

The Day Insp. Columbo Ferreted

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By Art Buchwald

Peter Falk, playing his famous role of Columbo, walked into the East Room of the White House in his dirty raincoat and flashed his police card. "Inspector Columbo," he said, showing it to President Nixon. "Say, this sure is a nice house you got here. How much does a place like this cost?"

"I'm having a private party for my staff," the President said indignantly. "What do you want?"

"Oh, I really apologize," Columbo said. "I didn't mean to come busting in on a party. Say, is that a real oil painting of George Washington? It's a fantastic work of art—don't get me wrong, I don't know anything about painting."

"Will you state your business, inspector?"

"I'm just making some routine inquiries about the Watergate bugging case. You see I'm on loan to the Senate Investigating Committee from the Los Angeles Police Department. It will only take a few minutes."

"We have nothing to hide here," the President said. "This is my assistant, H. R. Haldeman, my legal

aide, John Dean III, my former assistant, Charles Colson, the former Secretary of Commerce, Maurice Stans and the former Attorney General, John Mitchell and his wife Martha."

"This is really a great honor," Columbo said. "I never thought I would get to meet so many important people. Wait till I tell my wife. She's really going to be bowled over."

"What exactly is it you want to know?" the President asked.

"Oh, yes," Columbo said taking out his pad and pencil. "Now let me see."

Martha Mitchell said, "Inspector, I'd like to tell you a few things about the Watergate . . ."

"Martha, will you shut up?" John Mitchell interrupted.

"They're not going to hang this on my John," Martha said.

"Martha!"

"Can I offer you a drink, inspector?" the President asked.

"Just some orange juice if you've got it, Mr. Presi-

Out the Waterbugger

dent. I have a bad stomach. You know in this job you never eat properly. Last night I had a tuna fish sandwich on a roll and . . ."

"Will you get on with it, inspector?" H. R. Haldeman said.

"I'm sorry . . . where was I? Oh yes, now about the Watergate. This is just routine, you understand, but where were each of you the night of the break-in?"

"I was watching 'Patton,'" the President said.

"I was in Mexico City at a bank," Maurice Stans said.

"I was reading FBI files," John Dean III said.

"I was cutting the budget," H. R. Haldeman replied.

"I'll tell you where John was," Martha Mitchell said.

"Martha, clam up," John Mitchell said.

"Well if I don't tell him, I'll tell the United Press," Martha said.

"You see," Columbo said shutting his notebook, "I knew this would all be a waste of time. I told them no one in the White House knows anything about the Watergate. Say, that is some rug. Do you mind if I take a picture of it to show the folks in Los Angeles?"

Capitol Punishment

Just then the butler came in with Columbo's glass of orange juice.

"Thank you very much," Columbo said to the butler, "I didn't get your name."

"Alfonse, sir."

"Where were you on the night of the break-in, Alfonse?"

"I was polishing the silver."

"You're lying, Alfonse. You were at the Watergate."

"See here, Columbo," the President said, "you're relying on heresy evidence."

"No, I'm not, Mr. President. This coaster that the orange juice was served on says 'Property of the Watergate Bar and Grill.'"

"My God," said H. R. Haldeman, "the butler did it."

"Why didn't we think of that?" John Dean III said.

"Thank heavens, Columbo, you discovered the culprit," John Mitchell said. "Now we can all sleep tonight."

Martha Mitchell piped, "wait a minute, Mr. Columbo, there's a lot more to this than you think."

"Dammit Martha!" yelled John Mitchell, "Will you keep your big trap shut?"

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