

THE FIFTH NIXON

Written by

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"Next to a man's wife, his secretary is the most important person in his career." Richard Nixon

"Be Nice to secretaries... they know all your secrets." Anonymous

TITLE CARD: THE FOLLOWING IS BASED ON ACTUAL EVENTS...

OVER BLACK: **OVAL OFFICE -- February 16, 1971 7:56 am**

PRESIDENT NIXON (O.S.)
How does the recording work?

BUTTERFIELD (O.S.)
...the Secret Service is sorting it out... The locator is activated. It tells us where you are. It's automatically working.

PRESIDENT NIXON (O.S.)
*What happens when a record is made -
- a tape?*

BUTTERFIELD (O.S.)
A tape is made, yes, sir... There are only four people that know. Halderman, Ziegler, you, and me. Secret Service are only used for changing the spools. They cannot monitor it.

PRESIDENT NIXON (O.S.)
Good. You see, the whole purpose of this is to have the whole thing on file... for future purposes...

FADE IN

INT. WHITE HOUSE BASEMENT - NIGHT

STEVIE WONDER'S "SUPERSTITION" opening drum beat begins to play as we go...

CLOSE ON A PAIR OF HANDS fixing the bent rabbit ear antennas of a small TV. The hands turn the TV on:

A QUICK SERIES OF CHANGING TELEVISED NEWSCASTS as if someone is trying to find something different on the TV. (This quick cut version of events serves as SparkNotes for the audience -- using actual footage, we get a history of the greatest watershed moment in American history -- Watergate.)

- WATERGATE BURGLARS being arrested on June 17, 1972 plays.

DAN RATHER
...On June 17, five burglars were caught breaking into the Democratic National Committee Office at The Watergate Hotel.

- WOODWARD AND BERNSTEIN being interviewed

WOODWARD

...There is a link between the Watergate break-in and a possible cover up of the crime by the White House...

- WATERGATE HEARING COMMITTEE

JOHN DEAN

...Watergate is a cancer on the presidency.

- WATERGATE HEARING COMMITTEE

JOHN BUTTERFIELD

...Nixon *bugged* his own office... There are recordings of all his conversations.

WHITE HOUSE SPECIAL PROSECUTOR

We demand copies of all recordings made by and in the White House, that connects to Watergate. What the White House knew and when...

Another turn of the knob to...

WALTER CRONKITE (PRELAP)

After a lengthy battle, President Nixon will now be ordered to provide transcriptions of all White House tape recordings that fall under the subpoena --

Stevie Wonder's voice FADES UP as --

THE HAND turns the KNOB of the TV off.

SUPERIMPOSE: WASHINGTON, D.C. - NOVEMBER 22, 1973

CLOSE ON: The BACK OF A MAN (presumably the one that just shut off the TV) as he opens up a vault and carefully replaces a TAPE in a CENTRAL MIXER RECORDER. There are rows of used tapes, marked by date, on masking tape.

He presses record.

The GREEN LIGHT blinks on. He adjusts the volume and we hear A MAN in mid-conversation...

PRESIDENT NIXON (O.S.)
*...Anything that has any
 consequences of seriousness...*

After a few words are strung together, we immediately recognize that, yes, we know the voice -- it's PRESIDENT NIXON. (Nixon's taping system, which we just read about in 1971, now has been in full force for three years.)

PRESIDENT NIXON (O.S.) (CONT'D)
I'm not going to try to cover up...

As THE MAN heads to the elevator, we get a better glimpse: blue blazer, gun holster, buzz haircut -- Secret Service. He presses the button, speaks into his shirt cuff.

SECRET SERVICE AGENT
 Switched reel. Heading back up.

Camera follows the Agent down the --

HALLWAY

Teeming with STAFFERS, AIDES, AND OFFICE WORKERS, President Nixon's voice grows louder.

PRESIDENT NIXON (O.S.)
*I have listened to every tape.
 Every goddamn one.*

Before we know it, we've made it to the --

WEST WING OF THE WHITE HOUSE

PRESIDENT NIXON (O.S.) (CONT'D)
*...These tapes fall squarely under
 executive privilege. They have no
 right to them. No right.*

HAIG (O.S.)
I am sure you --

PRESIDENT NIXON (O.S.)
*What happened was a goddamn
 mistake. That's all...*

The Secret Service Agent enters the inner quarters of the Presidential Office and stops at a GREAT WHITE DOOR. The camera floats through the door. We're in the --

OVAL OFFICE

The camera tracks to the sound of the President's voice, honing in on the President's desk -- straight to the tiny blinking small BUGGING DEVICE that is embedded under the President's telephone.

Facing PRESIDENT NIXON is CHIEF OF STAFF, ALEXANDER HAIG, 48, in full military uniform. Although we can't see Nixon's face (and we won't for the entire movie -- only actual footage and his voice on the actual tapes), we can feel his agitation.

HAIG

As long as it's not your mistake.

Beat. No answer from the President.

HAIG (CONT'D)

Mr. President, the Justice Department's subpoenaed the tapes. There are 18 1/2 minutes missing.

PRESIDENT NIXON

I know. I know.

HAIG

Someone has to be held accountable.

Silence. A long beat.

NIXON

Has she been notified?

HAIG

It's happening now.

CUT TO:

INT. ROSE WOOD'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

CLOSE ON a 40-SOMETHING ATTRACTIVE REDHEAD, with clever eyes, looking out the window of her modest apartment onto the street traffic below. She's in a silk robe, her hair up in rollers. Smoking.

Behind her, a line of FRAMED PHOTOGRAPHS of Rose and the Nixons throughout the years and elephant figurines from around world dot the shelves. One of the perks of being the secretary to the President of the United States.

Meet ROSE MARY WOODS, our heroine. Although she might not look it, she's a force to be reckoned with.

She watches down below, takes a long drag as she sees --

A BLACK SEDAN pulling up to her apartment entrance. TWO DARK SUITED ATTORNEYS (we'll meet them in a minute) exit the vehicle and head into the building.

Her eyes flicker with recognition. She stubs out her cigarette. Feels for her hair rollers.

CUT TO:

A PLATE OF COOKIES AND TEA

Now dressed, Rose Woods pours tea for her guests (using her best china).

TWO WHITE HOUSE LAWYERS sit across from her. FRED BUZHARDT, 50, a Southern West Point grad, and LEN GARMENT, 49, Brooklynite. Her hand nervously shakes as she sets the tea kettle down.

No one speaks.

Finally, BUZHARDT clears his throat.

BUZHARDT

Sorry for the late intrusion. But the President wanted you told immediately.

ROSE

I thought what was erased... I thought it wasn't covered by the subpoena.

BUZHARDT

We were misinformed.

Silence. No one moves.

A beat.

BUZHARDT (CONT'D)

You'll need to get your own attorney.

ROSE

Why?

GARMENT

Essentially the White House has a conflict of interest in representing you.

Buzhardt gives him a look to shut up. But it's too late. The words hang in the air.

ROSE
Conflict of interest... Represent
me against what?

BUZHARDT
At this time, it's best for you to
speak to an attorney.

ROSE
I did what I was told. Transcribe
the tapes. I came to you and told
when --

BUZHARDT
As I said. It's best for you to
have your own attorney.

ROSE
Then I will get one.
(beat)
We live in Washington, D.C. - you
can't walk two feet without hitting
a lawyer.

GARMENT
Not the kind you need.

Buzhardt clears his throat.

BUZHARDT
Okay. We'll leave you to it.

The lawyers get up and leave.

Rose is left alone. She stares at the cookies before her.
They look pathetic now. Always the good girl, always the
hostess. Hold on Rose. Her world crumbling.

SUPERIMPOSE: ONE MONTH EARLIER

EXT. ESTABLISHING SHOT OF THE WHITE HOUSE - OCTOBER 1, 1973

Under the image of this majestic building, we continue to
hear newscasters opine about Nixon and the subpoenaed tapes.
Everyone has an opinion. We hear the voices of newscasters,
the ubiquitous discussion around Washington and the world...
*Did Nixon do it? Did he act alone? What's on the tapes? Will
they lead to clues of the break-in? When will he turn over
the tapes?*

We HOLD on this image for a moment before we --

CUT TO:

INT. WEST WING CORRIDOR - DAY

Rose Woods rushes down the corridor holding THE BOX of SUBPOENAED TAPE RECORDINGS. (If they look like the tapes we saw in the basement, they should.)

She walks at a clipped pace. This is Rose at her best. Beyond a career secretary. Complete devotion to the President is an understatement. Just enough salt to be able to play in the boy's club. Exactly who you would want to be the private secretary to the most powerful leader of the free world.

LYNN HEFNER, 20s, Rose's secretary, pen and paper in hand. Her clothes and hair, serious and conservative, are modeled on Rose's. Lynn tries to keep pace...

LYNN

The Press Office is asking for a comment on the Vice President's rumored resignation.

ROSE

The President has no comment.

LYNN

I'll let publicity know that the President will not be making any public appearances for the day.

ROSE

(thinking)

Wait... The White House is still hosting the Aiton Elementary fourth-grade class for Halloween pumpkin carving today, right?

LYNN

Right.

ROSE

We should make sure that there's an impromptu visit from the President.

(beat)

Get Steve to schedule in the time. Some nice photos of the Boss carving pumpkins with public school kids. Cute ones.

LYNN

Got it.

ROSE
 How's the prayer breakfast? I want
 to get the list in front of the
 Boss by the end of the day.

LYNN
 Should be done by noon.

ROSE
 (half to herself)
 There's a new addition. Someone the
 Boss asked for... I have it written
 down...

They pass STEVE BULL, 34, Special Assistant to Nixon. He
 points to the TAPES.

STEVE
 I spoke to the General, asked about
 the June 20th tape. He says
 transcribe only the time when
 Ehrlichman's in the room.

ROSE
 I'll double-check before I start
 in.

Steve heads the opposite way, Rose turns back to Lynn.

ROSE (CONT'D)
 What's next?

LYNN
 You wanted me to remind you about
 the dinner with --

ROSE
 Dinner for the President of the
 Republic of the Ivory Coast. Send a
 memo of that dinner list to the
 Social Office.
 (beat)
 Is Sally from Social back from
 maternity leave tomorrow?

LYNN
 I believe so.

ROSE
 Let's get her something from the
 White House. Also make sure that
 Steve has scheduled in a doctor's
 appointment for the Boss. I
 promised Mrs. Nixon...

(MORE)

ROSE (CONT'D)
What's that name I'm forgetting for
the breakfast list...

She stops. We see dark shadows under her tired eyes.

LYNN
How late were you here last night?

ROSE
It went long.

LYNN
To think that a Special Prosecutor
can override executive privilege --

ROSE
The President will obey the law.

Lynn nods.

ROSE (CONT'D)
In the meantime... these tapes are
going to be the death of me.

They pass through --

INT. LYNN'S OFFICE - DAY

PHONES RING in the background -- accompanying the constant
percussive SOUND OF TYPEWRITERS. Lynn shares her space with
TWO OTHER SECRETARIES.

Lynn follows Rose into --

ROSE'S OFFICE

Rose stops. Smiles. She's remembered.

ROSE (CONT'D)
Senator Garret. That's the name I
forgot. Well, no wonder. He's a
liberal-leaning Democrat. Add him
to the prayer breakfast.

Lynn writes down the name. She waits at the door. Rose holds
her box of tapes. When Lynn leaves --

Rose goes straight to her WALL SAFE and puts all the tapes
inside. Except for one.

CLOSE ON: the tape marked JUNE 20, 1972.

She sits at her desk, tape in hand, checks her notes.
Everything in Rose's office has its place, immaculate.

Even the elephant figurines are in line, with their trunks all facing east.

ROSE (INTO PHONE) (CONT'D)
 General Haig. I'm starting the June 20th tape... The subpoena says Ehrlichman and Haldeman with President Nixon but the morning meeting is with Ehrlichman alone. Okay... Got it.

CUT TO:

LATER:

Rose, wearing oversized headphones, transcribes.

Every few seconds, she stops and replays the machine by her side. It's an arduous process. Stop. Start. Play. Rewind.

Steve Bull, special assistant to Nixon, peeks in.

STEVE
 How are you doing with the tapes?

ROSE
 I'm waiting for the new Uher to come. This machine has no pedal and it's slowing me down.
 (beat)
 Is the Boss anxious?

Steve doesn't need to reply. Of course he is.

STEVE
 The General wants me to remind you to just do the subpoenaed session, with Nixon and Ehrlichman alone.
 (beat)
 Let me know if you need anything.

Rose takes a deep breath and heads back into transcribing. She's tired. Stares back at the tape machine. The phone continues to RING.

CUT TO:

ROSE stands at her desk, sorts THE MAIL, as she cradles the phone with her chin.

ROSE
 That's correct. I think ten tables are fine. I'll come over...
 (MORE)

ROSE (CONT'D)
No, it has to be specific, per the
Boss's instructions.

A SECRET SERVICE AGENT enters.

SECRET SERVICE AGENT WONG
I've come bearing gifts. Behold the
UHER 5000 with foot pedal.

Rose's face lights up.

ROSE
Just in time.

She presses the CALL BUTTON to the other room.

ROSE (INTO INTERCOM) (CONT'D)
I'm going back to transcribing
hell, hopefully made easier with
the new Uher. Will you ladies cover
the phones?

CUT TO:

ROSE'S TYPEWRITER

Clicking away. The words "JUNE 20, 1972. EOB PRESIDENT NIXON,
HALDEMAN" are visible.

The camera pans down to ROSE'S FOOT ON A PEDAL. We see the
new UHER 5000. While it looks like a standard tape recorder
machine from the 1970s, it's as much a part of this story as
anyone else -- remember this machine.

Rose struggles to get the hang of the new contraption. She
tries to work the pedal, which starts and stops the tape
recorder, so she can have her hands free to type. Awkward at
first, but then we watch as Rose picks up speed.

Nixon's booming voice emanates from her headphones.

NIXON (ON THE TAPES)
There's no question there's a
double standard here...

She's listening carefully.

The phone RINGS. She ignores it.

The RINGING persists.

Lynn pops her head in -- motions to the phone and mouths,
"Your sister".

Rose nods, slips off her earring, and reaches over to answer the phone like she's done a million time before. (Remember this reach.) Immediately her professional face falls.

ROSE (INTO PHONE)
Anne. I don't have time to argue.
Can you tell me what I did wrong
later?

She sees the phone light up, indicating a call from inside the residence.

ROSE (INTO PHONE) (CONT'D)
I have to go.

She picks up the other line. Professional face back on.

ROSE (INTO PHONE) (CONT'D)
Good morning, Mrs. Nixon. No, of
course you're not disturbing me...
(laughs)
Of course. I'll check up on the
Boss's doctor's appointment. I'll
come to the residence after work
and we'll strategize... Well,
without HRH, I hope things are back
to normal...
(laughs)
See you soon.

She hangs up and returns to the transcription. Earphones back on. All systems go.

She presses down on the pedal. Rewinds a bit. Listens. White noise. Huh. She presses down on the pedal a second time. Still nothing. She rewinds again, this time by hand. Silence. She looks down at HER FOOT ON THE PEDAL and releases it. Wait, was it on the pedal? She can't be sure...

She looks around. Takes off her headphones. Now just presses play. White noise fills the room. She gets up to close the office door. Stands over the tape machine.

