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FROST/NIXON

by

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WHITE: 06/26/07
FULL BLUE: 08/14/07
PINK REVS: 08/22/07
YELLOW REVS: 08/24/07

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1 THE HISS AND CRACKLE OF INTERFERENCE 1

..as a TV receiver is being tuned. Presently, it finds a local Washington DC nightly news programme. It's 17th June 1972. An ANCHOR speaks to camera...

ANCHOR

...we're getting reports of a break-in tonight at the Democrat National Committee Headquarters at the Watergate Hotel here in Washington..

2 A BLINDING WHITE LIGHT 2

TV lights are switched on. We're in a television studio, (though we only see fragments/details).

SOUND TECHNICIANS and ELECTRICIANS go about their business rigging lights. Setting-up microphones. Running cables.

3 ARCHIVE TELEVISION NEWS FOOTAGE 3

A local TV station reporter stands outside the Washington DC courthouse...

REPORTER

..I am standing outside the federal courthouse where the trial started today of the seven burglars caught breaking into the Democrat National Party Headquarters..

4 BACK IN THE TELEVISION STUDIO 4

CAMERAMEN put on headphones, do final checks with their cameras. ELECTRICIANS and CARPENTERS put finishing touches to the set..

At the centre of attention, a simple desk.

5 ARCHIVE TELEVISION NEWS FOOTAGE 5

A Network news programme. A major ANCHOR reads the news..

ANCHOR

...more dramatic developments at the Ervin Committee hearings today, as White House Counsel John Dean gave evidence implicating the President's direct knowledge of involvement in the Watergate cover-up..

6 EXT. PRODUCTION GALLERY/TRUCK - NIGHT 6

The glow of lights. The DIRECTOR, EDITOR and PRODUCTION TEAM in the production truck make final checks.

7 ARCHIVE TELEVISION NEWS FOOTAGE 7

A Network ANCHOR continues to tell the Watergate story..

ANCHOR

...with the arrest of key Nixon aides, John Haldeman and Bob Ehrlichman, and White House special Counsel Charles Colson, it now seems any last minute attempts to save the Presidency have failed...

Images of EHRlichman, COLSON and HALDEMAN fill the screen.

8 INT. OVAL OFFICE - WHITE HOUSE - NIGHT 8

A TECHNICIAN fixes a microphone on a desk. Above the desk, the Presidential Seal..

We realise now we're not in a television studio, but in the Oval office of the White House..

9 ARCHIVE TELEVISION NEWS FOOTAGE - (1974) 9

A news ANCHOR speaks to camera..

ANCHOR

The time is coming up to nine o'clock. We are expecting the President to address the nation any moment now, to announce his resignation..

10 INT. TV STUDIO - NIGHT - (1974)

10

The TECHNICIAN finishes fixing the mike on the desk. He gets to his feet. Is about to go, when..

VOICE

Maybe you should do this. You're a lot better looking than me.

The TECHNICIAN looks up to see RICHARD NIXON, 37th President of the United States, standing in front of him. The TECHNICIAN beats a hasty retreat..

'FLASH', a picture is taken by the White House photographer.

NIXON

That's enough now, Ollie. The other guys will only get mad if I give you too many.

(looks up/strains to hear)

What? OK...one more shot.

NIXON poses. 'FLASH', another shot. NIXON squints out at the television cameras, the army of TECHNICIANS. (Among them we pick out NIXON's new Chief of Staff, JACK BRENNAN)...

NIXON

You got an extra camera in case the lights go out?

(another agonized smile)

Standard joke. Standard joke.

It's the condemned man making jokes with his executioners. 'FLASH', another picture is taken. NIXON spins..

NIXON

(snaps angrily)

C'mon, Ollie, back off!

A frightening bark. Quick temper. Savage.

NIXON

My friend Ollie always wants a lot of pictures of me. I'm afraid he'll catch me pickin' my nose. He wouldn't PRINT that though, would ya, Ollie.

A hint of menace. OLLIE shakes his head, terrified..

OLLIE

No, Sir.

DIRECTOR

Fifteen seconds, Mr. President.

MAKE UP LADIES fuss over the President, putting finishing touches to his appearance..

NIXON

I'd like you to be generous with that powder of yours. They probably told you...I tend to...ah..perspire.

A TECHNICIAN takes a light reading..

NIXON

Taking a light reading? They say blondes photograph better than brunettes. Or is it the other way around.

11 INT. UNIVERSITY LIBRARY - DAY - (1982) 11

JAMES RESTON JNR - (mid 30's) - academic, author and journalist - the long-ish hair of a liberal intellectual, is being interviewed for a documentary in 1982...

RESTON

Nowadays, people forget - but in the summer of 1972, Richard Nixon was unassailable. He was winding down the war in Vietnam, achieved a diplomatic breakthrough with the Russians, he was the first Western Leader to visit China. None of his political opponents could lay a finger on him. His approval ratings matched Kennedy's. He was about to be re-elected with the largest landslide in recent memory, and then...he decided to try and cover-up a third rate burglary.

12 INT. WHITE HOUSE - OVAL OFFICE - NIGHT - (1974) 12

The STUDIO MANAGER calls out..

STUDIO MANAGER

Five, four, three..

A lighting change. NIXON turns directly to camera. In an instant his voice becomes deeper, more Presidential..

NIXON

Good evening. This is the thirty-seventh time I have spoken to you from this office where so many decisions have been made that shaped the destiny of our nation...

13 INT. LWT STUDIOS - LONDON - DAY - (1982) 13

A MAN in his late 30's, intelligent, bespectacled, long-ish hair, the faintest hint of a British Merseyside accent..(to the same documentary crew)..

BIRT

Like everyone else I had watched the Watergate drama play out in my living-room. I'd been glued to the Select and Judiciary Committee hearings night after night. Now finally, it had come to this..

14 INT. OVAL OFFICE - NIGHT - (1974) 14

NIXON continues..

NIXON

..therefore I shall resign the Presidency effective at noon tomorrow.

15 INT. UNIVERSITY LIBRARY - DAY - (1982) 15

Back to JAMES RESTON giving his interview..

RESTON

But instead of the satisfaction I imagined I'd feel, I just got angrier and angrier. Because there was no admission of guilt. No apology..

16 INT. OVAL OFFICE - WHITE HOUSE - NIGHT - (1974) 16

NIXON

...to leave office before my term is completed is abhorrent to every instinct in my body. I have never been a quitter.

(MORE)

NIXON (cont'd)

But I do so secure in the knowledge
that America is a better country, and
the world a safer place than when I
came to power five and a half years
ago.

17 INT. ABC STUDIOS - NEW YORK - DAY - (1982) 17

BOB ZELNICK, (40), a dark-haired, genial, measured East Coast
academic, intellectual and political journalist..

ZELNICK

Little did I know then that I would
one day be a part of the team that
would try to elicit that apology.

18 INT. OVAL OFFICE - NIGHT - (1974) 18

NIXON's resignation speech continues..

NIXON

...to have served in this office is to
have felt a very personal sense of
kinship with each and every American.
In leaving it, I do so with this
prayer: may God's grace be with you in
all the day's ahead.

19 INT. ABC STUDIOS - NEW YORK - DAY - (1982) 19

ZELNICK smiles as he continues...

ZELNICK

And that the team would be led by the
most unlikely white knight. A man with
no political convictions. Indeed
someone who had never voted in his
life. But a man who had one big
advantage over all of us.

(a beat)

He understood television.

20 INT. TELEVISION STUDIO - SYDNEY, AUSTRALIA - NIGHT - (1974) 20

Swirling lights. We're in a small, amateurish TV studio in
distant Australia. A STUDIO MANAGER holds up a sign,
'Applause'. Music plays the theme to The Frost Show, and the
eponymous host, (late 30's), skips through sliding doors.
Blazer and slacks. Sideburns and blow-dried hair.

FROST

Hello, good evening and with the eyes of the world focused on the White House, here in Australia burglars have broken into a meat factory in Brisbane and stolen a ton of pork sausages. Queensland police are looking for men in a long, thin, getaway car...

The STUDIO MANAGER laughs in exaggerated fashion, leading the audience...

FROST

My first guest tonight grew up in a tin hut in New South Wales. By the age of five she was hitting tennis balls against a wall with a piece of wood. A few weeks ago, she became the first Aboriginal Australian to win Wimbledon. She also got engaged to be married. Ladies and Gentlemen, Evonne Goolagong.

Applause as the tennis player walks out to be greeted by FROST..

FROST

You can't do it. We won't allow it. You cannot change your name. 'Goolagong' is the most famous name in Australia. Is there another reason? Something you're not telling us? Your husband's first name isn't 'Ging Gang', is it?

The STUDIO MANAGER laughs in exaggerated fashion again...

20A INT. CASA PACIFICA - OFFICE - DAY - (1982)

20A

JACK BRENNAN talks to camera from his office..

BRENNAN

We in the Nixon camp didn't know much about David Frost except that he was a British talk show host with something of a playboy reputation who'd had a talk show here in the US for a while, which had won some awards but hadn't syndicated well, and so had been dropped by the Network...

21 INT. TELEVISION STUDIO - NIGHT - (1974)

21

The show wraps up. Music, lights and applause. FROST is given the 'all clear' - then walks off stage, removing his jacket..

A round of 'Good show', 'Nice work', as he passes TECHNICIANS and CAMERAMEN. FROST heads for his dressing-room..

But stops when he sees..

A CROWD of people hunched around a television monitor in the production office. FROST decides to check it out.

We begin to hear the familiar baritone of NIXON's voice coming from the television..

NIXON (ON TV)

...I remember my old man. He was a streetcar motorman first...then he was a farmer..then he had a lemon ranch..

FROST reaches the crowd, which parts. FROST pushes through to see the television, where NIXON speaks. The former President stands on a raised stage, surrounded by his family..

NIXON (ON TV)

..it was the poorest lemon ranch in California. He sold it before they found oil on it..

FROST shoots a look at his DIRECTOR..

DIRECTOR

Nixon. Saying farewell to the White House staff.

NIXON (ON TV)

And nobody will ever write a book about my mother. But my mother was a saint.

FROST

What? This is live?

DIRECTOR

Yes.

FROST stares at the TV.

FROST

What time is it in Washington?

DIRECTOR
(checks watch)
Nine am.

FROST
Why didn't he wait? It's six in the morning on the West Coast. Half his audience is still asleep.

22 INT. WHITE HOUSE - EAST ROOM - DAY - (1974) 22

NIXON is fighting emotion as he addresses a room full of the White House Staff, security service, family members, including PAT NIXON...

NIXON
..and so, I say to all of you, be proud of what you have done. Continue to give your best. Never get discouraged. Never be petty.

The atmosphere is electric. We pick out a granite-faced BRENNAN among emotional STAFFERS that are openly weeping.

NIXON
Always remember. Others may hate you, but those who hate you don't win unless you hate them, and then you destroy yourself...

23 INT. TELEVISION STUDIOS - NIGHT - (1974) 23

FROST stares at the TV as NIXON walks towards a waiting helicopter on the White House lawn...

FROST
Find out the numbers for this, will you? Worldwide.

ON TV: NIXON turns and gives his victory salute..

DIRECTOR
Sure. I'll get someone onto it.

24 EXT. HELICOPTER - DAY - (1974) 24

The helicopter lifts away from the White House..

25 INT. HELICOPTER - DAY - (1974)

25

Inside: the helicopter is sound-proofed, and luxuriously equipped, in beige corduroy, with telephones and armchairs with the Presidential Seal. More like a private jet.

NIXON, a painful silhouette, stares out of the window, watches the White House become smaller and smaller, disappearing..

COL. JACK BRENNAN, (45), NIXON's Chief-of Staff, dark-haired, thick-set, ex-military, athletic, not PAT NIXON, sits opposite the PRESIDENT..

BRENNAN

It's a travesty, Sir.

NIXON stares out of the window..

NIXON

Well, it's done now. And this time there's no coming back.

BRENNAN

Never say never, Mr. President. What you need first is rest. Then who knows? Anything can happen.

NIXON

No, Jack. Not this time.

NIXON's eyes stare out of the window..

NIXON

This time it's over.

BRENNAN stares at NIXON..

BRENNAN (V.O.)

I remember his face. Just ravaged with pain. Staring out of the window...

26 INT. BRENNAN'S OFFICE - SAN CLEMENTE - (1982)

26

BRENNAN tries to contain his anger..

BRENNAN

...while down below him, liberal America cheered! And gloated! The trendies! The hippies!

(MORE)

BRENNAN (cont'd)

The draft-dodgers and dilettantes!
They had got rid of Richard Nixon.
Their bogeyman.

(MORE)

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11.

BRENNAN (cont'd)
And who did they get in his place?
(a beat)
Gerald Ford and Jimmy Carter.

27 EXT. LONDON WEEKEND TELEVISION - DAY - (1974) 27

LWT studios, a tall building in the heart of London, on the south bank of the Thames..

28 INT. TELEVISION STUDIO - LWT - DAY - (1974) 28

A hard-hitting current affairs programme, 'Weekend World', finishes taping. It's confrontational. Uncompromising.

PRESENTER

Thank you, Minister. Next week's programme comes from Bournemouth and the start of the Labour Party Conference. Until then, goodbye.

The show finishes. It's producer, JOHN BIRT, longish hair and spectacles, walks out onto the studio floor, takes the PRESENTER aside, and gives notes.

BIRT

What are you doing? You had your foot on his throat and you let him go!

PRESENTER

(gestures ear)

I had the mike in. You didn't say anything.

BIRT

I shouldn't need to say anything. He broke the law. You should have finished him off!

An ASSISTANT brings over a phone. Hands it to BIRT.

ASSISTANT

Mr. Frost for you.

BIRT

Hello? David?

29 INT. BENTLEY - LONDON STREETS - DAY - (1974) 29

DAVID FROST sits in the back of his Bentley. He has overheard BIRT giving the notes. He chuckles..

FROST

Beat them, John! Beat them with a stick! God knows I still bear my own scars. Now, where do you fancy for lunch? Simpsons or The Caprice? I've booked both.

BIRT

I'm sorry. I've only got half an hour.
It'll have to be the canteen here at
the studios.

FROST's smile fades.

FROST

The canteen?

30

INT. LWT - CANTEEN - DAY - (1974)

30

FROST's eyes widen in horror as he and BIRT enter the cheap, smoke-filled, subsidized canteen of a major studio complex. Filled with technicians, crew members, etc.

BIRT

So what's so important that it
couldn't wait. That it HAD to be
today.

The two men take trays, and start drifting along the line..

FROST

I've had an idea, John. Rather a bold
idea. For an interview. And in a
moment of....well, it's too late
now... it's done...I called his people
and made an offer. Now...if the
subject were to say 'yes', well, he's
rather a big fish, that swims in not
untricky waters...so it goes without
saying, I'd want a dear friend and the
finest producer I know by my side.

BIRT

Who is it?

FROST

Richard Nixon.

BIRT

Richard Nixon!

FROST

Don't look like that.

BIRT

How do you expect me to look? I spent
yesterday evening watching you
interview the Bee Gees.

FROST
Weren't they terrific?

BIRT
So...what kind of interview?

FROST
A full, extensive look back over his
life. His Presidency.

BIRT
And..?

FROST
And what..?

BIRT
C'mon, David, surely the only thing
that would interest anyone about
Richard Nixon would be a full, no
holds-barred confession..

FROST gestures..

