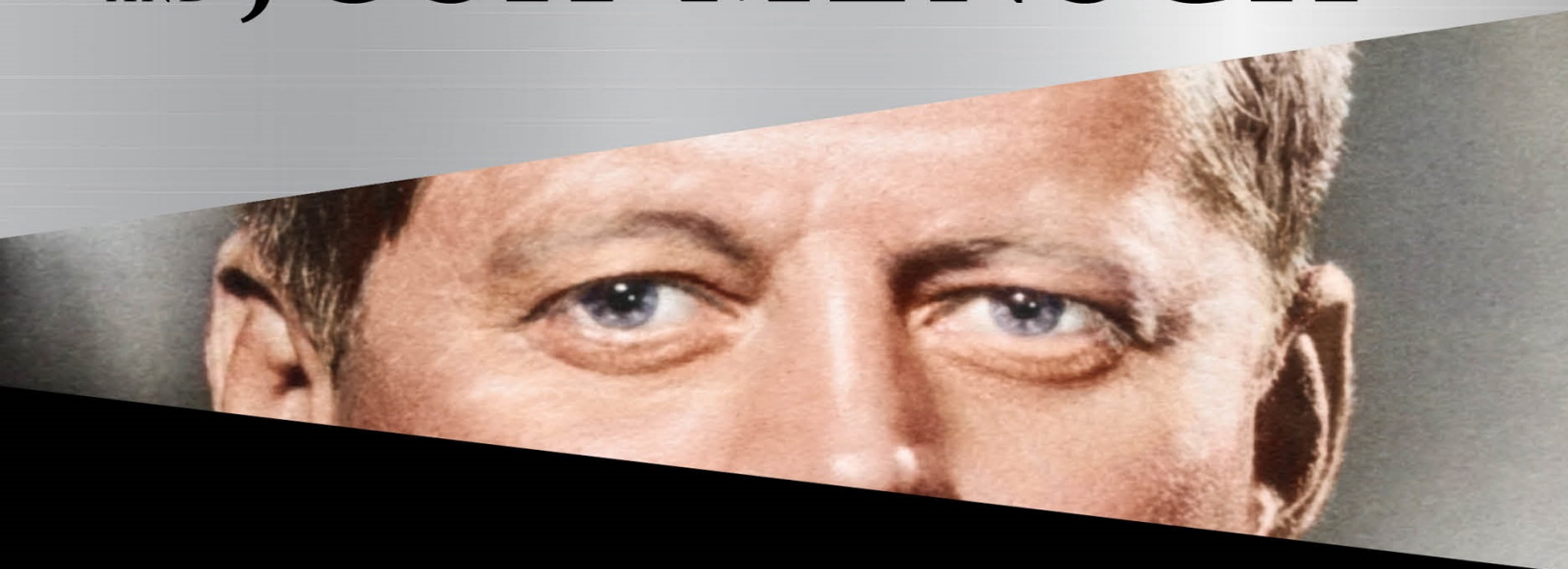


New York Times Bestselling Authors of *The Lincoln Conspiracy*

BRAD
MELTZER
AND JOSH MENSCH



THE JFK
CONSPIRACY

The Secret Plot to Kill Kennedy
—and Why it Failed

“History is full of fascinating twists and near twists—and Meltzer and Mensch are masters of the tales of such moments.” —JON MEACHAM

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For Josh Mensch, my dear friend and brother in writing. So grateful we got to make history together.

—B.M.

For Brad Meltzer, who may be the greatest mensch of all. Thank you for inviting me on this amazing journey through history.

—J.M.

A Note on the Text

When quoting directly from historical sources, we've occasionally altered the capitalization or punctuation to be consistent with the style and syntax of our text. The language itself has not been altered.

Prologue

Palm Beach, Florida

December 11, 1960

No one notices the car.

It's been there for a while, parked on one side of a quiet residential street. The morning is bright, with the sun shining through the tall, leafy trees that line the roadside.

If anyone were to look in the car's direction, nothing about it would seem unusual. It's a 1950 Buick sedan—not a fancy or noteworthy vehicle. And if anyone happened to glimpse the man sitting behind the wheel, they wouldn't think anything unusual about him either. He's an older man, with short white hair and a wide face. His dress and appearance are typical—he looks like many other motorists in South Florida or, for that matter, anywhere else in the United States.

Across the street from the parked car, a scene is unfolding that isn't so typical. A small group of men stand or pace just outside the entrance gate of a walled-off private estate. They're dressed professionally and wear sunglasses, sometimes whispering to one another. They seem to be waiting for something or someone to appear from inside the grounds.

Soon enough, someone does appear. A tall, trim man in his early forties, wearing a suit, with perfect posture and short, carefully parted reddish-brown hair. He's flanked by a few other men, who greet or nod at those who are waiting outside the property's gates.

The man's face is memorable, with tanned skin and a bright smile. It's not just any face. Unlike the motorist, he's got one of the most recognized faces in the country. Soon, he'll be one of the most recognized in the world.

This is John Fitzgerald Kennedy, who, a month earlier, was elected to be the thirty-fifth President of the United States. Six weeks from now, he'll take the oath of office and occupy the White House.

John F. Kennedy's election was one of the closest and most bitterly fought in American history. He won the popular vote over his opponent, Vice President Richard M. Nixon of California, by the smallest margin in the twentieth century. When it came to the Electoral College, several states had razor-thin margins that could've swung the victory in the other direction. It was the first election in U.S. history to be fully televised, drawing unprecedented scrutiny and a media frenzy greater than any the country had ever experienced.

It was also a divisive election at a divisive time. In the 1960s, the nation was entering a new decade that would be as turbulent and full of social upheaval as any other in the nation's past. The defining domestic issue of the day—the struggle for civil rights for Black Americans—has led to a furious and violent backlash that has put the country at a perilous crossroads.

Kennedy's victory was greeted, especially by younger voters, with unprecedented fervor and devotion. At a time when the nation is bitterly torn, a new generation has placed its hopes and ideals with this young President to move the country forward in a direction they believe in.

Equally fervent, however, are those on the other side of the divide. Many Americans reject the changes and upheaval the younger generation are pushing. For these voters, Kennedy embodies everything they believe is *wrong* with the country and where it's heading. And Kennedy's enemies don't just disagree with his policies—they despise *him*. In their minds, he's a tool of dangerous radicals, or a foreign interloper with motives to undermine the nation.

Before the President-elect gets in the car waiting for him, he stops and turns around to greet someone else—a woman who has emerged from inside the grounds. She's medium-tall with dark hair and, like him, carries herself with perfect posture. Walking near her is a child, barely three years old. The woman's face would be recognizable to most Americans as the President-elect's wife, Jacqueline Bouvier Kennedy.

Like her husband, since the campaign, she's become the focus of intense

public fascination and media scrutiny. The girl walking beside her is their daughter, Caroline Kennedy. Along with Caroline's younger brother, two-week-old John Jr., they're the soon-to-be First Family of the United States.

Across the street, the man in the parked car is still watching, taking in the scene. Most important, while his 1950 Buick may be nondescript on the outside ... on the inside, there's a secret.

Hidden in the trunk, tucked under blankets and mixed with assorted junk and tools, are seven sticks of dynamite. Affixed to that dynamite is a wire that runs from the trunk into the body of the vehicle, toward a small trigger mechanism. All the man has to do is activate this small trigger to blow up the vehicle—and everything around it. According to one expert, if detonated, the amount of dynamite is powerful enough to “blow up a mountain.” And right now, the man's hand is moving toward the ignition.

Across the street, President-elect John F. Kennedy takes a few steps toward the sleek black sedan parked by the side of the road. A few of the men in dark suits guide him to it. The sedan has been waiting for him, ready to drive him to somewhere most unusual for an American President: Sunday Mass. For Kennedy is, as almost every American knows, the first person of Catholic faith ever elected to the highest office.

For the man behind the wheel of the Buick, this is the moment he's been waiting for. It's why he's here in South Florida: to be on this street, on this day, with seven sticks of dynamite hidden in the trunk of his car.

It's a simple plan. Turn the key in the ignition. Put your foot on the gas. And turn the steering wheel just enough to slam the Buick into that sleek black sedan.

That's all it'll take to turn this quiet, leafy, sunny Florida street into a scene of horrors beyond imagining—and at this dawn of a new decade, to thrust the nation into unspeakable darkness.

PART I

The Candidate

1

SEVENTEEN YEARS EARLIER ...

The Solomon Islands

August 2, 1943

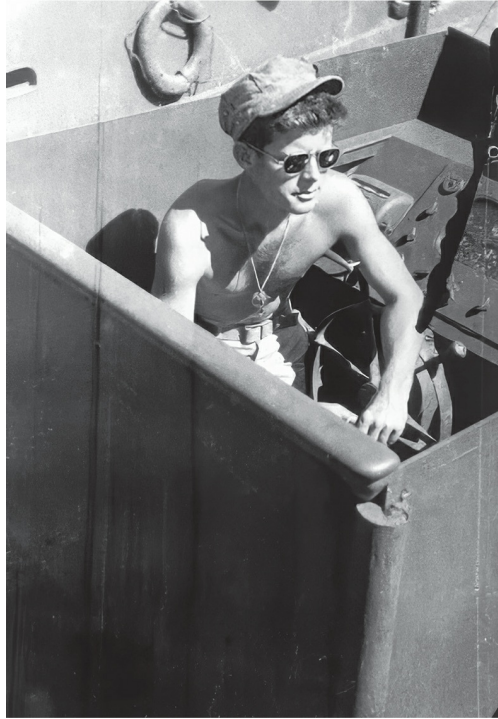
The sky is black. There's no moonlight to illuminate the choppy waves breaking softly against the boat's hull.

The vessel is roughly eighty feet long and twenty feet wide. It's a U.S. Navy motor-torpedo patrol boat, or a PT as they're often called, patrolling the Blackett Strait, a stretch of water in the Pacific Ocean southwest of Kolombangara in the Solomon Islands. On the opposite side of the world, in Southern and Eastern Europe, the United States and its allies Great Britain and the Soviet Union are engaged in a massive land war against Nazi Germany. Here in the South Pacific, the United States is battling the forces of Germany's ally Japan in brutal combat for control of sea, air, and land.

The U.S. has mostly gained control of the waters surrounding this part of the Solomon Islands, east of New Guinea, but the Japanese still send naval convoys through the region and launch air and sea attacks from nearby bases. That's why small American PT boats like this one patrol the area at night, on the lookout for intruding enemy ships.

On this particular PT, four of the thirteen crew members are asleep, the others manning their stations.

At the helm is the ranking officer on board, twenty-six-year-old Lieutenant Junior Grade John F. Kennedy, from Boston, Massachusetts. Like the other members of the crew, he wears a tattered life jacket and beat-up lightweight olive-green combat fatigues.



In the summer of 1943, during World War II, twenty-six-year-old Lieutenant Junior Grade John F. Kennedy is stationed in the South Pacific. He's the pilot and ranking officer aboard PT-109, an armed mobile patrol vessel. (Credit: circa 1943)

At 2:30 a.m., the boat is on the lookout for a Japanese transport thought to be in the vicinity. Only one of the PT's three engines is running so that the vessel will be as quiet as possible. For the PT's crew, these overnight patrols are common; they'll work in small shifts through the night while the others sleep.

That is, until the silence is broken.

"Ship at two o'clock!" one of crewmates, Harold Marney, calls out from the side deck. From behind the wheel, Kennedy turns to look, and, sure enough, the shadow of a ship can be made out against the dark water and sky. For a moment, he thinks it's another PT boat. But then he squints to get a better look.

That's not a PT boat. It's larger. Much larger.

The men on deck grasp it all at once. That ship they're looking at is a Japanese destroyer—a fully outfitted warship—from the Imperial fleet. It's roughly five times the length of the PT, with exponentially more armor and firepower. Still, Kennedy quickly spins the wheel to starboard, facing the PT's flank toward the larger vessel so the PT can fire off one of its small

torpedoes. The problem is there's no time to even load a shell—because the hulking shadow is getting rapidly larger. The destroyer is coming right at them, racing on the water at a speed of roughly forty miles per hour.

To Kennedy, it's unclear whether the Japanese ship is intentionally trying to ram them, or if its captain simply doesn't see the smaller boat in the darkness.

Doesn't matter. There's no time. Frantically spinning the wheel, Kennedy tries to swerve out of the way. But with only one engine engaged, the PT can't move fast enough. Now the destroyer is only seconds away, coming right at them.

So this is how it feels to die, Kennedy thinks to himself, shutting his eyes as the huge vessel SMASHES into their small boat. An explosion sends debris and plumes of flame through the air.

Two of the U.S. crew members are killed instantly in the collision. Others are badly injured as they're thrown around the hull and flung into the water by the force of the crash.

Only one crew member is below deck for the impact, the machinist Patrick McMahon, who is working in the boat's cramped engine room. He's completely unprepared for the shock of the collision. Water immediately gushes in from the smashed walls, and then, only moments after impact, flames from the explosion rip through the vessel, burning his shoulders, back, torso, and legs before he's submerged in water.

At first, the wreckage pulls McMahon straight down, but he somehow frees himself from the sinking debris. He has the surreal sensation of being several yards underwater, looking up to see flames on the water's surface. His body is too damaged to swim, but his life preserver pulls him toward the surface.

On what's left of the deck, Kennedy opens his eyes. He's clearly not dead. Getting his bearings and emerging from a daze, he hears men shouting, some nearby, some from the water. The Japanese destroyer has already disappeared into the darkness as quickly as it appeared, cleaving the smaller boat in two and leaving mostly floating wreckage in its wake.

A searing pain slices through Kennedy's back. He's had chronic back pain for years, ever since a teenage sports injury, but here, the impact has

made it worse. Otherwise, he seems to be intact. Quickly gathering his wits, he knows what takes priority.

Wasting no time, he takes off his boots, strips down to his underwear and life jacket, and dives into the dark water strewn with debris and pools of burning oil.

The water is illuminated only by flames, and Kennedy follows the shouts, swimming in the direction of his injured crew. Two men have floated farther away than the rest, Gunner's Mate Charles Harris and the machinist, McMahon. Nearly unconscious and with severe burns all over his body, McMahon can barely move.

"How are you, Mac?" Kennedy asks.

"I'm kind of burnt," McMahon replies, hardly able to talk.

Grabbing the wounded man and pulling him slowly back toward the debris, Kennedy swims against the current, tugging McMahon the whole way. Harris swims alongside them, struggling with an injured knee and the weight of his life jacket and sweater.

Meanwhile, those sailors who have the strength do their best to aid the rescue mission, pulling those who can't swim themselves up onto the damaged boat. Some of the men have broken bones. Others are nearly passed out from inhaling noxious fumes. In the end, rescuing the injured crew takes over three hours. Eleven crew members are accounted for, with two crewmates still missing. Their bodies will never be found.

As the sun rises over the Solomon Sea, some crew are lying on top of what's left of the boat's sinking hull, while a few simply float in the water. Some have slept an hour or two; others, like Kennedy, not at all.

For nine hours, overnight and then through the morning, they cling to the debris, with the healthy crew aiding the wounded. They have no food or water, and with the morning light comes the blazing hot sun. They can already feel the first waves of dehydration. The remains of the hull are sinking, and some of the men desperately need medical attention.

For a while, they're hopeful that the local command will stage a rescue mission to find them—but there are no ships on the horizon, no signs of U.S. aircraft above. With each passing hour, their hope of rescue fades.

They also know these waters aren't safe. That destroyer probably wasn't

alone, and there are Japanese island bases not far away, just outside the perimeter of Allied control.

Kennedy, although barely a junior officer, has the highest rank in the group, so he's the one who has to decide what to do. If they stay in the water, he knows it'll bring almost certain death, especially with no sign of rescue.

The closest bit of land is a small strip of uninhabited rock and vegetation—Plum Pudding Island—three miles away. Getting there won't be easy. The ocean is choppy, with unpredictable waves and currents. Making things harder, the men are weak and wounded. For some of them, a long swim could be fatal. But right now, Kennedy knows ... there's no choice.

From the floating debris, Kennedy and the crew extract a two-by-eight-foot plank of wood and tie a life jacket to it. The weaker men can keep a hand on the floating wood while the healthy take turns pushing the plank in the water, propelling everyone else. The plank also serves another purpose: they can tie their remaining shoes and the ship's lantern to it while they swim.

There's still one problem: the machinist, McMahon. He's nearly incapacitated. His injured arms are too weak to even hold on to a plank in the water. For him, they'll need to find another way.