Rewinds the tape back to the beginning. She hears voices. Okay, good. Then the white noise. White noise. And then, clicking. She presses stop. Shit.

Takes out the tape, puts it back in and tries again. Deep breaths. Rose tries as many versions as possible of trying to will this tape to work.

Nothing works.

She waits a moment. Tries to return to the exact moment in time that it happened. Sits back in the chair as she was before she answered the phone. She puts on her headphones. Closes her eyes and silently prays. Presses play to --

White noise. Weird techno clicking. Again.

The gravity of what has happened sets in.

Panic washes over her face. She looks back down at the PEDAL. Reaches for the phone and with a calm voice...

ROSE (INTO PHONE) (CONT'D)
Agent Wong. Are you at your desk?

Rose smooths her skirt as she quickly heads to the --

OFFICE OF SECRET SERVICE

The on-site hub of the White House. AGENT WONG, 50s, stands and smiles when Rose enters.

AGENT WONG
How's the new recorder working out?
Does the pedal make a difference?

ROSE
About the pedal...

AGENT WONG
It's not working?

ROSE
You push the pedal down and it controls the tape.

AGENT WONG
That's right.

ROSE
Can the pedal erase?

AGENT WONG
I don't believe so... I'll call down and send someone --

ROSE
No. No. That's okay.

AGENT WONG
Rose, is there something --

ROSE
It's fine. I'll handle it. Forget I
said anything.

AGENT WONG
Are you sure? I'm happy to bring
you a new --

ROSE
No, no. Thank you.

INT. ROSE'S OFFICE - DAY

Rose plays the TAPE one more time. Only clicking. White
noise. Can this really be happening?

Rose sits at her desk. Immobile. In her hand is THE JUNE 20TH
TAPE.

She watches NIXON'S GREEN GUEST LIGHT turn off. She doesn't
move. Her hands are shaking.

Lynn comes by her door. Sees Rose sitting very still.

LYNN
Everything okay, Rose?

Rose looks up.

LYNN (CONT'D)
You're white as a sheet.

ROSE
Ivory Coast dinner list?

LYNN
Trading calls with the Social
Secretary Office.

ROSE
Good.

She sits unmoving. Takes a breath after Lynn leaves.

Rose heads from her office to --

STEVE BULL'S OFFICE

He sits at his desk, on the phone scheduling. Looks up and
waves Rose in to see the President. She heads straight to --

THE OVAL OFFICE GREAT WHITE DOOR

She takes a deep breath and KNOCKS. The President gives her a warm greeting. Rose smiles, but her face remains tight.

PRESIDENT NIXON (O.S.)
Rose. Come in. Come in!

CLOSE ON ROSE'S WORRIED FACE

ROSE
Mr. President, may I have a moment?

INT. CHIEF OF STAFF'S OFFICE - DAY

ALEXANDER HAIG, 48, hangs in the background as Buzhardt and Garment surround Rose.

BUZHARDT
Tell us exactly what you told the President. Again.

ROSE
I was transcribing the morning tape.

BUZHARDT
The June 20th tape.

ROSE
Yes. The morning. I believe I stopped at the point where they mention Ely, Nevada to answer the phone.

BUZHARDT
And after the phone call?

ROSE
It was blank, not quite blank... more like white noise then clicking... I just don't understand how I could have erased it.

Silence. No one speaks. Haig holds THE SUBPOENA in his hand. He speaks for the first time.

HAIG
How long?

ROSE
I'm sorry?

HAIG
How long's the gap that you erased?

ROSE

Four minutes. Maybe four and a half. Tops. No more. But I'm not even sure I erased it. It was a short phone call.

A long beat. Haig's face is unreadable.

HAIG

Four minutes. Are you sure?

ROSE

Yes.

HAIG

Could it have been longer?

ROSE

No.

She has THE TAPE in her lap.

He turns to the other lawyers as if Rose isn't even there. Hands the Subpoena to Buzhardt, who scours it.

HAIG

What do we think?

BUZHARDT

It's past the morning portion.

HAIG

So, what happened isn't even covered by the subpoena?

BUZHARDT

Correct. She got up to Ely... Ehrlichman left. The subpoena specifically talks about the three of them.

HAIG

A few minutes from a non-subpoenaed tape hardly seems worth a second thought.

Silence.

HAIG (CONT'D)

I'll speak with the President.

Haig leaves. Buzhardt follows suit. Once everyone is gone except Garment --

ROSE
Len, I really don't know how this
could have happened.

GARMENT
Don't worry about it.

ROSE
(half whispers)
It's June 20th. Right after the
Watergate break-in.

GARMENT
Doesn't matter.

ROSE
Maybe I should ask the Boss --

GARMENT
Best leave the President out of all
of this.

He pats her on the shoulder. She nods. Holding it together.

INT. ROSE'S OFFICE - DAY

Rose puts the tape back into the safe. Locks it.

INT. BATHROOM - DAY

Rose washes her face, fixes her hair. Puts on fresh lipstick.

INT. WHITE HOUSE RESIDENCE - SUN ROOM - DAY

PAT NIXON, 60s, smokes elegantly. She has a book on her lap
that she's not reading. She looks up to see Rose enter.

PAT
Did you read *The Post*? The things
they say about Dick. Unbelievable.
And Henry gets all the credit on
negotiating with China.

Rose sits beside her.

PAT (CONT'D)
Don't you look purdy. Date tonight
with anyone special?

ROSE
Dinner with Bob.

PAT

Handsome Bob. Maybe Bob will make you an honest woman. Tell him I can help with the ring.

ROSE

Of course.

PAT

You know what we should do? Make Bob jealous. Let's find you someone. A handsome bachelor. That'll get Bob moving.

ROSE

Just make sure this bachelor has lots of hair.

PAT

I'll make a list. Eligible Washingtonians with full heads of hair. Probably will give us at least five people to work with.

ROSE

Not a Democrat please.

PAT

Now we're down to two.

They both laugh. Enjoying their routine.

ON CUE, a WHITE HOUSE WAITSTAFF enters to serve them tea. Once he leaves --

PAT (CONT'D)

So. When were you going to tell me?

ROSE

Tell you...?

PAT

About today. I know what happened.

Rose freezes.

PAT (CONT'D)

I know what's going on.

ROSE

You do?

PAT
There are no secrets in the White House.

Beat.

PAT (CONT'D)
Dick had it out with Spiro.

Pat's proud of her discovery. Rose plays along.

ROSE
Oh, right.

PAT
I knew it was something when I called this afternoon and Dick rushed me off the phone to go on a car ride with General Haig. In the middle of the afternoon, for Christ's sake. Not on his schedule.

ROSE
The boss went off with General Haig this afternoon?

PAT
Whisked away by the General. Like two high school students on the way to the prom.

ROSE
What did Steve say?

Pat looks at her carefully.

PAT
You'd know better than I.

Pat looks at her. Years of friendship between them.

PAT (CONT'D)
Did something else happen?

ROSE
No. God. Spiro. What an ass.

PAT
That's what I thought. Never a dull moment.

Rose nods. Her eyes widen to herself.

INT. MEDITERRANEAN RESTAURANT - NIGHT

Rose picks at her food. Across from her is BOB KNIGHT, 50s, professional lobbyist, matinee idol looks and the perfect escort: the right schools, the right dress, the right pedigree. He lights a cigarette.

BOB

... I told the donors about the Khrushchev visit when my dinner waistcoat clasp broke.

Rose nods. Barely listening.

BOB (CONT'D)

He couldn't believe one of the waitstaff returned with a yellow wooden golf tee. Which I used. Worked like a charm...

Rose nods, with a faraway look.

BOB (CONT'D)

Are you going to tell me what's going on in that big head of yours?

ROSE

Nothing.

BOB

And yet, you're not enthralled by my charming anecdotes.

ROSE

The golf tee as makeshift clasp is a great story. Sure to get some checkbooks opened.

Bob drops it, but watches her carefully. Rose opens up.

ROSE (CONT'D)

The President is worried about the tapes.

BOB

He worries too much. They'll never make him hand them over.

ROSE

Maybe...

A HANDSOME WAITER walks by. Bob stops to watch him. The waiter leans over to light Bob's cigarette.

The two men lock eyes. The waiter rushes off. Bob raises an eyebrow to Rose, who watched the exchange. She smiles in acknowledgement.

BOB
Let's go out.

ROSE
It's been a long day...

BOB
Someplace fun. Where we can dance
and look at handsome men. Turkish
Embassy?
(beat)
Come on, it's never as bad as you
think...

She nods, trying to shake off the day.

CUT TO:

CLOSE ON: ROSE'S WALL SAFE

Rose takes out another MARKED TAPE "AUGUST 15".

CLOSE ON: The TAPE MARKED JUNE 20TH sits inside. Defiantly staring back at her. She quickly shuts the safe door. Pull out to reveal --

INT. ROSE'S OFFICE - MORNING

Rose is there alone. We notice the quiet. No typewriters or office noise.

Rose transcribes. Very carefully, her eyes focused, making sure there are no problems. Periodically her eyes inadvertently flicker over to the safe. A reminder of her mistake.

SUPERIMPOSE: OCTOBER 20, 1973

INT. WHITE HOUSE - STEVE BULL'S OFFICE - DAY

Rose waits outside Nixon's office. There is commotion all around with WEST WING STAFFERS rushing about; clearly something big has happened. Rose remains calm. So does Steve, who has his head buried in his work. Neither speaks. Only when he is sure that no one can hear --

STEVE

Did the Attorney General really
refuse to fire the Special
Prosecutor?

ROSE

(quickly)
Yes.

STEVE

Haig is on a warpath. He --

He stops speaking as Haig, Garment, and Buzhardt clip past them. As they enter the President's office, they barely give Rose a glance. The door shuts, leaving only Steve and Rose.

ROSE

Whatever happens. We stand by the
Boss.

After a moment...

NIXON (V.O.)

Rose?

Rose heads into the Oval Office.

INT. WHITE HOUSE - OVAL OFFICE - DAY

CLOSE ON Rose, pen and paper in hand, ready to take dictation. Flanked by Garment, Buzhardt, and Haig. All three face Nixon (we see the back of Nixon's head).

BUZHARDT

The Attorney General and his deputy
have refused to fire Cox.

NIXON

Goddammit. Goddammit.

GARMENT

They're resigning.

NIXON

Jesus Christ. Why are they doing
this to me?

BUZHARDT

The question is, who can replace
the Attorney General?

HAIG

The tapes cannot get out.

Rose looks up. No one notices.

HAIG (CONT'D)

We need to insulate ourselves and find someone who can fire Cox and contain the situation.

Rose keeps her head down. We hear a CRASH as Nixon hurls a glass across the room.

CUT TO:

Rose sits, typing up notes. Steve Bull comes over.

STEVE

The General told me to make the President's response to their resignations... short and sweet... But considering the current mood...

Rose takes it and reads.

ROSE

(reads)

"With regret, the President has discharged Attorney General Archibald Cox due to his refusal to adhere with the President's instruction that he was not to see or compel notes, tapes, or memoranda of private conversations of the President."

Beat.

STEVE

Well?

ROSE

Change "adhere" to "comply".

Steve nods, is about to go. Rose is still thinking, revising.

ROSE (CONT'D)

And lose the "with regret". Keep it short. No need to be sweet.

INT. WHITE HOUSE RESIDENCE - SUN ROOM

CLOSE ON: TELEVISION

- WHITE HOUSE PRESS SECRETARY RON ZIEGLAR

PRESS SECRETARY ZIEGLAR
(reads from statement)

The President has discharged Attorney General Archibald Cox because of his refusal to comply with the President's instruction that he was not to see or compel notes, tapes, or memoranda of private conversations of the President.

- JOHN CHANCELLOR OF NBC NEWS

JOHN CHANCELLOR

Good evening. The country tonight is in the midst of what may be the most serious Constitutional crisis in its history.

- DAN RATHER reporting outside the White House.

DAN RATHER

...What is now being called the Saturday Massacre...

- WALTER CRONKITE

WALTER CRONKITE

...The President has fired the special Watergate prosecutor, Archibald Cox. Because of the President's action, the Attorney General has resigned. Elliott Richardson has quit, saying he cannot carry out Mr. Nixon's instructions. Richardson's deputy, William Ruckelshaus, has been fired.

Pull back to reveal --

Nixon's daughter, JULIE NIXON, 25, sitting on the couch, flipping through channels. Rose goes over and sits beside her.

JULIE NIXON

Daddy was so loyal to Mr. Cox...
For him to resign makes him look...

Julie wells up. Rose comforts her.

ROSE

Your father is the greatest president we have ever known. We just need to remain strong.

She takes the remote and turns off the TV.

ROSE (CONT'D)

Where's your mother?

Long beat.

JULIE NIXON

Doing what she does when she's upset.

Rose nods. Understands.

INT. WHITE HOUSE RESIDENCE - NIXON BEDROOM - DAY

Pat tosses out piles of dresses onto the bed. She's half zipped in a yellow dress, cigarette dangling from her lips. When she sees Rose enter, she ushers her in.

PAT

Good, you're here. Zip me up?
(re: her dress)
Remember this one?

Rose zips her up.

ROSE

From the '69 campaign.

Pat considers herself in the mirror. Quickly shimmies out of the dress. Picks up a pink gown.

PAT

How about this number?

ROSE

State dinner at the Del.

PAT

Right again!

Pat disappears into the walk-in closet.

PAT (O.S.) (CONT'D)

So, how bad is it?

ROSE

The resignations or the tapes?

She fingers a brocade dress that lies beside her.

PAT (O.S.)
What's on them?

Silence.

Pat comes back out, wearing a black dress. She looks at Rose.

PAT (CONT'D)
Come on, Rose. What's on the tapes?

ROSE
Nothing. Personal conversations.

PAT
Where he might not be seen in his
best light?

ROSE
Yes.

Beat.

PAT
And that's it?

ROSE
That's it.

PAT
And you will tell me when I need to
worry.

ROSE
Yes.

Pat goes over to the table. Lights another cigarette.

PAT
I thought when Haldeman left,
things would get better.

ROSE
We're still cleaning up his mess.

Pat fixes them both drinks. Rose takes hers and takes a sip.
It's strong.

ROSE (CONT'D)
I'm going to have to testify.

PAT
To what?

ROSE
Chain of custody.

PAT
So, you tell them what you did. How you got the tapes, how you kept them, transcribed them.

Rose sits in the silence. Takes a long drink.

ROSE
I've never testified before...

Pat takes a scarf and wraps it around her head like a fabulous film star.

PAT
Think Marlene Dietrich in *Witness for the Prosecution*. All you need is a wide brim hat and dark lovely red lipstick.

Rose laughs. Pat tosses her the scarf.

PAT (CONT'D)
They can't touch you if you don't let them.

SUPERIMPOSE: NOVEMBER 7, 1973

INT. WHITE HOUSE MESS HALL - DAY

White House restaurant usually reserved for senior level White House Staff, Cabinet Members, and selected guests -- today it's only Buzhardt, Garment, and Rose discussing the case over plates of soft-shell crabs.

BUZHARDT
...All they want to know is who had access to the tapes. Who could get to your safe, and if the President had the combination.

ROSE
No one had access.

BUZHARDT
Exactly.

BUZHARDT (CONT'D)
Remember not to volunteer anything.

Rose waits for a WAITER to finish refilling the glasses of water.

ROSE
What about *the* tape?

BUZHARDT
Which tape?