FROST
Oh, we'll get that, too.

BIRT
From Richard Nixon?

FROST
C'mon, John, just think of the numbers
it would get. Do you know how many
people watched his farewell speech in
the White House? Four hundred million?

31 INT. LWT STUDIOS - BIRT'S OFFICE - DAY - (1982)

31

BIRT smiles as he remembers..

BIRT
But in the end, we heard nothing. Soon
after arriving in California, Nixon
was rushed to hospital with an acute
attack of phlebitis.

32 INT. HOSPITAL - SAN CLEMENTE - DAY - (1974)

32

"Crash", NIXON, (on a gurney), is rushed into hospital
through swing doors. Raised voices.

DOCTORS, NURSES and SECRET SERVICE surround the gurney..

BIRT (V.O.)

It was around this time that the new President, Gerald Ford, desperate to move the agenda on from Watergate gave Nixon a full, free and absolute pardon..

33

INT. HOSPITAL - SAN CLEMENTE - (1974)

33

NIXON is attached to drips, post-operation, unconscious.

His WIFE and DAUGHTERS, along with two NURSES keep vigil by his bedside. Monitors beep. SECRET SERVICE MEN keep guard outside his room. It has the atmosphere of a wake. OVER THIS: a voice..

FORD (ON TV)

..I have searched my conscience to determine the right thing to do with respect to Richard Nixon, and his loyal wife and family.

Images on TV of White House staffers HALDEMAN, EHRLICHMAN, DEAN, COLSON etc going to jail for their role in Watergate..

FORD (ON TV)

Theirs is an American tragedy in which we have all played a part...

ZELNICK (V.O.)

It meant the man who had committed the biggest felony in American political history would never stand trial.

34

INT. NURSES' STATION - HOSPITAL - DAY - (1974)

34

At the NURSES' station, a television plays Gerald Ford's pardon speech. No one pays much attention. They carry on going about their business..

FORD (ON TV)

...therefore I, Gerald Ford, President of the United States, pursuant to the pardon power conferred upon me by Article II, Section 2 of the Constitution...

ZELNICK (V.O.)

That week the mood among those of us
around the world that believed America
still had a healthy democratic
tradition was pretty bleak.

35 ARCHIVE TELEVISION NEWS FOOTAGE 35

Images of civil protest, US citizens outraged by Ford's
pardon, taking to the streets. A country torn apart..

FORD (V.O.)

...do grant a full, free and absolute
pardon unto Richard Nixon for all the
offences which he has committed
against the United States..

36 INT. DAVID FROST'S LONDON HOME - NIGHT - (1974) 36

FROST is on the phone, working from home. He catches the
images of civil protest on his television in London.

We CLOSE on FROST's face. As he watches the television.

37 EXT. CASA PACIFICA - DUSK - (1974) 37

Dusk. A beautiful sunset. Above the beach, beside a coast-
guard station, a traditional Spanish-style house. This is
CASA PACIFICA. At the foot of the garden, NIXON sits in a
wheelchair. Alone. Recuperating. Wounded. In silhouette.

Staring out at the ocean.

FADE TO BLACK:

38 INT. NIXON'S OFFICE - DAY - (1975) 38

NIXON is in a wheelchair, his left leg stretched out, is in
his study working on his memoirs with FRANK GANNON and DIANE
SAWYER. A knock at the door. NIXON's valet, MANOLO SANCHEZ
clears his throat.

MANOLO

Mr. President? Swifty Lazar is here.

GANNON and SAWYER get to their feet to go..

NIXON

No, no. Stay! You'll get a kick out of this. My literary agent. From "Hollywood". Hygiene obsessive.

SWIFTY LAZAR, barely five feet tall, immaculately dressed in tailored clothes, appears in the doorway.

SWIFTY

Mr. President, good to see you.

NIXON

Irving Lazar, Diane Sawyer, Frank Gannon..

A round of handshakes and greetings. FRANK GANNON notices SWIFTY wiping his hands after each handshake...

NIXON

I was about to tell my associates how you got your nickname "Swiftly".

SWIFTY

Did three deals for Humphrey Bogart in one afternoon. When he wasn't even my client.

GANNON and SAWYER laugh, then leave.

39

EXT. CASA PACIFICA - DAY

39

SWIFTY and NIXON move towards the pergola. MANOLO SANCHEZ wheeling the former President down the path..

SWIFTY

So how are you feeling, Sir?

NIXON

Better. Though not yet well enough to 'golf', thank God. I despise that game. Never retire, Mr. Lazar. To me the unhappiest people of the world are those in the watering places, South of France, Palm Springs, Palm Beach, Newport..going to parties every night, playing golf every afternoon, then drinking too much, talking too much, thinking too little, retired - no purpose. What makes life mean something is purpose. A goal. The battle. The struggle.

(MORE)

NIXON (cont'd)

Even if you don't win it. You know, when my doctor declared me unfit to give testimony in the Watergate trial everyone thought I'd be relieved. They were wrong. That was the lowest I got.

SWIFTY

Well, if it's a challenge you want, here's one you might enjoy. How to spend two million dollars...\$2.3 to be precise. It's what I got for your memoirs.

NIXON

Thank you.

SWIFTY

Which might be a little short of what I wanted, but let me assure you, it's a whole lot more than they wanted.

NIXON

That book we're working on is important to me. It's probably the only chance I'm going to get to put the record straight and remind people the Nixon years weren't ALL bad..

40

EXT. PERGOLA - DAY

40

SWIFTY and NIXON eating lunch on the Presidential china..

SWIFTY

You know, if you want to put the record straight, I'd at least talk to him.

NIXON

Who?

SWIFTY

David Frost. The English talk-show guy.

NIXON looks up. Bemused..

NIXON

Why would I want to talk to David Frost?

SWIFTY

A while back he wrote asking for an interview. We didn't get back. Frankly, we didn't find him 'appropriate'. But if you want to get your side of the story across, he'd be the guy who'd let you.

NIXON

I thought we were doing one with CBS?

SWIFTY

We are. I just figured doing it with Frost would be a lot easier than doing it with Mike Wallace.

NIXON

It would. It would also have less credibility.

SWIFTY

True. But we could probably get better money.

NIXON looks up. Now he's interested.

NIXON

Really?

SWIFTY

Look, we will always have three-fifty on the table from CBS. But if I can get Frost to pay more, and secure better terms it might be shame to pass. Be interesting to know where he is right now..

41

EXT. SYDNEY HARBOR - DAY - (1975)

41

The Sydney Opera House in the background. FROST, in blazer and tie, watches as a man who's hands and feet are tied is lowered into the harbor.

FROST

We tied him to railway tracks, and he escaped! We buried him alive, and he walked free! Today we are lowering escape artist Derek Harrison into the water - to see if he can miraculously cheat death once more!

(MORE)

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18A.

FROST (cont'd)

Good evening, and welcome to "Great Escapes", my name is David Frost...

All around FROST, a TV CREW. Among them, an attractive blonde PRODUCTION ASSISTANT in a red beret..

41A INT. SWIFTY'S HOME - DAY (1982)

41A

SWIFTY LAZAR sits in his Los Angeles home. Palm trees and sunshine. He speaks to the documentary crew...

SWIFTY

In any deal, you need to know your opponent's breaking point. And to assess that you might call late at night, or at the week-end. If they take the call, it means they're desperate, and from that moment on, you know you've got the upper hand..

42 INT. FROST'S APARTMENT - SYDNEY - NIGHT - (1975)

42

"Rrrring", the phone rings. FROST hits the light. He answers the phone, his face creased with sleep. (We notice a sleeping female figure beside him. A shock of blonde hair. A red beret at the foot of the bed).

SWIFTY

Mr. Frost? Irving Lazar.

FROST

Who?

SWIFTY

"Swifty" Lazar? I represent President Nixon.

The GIRL sits up in his bed..

BERET GIRL

What time is it..?

43 INT. AGENCY OFFICES - DAY - (1975)

43

SWIFTY

Bad time?

FROST

No! Not at all..

SWIFTY

I'm calling with regard to your
request for an interview.

(MORE)

SWIFTY (cont'd)

And to say, having considered it, my client is not necessarily opposed to the idea.

FROST

Really? That's terrific news.

44 INT. SWIFTY'S OFFICE - DAY - (1975)

44

SWIFTY speaks on the phone with NIXON..

SWIFTY

I got \$500,000.

NIXON

Is that good?

SWIFTY

Mr. President, it's half a million dollars. For a news interview. It's unprecedented.

NIXON

And the catch?

SWIFTY

With *Frost*? None. It'll be a biiiig wet kiss. A 'valentine'. This guy is so grateful to be getting it at all, he'll pitch puff-balls all night and pay half a million dollars for the privilege.

A silence. Then..

NIXON

You think you could get \$550,000?

45 INT. SWIFTY'S HOLLYWOOD HOME - DAY - (1982)

45

SWIFTY in his home. He talks to the documentary crew..

SWIFTY

I got SIX. In any deal..there's give and take. They give you the money, you take it. And get the next train out of town.

46 EXT. HEATHROW AIRPORT - DAY - (1975) 46

London. The busiest airport in the world. To establish.

47 INT. CHECK-IN DESK - HEATHROW AIRPORT - DAY - (1975) 47

JOHN BIRT and DAVID FROST come in through revolving doors, and walk through the airport terminal..

BIRT

How could you have done that?

FROST

What?

Everywhere they go, heads turn. FROST is clearly a major celebrity in his native country.

BIRT

\$600,000. It's a fortune, David. Two hundred on signature?

FROST

Don't worry about the money.

They reach the check-in desk, hand over their passports. The STEWARDESS blushes as FROST smiles at her..

BIRT

Most Americans think he belongs in jail. You're making him a rich man.

48 INT. HEATHROW AIRPORT - DAY - (1975) 48

BIRT and FROST walk effortlessly through non-existent airport security, (oh, for the 1970's)...

BIRT

Plus, by outbidding them, you've made enemies of the Networks...

FROST

They're just jealous.

BIRT

..who are already sounding off about cheque-book journalism. If the Networks are against you, syndication is always going to be a struggle. No syndication, no advance sales.

(MORE)

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21A.

BIRT (cont'd)

No advance sales, no commercials. No
commercials, no revenue..

49 INT. DEPARTURE GATE - HEATHROW AIRPORT - DAY - (1975) 49

FROST and BIRT walk along a corridor towards their gate..

BIRT

And - here's the bigger question, why do it? You don't need it. Your career is in great shape. It would spread you across three continents, and jeopardize the other shows. Is it true Channel 9 in Australia want you to do another season of your talk show for them?

FROST

Yes.

BIRT

And London, too?

FROST

Yes...but that's London and Australia. This would be..

BIRT

...what?

They reach the queue for their plane.

FROST

You wouldn't understand - you were never part of the show in New York. But it's indescribable. Success in America is unlike success anywhere else. And the emptiness, when it's gone...and the sickening thought that it may never come back. There's a restaurant in New York...called Sardi's. Ordinary mortals can't get a table. John, the place was my canteen.

BIRT

You know, I'd be happier if I'd heard some kind of vision you had for this interview - or anything...

Suddenly a FAN approaches FROST, holding a 10x8 picture of FROST from satirical T.V. show "That Was The Week That Was" days. FROST signs.

BIRT

...but I don't. I just hear a man doing it because it would create headlines or give him a place at the top table. And that's what makes me nervous. Very nervous.

FROST

And you do 'nervous' so beautifully.

FAN

(mimicking)

"Hello, Good evening, and Welcome."

The FAN goes. FROST stares after him...

FROST

You know, I don't actually SAY that.

FROST and BIRT show their boarding cards to a STEWARDESS, and enter the plane.

50 EXT. RUNWAY - DAY - (1975) 50

The 747 carrying FROST and BIRT roars along the runway, and takes off, climbing into the air..

51 INT. 747. DAY - (1975) 51

Mid-flight. BIRT is asleep. FROST reads the Financial Times, smoking a large cigar. A STEWARDESS arrives with a bottle of champagne. Fills FROST's glass.

FROST looks across the aisle to see the attractive DARK-HAIRED WOMAN reading. Her champagne glass is untouched..

He thinks for a moment, then..

FROST (cont'd)

You don't like champagne?

CAROLINE

Not on aeroplanes.

FROST

Yes. Dehydrates one terribly. The trick is to have a glass of water on the go too. The way the Viennese serve coffee.

CAROLINE

I've never been to Vienna.

FROST

You'd like it. It's like Paris without the French.

A silence. FROST looks over...

FROST (cont'd)

Good book?

She lifts the cover. It's MIDDLEMARCH..

FROST (cont'd)

Middlemarch. They say the town in the book was based on the place I grew up.

CAROLINE

Which was?

FROST

Kempston. In Bedfordshire. Although, the truth is, we pretty much lived everywhere in our time. My father was a Minister.

*

CAROLINE

Oh really? Which party?

*

FROST

The Methodists.

*

*

CAROLINE laughs. An attractive, infectious smile.

*

FROST

What's your name?

*

*

CAROLINE

Caroline.

*

*

FROST

David.

*

*

*

CAROLINE
Yes, I know. David Frost.
(smiles to herself)
"Hello, Good Evening, and Welcome"

*
*
*
*

CAROLINE gets to her feet, and walks off. FROST's smile fades. FROST follows her up to..

*
*

52 INT. 747. DAY - (1975)

52

The bar area up. FROST and CAROLINE take seats..

*

CAROLINE
I heard an interview with you,
recently. On the radio. You were
giving it from back of your Rolls
Royce.

FROST
(correcting)
...Bentley.

CAROLINE
..on the phone! They said you were a
person who defined the age we live in.

FROST
Really?

CAROLINE
You and Vidal Sassoon.

FROST's face falls..

CAROLINE

What made you exceptional, they said -
was that you had achieved great fame
without possessing any discernible
quality.

*

FROST

How kind.

CAROLINE

And that you fly around a great deal.

FROST

It's true.

CAROLINE

Why?

FROST

I like to keep busy.

CAROLINE

Why?

FROST

I find it more interesting than
keeping still.

CAROLINE

Why?

FROST

Because..there's plenty of time for
that when I'm dead.

CAROLINE

What a strange thing to say.

CAROLINE looks at him closely..

CAROLINE

You have sad eyes.

FROST

Do I?

CAROLINE

Has anyone told you that before?

FROST

No.

CAROLINE

Are you a sad person?

FROST

Let's talk a little bit about you.

CAROLINE

Of course. You feel more comfortable asking questions.

FROST

How right you are. Why are you going to LA?

CAROLINE

It's where my boyfriend lives.

FROST

Pity.

CAROLINE

With his new girlfriend.

FROST

Things are looking up.

CAROLINE

I'm going to pack together my belongings. And ship them back home.

FROST

To London.

CAROLINE

Monte Carlo. It's where my ex-husband lives.

FROST turns..

FROST

You're complicated.

CAROLINE smiles, takes this as a compliment..

CAROLINE

Thank you. How about you?

FROST

Am I complicated?

CAROLINE

Are you single. It's what you were
asking, isn't it?

FROST

Yes....I am....
(evasive)
...technically...I think.

The captain's voice comes over the tannoy.

CAPTAIN

This is your captain speaking. You may have noticed we've now begun our final descent into Los Angeles. If you could return to your seats, and fasten your seat-belts..

A STEWARDESS tells FROST and CAROLINE to return to their seats.

53

INT. 747 - STAIRCASE - DAY - (1975)

53

FROST and CAROLINE come down the stairs..