Five years earlier, Kennedy was on the swim team at Harvard. Even with his injured back, he figures he's the best swimmer in the water. Right there, a plan is made. While everyone else uses the plank, he'll personally pull McMahon in the water, swimming for both of them, for three miles.

Thankfully, since McMahon is wearing a life preserver, the one thing he can do is float. Kennedy will need both arms to swim, so to pull him in the water he stretches a strap from McMahon's life jacket and clasps it in his own teeth. That's the only choice at this point. If he wants to get McMahon to the tiny island, it's three miles with a clear objective: don't drown.

At roughly 2:00 p.m.—that's nearly twelve hours after the collision—the group sets out from the wreckage. Their progress is painfully slow. Even the uninjured men are dehydrated and weak. Kennedy does a simple breaststroke, trying to keep his head above water as he pulls McMahon with the strap in his teeth.

Every time Kennedy inhales, he gets a mouthful of salt water. Struggling to swim, he has to stop every ten minutes or so, coughing, gagging, and

trying to catch his breath.

“How do you feel, Mac?” he keeps asking.

“I’m okay, Mr. Kennedy,” McMahon replies.

What starts as an hour-long swim becomes two hours, then three. Kennedy and McMahon get slightly ahead of the others. Pushing the plank while so many hold tight to it makes everyone’s movements awkward and slow.

Soon, though, the speck of land known as Plum Pudding Island starts growing bigger in the distance.

Just before dusk, after four straight hours of swimming, Kennedy is so exhausted he’s barely conscious. That’s when he feels it. Something solid beneath his toes.

It’s a bed of coral. He’s close. Only a few hundred feet to go.

He shouldn’t be surprised that it doesn’t get any easier. The coral is full of spikes and sharp edges, quickly lacerating his bare feet and legs as he stumbles toward shore, still pulling McMahon behind him.

As soon as Kennedy reaches solid ground he vomits and collapses, nauseous from the physical exertion and swallowing salt water. Pushing through the pain and the exhaustion, Kennedy and McMahon slowly crawl across the beach until they reach the bushes at the center of the tiny island.

It’s not much different for the others, who drag their damaged bodies toward the scraggly brush, using it as cover. For all they know, Japanese soldiers are lying in wait, or there’s a Japanese vessel nearby. For that reason, staying out of view is essential. As night falls, the men have all made it to the brush. They pass out in exhaustion, but somehow, they’re all still alive.

Looking back, it’s a miraculous swim. But their trials are far from over.

2

THE NEXT DAY ...

August 3, 1943

In the morning, Kennedy and his crew take stock of their situation.

For the past thirty-six hours, none of them have had food or water. The injured are in terrible shape. McMahon's burns are festering and swollen. He's in excruciating pain, slipping in and out of consciousness.

On the tiny island they try foraging for sustenance, but after a few hours cautiously groping through the brush, rocks, grasses, and dried trees, they find no food or water.

Kennedy calculates that their island is a mile or two from a stretch of ocean known as Ferguson Passage. Sometimes the United States sends supply vessels and patrol boats through the passage, usually at night. Maybe, if one of them can swim out to the passage with a lantern, he could flag down a ship from the water.

The only question is, who should go?

Kennedy, who has been vomiting for much of the past twelve hours, and who has an injured back and wounds all over his feet and legs, chooses himself.

Wearing only his underwear and a pair of shoes to protect his feet from the sharp coral, he ties the ship's lantern and a pistol to his life jacket. At roughly 3:00 p.m., he says goodbye to the rest of the crew and walks into the surf.

"These barracuda will come up under a swimming man and eat his testicles," a seasoned sailor had warned Kennedy when he first arrived in the region.

As Kennedy swims along the reefs, the fish keep their distance, but the

sailor's words ring in his ears.

It takes a few hours of swimming through the waves to reach Ferguson Passage. Once there, he finds what he hopes is a location that'll be visible to passing ships. Floating alone in the dark water, he readies the lantern.

At the slightest sound of a ship, he plans to wave the light. Maybe an American vessel will see him.

An hour goes by. Then another, and another. It's dead silent. He spends most of the night there, floating by himself in the dark water. Not a single ship passes through.

Finally, eventually, he gives up. Totally exhausted, he starts swimming back to the island.

Only now, the currents have shifted, pushing him sideways from where he needs to go. Struggling in the waves and fighting against the current, he becomes disoriented. He suddenly has no strength left in his body.

Barely able to move anymore, he turns over and floats on his back, letting the waves and currents carry him. The dark water starts to feel cold. There, floating alone in the ocean, his eyes close. Soon he loses consciousness completely, and the ocean currents slowly churn, carrying him away from the islands and out to sea.

Hours go by. It's hard to know how long Kennedy was floating along in the darkness, drifting in and out of consciousness, not sure where or even who he was.

The bright Pacific sun finally wakes him up.

In those fateful hours while he was passed out in the water, there had been a stroke of good fortune. That morning, the same currents that had made his return swim so difficult, and that were pushing him farther out to sea, had shifted course. Instead of carrying him farther away, the currents began pushing him southwest, back toward his destination.

When he opens his eyes and comes to his senses, the sun is beating down on him, but he quickly discovers he's now only a few hundred yards from Plum Pudding Island. The adrenaline gives him a tiny bit of strength—he begins swimming toward land.

The other crew members, who'd assumed they'd never see Kennedy again, spot him approaching. The previous night, he'd ditched his shoes to

better swim, so his already wounded feet and legs once again get lacerated and bloodied from walking on the sharp coral. He finally makes it to shore and collapses. He's been in the water for roughly fourteen hours.

That evening, while Kennedy rests, another member of the crew makes the same swim out to Ferguson Passage. They need to hail a ship.

Like Kennedy, he sees no vessels in the passage and gives up after a couple hours. When he returns, he shares the bad news.

By the next morning, it's been more than three days since the crash. The men are severely dehydrated and the brutal sun is relentless.

Kennedy makes a simple determination: if they stop moving and do nothing, they will surely die. No matter how exhausted or how much pain they're in, they need to try something, anything, that might offer a chance for rescue.

So that afternoon, Kennedy decides they should relocate. There's another small island a mile and three-quarters away, somewhat closer to Ferguson Passage. If the group can make the journey there, perhaps they'll find some sustenance, and if not, at least they'll be closer to where ships might pass.

The biggest issue is, how will they get the invalid crew to the other island? Once again, it comes back to the two-by-eight-foot wooden plank, where they tie their lanterns and pistols into place. From there, they gingerly pull McMahon into the water on his back. Once again, Kennedy clenches the strap of McMahon's life jacket in his teeth so he can swim and pull the injured man along.

After a three-hour swim, they're on another tiny beach on another tiny island, this one named Olasana. Like before, they can't find sustenance—there are a few coconut trees, but the fruit is either green or out of reach. Thankfully, the evening brings a light rain. By lying on their backs on the ground, they can catch some precious drops of fresh rainwater in their open mouths. They get a few more drops by licking wet leaves from the brush, sometimes spitting it out with a mouthful of bird droppings. It's precious little water, but after four straight days in the sun these few raindrops probably saved some lives.

The next day, the fifth since their ordeal began, their situation is increasingly desperate.

After studying their position, Kennedy and another crew member, Ensign George “Barney” Ross, decide they will split from the group and swim to yet another small island, just visible on the horizon. Maybe they can forage there, and at least they won’t just be waiting around to die.

It’s a grueling hour-long swim through more ocean waves and currents. The two men finally arrive at yet another small strip of land, this one called Naru Island. It’s here, exploring the beach, that they find, for the first time since being shipwrecked, something tangible to help them. It’s a small box of provisions with Japanese lettering on it, apparently abandoned by enemy soldiers.

Inside are a few pieces of candy and crackers—not much—but in their state of desperation, it feels like a miracle. Farther up the same beach, the miracle expands—there’s an old lean-to with a small keg of water nearby. On top of that, visible in the water, there’s a beat-up one-person canoe.

Offshore, they see something even more remarkable: what appears to be a grounded Japanese barge, stuck on the reef. Squinting, they spot two men paddling another canoe near the barge. Fearing that they’re Japanese soldiers, Kennedy and Ross take cover under nearby bushes. The canoe disappears.

What to do now? After a few sips of water and pieces of candy, some of their strength returns. Yet in their delirious state, they have trouble figuring out how to proceed. They know they have to get the snacks and water back to the men on the other island. But on this new island, they’re now closer to Ferguson Passage, and Kennedy doesn’t want to lose a chance to flag a ship when darkness falls. To complicate matters, the enemy is apparently near.

Since only one person will fit in their new canoe, they agree to split up.

Once the sun goes down, Kennedy sets out quietly in the canoe, carrying the box and the water, while Ross remains hidden on the island. In the darkness, Kennedy paddles to Ferguson Passage and, as before, readies the lantern, taking the risk that he might be spotted by whomever they saw earlier. After a few futile hours with no ships passing, Kennedy gives up and heads back to Olasana so he can share the snacks and water with the rest of the crew.

He arrives to a surprise. The men tell Kennedy that the two men in the other canoe had spotted them and came ashore. They weren’t Japanese

soldiers after all; they were native islanders from the region whom the Allies had hired as scouts—a common practice in the Pacific war. Unfortunately, the scouts couldn't speak English, and after some difficult attempts to communicate they left in their canoe.

As night falls, the men get some sleep, but Kennedy is up before dawn. He has to get back to Ross, who is now alone and vulnerable on Naru. Kennedy takes the canoe, but on the way, strong winds nearly capsize the small boat, filling it with water.

To his surprise, two native scouts appear in another canoe, bail him out, and help him get to the island, where they reconnect with Ross.

No question, the scouts have been a godsend. Still, the language barrier is hard to overcome.

Kennedy knows that top priority is getting a message to local command, but how can he do that if the scouts don't understand his words? There's no paper on the island, no pens or pencils, nothing.

With no other options, Kennedy grabs an unripe coconut. Using the only tool he has left—his sheath knife—he scrawls a message:

NAURO ISL
NATIVE KNOWS POS'IT
HE CAN PILOT
11 ALIVE
NEED SMALL BOAT
KENNEDY

Handing the coconut to the scouts, Kennedy uses hand gestures to convey that he wants them to take it to the nearest Allied base.

That's what it comes down to. John F. Kennedy's fate—and the lives of his men—now rests with two scouts carrying a coconut.

As the scouts paddle away, Kennedy wonders whether he'll ever see or hear from them again.

3

By evening, Kennedy and Ross are exhausted.

Kennedy is starting to worry the scouts will never return. Running out of options, he urges Ross to join him in the beat-up canoe to spend one more night out in Ferguson Passage, hoping to flag a ship.

Ross reluctantly agrees. But as they head out in the dark, a sudden storm hits.

The canoe once again gets waterlogged and capsizes. The two men are thrown from the small vessel into the stormy waves. It's so bad, both believe they will drown. The violent waves smash them against a shallow coral reef, badly bruising them. Yet it's also the reef that helps them navigate through the stormy waters and back to the beach. There, they collapse, drained of every remaining ounce of energy and strength.

Closing his eyes, Kennedy can't help but wonder if he, Ross, and the rest of the crew on the neighboring island can survive even one more day in their wretched, famished state. With every passing hour, he starts doubting whether they'll ever see those scouts again.

Thankfully, the scouts were extremely resourceful. Grasping the perilous situation, they ferried Kennedy's coconut to an English-speaking scout on a neighboring island, who arranged for yet another scout to deliver it to nearby Kolombangara into the hands of an Australian Allied officer, Sub-Lieutenant Arthur Reginald Evans, who is stationed there.

Back on Naru, Kennedy and Ross sleep a few hours.

At dawn, they wake to the sound of voices.

A large canoe carrying seven scouts lands on the beach. Best of all, they've got food, water, and supplies. "I have a letter for you, sir," one of the scouts says in clear English.

The letter is from the Australian officer Evans, informing Kennedy that a rescue mission is officially underway.

Immediately, the scouts take Kennedy and Ross back to Olasana to check on the rest of the crew. Mercifully, they're all still alive, although McMahon's condition has continued to deteriorate.

By the next morning, Sunday, August 8—six full days after the Japanese destroyer first rammed their ship—Kennedy and the PT-109 crew are on a small shuttle boat bound for an Allied base in Rendova Harbor.

Upon their arrival, they're met with cheers, the commanding officer greeting them personally. Two war correspondents in the region are also there to report the remarkable stories of the survivors.

There's little time to celebrate, however—the crew requires urgent medical attention.

At a makeshift outdoor medical facility, McMahon is saved from imminent death. Kennedy receives treatment for dehydration, malnutrition, fatigue, and the severe lacerations and abrasions on his feet and legs.

While the crew recuperates, the commander informs Kennedy that, according to Navy protocol, shipwrecked survivors are granted automatic reassignment back to the United States.

Kennedy's father is Joseph Kennedy Sr., the former U.S. ambassador to the United Kingdom, a man of great wealth and influence. When Kennedy Sr. hears of the ordeal, he's overwhelmed with relief that his son is still alive ... and immediately begins pulling strings to arrange for his expedited return to Massachusetts, hopefully by Thanksgiving.

Across the country, the story of the dramatic rescue begins to spread.



Lieutenant Junior Grade John F. Kennedy (r.) pictured with several members of the PT-109 crew. The photograph is from 1943, prior to the August 2 collision that destroyed the vessel and shipwrecked the crew. (Credit: AP Photo)

“Kennedy’s Son Is Hero in Pacific,” a *New York Times* headline declares. As a father and a politician, Kennedy Sr. can’t ask for more. The stage is set for a hero’s return.

There’s only one problem.

John F. Kennedy doesn’t want to come back to the United States. He wants to continue to serve in the Pacific. He doesn’t think it’s right that two sailors on his boat lost their lives while he gets to go home. He won’t take some desk job, either—he wants active duty.

To the dismay of Kennedy’s family, the Navy complies with the young officer’s request. After five weeks of medical recovery, Kennedy is back on duty, this time behind the wheel of PT-59, a similar vessel to the 109. He’ll see more combat in the months ahead.

In early 1944, after his eventual return to the United States, Kennedy

receives the Navy and Marine Corps Medal for his heroic efforts to save his crew after the PT-109's collision. The Navy's official statement declares that Kennedy showed "courage, endurance and leadership [that] contributed to the saving of several lives." But those words mean less to him than the sentiments of the PT-109 crew who served under him during the ordeal.

"He saved our lives," crewmate Charles Harris would later say of Kennedy. "I owed him my life. I tell everybody that. If it wasn't for him I wouldn't be here."

In the aftermath, Kennedy and the others learn more about the Navy's initial response to the crash of their vessel. In the hours and days after the Japanese destroyer smashed into PT-109 and split it in two, the Naval command in the area determined that there were no likely survivors. "We had to assume the whole damn boat exploded and sunk," as one officer later put it. With limited resources, the Navy couldn't risk a dangerous search and rescue mission in hostile waters for what seemed like a hopeless case. Kennedy and his men were, literally, left for dead.

But John F. Kennedy, from Boston, Massachusetts, is far from dead.

Instead, he returns from the war as a young man of mission and purpose—a man whose life is about to become absolutely extraordinary.

4

SEVENTEEN YEARS LATER ...

Washington, D.C.

September 7, 1960

A crowd of reporters gathers in the Mayflower Hotel in Washington, D.C. The press learned of this event only a few days ago, and most of them don't know quite who or what to expect.

The reporters are seated with their notebooks and audio recorders, all of them waiting for the few gathered men to begin this press conference. Most of these men are middle-aged, some wearing suits and some wearing ecclesiastical garb. One of them steps forward.

He's sixty-two years old, slightly paunchy, well dressed, with short graying hair. Most important, he's clearly comfortable speaking in front of others. It's a role he's used to. Many if not most Americans would recognize him from television appearances, from his photo on the back of books, or from seeing him behind the pulpit at the congregation of the popular Marble Collegiate Church in New York City.

He is the Reverend Norman Vincent Peale, one of the most prominent Christian ministers in the country. His book *The Power of Positive Thinking*, published in 1952, was a runaway bestseller and spawned several sequels.

Today, he and several other ministers have called a press conference to speak about a subject that's dominating the news cycle: the coming Presidential election, now only two months away.

"Faced with the election of a Catholic," Peale declares, "our culture is at stake."

