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Date _____

A Burglary, a Scandal, and a President

By Jane Runyon

It was a normal work night for Frank Willis. He was a security guard at a large complex in Washington, D.C. This complex had buildings that people lived in. It had a hotel. It also had buildings with offices. Frank Willis was guarding a building that housed the office of the National Democratic National Committee. On one of his rounds, Willis noticed that someone had placed a piece of tape over the lock in a door. The tape kept the lock from working properly. Cleaning people often used this to keep from having to unlock a door each time they went in or out. Willis removed the tape thinking that a cleaning crew must have forgotten to remove it. Later that night Willis discovered that a new piece of tape had been placed on the lock. He realized that something was wrong and contacted the Washington Police Department.



What the police discovered in the Watergate building would set in motion the largest scandal Washington had known. When they entered the building, the police found and arrested five men who had broken into the Democratic Committee offices. It was later discovered that this was their second break-in of the offices. During their first burglary, they had planted wiretap equipment. It was used to listen in on what the Democrats were doing. The second break-in was to replace some of the wiretaps that were not working.

You might want to ask these questions: Who would want to break into a political party office? What would they steal? The answers were fairly simple in the minds of the police. Their attention immediately went to the Republican Party. They were the ones who would benefit from information that would be found in this office. It was June of 1972. Richard Nixon, a Republican, was the President of the United States. He was in the middle of a campaign to be re-elected to the presidency. Any bit of information the Republicans could secure to keep the Democrats from defeating Nixon was important.

The police took their time and did an extensive investigation. They soon discovered that this was no simple burglary. What they needed to find out was just how far into the White House the law breaking went. As the investigation continued, names close to the president started to be heard. Aides close to the president were involved in the planning of the burglary. The burglary was just a small part of the plan.

A committee was formed by the Senate to do a government investigation. By April of 1973, President Nixon was forced to ask for the resignations of two of his most influential aides, Robert Haldeman and John Ehrlichman. He fired a White House lawyer named John Dean. Dean had testified before the Senate telling them about the involvement of White House personnel in the illegal acts.

Nixon reacted by naming Elliot Richardson as Attorney General. He wanted him to appoint a special lawyer to conduct yet another investigation. Richardson appointed Archibald Cox as the special counsel. During one of the investigations, it was discovered that the president had made tape recordings of everything that went on in the Oval Office of the White House. Very few people knew that these tapes even existed. Now everyone wanted to know just how deeply involved the president himself was in the illegal activities.

Archibald Cox subpoenaed the tapes. A subpoena is an order written by the court to produce something. President Nixon refused to turn over the tapes. Instead, he demanded that Cox drop the subpoena. Cox refused. October, 20, 1973, became known as the "Saturday night massacre" in history. Nixon made Elliott Richardson and his deputy, William Ruckelshaus resign. He wanted someone in office who would follow his orders. Robert Bork was finally named to replace Richardson. He did as Nixon commanded and fired Cox.

After these events, Nixon's popularity with the people plummeted. People stood on the street in front of the White House holding signs that said "Honk to Impeach." The noise of the horns honking became almost deafening. Nixon continued to proclaim his innocence. He maintained that he had no knowledge of what members of his re-election committee were doing. His words "I am not a crook" were published across America.

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Nixon eventually agreed to release edited forms of the tapes. He maintained that some of the material contained on the tapes was best kept secret. He said it was sensitive material important to the security of the nation. Many historians agree that most of the deleted passages were words and statements that would not reflect well on Nixon. One of these tapes had eighteen and a half minutes that had been erased. The blame for this blank space was put on the president's secretary, Rose Mary Woods. She said it was an accident. Investigators didn't agree.

On July 24, 1974, the United States Supreme Court ruled that the president must surrender all tapes to the new special counsel, Leon Jaworski. The tapes were released on July 30, 1974.

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Questions

_____ 1. Richard Nixon was the President of the United States in 1973.

- A. True
- B. False

_____ 2. Who discovered the Watergate burglary?

- A. A security guard
- B. An aide
- C. A senator
- D. A Democratic committeeman

3. What was the intent of the Watergate burglaries?

_____ 4. What is the Watergate?

- A. A Democratic plan
- B. A code name for the operation
- C. A Republican plan
- D. An office building

5. Why did President Nixon say he wouldn't hand over the original tapes of conversations in his office?

_____ 6. How many burglars were arrested?

- A. Five
- B. Four
- C. Three
- D. Two