ROSE
The tape. The June 20th tape that was erased. The tape that had four minutes --

BUZHARDT
It's not part of the subpoena. They don't ask. You don't tell.

GARMENT
We're all on the same team here.

ROSE
Okay.

BUZHARDT
Let's go over it again.

CUT TO:

CLOSE ON ROSE'S FACE

ROSE
Eight tapes. I was in charge of transcribing them.

Pull back to reveal --

INT. COURTROOM - DAY

Rose testifies on the stand. Mr. Buzhardt is standing in front of her mid-direct examination.

The PROSECUTION TEAM -- TWO BEARDED MEN and a WOMAN, all under 35, idealistic, and eager: RICHARD BEN-VENISTE, CARL FELDBAUM, AND JILL VOLNER -- takes copious notes.

Presiding is JUDGE SIRICA, 69, listening intently.

BUZHARDT
And where were the tapes kept when you weren't transcribing them?

ROSE
My wall safe.

BUZHARDT
How many copies?

ROSE
One.

BUZHARDT
What about the typewriter ribbon?

ROSE
The typewriter ribbon was burned.

BUZHARDT
And when did you finish?

ROSE
October 24.

BUZHARDT
Where are those tapes now?

ROSE
In a safe in my office.

BUZHARDT
And you are satisfied with the
transcription and quality of the
tapes?

Rose pauses. Gives Buzhardt a hard stare.

JUDGE SIRICA
Excuse me, can anyone hear Miss
Woods? Can you repeat that for the
record?

Rose leans into the mic.

ROSE
(louder)
Yes.

BUZHARDT
I have no further questions.

MRS. VOLNER, 30, the only woman at the prosecution table,
approaches. She wears a miniskirt.

VOLNER
Where do you keep this safe?

ROSE
In my office.

VOLNER
Combination lock?

ROSE
Yes.

VOLNER
Where does the President retain
documents of a top-secret nature?

ROSE
He doesn't. If you're talking about
national security then he would
send those back to Mr. Kissinger's
people. Anything private he would
keep in the residence.

VOLNER
Does the President have a
combination to your safe?

ROSE
No.

VOLNER
And you were in charge of putting
the tapes into the recorder and
transcribing them.

ROSE
Yes.

Volner goes back to the prosecution table and brings over a
UHER RECORDING MACHINE, the same kind that Rose used. Rose's
eyes quickly dart over to Buzhardt.

VOLNER
Were there any precautions made to
make sure you didn't accidentally
hit the erase button?

She glances over to Buzhardt, but he just sits there.

ROSE
Can you repeat the question?

VOLNER
(annoyed)
What precautions did you make to
not erase the tapes?

Rose takes another quarter glance over to Buzhardt. Still nothing.

VOLNER (CONT'D)

Ms. Woods?

ROSE

Everyone said to be careful. So, I was careful. I don't want to sound as if I'm bragging, but I am not so stupid.

(to Buzhardt)

If I were told that if you push a button it will erase on a small machine, then I would use every precaution not to do that.

VOLNER

What precautions did you take?

ROSE

I used my head. It's the only one I had to use.

Judge Sirica smiles. So does the stenographer. There is LAUGHTER in the gallery. She's winning her audience over. Rose smiles.

VOLNER

And who was on the first tape, dated June 20th --

ROSE

It was the President and Mr. Ehrlichman and Mr. Haldeman --

Buzhardt jumps up.

BUZHARDT

Objection. This is about chain of custody, not the substance of the tape recordings.

JUDGE SIRICA

Sustained. Let's move on, Ms. Volner.

INT. SEDAN - MOVING - DAY

Rose sits in the back, next to Garment and Buzhardt. Buzhardt taps her on the hand.

BUZHARDT

You were a hit! The judge and the press loved you!

She pulls her hand away. She can barely contain herself.

ROSE

Why didn't you object or say something about the erasures?

BUZHARDT

They were only talking about the subpoenaed portions of the tapes.

ROSE

But you could have asked me. I would have explained what happened.

(beat)

It feels like lying.

GARMENT

An omission is not a lie. You did not lie.

ROSE

And you wonder why people hate lawyers.

No one speaks. Rose turns to the window.

SUPERIMPOSE: NOVEMBER 15, 1973

INT. WHITE HOUSE - SOCIAL SECRETARY'S OFFICE - DAY

LUCY WINCHESTER, 36, Social Secretary, stands over a large table. Rose's by her side, distracted.

Lucy rearranges WHITE HOUSE SEATING PLACARDS, in groups of eight, in different orders.

The ultimate example of political maneuvering: seating a White House Dinner.

LUCY

I'm thinking white tie. Foreign leaders will love wearing medallions across their tummies.

She steps back and admires her handwork.

LUCY (CONT'D)

What do you think? Rose?

Rose snaps back to attention and looks at it carefully.

ROSE

You put Henry next to the Southern debutante?

LUCY

She's a junior from Vassar.

ROSE

Henry's been here, hasn't he.

(off Lucy's look)

Where did you have him before?

LUCY

Next to the Russian Ambassador's wife. He said he didn't want to be next to an old crone with no teeth.

Rose switches the cards.

ROSE

Blame me. Tell him the next time there's a beautiful spy, I will make sure she's at his table. For now, he must play nice with the crone.

I/E. GENERAL HAIG'S OFFICE - DAY

Haig is at his desk. Buzhardt comes to the door. Haig looks up, impatient.

BUZHARDT

I've heard from the Special Prosecutor's Office.

HAIG

(impatient)

And?

BUZHARDT

We're going to have to hand over the entire June 20th tape.

Haig motions for him to come in. He shuts the door, leaving us outside.

INT. WEST WING CORRIDOR - DAY

Rose walks through her office and into --

STEVE BULL'S OFFICE

Haig speaks quietly with Steve. When they see her enter, they stop talking.

HAIG

Get back to me when you find it.

Haig smiles affably to Rose.

HAIG (CONT'D)

Ms. Woods. You're looking well.

ROSE

General Haig.

HAIG

You finish up the transcribing?

ROSE

Yes. All complete.

HAIG

Good. Good.

Haig leaves.

Rose watches curiously.

STEVE

Henry's scheduled with the President regarding the meeting with Arab foreign ministers.

ROSE

I'll keep my eye out, or follow the scent of the young female interns.

She looks back in the direction of Haig.

ROSE (CONT'D)

What was that?

Steve shrugs, the PHONE RINGS, he answers. Rose doesn't press.

INT. WHITE HOUSE - OFFICE OF MANAGEMENT AND BUDGET - DAY

LAWRENCE HIGBY, 26, Haldeman's former assistant, works at his desk. He looks up to find HAIG standing over him. Lawrence reflexively sits up straight.

HAIG
Mr. Higby. I need a favor.

INT. EOB OFFICE - HALDEMAN OFFICE - NIGHT

Lawrence Higby nervously enters. Haig and Buzhardt are waiting for him, standing by the safe.

Higby spins the dial of the combination lock. CLICK. It pops open. He hands a FOLDER over to Haig. Haig quickly opens the folder, looking for something... He sees something...

HAIG (CONT'D)
(to Lawrence)
You can go, Mr. Higby.

INT. WHITE HOUSE CORRIDOR - DAY

Rose catches Haig in the hallway.

ROSE
May I have a moment?

HAIG
Always for the great Ms. Woods.

ROSE
Do you need any help with the tapes?

HAIG
Tapes?

ROSE
The transcribed tapes. They're still in my safe.

HAIG
Right. We will return them to the Secret Service before the hearing.

ROSE
(presses on)
Anything else you need from me?

HAIG
Nothing more than you already do.

He smiles and walks away at a clipped pace.

INT. STEVE BULL'S OFFICE - DAY

Rose enters. Steve is filing papers

ROSE
The Boss at the EOB?

STEVE
Yep. Then dinner at Trader Vics
with Mrs. Nixon.

Rose nods.

ROSE
So, tell me.
(off Steve's blank look)
What is going on with the General?

STEVE
You know I don't know half of the
things that come out of the
General's mouth.

She doesn't buy it. And he knows it.

STEVE (CONT'D)
He wanted to contact Lawrence.

ROSE
Haldeman's old assistant?

STEVE
They wanted to get into Haldeman's
safe. No one had the combination.
Lawrence had to call Haldeman up
and ask for the combo.

ROSE
What does the General want with
HRH's files?

He shakes his head.

ROSE (CONT'D)
Steve...

STEVE
June 20th.

INT. GEORGETOWN BAR - NIGHT

Rose scans the bar. Pink Floyd's ubiquitous MONEY blares as YOUNG WASHINGTON: STAFFERS, LOBBYISTS, enjoy the last drop of Happy Hour. It's still early: ties are loosened but people are still on their best behavior.

She sees LAWRENCE HIGBY sitting at a table with FRIENDS. They lock eyes.

CUT TO:

ROSE AND LAWRENCE AT THE BAR

ROSE

Why did General Haig want to get into Haldeman's safe so badly?

LAWRENCE

Honestly, when Haig came to my desk I thought he was going to complain about Saudi budgets and oil supplies.

ROSE

What did he want?

LAWRENCE

Haldeman's notes.

ROSE

For June 20th?

LAWRENCE

Yes.

ROSE

I thought that was not covered by the subpoena.

Beat.

LAWRENCE

This is bad, isn't it?

Rose doesn't answer.

INT. MARYLAND PARK - DAY

SUBURBAN MOMS let their CHILDREN play on the SWINGS, TEETER-TOTTERS, and MONKEY BARS.

Rose sits on a bench alongside her sister, ANNE, 30s, former prom queen, not a hair out of place.

They watch ANNE'S CHILDREN, 5 and 7, play in the SANDBOX.

ANNE

It sounds like they don't have your best interest in mind.

ROSE

No. President Nixon always has taken care of me. I just have to figure out what's --

ANNE

My advice? Find a new job.

Anne's 5-YEAR-OLD runs over, shoe laces untied. Rose leans over and ties them.

ANNE (CONT'D)

Did you even know that he was taping all those conversations?

ROSE

Of course not. I've told you a million times that I had no idea and the President would never --

ANNE

All Hank's friends still talk about how pretty you are.

ROSE

I work for the President of the United States. Anyone else would be proud that their sister had come so far.

Anne pulls out a compact and fixes her lipstick.

ANNE

There's more to life than a career. Even if it is working for the President.

ROSE

They're my family.

Anne turns to her. Hurt and annoyed.

ANNE

No, I'm your family. They're your employers.

Silence.

ANNE (CONT'D)
Your priorities, Rose. That has
always been your problem.

INT. BUZHARDT'S OFFICE - DAY

Haig KNOCKS on the closed door. Opens it.

Inside we see our two lawyers: Buzhardt and Garment in an
intense conversation.

HAIG
Where're we at?

Buzhardt and Garment look down at the table. An Uher between
them.

BUZHARDT
We might have a problem.

GARMENT
We can't duplicate the erasure.

Haig's face remains impassive, but his mind is racing.

HAIG
Then figure out how you can.

INT. WHITE HOUSE RESIDENCE - DINING ROOM - NIGHT

Post-dinner, Rose sits at the table with Pat, JULIE NIXON and
HER HUSBAND DAVID EISENHOWER, and TRICIA NIXON, 27. President
Nixon's half-eaten plate is still at the table.

PAT
What should we watch tonight?

JULIE
Not Around the World in Eighty Days
please.

PAT
I vote *The Good, the Bad and the*
Ugly.
(beat)
Otherwise known as a day with *The*
Washington Post.

They all laugh.

PAT (CONT'D)

Rose, you be the deciding vote.
What movie should we see?

JULIE

Please. Rose, be on my side. *Bang
the Drum Slowly.*

TRICIA

Around the World, please. When Dad
comes back I'll get him on our
side, Rose.

Rose smiles. She loves this family.

ROSE

I choose Eastwood. Definitely
Eastwood.

Pat gives Rose a kind look.

INT. APARTMENT - FOGGY BOTTOM - DAY

Mid-bridal shower. A GROUP OF WOMEN surround the BRIDE-TO-BE
as she opens presents. One kitchen appliance after another.

Rose sits demurely, but her mind's somewhere else. Buzhardt's
Secretary, KIMBERLY ANNE COOPER, 35, hands a drink to Rose.

KIMBERLY ANNE

You look like you could use it.

Rose takes the drink. The bride opens another box -- this one
is small and thin. THE WHITE HOUSE RECEPTIONIST, 20s, from
Texas, claps her hands in excitement.

WHITE HOUSE RECEPTIONIST

Just for a little fun.

The bride pulls out silky bright PINK LINGERIE. Some of the
women squeal. Kimberly Anne finishes her drink.

KIMBERLY ANNE

Who needs more ice?

Rose watches KIMBERLY ANNE head to the --

KITCHEN

Kimberly Anne uses an ICE PICK to chip away at an ice block
in the sink.

Rose enters.

ROSE
Need help?

Kimberly Anne hands Rose the pick and puts some ice into glasses. Then lights a cigarette.

KIMBERLY ANNE
How long until our bride quits and moves into a Georgetown brownstone?

ROSE
A year. Then a move to the suburbs when she gets pregnant.

KIMBERLY ANNE
These bridal showers, how many have we had this year?

ROSE
Three.

Kimberly Anne looks at her carefully.

KIMBERLY ANNE
You don't want to be the last woman standing.

She offers Rose a cigarette. Rose lights it, takes a long drag. Rose waits for her moment.

ROSE
Has Buzhardt told you anything more about the tapes?

KIMBERLY ANNE
Just that he was in a tizzy about the new Uher shipment.

ROSE
(plays along)
Right. The new Uher shipment.

KIMBERLY ANNE
I couldn't believe the rush order. 10 Uher 5000 and 10 Sony model tapes. Can you imagine?

ROSE
(carefully)
You wonder why they ordered all those Uhers...

KIMBERLY ANNE

Who knows, and who am I to question. Buzhardt is a good boss and seems to know what he's doing. Aren't you the one that says the President and his men always know best?

ROSE

The President does.

KIMBERLY ANNE

Exactly.

(beat)

Anyway, on to more interesting things... You're coming out for drinks next week? I made Lynn put it in the books a month ago.

ROSE

Of course.

KIMBERLY ANNE

I have someone for you to meet. Bert's friend. You'll like him.

Rose puts on a smile, gives a little nod. The White House receptionist, now a little drunk, peaks her head in.

WHITE HOUSE RECEPTIONIST

You ladies coming with the ice?

Rose follows the women back to the party; her party face on but her worried eyes grow dark.

INT. EXECUTIVE OFFICE BRANCH - CONFERENCE ROOM - NIGHT

An NSA TECHNICIAN makes a presentation of how the UHER RECORDER works. Behind him a SERIES OF BLUEPRINTS of the model are set on easels.

He passes out a NEW UHER 5000 to each SEATED MAN in the conference room. Some faces we recognize. Buzhardt and Garment.

NSA TECHNICIAN

Everyone take a tape from the pile in the center.

All the men take one.

NSA TECHNICIAN (CONT'D)

Now, for purposes of this experiment, I have before you copies of the 1972 Bootleg special of the Rolling Stones.

Some men GROAN, some LAUGH.

NSA TECHNICIAN (CONT'D)

Your goal here, in all seriousness, is to recreate what happened to the June 20th tape. Try and manipulate the tapes.

BUZHARDT

The question to be answered is, can we duplicate the erasure.

