



BY SHANA ALEXANDER

LOVE SONG TO MARTHA MITCHELL

Pop, pop, pop, pop, Mitchell, Dean, Haldeman, Stans. One by one, the ducks fall down. Watergate has no heroes. But it does have a heroine: Martha Mitchell.

Martha Mitchell, where are you? How are you? I wish I could call you up tonight. If ever a heroine was unsung, it is you; yet you are the only one among them who has behaved honestly in this whole hugger-mugger affair. "A dirty business" you called it from the very beginning. Through jeers, threats and exile, your story, and your outrage, has not varied a jot. Your gold pompadour is the single unmoving light in the entire Watergate constellation of orbiting alibis, doom-bearing comets and showers of Republican falling stars.

When the President wanted you, you served him. You were the only spice to his dull, drab company. (And it turns out that you were the only one of them who was exactly, and no less than, what you seemed.) Did he need Happy Headlines? You supplied them! You dared to do something that the icebound ships—Haldeman, Ehrlichman—couldn't conceive. You throbbed. That must be why your man loves you so. You are *alive*. How could they not know what kind of woman they were dealing with? How could they miss the independent spirit under the gold pompadour?

ALL-AMERICAN

Even your name, Martha Mitchell, is so American, a covered-wagon frontier name, the female equivalent of a Founding Fathers name, evoking Barbara Frietchie most of all:

*"Shoot, if you must, this sprayed
gold head
But spare John Mitchell's name,"
she said.*

Once as a young reporter I accompanied two patrolmen to the scene of a family fight. We found the wife on the floor, black-eyed and bloody, but when the cops accused the man she leapt to her feet shouting, "You keep your hands off my husband!" That's you, Martha Mitchell.

You are not interested in pushing your husband in the normal way of the corporation wife, not interested in pushing him up success's ladder, up to the

two-car, three-TV set, swimming pool, country club, heart-attack way of life. You are interested in *commitment*, and yours is utter. When you can't give it, that's when your life falls apart.

For the first year or two in Washington, you were like a rodeo girl riding a bucking horse. You were the star of the show, and how you loved queen-ing it, milking it for all it was worth. Of course you had the liberty of the clown, but you had more: you told it like it is, you called 'em as you saw 'em. That's what made us laugh.

Then they put you out, ostracized you to the Watergate, needled your derriere, even locked you in "for your own protection." The gray, icebound ships saw you as an embarrassment to their probity and sobriety, but failed to see that they themselves had much to be embarrassed about, beginning with their own cold-bloodedness.

ULTIMATUM

Finally, they banished you. Or did you leave town in disgust? "Choose between me and them" is the ultimatum John Mitchell told us then that you gave him. Was this really *your* proposition, I wonder, or just his version of it? In any case, it would appear now that he tried to have it both ways. You could have told him that never works.

What I like best about you is that you tell the truth. Maybe not the whole truth, but certainly nothing but the truth as you see it. If there is something on your mind, you say it. You are incapable of dissembling. If you like a drink once in a while, well, so do I. Anyway, it's mostly the sober people who tell lies. Drinkers can hardly wait to tell you the truth, as every bartender knows.

"A dirty business," as you've said. But it also strikes me as such a silly business. Why did they do it? They already knew more about the Democrats than the Democrats knew about themselves. And they were already just about certain to win the election. So why take the risk?

Watergate up to now is a plot with no plot. Want to hear my theory? I don't think the primary objective of the raiders was to dig up dirt on the Democrats at all. I think they were making a very careful check to see exactly

how much dirt, if any, the Democrats might have on them. Watergate, in short, was defensive and not offensive espionage.

The concept of defensive espionage is wholly consistent with the President's well-advertised admiration for vigorous, aggressive play, for always carrying the fight into the enemy's territory.

Anyway, Martha, another thing I like about you is your mistrust of the written word. The spoken word is safer in these Alice in Wonderland, topsy-turvy times. So don't give them a written deposition on Watergate. Don't put anything in writing. Instead, insist they put you on the stand. You want the right at long last to explain yourself. One can scarcely blame you for that.

Your husband appears oddly ambiguous on this point. "She'd be delighted to testify," he has said, but "God help the committee if she does."

I'm not sure what he meant by this—in fact, like most people I am having a lot more difficulty understanding his behavior than yours. But it occurs to me that if it turns out under oath that you did indeed know all about the "dirty business" from the very beginning, it will be even harder to believe that the President himself knew nothing.

LOYALTY ABOVE ALL

Loyalty is the supreme virtue of Nixon politicians, their bottom line. When somebody says, "I'd walk over my grandmother for Richard Nixon," that's fine. But when someone says, "I'd walk over Richard Nixon for my husband," that is danger. It takes the kind of guts they fear, and it accounts both for your vulnerability and for your threat to them. It is the final reason why I like you so very much.

You were not born, they sneer, but sprang full-grown from the pen of Al Capp. Wrong! You are in the best tradition of American womanhood, defending your country, your flag . . . but most of all, defending your man. You are folk art, an American primitive. I doubt you know or can even conceive any other way to respond to a man than with utter loyalty, an 007 kind of love. When love and loyalty die, your kind of woman will go find another man.

It appears to me just now that yours may be the only loyalty of Watergate.