all the details. . . . And yes, of course, that's what Nixon was talking about with those bastards, Haldeman and Ehrlichman. They knew. The president knew. Hunt and Liddy knew. . . .Who else? Dean? Magruder? LaRue? How many others?

The limousine slows down, making the turn off Virginia Avenue and into the Watergate driveway. Instinctively, he glances up at the fifth floor of the office building and sees that all the lights are still on in O'Brien's office. That was where it had happened, right here in his own goddamn fortress. . . .

His mind is still racing when the agent opens the door. "Here we are, sir. Your luggage is in the trunk; we'll bring it right up."

John Mitchell crawls out of the bright black Cadillac limousine and walks like a zombie through the lobby and into the elevator. Dick will be calling soon, he thinks. We'll have to act fast on this goddamn thing, isolate those dumb bastards and make sure they *stay* isolated.

The elevator stops and they walk down the soft, red-carpeted hall to his door. The agent goes in first to check all the rooms. Mitchell glances down the hall and sees another Secret Service man by the door to the fire exit. He smiles hello and the agent nods his head. Jesus Christ! What the hell am I worried about? We'll have this thing wrapped up and buried by ten o'clock tomorrow morning. They can't touch *me*, goddamnit. They wouldn't dare!

The agent inside the apartment is giving him the all-clear sign. "I put your briefcase on the coffee table, sir, and your luggage is on the way up. We'll be outside by the elevator if you need anything."

"Thanks," Mitchell says. "I'll be fine." The agent leaves, closing the door softly behind him. John Mitchell walks over to the TV console and flips on the evening news, then pours himself a tall glass of scotch on the rocks and stretches out on the sofa, watching the tube, and waits for Nixon to call—from a pay phone. He knows what that means and it has nothing to do with dimes.

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That was John Mitchell's last peaceful night in Washington. We will probably never know exactly what he and Nixon talked about on the telephone, because he was careful to make the call from one of the White House phones that was not wired into the tape-recording system. . . . Mitchell had not been told, officially, about the president's new tape toy; the only people who knew about it, officially, were Nixon, Haldeman, Larry Higby, Steve Bull, Alex Butterfield and the three Secret Service agents responsible for keeping it in order. . . . But unofficially almost everybody with personal access to the Oval Office had either been told on the sly or knew Richard Nixon well enough so they didn't need to be told . . . . In any case, there is enough testimony in the files of the Senate Watergate committee to suggest that most of them had their own recording systems and taped most of what they said to each other, anyway.

Neither John Ehrlichman nor Charles Colson, for instance, were "officially" aware of the stunningly sophisticated network of hidden bugs that the Technical Security Division of the Secret Service had constructed for President Nixon. According to Alex Butterfield's testimony in closed hearings before the House Judiciary Committee, Nixon told Chief SS agent Wong to have his electronics experts wire every room, desk, lamp, phone and mantelpiece inside the White House grounds where The President was likely ever to utter a word of more than one syllable on any subject.

I've been using tape recorders in all kinds of journalistic situations for almost ten years, all kinds of equipment, ranging from ten-inch studio reels to raisin-sized mini-bugs—but I have never even *seen* anything like the system Wong's Secret Service experts rigged up for Nixon in the White House. In addition to dozens of wireless, voice-activated mikes about the size of a pencil eraser that he had built into the woodwork, there were also custom-built sensors, delay mechanisms and "standby" switches wired into telephones that either Bull or Butterfield could activate.

In the Cabinet Room, for instance, Nixon had microphones built into the bases of the wall lamps that he could turn on or off with harmless-looking buzzers labeled "Haldeman" and "Butterfield" on the rug underneath the cabinet table in front of his chair. The tapes and recording equipment were installed in a locked closet in the basement of the West Wing, but Nixon could start the reels rolling by simply pressing on the floor buzzer marked "Butterfield" with the toe of his shoe—and to stop the reels, putting the machinery back on standby, he could step on the "Haldeman" button. . . .

Any serious description of Nixon's awesome tape-recording system would take thousands of words and boggle the minds of most laymen, but even this quick capsule is enough to suggest two fairly obvious but rarely mentioned conclusions: Anybody with this kind of a tape system, installed and maintained 24 hours a day by Secret Service electronics experts, is going to consistently produce extremely high quality voice reproductions. And since the White House personnel office can hire the best transcribing typists available, and provide them with the best tape-transcribing machinery on the market, there is only one conceivable reason for those thousands of maddening, strategically spotted "unintelligibles" in the Nixon version of the White House Tapes. Any Kelly Girl agency in the country would have given Nixon his money back if their secretaries had done that kind of damage to his transcripts. Sloppiness of that magnitude can only be deliberate, and Nixon is known to have personally edited most of those tape transcripts before they were typed for the printer. . . . Which doesn't mean much, now that Nixon's version of the transcripts is no longer potential evidence but sloppy artifacts that are no longer even interesting to read except as an almost criminally inept contrast to the vastly more detailed and coherent transcripts that House Judiciary Committee transcribers produced from the same tapes. The only people with any reason to worry about either the implications of those butchered transcripts or the ham-fisted criminal who did the final editing job are the editors at whichever publishing house decides to pay Richard Nixon $2 million for his presidential memoirs, which will be heavily dependent on that vast haul of Oval Office tapes that Gerald Ford has just decreed are the personal property of Richard Nixon. He will have the final edit on *those* transcripts, too—just before he sends the final draft of his memoirs to the printer. The finished book will probably sell for $15, and a lot of people will be stupid enough to buy it.