Peale explains that he's not speaking just for himself but as the

spokesperson for a new organization called the Conference of Citizens for Religious Freedom. As Peale describes it, the group is “more or less representative of the evangelical, conservative Protestants” in America. It’s composed of 150 Christian leaders from throughout the U.S., reflecting thirty-seven different Protestant denominations.

Their mission is simple: to warn Americans against the danger of voting for Senator John F. Kennedy, the Democratic nominee for President who, if elected, would be the first Roman Catholic to hold the nation’s highest office.

“We’re just raising the question as to how free he could be,” Peale says to the reporters.

Peale and the other members of the group speak as if the group had formed organically in Washington, D.C., through the network of Protestant clergy around the country. But, in fact, there is a backstory to this new organization, one that Peale doesn’t share with the reporters.



The Reverend Norman Vincent Peale is one of the most popular clergymen in mid-twentieth-century America. His 1952 book *The Power of Positive Thinking* was a bestseller that spawned several sequels. (Credit: Oscar White/Corbis Historical via Getty Images)

The group didn’t start in D.C., but rather at a secret meeting of American evangelical and Protestant leaders in Montreux, Switzerland, roughly a month earlier, on August 18. The overseas meeting had been arranged by none other

than the Reverend Billy Graham, the renowned Southern Baptist leader and one of the few American clergymen more popular and influential than Reverend Peale himself.

Graham has close links to many powerful politicians, and in the coming Presidential election, he supports his friend and ally, the Republican nominee and current Vice President, Richard M. Nixon. Graham opposes Kennedy because Kennedy is a Democrat, and also because Kennedy is Catholic. Graham doesn't believe a person of the Catholic faith should be President of the United States, and he'd invited like-minded Protestant leaders to his villa in Switzerland to strategize how to undermine Kennedy's campaign.

Naturally, Graham didn't want to risk his enormous popularity or tarnish his own image by engaging in partisan political attacks. He therefore opted to conceal his connection to the group he himself organized. To add another layer of deniability, he asked Reverend Peale, one of the ministers he'd invited to Switzerland, to be the group's public face and to keep Graham's role secret. After the conference in Montreux, Graham remained in Europe while Peale and the rest returned to the States, recruited more Protestant leaders to their cause, and finalized the group's plans.

That's what brings Peale and a few other group leaders to the Mayflower Hotel for today's press conference. Sharing their message with a roomful of reporters will help them disseminate it to the public.

In addition to their in-person press conference, the group's leaders provide the press with a prewritten statement outlining their position. The statement never states the names of either Presidential candidate, but because only one is Catholic, there's no question whom they're referring to.

"While the current Roman Catholic contender for the Presidency states specifically that he would not be influenced, his church insists that he is duty-bound to admit to its discretion," the statement reads. It raises alarms about the ways in which Catholics have infiltrated formerly American institutions, trying to indoctrinate young people. "In various areas where they predominate," it continues, "Catholics have seized control of the public schools, staffed them with nun teachers wearing their church garb, and introduced the catechism and practices of their church."

The Conference questions, for example, whether a Catholic President

could “withstand altogether the determined efforts of the hierarchy of his church to gain further funds and favors for its schools and institutions, and otherwise breach the wall of separation of church and state.”

Peale isn’t the only one who speaks at the press conference. Another pastor, Dr. Harold Ockenga, declares to reporters that as a Roman Catholic, Kennedy was a “captive of his system,” and that however independent he might claim to be, “the pressures will be on him” from the Vatican in Rome.

The comments from Peale and others, as well as the written statement, raise alarms about the prospect of a Catholic President on a mostly theological basis. They are just “raising the question,” as Peale had said, and their concerns are about the hierarchical nature of the Roman Catholic Church and whether an American President could operate freely.

Yet Peale and the other members of the group all know—just like the reporters and the American public also know—that this antipathy toward Catholicism isn’t just about theology.

To really understand the anti-Catholic sentiment in the 1960 election cycle, it helps to examine the group most widely associated with anti-Catholicism in the first half of the twentieth century.

The Ku Klux Klan.

The Klan, or KKK, originally arose in the American South in 1865 as a means for white citizens to terrorize and control the many Black Americans who had just obtained freedom from slavery in the aftermath of the Civil War.

Usually operating with the support of local government and law enforcement, the Klan used horrific violence to punish Black persons and families who tried to claim the basic rights of being a citizen—the right to vote, to obtain an education, and to seek economic advancement—that the federal government had guaranteed to southern Blacks after the passage of the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments.

The Klan had a clear message of white supremacy—that whites were inherently superior to Blacks—but it wasn’t just a ranking of races. The Klan believed that in the postslavery era, it had to protect America from the threat of the Black population.

The early Klan reached its peak in the 1870s, during the Reconstruction

era of the South, then declined in membership and prominence by the end of the nineteenth century.

Yet the Klan was far from over.

In the 1920s, the organization experienced a dramatic resurgence, and its membership soared to new heights. This time around, it became more than just a southern institution; it was now a nationwide outfit with a presence in every state, especially in the Midwest.

The early Klan had operated like a secret society, but this second wave of the organization was right out in the open. The 1920s KKK hosted community picnics, held public rallies, published newspapers, and engaged openly in politics. The group had Senators, Governors, and many local politicians among its ranks. At one point, Klan leaders boasted a membership of more than ten million, and while this number is almost certainly inflated, at its peak, its membership was at least several million.

The new Klan's anti-Black ideology wasn't so different from the first incarnation, but in this revived KKK there was a new message. Black people weren't the only threat to the traditional American way of life. Now there was another group that posed a potentially even bigger threat: immigrants.

"Immigration Is Periling America," declared a 1923 headline from *The Fiery Cross*, the Klan's popular Indiana-based newspaper. Similar messages appeared throughout the Klan's literature and propaganda.

There's a reason the Klan's resurgence and new message came when it did. In the 1920s, the United States had just experienced its third major wave of immigration, its biggest yet. Unlike earlier waves, when most immigrants were from Northern or Western Europe, this latest influx was more diverse. Many were from Southern and Eastern Europe, places such as Italy, Poland, Greece, and more exotic-sounding places like Lithuania and Czechoslovakia. New groups of immigrants were also arriving from Mexico and Latin America.

However diverse, one thing this group of immigrants had in common was they were mostly Catholic. Some, especially from Russia and Eastern Europe, were Jewish. What they weren't, for the most part, was Protestant.

For the Klan and others, "Catholic" became basically synonymous with "immigrant." And Catholics, like Jews and Blacks, were therefore not *real*

Americans.

One of the founders and leaders of the 1920s Klan, the “Imperial Wizard” Hiram Wesley Evans, spelled out the new ideology clearly. The KKK’s mission, he wrote, was to uphold the three “great racial instincts” of America, which were “loyalty to the white race, the traditions of America, and to the spirit of Protestantism.”



THIS TREE MUST COME DOWN

In a 1920s illustration published by the Pillar of Fire Church, a white-hooded Klansman hacks down the evil tree of foreign Catholicism taking root on American soil. Like in much Klan literature, the word “Rome” is used to represent the sinister dangers of Catholic immigrants. (Credit: *The Ku Klux Klan in Prophecy*)

True patriots, then, had to protect pure white Christian America from the rise of Blacks, Jews, Catholics, and other immigrants. Starting with their often-used slogan “America First,” the Klan always linked American patriotism to white supremacy and their anti-immigrant mission, carrying that message in Klan-run newspapers, pamphlets, radio broadcasts, and even songs. One sample Klan song captures the group’s ideology:

*Klansman, Klansman, of the Ku Klux Klan,
Protestant, gentile, native born man,*

*Hooded, knighted, robed and true,
Royal sons of the Red, White and Blue.*

White supremacy, anti-Catholicism, anti-Semitism, fear of immigrants—for the KKK, they're all linked together, and it's up to "native born" patriotic white Americans to fight back.

The anti-Catholic attacks from the Klan and other groups were particularly devastating to the large Irish-Catholic community in America. The great wave of Irish immigration had mostly occurred in the mid-nineteenth century, and those immigrants had faced fierce prejudice. But the community eventually thrived, and after several decades of Irish American assimilation, the anti-Catholic fervor seemed to quiet. So it was with great dismay that Irish Catholics saw the prejudice return, perhaps worse than before.

The rise of anti-Catholicism and anti-Semitism in the 1920s also contributed to an increasing demographic divide in American life, pitting the rural, small-town America of the South and Midwest against the big-city America of the industrial Northeast. The Klan portrayed rural America as patriotic, white, and Protestant. Big cities, on the other hand, were dangerous cesspools of filth and crime, teeming with Blacks, immigrants, and Jews.

Not by coincidence, it was precisely during this time that Catholic Americans in northern big cities, with their growing numbers, were achieving great political power at the local level.

The fissure in the nation's demographic and ideological divide reached a breaking point in 1928 when, for the first time in history, a Catholic American attempted to run for President. Al Smith, the Governor of New York and a product of the powerful Catholic political machine in New York City, became the Democratic nominee for the presidency. A larger-than-life character and a person of enormous confidence, Smith believed that through sheer force of personality, he could win over all the anti-Catholic voters outside the Northeast.

He had no idea what he was in for.

Smith's candidacy unleashed a torrent of anti-Catholic rage and prejudice throughout the South and Midwest, characterized by overt bigotry and

sometimes violence. The KKK staged angry demonstrations and burned crosses at Smith's campaign stops around the country.

One pamphlet distributed during the campaign read: "For Hoover and America, or for Smith and Rome. Which? Think it over, Americans." Anti-immigration sentiment was at a high point. Americans made their choice. Herbert Hoover won by a landslide, capturing nearly 60 percent of the popular vote and defeating Al Smith in the Electoral College by a margin of 444 to 87.

"The greatest element involved in the landslide was religion," Nebraska Senator George W. Norris remarked after the election.

Licking his wounds, Smith himself told an advisor, "To tell you the truth, the time hasn't come when a man can say his beads in the White House."

In the wake of Smith's disastrous Presidential bid, a conventional wisdom set in: America would never elect a non-Protestant President. Catholic Americans and Jewish Americans could obtain local power in places where they were heavily represented—in northeastern big cities, mostly—but the wider country had too much venom against immigrants for a Catholic to ever be elected President.

That conventional wisdom remained for several decades. So by 1960, that history of anti-Catholicism was still very much alive when the Irish American Massachusetts Senator John F. Kennedy became the first Catholic since Al Smith to win a major-party nomination for President of the United States.

As a result, at the height of the campaign, when the Reverend Norman Peale steps forward to warn Americans that "faced with the election of a Catholic, our culture is at stake," everyone knew exactly what he really meant.

The statements and activity of the Conference—or "Peale's Group," as the press sometimes called it—received criticism from many quarters. "We believe that Dr. Peale and his associates ... show blind prejudice," a liberal group in New York State replied.

It didn't help. The anti-Catholic messaging from Peale's group had already been transmitted nationwide, picked up by every newspaper, just as the group planned.

World War II was over. The Nazis had been defeated. But this battle

brewing at home? This was for the soul of America itself.

As the young John F. Kennedy was about to find out, when it came to these sorts of attacks, you never knew where those hateful words would play—or whom exactly they'd incite.

5

Belmont, New Hampshire

September 1960

Richard Pavlick of Belmont, New Hampshire, really cares about flags.

American flags, that is.

When they're hung, where they're displayed, and how they're raised and lowered.

Once, he traveled to Washington, D.C., to march in front of the White House to protest how flags were treated. And back when he worked for the post office in Boston, he wrote an angry letter to the U.S. Postmaster General complaining that they raised the flag in the South Boston station where he worked and left it up improperly overnight. Now, as a full-time resident of Belmont, Pavlick sometimes writes letters to town officials complaining about problems with how American flags are displayed.

As a town, Belmont is small and ordinary, like many that dot the rural New England countryside. This area's only claim to fame is that the author Grace Metalious, who lives in neighboring Gilmanton, based her bestselling 1956 novel *Peyton Place* on the small towns in the area, including Belmont. After the book was adapted into a movie, the words "Peyton Place" became shorthand for quintessential all-American towns like this.

At seventy-three years old, the flag-obsessed Pavlick is a typical small-town retiree. He's lived in Belmont for six years—and before that in nearby Laconia. Originally from Boston, he served briefly in the Army as a young man, including a short stint in World War I.

He considers himself a New Englander through and through. But just as the novel *Peyton Place* exposed dark undercurrents just beneath the placid

surface of a small town, so too Richard Pavlick's outward normalcy conceals something darker.

First, he is a man full of grievances. "A chronic complainer," one townspeople would later say, and "he was always writing to the newspaper and complaining about something." No question, Pavlick has strong opinions, some of them personal, some financial. He'd had property disputes with other residents and once battled with the local water company over utility rates and the addition of chemicals to the water supply.

Pavlick's strongest opinions, however, are political. At this moment, he's intensely focused on the coming Presidential election, the Kennedy vs. Nixon contest.

From his days in Massachusetts and a lifetime in New England, Pavlick knows all about the influential Kennedy family.

He doesn't like them one bit.

In Pavlick's eyes, Joe Kennedy Sr. is now trying to buy or steal the election for his son with wealth and connections—and Pavlick believes no family should have such an outsize influence in politics. Back when Pavlick lived in Boston, he wrote a few angry letters to then-Senator John Kennedy, complaining about the post office pension system.

Yet all it takes is a quick look into Richard Pavlick's past, and it's clear that there are other, more noticeable reasons for his particular loathing of the Kennedy family.

In 1955, Pavlick attempted to form a veterans' organization called the Protestant War Veterans Legion. The group, according to Pavlick's rules, was to include "every war veteran not affiliated with the Jewish or Catholic War Veterans." To put it in clearer terms, no Jews or Catholics allowed.

Writing to several Protestant ministers, he declared, "The safety of the United States can only be preserved by controlling or eliminating those ideologies foreign to the American way of life and those who seek control of the political future of the United States."

To this day, there's no evidence that Richard Pavlick ever belonged to the Ku Klux Klan or related organizations, but his ideas about Catholics and immigration were of a similar stripe. "Keep the United States of America free from isms—religious, racial or alien-controlled," he wrote in another letter.

In his view, America was under threat from foreign influence, so patriotic Americans like himself had a responsibility to defend it.

It's worth pointing out that Pavlick held his anti-Catholic views long before the Reverend Billy Graham and the Reverend Norman Peale got involved in the 1960 Presidential race. But their reinforcement of that prejudice, straight from the mouths of prominent Protestant leaders, only heightened and legitimized his manner of fear and prejudice.

As the weeks of the campaign roll forward, Kennedy and Nixon pull neck and neck. The country is riveted—and Richard Pavlick becomes increasingly agitated.

For the residents of Belmont, it won't be long before they realize just how much darkness is hiding in their midst.

6

September 1960

“A New Frontier.”

John F. Kennedy first used those words on July 15, 1960, in his acceptance speech at the Democratic National Convention in Los Angeles, California, on the night he won the party’s nomination for President.

The phrase stuck, soon symbolizing everything from Kennedy’s campaign to the candidate himself.

No question, Kennedy *was* young. Forty-two years old at the start of his campaign. If elected, he’d be the youngest President ever to hold the office. In the twentieth century, only Theodore Roosevelt, who became President back in 1901, was a similar age, and he was an outlier. Every other President was over fifty.

From the start, the political class believed Kennedy’s youth would be a liability. When the Massachusetts Senator first announced his Presidential run, former President Harry Truman asked, “Senator, are you certain that you are quite ready for the country, or that the country is ready for you in the role of President...? [We need] a man with the greatest possible maturity and experience.... May I urge you to be patient?”

“Grow up and stop acting like a boy,” U.S. Senator and rival for the Democratic nomination Hubert Humphrey also weighed in.

During the primaries, the insults kept coming. When Kennedy’s doctors made his medical records public, his Democratic primary opponent Senator Lyndon Johnson of Texas quipped that Kennedy was “lucky to receive a glowing medical report ... from his pediatrician.”

It was a solid jab, yet what none of Kennedy’s opponents understood was that, in 1960, at the start of a decade that would usher in enormous

transformation, youth wasn't a liability. In fact, his youth, confidence, and optimism were probably the defining assets of his campaign.

Some of this was due to demographics.

The term "teenager," which would later become an indelible part of the American vocabulary, was still new, referring to a group that had only recently been invented. The first known popular usage of the term was in 1946, not becoming commonplace until the 1950s.

In previous generations, young people generally went straight into the workforce, usually into the family business. The jump from kid to breadwinner happened fast. But in the 1940s and 1950s, as child labor was gradually outlawed, young people started going to secondary school, driving cars, and having leisure time. Most vital, in the middle class and above, they had money to spend.