Each man does as he's told, puts on the headphones, sets the PEDAL of the UHERS at their feet. As they start to press play, we hear Mick Jagger's SEDUCTIVE VOICE --

ROLLING STONES (PRELAP)

Please allow me to introduce myself...

INT. ROSE'S OFFICE - NIGHT

CLOSE on TWO SUITED MEN searching Rose's office. We don't see their faces, but in a series of quick cuts we see they are quickly, methodically, searching the office, careful to keep everything in place. (If this feels like the break-in scene of the Plumbers in ALL THE PRESIDENTS MEN, it should.)

ROLLING STONES (O.S.)

I'm a man of wealth and taste. I've been around for a long, long year..

What they are looking for we don't know. ONE SUITED MAN, wearing LEATHER GLOVES works the wall safe. Carefully listening, like a safe cracker. CLICK. The safe opens.

CUT TO:

OUTSIDE HALLWAY - we see that there is OLIVER WRIGHT, 23, part of the night cleaning crew, who has heard the ruckus in Rose's room, he stops. Realizes that being witness is not a smart idea, he quietly heads in the opposite direction.

ROLLING STONES (CONT'D)

Stole many a man's hope and faith...

INT. ROSE'S OFFICE - MORNING

She sits down, pulls the cover off her typewriter. As she does, Rose notices one of her ELEPHANT FIGURINES on the table is a little off-center. Strange. She quickly turns his trunk to face east.

Now she takes a closer look at her desk and office. Her spidey sense is tingling. Something is imperceptibly off. She heads to the safe. Opens it and sees the tapes.

Checks the JUNE 20th TAPE. It still sits with the rest of the other seven tapes.

Buzhardt peeks his head into her office.

BUZHARDT
Ready for the handoff?

Rose nods, but is clearly unsettled.

INT. ROSE'S OFFICE - DAY

Buzhardt and a SECRET SERVICE AGENT are given the tapes by Rose, as she takes them out of the safe. Buzhardt speaks into a mini dictaphone.

BUZHARDT
The official handover for chain of custody, 10:30 am, turning over the subpoenaed tapes back to the Secret Service from Ms. Woods' safe.

The Agent leaves with the BOX OF TAPES. Buzhardt smiles at Rose, but she's worried.

INT. WHITE HOUSE SUN ROOM - DAY

Rose tracks down USHER REGINALD WRIGHT, 50s, African American, as he cleans the room. When he sees her, he straightens up.

USHER REGINALD
Ms. Woods. I didn't see you there, will you be wanting this room?

ROSE
I need to speak with you.

USHER REGINALD
How can I help you?

Rose waits.

ROSE

I have been... I need to know who was in the West Wing last night. After hours. The cleaning crew?

He looks at her. She looks as AN AIDE PASSES.

A beat.

USHER REGINALD

When was this?

ROSE

Last night. Who was on duty?

Another beat. We can see in Usher Reginald's eyes that he knows something.

USHER REGINALD

I'm sorry. I can't help you.

INT. WHITE HOUSE KITCHEN - DAY

GLADYS WRIGHT, ASSISTANT PASTRY CHEF, 40s, African American, works on the finishing touches of petit fours.

GLADYS

Rose -- if you're checking on the menu, I have it noted that the Romanian president has an upset stomach.

ROSE

I need to speak to Reginald.

Gladys looks up.

GLADYS

Reggie? I guess he would be in the residence. Did you check the sun room?

Rose nods.

ROSE

Actually I found him.

GLADYS

Wonderful.

ROSE
Was Reginald was on duty last
night?

Gladys gets back to work on the petit fours.

GLADYS
What did he tell you?

ROSE
He didn't.

Gladys smiles.

GLADYS
Then I guess that's your answer.
(beat)
Anything else I can help you with?

ROSE
No. Everything looks lovely. As
always.

She leaves. Gladys stops icing, stares after her.

INT. GARMENT'S OFFICE - DAY

Rose enters. Garment is knee-deep in paperwork. He looks up
and smiles. There's an easy camaraderie between them.

GARMENT
How're things?

ROSE
Good.

She looks at the door.

ROSE (CONT'D)
Okay to shut it?

He nods, and she does.

ROSE (CONT'D)
Do I have to worry about anything,
Len?

GARMENT
No. Why?

ROSE
I'm not an idiot. I know something
is going on.
(MORE)

ROSE (CONT'D)

I know there are secret meetings.

(whispers)

I could swear someone might have been in my office last night. Is this about the erasure, because I know --

GARMENT

There's nothing.

ROSE

I just need to know. I need you to tell me if I need to worry.

A beat.

GARMENT

You don't need to worry.

Garment looks like he wants to say more. But doesn't.

I/E. WRIGHT HOUSE - MARYLAND - NIGHT

Rose parks her car in front of a WELL-MANICURED ROW OF HOUSES. It's a quiet street, a two-bus transfer commute away from the White House. A whole different world.

Rose gets out of the car. Looks around. Some NEIGHBORS sitting on the porch look at her, more like stare.

Rose heads to the house with the RED DOOR. KNOCKS.

Gladys answers. When she sees it's Rose, she crosses her arms.

ROSE

I need to speak with Reginald.

GLADYS

I thought that he was pretty clear.

ROSE

I know. And I know that you are worried and thinking --

GLADYS

You don't know what we're thinking.

Beat.

ROSE

Please... A moment of your time.

Gladys' face softens.

INT. WRIGHT HOUSE KITCHEN - NIGHT

CLOSE ON THREE PIES cooling on the counter.

PULL BACK TO REVEAL:

Rose sitting across from Usher Reginald and Gladys.

Usher Reginald holds his hands tightly.

USHER REGINALD

I don't know what you want me to say, Ms. Woods. I don't know.

ROSE

I understand you don't want to get involved.

USHER REGINALD

These are good jobs we have. Number one rule at the White House, look the other way.

ROSE

I understand.

GLADYS

Do you?

Silence.

USHER REGINALD

What was taken? Something valuable?

GLADYS

Reggie, no.

USHER REGINALD

Are the police involved?

ROSE

No. Nothing like that. I don't think so. Actually, I'm not sure. But no one's going to get in trouble.

GLADYS

And you think someone from the support staff took it?

Then it dawns on her the cause for their nervousness.

ROSE
No. Oh, no. Nothing like that.

Silence.

ROSE (CONT'D)
No one at the White House is
asking. Just me.

Usher Reginald and Gladys look at each other. This might be
even worse.

USHER REGINALD
Why do you want to know if one of
the under-butlers or ushers were
there?

ROSE
Someone broke into my office.

USHER REGINALD
You say nothing will happen, but
when something does come out...

GLADYS
(pointedly)
They don't fire the white
secretary.

ROSE
Someone broke into my office. Or
some people. Looking for something
and I have no idea what for. I
don't know what or why.

They don't respond. Rose gets upset.

ROSE (CONT'D)
I have always done what I've been
told. I have served the President
from when he was a Senator from
California to Vice President to
President. Twenty-three years.
(beat)
I've devoted my life to playing by
the rules. But I don't know the
game now. I don't know the rules.
(beat)
I'm sorry. I'm sorry to bother you.
I'll let myself out.

Gladys and Reginald exchange looks as she leaves.

INT. ROSE'S OFFICE - DAY

Rose works at her desk.

Usher Reginald enters in with A BOUQUET OF AUTUMN FLOWERS in a vase.

Rose looks up.

ROSE

Is this for the residence? Is Mrs. Nixon expecting the bouquet?

USHER REGINALD

I don't believe so.

Rose looks at him quizzically. He stands there awkwardly. A few people pass by the door.

USHER REGINALD (CONT'D)

Beautiful day today.

ROSE

Yes.

USHER REGINALD

I'm meeting my nephew tonight at the Broadway Diner. Celebrating him making Dean's List.

ROSE

That's wonderful.

USHER REGINALD

We'll be there at 7 o'clock.

Beat. He looks at her.

USHER REGINALD (CONT'D)

7 o'clock. You would like that diner. Even Gladys says it makes good desserts.

He looks at her. Rose nods, understands.

ROSE

The Broadway Diner. I will check it out.

He nods and leaves as Lynn walks in.

INT. BOARDWALK DINER - NIGHT

Rose sits in a booth, nursing a CUP OF COFFEE. Across from her: Usher Reginald and his NEPHEW, OLIVER WRIGHT, the young usher we saw witness the break-in. Now we realize who Usher Reginald and Gladys were protecting.

USHER REGINALD
He can't lose his job.
(proudly)
My nephew's gonna go to medical school.

OLIVER
I'm taking the MCATs this spring.

ROSE
No one will know. I promise.

Reginald gives a nod to Oliver.

OLIVER
They were in your office.

ROSE
Who?

Oliver shakes his head.

ROSE (CONT'D)
It will never come back to you.

Oliver turns to Reginald, who nods.

OLIVER
The lawyers. Mr. Buzhardt and Mr. Garment.

This lands on Rose. Hard.

INT. ROSE'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Bob makes martinis for himself and Rose, as Rose fiddles with her ELEPHANT FIGURINES on her ETAGERE.

In the background, the television blares the news of the Mideast crisis.

BOB
What were they looking for?

ROSE
God if I know.

BOB
Go to the President. Tell him.

Rose points the TV.

ROSE
He has more important things to
worry about.

BOB
Is that it?

ROSE
What do you mean?

BOB
I mean, is there a part of you
that's more afraid that the
President already knows?

Rose refuses to answer.

INT. JUDGE SIRICA'S OFFICE - NIGHT

Judge Sirica shows Buzhardt and Garment to their seats.

JUDGE SIRICA
I read your memorandum. I have to
say, I'm surprised.

BUZHARDT
As were we. But the fact is, there
are only three people with access
to the erasure.

GARMENT
And we're confident that Rose Mary
Woods can provide the court with a
much-needed explanation.

JUDGE SIRICA
Schedule her to come back in and
we'll notify the prosecution. Are
you all in agreement that she's
responsible?

BUZHARDT
We are.

Garment looks down, feeling guilty.

INT. ROSE'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

CLOSE ON: WHITE HOUSE LOG SHEET for OCTOBER 1, 1973. PULL OUT TO REVEAL --

Rose scouring the list.

Hair in rollers and in her stocking feet. She drinks bottled beer and eats from a PLATE OF COOKIES, frustrated. Looks out the window.

She accidentally spills her beer on her blouse and knocks the plate of cookies off the table. There's a KNOCK on the door.

Rose puts on a ROBE to answer the door.

We're back to our very first Rose and the lawyers scene. But now from Rose's perspective. She opens the door and we see Garment and Buzhardt at the door.

ROSE

One second.

She closes the door and eyes her WORK PRODUCT on the table, then the COOKIES on the floor.

CUT TO:

PLATE OF COOKIES

BUZHARDT

As I said, it's best for you to have your own attorney

ROSE

Then I will get one.

(beat)

We live in Washington, D.C. You can't walk two feet without hitting a lawyer.

GARMENT

Not the kind you need.

Buzhardt clears his throat. Even he knows how ridiculous it sounds.

INT. WHITE HOUSE RESIDENCE - SUN ROOM

Rose sits with a tea cup in her lap, trying to put on a brave face. Pat is across from her, concerned.

PAT
What did they say, exactly?

ROSE
Mrs. Nixon. I don't think you
should get involved.

PAT
If you're involved, I'm involved.

ROSE
I'm sure one of these names will be
fine enough to represent me --

PAT
Over my dead body. We need someone
we can trust that answers to no
one.

Pat gets up and leaves the room.

In a moment Pat returns, holding a BUSINESS CARD.

PAT (CONT'D)
Someone more... independent.

Rose takes the business card.

ROSE
(reads card)
Jerome Rine.

PAT
Now, just to warn you. He's...
ethnic... But he's a good lawyer.
Most important, he's not part of
the Washington machine.

ROSE
Thank you, Mrs. Nixon.

PAT
Rose. You've been supporting the
president for 23 years. You baby-
sat the girls, they call you Aunt
Rose...
(beat)
Can you at least call me Pat in the
residence?

ROSE
Thank you, Pat.

PAT
See? Was that so hard?

INT. POSIN'S DELI - DAY

Rose holds her purse tightly as she surveys the old fashioned Jewish deli: complete with red pleather booths and laminated menus. A meat case across the back, and a CROTCHETY DELI GUY shouting orders.

Loud, noisy, with the air hazy with smoke. Rose is not in her element.

She sees JERRY RINE, 50s, doughy-looking, messily eating a corned beef sandwich.

Beside Jerry, HIS DAUGHTER, SARAH, 20s. He takes the pickle on his plate and points it at her. They are in the middle of a debate. Sarah swats it away.

Rose heads over to them.

ROSE
Jerome Rine?

JERRY
You must be Rose. Call me Jerry.

He motions for her to take a seat.

JERRY (CONT'D)
Join us. We're debating the Fourth Amendment. My daughter is starting to sound like Pinochet.

SARAH
Forgive my father. He thinks everyone who doesn't agree with him is a fascist.

Jerry pulls out some of the hanging meat from his sandwich, it slips through his chubby fingers. Rose can't mask her revulsion.

JERRY
So. Pat called me. You're in quite a pickle. No pun intended.

ROSE
I honestly think it's a big misunderstanding.

Beat.

JERRY

No thanks to your boss, I'm sure.
Our friend Dick's getting in some
hot water.

ROSE

(defensive)

I disagree. I think the President
is doing a wonderful job leading
the country and --

Jerry waves the WASHINGTON POST PAPER at her, speaking
loudly.

JERRY

Not what the court of public
opinion says.

Rose stands up. She's had enough.

ROSE

Mr. Rine. I'm sorry. I think this
is a mistake. I will not have
anyone speak ill of the President --

JERRY

18 1/2 minutes.

ROSE

I'm sorry?

JERRY

I spoke with the Judge's Clerk this
morning. The White House Lawyers
have informed the Judge of an 18
1/2 minute gap in the June 20th
tape that you allegedly erased.

Silence. Rose is dumbfounded. All she can do is shake her
head and then --

ROSE

You're mistaken. I told them I may
have erased four minutes, but even
that... I told them that I wasn't
sure. They have the tapes now. They
can check.

JERRY

Ms. Woods. The White House has a
problem.

(MORE)

JERRY (CONT'D)

There are 18 1/2 minutes of conversation that are unaccounted between the President and his Chief of Staff, Halderman, -- their first conversation after Watergate.

He lets those words hang for a moment, Rose doesn't respond.

JERRY (CONT'D)

They are going to hold someone responsible, and that someone seems to be you.

She stands frozen. Processing. *18 1/2 minutes?*

ROSE

No. This is a mistake. It wasn't 18 1/2 minutes.

JERRY

Mrs. Nixon was right. You need a good lawyer.

Rose just stands there. Jerry gets up.

JERRY (CONT'D)

Let's start again.

(wipes his hand, offers it)

I'm Jerry Rine. I graduated from Harvard Law School the same year Dick graduated from Duke. I've been a trial lawyer for the past 20 years, and have never lost a jury case. I believe in the law and government. And, I'm a registered Democrat.

(beat)

But I will fight for you. So please...

He motions for her to sit. Rose warily does.

INT. WHITE HOUSE CAFETERIA - DAY

Rose and Lynn go through the cafeteria line. Lynn flaunts her ENGAGEMENT RING.

LYNN

Can I repeat how he proposed one more time? I promise the third time's a charm.