The second and more meaningful aspect vis-à-vis Nixon's tape system has to do with the way he used it. Most tape freaks see their toys as a means to bug other people, but Nixon had the SS technicians install almost every concealed bug in his system with a keen eye for its proximity to Richard Nixon.

According to Butterfield, Nixon was so obsessed with recording every move and moment of his presidency for the history books that he often seemed to be thinking of nothing else. When he walked from the White House to his office in the EOB, for instance, he would carry a small tape recorder in front of his mouth and maintain a steady conversation with it as he moved in his stiff-legged way across the lawn.

. . . And although we will never hear those tapes, the mere fact that he was constantly making them, for reasons of his own, confirms Alex Butterfield's observation that Richard Nixon was so bewitched with the fact that he really was *The President* that his only sense of himself in that job came from the moments he could somehow record and squirrel away in some safe place, for tomorrow night or the ages.

There is a bleeding kind of irony in this unnatural obsession of Nixon's with his place in history when you realize what must have happened to his mind when he finally realized, probably sometime in those last few days of his doomed presidency, just exactly what kind of place in history was even then being carved out for him.

In the way it is usually offered, the sleazy little argument that "Nixon has been punished enough" is an ignorant, hack politician cliche. . . . But that image of him walking awkward and alone across the White House lawn at night, oblivious to everything in front or on either side of him except that little black and silver tape recorder that he is holding up to his lips, talking softly and constantly to "history," with the brittle intensity of a madman: When you think on that image for a while, remember that the name Nixon will seem to give off a strange odor every time it is mentioned for the next 300 years, and in every history book written from now on, "Nixon" will be synonymous with shame, corruption and failure.

No other president in American history has been driven out of the White House in a cloud of disgrace. No other president has been forced to preside over the degrading collapse of his own administration or been forced to stand aside and watch helplessly—and also guiltily—while some of his close friends and ranking assistants are led off to jail. And finally, no president of the United States has ever been so vulnerable to criminal prosecution, so menaced by the threat of indictment and trial, crouched in the dock of a federal courtroom and so obviously headed for prison that only the sudden grant of presidential pardon from the man he appointed to succeed him could prevent his final humiliation.

These are the stinking realities that will determine Richard Nixon's place in American history. . . . And in this ugly context, the argument that "Richard Nixon has been punished enough" takes on a different meaning. He will spend many nights by himself in his study out there in San Clemente, listening over and over to those tapes he made for the ages and half-remembering the feel of thick grass on the Rose Garden lawn adding a strange new spring to his walk, even making him talk a bit louder as he makes his own knotty, plastic kind of love to his sweet little Japanese bride, telling it over and over again that he really *is* The President, The Most Powerful Man in the World—and goddamnit, you better never forget that!

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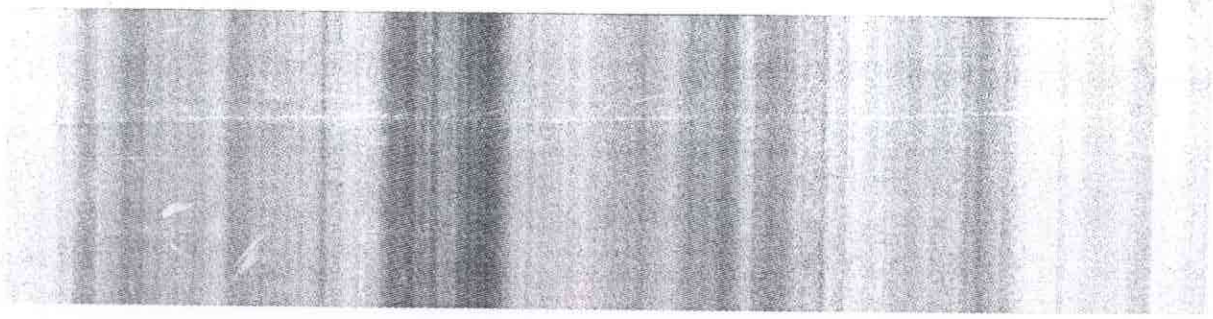
Richard Nixon is free now. He bargained wisely and well. His arrangement with Ford has worked nicely, despite that week or so of bad feeling when he had to get a little rough with Gerry about the pardon, threatening to call in the *L.A. Times* man and play that quick little tape of their conversation in the Oval Office—the one where he offered to make Gerry the vice-president, in exchange for a presidential pardon whenever he asked for it—and he had known, by then, that he would probably need it a lot sooner than Gerry realized. Once their arrangement was made (and taped), Nixon just rode for as long as he could, then got off in time to sign up for his lifetime dole as a former president.

He will rest for a while now, then come back to haunt us again. His mushwit son-in-law, David Eisenhower, is urging him to run for the U.S. Senate from California in 1976, and Richard Nixon is shameless enough to do it. Or if not in the Senate, he will turn up somewhere else. The only thing we can be absolutely sure of, at this point in time, is that we are going to have Richard Milhous Nixon to kick around for at least a little while longer.