It almost sounds absurd now, but back then, older Americans didn't know what to make of this new category of young Americans, mostly treating them with derision or even fear. "The abolition of child labor and the lengthening span of formal education have given us a huge leisure class of the young, with animal energies never absorbed by tasks of production," the *New York Times* worried in 1957.

Older Americans also became obsessed with dangers like "juvenile delinquency," a condition that often boiled down simply to young people not respecting or agreeing with their parents.

Needless to say, the youth revolution caused sweeping changes in the culture, especially in entertainment and the arts.

In music, pioneering Black artists Little Richard, Chuck Berry, Bo Diddley, and others melded the traditional Black music form the blues with up-tempo rhythms to create a new musical form—rock 'n' roll—that would send those teenage "animal energies" into overdrive.

White artists such as Elvis Presley and Buddy Holly added elements of country and pop music to make the sound more mainstream—turning teen-oriented music into a cultural and commercial juggernaut.

For all the hand-wringing that grown-ups did about this new teenage explosion in society, they often ignored a key aspect of the group. Namely, that this new generation of young people, coming of age in the 1940s and

1950s, was the most educated generation in history.

In 1920, only 30 percent of teenagers were in high school. By 1936, the percentage had doubled. Since then, the numbers climbed every year.

Accompanying this education came an independent spirit ... and a profound sense of idealism.

Young people were the ones who led the way in the defining domestic issue of the day: the Civil Rights Movement. Young Black leaders, many of them still high school and college students, had emerged all over the South, forming organizations to fight the injustice of forced segregation, voting discrimination, and other forms of inequality codified by “Jim Crow” laws in southern states.

In 1955, fifteen-year-old Claudette Colvin of Montgomery, Alabama, refused to give up her seat and stand in the whites-only section of a public bus. Police dragged her off and arrested her, sparking a lawsuit.

Nine months later, activist Rosa Parks was famously inspired to do the same, which led to the Montgomery bus boycott.

At lunch counter sit-ins, nonviolent demonstrations, and protest marches, teenagers and other young people often led the way.

More than previous generations, young white Americans were ready to join the struggle for civil rights, often diverging from their own parents. White college students especially were ready to put their hearts—and in a few cases their lives—on the line to join the fight.

And a fight it was. The push for Black integration and equality was met with overwhelming force and brutality. Southern governments and law enforcement responded to the movement with shocking violence, using every tool of the state to brutalize, arrest, and imprison protesters.

Southern law enforcement often coordinated directly with the Ku Klux Klan and similar white vigilante groups. If there was a sit-in or march, gangs of KKK members would arrive at a designated time, armed with baseball bats and axe handles. Sure, the police were there, but they’d stand back and watch the white foot soldiers beat on nonviolent protesters. Then, the police would arrest the bloodied victims.

In the late 1950s, as the battle over civil rights intensified and the images became increasingly violent, America was approaching a crossroads.

What kind of country did we want to be?

John F. Kennedy, the handsome and young-looking forty-three-year-old, had an idea.

Lucky for him, these educated, idealistic, rock-'n'-rolling teenagers who came of age during the 1950s were listening.

7

It wasn't just his youth and looks.

John F. Kennedy's words—starting with the “New Frontier” speech—spoke to something bigger, to something at the core of the younger generation's cravings.

When Kennedy first gave his speech back in July, he put the term right at the beginning, then repeated it several times, letting it ring in the air.

“[W]e stand today on the edge of a New Frontier—the frontier of the 1960s—a frontier of unknown opportunities and perils—a frontier of unfulfilled hopes and threats,” Kennedy declared. He continued:

I tell you the New Frontier is here, whether we seek it or not. Beyond that frontier are the uncharted areas of science and space, unsolved problems of peace and war, unconquered pockets of ignorance and prejudice, unanswered questions of poverty and surplus. It would be easier to shrink back from that frontier, to look to the safe mediocrity of the past.... But I believe the times demand new invention, innovation, imagination, decision. I am asking each of you to be pioneers on that New Frontier.

In the speech, all the language and imagery was forward-looking. Whether he intended it or not, it was a rejection of the 1950s status quo. So many teenagers had spent the decade rebelling—and now, a little older in 1960, many would be voting for the first time.

They were primed for a new, forward-thinking leader to capture their imagination.

“My call is to the young in heart, regardless of age,” Kennedy declared. “That is the choice our nation must make—a choice that lies not merely

between two men or two parties, but ... between the fresh air of progress and the stale, dank atmosphere of 'normalcy.'”

One of the ironies of the campaign was that Nixon, at age forty-seven, wasn't much older than Kennedy. On many issues, including most questions of foreign policy, the two candidates held similar positions. Yet everything about Nixon, from his hairline, to his demeanor, to his long association with Eisenhower, evoked the previous generation.

Kennedy was the future.

“The Republican nominee-to-be,” Kennedy declared, “is also a young man. But ... [h]is party is the party of the past.... Their pledge is a pledge to the status quo—and today there can be no status quo.”

By September 1960, the polls were clear: 61 percent of voters aged twenty-one (which was the minimum age required to vote in Presidential elections at the time) to twenty-nine favored Kennedy over Nixon. A similar majority who were older than fifty favored Nixon. Back in 1956, that younger demographic had voted 57 percent for Republican Dwight D. Eisenhower. That's how much society had changed in four years.

Along with appealing to young voters, Kennedy used his family's immigrant past as a rallying cry—and as an electoral strategy.

Kennedy's Presidential campaign was the first to create an initiative specifically aimed at Latino communities, a group previously ignored. It started mostly from local grassroots organizations that approached the campaign with a clear message: Latino voters were excited about Kennedy. They liked that he was Catholic and from an immigrant family—but to really win over these voters, he'd need to reach out directly and convince them to go to the polls.

The campaign started using the catchy name “Viva Kennedy” to generate excitement, coordinating with the local organizations for voter outreach and to plan events.

It wasn't easy pulling all these disparate groups together. There were large Mexican American communities in the key electoral states Texas, California, and Arizona; the Cuban American community in Florida; and the large Puerto Rican community in New York.

Today, we might assume Kennedy was playing politics, but immigration

was a passionate subject for him—one he frequently wrote and spoke about.

“Immigration is by definition a gesture of faith in social mobility,” he wrote as Senator in a long essay, *A Nation of Immigrants*, tracing the history of immigration in America and celebrating the contributions that immigrants have made.

[Immigration] is the expression in action of a positive belief in the possibility of a better life. It has thus contributed greatly to developing the spirit of personal betterment in American society and to strengthening the national confidence in change and the future. Such confidence, when widely shared, sets the national tone.

This idealism about immigration, like his growing embrace of the Civil Rights Movement, endears him to the younger generation of voters.

Of course, amid the optimism of the New Frontier was a massive countervailing force shaping the world in 1960: the state of anxiety about America’s ongoing Cold War against the communist Soviet Union.

It was more than a standoff between two superpowers. The great fear was that these two nations would tap into their powerful nuclear arsenals, creating terrifying “mutually assured destruction.”

In politics, the Cold War raised the stakes, creating a general tension and anxiety that pervaded the country. But it was also a generational issue. The younger set would be tasked with solving these critical global issues, unlike the previous generation, who created them in the first place.

Speaking at a “Young People for Kennedy” rally in Portland, Oregon, during the campaign, Kennedy would address these concerns head-on. “I do not want to be a President of a destroyed world perishing under the mushroom clouds of nuclear holocaust. If the Presidency is not used to lead us from the edge of destruction, the office itself is worthless.”

Of all the generational shifts underway in 1960, there is one that plays heavily in Kennedy’s favor: the rise of television in politics.

From today’s viewpoint it’s obvious. Kennedy was a natural for television, comfortable on camera with an intuitive sense of how to use the medium. This quality famously helped him in his first debate with Nixon—the first time a Presidential debate had ever been televised—during which

Kennedy was relaxed, tanned, and confident. Nixon, on the other hand, was a mess, looking pale, sweaty, and nervous.

But it's more than just the debates. Kennedy's youthful appearance, charm, and comfort with television help him at every event and in every news cycle.

Indeed, thanks in part to TV, Kennedy's candidacy begins to take on dimensions that transcend traditional politics, entering into the new realm of popular culture. "He combines the best qualities of Elvis and Franklin Delano Roosevelt," one political observer quipped.

As the race continues, the Kennedy campaign begins attracting massive crowds with an increasing media frenzy. Somewhere along the way—it's hard to say just when—newspaper writers start using the acronym of his name, JFK, rather than spelling it out. The acronym sticks, and this little bit of shorthand only increases his appeal. With obsessive media coverage following him day in and day out, Kennedy is no longer a standard political candidate, he's a cultural phenomenon.

Naturally, the more the media fawned over him, and the more college students and northern liberals celebrated him, the more hatred and anger he got from the opposition.

For many Americans—especially older white Americans—the so-called New Frontier was exactly what they *didn't* want. The anti-Catholic smears painted Kennedy as a dangerous usurper, brainwashing the young with radical ideas. His support for immigration, and his growing embrace of the Civil Rights Movement, further alienated many white Americans who simply did not want the country to be more racially or ethnically diverse. Most important, they didn't want these other groups to share equal status with whites.

Before the campaign, the two candidates would've both described themselves as political moderates, but as time goes on, they begin to represent opposite sides of the growing culture war.

On October 13—a month before the election—the "Grand Dragon" of the Florida Ku Klux Klan, William Griffin, publicly endorses Nixon. Asked about this endorsement during one of the Presidential debates, Nixon carefully disavowed the KKK. It hardly mattered.

“I don’t give a damn what Nixon said. I’m still voting for him,” Grand Dragon Griffin replied.

He wasn’t the only one, which explained why the Kennedy campaign was initially so afraid of what the press called “the religious issue”—Kennedy’s Catholicism—and whether it would inevitably destroy his candidacy.

Months before Reverend Peale’s press conference, the issue had already reared its head in the Democratic primaries, particularly in West Virginia. There, white Christian voters received pamphlets, produced in part by the local KKK, declaring that a vote for Kennedy was “a vote against your God, your Savior, and your church.”

The messaging from the Klan had not changed much since the 1920s. Any group other than white Protestant Christians—including Catholics, Blacks, Jews, and nonwhite immigrants—was not *real* Americans and posed a threat to the country.

As the general election began, the “religious issue” initially stayed under wraps. Nixon and his campaign never overtly raised the question of Kennedy’s Catholicism, and most mainstream Republican organizations also steered clear of it. And yet, as time went on, the Kennedy team could see what was coming. They became convinced that Nixon’s campaign or its allies were engaged in “whisper campaigns” to smear Kennedy’s Catholicism while claiming their candidate would never engage in such attacks.

Their suspicions weren’t unfounded. Evidence later showed that the Nixon campaign had a paid operative coordinating with fundamentalist Christian organizations and white nationalist groups specifically to stoke anti-Catholic fears.

It wasn’t just Nixon who was two-faced about the issue of JFK’s Catholicism. Back in August, still relatively early in the general campaign, Kennedy received a personal letter from the Reverend Billy Graham. “There is a rumor circulating in the Democratic Party that I intend to raise the religious issue publicly during the Presidential campaign. This is not true,” the letter stated.

Yet Graham wrote that letter only a few days before convening his own secret meeting in Montreux, the whole point of which was to raise “the religious issue” to the public and try to destroy Kennedy with it.

Indeed, it's Reverend Peale's press conference, secretly orchestrated by Graham, that really puts the issue front and center.

Forget a whisper campaign—this is a loud shout.

Sure enough, just as planned, after Peale's press conference the media jumps on the story. "Religion Pushed into Political Campaign Spotlight Despite Objections," one headline declares.

Within a day of Peale's event, news outlets all over the country are covering the story. Both candidates are asked about it at every campaign stop.

Religion is "the Democrats' No. 1 problem in the South," Kennedy's campaign manager and younger brother Robert F. Kennedy admits to reporters a few days later.

Can it sink a Presidential campaign? That's the fear—and in 1960s America it's a real one.

No doubt, JFK is on the defensive. Democratic leaders are starting to worry that he'll suffer the same sorry fate as Al Smith three decades earlier.

There's only one choice: the candidate has to fight back.

8

Houston, Texas

September 12, 1960

He's in the belly of the beast—and it's not a friendly crowd.

Senator John F. Kennedy stands at the podium, glancing out at the packed room.

Most of the faces are white, middle-aged, and older. News cameras, photographers, and print journalists are also on hand.

Welcome to the Greater Houston Ministerial Association, an organization of pastors and church leaders representing Protestant denominations throughout Texas. Unlike the fawning students or the huge cheering crowds he's been drawing at colleges and in big northeastern cities, this crew is hostile.

He knew what he was getting into. In fact, after Reverend Peale's press conference, Kennedy and his team decided to accept this speaking engagement specifically to address the "religious issue" head-on.

As with any political controversy, it's a gamble, and some of Kennedy's allies had warned him against coming here. "They're mostly Republicans and they're out to get you," Sam Rayburn, Democratic Speaker of the House and longtime Texas Senator, told JFK.

"We can win or lose the election right there in Houston on Monday night," advisor Ted Sorensen added.

It's a make-or-break moment, and Kennedy isn't shying away from it.

"Because I am a Catholic, and no Catholic has ever been elected President, the real issues in this campaign have been obscured," he begins. "So it is apparently necessary for me to state once again—not what kind of

church I believe in, for that should be important only to me—but what kind of America I believe in.”

Once the campaign began, Kennedy started taking voice lessons, to enhance the volume and control of his voice. Through his sometimes thick New England accent, he speaks forcefully and clearly.

“I believe in an America where the separation of church and state is absolute,” he declares. “I believe in an America that is officially neither Catholic, Protestant, nor Jewish, where ... no religious body seeks to impose its will directly or indirectly upon the general populace or the public acts of its officials—and where religious liberty is so indivisible that an act against one church is treated as an act against all.”



On September 12, 1960, during the heart of the election campaign, Kennedy speaks to the Greater Houston Ministerial Association in Texas. He responds directly to the anti-Catholic attacks that have been leveled at him and his campaign. (Credit: Bettmann/Bettmann via Getty Images)

The fact is, the attacks on his faith got under Kennedy’s skin. He was offended by the idea that he, as a dedicated public servant, would have some sort of divided loyalty due to the church he belongs to. Not to mention, all this anti-Catholicism was just raw prejudice against his faith, and against the

faith of many immigrant communities.

“While this year it may be a Catholic against whom the finger of suspicion is pointed,” he adds, “in other years it has been, and may someday be again, a Jew—or a Quaker—or a Unitarian—or a Baptist.... Today I may be the victim—but tomorrow it may be you—until the whole fabric of our harmonious society is ripped at a time of great national peril.”

Kennedy’s mention of the Quaker faith is pointed. Nixon is a Quaker—not a common denomination—and Kennedy is highlighting the bigotry of attacking one person’s personal faith but not another’s.

As the speech continues, he raises a subject that he usually avoids: his and his family’s military service in World War II. A year after Kennedy had returned home from his ordeal in the Pacific, his family received tragic news. John’s older brother, Joe Kennedy Jr., whom John looked up to and his father adored, had been killed piloting an aerial mission in England.

Kennedy normally thought it inappropriate to talk about his or his brother’s tragedies in a political context. But these anti-Catholic crusaders were questioning his family’s patriotism, and he couldn’t let that stand.

“This is the kind of America I believe in—and this is the kind I fought for in the South Pacific, and the kind my brother died for in Europe,” Kennedy proclaims. When he and his brother served, “No one suggested then that we may have a ‘divided loyalty,’ that we did ‘not believe in liberty,’ or that we belonged to a disloyal group that threatened the ‘freedoms for which our forefathers died.’”

Having defended his family’s loyalty and their sacrifice for the country—made as proud Catholic Americans from an Irish immigrant family—Kennedy ties together the themes of the speech in an idealistic declaration.

Finally, I believe in an America where religious intolerance will someday end—where all men and all churches are treated as equal—where every man has the same right to attend or not attend the church of his choice ... and where Catholics, Protestants and Jews, at both the lay and pastoral level, will refrain from those attitudes of disdain and division which have so often marred their works in the past, and promote instead the American ideal of brotherhood.

To his surprise, the audience applauds.

By the time he's done, it's hard to know whether any of the stern Protestant ministers in the room are fully swayed to his side. But Kennedy knows he's not speaking to just these ministers. He's speaking to the cameras, to a national audience. And with the media covering his every move, he knows his words in this room will travel far and wide.

