

OF RABBITS AND PRESIDENTS

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One wonders why and how the story about the President and the Rabbit, which appeared in the news at the end of August, ever came about. An AP scoop? Another *Washington Post* investigative reporting triumph? A Republican dirty trick? A terrorist organization escapade? A White House leak? A CIA plot?

Poor Jimmy. As if he didn't have enough troubles at the time with Andy Young resigning, the Iranians reselling his humanitarian kerosene, Miz Lillian on the circuit again and Billy back in Libya. The scenario of the free world's leader flailing away with a paddle at a wet rabbit (swimming yet!) must have made Brezhnev chuckle, the elegant Giscard d'Estaing shudder and China's Deng wonder if he had chosen the right ally. A "Banzai Bunny" the papers said; a killer-rabbit "hissing menacingly, its teeth flashing and nostrils flared, and making straight for the president"—grist for the mills of Art Buchwald, Russell Baker and Jeff MacNelly.

Well, don't believe a word of it. The true story is all on White House tapes and it happened this way:

Last April while the president was out in his canoe on his Plains farm lake, a lonesome, maiden-lady beaver—despite his later denials as to beavers—attracted by the flashing of Jimmy's own teeth, set out determinedly across the lake to find a mate. She wasn't hissing, just breathing passionately. Jimmy saw her swimming toward him and thought to himself, *This will make a great picture*. So he called to his White House staff photographer in the Secret Service canoe trailing him and said, "Get a few shots of me swinging my paddle at her."

He told no one about the encounter or about the picture because, in the back of his mind, he was plotting a secret revenge on the press. *One of these days*, he said to himself, *I'll give those clever creeps a hot story about an assassination attempt by killer rabbit. Not one of those smart ass, citified cynics knows the difference between a corn pone and a hushpuppy, much less a beaver and a rabbit, not even a dry one.*

Back in the White House, Jimmy bided his time and waited for the right moment. Just when his popularity in the polls leveled off at a steady minus 16 ½, he leaked the story to an aide. Presto! It hit the front pages like a bombshell.

Ham Jordan was a little concerned that the press might dig more deeply into the story

and ask why the administration chose to cover up the incident for more than four months, or, worse, demand to hear the tapes. But the president continued to stonewall. Although more about the affair is known now and it is no longer front-page news, as of this writing (September 11, 1979), the White House still had refused to make even the photographs public. Jimmy still had not let on that the killer rabbit incident was staged as a put-on to make fools of the media. But it will all come out some day.

If you're not convinced about any of this, just write to Rosalyn and ask her. Woodward and Bernstein where are you?

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