CAROLINE

How about you? Why are you going?

FROST

To meet Richard Nixon.

CAROLINE

Really? They say he has the most enormous head. But the sexiest voice. Where is he now? In some dark, underground cave? Licking his wounds?

*

FROST

Actually no. In his rather smart beachside villa in California.

CAROLINE

Richard Nixon? In a beachside villa? How...incongruous.

FROST

Yes. It's called 'Casa Pacifica.' I'm told he still drives a golf buggy with the Presidential crest on it.

CAROLINE

How interesting. It must be hard to let some things go.

They reach their seats, where JOHN BIRT is waking up..

FROST
You can come, if you like?

CAROLINE
To meet Nixon?

FROST
Why not? *

CAROLINE
Are you sure? I'd love that. *

'Ping', the fasten seat-belt sign lights up..

FROST
My office will call you first thing in
the morning! And send a car. With a
phone!

54-57 OMITTED

54-57

58 EXT. CASA PACIFICA - DAY - (1975)

58

A blue Mercedes pulls up at the President's house. SECRET
SERVICE BODYGUARDS keep watch outside.

59 INT. CASA PACIFICA - DAY - (1975)

59

NIXON looks through a crack in the blinds to see FROST
getting out of his car.

NIXON stares at FROST's fashionable clothes. The ease of his
smile. The beautiful girl on his arm.

A flicker behind NIXON's eyes.

60 EXT. CASA PACIFICA - DAY - (1975)

60

NIXON, BRENNAN and SWIFTY LAZAR emerge from the house.

NIXON
You found it okay?

FROST
Yes. Thank you.

NIXON
Pleasure to meet you, Mr. Frost.

FROST
And you, Sir. May I present Caroline
Cushing.

NIXON
Miss Cushing..

NIXON looks down. Notices CAROLINE is barefoot..

CAROLINE
The house. It's so beautiful. And
romantic.

NIXON
Would you like a little tour? Stretch
your legs after the journey?

CAROLINE
Oh, I'd love that.

CAROLINE puts on her shoes. NIXON, clearly enchanted, leads
CAROLINE away. FROST and BIRT shoot a look at one another. A
good start.

They notice they are being watched by SECRET SERVICEMEN.
Their smiles fade.

61 INT. CASA PACIFICA - NIXON'S OFFICE - DAY - (1975) 61

NIXON is showing FROST, BIRT & CAROLINE round the house. JACK
BRENNAN and SWIFTY LAZAR follow..

NIXON
..this is the office where Brezhnev
and I had our summit. Brezhnev sat
there, Gromyko there, Dobrynin there.
We talked for nine hours straight.

FROST sees framed photographs of NIXON with world leaders. He
shoots a smile at CAROLINE. Then notices BRENNAN is watching
him.

NIXON

After the meeting, as a souvenir of
the visit, I remember we had a Lincoln
specially made.

(MORE)

NIXON (cont'd)

Dark blue, cherry wood, leather. All the trimmings. We got inside for the photographers. Brezhnev and myself - when, next thing I know, he starts the engine.

BIRT sees NIXON's desk, scattered with books, philosophy, economics, memoirs. Yellow-pads with notes. Memos. Elaborately hand-written.

NIXON

Now, the first rule of political life is you never let a President get behind the wheel of a car. Ever. We're not used to doing anything for ourselves - let alone drive. And the Chairman, the way he put his foot down, my guess is the last thing he drove was a tractor on a Ukrainian potato farm..

CAROLINE looks out of the window - sees a woman in the gardens, talking to groundsmen. NIXON's wife. PAT NIXON.

NIXON

Anyway, he drove us out, through the estate. Finally we got out to a remote point on the coast out there, overlooking the sea. And he turned off the engine. And we talked. For two hours straight. Most politicians have tragedy in their early lives. I lost two brothers to tuberculosis. He watched his father die from the cancer he caught in the steelworks. He was a sad man. But a noble adversary.

NIXON turns to face FROST, BIRT and CAROLINE. The tour has come full circle.

NIXON

But I wouldn't want to be a Russian leader. They never know when they are being taped.

An awkward silence. NIXON turns, looks at FROST..

NIXON

So, until March, then. I look forward to it.

FROST

Thank you, Mr. President. So do I.

NIXON

I've never been challenged to a duel before. I guess that's what this is.

FROST

Well, not really...

NIXON

Of course, it is. I like that.

NIXON takes FROST's hand. The grip is suddenly hard. Vice-like.

NIXON

No holds barred...no holds barred.

FROST smiles nervously, withdraws his hand. He is about to go, when SWIFTY calls him back..

SWIFTY

Oh, Mr. Frost? Before you go..? There is still the small matter of the..

SWIFTY gestures, miming signing a cheque..

FROST

Of course. I do beg your pardon.

He gets out his cheque-book, starts writing..

FROST

Two hundred thousand dollars...

NIXON notices something in FROST's demeanor.

NIXON

I do hope that isn't coming out of your own pocket.

A nervous smile..

FROST

Believe me, Sir, I wish my pockets were that deep.

(changing subject)

Made out in the name of..?

SWIFTY

(correcting)

'Irving Paul Lazar.'

NIXON
'Richard M. Nixon'.

NIXON takes the cheque...

SWIFTY

Will you give me the cheque, Sir?

NIXON

What are you talking about? The cheque is for me..

SWIFTY

I know. But I am your agent.

From NIXON's uncomprehending look..

SWIFTY

Believe me, this is the customary procedure.

NIXON

But it makes no sense....I could just deposit it...take it to the bank...

SWIFTY

Mr. President, I'll take care of it.

NIXON

But..but..

SWIFTY

Will you give it to me - please!

SWIFTY prizes the cheque from a reluctant NIXON. NIXON, for a moment, looks quite forlorn..

61A EXT. COURTYARD - CASA PACIFICA - DAY

61A

NIXON leads FROST, CAROLINE, BIRT et al out of the house...

NIXON

Well, goodbye.
(shaking hands)
Mr. Frost. Ms. Cushing.

NIXON notices CAROLINE has a camera..

NIXON

Would you like to take a photograph?

CAROLINE

Yes, I'd like that very much.

NIXON beckons MANOLO then he, FROST and CAROLINE all pose for a photo. 'Flash', the camera pops.

NIXON

There. You can put that in your apartment in New York and all your liberal friends can use it as a dartboard.

CAROLINE

Actually, I'm living in Monte Carlo at the moment.

NIXON

Really?

She exits. NIXON watches CAROLINE go, then takes FROST aside..

NIXON

Take my advice. You should marry that woman.

FROST

Yes. Lovely, isn't she?

NIXON

More important than that - she comes from Monaco. They pay no taxes there.

NIXON smiles..

NIXON

Good bye.

FROST

Goodbye..

NIXON and BRENNAN watch as FROST, CAROLINE, BIRT walk off. The PRESIDENT waves. Then, after a beat..

NIXON

I betcha it did.

BRENNAN

What?

NIXON

Come out of his own pocket. Y'know, he couldn't look me in the eye.

BRENNAN

I hear none of the Networks are biting. Without the Networks, the ad agencies don't want to know. If you ask me, there's a good chance this whole thing will never happen.

*

NIXON

Really? So that meeting we just had - might have cost him two hundred thousand dollars?

BRENNAN

Correct.

NIXON

Had I known that, I might have offered him a cup of tea.

BRENNAN laughs. They watch FROST reach his car.

NIXON

Did you notice his shoes?

BRENNAN

No.

NIXON

Italian. No laces. What do you think? My people tried to get me to wear a pair like that.

BRENNAN

I think a man's shoe should have laces, Sir.

NIXON

You do?

BRENNAN

Yes, I do. Personally, I find those Italian shoes quite effeminate.

NIXON clears his throat. A little disappointed. He had clearly liked the shoes.

NIXON

Quite right.

NIXON turns and walks back to the house..

61B INT. NBC OFFICES - DAY

61B

A network CHIEF sits behind his desk..

NETWORK CHIEF

Why would an American Network hire a total outsider? Someone who's already had his own show cancelled, incidentally..?

62 INT. LAX AIRPORT - DAY

62

FROST listens on a pay-phone. His smile fades..

FROST

I see. Well, I'm sorry you feel that way. Obviously I think you're making a terrible mistake.

FROST hangs up.

FROST

NBC. That's the Networks out. All of them.

BIRT

Oh, dear. Well, that's the end of that, then. I'm sorry, David.

FROST

Not so fast.

FROST has a glint in his eye. Already forming an idea.

FROST

Where's your adventurer's spirit?

63 OMITTED

63

64 INT. HOTEL - NEW YORK - DAY - (1976)

64

The Plaza Hotel. Fifth Ave, New York. FROST swivels on a chair, smoking a cigar...

FROST (O.S.)

...the idea is we pay for the programme and syndicate it ourselves. Completely by-passing the networks...

65 INT. HOTEL - NEW YORK - DAY - (1976)

65

FROST is on the telephone, speaking to his creditors in London..

FROST

Never been done before. Historic stuff.

BIRT enters, and signals FROST should wrap up. There are two MEN standing in the doorway. FROST wraps up his call.

FROST

...of course I'd match any contribution you make. Dollar for dollar. It's made for you this one, Jimmy. Have a think, and call me back.

Hangs up.

BIRT

David, I'd like you to meet Jim Reston and Bob Zelnick. Our two prospective cornermen.

FROST

Delighted to meet you..

BOB ZELNICK, dark haired, genial, early 40's...

BIRT

Bob has been Washington correspondent for Public Radio for the past ten years. Is moving to ABC in the New Year.

ZELNICK

The general view is that I'd been wasting my matinee-idol looks on radio.

JIM RESTON, whippet-thin, beady-eyed. A complex, feisty persona..

BIRT

Jim teaches at the University of North Carolina, and is working on a book about the corruption, criminal dishonesty, paranoia and abuses of power of Richard Nixon.

(MORE)

FROST/NIXON (Yellow Revs) - 8/24/07

37A.

BIRT (cont'd)

(a beat)

His second on the subject.

RESTON

Fourth.

FROST

Delighted to have you both aboard.

FROST shakes ZELNICK's hands. But before RESTON shakes, he clears his throat. An awkward moment..

RESTON

Actually, before I sign on, I would like to hear what you were hoping to achieve with this interview.

FROST stops. An incredulous smile..

FROST

What I want to achieve?

FROST exchanges looks with JOHN BIRT..

FROST

Jim, I've secured 12 taping days, close to thirty hours with the most compelling and controversial politician of our times. Isn't that enough?

RESTON

Not for me. I'd be giving up a year of my life - leaving my family - to work on a subject matter that means more than you can probably imagine. And the idea of doing all that without achieving what I want to personally - would be unthinkable to me..

FROST

What is it that you want to achieve?

RESTON

I'd like to give Richard Nixon the trial he never had.

FROST

Well...of course we will be asking difficult questions.

RESTON

"Difficult questions"? The man lost fifteen thousand Americans and a million Indo-Chinese during his administration. He only escaped jail because of Ford's pardon..

FROST

Yes, but equally, going after him in some knee-jerk way, assuming he's a terrible guy..wouldn't that only create more sympathy than anything else?

RESTON

Right now, I submit it's impossible to feel anything close to sympathy for Richard Nixon. He devalued the Presidency and left the country that elected him in trauma. The American people need a conviction. Pure and simple. The integrity of our political system, of democracy as an idea entirely depends on it. And if in years to come people look back and say it was in this interview that Richard Nixon exonerated himself, that would be the worst crime of all. Did you know that Mike Wallace is doing a piece on this, and that in the bars around Capitol Hill and Georgetown this entire project is a joke?

A stunned silence. Then..

FROST

Well, thank you for that Jim. Would you give us a couple of minutes?

ZELNICK looks, 'Me too?' RESTON and ZELNICK go.

65A INT. CORRIDOR OUTSIDE - DAY

65A

RESTON and ZELNICK walk out. ZELNICK hisses..

ZELNICK

What are you doing? I went out on a limb for you. Keep that pinko shit to yourself. Some of us actually want this job.

RESTON

I do, too. But only if it's done right. Little Lord Fauntleroy in there - "Sympathy for Richard Nixon?"

65B INT. HOTEL - NEW YORK - SAME TIME

65B

Leaving FROST and BIRT alone.

FROST

Is Mike Wallace doing a piece on this?

BIRT

Apparently.

FROST

Why didn't you tell me?

BIRT

It isn't relevant.

FROST

What's the angle? "British talk show host. Good with actresses. Not so good with stonewalling Presidents?"

BIRT

That's the general idea.

FROST

Right. Well, it's hard not to feel a *little* insulted by that.

FROST puts on his jacket, then..

FROST

Bob's obviously a pro. But what are we going to do about Reston?

BIRT

The man's an idiot. Over-emotional. Send him home.

FROST

Well, I think he should stay.

BIRT

What?

FROST

I liked his....passion.

BIRT
He'll drive us all bloody mad.

FROST

Maybe. But sometimes being out of your comfort zone is a good thing. I'm told.

'Pop, FROST opens a bottle of champagne..

FROST

Ask them back in.

BIRT brings ZELNICK and RESTON back in. FROST pours champagne into glasses..

FROST

To the trial of Richard Nixon!

RESTON

Conviction.

ZELNICK closes his eyes.

FROST

Very well. The conviction of Richard Nixon.

FROST raises his glass. People clink uncertainly.

66

INT. HOUSTON - HOTEL - NIGHT - (1976)

66

The ballroom of a five star hotel in Houston. A sign outside tells us this is a convention of Texas orthodontists.

NIXON in dinner-jacket and tie, speaking on the after-dinner circuit, perspiring heavily, (and clearly hating every moment of it)..

NIXON

..anyway, I took my seat next to Mrs. Mao at the banquet table. One of the challenges of life as a President is the endless round of cocktail parties...social engagements, banquets...people who know me would tell you that small talk is not one of my strong suits...particularly not in Mandarin...so, Mrs. Mao and I...we just..well, stared at one another.

(MORE)

NIXON (cont'd)

Across the table, Mrs. Nixon and Chairman Mao himself...they stared at one another too...further down, Dr. Kissinger and their foreign minister...they were staring at one...well, you're getting the picture now. Anyway this particular dinner, I don't remember exactly the day in the Chinese Communist calendar we were celebrating, some uprising in some Mongolian agricultural collective...

67

INT. HOTEL - CORRIDORS - NIGHT - (1976)

67

'Crash', NIXON and BRENNAN and two SECRET SERVICEMEN burst through swing doors, walking down a corridor backstage. NIXON is in a fury. Suddenly dark and frightening.

NIXON

I can't stand it, Jack! Reducing the Presidency to a series of banal anecdotes..I feel like a circus animal. Doing tricks! And I thought I made it clear, I didn't want to take any questions on Watergate. GODDAMMIT! As soon as it came to question time, all those SONSOFBITCHES ever want to hear about is Watergate! It's as if all my other achievements have ceased to exist.

BRENNAN

Well, you're going to get your chance to talk about them sooner than you think.

NIXON

How?

NIXON stops.

BRENNAN

Frost got there. He got the money.

NIXON

What?

BRENNAN

I hear most of it's borrowed - that friends have bailed him out, but the point is we start taping end of March.

NIXON

Really?!?

NIXON's anger dissipates. His face wreathed in smiles..

NIXON

That's terrific. How much time is devoted to Watergate..?

They walk through doors, and into..