ROSE
(patient)
Of course.
(re:ring)
It's lovely.

They take their trays and look for a space to sit. The SECRETARIES that we saw before at the party now sit at a table looking like some version of adult mean girls. Kimberly Ann flicks her eyes quickly over in Rose's direction. All the others follow suit.

ROSE (CONT'D)
I bet she got an earful from
Buzhardt for telling me about those
Uhers. She must have the most awful
things to say...

LYNN
Let them talk.

Kimberly Anne turns and gives Rose a cold look.

ROSE
I get it. She is loyal to her boss
and doesn't want to lose her job.
She has to tow the party line.

LYNN
That's no reason to abandon your
friends. I would never abandon you.

ROSE
Maybe you should. In this building
I'm as good as kryptonite.

Lynn motions to an empty table.

LYNN
Come on, Kryptonite. My ring and I
are very hungry.

INT. STEVE BULL'S OFFICE - DAY

Rose finds Steve looking through a magazine during his lunch break. He looks up to see Rose and knows why she's there.

ROSE
Right after I told the General
about the gap, he and the President
went on a car ride.

STEVE

Yes.

Silence. She waits.

ROSE

You must have heard through the grapevine that they told me to get a lawyer.

STEVE

I heard something like that.

ROSE

It's about the tapes.

(beat)

I need to know if the President knows.

STEVE

What did you tell me the first day I was hired?

ROSE

To protect the President above all else. Nothing else matters.

STEVE

There's your answer.

INT. SPORTS BAR - NIGHT

HALF THE BAR PATRONS (men in suits) watch the evening news while the other half watch the MLB playoff game.

Rose faces the TV with the news. All about the Watergate hearings. She tries to avert her eyes, but the news coverage is hypnotic.

Jerry's mid-conversation, making lists of trial strategy on napkins. Sarah's beside Rose.

JERRY

So, I spoke to the Special Prosecutor's Office. And you're scheduled to testify next week. Subpoena should be coming today or tomorrow.

Rose drags her gaze from the screen.

ROSE

I need a copy of the tape.

E/I. BOB'S GEORGETOWN BROWNSTONE - NIGHT

Rose KNOCKS on the door. It's late. Bob opens the door. Surprised. Maybe he just woke up? She holds up the COPY OF THE JUNE 20th TAPE.

ROSE
I know why I need a lawyer.

INT. BOB'S LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Bob makes Rose a drink.

They play the tape and listen to the CLICKING and WHITE NOISE. He turns it off.

BOB
Well you can't dance to it.

Rose stares at the tape.

BOB (CONT'D)
18 1/2 minutes of that?

ROSE
Yes.

BOB
And they want you to say that you did it?

ROSE
Yep.

BOB
All of it?

ROSE
Yes.

BOB
What did your lawyer say?

A MAN, 40s, descends the stairs. Handsome, tousled hair, he sees Rose and stops. Rose realizes that she has interrupted something.

ROSE
I'll come back.

BOB
Don't be silly. Rose, this is my friend, John. He's leaving.

JOHN
Good to meet you.

John tucks in his shirt, wanting to make a quick exit.

JOHN (CONT'D)
I'll see you.

BOB
Right.

John leaves. After he does, Rose looks at Bob.

ROSE
I'm sorry I interrupted.

BOB
You didn't.

No one speaks.

BOB (CONT'D)
(teasing)
Are you offended?

ROSE
Of course not.

She smiles, with clear unsaid acceptance.

ROSE (CONT'D)
You must know that whatever makes
you happy makes me happy.

BOB
Same goes for me. Single women and
homosexuals have to stick together.
At least as long as we stay
Republican.

Rose laughs.

ROSE
Well, he seems like a very nice
man.

BOB
His wife seems to think so.
(re: tape)
What will you do?

ROSE
I don't know.

INT. SPECIAL PROSECUTION OFFICE - DAY

AN INTERN delivers a DOCUMENT for Volner and the other prosecuting attorneys we met earlier.

BEN-VENISTE

What now?

VOLNER

Ms. Woods is returning to amend her testimony.

BEN-VENISTE

Amend to what?

FELDBAUM

(tries to sound like Rose)

"I'm sorry that when you asked if the President had access to the safe I lied. I love him. I looove him."

Volner shakes her head. She knows she has to hold her tongue. The price of being the only woman lawyer in the room.

VOLNER

Maybe the President's men had more access to the tapes than she originally testified... Or...

BEN-VENISTE

Or, what?

VOLNER

Or, she lied.

Feldbaum senses an opportunity.

FELDBAUM

I can do the cross. If there is an inconsistency maybe --

VOLNER

No. It's my witness. I did her initial testimony.

FELDBAUM

(to Ben-Veniste)

This might lead to something.

Volner tries to keep her cool.

VOLNER

I know you guys joke about how the press calls me the lawyer in the miniskirt. Like how a dress defines me. Or, maybe the reason that I'm even on this committee...

(to Ben-Veniste)

They don't know that I was one of 23 females to graduate from Columbia Law School. Or that I made Dean's List...

(pointedly)

But you do. You both know.

(beat)

In every aspect of my life, I've had to be better. Better than all of you. So, please don't tell me I can't handle a cross of a secretary.

Ben-Veniste nods. Volner smiles, triumphant.

E/I. 21ST STREET HIGH-RISE - DAY

Rose and Sarah enter fresh from the cold into a nondescript lobby room of sorts. A RECEPTIONIST, 20s, smiles.

SARAH

Sarah Rine of Rine & Associates and Ms. Woods to see Mr. Anderson.

The receptionist presses the call button and announces them.

INT. WAITING ROOM - DAY

Now in a smaller room. Rose holds on to her purse tightly, nervous. Sarah smiles reassuringly.

MR. ANDERSON, 50s, middle-aged paunch and no sense of humor, enters to greet Sarah.

MR. ANDERSON

Ms. Woods, Ms. Rine. How's your father? I haven't seen him since we campaigned for McGovern. Is he still tilting at windmills?

SARAH

He's doing fine.

Mr. Anderson turns to Rose, as if noticing her for the first time.

MR. ANDERSON

Okay. Ms. Woods, if you could wait here while Ms. Rine and I discuss the procedure. It won't be long.

SARAH

(to Rose)

Don't worry, this is just a practice run to see if we want to request a polygraph in court.

Rose nods.

Sarah and Mr. Anderson leave. Rose is alone. Some Muzak wafts in through the walls.

The receptionist enters --

RECEPTIONIST

We've met before, Ms. Woods.

ROSE

Oh?

RECEPTIONIST

(whispers)

At the RNC dinner in Chicago. Don't tell all these Democrats...

ROSE

Tell them what?

Mr. Anderson and Sarah return.

MR. ANDERSON

All the paperwork's been sorted out. Ready for the torture chamber?

INT. POLYGRAPH ADMINISTERING ROOM - DAY

Rose sits hooked up to the polygraph. The ADMINISTRATOR, 40s, with thick glasses, adjusts the machine.

ADMINISTRATOR

Not a great time to say you're working for the White House.

ROSE

I'm sure I don't know what you mean.

ADMINISTRATOR

Well, we'll get it all sorted. The Watergate Committee and all... Soon your boss might be out of a job. Boy, I'd love to get him strapped into one of these.

The administrator laughs. Rose doesn't know what to say.

ADMINISTRATOR (CONT'D)

Now I want to warn you. If you're guilty, you shouldn't be here. I have my own integrity and reputation to consider.

ROSE

I understand.

ADMINISTRATOR

We'll do some control questions and then we'll move into the heart of the matter.

He readjusts the ARM BAND on Rose's arm that's connected to the machine.

ADMINISTRATOR (CONT'D)

Don't worry, it's like the dentist. You think it's going to hurt but it doesn't.

ROSE

I think that's a little tight.

He doesn't adjust it.

ADMINISTRATOR

Here we go. Are you called Rose?

ROSE

Yes.

He checks the machine. We can't see the results. His blank face is unreadable.

ADMINISTRATOR

Do you work as a personal secretary to President Nixon?

ROSE

Yes.

Another check at the machine.

ADMINISTRATOR
Did you go to college?

ROSE
I went to secretarial school.

ADMINISTRATOR
Did you go to college?

ROSE
No.

ADMINISTRATOR
Have you ever cheated anyone out of anything?

Rose's a little taken aback.

ROSE
No. I mean, not since I was a child. Maybe. Like to get an extra piece of candy.

ADMINISTRATOR
Yes or no.

ROSE
No.

He checks the machine, his face impassive.

ADMINISTRATOR
Have you ever stolen anything?

ROSE
No, maybe a penny or nickel when I was little.

She begins to sweat. The room starts to spin.

ADMINISTRATOR
Yes or no.

ROSE
No.

ADMINISTRATOR
Did anyone order you to alter or erase the June 20th tape?

ROSE
No.

ADMINISTRATOR

Did you deliberately erase or alter
the June 20th tape?

ROSE

No.

A beat. The Administrator looks disappointed.

ADMINISTRATOR

Did the President order you to
alter the tape?

ROSE

No. And I think it's terribly
unfair to say that when the man has
done a tremendous job as President,
and people are going out of their
way to make him look terrible.

The administrator doesn't look happy.

ROSE (CONT'D)

He would never order me to do
anything like that. Never. No.

The administrator clicks off the machine.

ADMINISTRATOR

You can go back to the lobby.

INT. LOBBY - DAY

Rose waits while the receptionist flips through magazines. In
a moment, Sarah comes to join her. Sarah's pissed.

SARAH

Let's go.

Rose looks up, follows her out.

EXT. STREET - DAY

Rose catches up with Sarah, who buys two hotdogs from a
VENDOR. She hands one to Rose.

ROSE

What happened?

SARAH

They said that the test run was
inconclusive.

ROSE
Why? I couldn't possibly have failed. I was telling the truth.

SARAH
I don't know. I guess we should have checked the party affiliation before we hired them.

Rose understands all too well.

ROSE
The Democrats want me to blame the President and say he ordered me to do it... and the Republicans want me to take the blame for something I didn't do.

SARAH
In a nutshell, yes.

ROSE
Well, I won't do either.
(beat)
Why is it that neither side wants to hear the truth?

SARAH
One word: politics.

Rose looks down at her hotdog.

SARAH (CONT'D)
I'm thirsty.

INT. BAR - DAY

Sarah and Rose are each drinking Manhattans.

SARAH
Do you mind me asking you a question?

ROSE
I believe in the President. I don't think that he --

SARAH
No. Not that.
(beat)
I saw your file.
(MORE)

SARAH (CONT'D)

You graduated with top marks from high school, everyone agrees that you're the best editor and writer, I just -- did you ever wish for more?

Rose pauses. No one's asked her that in a long time.

ROSE

I never had time to think about things like that, who I wanted to be, or who I admired... I had to work... I grew up knowing I had to take care of my family.

(lifts her drink up)

I devoted my life to my career.

SARAH

It's admirable.

ROSE

I'd like to think so. That I've made a mark, however small...

SARAH

I just don't know how you do it. I couldn't take orders from people all day. From men not as smart as --

ROSE

You get used to it.

(beat)

Besides, never underestimate the power of the secretary. If we don't already know your secrets, we'll find them...

(wheels turning)

Which is what any good secretary would do...

INT. WHITE HOUSE CORRIDOR - NIGHT

ROSE heads down to the White House basement.

Rose arrives at the --

BASEMENT

Agent Wong stands to greet her.

AGENT WONG

Ms. Woods, you're working late.

ROSE

Yes. The President wants the log of everyone that came in and out of the West Wing on July 13, 1973.

EXT. JOGGING TRACK, GEORGETOWN - EVENING

Steve Bull runs the track like a former athlete. Rose watches. As he does his last sprint, he sees her. Doesn't look too happy as he comes toward her and catches his breath.

ROSE

I read the logs. Ten days. General Haig had the tapes for ten days. That was after Haldeman kept them in a drawer.

(beat)

Before I even got custody of the tapes. He had them. He had full control over them and must have know about the erasures.

STEVE

Yes.

ROSE

(pointedly)

And you had the key.

STEVE

Yes.

ROSE

Did you tell them when you testified? About General Haig and his access long before I did?

He looks at her. Sweat pouring down his face, we notice how young he is. So does Rose.

STEVE

I told the truth.

E/I. LYNN'S APARTMENT BUILDING - NIGHT

Lynn carries in her groceries. She sees TWO SUITED MEN sitting in the lobby,

INT. LYNN'S APARTMENT CORRIDOR - NIGHT

Lynn pulls out the keys. She sees the men have come up the elevator behind her. She quickly goes inside.

She puts down the bags. There's a KNOCK on the door. She looks through the PEEP HOLE.

CLOSE ON: FBI BADGE

With a deep breath, she opens the door, leaves the chain on.

FBI AGENT #1
Ms. Hefner. May we come in?

INT. LYNN'S APARTMENT BUILDING - NIGHT

Lynn stands by the door. The TWO FBI AGENTS hover, mid-conversation.

FBI AGENT #1
What do you know about the subpoenaed tape?

LYNN
What tape?

FBI AGENT #1
(annoyed)
June 20th, 1972.

LYNN
Nothing.

FBI AGENT #2
Nothing? You work right next to Rose Woods, don't you?

LYNN
How did you get inside my building?
(off no answer)
I think you should leave.

FBI AGENT #1
If you're not comfortable talking, feel free to retain an attorney.
(beat)
We'll be in touch.

They leave. Lynn leans against the door. Frightened.

INT. ROSE'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Rose sits with Lynn on the couch.

LYNN

It was the way that they said it. I didn't know what to do. What does the FBI want with you?

ROSE

Who knows. I'll testify and it will be done. We'll even laugh about it.

Both smile. But neither really believe it.

RADIO (PRELAP)

In Washington today we have an air pollution alert. People with respiratory problems are warned to stay indoors...

CLOSE ON ROSE'S RADIO

Pull out to reveal Rose getting ready for her big day in court. WIDEN TO REVEAL --

INT. ROSE'S APARTMENT - DAY

Rose takes out HER MOTHER'S CROSS NECKLACE and her ROSARY RING to wear. Wears them like armored talismans. Half dressed, she stares at her dress neatly laid out on the bed. Bracing for the day.

INT. ROSE'S OFFICE - DAY

Rose sifts through the MOUNDS OF MAIL. She opens and catalogues each one. She checks her watch.

Heads into --

LYNN'S OFFICE, holding a DOCUMENT.

ROSE

I'll run this to Mr. Garment's office and be off.

Lynn nods. Understands the code words.

LYNN

What shall I say to the President?

ROSE

Say I'm off at lunch. If it runs long. Or, that I have a doctor's appointment I couldn't reschedule.

(quietly)

Just don't tell him.

LYNN

I'm sure that he must --

ROSE

(snipes)

I don't care what he knows. Or what you think he knows.

(apologetically)

I'm sorry. Please, just don't tell him.

LYNN

Good luck. I'm behind you, no matter what.

Rose nods. Keeping a brave face.

INT. COURTHOUSE - DAY

A PACKED COURTROOM. Rose is in the WITNESS BOX, fidgety and nervous.

Jerry's at the defense table. Buzhardt beside him. At the Prosecution table, Ben-Veniste and Feldbaum are hunched over their legal pads.

Jill Volner is mid-cross.

VOLNER

You're here today to tell us the reason for the erasure that was found on the June 20th tape.

ROSE

I thought it was a gap.

