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CARL BERNSTEIN

All of the events in this book are real; the names of a few participants have been changed.

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THIS BOOK IS FOR MY PARENTS.
I AM PROUD OF THE CHOICES THEY MADE.

IT IS FOR JACOB AND MAX—THE NEXT GENERATION.
AND IT IS FOR BOB WOODWARD AND KATHLEEN TYNAN.

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BY CARL BERNSTEIN

All the President's Men *(with Bob Woodward)*
The Final Days *(with Bob Woodward)*
Loyalties: A Son's Memoir

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LAUNDRY (1978)

"At some point you're going to confront your feelings," says my friend. I'm not sure that she comprehends the depth of pain and anger. And about what? Does anyone really care what happened to two or ten or twenty or thirty people who were on the fringes of the failing social and political movements of the last generation?

Yesterday was unbearable. Transcribing pages and pages and pages of notes from a tape recorder, thousands and thousands of words, most of them about the chaos that ruled our house when we were little, the inability of my mother to get a grip on running the household and what seemed like the accompanying abdication of parenthood by my father. I'm not sure that it contributes to an understanding of the times.

Which, after all, was how this got started. The typewriter would deliver of itself a calm, dispassionate account of that last undisturbed corner of our national nightmare. Names, dates, places, transcripts, footnotes, appendices. Scrupulously journalistic. Feelings weren't contemplated.

Not for the first time I lost the thread last week. Very depressing. Long walks on the beach with my friend, describing the problem: How do you keep from becoming self-indulgent? Why should the reader be interested in my obsession? How do I deal with my father's resistance and obvious disapproval?

Keep writing, says my friend; his reaction is part of the story. The material will carry you.

The files fill the cottage now. Spiral notebooks from two years of interviewing. Bookshelves overflowing with bound accounts of lives spent in service to the Party, informing on the Party, declaring war on the Party—almost all of it irrelevant. Reams of transcripts—the testimony of my mother, my father, of those who held me and bathed me and taught me. Cassettes, voices from the grave, heaped in boxes—my grandmother, trying to explain away her coolness to my parents' marriage. Clippings from the paper's morgue ("Bernstein, Sylvia, Local Commie," says the file heading on my mother).

His personal files—musty, mildewed—are here, too, and those of the union. For years they were kept under the steps in Silver Spring. It seemed unlikely that the FBI would look there. It also seemed unlikely that the FBI would come to my Bar Mitzvah. But they did.

I cannot remember a single instance of my father complaining, which is not as surprising as it might seem; I have hardly any memory of him raising his voice, whatever the provocation, at either his children or his government. He has always been a man of quiet passion, eloquent and reasoned even in anger, capable perhaps of hate but not of retribution. I must have wished otherwise, for I have long carried this sense, probably exaggerated, of his frailty, have allowed my mind to confuse his gentleness with defenselessness. His physical appearance, particularly to a son who wanted desperately that his father concern himself with something heroic, like

football, instead of with matters of the mind, always contributed to this sense: bantam, diminutive, those short arms and spindly legs that I allowed to embarrass me when we went to the beach. Fully dressed, the impression was usually no less helpless, partly because of the indifference with which he clothed himself, but mostly because of the absentmindedness he seemed to carry almost everywhere. I have seen him dry the dinner dishes and then stack them neatly in the refrigerator. It was only when I had reached my thirties and discovered myself similarly afflicted that I began to consider the view of his closest friends that the absentmindedness might be somehow endearing. His obliviousness could be hilarious, his private thoughts so consuming that at times it would not be unreasonable for a stranger to assume that he was conducting some kind of séance with himself. I can remember being awakened some mornings by the sound of talking downstairs, and, tiptoeing down the steps, I would find my father in motion, deep in conversation with himself, dressed in a robe haphazardly tied, a cigar stuck in the corner of his mouth, head cocked to one side, ashes tumbling onto the burgundy robe as he paced the room.

What were his aspirations? I've often wondered since. What are his regrets? He is a man who wanted more than anything else to participate in the events of his day, who came to Washington to be a participant and, by the age of forty, found himself excluded.

Was there some mechanism of self-protection that failed, that became short-circuited by ideological or other currents? Surely by 1942 it was possible to foresee that membership in the Communist Party, if discovered, would be ruinous. Above all my father is a cautious man, a believer in weighing the consequences of behavior before choosing a course, or so he has always seemed to me. With the exception of that decision to join the Communist Party, I do not know of a single act in his adult life that might be characterized as reckless. He is a man who eschews unnecessary danger. He is quite capable of courage, won't be swayed by fashion, refuses to compromise with principle—but all that is something quite apart from consciously reaching a decision bound to cause him so much pain.