68

INT. HOTEL KITCHENS - NIGHT - (1976)

68

The hotel kitchens. COOKS stops and stare. NIXON is being shown the secure, back way out of the hotel and to the car park.

BRENNAN

...25%. Just one of four ninety-minute shows.

NIXON

The other three are divided into..?

BRENNAN

Foreign Policy, Domestic Affairs and Nixon the Man..

NIXON stops..

NIXON

"Nixon the man?" As opposed to what?
"Nixon the horse?"

BRENNAN

I imagine....it's some kind of biographical piece, Sir.

NIXON

(shudders) I can see it now. The deprived childhood. The father that beat me. The brothers that died, leaving me consumed with "survivor guilt". Spare me. Still, the fact it's come together is a good thing, no?

BRENNAN

Mr. President, it's fantastic. Frost is just not in your intellectual class.

(MORE)

BRENNAN (cont'd)

You'll be able to dictate terms.
Rebuild your reputation. If you ask
me..

NIXON

What?

69

EXT. CAR PARK - HOTEL - NIGHT - (1976)

69

NIXON and BRENNAN walk out into the car park. SECRET SERVICEMEN make sure the area is secure..

BRENNAN

If this went well, Sir, if enough people saw it and revised their opinions - you could move back East. Way, way earlier than we'd expected.

NIXON

You think?

BRENNAN

I'm certain.

NIXON

Oh, Jack...I like San Clemente, make no mistake. It's a beautiful place. But it'd be good to get back to where the action is. The hunger in my belly is still there.

NIXON visibly gets excited, then tails off as they approach the car..

NIXON

Guess it all boils down to Watergate, huh?

BRENNAN

Nothing to worry about. It's not as if there will be any revelations. That stuff has been combed over a million times by journalists and Congressmen. And still no one's pinned anything on you.

NIXON

Still, it's been a while since I spoke about it on record. I'd better start doing my homework. It'd be good to know his strategy. Where's he staying?

BRENNAN

At the Beverly Hilton.

NIXON
The Beverly Hilton, you say?

NIXON rummages in his pocket..

NIXON
I've got the numbers somewhere of a
few fellas we could send in. Cubans.
With CIA training..

NIXON looks up. Sees BRENNAN's horrified expression..

NIXON
Jesus, Jack. It was a joke!

BRENNAN stares, then smiles in relief. They climb into the
car, which drives off, accompanied by POLICE OUTRIDERS.

70 INT. LWT OFFICES - DAY - (1982) 70

JOHN BIRT speaks to the documentary crew..

BIRT
As it happens, we took the whole
question of security very seriously.

71 INT. THE BEVERLY HILTON - DAY - (1976) 71

BIRT, RESTON and ZELNICK all sign forms..

BIRT (V.O.)
We had strict confidentiality clauses
for everyone involved.

72 INT. THE BEVERLY HILTON - DAY - (1976) 72

BIRT hands a box of research files to a hotel EMPLOYEE who
puts them in the hotel safe..

BIRT (V.O.)
From day one we kept a locked safe for
all our files.

73 INT. RESTAURANT - DAY - (1976) 73

Various shots: RESTON, ZELNICK, BIRT and FROST sit in a restaurant over a period of many weeks, working on the interviews, papers strewn all over the table..

BIRT (V.O.)

Since the ex-President's name attracted attention we would refer in telexes to 'the subject', and in restaurants Nixon would become William Holden or Charlton Heston.

74 INT. UNIVERSITY LIBRARY - DAY - (1982) 74

RESTON takes over the story...

RESTON

As for the work? Over the months we divided it into three sections.

75 INT. THE BEVERLY HILTON - DAY - (1976) 75

BIRT, ZELNICK and RESTON, shirtsleeves and styrofoam, are strategizing. A television plays in the corner..

BIRT

...okay, how are we going to kick this off..? What should the first question be?

RESTON (V.O.)

Birt took Vietnam. Bob took Foreign and Domestic Policy. I got Watergate and the Abuses of Power. And David? We never really saw much of David.

ZELNICK

The first question should be a loosener. Say what a tough time it's been. Express concern for Mrs. Nixon after her stroke. For the President after his phlebitis. And ask what kind of life he's established for himself in retirement.

BIRT

And the deafening 'click' you'll hear,
Bob, will be forty million Americans
switching off their TV's.

Suddenly the television plays breaking news: a second assassination attempt on GERALD FORD...

RESTON
(watching TV)
Ouch! Take THAT for pardoning Nixon!

76 INT. ABC STUDIOS - DAY (1982)

76

BOB ZELNICK takes up the story...

ZELNICK
Perhaps because I was the eldest, or because I had the darkest hair, I got to play Nixon in our rehearsals.

77 INT. HOTEL SUITE - THE BEVERLY HILTON - DAY - (1977)

77

RESTON, ZELNICK and BIRT sit in a room strewn with papers, files, research materials. ZELNICK sits to one side..

ZELNICK (V.O.)
The fellas would throw questions at me, and, based on years of watching and writing about the President, I would anticipate what his line would be..

BIRT
On the White House taping system?

ZELNICK (AS NIXON)
Ours was not the first administration to use taping systems. Lyndon Johnson's White House had them. So did Kennedy's..

RESTON
On the alleged abuses of power..?

ZELNICK (AS NIXON)
Let me tell you, other administrations were up to far worse..

BIRT
The illicit bombing of Cambodia..

ZELNICK (AS NIXON)

Done with the secret approval and support of the Prince of Cambodia against a hostile force that had invaded his country..

BIRT

And just for fun. Jack Kennedy.

ZELNICK's face darkens, (as NIXON)..

ZELNICK (AS NIXON)

That man screwed anything that moved, fixed elections and took us into Vietnam! And the American people loved him for it! While I worked round the clock in their service, and they hated me! Look, now I'm sweating! Dammit! And Kennedy's so GODDAM handsome! And blue-eyed! Women all OVER him!!

The door opens. FROST and CAROLINE walk in. FROST is dressed in tux pants. Jacket and bow-tie in hand. CAROLINE holds a newspaper.

FROST

Finally! A friend in the American Press!

FROST indicates to CAROLINE, who reads from the paper..

CAROLINE

Jack Anderson in the Washington Post. "If Richard Nixon was expecting an easy ride in the up-coming interviews with David Frost, it appears he might have made a mistake. Frost has hired a team of "crack investigators" with the aim of forcing him into admissions he has hitherto been unwilling to make.

BIRT

"Crack investigators?"

RESTON

Can I be 'Crack One'?

ZELNICK

(eyes widening)
Can I be 'Deep Crack'?

Everyone laughs. The phone rings. BIRT picks it up. RESTON approaches FROST - takes him to one side.

RESTON

David, researching my last book, I was pretty certain Nixon had a meeting with Charles Colson, his darkest henchman, sometime before June 23rd, but I never knew the exact date, so couldn't find the transcript. But if you gave me a week back in the Federal Courthouse library.

FROST

A week? Goodness, Jim. We couldn't afford to lose you for that long..

RESTON

If we're going to nail him in these interviews, we're gonna need to ambush him. Take him by surprise.

FROST

(pats RESTON's back)

Don't worry. We'll get him anyway.

BIRT catches FROST's eye, covering the phone..

BIRT

Jack Brennan. He sounds a little emotional.

FROST walks next door, (followed by CAROLINE), and picks up the phone..

FROST

Jack!

BRENNAN paces angrily in his San Clemente office. (We intercut between the two locations).

BRENNAN

Watergate.

FROST

Yes, Jack.

BRENNAN

Our lawyers want to agree on a definition of the word.

FROST

I believe it's a large hotel and office complex in Washington, Jack.

BRENNAN

You know what I mean. For the interviews. We want to propose that "Watergate" is an umbrella term for everything negative.

FROST walks out onto the balcony....

*

FROST

What..so all the other domestic charges against him..the Brookings Institute, the Plumbers Unit, the Enemies List..you're saying that all goes into 'Watergate'?

BRENNAN

Correct.

FROST

That's absurd. And a clear breach of the terms of our agreement.

BRENNAN

Okay, how would you define Watergate?

FROST

That it covers just that. The Watergate break-in of June 17th and the subsequent cover-up and investigations.

BRENNAN

Fine, in which case the deal is off.

FROST

Fine - in which case you can expect a lawsuit for something in excess of \$20 million in damages and lost earnings.

BRENNAN

The terms of the contract stipulate quite clearly that Watergate take up no more than 25% of the time!

FROST

Yes - but nowhere does it say that for the rest of the 75% he gets to drone on and sound Presidential.

BRENNAN almost chokes..

BRENNAN

"Drone on?" Jesus Christ! Where's your respect? Remember who you're talking about. You media people, you're so goddammed smug and self-righteous. You know as well as I do, that sixty per cent of what Nixon did in office was right, and thirty per cent might have ended up wrong, but he thought it was right at the time.

FROST

That still leaves ten percent where he was doing the wrong thing, and knew it.

BRENNAN

I guarantee you, if you screw us on the sixty per cent, I'm going to ruin you if it takes the rest of my life.

*

FROST hangs up, visibly rattled. Thrown. Then walks into the room, picking up his tux jacket on a chair..

FROST
How do I look?

CAROLINE
Fine, David. Fine.

FROST and CAROLINE go.

RESTON
Why the monkey suit?

BIRT
David has a film premier he needs to attend.

RESTON
What? The night before we start taping? What's the movie?

BIRT
'The Slipper and the Rose'.

ZELNICK
The *Cinderella* movie?

BIRT
David is the executive producer!

ZELNICK
The one with Richard Chamberlain singing "Ding, diddy, ding ding?"

RESTON
You don't think it might be an idea for our interviewer to be rested and focused on the job in hand?

BIRT
Don't worry. David is a performer of the highest calibre who has been in pressure situations many times before. Come the hour, he'll be fine.

BIRT exits. RESTON turns to ZELNICK..

RESTON

Did he say.. "performer"?

ZELNICK

Yes.

RESTON

That was the word he used?

ZELNICK

Yes. He said "performer".

RESTON

Not 'journalist'? Or 'interviewer'?

ZELNICK

No, he said 'performer'.

RESTON

Out of interest...where are you at this moment. Psychically?

ZELNICK

I am imagining the dust, the darkness, the agony and the unimaginable loneliness of the wilderness I am about to be despatched to by my Washington political colleagues.

78 EXT. CINERAMADOME - STREETS - NIGHT - (1977) 78

FROST's limousine arrives outside a cinema, with screaming CROWDS waiting. FROST and CAROLINE step out and into an explosion of PHOTOGRAPHERS' flashbulbs and REPORTERS questions..

79 OMITTED 79

80 INT. CASA PACIFICA - NIXON'S OFFICE - NIGHT - (1977) 80

NIXON sits in 'Casa Pacifica', in his study, preparing for the interviews with his team of KEN KHACHIGIAN, RAY PRICE, FRANK GANNON and DIANE SAWYER..

KHACHIGIAN

..any opportunity you get, go right to foreign policy, right to Mao, right to Kruschev.

GANNON

Just go right!

A knock at the door. BRENNAN bursts in..

BRENNAN

Sir? Something I think you should see.

BRENNAN turns on the TV.

ON TV: FROST and CAROLINE at the premier, in the flashlights.
FROST smiling, waving at cameras. A REPORTER calls out..

REPORTER (ON TV)

Some people in the media have suggested you're not the right man for the job. That you'll be too soft on the President. What will you do if he stonewalls you?

FROST (ON TV)

I shall say so. Again and again..but I should say now, I'm not expecting his approach to be to stonewall. I'm hoping it will that of a cascade of candor.

REPORTER (ON TV)

"A cascade of candor"? From Richard Nixon? You think that's what you'll get?

FROST (ON TV)

No. It was just a phrase I thought might appeal to you.

NIXON watches the TV. Stares at FROST..

NIXON

Strange fellow.

GANNON

Started life as a comic, y'know.

NIXON

That right?

SAWYER

Almost married Diahann Carroll.

NIXON

Who?

GANNON

The singer.

NIXON
Isn't she black?

GANNON
(patting file)
All in the file which we put together
as part of our general preparations.

GANNON indicates a file on the desk. NIXON stares, then..

NIXON
C'mon. Let's get back to work.

BRENNAN kills the TV. 'ZAP', FROST vanishes.

FADE TO BLACK:

81 INT. THE BEVERLY HILTON - LOBBY - THE FOLLOWING MORNING 81

RESTON, ZELNICK and BIRT are milling around. In silence.
Dressed in suits. Clutching files. Pacing nervously.

'Ping', elevator doors open. FROST arrives with CAROLINE,
FROST kisses her goodbye, then CAROLINE goes. FROST turns to
his colleagues..

FROST
Shall we?

But ZELNICK, BIRT and RESTON are craning necks, watching
CAROLINE go..

FROST
Gentlemen..?

They walk out to their CAR.

FROST
And for the record, I'm going to be
starting with John's idea - "Why
didn't you burn the tapes?"

ZELNICK
No, please God, no. That would be a
disaster and open up the whole
Watergate thing way ahead of our
agreed time. What's the point of
having contractually set specific
times to deal with certain subjects if
we go and break it with the first
question?

BIRT

Because this is war, isn't it? Gloves
off.

FROST

I like it. It's... 'ballsy'.

BIRT

Strategically, it'll give us the upper hand.

FROST and BIRT get into the front of the car. RESTON and ZELNICK shoot a look at one another. Get into the back.

82

EXT. CASA PACIFICA - SAN CLEMENTE - DAY - (1977)

82

SECRET SERVICEMEN wait patiently. A series of cars with darkened windows. The President's motorcade. Engines running.

GANNON, SAWYER, KHACHIGIAN and BRENNAN all climb into cars.

Finally, NIXON, dressed in a dark, blue suit, emerges from Casa Pacifica, and walks towards the waiting motorcade.

He is about to climb into his car, when a VOICE calls out..

PAT NIXON

Wait! Dick?

NIXON turns to see his wife, PAT NIXON come up the path towards him.

She comes up close. Their eyes meet. An intensity in her look. In her hand, a white handkerchief. She puts the handkerchief in his top pocket.

Another look between them. She straightens his lapel. Then she turns around, and walks back into the house.

83

EXT. SMITH HOUSE - MONARCH BAY - DAY - (1977)

83

FROST's car pulls up outside the location. Large trucks are parked outside. TECHNICIANS carrying lights, catering, generators, cables.

FROST is immediately besieged by PHOTOGRAPHERS and TV CREWS that have gathered outside. (RESTON and ZELNICK go into the house).

Suddenly a ripple of excitement from outside. Shouts of "He's here!", as NIXON's motorcade sweeps into the street. Black sedans. Darkened windows.

Doors open. SECRET SERVICE get out. Ear-pieces. Walkie-talkies. Guns in holsters. It's an impressive, intimidating entrance.

Finally, a car door opens and a pair of classic black shoes, (with laces), hit the tarmac. NIXON gets out of his car, is greeted by FROST. They shake hands.

84

INT. SMITH HOUSE - MONARCH BAY - DAY - (1977)

84

Watching from inside the house: RESTON stares. Seeing NIXON in person for the first time.

RESTON

Y'know, I've written four books about him, but this is the first time I've actually seen him in the flesh.

RESTON stares as if mesmerized at NIXON as he poses for photographers, and walks towards the house..

RESTON

He's taller than I imagined. And tanned..

ZELNICK

You going to shake his hand?

RESTON

You kidding me? After everything that prick's done to this country..?

