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# Rashomon- Feller

By Russell Baker

## Gerald Ford's version:

"Rocky, my dear old friend!" exclaimed President Ford as he bounded across the Oval Office to greet his unexpected visitor. "How wonderful of you to drop by! And you so busy doing such a splendid job in the Vice Presidency!"

The two men embraced emotionally, and a tear dampened the Presidential eye, evoked by the realization of what a splendid job his old friend was doing in the Vice Presidency. "But what is this?" he cried, glimpsing the noose which Mr. Rockefeller wore about his neck.

"So long, fella," explained the Vice President, starting to suspend himself from the ceiling.

"Don't do it, Nelson," pleaded the President. "You're the most splendid Vice President I ever had."

Mr. Rockefeller waved aside the President's objection. "I'm not doing it for me," he said. "I'm doing it for you. With me out of the way, you will be relieved of an awkward political problem."

"But I don't ask the ultimate sacrifice of you," the President protested, reaching for a letter opener to cut the rope.

"Stay! Stay!" gasped the Vice President. "Let me do what is best for America." With a smile of brotherhood, Mr. Ford embraced the dangling Vice President a last time, murmuring, "Oh, what a friend I have in Nelson," and returned to his desk.

With his final breath, the Vice President gasped, "I'll support you fully in the '76 campaign."

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## Nelson Rockefeller's version:

"What do you have in that basket?" asked the President as the visitor he had been awaiting for weeks finally appeared in the Oval Office.

"It's the basket your campaign manager sent me several weeks ago," said Nelson Rockefeller. "I've been doing such a splendid job in the Vice Presidency that I didn't have time to examine it until this evening."

"Bo Callaway sent you a basket?" murmured the President. "How nice."

"Was it at your request, Mr. President?"

Mr. Ford saw a small snake slither out of the leaves in the basket. "You know Bo," he said. "A great practical joker."

"I have a great sense of humor myself," said Mr. Rockefeller, "but I wouldn't send my Vice President a basket with an asp in it."

"Bo sent you an asp?" the President said. "That Bo! What a weird guy."

"It's an asp, all right," said Mr. Rockefeller, grasping the snake and holding it to his breast.

"What are you going to do with it?" the President asked.

"I've always said I wasn't a candidate for this job in '76, and I'll use the asp to prove it," the Vice President said. "Unless you object."

"I'd never stop you from proving that you're a man of your word," said the President.

After Mr. Rockefeller had let the asp bite him, the President asked him to put the snake safely back in the basket and put a lid on it. Then, as the Vice President slumped to the floor, Mr. Ford said, "Can I count on your support in the '76 campaign, Nelson?"

Mr. Rockefeller was too convulsed with laughter at Bo's great sense of humor to give a coherent reply.

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## The politician's version:

Nelson Rockefeller, having been handed the black spot by Bo Callaway, was snatched while presiding over the Senate, bound, thrown into the trunk of a limousine and delivered to the Oval Office.

Gerald Ford rose and gave him the ceremonial kiss on both cheeks, the traditional parting gesture between two men of respect. Donald (Rummy) Rumsfeld opened a trapdoor directly under the Truman portrait and everyone listened to the splash of water and the snapping of crocodile jaws far below.

"Shall he sleep with the fishes?" Rummy asked Ford.

Ford smiled and nudged Rockefeller. "My boy Rummy," he said. "He's got a hot temper, no?"

"He's broken the unwritten code," snarled Rummy.

"The boy's right, Rocky," said Ford. "You've been hurting us real bad in the Southern territory. You know the code. Nobody speaks in a New York accent and lives to tell about it."

"He's doing us no good in the New Hampshire territory either," said Rummy.

"That's right, Rocky," said Bo. "We told you, you got to look more like Ronnie Reagan, but you don't even get your hair dyed. You ain't played ball, Rocky."

"Tell you what I'm going to do, Rocky," said Ford. "We're all going to walk out of the Oval Office for a few minutes and leave you alone with this gun and a note to sign before you use it."

They untied Rocky's gun-and-signing hand and walked away. Before closing the door, Ford said, "Don't mess up the office, Rocky."

Rocky lifted the pen and signed the note, then picked up the gun, reconsidered, crashed through the windows into the Rose Garden and disappeared into the night. Though the note was published next day, the mob whispered that Rocky was still alive and armed, which meant he might support himself in the '76 campaign.

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