Indeed, in the hours and days that follow, his speech receives such a positive reaction that the campaign begins sending video snippets to various supporters, to fundraisers, and to local media markets that Kennedy will visit.

Perhaps most important, he's turned the tables on his opponents. Instead of avoiding or deflecting the anti-Catholic attacks, he's met them head-on. And by endorsing religious tolerance, Kennedy has made his critics look like un-American bigots.

"As we say in my part of Texas," Senator Rayburn exclaims shortly after the event, "he ate 'em blood raw!"

In the political world, it's more than a triumph for Kennedy—it's a key turning point in the campaign.

Of course, that doesn't mean everyone's cheering.

9

New York

October 12, 1960

The applause is deafening. The crowd is huge, packed shoulder to shoulder on the city streets. Reporters are racing back and forth.

The excitement is palpable.

In other words, a typical day on the Kennedy campaign.

As Kennedy steps onto an outdoor platform, some of the cheering has become predictable. One journalist notes the “ever present screaming teenage female following which seems to spring up wherever Kennedy goes.” It’s the same with the brass band playing and the crackle of firecrackers, which they use at many of their campaign stops.

Yet there’s something different here today. The first is the location—116th Street and Lexington Avenue in upper Manhattan, a neighborhood known as Spanish Harlem. The same reporter crudely describes the area as an “overcrowded and slum-ridden Negro and Puerto Rican section of New York.”

Even statewide political campaigns don’t usually travel to neighborhoods like this. In fact, today is the first time a major-party Presidential candidate has ever held an event here.

Kennedy’s speech is tailored to the audience. He and his team know that for many nonwhite Americans, the most pressing issue of the day is civil rights and racial discrimination.

“We have to prove our faith in the equality of all men by practicing at home what we preach abroad,” he declares, “by taking action to establish the full civil rights of every American in this land.

“I am a member of a minority group,” he continues, “and all the forces of bigotry and prejudice, led by the Ku Klux Klan, are condemning me with lies and hate,” Kennedy tells them, adding, “my Party Platform is the strongest civil rights platform in the history of American politics.”

Of course, the speech gets applause. But Kennedy’s got another surprise in store for the crowd—one that will eclipse his own.

Suddenly, there’s a woman standing next to him. The crowd recognizes her instantly.

Jacqueline Bouvier Kennedy. JFK’s wife.

Now, the crowd really goes wild. Smiling, Kennedy steps out of the way, and Jackie approaches the microphone.

“*Queridos amigos*,” she begins in Spanish, with the words “Dear friends.”

She speaks fluently, in what one onlooker describes as a “measured but perfectly accented” delivery.

Translated to English, she tells them, “I am so happy to be with you. My Spanish is poor but my knowledge of your history, culture, and problems is better.” After more applause, she continues, “I can assure you that if my husband is elected President you will have a real friend in the White House. Many thanks.” And finally, “Viva Kennedy!”

Jackie’s words are brief, but she’s the one who receives the most rapturous reception—and then garners the most press attention. “Jackie Kennedy Wowed ’Em with Spanish in Harlem,” one headline reads.

This isn’t the first time the Kennedy campaign took advantage of her fluency. Early in the race, she recorded a television spot in Spanish, speaking directly to the camera. But Spanish isn’t the only language Jackie speaks.

She also recorded radio spots speaking fluent Italian and German. When JFK traveled to Louisiana, she spoke French to Cajun voters. The team even recorded a radio spot in Polish, though Jackie doesn’t actually speak Polish. They used her sister, who speaks Polish and has a similar voice. Voters never knew the difference.

Perhaps the biggest reason why Jackie’s appearance today is so unexpected is that she’s seven months pregnant. It’s hard to tell due to the loose coat she’s wearing, but everyone in the crowd already knows.

Indeed, Jackie’s life and personal story have been picked through and

scrutinized. When it comes to the Kennedy mystique, she's as fascinating to the public as he is. For good reason.

Jacqueline Bouvier Kennedy was born and raised in privilege. Her father was a wealthy stockbroker and her mother a socialite.

Growing up, she was sent to the finest prep schools and boarding schools, studying ballet and winning a national equestrian competition at the age of eleven. Even more than her future husband, "Jackie"—as she was usually called—was an excellent student and applied herself vigorously to academics.

Attending Vassar College, then an all-women's school, she studied European history and languages. In secondary school, her parents had a messy divorce, so in her junior year at Vassar, she went abroad to France, partly to escape the aftermath of the family drama.

"I loved it more than any year of my life," she would later write. "I learned not to be ashamed of a real hunger for knowledge, something I had always tried to hide."

Returning to the States, Jackie was bursting with ambition. Transferring from Vassar to George Washington University in Washington, D.C., she applied to and beat out several hundred applicants for a prized editorship in *Vogue* magazine's New York office. She declined the position so she could stay in D.C., where she secured an entry-level job at the *Washington Times-Herald* newspaper.

Eager for more responsibility, she convinced the city editor to give her a reporting position, and soon she was the Inquiring Camera Girl, who roamed the city with a camera, took photos of people, and asked them questions, which were featured in a daily column.

It was a massive success. Talking to everyone from politicians, to celebrities, to regular people on the street, she averaged an astonishing 144 interviews per month to feed the column's demand. She also covered major events, including Eisenhower's first Inauguration.

Jackie was by all accounts a talented photographer and reporter, and she would later say that these years were among the most rewarding of her life.

When she was working for the paper, she met a bachelor Congressman from Massachusetts named John F. Kennedy. They were in the same social

circles, were both Catholic, and came from similar wealthy backgrounds.

She was impressed by his charm, his love of books, and his political ambition. He was likewise dazzled by her, and soon proposed.



In her early twenties, Jackie Bouvier worked as a journalist for the Washington, D.C., newspaper the *Washington Times-Herald*. As the newspaper's Inquiring Camera Girl, she traversed the city interviewing and taking photographs of residents for a daily column. (Credit: ullstein bild Dtl./ullstein bild via Getty Images)

At first, she didn't give an answer—she had to go to England for a month to cover Queen Elizabeth's coronation for the newspaper—but eventually Jackie said yes.

Their engagement coincided with John launching his campaign to be a Massachusetts Senator.

By the time they were married on September 12, 1953, he had won the seat. Given the demands and expectations on their time, Jackie felt she had no choice but to give up her own career, devoting herself full-time to her new role: Senator's wife.

From there, they became a typical political family. Jackie was well liked in the social circles of Massachusetts and Washington, D.C., and in 1957, she gave birth to their first child, Caroline.

Yet once the Presidential campaign began, everyone knew there was something special about Jackie.

She was poised, articulate, and charming. No question, like her husband, the camera loved her. Right from the start, the public couldn't get enough—her personal style ... her fashion choices—they wanted to know everything about her. The fact she was a little shy only added to the mystique.

In the early days of the race, when Jackie learned she was pregnant, it became yet another part of her personal life for the public to consume.

Because of her condition, doctors let her attend only a few campaign events. But that didn't slow her down. In addition to filming TV interviews at home, Jackie organized an all-woman consortium to study women's political concerns across the country and even wrote a weekly newspaper column called Campaign Wife.

As if that weren't enough, she had a sly sense of humor. "I think it's so unfair of people to be against Jack because he's a Catholic," she commented at the height of the religious controversy. "He's such a poor Catholic."

Telegenic. Poised. Charming. It almost seemed unfair that JFK, who already had so many advantages, would also have a wife just as charismatic as he was.

"How the hell are we supposed to compete with *that*," a Nixon advisor grumbled while watching news footage of the couple walking hand in hand, smiling and waving at an adoring crowd.



The Kennedy campaign team quickly realized that Jackie Kennedy was a tremendous asset and brought her before the public as much as possible. Jackie recorded televised campaign spots, sat for many interviews, and wrote a popular weekly column, *Campaign Wife*, documenting her experiences as the spouse of a Presidential candidate. (Credit: New York Daily News Archive/New York Daily News via Getty Images)

That was the star power of John and Jackie Kennedy. Individually, magnetic—but together, something even greater.

At the start of the campaign, it's easy to play the role of glamorous, happy couple for public consumption. But as the election draws near, Jackie is about to discover that playing the role of the happy political wife can be a terrible burden—especially when the reality of their lives beneath the surface is something far more complicated.

10

Belmont, New Hampshire

*November 8, 1960
Election Day*

It's a brisk New England morning as residents of Belmont, New Hampshire, wait in line at their polling stations.

Over the past few weeks, like many towns across the country, Belmont's got a bit of election fever. Lawn signs decorate the grass, bumper stickers are in place, and residents have been following the campaign news.

For Richard Pavlick, the retired postal worker, it's an easy decision. He's never been shy about his politics—or his dislike of Kennedy.

Anyone who knows him knows he'll cast his vote for Richard Nixon.

Although New Hampshire is adjacent to Kennedy's home state of Massachusetts, Pavlick's vote is with the majority in his state. Similar to most of the country, New England has a rural/urban split in the vote, with small towns voting for Nixon and larger urban areas—with more Catholic, Black, and Jewish voters, among other differences—voting for Kennedy.

Election returns will later show that in mostly rural New Hampshire, Nixon wins the state with 53.4 percent of the vote; in Belknap County, which includes Belmont, returns later show that 9,156 residents voted for Nixon, and 5,630 voted for Kennedy.

So there's nothing unusual about Pavlick's vote on Election Day, or even about his passion for politics. But what Belmont residents don't know is that the retired postal worker's past is littered with details that aren't so ordinary.

Years ago, in the neighboring town of Laconia, Pavlick lived above a lunchroom with a jukebox. Apparently, Pavlick wasn't a fan of the loud rock 'n' roll music.

Annoyed, he complained.

The lunchroom proprietor was hardly sympathetic. He didn't back down, and he and Pavlick started going back and forth.

That is, until Pavlick wrote a letter saying he had a gun and was "threatening to shoot him if the jukebox noise was not abated."

With that, town officials launched an investigation. The matter was resolved only when Pavlick decided to relocate to nearby Belmont.

The incident in Laconia wasn't his first run-in with authority.

Back in the early 1950s, Pavlick tried to form a veterans organization that excluded Catholics and Jews.

The group caught the attention of a researcher and investigator named Gordon Hall, a World War II vet who was disturbed by the rise of anti-Semitism and racism in the United States.

Acting as a mole, Hall would pretend to be interested in these extremist organizations and then use an alias to begin corresponding with them, reporting the worst to law enforcement. It didn't take long for Pavlick to become a person of interest.

No doubt Pavlick's proposed veterans organization was anti-Catholic and anti-Semitic, but after exchanging a few letters, Hall determined that Pavlick's efforts probably wouldn't get off the ground.

As a result, Hall stopped writing letters.

Apparently, it upset Pavlick so much, he began searching for Hall.

To hide his identity and protect himself from the extremist groups he researched, Hall had used a friend's home as his alias and return address.

It didn't take long for the clearly mad Pavlick to show up at that home, accompanied by a large and angry dog. "That dog was five feet high, and nasty," Hall's friend later explained.

Luckily, the friend was able to convince Pavlick that he had the wrong address—and that he wasn't the person Pavlick had been writing to. Even luckier, Pavlick was never able to track down Hall himself.

Nearly a decade later, it should've been a warning sign—especially when Pavlick wrote a new letter on November 7, the day before the 1960 Presidential election.

"Tomorrow many will be disgusted with the country if Kennedy is

elected,” Pavlick began. “[I] hope that it will be Nixon, it better be.” Pavlick went on to explain that if Nixon didn’t win, he would “put a hex on Kennedy and his family millions.”

At the time, the recipient of the letter—an acquaintance of Pavlick—didn’t see anything particularly dangerous in the former postal worker’s words.

Today, as Election Day in Belmont winds down, everything is peaceful.

But as local residents will soon find out, Richard Pavlick’s “hex” will be far more potentially destructive than anyone in this small town could’ve imagined.

11

LATER THAT NIGHT ...

Hyannis Port, Massachusetts

November 8, 1960

Finally, the whole Kennedy clan is together.

Throughout the campaign, with John and Robert always on the campaign trail, there weren't many opportunities for the extended family to gather.

Today, though, most of them are here, at the Kennedys' beachside compound in Hyannis Port, in Cape Cod, Massachusetts. Brothers, sisters, aunts, uncles, in-laws, and some close family friends. Also, of course, the inner circle of campaign advisors.

As election returns come in, they're about to learn whether John Kennedy—son of Joseph Kennedy Sr. and Rose Kennedy; younger brother to the late Joe Kennedy Jr.; older brother to Rosemary, Kathleen, Eunice, Patricia, Robert F., Jean, and Edward “Ted” Kennedy; husband to Jacqueline Kennedy; and father to Caroline Kennedy—will be the next President of the United States.

They've spent the day running with their dogs on the cold beach, tossing a football, and sipping drinks as they sit on the generous lawns. John and Robert have mostly been huddled with the campaign team, talking anxiously about every final poll and prediction.

The fact is, the race is still too close to predict. For the Kennedys, oscillating polls in the final few weeks have brought both positive and negative news. On the one hand, New York State—a big electoral prize that Nixon's team tried hard to win—was polling better for Kennedy. On the other, Nixon's home state of California—also a big prize, where Kennedy

had spent a lot of time campaigning—was trending toward Nixon.

As for the “religious issue,” anti-Catholic forces were continuing to hurt Kennedy in the middle of the country. According to one advisor, it was “[g]etting hot. Many states report trouble spots.... It is hurting in many states—some badly.”

Overall, the night is a roller coaster. Because 1960 was the first election to receive live television coverage, anchors are reporting results as they’re made available. As a result, like millions of other families, the Kennedys settle in for a long night in front of the TV.

With their earlier time zone, the eastern states report first. Kennedy does better than expected in Connecticut, which is an early good sign for the bellwether state. When Pennsylvania and New York also fall his way, the mood in Hyannis Port is optimistic.

Yet as the evening wears on, the good news stops. The Midwest and rust belt start veering to Nixon, with margins bigger than expected. At around 10:00 p.m., the Kennedy camp is devastated to learn they lost Ohio—an important state they believed they would win. They had similar high expectations for Illinois, which now is too close to call. The Republicans begin sweeping the farm belt and mountain states.

“We’re being clobbered,” Robert says as one state after another goes to Nixon.

Soon enough, though, the pendulum starts to swing back in the other direction. Texas goes for Kennedy, perhaps rewarding his decision to nominate his former primary opponent Senator Lyndon B. Johnson as his running mate. Michigan also eventually goes to the Democrats—a huge win—as does Illinois.

Even with the losses in the farm belt, the electoral math starts giving Kennedy a solid lead. It’s so strong that by the time Nixon wins California it seems too little, too late.

By 3:00 a.m., the wait seems grueling, but the numbers are finally squarely in Kennedy’s favor.

When the networks announce that the Nixon campaign wants to have a press conference, the assumption is he’ll concede.

But it’s not that simple. As the networks cut to the Ambassador Hotel in

Los Angeles, they find Nixon looking haggard with a forced smile. He acknowledges quickly that the election returns are looking good for his opponent.

“If the present trend continues,” Nixon says to the roomful of supporters, then Kennedy will be the next President. If so, he goes on, it’s important “we unite behind the man who is elected.” Without saying much more, he waves his supporters good night.

Live on NBC News, the anchor team of Chet Huntley and David Brinkley try to decipher Nixon’s message. “I don’t know whether that was a concession or not, do you?” Huntley asks.

Brinkley replies that Nixon “came as close as a man can, but did not actually concede.”

Although Nixon’s language is cryptic, the implication is clear: a few of the key states are very close, and his team isn’t ready to concede. Rumors swirl that he will formally contest one or more states.

On the Kennedy side, some are furious that Nixon won’t simply admit defeat. Without a concession, he’s left them all in limbo.

But JFK himself shrugs it off. Maybe because he can relate, or maybe because he’s exhausted.

“Why should he concede?” Kennedy says. “I wouldn’t.”

It’ll take hours for the final tallies to be sorted, so somewhere close to 4:00 a.m. JFK goes to bed.

A few hours later, he wakes up, rubs his eyes, and sees Caroline, his three-year-old daughter, standing next to his bed.

“Good morning, Mr. President,” she says.

That’s how he learns it. The Kennedys’ caregiver had sent Caroline up to break the news. A few minutes later, while Kennedy is still in his pajamas, close advisor Ted Sorensen enters the bedroom to confirm the results. The thin margins in Illinois, Texas, Michigan, and a few other key states had not been challenged or overturned. It’s now mathematically impossible for Nixon to win.