FROST and NIXON walk into the house, followed by NIXON's entourage. FROST turns to face RESTON..

FROST

May I present Jim Reston, one of my researchers.

NIXON

Pleasure to meet you, Mr. Reston.

NIXON extends his hand. RESTON stares, then inexplicably, his hand slowly, involuntarily rises up..

RESTON

Mr. President.

RESTON and NIXON's hands shake. NIXON and his retinue move on. RESTON stares in shock. ZELNICK comes up to him..

ZELNICK

That was devastating. Withering. You know, I doubt he'll ever get over that.

RESTON

Fuck off.

ZELNICK, RESTON and BIRT smile, then walk towards the Frost team 'observation room', (a bedroom now filled with TV monitors relaying the footage from the set).

They are about to disappear inside, when they look up to see their opposite numbers: BRENNAN, KHACHIGIAN, SAWYER and GANNON enter their 'observation room'.

The two teams stop and stare at one another. Eyeball to eyeball. Then go in.

85

INT. STUDIO - MONARCH BAY - DAY - (1977)

85

FROST and NIXON remain on set, under studio lights, as HAIR, MAKE-UP and SOUND TECHNICIANS make final adjustments..

FROST

Before we start, I just want to say how delighted we all are by Mrs. Nixon's recovery.

MANOLO SANCHEZ brings NIXON a cup of tea on the Presidential China..

NIXON

Well, thank you. It's true, she's much better now, and is getting round to the business of replying to all the cards. Have a guess how many she received?

From FROST's blank look..

NIXON

A hundred thousand.

FROST

Goodness.

NIXON

Mostly from schoolchildren. Isn't that interesting?

(a beat)

(MORE)

NIXON (cont'd)

And from our point of view - I'd just like to say how pleased we are you got this all together.

FROST

Thank you.

NIXON

I understand it's been quite a struggle.

FROST

Well...I...

NIXON

How much has it cost? Do you mind me asking? C'mon. Between us.

FROST

Very well...two million.

NIXON

Two million? I didn't realize we were making Ben Hur. But you've raised it all now?

FROST

Not quite. But getting there. Everyone has been kind. And deferred fees.

NIXON

Not quite everyone.

NIXON smiles icily. Then takes out a handkerchief..

NIXON

I'd like to put a handkerchief here, if I may. Is that out of shot? Contractually..I think..we made a provision that during each question I might dab my upper lip. Which you won't show when you cut it together..

*
*

A beat.

NIXON

You're probably aware of my history with perspiration.

FROST

If you're referring to the TV debate with Jack Kennedy in 1960?

NIXON

They say that moisture on my upper lip cost me the Presidency. People who listened on the radio thought I'd won. Television and the close-up. So now they insist I bring my handkerchief and that I have my eyebrows trimmed.

A silence..

NIXON

Do you trim yours?

FROST

No.

NIXON

Of course not. You're light skinned and have blue eyes. And have no problems with perspiration, I imagine?

FROST

Not that I'm aware.

NIXON

You were obviously born to be on the tube.

A MAKE-UP LADY gives NIXON final touches..

DIRECTOR

Sixty seconds everyone..

NIXON clears his throat. He looks down. Then..

NIXON

Those shoes. They're Italian, aren't they?

FROST

My shoes..? I believe so.

NIXON

Interesting.

A beat..

NIXON

You don't find them too effeminate?

FROST

No.

NIXON

I suppose someone in your..ah..field
can get away with them.

NIXON stares at them enviously, as DAVIS, the STUDIO MANAGER
calls out..

DAVIS

Five, four, three..

NIXON and FROST focus in anticipation, two athletes waiting
for the gun, then DAVIS cues FROST..'Go!'

FROST

Mr. President, we are going to be
covering a lot of subjects in a great
deal of detail over the course of
these interviews, but I'd like to
begin completely out of context, by
asking you one question, more than any
other, almost every American and
people all over the world want me to
ask: "Why didn't you burn the tapes?"

NIXON stiffens, as if he'd received an electric shock.

86 INT. NIXON TEAM OBSERVATION ROOM - DAY - (1977) 86

BRENNAN looks up. Under his breath..

BRENNAN

Sonofabitch..

87 INT. FROST TEAM OBSERVATION ROOM - DAY - (1977) 87

ZELNICK stares anxiously at the TV monitor which has a close-
up of NIXON's face.

ZELNICK

(under his breath)

God-damm-it..

88 INT. SET - MONARCH BAY - DAY - (1977) 88

NIXON perceptibly flinches. Stares at FROST. Then, a barely
perceptible flicker behind his eyes..

NIXON

Mr. Frost, I'm surprised by your question, since we have an agreement, a contractual agreement, I believe, that we would cover Watergate in our last taping session. But if your "viewers" really do have a "major concern", then perhaps I should briefly respond to it now..

NIXON crosses his legs. Sits back.

NIXON

What probably very few people realize is that the taping system in the White House was set up by my predecessor President Johnson - partly to avoid the necessity of having a secretary in every meeting, and partly to ensure there was a record kept of every verbal agreement - no matter how off-the-cuff or casual. Initially, on coming into the White House, I insisted on dismantling the system..

89

INT. BRENNAN'S OFFICE - SAN CLEMENTE - DAY - (1982)

89

JACK BRENNAN smiles in satisfaction..

BRENNAN

In boxing, there's always that moment, you see it in challengers' faces. The instant they feel the power of the champ's first jab. A sickening moment, when they realize all the pep-talks, and the hype and the months of psyching themselves up has been delusional all along. You could see it in Frost's face. If he hadn't known the calibre of the man he was up against before the interviews started, he knew it half way through that first answer..

90

INT. SET - MONARCH BAY - DAY

90

FROST's face: staring at NIXON. Visibly shaken.

NIXON

...I hadn't liked the idea at all but President Johnson had repeatedly said how crazy it would be to remove the system which he felt was the best way to preserve for history important White House transactions...

91 INT. FROST TEAM OBSERVATION ROOM - DAY - (1977) 91

ZELNICK's heart sinks, watching the monitors..

ZELNICK

So much for our "ballsy" opening..

NIXON (ON TV)

You see, since the best advice is almost always of the confidential variety, now the tapes have been made public, people are unlikely ever to feel comfortable speaking in confidence at the White House..they are less likely to offer that advice so in the end it's the whole political system..and by implication the country that suffers...

RESTON

C'mon, David, shut him up! Change the line of attack!

Miraculously, as if FROST had heard him...

FROST (ON MONITOR)

So when did you actually decide, at what moment did you know you were going to resign?

BIRT

Good.

92-93 OMITTED 92-93

94 INT. TV SET - MONARCH BAY - DAY - (1977) 94

NIXON deals with it effortlessly..

NIXON

Oh, I remember exactly. It was July 23rd.

(MORE)

NIXON (cont'd)

After it was clear the Southern Democrats that were still against impeachment had the screws put on them by the Speaker of the House. That night I said to Al Haig, "That's it. There goes the Presidency." Of course, being Al, he tried to talk me out of it...

95 INT. FROST TEAM OBSERVATION ROOM - SAME TIME - (1977) 95

NIXON continues talking about GERALD FORD. RESTON turns to BIRT, an imploring look..

RESTON

John, do something! This is desperate. Twenty-three minutes on the first question??

BIRT

OK. Let's take a break. Let's change the tapes..

BIRT gets up and walks out into the set..

96 INT. TV SET - MONARCH BAY - DAY - (1977) 96

BIRT walks out and calls for a break. Lights come up. NIXON gets up from his chair, and is immediately fussed over by HAIR and MAKE-UP. BIRT takes FROST aside..

BIRT

What are you doing, David? You've got to stop him rambling.

FROST

It's all right - these are just introductory exchanges.

BIRT

But this session only lasts two hours - nearly half of it's gone. And you're wasting valuable material. The moment he made the decision to resign. We should be scoring points with that..

FROST

You want me to switch to Vietnam?

BIRT

No!! You've got to get something out of that resignation night. That was Nixon at his lowest point. A total wreck. On his knees? Praying with Kissinger? Come on. You can nail him with that stuff.

Meanwhile: in the other corner, NIXON is with BRENNAN, GANNON, KHACHIGIAN and DIANE SAWYER..

NIXON

Was that okay?

GANNON

The best start imaginable.

NIXON

I didn't sound arrogant, or self-serving?

BRENNAN

Not at all. You sounded controlled, even-handed, statesman-like. Continue exactly the same way. Long answers. Control the space. Don't let him in..

The two TEAMS go back to their observation rooms. FROST and NIXON resume their seats.

97

INT. TV SET - MONARCH BAY - DAY - (1977)

97

DAVIS, (the STUDIO MANAGER), counts down, "Five, four.." NIXON wipes the perspiration from his face. FROST drinks from a glass of water. The STUDIO MANAGER cues DAVID..

FROST

Reading the account of those extraordinary final days, it seems your most emotional moment was in that heart-to-heart you had with Henry Kissinger. Was that perhaps the most emotional moment of your career?

NIXON

Yes, it was perhaps as emotional a moment as I have ever had..

NIXON hesitates, a dramatic pause...

NIXON

..except, well, it's hard to say what is the most emotional moment, because each is different. I remember the day Eisenhower died..

98 INT. FROST TEAM OBSERVATION ROOM - DAY - (1977)

98

Watching on the monitor, RESTON's heart sinks..

RESTON

Oh, no, don't do this..

NIXON (ON TV)

And the day I walked my eldest daughter Tricia down the aisle..

ZELNICK

Please, God no..

99 INT. TV SET - MONARCH BAY - DAY (1977)

99

NIXON continues..

NIXON

And the day during the Impeachment hearings when Julie, my youngest, came into my office, threw her arms around me, kissed me and cried. She so seldom cried. She said, "Daddy, you're the finest man I know.

100 INT. FROST TEAM OBSERVATION ROOM - DAY - (1977)

100

RESTON stares in disbelief..

RESTON

"Daddy, you're the finest man I know?"

NIXON (ON MONITOR)

Whatever you do I will support you, just go through the fire a little longer.

101 INT. NIXON TEAM OBSERVATION ROOM - DAY - (1977)

101

GANNON and BRENNAN smile in delight..

BRENNAN

This is beautiful!

102 INT. TV SET - MONARCH BAY - DAY - (1977)

102

FROST has slumped in his chair..

NIXON

..and so there we were, Kissinger and I, in the Lincoln sitting-room, sipping Courvoisier, and together we began to reminisce about some of the great decisions we'd participated in; China, the Soviet Union, the peace settlement in Vietnam - plus domestically, of course, huge strides had been made in racial desegregation, and he said, "Mr. President, I want you to know, it's a crime you're leaving office, a disservice to the peace in the world that you helped build, and history is going to record that you were a great President". Then his voice broke. Now, I can't stand seeing someone cry.

RESTON

You're going to see me cry soon.

NIXON

And so I started to cry too. But when I say 'crying', I don't mean sobbing or anything like that. But there we were. Two grown men, who'd between them, seen the mountain tops, and many of the great crises of their times. And I put my arm around him, and I said.. "Let me tell you something I've never told anyone. Whenever I've had a tough decision to make I've come into this room for the purpose of praying. So if you don't mind, could we just have a moment of silent prayer?" So we knelt down. In front of that table where Lincoln signed the Emancipation Proclamation..

FROST looks up to see DAVIS the STUDIO MANAGER hovering..

FROST

Is there a problem?

The STUDIO MANAGER indicates his watch..

DAVIS

That's time. We're over two hours.

NIXON

Really..? So soon?

FROST

Right..well, Mr. President. I gather our time is up..

NIXON

Pity. I was beginning to enjoy that..

BRENNAN walks on set, beaming..

BRENNAN

That was terrific. Both of you.

BIRT, ZELNICK and RESTON walk on. Ashen-faced. TECHNICIANS remove FROST and NIXON's microphones..

NIXON

Funny. I was expecting questions on Vietnam. And we'd prepared for that, hadn't we, Jack..?

BRENNAN nods, 'Absolutely'.

FROST

Yes, so did I..

NIXON

Guess we just got caught up reminiscing..

FROST

Indeed..

Handshakes with FROST..

NIXON

The day after tomorrow, then? 10.00.

FROST

Yes, indeed.

FROST and NIXON shake hands, then NIXON and his entourage go.

103 EXT. MONARCH BAY - DAY - (1977) 103

NIXON exits the house to a volley of photographers' flashlights and journalists' questions. NIXON smiles..

104 INT. TV SET - MONARCH BAY - DAY - (1977) 104

By contrast: FROST and his team remain inside. In deathly silence.

FROST

There's no need to say anything..

ZELNICK

David, it was a disaster..

FROST

Not entirely. We can use some of that Kissinger stuff.. But, yes. I'm disappointed too..

FROST raises his hands in a defensive gesture..

FROST

But I wonder..could we possibly spare the post-mortem for now? I don't mean to minimize it, it's just I need to get back to LA to meet some people from 'Weed Eater'.

FROST goes. ZELNICK turns, and stares at BIRT, who avoids his eyes, looks down at his notes..

ZELNICK

'Weed Eater?'

BIRT

I believe that's what he said - yes.

ZELNICK

What the hell is 'Weed Eater?'

BIRT

I believe it's some form of...
(makes whirring noise)
...horticultural mechanism. One of our sponsors.

RESTON

'Weed Eater?' What happened to Xerox,
General Motors or IBM?

BIRT

I gather....not all of the Blue Chip
accounts have come through.

(seeing the bright side)

But we have Alpo.

RESTON

Dog food?

ZELNICK

We've started taping. What are you
saying? Are we close? John...?

BIRT

Look...I suggest you take this matter
up with David.

RESTON

Are we close?

BIRT clears his throat..

BIRT

I believe we're at thirty per cent.

RESTON

To go? Or thirty per cent sold?

BIRT

Look, you're really going to have to
talk to.... Thirty per cent sold.

RESTON

Jeeee-sus.

ZELNICK

I thought we were fully financed!

BIRT

We were. But the finance was always
conditional on advertising sales. And
no one expected them to....fall apart
like this.

ZELNICK

What's that based on?

RESTON

Credibility of the project. What else
are advertising sales based on?

Silence. BIRT stares at the RESTON and ZELNICK, then..

BIRT

Look, I understand your concern, but could I ask you to go a little easier on David in the next couple of days, bearing in mind the extraordinary pressure he's under. At the moment, he's effectively paying for it all himself. So he's in for a lot more here than his reputation.

ZELNICK

And we're not?

- 105 EXT. WEED EATER OFFICES - DAY - (1977) 105
FROST's car pulls up. He dashes out. Leaves the car parked in a restricted space.
FROST (V.O.)
...but I thought you made a firm commitment..
- 106 INT. WEED EATER OFFICES - DAY - (1977) 106
FROST rushes up a staircase.
FROST (V.O.)
I don't understand...why this sudden change of heart?
- 107 INT. WEED EATER OFFICES - DAY - (1977) 107
FROST sits alone in the waiting area of modest, uninspiring offices. Exhausted. Hollow-eyed.
FROST (V.O.)
Well, who's predictions are you basing that on...?
- 108 INT. WEED EATER OFFICES - DAY - (1977) 108
FROST sits with the detached, unmoved EXECS from Weed Eater, and pitches the interviews. It's humiliating. They are clearly not that interested..

FROST (ON PHONE)

But..that's just madness! It's Richard
Nixon! These interviews will do mid
30's audience share, minimum...