VOLNER

Ms. Woods, I would like to remind you of your constitutional rights. You have a right not to answer questions on the grounds that it might incriminate you.

ROSE

Yes.

VOLNER
Are you represented by counsel?

ROSE
Yes, I am.

VOLNER
Who recommended you to get an attorney?

JERRY
Objection.

JUDGE SIRICA
Is this relevant?

VOLNER
It bears on her testimony as to whether she talked to any of the White House attorneys.

JUDGE SIRICA
Anyone has the right to an attorney.

JERRY
I have nothing to do with the White House. Believe me.

The Press TITTER.

VOLNER
How did you determine what part of the tape was part of the subpoena?

ROSE
General Haig informed Mr. Bull and myself.

VOLNER
Anyone else?

ROSE
Well, I checked with the President, of course.

VOLNER
How long did the conversation that you listened to on the tape last?

GARMENT
Sidebar. Your Honor?

CUT TO:

JUDGE SIRICA'S BENCH, all the lawyers huddle around.

GARMENT (CONT'D)

I'm not sure this discussion should be made public for the purposes of a Grand Jury.

JERRY

I want all this public, Your Honor.

BUZHARDT

We know what you want.

JUDGE SIRICA

Is there an objection to making everything public?

VOLNER

Not from us, Your Honor.

BUZHARDT

The White House objects.

JERRY

Not from me or my client. I want everything to come out.

JUDGE SIRICA

Just so we're clear... We have to balance the prosecution's interest, the White House's interest, and Ms. Wood's interest. Have I got that right? Any more lawyers in here, we'll have to build a bigger boat.

BUZHARDT

Your Honor, the White House is within its rights to be a part of this hearing since the very nature of what is being discussed --

JUDGE SIRICA

Tread lightly, Ms. Volner.

Everyone returns to their tables. Volner addresses Rose.

VOLNER

During the time that you listened to Mr. Ehrlichman and the President, who else participated?

ROSE

I don't know the exact moment Mr. Ehrlichman left and Mr. Haldeman arrived.

VOLNER

Was there ever a time when Mr. Ehrlichman, Mr. Haldeman, and the President spoke together?

ROSE

I didn't hear it.

VOLNER

Any discussion of Watergate?

She looks over to Buzhardt.

ROSE

No. Not that I heard.

VOLNER

Then how did this erasure magically happen?

JERRY

Objection.

JUDGE SIRICA

Sustained. Ms. Woods, explain to the court how you came upon the gap.

ROSE

I was turning and reaching for my phone, which buzzes and buzzes and buzzes, I might have held my pedal down on the Uher. It was something like 4 1/2 to 5 minutes.

VOLNER

You told the President this?

ROSE

Yes.

VOLNER

Who were you on the phone with?

Rose debates. Shakes her head.

ROSE

I haven't the slightest idea.

VOLNER

How long were you on the phone?

ROSE

4 1/2 to 5 minutes.

VOLNER

Could the telephone call have lasted 18 1/2 minutes?

She looks over to the White House lawyer table. Straight at Buzhardt and Garment.

ROSE

(firmly)

No.

Judge Sirica leans down to Rose.

JUDGE SIRICA

Did you not think it was important to tell us everything you knew about what happened when you transcribed the tapes? Didn't you think it was important?

Rose barely nods, ashamed.

ROSE

I understood that I was to talk about the subpoenaed tapes.

JUDGE SIRICA

And when asked about precautions, you used your head? Isn't that what you said?

JERRY

Objection. I think it's important that we allow Ms. Woods to explain.

VOLNER

Has the President ever told you about your erasure?

JERRY

Objection. Ms. Woods never said that she caused the elimination erasure of 4 1/2 minutes on October 1st.

VOLNER

Why did you assume that your foot was on the pedal?

Rose thinks. Good question.

ROSE
I just assumed. I wasn't sure.

VOLNER
Is it possible you put your foot on the pedal after you finished the phone call?

ROSE
I reached back to answer my phone --

Rose makes a motion to reach.

VOLNER
Your Honor, at this time, I would like to make an inspection of Miss Woods' office.

CUT TO:

CLOSE ON: ROSE WOODS DOING THE ICONIC STRETCH

Reaching for the phone while keeping her foot on the UHER FOOT MEDAL MACHINE. PULL BACK TO REVEAL --

INT. ROSE'S OFFICE - DAY

The WHITE HOUSE PHOTOGRAPHER taking pictures of Rose posing. We see her trying to replicate the stretch. But it's awkward and we can see she is struggling to get the exact angle of having her foot on the pedal and answering the phone at the same time.

Rose looks down and sees THE RUG INDENTATIONS of the carpet. Her typewriter table has been moved to be closer. She can't help but be surprised. Ms. Volner follows Rose's gaze and notices the rug. Snaps to the White House Photographer.

VOLNER
I want pictures of the rug.

Rose stares at THE RUG INDENTATION as she holds the humiliating pose, keeping her politically tight smile.

CUT TO:

INT. ROSE'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Rose sits in the same outfit she wore for court. It's dark, the shades aren't closed. How long has she been sitting there, we don't know. As she stares off into some point in space, the PHONE CONSTANTLY RINGS AND RINGS... She doesn't move.

INT. COURTROOM - DAY

Volner shows Rose the PHOTOGRAPH of her doing "the stretch".

VOLNER

You're in quite a balancing act here, would you agree? To get to the phone and press the pedal?

Rose examines the photo.

ROSE

Yes, that's the photo you asked me to pose for.

VOLNER

I didn't ask you to pose, please correct that statement.

ROSE

What did you have me do?

VOLNER

I'm asking if you always stretch when answering the phone.

ROSE

I don't know if I always do. I don't pose for a picture usually.

VOLNER

That's quite a stretch.

JUDGE SIRICA

All right, ladies. We have enough problems without two ladies turning this into an argument.

The entire courtroom erupts in LAUGHTER. Except for Rose. Except for Ms. Volner. They exchange a quick sympathetic look. Welcome to the 1970s.

VOLNER

I would ask for you to please look at the photo closely.

CLOSE ON PHOTO. Rose examines it.

VOLNER (CONT'D)

Do you see the rug indentations by your desk that showed someone moved the typewriter table closer?

JERRY

Objection.

Volner continues, emboldened. Not waiting for a ruling.

VOLNER

Did you move your desk closer to make the stretch easier?

ROSE

No! Of course not.

VOLNER

But you see indentations. Someone moved your table, correct?

JERRY

Objection. What indentations? What are we talking about?

VOLNER

She knows exactly what I'm talking about.

JUDGE SIRICA

Sustained. Move along, Ms. Volner.

VOLNER

Okay, let's look at the picture itself. Do you see that your foot isn't even on the pedal?

Beat. Rose takes a breath.

ROSE

No. It's not.

VOLNER

Did you erase the 18 1/2 minutes of conversation between the President and Chief of Staff Halderman the day after the Watergate break-in?

ROSE

No.

VOLNER
Then who *did*?

JERRY
Objection.

JUDGE SIRICA
Sustained.

Rose looks back at her and then the photo, swallowing hard.

VOLNER
Someone moved your table so that it would look like you could easily make that reach. Who are you covering up for? Why are you hiding the truth?

JERRY
Objection! Objection!

The ROOM erupts in murmurs and opinions.

VOLNER
Withdrawn.

The Judge bangs his gavel, but the damage is done. The words hang there in judgment.

EXT. COURTHOUSE - DAY

Jerry, Sarah, and Rose walk past the THRONGS of REPORTERS trying to get Rose to make a statement. Pushing and shoving; there's blood in the water.

They walk past the press and round the corner --

ROSE
I need to clear my head.

Rose covers her red hair with a scarf and shrugs them off.

As she goes around the bend -- we see that Volner is running to catch up with her. Rose walks faster. Rose doesn't acknowledge her. Her eyes focused ahead.

VOLNER
These people are throwing you to the wolves... You know that, right? You need to tell the truth.

Rose stops. Turns.

ROSE
I'm sorry. Who are the wolves
again?

Volner doesn't respond.

Rose walks away toward the Washington Mall. Alone and vulnerable against the magnificent Monument looming in the horizon.

A SERIES OF ARCHIVAL FOOTAGE

- ROSE MARY is on the COVER OF TIME MAGAZINE 1973 "*The Secretary and the Tapes*"
- ROSE MARY is ON THE COVER OF NEWSWEEK "*Rose Mary's Boo Boo*"
- Lots of POLITICAL CARTOONS covering "the Rose Mary stretch"
- A TELEVISION CLIP OF JOHNNY CARSON'S MONOLOGUE

JOHNNY CARSON
President Sadat had a belly dancer
entertain President Nixon at a
state dinner. Mr. Nixon was really
impressed. He hadn't seen
contortions like that since Rose
Mary Woods.

- HEATED interviews of SECRETARIES, PEOPLE ON THE STREET - No one believes Rose Mary Woods. She is the butt of every joke.

CLOSE ON TELEVISION:

Haig is interviewed outside the courthouse. (We will replicate the actual footage with our Haig actor.)

HAIG
I've known women who think they've
talked for five minutes and then
have talked for an hour. I think
Rose doesn't really know how long
she spoke.

PULL OUT TO REVEAL --

INT. ROSE'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Alone on her sofa, Rose watches his interview on her TV, feeling the humiliation as millions of television viewers see and judge. In Technicolor.

Rose lets the facade go. All of a sudden tears flood her eyes in shame and anger.

ROSE
Liar.

INT. POSIN'S DELI - DAY

Jerry and Rose go over the case. A little of Jerry is growing on her. She eats a pastrami sandwich with a fork.

JERRY
So, my spies tell me they can't duplicate any of the erasures.

ROSE
Any? Not even the four minutes?

JERRY
Not a one. It's the first time that twelve impaneled experts have agreed on anything.

This lands on Rose.

ROSE
So my Uher...

JERRY
Could not have erased anything.

Rose shakes her head.

JERRY (CONT'D)
You're not as surprised as I thought you'd be.

ROSE
A lot has happened since we first spoke. What's the worst case scenario?

JERRY
We're not there yet.

ROSE
Say they don't believe me. Say that no one comes forward to support me. Say that all we have is my word.

JERRY
Worst case scenario... With you hanging out to dry alone...
(MORE)

JERRY (CONT'D)
You get indicted for obstruction.
Possibly conspiracy.

The words hit Rose hard.

INT. POSIN'S DELI - DAY

Rose is waiting for her takeout. Garment spots her and comes over.

GARMENT
I didn't know you knew about this
place.

ROSE
(dryly)
It's an institution.

Garment hands his ticket to the CROTCHETY DELI GUY.

GARMENT
(to Deli Guy)
Easy on the mayo.

He turns to her.

GARMENT (CONT'D)
I'm sorry.

ROSE
For what?

GARMENT
For how everything was handled.

ROSE
How I was handled, you mean?

GARMENT
Rose, it's more complicated --

ROSE
It's not complicated. I trusted you
and you betrayed that trust.

Garment shakes his head. The Deli Guy gives her the take out bag.

ROSE (CONT'D)
Enjoy your lunch.

INT. WHITE HOUSE RESIDENCE - SUN ROOM - DAY

Rose and Pat have their deli sandwiches on nice china. Pat picks at her sandwich.

PAT

Rose, you have to know that the President and I are 100 percent behind you.

ROSE

I know.

PAT

And the girls love you so much.

ROSE

They are remarkable women.

Beat.

PAT

I just want to say... We joke about you and handsome Bob, and Bob proposing...

ROSE

Yes. He is, after all, Republican with a full head of hair.

Pat nods, but her face is serious.

PAT

Rose, I know Bob. You're never going to marry Bob. Neither of you have to pretend with me.

Rose looks at her surprised.

PAT (CONT'D)

You didn't think I knew. God, Bob is the best-kept open secret in Washington. Bless his heart.

Rose laughs.

PAT (CONT'D)

We never talk about you and how much you have sacrificed... How it must feel for you to go home to your apartment... alone...

(beat)

(MORE)

PAT (CONT'D)
I can only imagine how hard it was
when you first came to
Washington... right after losing
someone so close...

Rose looks down, not expecting this intimacy. Her face falls.
Pat has poked at a carefully nursed wound.

PAT (CONT'D)
We don't have to talk about it.

ROSE
He's been gone now longer than I
knew him.
(quietly)
You know there isn't even a word
for when your fiance dies. You're
not a widow because you've never
been a wife.
(beat)
You're just the person who makes
all the phone calls and returns all
the engagement gifts.

Rose chokes on the words.

ROSE (CONT'D)
And then you have to pick yourself
up and start again.

She looks up at Pat, her eyes well up with tears. Pat puts
her hand on Rose's.

PAT
I'm so sorry.

ROSE
I still do miss him and wonder what
our life would have been like...

Rose's eyes well up. She tries collect herself.

ROSE (CONT'D)
But, that was a different time. Now
I have the greatest job in the
world. Working for the President.
(beat)
And to my mind there has been no
better First Lady. You and your
family. You're enough. You have to
be...

Pat finishes off her drink. She squeezes Rose's hand.

INT. SPECIAL PROSECUTION OFFICE - DAY

Ben-Veniste, Volner, and Feldbaum and a ROOMFUL OF PROSECUTORS are mid-debate. Jaworski sits at the head, listening.

FELDBAUM

Prosecute her for what? For what?
Blind devotion to the President?

VOLNER

For lying. For obstruction. For
conspiracy.

BEN-VENISTE

This is sounding personal.

Volner gives a look.

VOLNER

She's lying. She knows more than
she's saying.

Turn to their boss, Jaworski, who has been silent.

JAWORSKI

Write it up. If there's enough to
indict, we'll indict the secretary
to the President of the United
States.

INT. ROSE'S OFFICE - DAY

CLOSE ON A MOUND OF MAIL

Rose starts opening LETTERS. Calls out to Lynn.

ROSE

There's not that many for one week.
Although we should see --

Lynn comes in HOLDING A LARGE CARDBOARD BOX. Full of letters.

ROSE (CONT'D)

Spoke too soon. Hopefully most of
these letters are supportive of the
President. The hate mail, I swear
to God, we're burning.

LYNN

They're not for the President.
(off Rose's surprised look)
They're for you. Boxes of them.

ROSE
For me? Why?

LYNN
Secretaries who believe in you.
(beat)
I put my favorite ones at the top.

INT. ROSE'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Rose gets ready for bed. The box full of letters that Lynn gave her is by her side. We see she has opened many of the well wishes. The PHONE RINGS.

ROSE
Woods residence... Where did you
get this number?

A cloud comes over Rose as she listens.

She hangs up fast, as if it were hot to touch.

After a few moments the phone RINGS again. She stares at it. Then answers.

ROSE (CONT'D)
Hello? Hello? Who is this?

She hangs up again. She looks out her window, the street below is deserted. The phone RINGS again. She puts the phone in the closet.

We can still hear the MUFFLED RINGING.

INT. BOB'S LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Bob fixes Rose a drink. He's in a tux and tails.

BOB
Are you sure you don't want to
come?

ROSE
The last thing I want to do is go
out and have people talk about what
a joke I am.

BOB
You're not a joke.

ROSE
I've been getting phone calls at night. Sometimes hang ups. Sometimes breathing. The other day, one said they were pollsters.

BOB
Pollsters? Really?

ROSE
Exactly, and it's my private line. I think they were checking up to see if the number the phone company gave them was the proper number.

BOB
They?