Soon, they receive a message from President Eisenhower congratulating Kennedy on his victory.

Kennedy puts on his suit.

It's gonna be a big day.

The final tally has Kennedy with 303 electoral votes to Nixon's 219. But that electoral gap conceals how very close the election was. Several big states had margins of less than one percent. No doubt, the country was sharply divided.

The popular vote tells the real story: out of 68,838,219 votes cast, Kennedy won 34,226,731, while Nixon won 34,108,157. That's a difference of 118,574 votes—0.17 percent—the smallest popular vote margin of any Presidential election of the twentieth century and the twenty-first century so far.

Despite the victory, the mood at the Kennedy compound remains solemn. Perhaps it still doesn't feel real, or maybe the mixture of fatigue and frayed nerves just makes it hard to be celebratory. Adding to it, Kennedy's opponent still hasn't conceded.

Once again, they gather around the TV. Soon enough, the news anchors announce an imminent California press conference.

At approximately 1:00 p.m. it begins, but instead of Richard Nixon, viewers see Nixon's press secretary, Herb Klein.

Speaking for the Vice President, Klein explains that Nixon accepts the results—and has a final message for Kennedy that “you will have the united support of all Americans as you lead the nation.”

To Nixon's credit, despite some early rumors of irregularities in Illinois and Texas, he doesn't publicly question the results or sow doubts about the electoral process. But what no one understands is why Nixon sent his press secretary to concede rather than address the nation himself.

Kennedy, who had given Nixon the benefit of the doubt the night before, is not impressed. If nothing else, Nixon should've taken the opportunity to personally thank his staff and supporters, not to mention the thousands of volunteers around the country who spent the better part of the last year working for him.

“No class,” Kennedy says, shaking his head.

Still, the concession provides closure. The election is finally over.



The morning after Election Day, John F. Kennedy watches the continuing television coverage with his family and close advisors. His younger brother and campaign manager, Robert F. Kennedy, stands just behind him. Due to razor-thin margins in several states, the Nixon campaign declined to concede the night before. (Credit: Courtesy of the Jacques Lowe Estate)

Time to stop watching television and start moving forward. A growing army of aides, advisors, prominent well-wishers, as well as family and friends are descending upon the compound.

In no time, outside the walled security of the Kennedy estate, massive crowds are gathering all over Cape Cod, celebrating, hoping to get a glimpse of the new President-elect.

Amid the increasing hubbub, Jacqueline Kennedy, the soon-to-be First Lady of the United States, throws a raincoat over her morning clothes and slips away.

Now seven and a half months pregnant, plus the exhaustion from lack of sleep, she walks alone along the windy beach, the cold Atlantic waves nipping at the shore.

In her younger literary days, Jackie wrote poems about taking solitary walks along the ocean. It was a form of meditation—a way to appreciate the natural world.

Today, she could use the perspective. The world is shifting around her.

The calm doesn't last long. Within minutes, her solitude is interrupted.

Someone's running out to join her. It's her husband, the new President-elect of the United States. Maybe he wants to share a quiet moment ... or take in the magnitude of what's happened.

Instead, he has instructions.

They need her for a photo session back at the compound, and the casual clothes she's wearing won't do. She needs to change and be camera-ready. As soon as possible.

After the photos, she and John are set to travel by motorcade in an open car through the crowded streets to Hyannis's National Guard Armory. There, hundreds of members of the press are gathered, having spent the past sixteen hours waiting for the postelection press conference.

Once they arrive, JFK will address the country for the first time as President-elect.

For Jackie, the future has arrived. From now on, the television cameras will be everywhere—along the motorcade route, inside the armory, outside, everywhere they go, the world will be watching.

She knows the next step.

Next to her husband for every part of it, she'll have to be smiling, waving, forever gracious.

Kllk-kllk-kllk-kllk, a chorus of camera shutters will sing as they pass.

All those lenses aimed at him, at her, at their entire family—like a modern-day firing squad.

PART II

Transitions

12

Augusta, Georgia

November 9, 1960

It's a beautiful day for golf.

The Augusta National Golf Course in Augusta, Georgia, is famous for hosting the PGA's annual Masters Tournament, one of the largest golf events in the world. Today, however, there are no crowds and only a few players on the green.

A small cluster of golfers and caddies are playing on or near the seventeenth hole. They're wearing the usual—khaki pants, short-sleeved collared polo shirts, and sunglasses—while a few are carrying golf bags on their shoulders.

Everything about them looks unremarkable.

Which is the point.

They're not actually playing or even caddying. In fact, the ones with the golf bags on their shoulders? That's a disguise. Their bags contain a few token clubs to look innocuous—but hidden inside are fully loaded Thompson .45-caliber submachine guns.

Though that's not even the most unusual part about this group. On the seventeenth hole, one of the men teeing up is the outgoing President of the United States, Dwight D. Eisenhower.

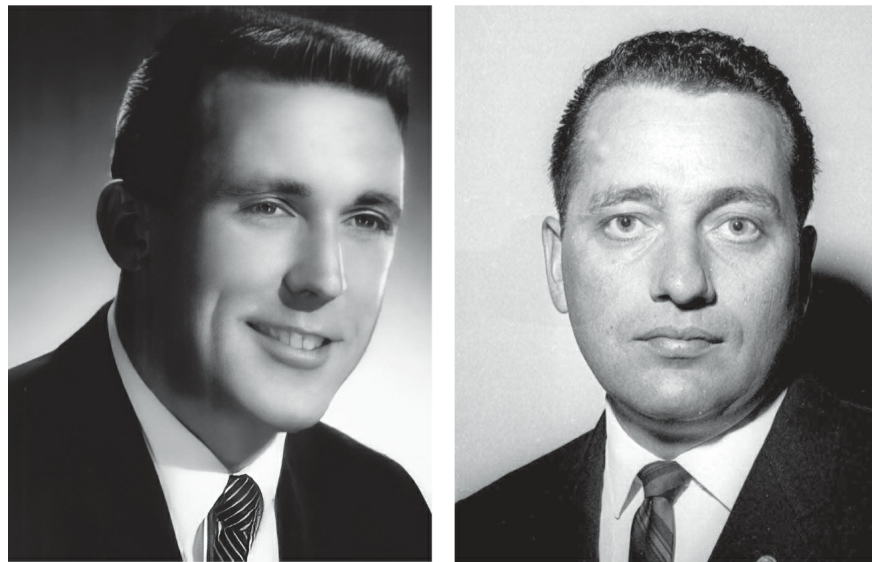
The men with the fake golf gear and submachine guns are agents of the United States Secret Service, working the President's personal detail. They're on the course to monitor his every move—and to keep anyone else from getting too close to the President.

As the agents watch, Eisenhower swings his club at the top of the hole.

The ball sails along the fairway and lands just short of the green. It's a pretty good shot.

Two of the agents—both on the younger side, in their late twenties—exchange a quick glance. One of them, Agent Clint Hill, makes an expression of mock surprise and gives a quick thumbs-up. The other, Agent Gerald Blaine, smiles. Both have been on the golf course with Eisenhower many times, and they know one thing about the President: he's not a very good golfer. So this was an unusual shot. The only reason the agents make this joke is that they're far away, near the green, safely out of eyesight.

Earlier that morning, President Eisenhower flew to Augusta while most of the country was still following the dramatic election coverage on television. After several weeks of campaigning for his Vice President, Richard Nixon, Eisenhower is exhausted. He's also deeply disappointed that Nixon lost.



Gerald Blaine (l.) and Clint Hill (r.) are Secret Service Special Agents. Both served on the White House Detail during the second Eisenhower administration. With the election of John F. Kennedy in November 1960, their work lives will be transformed. (Credits: [left] n/a; [right] AP Photo)

It's hard enough being the President of the United States for eight straight years. At age seventy, he's ready to retire. He's here at Augusta National with a few friends, playing eighteen holes to try and relax.

Of course, the morning is anything but relaxing for the agents traveling with him. For the Secret Service, today marks the first day of the official transition from one administration to another. They've been with Eisenhower

for eight years. They've got their operation honed into a finely tuned machine. Eisenhower ran his administration with military precision—not surprising for a former five-star general—and the Secret Service had learned how to anticipate his every move and decision. By his second term, their operation ran like clockwork.

But on this morning, it's all about to change. Switching to a new administration is enormously stressful for the Secret Service; they'll have to devise new protocols and routines, change their staffing, and learn the specific needs of a whole new group of people.

As for the incoming President, they didn't know much about John Kennedy. They know what everyone else knows: he's much younger, has a big extended family, famously likes to go sailing and play sports, and seems to lead a very active social life. Those qualities will undoubtedly create many difficulties for the Secret Service, making their work more complicated than it was under Eisenhower.

Yet there's another reason why today is stressful, especially for the younger agents. The Secret Service is a complex organization. The Presidential transition will be a time for reorganization and personnel shuffling. No one knows what their new position will be—or even whether they'll have a new position. Some worry they'll be demoted, or rerouted to some obscure field office, away from the action. So right now, everyone on the President's detail is anxious about their fate.

When the golf game finishes, younger agents Jerry Blaine and Clint Hill do a final security check on the grounds and start prepping for the President's transport out of Augusta National. But as they leave, one of their colleagues jogs over to them.

He has a message: the Special Agent in Charge of the White House Detail—James Rowley, their immediate superior, who had also traveled to Georgia but is not on the course—wants to see them right away.

This is it—what they've been waiting for.

It's a moment that will change their lives forever.

Hyannis Port, Massachusetts

November 11, 1960

It's been three days since the election—less than forty-eight hours since John F. Kennedy's victory was made official.

Richard Pavlick, of Belmont, New Hampshire, starts his day as usual, waking up in his small, modest home, where he lives alone. Today, though, his usual routine is about to shift.

He leaves his house at roughly 9:00 a.m., sliding into the worn, pale green 1950 Buick he keeps parked outside. Behind the wheel, he drives south from Belmont toward Concord. Then from Concord, he continues farther south. After an hour—about sixty miles—his Buick crosses the state line from New Hampshire into Massachusetts.

He doesn't stop there. He keeps driving south. After another thirty or forty minutes, he's close to Boston. From Boston, he heads in a more southeasterly direction, along the coast of Massachusetts Bay, then Cape Cod, eventually cutting straight through the peninsula toward the southern shore.

By noon, after roughly three hours and 160 miles, he approaches his destination.

Hyannis Port, Massachusetts.

TWO DAYS EARLIER ...

Augusta, Georgia

November 9, 1960

As Secret Service Agents Jerry Blaine and Clint Hill walk into their boss's makeshift office, they have no idea what to expect. They've been summoned—along with another young agent on the team—with no explanation.

Their boss, James Rowley, the head of the White House Detail, is a no-nonsense guy who gets right to the point.

"I have some personnel shuffling to do," Rowley says to the three young agents.

"Jerry and Bill," he says to Blaine and the third agent, "you'll be on the President-elect detail. Mr. Kennedy is going to spend the next month and the holidays at his father's estate in Palm Beach, Florida. Sign a GTR for a flight to West Palm Beach this evening."

A GTR is a government transportation requisition slip. Secret Service agents always carry them in case they need to get somewhere in a hurry. In their job, same-day travel requests happen all the time.

Jerry Blaine feels a surge of excitement as he hears about his new post. Serving on the new President's security detail is exactly what he wanted. Instead of being transferred to a desk or out to some field office, he'll be where the action is. The fact they gave him this assignment also indicates that his superiors approve of his job performance during the seven months he's been on Eisenhower's detail.

Once the instruction sinks in, Blaine realizes there's also some bad news. If Rowley is correct that President-elect Kennedy will remain in Florida from

Thanksgiving through Christmas, that means Blaine will be there too. He won't get to spend the holidays with his wife and two children. The President-elect is now officially his detail's "protectee"—and Secret Service agents don't leave their protectee's immediate vicinity. Ever. Potential assassins don't take holidays off; neither do the agents.

It's a tough sacrifice for those agents with spouses and kids, which is most of them. It's one downside of being a member of what Blaine calls "an elite club that was unlike any other organization in the world."

As Blaine and the other agent get their marching orders to join the President-elect, Clint Hill has a feeling of dismay wash over him. The only thing he'd wanted was to hear that *he* would be on the new President's detail. To learn that he wasn't chosen is a gut punch. He can't help but wonder if he's about to be fired.

Finally, Rowley turns toward Hill.

"Clint," he says, "Defense Secretary Tom Gates is here briefing the President and is returning to Washington shortly. I want you to fly back with him, then go to Secret Service headquarters and talk to Chief Baughman. The Chief is expecting you."

Hill is working hard not to look stunned.

Urbanus E. Baughman, usually called U.E., is the Chief of the United States Secret Service. He's held the position since 1948, when President Harry S. Truman appointed him. In Secret Service circles, Baughman is a legend, and it's unusual for the rank and file to meet him in person, let alone be invited to his office.

Is this good news or bad news? Hill has "a dozen questions," as he later recalled of this moment, but the protocol of the Service is that when you're given instructions by a superior, you don't question them. You follow orders.

"Yes, sir," Hill says.

As his two friends and colleagues start making arrangements to fly to Palm Beach to join the President-elect, Hill gets ready for what he knows will feel like an interminable flight back from Atlanta to Washington, D.C. The whole way there, he'll be wondering what the future holds.

"I had a foreboding feeling," he would later recall, "that whatever lay ahead for me could not be good."

It started early.

As a child, John Kennedy was shy, bookish, and often sickly. During several health crises in his youth, he surrounded himself with books in his bedroom or hospital room, reading voraciously about history, politics, literature, and world affairs.

In adolescence, he came out of his shell. He was funny and smart, with an easygoing charisma. His physical appearance shifted from pale and sickly, to tall and boyishly handsome, with striking blue eyes. Although he'd continue to struggle on and off with health problems throughout his life, he outwardly exuded robust energy and athleticism.

At boarding school and then at college, these qualities had a clear effect: women really liked John Kennedy—and Kennedy liked them back.

“Jack was tremendously interested in girls,” one former school friend explained. And his preference was never for long relationships. “Although he had an awful lot of girls, he never really had any one girl for a very long period.”

During his college years, he'd write letters to friends detailing his frequent escapades with women.

Of course, a college-aged man trying to seduce women—and bragging about it—is hardly unique. But with young John F. Kennedy, his behavior would be persistent, continuing far beyond his college years.

As a young man, his attractiveness and charisma only made it worse. He had the effortless confidence of someone who'd grown up with all the advantages of privilege, who'd received the best education money could buy—and who'd been taught that he could accomplish anything.

When Kennedy returned from the war a decorated hero, his stature and

confidence only grew. By the time he entered politics, his innate idealism and knack for public speaking made him a magnet for women.

As a young, talented congressman with his star on the rise, he was profiled in magazines and newspapers touting him as one of the country's most eligible bachelors. Kennedy seemed to enjoy the reputation. He remained unmarried through his twenties and early thirties, and it was clear he liked it that way.

"He was a great chaser. Jack liked girls and girls liked him," fellow Congressman George Smathers observed. "He came by it naturally.... He just had a great way with women."

Another JFK friend and former Congressman, Frank Thompson Jr., was even more blunt. JFK always had a "smorgasbord of women" to choose from, Thompson said, because the "girls just went crazy about him."

When Kennedy met and began courting Jacqueline Bouvier, he was in his midthirties; she was in her early twenties. By all accounts, he was genuinely smitten. But those who knew him well doubted his old habits would go away. Kennedy had rarely stayed in one relationship for long, and during his bachelor years fidelity to any one woman had never been a high priority.

Some of Jackie's friends even warned her about him.

"I knew what a womanizer he was," Jackie's former colleague from the *Washington Times-Herald* John White later recounted. "I told Jackie I didn't think he'd make a very good husband."

Still, the courtship continued—and despite his reputation, she eventually accepted his marriage proposal.

After their engagement, a former classmate of JFK's named Kirk LeMoyne "Lem" Billings—one of JFK's best and oldest friends—was so concerned about Kennedy's behavior with women that he felt the need to talk to Jackie about it before the wedding.

"I'd known Jack a long time, and I felt I should prepare her a little bit for what I felt were some of the problems that Jack might have marrying at thirty-five," Billings later recalled. "She was terribly young, and it might be best if she was prepared for it."

One night at a cocktail party hosted by the engaged couple, Billings saw his opportunity. He pulled Jackie aside. "I told her that night I thought she

ought to realize that Jack was thirty-five years old, had been around an awful lot all his life, had known many, many girls ... that she was going to have to be very understanding at the beginning, that he had never really settled down with one girl before, and that a man of thirty-five is very difficult to live with.”