The EXECs are unmoved. Their body language says it all.

109 INT. FROST'S SUITE - THE BEVERLY HILTON - NIGHT - (1977) 109

CAROLINE is dressed-up to go out. Waiting for DAVID. She watches through a half-open door as FROST is on the phone, behind a wall of cigar smoke..

FROST (ON PHONE)

Jimmy, David...back again like the proverbial bad penny, look - I hate to ask this of a friend...and I know you're already in for more than I asked for..

We CLOSE on CAROLINE's face. Her voice fades in..

CAROLINE (V.O.)

It's strange...any normal person would just take a rest...or just give up...

CAROLINE stares. A flicker of sadness. Then she goes. The door closes. FROST doesn't notice. Carries on the phone.

FROST (ON PHONE)

..I just need you to dig a little deeper..I'm RIGHT up against it now..

110 INT. CAROLINE'S HOUSE - LOS ANGELES - DAY - (1982) 110

CAROLINE speaks to the documentary crew..

CAROLINE

...but that would have meant admitting failure. And David doesn't DO failure.

111 EXT. SMITH HOUSE - DAY - (1977) 111

Flashlights pop as FROST and CAROLINE arrive in Monarch Bay. FROST waves. Big smiles. All confidence. All show.

CAROLINE (V.O.)

Failure is for other people..

CAROLINE smiling, too. But we sense beginning to detach.

112 INT. MAKE-UP - SMITH HOUSE - DAY - (1977)

112

FROST sits in make-up. Desperately catching up on last-minute reading. Behind him, JOHN BIRT..

BIRT

I had a chance to review yesterday's tapes.

RESTON and ZELNICK stand outside in the corridor, and are eavesdropping anxiously..

FROST

And..?

BIRT

Honestly? Far too soft, David.

FROST

Go on. Beat me, John. Beat me with a stick!

BIRT

I'm serious, David. You've GOT to make it more uncomfortable for him! Sit forward! Attack more! If he tails off, bang, jump in with another question. Don't trade generalizations with him. Be specific. Above all, don't let him give these self-serving, twenty-three minute homilies.

FROST

Right.

BIRT

And keep your distance before the tape starts running. He was toying with you yesterday. All that stuff about Ben Hur, and struggling to raise the money. Don't engage. Those are mind games. Never forget, you're in there with a major operator.

FROST

Got it.

113 INT. SET - MONARCH BAY - DAY - (1977)

113

FROST waits on set. Presently, NIXON and All the President's Men enter. NIXON walks up to FROST, a confident smile..

NIXON

Ah, the Grand Inquisitor.

FROST smiles back. Warily.

FROST

No. Just your friendly neighborhood
confidante.

NIXON and FROST shake hands. Are about to take their seats..

"BANG" - a loud bang. One or two voices scream in shock. In
an instant the President's SECRET SERVICE guys rush into the
room..

SECRET SERVICEMEN

Everyone OK?

NIXON remains calm. And standing. The STUDIO MANAGER calls
out..

DAVIS

Okay - just a lightbulb that blew.

NIXON smiles, seeing FROST's alarm.

NIXON

With all these security servicemen
around, there's no need to worry. As a
President - you get used to this kind
of thing.

NIXON and FROST take their seats..

NIXON

Pleasant evening last night?

FROST

Ye-es. Thank you.

MAKE-UP and SOUND TECHNICIANS do their final checks..

NIXON

Did you do any fornicating?

FROST

(visibly thrown)
I beg your pardon?

In the observation room: BIRT closes his eyes, "Oh, no".

DAVIS, the STUDIO MANAGER, counts down.. 'Five, four,
three..' Then cues FROST, who struggles to gather himself..

FROST

Mr. President, you came to office promising peace, but no sooner did you get into the White House than US involvement in Vietnam deepened - and the war was prolonged with calamitous consequences. Did you feel you'd betrayed the people that had elected you?

NIXON

You know, Mr. Frost, I'm an even-tempered man, but nothing upsets me more than when I hear blame for Vietnam being laid at my door. Vietnam was not my fault. It was my inheritance. Of course, I could have 'bugged out,' blamed it on my predecessors, and pulled the troops out early, and very possibly won some Scandinavian peace prize into the bargain, but this was an important test of American credibility. The whole world was watching to see if we have the "character" to see it through. But I believed in the cause. And sometimes what you believe in is the harder path. It could be said I was the last casualty of Vietnam...

*

*

*

114 INT. FROST TEAM OBSERVATION ROOM - DAY - (1977) 114
BIRT leans forward..

BIRT

...Cambodia, come on David.

FROST (ON MONITOR)

..and Cambodia?

115 INT. TV SET - MONARCH BAY - SAME TIME - (1977) 115
A flicker behind NIXON's eyes..

NIXON

Yes, and Cambodia.

FROST

An invasion which everyone advised you against. All the Pentagon and CIA intelligence suggested it would fail. So why did you do it?

NIXON

Well, first of all, as a result of our incursion into Cambodia, we picked up 22,000 rifles, 15 million rounds of ammunition, 150,000 rockets and mortars belonging to the North Vietnamese, which would only otherwise have been directed onto American soldiers or innocent South Vietnamese civilians. Now, I can't put a finger on the amount of lives that saved. I just know that as a result, our casualties went down and we were able to step up our withdrawal.

FROST

But one of the principal justifications you gave for the incursion was the supposed existence of the "Headquarters of the entire Communist military operation in South Vietnam", a sort of "Bamboo Pentagon" which proved not to exist at all.

NIXON

Now, just a minute....

FROST

And by sending B52's to carpet bomb a country, wiping out whole civilian areas, you end up radicalizing a once moderate people, uniting them in Anti-American sentiment, and creating a monster in the Khmer Rouge which would lead to civil war and genocide..

116 INT. FROST TEAM - OBSERVATION ROOM - DAY - (1977)

116

BIRT speaks into a walkie-talkie..

BIRT

Okay, run VT..

117 INT. TV SET - MONARCH BAY - DAY - (1977)

117

Violent, distressing news footage fills several monitors on the set..of devastated Cambodian villages, South Vietnamese soldiers clinging to the skids of American helicopters..

NIXON watches it. But as soon as the VT tape ends, he turns on FROST. Imperious. Defiant.

NIXON

Look..it was never US policy to kill civilians. That's the enemy's way. And if you're asking the question, do I regret the casualties on both sides in the war? Of course, I do. I experienced real difficulties at home, as you know, as a result. With the universities and so forth. I attended a judicial conference in Williamsburg, Virginia, late in 1970 and as I walked into the hall to make a speech a little girl, I don't think she was more than 16, broke through the line of people there, and ah...she just spat in my face, just covered my face with spit, and she said, "You are a murderer." Of course I wiped the spit off, went in and made the speech. And I was thinking, she was such a pretty girl, but at that moment she was so ugly, and it was the war that had made her so. I lost a great deal of sleep over that particular incident. And the worry, the responsibility, let me tell you, it can wear you down. But whenever I had doubts, I remembered the construction worker in Philadelphia who came up to me and said, "Sir, I have only one criticism of that Cambodia thing. If you had gone in earlier, you might have captured the gun that killed my boy three months ago. So, in answer to your question, do I regret going into Cambodia? No. I wish I'd gone in sooner. And harder."

At that, the STUDIO MANAGER walks on and calls 'time!' The lights come up. NIXON and FROST get to their feet. The two TEAMS walk onto the set.

A triumphant BRENNAN walks on and effusively shakes ZELNICK and BIRT's hands..

BRENNAN

Congratulations, this is terrific!
We're getting some great material..!

Neither BIRT nor ZELNICK can speak. They stare. Hollow-eyed.
Pale. Traumatized.

118 EXT. HOUSE - MONARCH BAY - DAY - (1977) 118

NIXON and his team leave to popping flashlights, big smiles,
good-natured banter with the NEWSMEN..

119 INT. FROST TEAM OBSERVATION ROOM - DAY - (1977) 119

By contrast, FROST, BIRT, ZELNICK and RESTON stand in deathly
silence, as TECHNICIANS wrap up around them..

FROST

Better..?

BIRT

It was. Unquestionably better.

FROST

I assumed a more challenging position
like you said. Was more conscious of
my body language. Asked what I thought
were more penetrating questions. And
didn't allow him to ramble quite as
much..

RESTON

But his replies were still too long.
Ten minutes instead of twenty. And you
weren't scoring where you had to.

FROST flashes with irritation..

FROST

Can we make that 'we', Jim? 'We'
weren't scoring where 'we' had to? I
think that would help..

ZELNICK

And on Cambodia, a development of the
war so morally repugnant, so utterly
unjustifiable you let him go on and
on..and without being challenged, some
of his justifications almost sound
reasonable.

RESTON

Right now, for a liberal American,
it's agony. It's like watching a dead
man come back to life.

FROST

Well - it's still early days. What's
next?

BIRT

Foreign policy.

FROST goes.

ZELNICK

Oh, God. The big power stuff? Russia?
China? The Middle East?

BIRT

Yes. Why?

ZELNICK

(thinking FROST has gone)
If he beats him up like that on
Vietnam, what's he going to do with
his real achievements?

But FROST only reached the door. And heard every word.

119A INT. UNIVERSITY LIBRARY - DAY - (1982)

119A

RESTON speaks to the documentary crew..

RESTON

The answer was grow by six inches. It
was agony to watch.

120 INT. TV SET - MONARCH BAY - DAY - (1977)

120

NIXON in the interviews. Energized. Tanned, confident and
statesmanlike. FROST, by contrast, is slumped in his chair.
Hollow-eyed. Defeated.

NIXON

...that's when Khrushchev called me,
BEGGING me to intervene...see he and
Mao didn't get along, and he knew that
the Chairman would talk to me...no one
else...I was the only one Mao trusted
personally...man to man...

121 INT. FROST TEAM OBSERVATION ROOM - DAY - (1977) 121

The FROST TEAM watch in depressed silence as NIXON gives a masterclass in geo-politics, and the benefits of diplomacy..

RESTON (V.O.)

I remember when it had come to working out the order we would be taping the sessions - I had always argued that we tape the Foreign Policy last.

NIXON (ON SCREEN)

....detente, as I understand it, or modern diplomacy, or political friendship, is a procedure whereby leaders of the major powers, having gotten to know one another personally over time can settle disputes diplomatically - in conversation - before reaching a flashpoint...

RESTON

My reason was simple. Nixon was always going to shine in that arena, and the last thing we wanted was that he take that increased confidence into the all-important abuse of power sessions.

122 INT. UNIVERSITY LIBRARY - DAY - (1982) 122

RESTON speaks to the documentary crew..

RESTON

Which, of course, is exactly what happened. And when David tried to lay a finger on him, Nixon made mincemeat of him..

123 OMITTED 123

124 EXT. HOUSE - MONARCH BAY - DAY - (1977) 124

'Crash', FROST, BIRT, RESTON and ZELNICK burst out of the house at Monarch Bay, mid-argument..

ZELNICK

What "revolution", David? You let Nixon claim this country was in a state of revolution with protestors "bombing" and "assaulting" police officers?

(MORE)

ZELNICK (cont'd)

Well, that's not the way it looked to ME. All I could see was people protesting peacefully and legitimately against the Vietnam War...

FROST is heading towards the beach..

RESTON

By the end, the Huston Plan was beginning to sound like a rational response.

FROST

Well, I'm sorry you feel this way. But I simply cannot share your view.

ZELNICK

About what?

FROST

About any of it, frankly. I thought today was a huge improvement.

RESTON

Are you nuts? Let me tell you how bad things were today. After the taping finished, I overheard two crew members say..they never voted for him when they had the chance. But if he ran for office again today, he'd get their support. You're making him look Presidential, for Chrissakes. And forget the trivia! Who cares whether Nixon took the White House bed to Europe when he travelled?

FROST

I do.

RESTON

Well, it's irrelevant, and just the sort of banal anecdote that would distract a t...

RESTON stops, tailing off. Stops himself.

FROST

What?

A silence.

FROST

Go on. Say it.

A silence.

FROST

You were going to say "talk show host"?

RESTON

Yes.

A silence.

FROST

Look, it's useless me trying to answer your points. Frankly, I don't share any of your sense of pessimism or alarm and this ridiculous self-flagellation, in my view, is just...depressing...and threatening to de-rail the whole enterprise. If there is anyone here who really has lost faith, and thinks we are going to fail, they better leave now, or it'll infect everyone else.

A silence. Gulls wheel above them. Dive for fish.

FROST

No one? Right. Good. Now I suggest instead of festering around the hotel for the next five days, we all go our separate ways over Easter. But before we go..Caroline and I would like you to join us for a little celebratory dinner at Patrick Terrail's new place.

FROST walks back towards the house. ZELNICK holds his head, can't help laughing..

ZELNICK

To celebrate what, David? The fact the project is going down the pan? And we're all going to be working at Burger King?

FROST turns, a flash of anger...

FROST

It's my birthday, Bob. I'd like to
celebrate my birthday with a few
friends.

With that, FROST turns and walks back to the car. OVER THIS: music fades in. The sound of festive singing.

125 INT. MA MAISON - NIGHT - (1977)

125

We're in the legendary Beverly Hills restaurant. In it's heyday. A packed party.

Squashed in a booth between two beautiful Hollywood types, like out-of-place schoolteachers, are RESTON and ZELNICK. A blur of naked flesh, as skimpily dressed WOMEN walk past..

ZELNICK

Was that Hugh Hefner?

RESTON

I believe it was. With Michael York.
And over there. On the piano, is that
Neil Diamond and Sammy Kahn.

IN ANOTHER CORNER:

The two famous entertainers pay a duet with lyrics composed for the occasion..

DIAMOND/KAHN

(to the tune of "Love and
Marriage")

"Frost and Nixon, Frost and Nixon..go
together like Prancer and Vixen..

IN ANOTHER CORNER:

JOHN BIRT is with CAROLINE and DAVID...

CAROLINE

..just putting it all together, David -
it's an extraordinary accomplishment,
no one else could have done that..

BIRT

..and the interviews will always exist
as a valuable resource for future
generations of academics, political
historians...

FROST

That bad?

FROST's face: a flash of vulnerability. Then he looks up to see two GUESTS, and his face bursts into a radiant smile..

FROST

Well, look who it is! Darling, you
look wonderful!

BIRT and CAROLINE can't help smiling. Meanwhile, the duet
builds to a climax..

DIAMOND/KAHN

"Frost and Nixon, Frost and Nixon,
it's a situation that's going to need
some fixin'.."

We CLOSE on NEIL DIAMOND's hands...

MATCH CUT TO:

126 INT. CASA PACIFICA - NIXON'S OFFICE - DAY - (1977) 126

Another pair of hands, dancing on piano keyboards..

We're in Casa Pacifica. And the hands belong to NIXON who
plays piano, the following day.

JACK BRENNAN, DIANE SAWYER, KEN KHACHIGIAN and RAY PRICE clap
when he finishes.

PAT NIXON

My, what a festive atmosphere.

PAT NIXON has entered the room. She walks with a slight limp.
The MEN jump to their feet.

PAT NIXON

Please, don't get up. I take it from
this the interviews have gone well?

BRENNAN

Better than that, Ma'am. It's a
shutout. The President is sitting on
an 11-0 lead.

PAT NIXON

Really?

PAT NIXON looks over at her husband.

PAT NIXON

Well, that's most gratifying.
(a polite smile)
I'm so glad it's all gone according to
plan.

