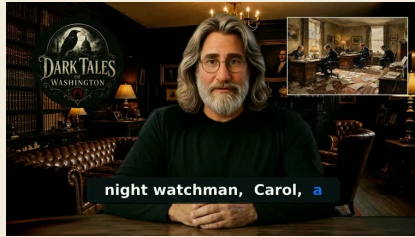




DARK TALES OF WASHINGTON ♦

Watergate

An AI Wrangler illustrated story



From the film

MARTY

Come in close to the fire tonight, friends, because this one comes to us out of the warm Washington dark of a June night in 1972, out of a great riverside building of curved concrete balconies on the banks of the Potomac, a place called the Watergate. This is a true story, Carol, every word of it documented, and it begins with something so small the newspapers first called it a third-rate burglary. Five men in business suits and surgical gloves, breaking into an office in the dead of night. And it ends, two years later, with a president of the United States climbing aboard a helicopter and flying away in disgrace. That is the whole arc of it, Carol, and I still can hardly believe the distance between those two points.

CAROL

The Watergate. Marty, I know the name is famous, but I've never had it told to me from the beginning, as a story. Five men in the dark with surgical gloves. What on earth were they after in there?



MARTY

They were after secrets, Carol. That sixth floor of the Watergate held the headquarters of the Democratic National Committee, the opposition party's nerve center in a presidential election year. And these men had come to photograph documents and fix a wiretap they'd planted on the telephones weeks before. It was the small hours of June the seventeenth, and it should have gone off clean and quiet. But there was a night watchman, Carol, a young security guard named Frank Wills, making his rounds, and he noticed something. A door latch, down in the stairwell, taped over so it wouldn't lock. He tore the tape off and moved on. And when he came back around and found the latch taped again, he knew someone was inside. He picked up a telephone and called the police.

CAROL

A piece of tape on a door latch. Marty, that gives me chills already, the whole thing turning on one watchful young man. So the police came. Did they catch them right there?



MARTY

Right there, Carol, crouched in the darkened offices. Five burglars, arrested on the spot. And here is where the small thing begins to grow teeth, because these were no ordinary thieves. They carried thousands of dollars in crisp hundred-dollar bills with serial numbers running in sequence. One of them had an address book, and in that book was the name of a man who worked inside the White House. The threads ran, Carol, from those five men in that office, straight back toward the president's own re-election committee, an outfit so aptly named that its initials spelled CREEP. And the great question of the next two years was born in that instant: how high did it go?

CAROL

How high did it go. Marty, I can feel the story opening up like a dark hallway. But surely powerful men know how to make a small thing disappear. Why didn't it just fade away?



MARTY

Ah, Carol, that was exactly the plan. Not to answer the break-in, but to bury it. This is the part historians call the cover-up, and it is the true heart of the tragedy. Money was quietly raised and passed to the burglars to buy their silence, hush money, to keep them from talking. Investigators were steered away. And it very nearly worked. But two things would not let it die. The first was a pair of young reporters at the Washington Post, Carol, Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein, working the phones and the doorsteps night after night, following that trail of money. And the second was a secret. Woodward had a source, a man so high inside the government and so frightened that he would only meet in the dead of night, in the shadows of an underground parking garage.

CAROL

An underground parking garage in the middle of the night. Oh, Marty, that is straight out of a thriller. Who was he? How did they even signal each other to meet in such a place?



MARTY

They had signals worked out like spies, Carol. If Woodward needed a meeting, he'd move a flowerpot with a little red flag on his apartment balcony. And the source, in turn, would leave marks in the young reporter's morning newspaper. Then down they'd go, into the concrete and the exhaust fumes, and this shadowy man would confirm what Woodward had, nudge him one way, warn him off another. He told him a phrase that became legend: follow the money. The Post editors, needing to protect him, gave him a code name off a movie marquee of the day. They called him Deep Throat. And here is the wonder of it, Carol, his true identity stayed secret for more than thirty years. It was not until 2005 that the world learned Deep Throat was Mark Felt, the second-highest official in the FBI itself.

CAROL

The number two man at the FBI, hiding in a parking garage. Marty, imagine carrying that secret for thirty years. So the reporters kept pulling the thread. But it takes more than newspaper stories to bring down a president, doesn't it?



MARTY

It does, Carol, and this is where the whole nation gets pulled in. By the summer of 1973, the United States Senate had opened hearings, and they were carried live on television, day after day, ordinary Americans watching witness after witness raise a hand and swear the oath. It was a senator from Tennessee, Howard Baker, who framed the question that the whole country was holding its breath over. He leaned into his microphone and asked, what did the President know, and when did he know it? And then, Carol, into those hearings walked a rather nervous White House aide, and almost in passing he revealed a secret that changed everything. President Nixon, he said, had a hidden taping system in the Oval Office. Nearly every conversation the president had held, for years, had been secretly recorded.

CAROL

Tapes. Marty, you mean the answer to Baker's whole question might be sitting there on reels, in the president's own voice? Everyone must have wanted those tapes at once.



MARTY

Everyone, Carol. The Senate wanted them, and a special prosecutor named Archibald Cox, appointed to get to the bottom of it all, demanded them in court. And the president refused. He fought it, he claimed the tapes were his by the privilege of his office. And then came the night that shocked the country, a Saturday in October of 1973, the night they call the Saturday Night Massacre. Nixon ordered his Attorney General, Elliot Richardson, to fire the special prosecutor. And Richardson would not do it, Carol. He resigned instead. So the order passed down to his deputy, William Ruckelshaus, and he refused too, and resigned. Two of the highest law officers in the land, quitting in a single night rather than carry out the president's command. It was only the third man down the line who finally fired Cox. And the country recoiled in horror.

CAROL

Two men resigning in one night rather than obey. Marty, that tells you everything about how far it had gone. But they got the tapes in the end, didn't they? Please tell me they got the tapes.



MARTY

They got them, Carol, but not without one last riddle that has never been fully explained. When the tapes finally began to come out, one of them, a crucial conversation from just days after the break-in, had a gap in it. Eighteen and a half minutes of silence, an erasure, a buzzing hole right where the talk turned to Watergate. The White House offered explanations that satisfied no one. And still Nixon held the rest back, until the Supreme Court of the United States ruled, unanimously, that he had to hand them over. No man is above the law, they said, not even the president. And on one of those tapes, Carol, from just six days after the burglary, the world finally heard the president's own voice arranging to have the FBI investigation shut down. They called it the smoking gun.

CAROL

The smoking gun, in his own voice. Marty, after two years, there it finally was, the thing they couldn't explain away. What could he possibly do after that?



MARTY

There was nothing left to do, Carol. The evidence was plain, the last of his support fell away, and rather than be removed from office, Richard Nixon chose to go. On the evening of August the eighth, 1974, he sat before the television cameras and told the nation he would resign, the first president in American history ever to do so. And the next morning he stood in the East Room of the White House, said his farewells, and walked out to a waiting helicopter on the lawn. He turned at the top of the steps, Carol, and raised both arms in that famous V, and then he flew away, and it was over. A third-rate burglary, five men and a roll of tape on a door latch, had brought down the most powerful man in the world. That is the story, and it is all true. I'm Marty Shepard.

CAROL

And I'm Carol, and tonight I'll be thinking about that young watchman on his rounds and those two reporters chasing the money in the dark, and how the smallest acts of paying attention can matter more than all the power in the world. Keep your eyes open, tell the truth even when it costs you, and always, always come back to the fire.