The implication was clear. He didn't believe John F. Kennedy would be a faithful husband.

Surprisingly, Billings didn't keep his conversation with Jackie a secret. “Of course, later I told Jack everything I said to her—and he was pleased because he felt it would make her better understand him.”

So how did Jackie react? According to Billings, at first, “She was very understanding about it and accepted everything I said.”

But this initial understanding may not have been correct. After the couple married, Jackie candidly brought up the subject to Billings again. “When you discussed that with me ... I thought it was a challenge,” she told him.

Whatever the case, Billings was right about one thing: John F. Kennedy's womanizing would not stop after his marriage. If anything, it would only get worse.

West Palm Beach, Florida

November 9, 1960

Woody's Motel.

It's a small, plain one-story motel not far from a drab commercial intersection in West Palm Beach, Florida.

That's where Secret Service Special Agent Jerry Blaine arrives just after nightfall. It's been about eight hours since he watched President Eisenhower tee off on the seventeenth hole at Augusta. Now he's about to embark on a new adventure—and it all starts here.

Woody's has a small, questionable-looking pool, with the rows of rooms forming a U-shape around it. Overall the place “looked like it had been around for decades and was in need of some updating,” Blaine notices as he looks around.

Another agent, Emory Roberts, had been in Palm Beach since morning and had arranged this lodging for the team of agents who'll gradually arrive from various locations to work together on the new President-elect's security detail. They'll basically all live here for the next few months, during the Presidential transition.

Woody's is typical of the modest lodgings for most Secret Service agents on the road. It has two advantages: first, it's close to the Kennedy family estate in Palm Beach, where the President-elect will be spending a good deal of time; second, the cheap nightly rate fits into the Secret Service per diem.

As the agents settle in for their first overnight in Palm Beach, they learn something else about Woody's: the room's walls are thin, so they can hear any laughter or conversations from nearby rooms. If someone jumps into the

little pool outside, they hear that too. Still, the beds are comfortable enough, and the agents just have to get used to a little noise.

After a quick night's sleep, Blaine and his fellow agents are up at dawn, ready to start their new assignment.

Their first task is to scout the Kennedy family estate in advance of the President-elect's arrival.

The Kennedys' estate is one of a few large oceanfront properties located on North Ocean Boulevard, a main road that runs parallel to the beach. JFK's father, Joseph Kennedy Sr., acquired the property in the 1930s, and since then, it's served as the extended Kennedy family's second vacation home and winter getaway.

Now that John F. Kennedy will be President, he informed the Secret Service that he'll spend most of the transition period at the Florida estate, and then continue to use it as a Presidential headquarters and year-round family retreat.

This is all well and good for the Kennedys, but for the Secret Service, it means something else: danger. A sprawling unsecured location in an unfamiliar environment—and one that any citizen could probably find just by asking around? When it comes to protecting a President, it's a worst-case scenario.

On top of that, Kennedy announced that he plans to arrive in Palm Beach *tomorrow* to begin his transition. So the Service has barely twenty-four hours to scout the location, assess the security needs, and make arrangements prior to the President-elect's arrival.

Since Woody's is not far from the Kennedy compound, the agents quickly arrive at the North Ocean Boulevard address. The property's grounds are hidden behind a wall that runs alongside the road, with vehicle access through a single iron gate. Inside the gate is a curving driveway with a large garage to one side. As the agents exit their vehicles, spread before them is the lavish Kennedy estate.

The agents gaze around. Agent Emory Roberts—who had come in advance to arrange the lodgings for the rest—starts to give them a lowdown on where they are and what to expect.

“As you can see, this is a large piece of property that's not only

vulnerable in the front, but also to the ocean in back, along with a vacant lot next door that's used by neighbors to access the beach," Roberts explains. "We've got to establish security before Mr. Kennedy arrives. I'll give you a quick tour and then we'll get to work."

The agents take in their luxurious surroundings. At the center of the property is a two-story L-shaped, stucco Spanish-style mansion, surrounded by lush vegetation. The sprawling grounds also contain a tennis court, a large, rectangular saltwater swimming pool surrounded by umbrellas and deck chairs, and a vast back lawn dotted with palm trees. The lawn overlooks the beach, with a drop of several feet from grass to sand to allow for a retaining wall.

"Think of it as your home away from home," Roberts instructs as he shows the agents around. "From what I understand, the Kennedys plan to split their weekends between here and Hyannis Port, depending on the season."

As the agents study and assess the details of the property, they get a sense of the specific security challenges.

On the plus side, there are two high walls on either side of the estate, preventing an intruder's easy access from the adjoining properties.

But there are some big negatives. First and foremost, the entire rear of the property, including the lawn and pool, is wide open to the beach and ocean. The waterfront has restricted access, but residents from adjoining properties can walk up and down the beach. An intruder could potentially blend in, walk right up to the property, and no one would notice.

What's even more troubling than the beach is the water itself. The agents can see sailboats and other vessels drifting by, some fairly close to shore. All it would take is a boat and a gunman with a scope to easily get off a clear shot, targeting the President or a family member on the lawn or in the pool area.



The Kennedy family's winter compound in Palm Beach, Florida, is a 33,000-square-foot mansion situated on two acres of beachfront property. After Election Day, President-elect John F. Kennedy informs the Secret Service that he plans to spend most of the transition period working from the Palm Beach estate. (Credit: Bettmann/Bettmann via Getty Images)

The agents make quick plans. First, they'll coordinate with the Coast Guard to have an armed boat patrolling the beachside waters 24/7, even when the President-elect isn't in Florida. The Coast Guard can restrict access to the waters surrounding the estate and be on constant lookout for suspicious activity on the water.

Second, the Secret Service plans to further restrict access to the beachfront along the Kennedy property. They'll station armed agents atop both ends of the retaining wall that stretches along the rear of the beach adjoining the elevated Kennedy lawn. Situated several feet above the neighboring beaches, they'll have a clear view of anyone approaching.

Still, while the beach and rear lawn are the Secret Service's primary concern, the front of the property also poses some risks. A two-way street named Monterey Road intersects with North Ocean Boulevard directly in front of the Kennedy estate. A thin stone wall with an iron gate provides the only barrier at the front of the property.

The agents assess that a vehicle going full speed down Monterey, driving straight toward the property, could simply ram through the gate or wall to gain immediate access.

Again, the agents devise quick solutions. They'll reach out to the Palm Beach Police Department and request that Monterey Road be changed from a two-way street to a one-way, in the direction *away* from the Kennedy compound. Then no vehicle could ram the gate head-on. The Secret Service will also request that a Palm Beach Police vehicle permanently patrol the blocks in front of the home, always keeping an eye out for danger.

Finally, for a lookout post, the agents commandeer a two-car garage on the interior grounds close to the front wall. They'll station at least one armed guard on the garage roof 24/7, giving them a view of the streets, sidewalks, and traffic in front. The garage and its roof will also serve as an impromptu command post, where agents can converge, make plans, and store supplies.

Taken together, it's a good start.

But the team needs to hurry. They only have a few hours.

The President-elect arrives tomorrow.

Washington, D.C.

The Following Day

Secret Service Special Agent Clint Hill is ready to hear his new assignment. At least, that's what he hopes is about to happen.

The headquarters of the Secret Service is in the U.S. Department of Treasury building on Pennsylvania Avenue in Washington, D.C. Right next to the White House.

That's where Hill enters for his scheduled meeting with U. E. Baughman, the Chief of the United States Secret Service.

Hill has no idea why a young agent like himself has been summoned to see Baughman in person. In fact, everything about this appointment seems highly unusual.

Once Hill goes through the building's security and heads upstairs, a secretary shows him to the agency's executive offices. Entering Chief Baughman's large office, the first thing Hill notices is a plaque on the wall with a quote:

YOU AIN'T LEARNING NOTHING WHEN YOU'RE TALKING.

It could easily be the motto of the Secret Service. The agents are trained to observe, study, listen—and keep their mouths shut. If they must speak on the job, they say as little as possible.

Hill is doing his best to muster some confidence for the meeting, but it quickly dissipates when he sees that Baughman, who's sitting behind a big desk, isn't alone. He's flanked by the Deputy Chief, an Assistant Chief, and two inspectors. They all gaze intently at Hill—five against one.

“Come on in, Clint,” Baughman says, speaking first. “Have a seat and make yourself comfortable.”

Hill follows orders and sits down in the chair, although nothing in the world would make him comfortable at this moment. He stays quiet, waiting for them to speak.

After Baughman makes quick introductions, he gazes steadily at Hill. “Clint, how long have you been in the Secret Service?”

Thankfully, a simple question. “I started in the Denver Field Office on September 22, 1958, sir.”

“And when were you transferred to the White House Detail?”

“Just over one year ago,” Hill replies. “On November 1, 1959.”

Hill can’t help but think that all this information is in his file. Surely, they’ve already looked him up. So why are they asking him basic questions?

They continue, Baughman and the others, asking about every facet of his time with the Service. But the questions aren’t just about his job; they ask about his family, his personal background, and his life outside work. Some of the questions seem irrelevant: Do you swim? Do you know how to play tennis?

Every so often, Baughman and the brass huddle in the corner, talking among themselves. Hill is out of earshot, wondering what they’re saying. As he sits there, he tries to think of what he did wrong that could get him fired, or demoted, or whatever it is they have in store for him.

The questions keep coming. All told, it’s a nearly ninety-minute interrogation. This means that Hill has had to do an awful lot of talking—the exact opposite of what it says on Baughman’s plaque.

Finally, the questions stop and the long interview is over. Hill hopes he’ll finally learn what it was all about.

“Clint, we have made a decision,” the Chief says, looking straight at him. Hill swallows hard.

“You are being assigned to protect Mrs. John F. Kennedy.”

There’s a long pause. *Mrs. John F. Kennedy?*

It was the last thing he expected. His mind starts buzzing. Why this assignment? What’s in his background that caused them to make this decision?

With surprise also comes a wave of disappointment. The fact is, Clint Hill considers this a letdown. The First Lady detail isn't something he's ever been interested in. "I was devastated," he later recalled. "It felt as though I had been demoted from the starting lineup to the bench.... While my buddies on the President's detail would be right in the middle of all the action, I knew where I was going to end up: fashion shows, afternoon tea parties, and the ballet. I felt as if my career had come to a screeching halt."

Of course, Hill can't say that in the moment. Baughman is staring at him, waiting for a response. There's only one thing to say.

"Yes, sir," Hill replies.

Later, Hill will learn at least one reason he was picked for the position. Jacqueline Kennedy, at age thirty-one, will be the youngest First Lady to occupy the White House in the modern era of the Secret Service. Hill's superiors thought that she might be more comfortable with an agent roughly her age, rather than one of the many middle-aged men on the force.

Also, the bosses know Hill has a young son roughly the same age as John and Jacqueline Kennedy's daughter, Caroline. They figured this too might help Hill and the First Lady form a connection.

Still, as Hill leaves the Treasury building, all he can think is that it's a role he feels totally unsuited for. Now he definitely won't be "where the action is."

He couldn't be more wrong.

Hyannis Port, Massachusetts

November 11, 1960

In the seventy-two hours since the election, the tiny seaside village of Hyannis Port in Cape Cod, Massachusetts, has become the focus of national attention.

Richard Pavlick later explained that he made the drive here “to see how much the roads and scenery had changed, and to see the Kennedy home there.”

Whether autumnal sightseeing was really part of Pavlick’s motivation will never be known. But the part about trying to see the Kennedy family compound in Hyannis Port—where President-elect John F. Kennedy has spent election night and the day since, with the media following his every move—that part is definitely true.

Around noon, when Pavlick arrives in the Hyannis area, his first stop is at the small local airport, Barnstable Municipal. There, he has a quick lunch. At the food counter, he strikes up a brief conversation with an NBC reporter, one of the many journalists who have descended upon Cape Cod’s southern shore in recent days.

After his meal, Pavlick is back in his car, driving “toward the waterfront,” as he later described. But it’s not views of the ocean he’s looking for. Possibly based on directions from the reporter, he drives in the direction of the Kennedy beachfront compound.

Remarkably, he gets pretty close. But then, “As I was almost near the waterfront road,” he later recounted, “two cars came around the bend and the officers patrolling the street ordered me and all other cars to the side of the

road.”

The two cars he’s talking about are dark sedans. Nearby police vehicles serve as escorts. Given where they’re coming from, it’s no mystery who’s inside: the President-elect and his security detail, apparently departing the Kennedy compound.

As they pass, Pavlick and the other motorists remain on the side of the road, staring at JFK’s cars.

“Kennedy and the Secret Service men passed within ten feet of me,” Pavlick later described. Once the police officers give the all-clear sign to the motorists who had pulled over, Pavlick spins his Buick around. Instead of continuing toward the waterfront, he starts following the President-elect’s vehicles.

He’s not the only one. As Pavlick trails the two sedans, some other motorists start doing the same. In no time, they realize that the small Kennedy motorcade is heading back toward the place that Pavlick just left: the local airport.

It doesn’t take long for Pavlick to pull into Barnstable Municipal for the second time that day, quickly parking his Buick.

Along with a crowd of onlookers, he walks over to a chain-link fence surrounding the airfield. The fence isn’t high, so people are able to see clearly over it. If JFK is planning to board an airplane, Pavlick and other onlookers will have a clear view.

Soon the crowd around Pavlick starts growing, with everyone pressing against the fence, trying to get the best view. A buzz of excitement and anticipation grows, with onlookers and reporters waiting impatiently.

And then, there he is, in person, walking toward a plane. John F. Kennedy—the future President of the United States.

He’s tall, handsome, and has a wide smile, just like on television.

When Kennedy sees the crowd along the fence, he veers and comes straight toward them. Soon, he’s actively shaking hands with the onlookers.



On November 11, 1960, three days after Election Day, a crowd is packed around the fence surrounding Barnstable Municipal Airport, in Cape Cod, Massachusetts, to see President-elect John F. Kennedy board an airplane. Richard Pavlick, of Belmont, New Hampshire, is off camera among the crowd lining the fence. (Credit: Boston Globe/Boston Globe via Getty Images)

The crowd is several people deep, with those in front eagerly stretching out their arms.

At first, Pavlick isn't close to where Kennedy is shaking hands. But as JFK continues along the fence, he gets closer and closer to Pavlick. "Had he come another twenty-five feet, I may have shaken hands with him," Pavlick later recalled.

In the end, the line of people is too long for Kennedy to greet everyone, so after a few final handshakes he turns away. The crowd cheers as JFK walks with his security escort toward the private plane waiting for him on the

tarmac.

As the onlookers watch, Kennedy climbs the plane's steps and, with a final wave to the crowd, ducks into the aircraft.

Soon, the President-elect's plane speeds down the runway, lifts off, and disappears into the sky.

The crowd at the fence disperses. "As there was no reason why I should stay around, I got into my car," Pavlick later recalled.

Whatever interest Pavlick had in sightseeing around Cape Cod, it's apparently gone. Once in the car, he immediately heads north, straight up through the peninsula. It doesn't take him long to reach the highway, beginning a three-hour-long journey back to Belmont.

Richard Pavlick started his day planning to see the Kennedy family compound in Hyannis Port. He ended up seeing much more—the President-elect himself, up close and in person.

It won't be the last time.

Georgetown, Washington, D.C.

November 11, 1960

Secret Service Special Agent Clint Hill stands on the sidewalk on N Street in Georgetown, an affluent residential neighborhood in Washington, D.C. He gazes up at the handsome three-story redbrick town house before him—and takes a deep breath.

This is the Washington residence of President-elect Kennedy and his family. JFK himself is not here; he just departed Hyannis Port, flying directly to Palm Beach with his inner circle of advisors.

Hill is here to meet soon-to-be First Lady Jacqueline Kennedy. Due to her pregnancy and the fact that she's about to give birth in just over a month, her doctors urged her to come from Hyannis Port straight to Georgetown, close to her physician and the hospital. Her daughter, Caroline, is also here with her.

Hill is there with his immediate superior, Jim Jeffries, who was just appointed chief of the First Lady's security detail. Jeffries is the more senior agent, which means he'll do more of the coordinating and office work; it'll be Clint Hill who will spend the most time physically in the First Lady's presence.

In addition, a rotating cast of junior agents will provide extra support and stand perimeter outside any home, hotel, restaurant, park, or wherever else the First Lady may be on any given day.