PAT NIXON turns, then walks out of the room. Everyone sits. Expects the former President to start playing again..

But NIXON's expression has darkened. Lost in thought.

127 INT. FROST'S HOTEL SUITE - NIGHT - (1977)

127

FROST is sitting in his hotel-suite. Speaking on the telephone. His voice is low. Hushed. Defeated. Broken. CAROLINE stands in front of the mirror, getting dressed..

FROST (ON PHONE)

I see. Is there nothing we can do?

Listens. A silence.

FROST (ON PHONE)

Really?

FROST's face becomes ashen..

FROST (ON PHONE)

Right. Well....thanks for letting me know.

FROST hangs up. Badly shaken.

FROST

It's true. They've dropped the Australian show.

CAROLINE

Oh, David..

FROST

They felt I needed to 're-evaluate my priorities'. Now my producer is worried the London show will follow. I'm in this for everything I've got. And there's STILL no guarantee it will ever see the light of day. What have I done? What was I *thinking*? Why didn't anyone stop me? They should have *physically* stopped me.

*
*
*
*

CAROLINE looks at him. Moved. Yet not sure what to do. How to help. She goes to hug him, but he freezes, does not respond..

CAROLINE

Look, let's stay in tonight. I'll go down to Trader Vic's and bring something back. Fish or steak. Which?

(MORE)

FROST/NIXON (Yellow Revs) - 8/24/07

84A.

CAROLINE (cont'd)

(a beat)

David..?

But FROST is too distracted to hear. CAROLINE stares. At a loss. Once again, he is unreachable.

CAROLINE

I'll call from the restaurant.

CAROLINE takes a last look at him, and goes. Leaving FROST alone..

He continues to pace up and down restlessly. He stands in the middle of the room. Visibly deflates..

It's an intensely private moment. His face is long. His eyes baggy and tired. For the first time his spirit seems broken.

Presently, the phone rings.

FROST stares at it for a while. Cannot face it. Finally he goes to answer it. When he speaks, it's with a quiet, defeated voice..

FROST

I'll have a cheeseburger.

But the slurring voice at the other end does not belong to CAROLINE.

VOICE (ON PHONE)

Mmm. Sounds good. I used to love cheeseburgers. But Doctor Lundgren made me give them up. Switched me to cottage cheese and pineapple instead. He calls them my Hawaiian Burgers. But they don't taste like burgers at all. They taste like styrofoam.

FROST freezes. Immediately recognizes NIXON, speaking from San Clemente.

128

INT. NIXON'S STUDY - SAN CLEMENTE - NIGHT

128

NIXON in his study high up in San Clemente. (We intercut between the two locations as necessary)..

NIXON

I...ah..hope I'm not disturbing.

FROST

No.

NIXON

It's a Friday night. You..ah..probably have someone there..whom you're entertaining..

FROST

No.

NIXON

Then what are you doing?

NIXON is flicking through a file on his desk. We notice it is full of pictures of FROST.

NIXON

A handsome young fellow. An eligible young, bachelor, alone on a Friday night?

FROST

If you must know..I'm preparing for our final session.

NIXON

Ah, the all-important final session.

FROST

Yes.

NIXON

'Watergate'.

NIXON continues to scan the file. We see newspaper headlines about FROST's early career..

NIXON

It's a small consolation to me that for the next couple of days, that word will be as much of a millstone around your neck as it has been around mine. Because I guess, the way you handle Watergate will determine whether these interviews are a success or failure. Should I be nervous?

FROST

Well, I'm going to give it my best shot.

NIXON

Quite right. No holds barred. No holds barred. You know, it's strange.

(MORE)

NIXON (cont'd)

We've sat in chairs opposite one another, talking for hours, it seems days on end..and yet I've hardly gotten to know you. One of my people..ah..as part of the preparation of this interview..did a profile of you, and I'm sorry to say..I only got around to reading it tonight. There's some interesting stuff in there.

NIXON's eyes take in childhood photos of FROST, humble beginnings...

NIXON

The Methodist background, modest circumstances. Then off to a grand university. Full of richer, posher types. What was it? Oxford?

FROST

Cambridge.

NIXON

Did the snobs there look down on you, too?

FROST

I..I..

NIXON

Of course they did. That's our tragedy, isn't it, Mr. Frost? No matter how high we get, they still look down at us..

FROST

I..really..don't know what you're talking about..

NIXON

Yes, you do. C'mon. You know exactly. No matter how many awards - or how many column inches are written about you - or how high the elected office is for me - it still isn't enough, am I right? We still feel like the little man? The loser they told us we were? A hundred times. The smart-asses at college. The high-ups. The well-born. The people who's respect we *really* wanted. *Really* craved. And isn't that why we work so hard now? Why we fight for every inch?

(MORE)

NIXON (cont'd)

Scrambling our way up, in undignified fashion, whatever hillock or mountain it is, why we never tire, why we find energy or motivation when any sensible person would lie down, or relax.

In the file: articles about FROST's failure in America. The network show being cancelled..

NIXON

If we're honest for a minute. If we reflect privately just for a moment...if we allow ourselves...a glimpse into that shadowy place we call our soul, isn't that why we're here now...? The two of us? Looking for a way back? Into the sun? Into the limelight? Back onto the winner's podium? Because we could feel it slipping away? We were headed, both of us, for the dirt. The place the snobs always told us we'd end up. Face in the dust. Humiliated all the more for having tried so pitifully hard. Well, to hell with that. We're not going to let that happen. Either of us. We're going to show those bums, and make them choke on our continued success. Our continued headlines. Our continued awards, power and glory. We're going to make those motherfuckers choke. Am I right?

FROST

You are. Except only ONE of us can win.

NIXON

And I shall be your fiercest adversary. I shall come at you with everything I've got. Because the limelight can only shine on ONE of us. And for the other, it'll be the 'wilderness'. With nothing and no one for company, but those voices ringing in our heads.

A pause. NIXON sways slightly..

NIXON

You can probably tell..I've had a drink. Not too many. Just one or two.

(MORE)

NIXON (cont'd)

But believe me, when the time comes,
I'll be focused and ready for battle.

FROST

I would expect nothing less.

NIXON

Well, good night, Mr. Frost.

FROST

Good night, Mr. President.

NIXON hangs up, and disappears into the darkness. At that moment the door opens and CAROLINE enters again..

CAROLINE

With or without cheese?

She holds bags containing fast food..

CAROLINE

I brought burgers.

She looks up, notices FROST's expression...

CAROLINE

David..?

FROST is deeply shaken. The blood has run from his lips.

FROST

I've got to work.

129 INT. FROST'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

129

FROST is working. His desk is covered in notes. White A4 legal pads. Books. Transcripts. Files prepared by his TEAM.

Various constitutional papers, the Statute with regard to the Obstruction of Justice.

FROST's eyes skim across the writing. Close on his PEN's nib as it circles key words. Key phrases.

FROST listens to tapes. The President's voice as he talks to COLSON, EHRLICHMAN and HALDEMAN..

FROST pours over transcripts, his pen circling key phrases, "I don't care if they spend five years in jail.."

FROST re-writes questions: re-orders them, numbering them. Checking against his team's predictions of NIXON's strategy. His answers.

FROST grows tired: his pen circles various dates. June 20th. Suddenly FROST's eyes come to rest on a name. CHARLES COLSON.

FROST drinks coffee. Stares at the name, 'Colson' and the date, June 20th. Grabbing at straws now.

He checks the time on his clock, then picks up the telephone and dials a number.

130 INT. RESTON'S HOUSE - WASHINGTON - DAY 130

JIM RESTON picks up the phone. He's at home with his WIFE and a baby child. Political posters all over the walls. Peace signs with bullet holes around the fingers.

FROST

Jim? It's David. Still in DC? Remember that hunch you had about the meeting Nixon had with Charles Colson? Before June 23rd?

RESTON

Oh, yeah. I wanted to go back to the Federal Court House Library.

FROST

Well, I've got a date for you. June 20th.

131 EXT. THE BEVERLY HILTON - TWO DAYS LATER - DAWN - (1977) 131

A taxi pulls up. RESTON gets out. Carrying bag and briefcase.

132 INT. THE BEVERLY HILTON - FROST'S BEDROOM - DAY - (1977) 132

FROST is fast asleep - his desk is covered in notes and writings as he continues to work. The bell to his room rings...

FROST goes to the door, opens it. Standing in the corridor outside is JIM RESTON.

FROST

And..?

133 INT. CASA PACIFICA - NIXON'S BEDROOM - SAME TIME - (1977) 133

MANOLO SANCHEZ lays out NIXON's clothes in the President's bedroom. Through a half-open door, we see...

NIXON running on the spot. As he has done every morning of his professional life.

134 INT. LOBBY - THE BEVERLY HILTON - DAY - (1977) 134

BIRT and ZELNICK are assembled in the lobby of their hotel. BIRT anxiously checks his watch.

BIRT

It's 8.30. Where's David? Bob? Have you seen him today?

ZELNICK

Not yet.

'Ping', FROST, RESTON and CAROLINE appear from the elevators.

FROST

Good morning.

FROST looks at ZELNICK and BIRT..

FROST

C'mon, let's go..

FROST, RESTON and CAROLINE walk off towards the car. ZELNICK and BIRT are left staring at one another - thrown.

BIRT

What's THAT about?

135 EXT. SMITH HOUSE - MONARCH BAY - DAY - (1977) 135

The Smith house at Monarch Bay. FROST's car pulls up. Bang on 10.00. As FROST, RESTON, ZELNICK and BIRT get out of the car..

NIXON's motorcade arrives. BIRT checks his watch..

BIRT

It's the first time he's late.

Doors open. NIXON gets out of his car. Wearing sunglasses. He walks straight into the house. In silence. No eye contact with FROST. No words spoken. No greetings. No jokes.

FROST exchanges a look with RESTON, then follows.

The two teams are left facing one another. They avert eyes, and follow NIXON and FROST into the house in silence.

136 INT. TV SET - MONARCH BAY - DAY - (1977) 136

FROST and NIXON walk towards one another, as technicians make final adjustments..

FROST
Mr. President.

NIXON
Mr. Frost.

The two men shake hands, then take their seats.

FROST
Well, if today's session is anything like our phone-call, it should be explosive.

NIXON
What phone-call?

FROST
The phone-call to my hotel room?

This time it's NIXON who's thrown..

DAVIS
Five, four, three...

137 INT. PRODUCTION TRUCK - DAY - (1977) 137

The DIRECTOR leans forward, then..

DIRECTOR
Cue David..

138 INT. TV SET - MONARCH BAY - DAY - (1977) 138

The STAGE MANAGER cues FROST..

FROST

Looking back over your final year in office, do you feel you ever obstructed justice or were part of a conspiracy to cover-up or obstruct justice?

NIXON gathers himself.

NIXON

No, I don't. And I'm interested...you use the term 'obstruction of justice'. You perhaps have not read the statute with regard to the obstruction of justice.

FROST

As it happens, I have.

NIXON

You have, you say? Well, then you'll know it doesn't just require an act. It requires a specific, corrupt motive. And in this case I didn't have a corrupt motive. What I was doing was in the interests of political containment.

FROST

Be that as it may, the direct consequences of your actions would have been that two convicted burglars would have escaped criminal prosecution. How can that NOT be a cover-up or obstruction of justice?

NIXON

I think the record shows, Mr. Frost, that far from obstructing justice - I was actively facilitating it. When Pat Grey of the FBI called me on July 6th, I said, "Pat, go right ahead with your investigation." Hardly what you'd call obstructing justice.

FROST

That may be. But for two weeks prior to July 6th we now know, you were desperately trying to contain or block the investigation.

NIXON

Now, hang on...

FROST

Obstruction of justice is obstruction of justice - if it's for a minute or five minutes. And it's no defence to say that your plan failed. I mean, if I try to rob a bank and fail, that's no defence. I still tried to rob that bank.

NIXON

Now, wait a minute, Mr. Frost...there is no evidence of any kind..

FROST

...the reason there is no evidence is because eighteen and a half minutes of the conversation with Bob Haldeman from this June period have mysteriously been erased.

NIXON

An unfortunate oversight. But Bob Haldeman is a rigorous and conscientious note taker. And his notes are there for all to see.

FROST

Well, we found something rather better than his notes.

FROST produces RESTON's notes..

FROST

There's one conversation with Charles Colson in particular, which I don't think has ever been published..

NIXON

Hasn't been published you say?

FROST

No, but one of my researchers found it in Washington. Where it's available to anyone who consults the records..

139 INT. FROST TEAM OBSERVATION ROOM - DAY

139

RESTON takes a deep breath..

RESTON

Okay, baby - here we go.

RESTON indicates the TV monitors...

140 INT. TV SET - MONARCH BAY - DAY

140

NIXON

Oh, I just wondered if we'd seen it..

FROST

More than seen it, Mr. President, you spoke the actual words.

NIXON's face visibly jolts..

FROST

You've always claimed you first learned of the break-in on June 23rd. But this tape, made three days earlier, clearly shows that to be a falsehood. In it, you say to Colson, "This whole investigation rests unless one of the seven begins to talk. That's the problem."

NIXON

What do we mean by "one of the seven begins to talk"?

NIXON is clearly rattled now. He reaches for the handkerchief beside the table..

FROST

Then moving onto a conversation you had with John Dean on March 21st, the following year, in one transcript alone, in black and white, I picked out, One, "You could get a million dollars and you could get it in cash. I know where it could be gotten". Two, "Your major guy to keep under control is Hunt". Three, "Don't we have to handle the Hunt situation?" Four, "Get the million bucks. It would seem to me that would be worthwhile." Five, "Don't you agree that you'd better get the Hunt thing going?" Six, "First you've got the Hunt problem. That ought to be handled." Seven, "The money can be provided. Ehrlichman could provide the way to deliver it.

(MORE)

FROST (cont'd)

That could be done." Eight, "We've no choice with Hunt but the \$120,000, or whatever it is, right?" Nine, "Christ, turn over any cash we've got."

FROST looks up at NIXON..

FROST

Now, it seems to me, that someone running a cover-up couldn't have expressed it more clearly than that. Could they?

NIXON

Look! Let me stop you right there. You're doing something here which I am not doing, and I will not do throughout these broadcasts. You're quoting me out of context, out of order.

FROST

You have always maintained that you knew nothing about any of this until March 21st. But in February your personal lawyer came to Washington to start the raising of \$219,000 of hush money to be paid to the burglars. You seriously expect us to believe you had no knowledge of that?

NIXON

None. I believed the money was for humanitarian purposes to help disadvantaged people with their defences.

FROST

It was being delivered on the tops of phone booths with aliases and at airports by people with gloves on. That's not normally the way lawyers' fees are delivered.

NIXON

Well, I've made statements to this effect before. All that was Haldeman and Ehrlichman's business. I knew nothing.

FROST

All right, if Haldeman and Ehrlichman were really the ones responsible, when you subsequently found out about it, why didn't you call the police and have them arrested? Isn't that just a cover-up of another kind?

NIXON is struggling for air. His face is ravaged..

NIXON

Maybe I should've done. Maybe I should've called the Feds into my office and said, "Here are the two men. Haul them down to the dock, fingerprint them and throw them into the can". But I'm just not made that way. These men, Haldeman and Ehrlichman, I knew their families. Known them since they were just kids. And I've always maintained - what they were doing - what we were ALL doing was not criminal. When you're in office, you have to do a lot of things that are not, in the strictest sense of the law, legal. But you do them because they're in the greater interests of the nation.