ROSE
The Special Prosecution Committee. Who else?

Bob doesn't answer. Rose steels herself. The question hangs between them.

INT. ROSE'S APARTMENT - DAY

Rose sets out TWO SUITS, one RED and ONE GREY, out on her bed.

The phone RINGS.

ROSE (INTO PHONE)
Mrs. Nixon. Ready for the big day?

INT. PAT NIXON'S BEDROOM - DAY

Pat stands at her closet looking at her suits.

PAT (INTO PHONE)
I was just thinking what would be the most powerful color to project for the day. For all those creeps.

INTERCUT BETWEEN PAT AND ROSE

ROSE
A powerful color...

PAT
I'm thinking red. Red is nice.

Rose looks at her red suit.

ROSE
You're wearing red?

She starts to put the red suit back in her closet.

PAT
Not me. I think WE should wear red.
Rose. Let them come at us, Rose.
Let them try.

USING ARCHIVAL FOOTAGE WE ARE CLOSE ON: GERALD FORD as he gets sworn in. Nixon's behind him --

PULL BACK TO REVEAL --

We're in --

INT. THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES - DAY

The swearing in ceremony for GERALD FORD as VICE PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES. Pat Nixon and Rose sit beside each other both WEARING RED POWER SUITS.

Rose notices Haig on the same row. She doesn't look at him. Pat turns to her and gives her an encouraging pat on her hand.

EXT. WASHINGTON MALL - DAY

Rose and Jerry meet at a bench for lunch. Lots of TOURISTS pass them, but Jerry is focused and animated.

JERRY
I found a way to exculpate you.

ROSE
How?

JERRY
The President.

ROSE
No.

JERRY
Hear me out. There's an argument to be made that the 18 1/2 minute gap has to be the presidential responsibility because he said they were his tapes.

ROSE

No.

JERRY

No? No, what? No, I want to be a martyr? No, I want to go to jail?

ROSE

No. I will not implicate the President.

Silence.

JERRY

Rose, you hired me so that I could represent you to the best of my abilities.

ROSE

I won't betray the Nixon family.

He gets up. Annoyed.

JERRY

You're not doing yourself any favors protecting people who don't need your protection. More importantly, you're not letting me do my job.

ROSE

We'll just have to find another way.

JERRY

That worst case scenario that we talked about? It's here. You need to look out for yourself.

ROSE

I know.

JERRY

Do you?

He waves NEWSPAPERS at her.

JERRY (CONT'D)

The country is at war and the President of the United States may have orchestrated the biggest cover-up in American history.

(off no response)

(MORE)

JERRY (CONT'D)

People want your boss's head on a platter. And your boss... is going to need a scapegoat.

ROSE

There has to be another way.

JERRY

When you come to your senses and let me defend you, let me know.

He gets up, is about to say something else, and then exits. Leaving Rose alone.

INT. ROSE'S APARTMENT - DAY

Rose sits at her dining room table. Her tape recorder in front of her. She presses play. The beginning of the June 20th tape. She listens.

CUT TO:

ROSE CLEANING HER KITCHEN

The tape's still playing. Rose mops the floor. The 18 1/2 minutes of clicks begin. Rose pushes the mop harder...

CUT TO:

ROSE

on her hands and knees scrubbing the floor. The clicking continues... then Nixon's voice comes back...

NIXON (O.S.)

Back to the wiretapping. I think it's very serious.

HALDEMAN (O.S.)

Right.

NIXON (O.S.)

No question there is a double standard. Prior authorizations have done it. That's a standard thing. Why the Christ do we have to hire people to sweep our rooms?

This gets Rose's attention. What did he just say? She goes over to the tape recorder. Rewinds. Plays.

NIXON (CONT'D)
Back to the wiretapping...

Rose listens. Really listens. Her mind spins. For the first time getting a clearer picture.

EXT. WASHINGTON MALL - EVENING

Rose power walks alongside Bob. Some ONLOOKERS recognize her and whisper but Rose's oblivious. She's revved up, energized. We haven't seen Rose this focused for a long time.

ROSE
 As far as I can tell, there are three theories on what happened to the missing 18 minutes.

BOB
 Shoot.

ROSE
 One is that the dumb secretary erased them because she's in love or blindly devoted to her boss.

BOB
 I have it on good authority that the dumb secretary didn't do it.

ROSE
 Second, is that some of the people in the White House erased the portion of the tape while it was in my safe.

BOB
 How did they get into the safe?

ROSE
 That's the question. And if they could, why didn't they just take the tapes?

She stops.

ROSE (CONT'D)
 I listened to the tape. All of it. And at the end, they are talking about a phone wiretap.
 (beat)
 What if the erasure happened earlier?

(MORE)

ROSE (CONT'D)

Right when the taping system was dismantled? Before I even got them.

BOB

Why?

ROSE

Because the tape talks about an illegal wiretap. An illegal phone tap that was approved of by HRH, Ehrlichman, all of them. Including Haig. All the damn lawyers.

Bob nods, thinking.

BOB

What wiretap would they want to erase that would have been worse than Watergate?

ROSE

That's what I have to find out.

BOB

And then what?

ROSE

What do you mean?

BOB

I mean, after you find out. What will you do?

ROSE

I tell the President. I tell my lawyer, he tells Judge Sirica. I don't get indicted.

Beat.

BOB

What if the President already knows.

ROSE

What?

BOB

An illegal wiretap made by the White House... The President would have known.

Her face falls. She nods ever so slightly. She knew this but to hear it said out loud...

INT. SMITHSONIAN MUSEUM - NATIONAL PORTRAIT GALLERY - DAY

Bob stands before an ENGRAVED PORTRAIT. Handsome as ever. A 40-SOMETHING SUITED MAN in a conservative suit comes up beside him. Stares at the portrait with equal intensity. Neither looks at the other. We see the suited man's WEDDING RING. We get a better look at the suited man and realize that he is JOHN, the same handsome man that we saw earlier exiting Bob's bedroom.

BOB

You're looking well. How's Lisa?

No answer.

BOB (CONT'D)

I think Lisa would like me.

(beat)

We have so much in common. We both like The Carpenters and emotionally unavailable men.

JOHN

What do you want?

BOB

What does anyone want? World peace, an end to the oil crisis, to see Paul Newman naked...

Silence.

JOHN

I told you never to call me at my home.

BOB

I'm a lobbyist, you know I don't listen.

(serious)

I need a favor. I need some information about some FBI wiretaps.

JOHN

No.

BOB

No? Pretty definitive for someone with a pretty wife and family.

JOHN

You think I'm worried about my family finding out?

(quietly)

These people I work for are dangerous.

BOB

The FBI will never find out.

JOHN

You say that but they always do.

BOB

They won't.

John fiddles with his wedding ring, nervously. He looks up to Bob, they make eye contact for the first time.

INT. EXECUTIVE OFFICE - WHITE HOUSE LAW LIBRARY - EVENING

Rose looks through the shelves of books, yellow pad in hand. The place is cleared out for the most part. A LIBRARIAN approaches her.

LIBRARIAN

Ms. Woods, anything I can help you with?

ROSE

I'm looking for surveillance cases.

LIBRARIAN

Federal or state?

ROSE

Federal. Where the government had surveillance on private citizens.

LIBRARIAN

I'll start digging. Might be a long list.

Rose stands at the counter waiting. She glances over to the back LIBRARY CARRELS and sees Mr. Buzhardt leaning over a table of TWO YOUNG ATTRACTIVE WOMEN. She quickly turns around. Shit. Did he see her?

She stands still for a moment. Not sure what to do.

From the distance, she sees the librarian heading toward her with a LAW BOOK. Out of the corner of her eye, she sees that Buzhardt has seen her.

Rose points to her watch, as the librarian comes closer.

ROSE
I'll come back. I'm in a rush.

She rushes out.

INT. GEORGETOWN LAW SCHOOL - DAY

CLOSE ON: LAW BOOK - UNITED STATES v. KEITH

PULL BACK to reveal:

Sarah and Rose sitting in one of the long library tables.

SARAH
So what's this about?

ROSE
Nothing. Just doing some extra research and I don't want to use the White House library.

Rose doesn't say more. Sarah doesn't press.

SARAH
Here are the Fourth Amendment wiretapping cases you asked about.

She hands Rose the advance sheets and Rose starts to read. Sarah points to a particular section.

SARAH (CONT'D)
United States v. Keith. The Supreme Court said that the government illegally wiretapped a private citizen's home.

ROSE
(reads)
"The revelations posed the frightening possibility that the conversations of untold thousands of citizens of this country are being monitored on secret devices which no judge has authorized..."

SARAH
Makes you wonder what they would do when someone disagreed with them, or refused to tow the party line.

ROSE

We know the answer to that, don't we.

Sarah can't help but be surprised at this critique. Rose doesn't look up.

ROSE (CONT'D)

You didn't tell your father?

SARAH

No. Although he's working hard for you. He is at the office right now writing a brief to the judge.

ROSE

I know he is. I don't want anyone to know.

SARAH

Know what? You still haven't told me.

We see on Rose's face she has found what she's looking for. She takes THE PAPERS and folds them up and places them into her purse.

Rose looks around at the YOUNG LAW STUDENTS. We see a touch of envy in her face.

ROSE

When I grew up, girls were either teachers or secretaries.

She motions to the law books surrounding them.

ROSE (CONT'D)

Now the world seems much bigger. You're lucky, you can be so much more.

Rose looks around at all the women law students buried in their books, and gives Sarah a bittersweet smile.

INT. WATERGATE CAFE - NIGHT

Rose nurses a cup of coffee. Highlighting the cases in front of her like a regular law student.

A WAITER comes over to her table.

WAITER

Ms. Woods?

ROSE

Yes.

WAITER

There's a telephone call for you.

Strange. Rose gets up, leaves her paperwork at her table.
Goes to the --

BAR

Rose picks up the TELEPHONE RECEIVER.

ROSE

Hello?

Nothing.

ROSE (CONT'D)

Hello?

She looks around. All of a sudden nervous. Who would know
that she's here?

She sets the phone down. The BARTENDER takes the phone and
sets it under the bar. Rose goes back to her table.

At the corner of her eye, at the CAFE DOOR, she sees --

Bob's friend, John -- Rose can't hope but show her surprise.
He comes toward her.

JOHN

We need to talk.

CUT TO:

LATER

Rose sits across from John, who chain-smokes.

JOHN

My Grandma used to listen to other
people's conversations with a
glass. Held it up to the wall. Thin
walls.

ROSE

I'm not sure what Bob has told
you...

He stamps out his cigarette.

JOHN
You want to know about the
wiretaps.

ROSE
Yes.

John takes a moment.

JOHN
Even as far back as 1969, your boss
was increasingly suspicious of
leaks to the press. SALT talks,
Vietnam, Sino-American relations.

ROSE
I know all that. I'm talking about
something that the President's men
might worry would be worse than...

JOHN
Breaking into the Democratic
National Committee?

Beat.

ROSE
Yes.

JOHN
Well illegal wiretaps on private
citizens are an impeachable
offense. Any lawyer would know
that.
(beat)
Your boss likes to tap people's
phones. Whether he has permission
or not.

ROSE
And if there were an illegal
tapping of phones. Who would be
involved?

JOHN
The President and his men.

ROSE
Mr. Haldeman?

JOHN
Yes.

ROSE
Mr. Kissinger?

JOHN
Yes.

Beat.

ROSE
General Haig?

JOHN
Yes. All of them. Anyone connected.
(pointedly)
To your boss. Everyone. You
understand?

Rose understands. He pulls out a MANILA ENVELOPE and gives it to her.

JOHN (CONT'D)
Tell Bob we're even.

He gets up and leaves. Once he is out of sight she carefully opens the envelope.

She pulls out the STACK OF PAPERS.

CLOSE ON PAPERS: DOCUMENTATION OF WIRETAP REQUESTS FROM THE WHITE HOUSE.

Rose can hardly believe it.

EXT. WASHINGTON STREET - NIGHT

Rose heads back to her apartment. With the MANILA ENVELOPE tucked in her bag, she's nervous.

A sudden rush of traffic, but the sidewalk is empty. As the traffic lulls, Rose can hear her own footsteps.

And the footsteps of someone behind her.

She looks back to see a YOUNG MAN IN SUIT, Washington lawyer type. He moves closer and closer. He comes in step twenty feet behind her.

And stays there. Their steps echo like heartbeats in sync.

She stops to pretend to admire some window shopping. He passes her. Probably was nothing, but her heart is racing.

INT. ROSE'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Rose holds the MANILA ENVELOPE, thinking. Not sure what to do. She looks over at HER PHONE. We see the thought occur to her. Her phone is probably bugged.

She quickly takes the phone apart, piece by piece. Looking for a evidence of a bug. Anything. Soon there it is nothing more than screws, coils, and wires. She stares at the pieces as if they are a some sort of puzzle with no solution. And then --

There's a KNOCK at the door -- it's Pat.

PAT

Sorry for the surprise visit. But I didn't want the visit on my official schedule. There's a throng of reporters downstairs that I slipped by.

CUT TO:

ROSE'S LIVING ROOM

Pat surveys the elephant figurines. Rose puts the ENVELOPE casually on a pile of magazines as she makes a drink for herself and Pat.

PAT

Julie said something funny to me today. She told me there was no point in telling me she isn't feeling well because I would have no sympathy... She's right. You know me, even if I were dying, I wouldn't let anyone know...

She laughs at her joke and then picks up a JADE ELEPHANT. Even though her hair is perfect, and she's perfectly poised... we can see she's drunk just enough to smooth out the edges.

PAT (CONT'D)

Is this one from China?

ROSE

Yes.

PAT

Henry still gets all the credit.

(beat)

(MORE)

PAT (CONT'D)
Did you hear about the Vassar
intern?

ROSE
Not surprising.

PAT
No. Not surprising at all. The
smartest Washington minds are being
ruled by the smallest heads.

They LAUGH. Easing some tension in the room.

Silence. Rose waits for Pat to speak. Her eyes dart to the
MANILA ENVELOPE. Not sure if Pat sees.

PAT (CONT'D)
Any word on what the prosecution
has decided?

ROSE
No.

Pat sees the completely dismantled phone. She looks back to
Rose.

PAT
Politics. I never wanted Dick to
run for President; did you know
that?
(lost in thought)
When you first arrive at the White
House, the previous first lady
gives you the lay of the land. And
you look around thinking about how
to make the place yours. How to
decorate. Small things like, should
I purchase the King Charles China
pattern?...

Beat.

PAT (CONT'D)
They don't tell you how to prepare
for this kind of crisis.
(beat)
Jackie and her pill box hats would
never be able to withstand five
minutes of Woodward and Bernstein.

ROSE
Never.

PAT

Where's my Aristotle Onassis to whisk me away to one of his yachts and outta this fishbowl?

She and Rose laugh. Pat looks out the window.

PAT (CONT'D)

They're talking impeachment.

ROSE

Never going to happen. The Democrats can talk all they want.

PAT

It's not just the Democrats.

(beat)

Do you think they can force Dick to resign?

ROSE

No. Of course not. He's weathered worse... they tried the same thing in '52 with the expense fund accusations. It passed.

PAT

This is different. This feels very different.

Silence.

PAT (CONT'D)

Dick will never recover. They won't stop until they find something.

ROSE

There's nothing to find.

PAT

Are you sure?

(off no answer)

Is there nothing to find?