FROST

Wait a minute...did I hear right? Are you really saying that there are certain situations where the President can decide whether it's in the best interests of the nation and do something illegal?

NIXON

I'm saying that when the President does it, that means its not illegal.

FROST

I'm sorry..?

NIXON

That's what I believe. But I realize no one else shares that view.

FROST leans forward..

FROST

So, in that case....will you accept,
then....to clear the air once and for
all...that you were part of a cover-
up, and you did break the law?

NIXON's face: in close-up. Staring. Frozen.

141 INT. FROST TEAM OBSERVATION ROOM - DAY (1977) 141

RESTON, ZELNICK and BIRT lean forward. Stare at the screen.

RESTON

Oh, my God. We got him!

142 INT. NIXON TEAM OBSERVATION ROOM - DAY (1977) 142

BRENNAN, GANNON and KHACHIGIAN lean forward. Stare at the
screen.

BRENNAN

Oh, shit! He's going to blow!

143 INT. TV SET - MONARCH BAY - DAY (1977) 143

NIXON stares. Ravaged. Is about to speak, when...

BRENNAN

OK, let's take a break there!

JACK BRENNAN walks onto the set. Calling 'Time!'

144 INT. FROST TEAM - OBSERVATION ROOM - DAY - (1977) 144

BIRT, RESTON and ZELNICK bolt upright. Horrified.

ZELNICK

What! What's he doing?

RESTON

What the fuck's going on! Is that it?

BIRT jumps to his feet, grabs his file, and runs out,
followed by ZELNICK...

145 INT. TV SET - MONARCH BAY - DAY - (1977)

145

BIRT runs out onto the set...

BIRT
What are you doing?!

ZELNICK
A break?!? Are you crazy?

FROST throws his clipboard down, visibly irritated..

FROST
OK. Change the tapes.

In the middle of all this, NIXON gets to his feet and quietly slips off to his dressing-room.

BRENNAN
David, can we talk a minute?

ZELNICK
What the HELL's going on, Jack? He was about to blow and you know it!

BRENNAN
Fellas...this is a critical moment in his life..

BIRT
We could sue you for this!

ZELNICK
You deliberately sabotaged the interview.

BRENNAN raises his hands defensively..

BRENNAN
Look...we're all in this together...I'm sure we can find a solution that works for everyone..

BRENNAN walks out, following NIXON..

ZELNICK
(calling after him)
What are you talking about? What solution? This is an interview.

ZELNICK is taken aside by FRANK GANNON, KEN KHACHIGIAN and RAY PRICE.

146 INT. NIXON'S DRESSING-ROOM - MONARCH BAY - DAY - (1977) 146

NIXON'S dressing-room. BRENNAN closes the door behind him.
NIXON paces in the shadows..

NIXON

What did you do? Throw in the towel,
Jack? Take pity on me?

BRENNAN

I just felt..if you were going to make
some kind of...emotional
disclosure..we should just take a
moment to think it through..sketch it
out. I just want to impress upon you
how crucially important this moment
is...and how many potentially
devastating consequences unprepared
emotional...disclosures could have.

NIXON

I know. But equally - to go on. And
carry on denying it all?

A long pause. NIXON thinks, wrestles with a decision..

NIXON

I appreciate the gesture.

He shakes BRENNAN'S hand..

NIXON

Thank you, Jack.

NIXON turns and walks back to..

147 INT. TV SET - MONARCH BAY - DAY - (1977) 147

..the main set. Where FROST is waiting with BIRT and ZELNICK.

RESTON

He's coming back!

ZELNICK

Be careful, David. They might have
come up with something.

BIRT

It'll be fine, David. Pick up where
you left off.

FROST stares at NIXON as the PRESIDENT reappears..

148 INT. PRODUCTION TRUCK - DAY - (1977) 148

The DIRECTOR sees FROST and NIXON back in their seats.

DIRECTOR

Okay, everyone! Ten seconds..

149 INT. TV SET - MONARCH BAY - DAY - (1977) 149

FROST takes his seat opposite NIXON. Not a word is exchanged. The two MEN stare at one another..

DAVIS

Five, four, three..

The STUDIO MANAGER cues FROST, who leans in ruthlessly close. Exactly where they left off.

FROST

Mr. President, we were talking about the period March 21st to April 30th. About the mistakes you'd made and so on. I'm wondering...would you go further than mistakes? The word that seems not enough for people to understand.

NIXON

Well, what word would you express?

FROST

All right. Since you've asked me..

FROST throws down his clip-board..

FROST

..there are three things the American People would like to hear you say. One, there was probably more than mistakes. There was wrongdoing - yes, it might have been a crime too. Secondly, I did abuse the power I had as President. And thirdly, I put the American people through two years of agony and I apologize for that. And I know how difficult it is for anyone to admit that - most of all you. But I just feel if you don't, you'd regret it the rest of your life.

NIXON's face: a flicker behind the eyes..

NIXON

It's true, I made mistakes. Horrendous ones - ones that were not worthy of a President. Ones that did not meet the standards of excellence that I always dreamed of as a young boy. But if you remember, it was a difficult time. I'd been caught up in a "five front war", against a partisan media, a partisan House of Congress, a partisan Ervin Committee...

But NIXON tails off, as he catches himself..

NIXON

But yes, I'd have to admit there were times I did not fully meet that responsibility, and...was involved in a 'cover up' as you call it. And for all those mistakes, I have a very deep regret. I still insist they were mistakes of the head, not mistakes of the heart...but they were my mistakes and I don't blame anyone else. I brought myself down. I gave them a sword. And they stuck it in...and they twisted it with relish..and I guess, if I'd been in their position, I'd have done the same..

FROST

And the American People?

NIXON

I let them down. I let down my friends. I let down the country. Worst of all, I let down our system of government and the dreams of all those young people that ought to get into government but now think it's too corrupt. I let the American people down, and I have to carry that burden with me for the rest of my life. My political life is over.

FROST stares at NIXON. Unable to believe what he has just witnessed.

RESTON

The first and greatest sin of television is that it simplifies.

150 INT. TV SET - MONARCH BAY - SAME TIME - (1977) 150

The CAMERAMEN, hardened professionals one and all, stare. Unable to believe what they have just seen.

RESTON (V.O.)

Diminishes. Great, complex ideas..

151 INT. FROST TEAM OBSERVATION ROOM - SAME TIME - (1977) 151

BIRT, RESTON and ZELNICK stare at the monitors in their observation room. In silence.

RESTON (V.O.)

Tranches of time..

152 INT. NIXON TEAM OBSERVATION ROOM - SAME TIME - (1977) 152

BRENNAN, SAWYER, KHACHIGIAN and PRICE stare at the monitors in their observation room. In silence.

RESTON (V.O.)

Whole careers..

153 INT. PRODUCTION TRUCK - SAME TIME - (1977) 153

The DIRECTOR, VISION-MIXER, EDITOR and LINE PRODUCER stare at their monitors, unable to believe what they have just seen.

RESTON (V.O.)

Become reduced to a single snapshot.

154 INT. UNIVERSITY LIBRARY - DAY - (1982) 154

JIM RESTON speaks to the documentary CREW..

RESTON (V.O.)

At first I couldn't understand why Bob Zelnick was quite as euphoric as he was after the interviews.

155 EXT. SMITH HOUSE - MONARCH BAY - DAY - (1977) 155

BOB ZELNICK shakes hands with BRENNAN and GANNON. Champagne pops. Cigars are handed out.

RESTON (V.O.)

Or why John Birt felt moved to strip off and rush into the ocean to celebrate.

An ecstatic JOHN BIRT tears off his clothes as he runs across the beach, and throws himself into the ocean..

RESTON (V.O.)

But that was before I understood the reductive power of the close-up.

156 INT. UNIVERSITY LIBRARY - DAY - (1982) 156

RESTON continues his documentary interview..

RESTON

Because David had succeeded, on that final day, in getting, for a fleeting moment, what no investigative journalist, no state prosecutor, nor Judiciary committee, nor political enemy had managed to get...

157 A TELEVISION SCREEN - FULL-FRAME - (1977) 157

NIXON's face in close-up on a television screen..

RESTON (V.O.)

Richard Nixon's face, swollen and ravaged by loneliness, self-loathing and defeat..

NIXON (ON TV)

I let them down. I let down my friends. I let down the country..

RESTON (V.O.)

..filling every television screen in the country..

A quick-fire montage: of TELEVISIONS up and down the United States of America, East and West, North and South..

RESTON (V.O.)

...the rest of the project and it's failings would not only be forgotten. They would totally cease to exist.

158 EXT. MONARCH BAY - DAY - (1977)

158

NIXON shuffles out after the interviews. Clearly dazed, he bends down and pats a small dog belonging to a neighbor, muttering...

NIXON

Is this what you call a Dachshund?

The DOG walks back to his OWNER. NIXON stares, then walks towards his limo.

PULL BACK TO REVEAL: this moment is witnessed by FROST, who stands by a window, looking out.

In the house: celebrations have broken out all around him, but FROST is not celebrating.

His face looks almost sad: humble in victory. Filled with compassion. He watches as NIXON gets into his car, door held open by SECRET SERVICEMEN..

...and drives away.

159 EXT. NEWS STAND - DAY - (1977)

159

TIME MAGAZINE and NEWSWEEK both carry pictures of FROST on their covers...

BIRT (V.O.)

The Nixon/Frost interviews were *wildly* successful. They attracted the largest audience for a news program in the history of American television. David made the cover of Time and Newsweek magazines..

160 EXT. THE BEVERLY HILTON - LOS ANGELES - DAY - (1977)

160

FROST and JOHN BIRT arrive back at their hotel where a couple of JOURNALISTS and PHOTOGRAPHERS are waiting, (we recognise them as some of the same GUYS that gave FROST a hard time earlier)..

BIRT (V.O.)
...and inspired half the Political
Press corps, as hard-bitten and
unsentimental a bunch of assassins as
you could wish to meet, to call him
with messages of contrition and
congratulation.

161 INT. LWT - TELEVISION STUDIOS - DAY - (1982) 161

JOHN BIRT finishes off his documentary interview..

BIRT
I believe David saw the former
President Nixon just one more time.
Before he left for London again, he
drove up to San Clemente, to say
goodbye.

162 EXT. CASA PACIFICA - SAN CLEMENTE - DAY - (1977) 162

The sound of gulls wheeling. FROST and CAROLINE arrive
outside Casa Pacifica. FROST carries a small parcel...

NIXON approaches, wearing golf clothes. The two MEN shake
hands..

NIXON
Mr. Frost. Ms. Cushing. Please excuse
my..ah..golf outfit. It's the official
uniform of the retired.

He smiles embarrassedly..

NIXON
So..on your way home?

FROST
Yes.

NIXON
Into a bright new dawn of fresh
enterprises, and challenges..

FROST
Let's hope so.

A haunted flicker behind NIXON's eyes.

NIXON

Good for you. The limelight continues to shine for one of us.

A silence.

NIXON

I..ah..didn't catch the interviews as they went out. But they tell me they were a great success. I gather the ..ah.. journalists that were so positive about you were not so kind to me..

FROST

Yes, I was sorry to see that..

NIXON

No condolences necessary. I've grown to expect nothing else from those sons of whores..

NIXON turns to CAROLINE..

NIXON

Forgive me, Ms. Cushing. I would have said "sons of bitches", but Manolo here is a lover of dogs, and hates me to defame animals.

MANOLO SANCHEZ arrives, immaculate as always, blazer etc. A big, enthusiastic smile..

MANOLO

Can I get anyone anything?

NIXON

Tea? Perhaps some champagne...David? I have some caviar too, which the Shah of Iran sent me..

FROST

No. Thank you.

NIXON

Are you sure? It'd be no trouble.

FROST

No really. We must be..

NIXON extends his hand..

NIXON

Well, thank you for coming by. You were a worthy opponent.

FROST

Goodbye, Mr. President.

They shake hands. FROST turns, is about to go, then..

FROST

Oh, I almost forgot. I brought you a present.

FROST hands over a box..

FROST

Those shoes, you admired. I brought you a pair.

NIXON opens the box. Takes a peek inside. Gucci loafers. There's something unexpectedly touching about it..

NIXON

Well, thank you. I'm touched.

FROST and CAROLINE go..

NIXON

Safe trip, now.

FROST and CAROLINE turn and walk off. But they haven't got very far, before..

NIXON

Oh, David. One last thing.

CAROLINE indicates she's going to go ahead and wait. FROST turns, and walks back to NIXON alone..

NIXON

Those parties of yours. The ones I read about in the papers. Tell me...do you actually *enjoy* them?

FROST smiles, bemused..

FROST

Yes, of course.

NIXON

Really? You have no idea how fortunate that makes you.

A flicker behind NIXON's eyes.

NIXON

Liking people. And being liked.
That..facility you have with people.
That lightness. That charm. I don't
have it. Never have. Makes you wonder
why I chose a life which hinged on
being liked. I'm better suited to a
life of thought. Debate. Intellectual
discipline. Say, maybe we got it
wrong. Maybe you should have been the
politician. And I the rigorous
interviewer.

FROST

Maybe.

FROST is about to turn, then..

NIXON

Did I really call you that night?

*

FROST

Yes.

NIXON

Did we discuss anything important?

FROST thinks, then...

FROST

Cheeseburgers.

NIXON

Cheeseburgers?

NIXON stares, as FROST turns and walks into the sunset,
towards his car and a waiting CAROLINE.

RESTON (V.O.)

Despite being buried with full honours
in 1994, Richard Nixon never again
held public office of any kind.

NIXON raises his arm, waves at FROST as he drives off...

RESTON (V.O.)

His most lasting legacy is that today
any political wrongdoing is
immediately given the suffix..'gate'.

163 EXT. FREEWAY - CALIFORNIA - DAY - (1977) 163

FROST and CAROLINE drive along the Pacific Coastal Highway in the open-topped car back to Los Angeles.

RESTON (V.O.)

As for David? New York, London and Sydney welcomed him back with open arms. He even got back his table at Sardi's.

FROST smiles. CAROLINE's hair blows in the wind..

164 INT. CLUB - BEVERLY HILLS - EARLY EVENING - (1977) 164

FROST and CAROLINE walk into a fashionable club in Beverly Hills. Immediately DRINKERS and DINERS get to their feet, applauding - surrounding FROST, congratulating him...

RESTON (V.O.)

His photo would appear in newspapers from time to time. At one party or another. In his crowds of air-kissing politicians, actors and high-fliers, it was tough to tell where the politics stopped and the showbiz started.

CAROLINE is left alone. She watches FROST, in his element, and smiles to herself. He's fine. She slips quietly away..

RESTON (V.O.)

Maybe that was the point. Maybe, in the end, there is no difference. And David understood that better than anyone.

165 EXT. CASA PACIFICA - SAME TIME - (1977) 165

NIXON sits outside. He looks down at the shoe-box, opens it, and pulls out his pair of Gucci loafers..

NIXON looks left and right. Checks no one is watching.

Then he delicately puts on the shoes, takes a few steps.

Gingerly. Unsure.

But as he walks, as he tries them out, from his expression,
we can tell..

He likes them.

It's heartbreaking.

NIXON carries on walking - into his garden, towards the Ocean
- into the long shadows created by the setting sun..

..and gently his silhouette begins to fade away.

FADE TO BLACK:

The End