Beat. Rose holds her gaze, and does everything but look over at the MANILA ENVELOPE.

ROSE

There is nothing to find.

Pat nods, this seems to satisfy her.

PAT

I will do anything to protect him.

ROSE

I know.

Rose keeps her face fixed in a tight smile.

EXT. WHITE HOUSE LAWN - NIGHT

ARCHIVAL FOOTAGE OF Nixon lighting the White House Christmas tree - A CAMP FIRE GIRL AND A BOY SCOUT at his side. SUPPORTERS OF NIXON are there with BANNERS cheering him on. PULL OUT TO REVEAL --

Rose standing alongside Pat as they watch on.

EXT. MARYLAND PARK - DAY

Rose pushes her 5-YEAR-OLD NIECE on the swings. Rose laughs, as the little girl squeals with delight.

5-YEAR-OLD NIECE

Higher! Higher!

ROSE

We can't tell your mom. She'll hate that we're --

Rose stops.

5-YEAR-OLD NIECE

Why are you stopping? Push more!

Rose doesn't move. Coming toward her is a striding Jill Volner.

CUT TO:

PARK BENCH

Rose and Jill sit as Rose watches her niece play in the sandbox.

ROSE

You needn't bother coming here. I have nothing to say.

VOLNER

I am not going to stop until I find the person accountable, and if you happen to be in the way...

Rose watches her niece, betrays nothing.

VOLNER (CONT'D)

You were as surprised as I was when you saw the indentations in the rug.

Beat.

VOLNER (CONT'D)

I know what it's like to be the only woman in a room of men.

Rose smiles.

ROSE

That doesn't make us on the same side.

(calls to Niece)

Amy! We need to get back to the house.

VOLNER

Have you read the papers? Your boss is going to be impeached, it's just a matter of time.

ROSE

So says *The Washington Post*.

VOLNER

Miss Woods, you're loyal. I get it. But, sometimes loyalty and truth are in conflict.

She pulls out a PEN and writes her number on her BUSINESS CARD.

VOLNER (CONT'D)

They broke the law and there will be consequences. Are you really certain that the person you're protecting is worth it?

Rose takes the card.

INT. WHITE HOUSE RESIDENCE SCREENING ROOM - NIGHT

Rose sits in the screening room alongside Pat, Julie, and Tricia. Rose is subdued.

JULIE

I cannot wait to see this, can you? Robert Redford. So dreamy.

TRICIA

Yes. But do you really believe he would ever love Barbara?

ROSE

(blurts)

Why not. She's her own woman and she doesn't take any shit.

(half to herself)

No matter who gets in her way.

Julie and Tricia laugh. Rose smiles at her joke. She has surprised herself. Pat looks at her curiously. Rose evades her gaze.

The LIGHTS go down and the MOVIE CREDITS begin to roll...

INT. WHITE HOUSE CAFETERIA - DAY

Rose gets her tray. She sees the gaggle of secretaries huddled together (the same women as before). They stop talking when she passes them.

KIMBERLY ANNE

Rose. How are you?

ROSE

Peachy.

She walks on. The women turn back to their discussion. We stay on Rose's face. She's done turning the other cheek. She doubles back.

ROSE (CONT'D)

I would understand being treated this way if you were men. I'm surrounded by men who fuck and lie, and they do it just because they can.

KIMBERLY ANNE

Rose -- sure this isn't the right forum for this kind of talk.

ROSE

No, this is the perfect forum. Here. In the White House. Where I have served the President.

(beat)

I thought you women were my friends.

(MORE)

ROSE (CONT'D)

When you got engaged I threw the parties, I sent the flowers to the hospital when you gave birth, I was the shoulder you cried on when some man here crossed a line...

She looks at each one of the women.

ROSE (CONT'D)

(lowers her voice)

I have kept your secrets. Married men you've slept with, lies you have told... and I have never judged.

(gets emotional)

I was silly to think... assume that I would get your support.

(beat)

Well, guess what? I can fight my battles myself.

She leaves, the other secretaries are speechless.

INT. ROSE'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Rose opens the MANILA ENVELOPE.

Takes a PIECE OF WHITE PAPER, consulting with the WIRETAP LIST, and starts making a list.

INT. WHITE HOUSE - WEST WING - NIGHT

CLOSE ON: WHITE PIECE OF PAPER

Rose, finished with her list, folds it carefully..

Paper in hand, she makes her way down the corridor of the --

WEST WING to --

GENERAL HAIG'S OFFICE

Rose stands outside the door. Armed with her tiny folded piece of paper and as much bravery she can muster. She KNOCKS.

General Haig's at his desk, immersed in a pile of paperwork. He looks surprised to see Rose.

HAIG

Rose. I didn't know anyone else was here tonight. I thought there was a tree lighting.

ROSE

There was.

She swallows, deep breath.

ROSE (CONT'D)

Jill Volner visited me.

HAIG

Jill?

ROSE

The Special Prosecutor.

HAIG

Jill Volner, right. And what plumbs of wisdom did the miniskirt impart? Fashion tips?

ROSE

Ms. Volner thinks that I might know something about what happened to the June 20th tape. She's convinced I'm covering up for someone.

HAIG

Ah. Well, hope you settled things.

ROSE

I told her nothing.

HAIG

Good.

ROSE

But what I haven't decided is whether I tell her that I know.

HAIG

You know what?

She holds THE FOLDED PAPER tightly in her hand.

ROSE

I know.

Haig looks up from his work.

ROSE (CONT'D)

On June 20, 1972 Haldeman and Ehrlichman were talking about illegal phone taps on private citizens that you sanctioned. That's what was erased. It had nothing to do with Watergate.

He looks at her curiously, leans back in his chair. He doesn't like this, but he'll play.

HAIG

You're going to have to help me out here, Rose. What are you talking about?

ROSE

And I have a list of them. The ones that were ordered. Every illegal wiretap that was requested by the White House.

HAIG

Rose.

ROSE

There have been lots of theories about those 18 1/2 minutes.

HAIG

Rose. I don't think this --

ROSE

I blamed myself. How could I have erased those 4 1/2 minutes. What good luck for you, that the dumb secretary was taking blame.

He looks at her. Then stands. He's tall. Towering over her. She won't back down.

He sees the FOLDED PAPER in her hands.

HAIG

Rose. You need to calm down. I don't know what you've --

ROSE

I know *you think* that people won't believe me. Heck, I don't know 4 minutes from 18, isn't that what you said?

HAIG

Rose --

ROSE

Someone will want to know the names and dates I have on this paper.

HAIG

You do this, you harm the President. You harm the family.

ROSE

That's why I'm coming to you first. Because I know you will understand. But if there are charges lodged against me... I promise I will not remain silent.

For the first time Alexander Haig looks uneasy. Could this woman really hold all this power in her hands?

Rose holds the FOLDED PAPER tightly. Doesn't flinch. Maybe for the first time Haig sees Rose as more than a secretary willing to take the blame.

And then he smiles.

HAIG

We all do what we think is best. So you're not going to do anything.

ROSE

No?

HAIG

You come after me. You think that's as far as it will go? You come forward and what do you think happens to the Nixon family?

ROSE

This isn't about the Nixons. This is about you.

HAIG

No, this is about the White House. Which has become a house of cards. Anything about the President's men will eventually lead to the President.

(beat)

Your betrayal would hang our President. Your boss. Could you live with that?

Rose looks down. He knows he has her.

HAIG (CONT'D)

You better get going, Rose. These are not the games a woman like you can play.

(beat)

Now, if you will excuse me, I have work to do. Aren't the Nixons expecting you at the residence for dinner and a movie?

EXT. WHITE HOUSE - NIGHT

Rose, still burning from Haig's words, passes a GROUP OF PROTESTORS holding "IMPEACH NIXON SIGNS" and chanting.

They try and pass her pamphlets as she trudges by. Rose's eyes are focused somewhere far out in space.

INT. ROSE'S APARTMENT - DAY

Rose, still in her trench coat, sits at the kitchen table. Maybe she has been sitting there all night. In her hands is the JADE ELEPHANT.

INT. WHITE HOUSE RESIDENCE - NIGHT

Rose finds Pat smoking and flipping through the *National Enquirer*, visibly tired. Pat looks up at Rose and smiles.

ROSE

Where's the Boss?

PAT

In the library. Muttering.

ROSE

I need to speak with him.

Pat watches her curiously. Rose's nervousness shows. She doesn't move. Pat takes a long drag.

PAT

Remember the sixty-two campaign?
All those envelopes...

ROSE

By the end, my tongue was numb.

PAT
I don't think I could have gotten
through it without you beside me...

Rose takes a breath.

ROSE
I had a talk with General Haig.

PAT
I heard.

Silence. Pat waits for her to speak.

ROSE
He doesn't think I'll have the
courage to do it.

Beat.

PAT
Do you?

ROSE
I don't want to hurt anyone...

PAT
Well, do what you think is best.
But, know that we would never let
anything happen to you.
(beat)
You're the fifth Nixon, you're one
of us.

ROSE
I'm the secretary accused of doing
something I did not do.
(determined)
And I won't say that I did.

PAT
Of course not...

ROSE
No matter who it may hurt.

PAT
Rose, what's happened?

ROSE
No matter who asks me to lie.

Pat's face, unreadable, fixes into a tight smile.

PAT

Best you go speak to the President
then... it's getting late.

Rose stands there for a moment longer, wanting to say more.

INT. WHITE HOUSE RESIDENCE - PRIVATE STUDY

We stay on Rose's face as she KNOCKS. Her hand holds the doorknob for a long moment. She closes her eyes and braces herself.

We see the FOLDED PAPER in her hands as she enters the President's study.

ROSE

I need a moment, Mr. President.
(deep breath)
Because I need to tell you what I
know about what was erased and what
I intend to do...

EXT. PHONE BOOTH - NIGHT

Rose, determined, dials and then speaks.

ROSE (INTO PHONE

Jerry, you said I had to start
protecting myself... Well, I've
done something... No, not on the
phone... Tomorrow. Great. Yes...

She hangs up the phone. Doesn't let the receiver go.

EXT. WASHINGTON OFFICE BUILDING - MORNING

Jerry leaves his office building and hurriedly makes his way down the street. We realize that we are not the only ones watching him. PULL OUT TO REVEAL --

HAIG sitting in a parked car. As Jerry moves down the street, Haig starts his car. We stay with Haig as he trails him. Jerry seems unaware that he is being followed.

Jerry stops at the light ready to cross the street to enter the Mall. He looks around. We hope he realizes someone is tailing him. We wait with baited breath for the light to change. When the pedestrian light goes green, he crosses. Haig stays with him, now on foot. We wonder what he will do.

EXT. WASHINGTON MALL - MORNING

Rose watches the sunrise. She's been up all night. Coffee and cigarette in hand, she looks on at the majesty of the building. It still has meaning for her. She pulls out the WHITE FOLDED PIECE OF PAPER from her pocket, to make sure it's still there.

CLOSE ON: THE WHITE FOLDED PIECE OF PAPER

Rose looks at it, knowing what this will mean. She looks up to see -- General Haig heading straight toward her, out of breath. Rose can't help but show her surprise.

HAIG

You shouldn't have called your lawyer.

ROSE

What do you want?

HAIG

To tell you, you're not getting indicted. Any and all allegations against Rose Mary Woods are officially being dropped.

Beat.

Rose digests the information.

ROSE

Why are you telling me this?

HAIG

To let you know the good news. And that the President hopes that you're pleased with this outcome.

She looks at him.

ROSE

So you're speaking for the President?

HAIG

Always. I'm always speaking for the President. Don't you know that by now?

He eyes the PIECE OF PAPER. She follows his gaze.

HAIG (CONT'D)

They care for you.

ROSE

I know.

Silence.

HAIG

Am I right about you still not
wanting to hurt them?

We see him look at the note in her hand. She follows his
gaze. She holds the power in her hands. She has the one thing
that can make General Haig nervous.

ROSE

You mean about me not revealing the
truth to the world about the 18 1/2
minutes? The 18 1/2 minutes you
wanted everyone to believe I
erased? And tried to frame me for?

This time Haig is silent.

ROSE (CONT'D)

I was thinking about what you said,
how I would never hurt the Nixons.
That's true...

HAIG

That's what I thought.

ROSE

Loyalty means something to me, even
if it doesn't to anyone else.

HAIG

I'm happy to hear that.

ROSE

I have spent over 30 years with a
family. A family that loves me. And
I need to believe that they would
never intentionally harm me.

HAIG

Good.

ROSE

Still... You know, I hear that even
the Judge is trying to sell his
story of Watergate.

(beat)

Can you believe it? Everyone
selling their story for a price?

(beat)

(MORE)

ROSE (CONT'D)

Do you know how many reporters call me each day? After all, I was the first secretary to make the cover of *Time Magazine*. People will want to hear my story of the 18 1/2 minutes... and your role in it.

Haig doesn't move.

HAIG

You think I did anything without the President knowing?

ROSE

We all do what we think is best, isn't that what you say?

(beat)

I have an entire lifetime to decide whether I tell my story or not.

They stare, not speaking. Haig blinks first.

HAIG

That's the choice you must make.

ROSE

That's right. My choice. Not yours. Not the President's.

(beat)

You should go. The President will be expecting you.

Haig leaves. She watches him disappear into the CROWD OF TOURISTS. After a moment, she looks down at the WHITE FOLDED PAPER in her hands.

We see Jerry in the distance, waving his briefcase in happiness. Rose goes to meet him. She passes a TRASH CAN. She stops. Looks at the paper in her hand. Then --

Rose tosses -- THE WHITE FOLDED PIECE OF PAPER in it. The secrets of the 18 1/2 minutes joining the rest of the garbage. She watches it sink into the trash. We have our eyes on this white paper. We HOLD ON this image.

Rose heads down Grand Avenue, not looking back. Not ever looking back. She passes the looming marble Washington Monument. She moves ahead of us. Determined.

We CRANE UP to see the full majesty of The Washington Mall, a symbol of Washington at its best. The Capitol, Lincoln Monument... the title cards begin to roll... as we show actual footage of events (including Alexander Haig's infamous speech on the court house steps)

CARD #1: RICHARD NIXON RESIGNED THE OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENCY ON AUGUST 9, 1974. HE WAS PARDONED ON SEPTEMBER 8, 1974.

CARD #2: JUNE 1974 ALEXANDER HAIG TESTIFIED DENYING RESPONSIBILITY FOR MORE THAN 100 WIRETAPS THAT WERE SENT TO THE WHITE HOUSE. FBI RECORDS SHOW THAT HAIG REQUESTED 12 OUT OF THE 17 INDIVIDUAL WIRETAPS.

CARD #3: GENERAL HAIG SERVED AS CHIEF OF STAFF FOR BOTH GERALD FORD AND RONALD REGAN.

CARD #4: ROSE CONTINUED TO WORK FOR PRESIDENT NIXON UNTIL HIS DEATH.

CARD #5: ROSE MARY WOODS NEVER SPOKE ABOUT THE INCIDENT TO THE PRESS. UNLIKE ALL THE LAWYERS AND POLITICIANS THAT WERE INVOLVED IN THE WATERGATE SCANDAL, ROSE NEVER GRANTED AN INTERVIEW. SHE NEVER WROTE A BOOK. SHE TOOK THE SECRET OF THE 18 1/2 MINUTES TO HER GRAVE.

FADE TO BLACK.