Hill remains upset about his new assignment. But it doesn't make sense to dwell on it—it's time to go in.

After Hill and Jeffries enter the town house, they are shown into a ground-floor living room. Jeffries then continues farther into the house to

greet the First Lady–to-be, telling Hill to wait where he is.

Once Jeffries leaves the room, Hill has a moment to take in his surroundings. It's an elegant room with plush upholstered furniture, built-in bookcases, and antique lamps. The decor has a "distinctly European feel," Hill thinks to himself, and he has "that feeling that if an object should be moved ever so slightly, it would be noticed immediately."

Hill has learned enough about Jacqueline Kennedy to know that she grew up in a world of wealth and privilege. A home like this, then, is no surprise. The refined interior also serves to highlight something else: how very different the soon-to-be First Lady's background is from his own.

Clint Hill grew up in the tiny, isolated farming town of Washburn, North Dakota. According to the sign at the end of Washburn's main road, the town's population at the time was 912.

As a child, Hill lived in a modest home, where the quarters were often so tight he slept on the porch, keeping all his clothes in a single drawer in the living room.

When Hill was six years old, he learned that he'd been adopted. His parents had driven 240 miles to the city of Fargo, to the North Dakota Children's Home for Adoption, to select him from the other infants. Although he loved and respected his humble, hardworking adopted parents, the fact that he didn't know his real parents gave him a natural restlessness, as if he was always in search of something.

In his teenage years, beyond the no-frills local public high school, there wasn't much culture or community. Hill left Washburn in 1950 to attend Concordia College in Minnesota. After graduation, he enlisted in the military and served for two years. Then, a chance tip from a friend led him to apply for an entry-level spot in the U.S. Secret Service.

He got the job—and felt like he'd found his calling.

Now, here he is, a decade after he left rural North Dakota, in an elegant room in the nation's capital, about to meet the future First Lady of the United States.

Looking at his immediate surroundings, Hill can't help but feel another wave of disappointment. He'd done his time on Eisenhower's detail. At this point, he should be with the President-elect himself, not the First Lady. This

room, he thinks, is “a home for tea parties and ladies’ luncheons.”

His thoughts are interrupted when Agent Jeffries returns to the room. He’s not alone.

There she is, in person, the woman whose image has been in the media almost nonstop for the past year.

Jackie Kennedy—America’s new First Lady.

Concord, New Hampshire

November 14, 1960

It's not stopping.

Five days after the election, New Hampshire, like everywhere else in the country, is filled with nonstop coverage of election results and the transition to the Kennedy Presidency.

The New Hampshire newspapers alone capture the scope of it.

"Most of the World Cheers U.S. Election of Kennedy," the *Nashua Telegraph's* headline declares. "Why Did Kennedy Win?" wonders West Lebanon's *Valley News*, enlisting four political experts to give their opinions. "Red Boss Begins Maneuvering for Kennedy Meeting," the *Portsmouth Herald* announces, referring to Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev. "No More Leisure for New First Lady," the *Herald* adds. The *Concord Monitor* reports that "New Voting Marks Set in Election," referring to the record local turnout on Election Day.

Another headline, also from the *Monitor*, is one that might strike a particular nerve for some voters: "Pope Sends His Good Wishes to Kennedy," the *Monitor* declares.

Today, it's impossible to know if Richard Pavlick, of Belmont, has read any of these headlines since his trip to Hyannis Port. But given how closely he'd followed the election, it's almost certain he's consumed similar press coverage.

Like anyone else who doesn't like the idea of a John F. Kennedy presidency, Pavlick can't be happy.

Exactly how Pavlick spent the next few days isn't known. But one thing

is on the record: on November 14, he goes shopping in Concord, about an hour from Belmont.

The store is called the New Hampshire Machinery & Explosives Company.

Pavlick isn't there for the machinery part. He's there for the latter part.

The far more dangerous part.

It's something that was far easier to purchase back in 1960.

Dynamite.

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THREE DAYS EARLIER ...

Georgetown, Washington, D.C.

November 11, 1960

It doesn't take long for Jackie Kennedy to make an impression.

"I'd seen photographs of her, of course, but in person she was more striking than I had imagined," Clint Hill would recall of the moment her first saw her walking into the living room, and then he goes on:

She was tall—about five foot seven inches—but it was the way she carried herself, almost gliding into the room with a dancer's erect posture, that exuded an air of quiet confidence. Her chin-length, dark brown hair was perfectly coiffed, and she wore just a touch of makeup, enough to accentuate her dark brown eyes and full lips but still look natural.

"Mrs. Kennedy, this is Clint Hill," Jeffries says as she approaches. "He will be the second agent for your personal protection."

"It's a pleasure to meet you, Mr. Hill," Jackie says, offering her hand.

"It's very nice to meet you too, Mrs. Kennedy," Hill replies. Beyond being polite and friendly, she also seems reserved and a little shy.

She invites the men to sit, and they do, gingerly taking seats on the immaculate furniture. She makes it clear that she's busy, so Agent Jeffries gets right to the point, explaining how the Secret Service will protect her from this moment forward.

"There will be various agents assigned to handle the perimeter security of your residence—whether that's here, the White House, Palm Beach, or

Hyannis Port—at all times,” he explains. “Either Mr. Hill or I will be with you whenever you leave the residence, and if you travel outside of Washington, both of us will accompany you.”

Mrs. Kennedy maintains her polite composure, but the more she hears, the more uncomfortable she looks. She doesn’t hold back explaining why.

“My biggest concern, really, is maintaining as much privacy as possible,” she says. “Not only for me, but for Caroline and the new baby, as well. I don’t want us to feel like animals in a zoo.” Then, looking squarely at Hill and Jeffries, “And I certainly don’t want someone following me around like a puppy dog.”

The conversation continues, and repeatedly, she tells them that privacy is her biggest worry.

“I also know that as soon as the baby is born, the press will be overbearing,” she says. “They can be so intrusive. I used to be one of them, you know, and I’m well aware of how they operate.”

She seems to be addressing this to Hill. He hasn’t said much thus far, and perhaps she wants to see how he’ll respond.

Clearing his throat, Hill begins, “Yes, Mrs. Kennedy. Part of our job will be to protect you from the press, and to make sure that you and your children can live as normal a life as possible.” With a slight smile, he then takes a risk. “Believe me, we don’t like the press any more than you do.”

She smiles too. His comment seems to go over well, and as she stands up, she tells them, “It’s been lovely meeting you, gentlemen. Now I have some things to attend to.”

Her tone is polite but firm. No doubt, the conversation is over.

Outside, Hill reflects on the meeting. Jacqueline Kennedy made it clear that maintaining her and her children’s privacy is her number one concern. She doesn’t relish the idea of security agents constantly invading her personal space.

Hill understands, but he also knows she has no idea what she’s in for. Once she becomes First Lady, the pressures and intensity of public and media scrutiny will be beyond anything she’s experienced. The threat of danger and need for around-the-clock protection and security will never cease—and the intrusion of the Secret Service and other handlers will be relentless.

Indeed, it was U. E. Baughman, the Secret Service Chief and the person who gave Hill the job, who once described the Presidency this way:

[The President] cannot have what is considered a normal life, home or family relationship. He has no choice as to where he lives. He is a focal point for public and world attention. He is a slave to his office, being obliged to serve his country without cease at all hours and every day of the year. He can have very little privacy. If he has young children, they are largely governed by protocol and cannot enjoy the freedom of the White House as they would a normal home.

The same basically applies to the First Lady. On top of that, since Jacqueline Kennedy has *already* become a focus of public attention, the media scrutiny will be even greater than usual—and so will the danger of someone trying to harm her.

As a member of the First Lady's security detail, Clint Hill's job will be to track her every move, never let her out of his sight ... and, well, to follow her around like a puppy dog.

It's going to be an interesting four years.

Hill makes one other observation as he continues to assess Jacqueline Kennedy's circumstances. For any incoming administration, the First Lady has enormous responsibilities. She has to hire a staff, plan the entire family's transition into a very unusual new home, and organize high-pressure formal occasions, starting with the events of Inauguration Day that lead to the Inaugural Ball. She'll also be remodeling, decorating, and furnishing the residence of the White House with the entire world watching and judging.

Yet here's Jackie Kennedy, eight months pregnant, by herself in Georgetown while the President-elect and his transition team decamp to Palm Beach.

She's been left here alone to handle all these pressures, all while taking care of their daughter, Caroline.

Yet it is all too common for Jackie Kennedy to be alone—and for more reasons than one.

Washington, D.C.*The 1950s*

By the mid-to-late 1950s, when Kennedy becomes a Senator, people are starting to gossip. The record shows that his behavior with women during this time is almost dizzying. Of course, rumors and empty speculation are also in the mix—but the verified accounts are simply too numerous to deny.

Among others, the young Senator has affairs with Hollywood actresses, exotic dancers, secretaries, ex-debutantes, and a young Swedish woman whom he traveled overseas to see on multiple occasions.

The Swedish woman, Gunilla von Post, later wrote about her time with the married Senator—and why she and so many others succumbed to his advances.

“He positively radiated warmth.... He rarely missed a chance to flirt with all the women, our mothers included,” she recalled. “[H]e cast a spell on people that I’ve never quite seen before or since. And everyone—man, woman, child—was smitten, and happy to be near him.”

Yet the consequences of all these affairs obviously weren’t nearly as warm. In 1958, during the lead-up to Kennedy’s Presidential campaign, one older couple in Washington, D.C., witnessed his ongoing affair with a young woman who lived above them.

Offended by Kennedy’s behavior—especially as a possible future President—they took the story to the press, bringing their own supporting evidence.

Yet once the Kennedy team heard of the threat, the couple received an ominous message that if they continued their efforts, the husband’s career

and finances would be ruined. It's not known whether JFK personally knew of this message, but whoever gave it was clear that the Kennedys have a powerful apparatus that would stop at nothing to protect their candidate's image.

In addition, the customs of political reporting at the time dictated that the press didn't generally write about or feature politicians' extramarital infidelities. Instead, such stories became the stuff of rumors and gossip magazines. For the public, those stories were received as innuendo, not from reliable news sources, and unverified. JFK's philandering may have been an open secret in political circles, but for better or worse, he never had to answer to the public for his behavior.

When it comes to the question of why Kennedy thought he could continue his many affairs with little to no consequence, there are multiple possible answers. To find one of them, all you have to do is look at his dad.

JFK's father, the family patriarch Joseph Kennedy Sr., was a towering influence on all his children. He was also a notorious womanizer who flaunted and bragged about his extramarital affairs.

According to a political reporter who covered Joseph Sr., when it came to his view of women, they "were another thing that a rich man had—like caviar. It wasn't sex, it was part of the image ... his idea of manliness."

At one point, back in the 1920s, Joseph Sr.'s rampant womanizing made it into the press when, as a young married man, he had a semipublic affair with famed Hollywood actress Gloria Swanson. A Boston reporter obtained the phone records between Joseph Kennedy in New York and Swanson in California, joking that the two of them shared "the largest telephone bill in the nation during the year 1929."

While Joseph Sr. gallivanted around to social events with mistresses on his arm, his long-suffering wife, Rose Kennedy, had to endure the repeated humiliations, both in public and before her family.

Even worse, Joseph Sr. sometimes brought his conquests home when his wife wasn't there, exposing his children directly to his behavior. For his sons it was a clear message: philandering was not just acceptable, it was a source of pride, something that came naturally with wealth and power.

In JFK's letters to his father, back during his college years, he'd brag

about his female conquests, as if he knew it would impress his dad.

Yet it wasn't just the Kennedy children who grew up under a legacy of womanizing.

Jackie Kennedy's father, John "Black Jack" Bouvier, was a handsome, wealthy stockbroker whom Jackie worshipped as a child. He was also a serial philanderer whose infidelities, gambling, and alcohol abuse led to the dissolution of his marriage to Jackie's mother.

Despite the destruction that her dad's behavior wrought on the family, Jackie and her sister were conditioned to tolerate and even approve of his habits. According to friends, in her teenage years, Jackie "admired and respected him," even when he made lecherous advances on her young female friends.

In short, both JFK and Jackie grew up in environments where powerful wealthy men felt entitled to do as they pleased, especially when it came to women. Both of their fathers had little regard for consequences, and their mothers were expected to endure and suffer silently.

Today, it's impossible to really know how much their fathers' actions directly shaped the marital attitudes of the new President and First Lady, but it's hard to ignore that "Jack and Jackie," as their friends affectionately called them, were perpetuating these family dynamics.

In the years following the couple's marriage, there's little doubt that Jackie knew her husband was being continuously unfaithful to her. Given how much his behavior was common knowledge in their social circles, it would've been nearly impossible for her *not* to know.

The more complicated question is how she felt about his behavior—and how it impacted their relationship. As a guarded and private person, Jackie revealed very little of her personal life, even to her friends.

Still, those in the Kennedys' inner circle had their own opinions. Some believed she was tolerant of his infidelities, accepting them as a natural outcome of marrying an ambitious and successful man.

Others came to different conclusions.

JFK's friend Kirk LeMoyne Billings—the one who pulled Jackie aside at the cocktail party—thought that during their courtship and engagement, Jackie tolerated his womanizing, but "once she was married and once it was

happening to her, she found it much harder to accept.”

Jackie simply wasn't prepared, Billings would later say, “for the humiliation she would suffer when she found herself stranded at parties while Jack would suddenly disappear with some pretty young girl.”

Opinions may differ as to how deeply JFK's affairs affected her, but there was one episode early in their marriage that was especially brutal for Jackie—and it happened at the worst possible time.

West Palm Beach, Florida

November 11, 1960

The President-elect is on his way.

For Jerry Blaine and the rest of the Secret Service team in South Florida, this is the day they'll finally meet the person they're officially assigned to protect.

It's been about twenty-four hours since the agents first set foot on the Kennedy estate to prepare for his arrival—and roughly forty-eight hours since Jerry Blaine was on the golf course in Augusta, Georgia, watching President Eisenhower tee off.

Since election morning, Blaine and the others have been on the move every waking minute.

Now, the team is on the airfield at Palm Beach International airport, awaiting JFK's plane. A dot appears in the sky, and sure enough the Kennedys' private plane—it's named *Caroline*, after JFK's daughter—descends to the runway. To add to the agents' stress, a large and boisterous crowd has assembled. They're lined up around the terminal and even on the tarmac, some carrying signs, others snapping photos.

The press has been eagerly following Kennedy's every move, and since his departure this morning from Hyannis Port, word spread of his arrival here in Florida.

The plane rolls to a halt not far from the waiting agents and the crowd. The stairs get lowered, everyone watching.

A moment later, the unmistakable figure of John F. Kennedy emerges at the top of plane's steps, waving and smiling.

He's tan and casually dressed in khakis and a light cardigan sweater. A cheer erupts from the crowd.

The Secret Service agents on the ground quickly recognize one of their colleagues, Agent Floyd Boring, right next to Kennedy, descending the stairs with him.

The morning after the election, Boring had met Kennedy in Hyannis Port, gave him his first official Secret Service briefing, and then joined him for the flight. Moving forward, members of the detail will accompany JFK wherever he goes.

"Congratulations, Mr. President!" a woman cries out from the crowd.

When Kennedy hears this, he smiles even more broadly and, to the agents' complete surprise, suddenly jogs over to the crowd and starts shaking hands and greeting the well-wishers.

Startled, Boring immediately goes into protection mode, following the President-elect almost step for step.

Blaine and the other agents on the tarmac had been instructed that Kennedy would head their way immediately after exiting the plane. As a result, they were waiting by the cars to escort him from the airport.

When Kennedy instead runs to the crowd, Blaine and the others have no choice but to rush into action. Joining Boring, they form a rough circle between Kennedy and the crowd, giving him some space to move but using their bodies to prevent him from being swarmed. Amid the bustle, they visually scan each person in the crowd, looking for unusual gestures or movements.

For Blaine, this is also the first time he gets to see Kennedy up close and in person.

It was easy to see why [he] garnered such attention.... John F. Kennedy seemed as if he truly wanted to meet the people and greet each one of them directly. He was strikingly handsome and at six foot one, he seemed to tower over most of the people there. He had an easygoing, charming way about him that could be classified only as charisma. You couldn't help but be drawn to him.

Shaking hands and seemingly oblivious to any danger, Kennedy smiles

for the cameras and exchanges jokes and greetings with the well-wishers and members of the press.

“Let’s get into the car, Mr. Kennedy,” Agent Boring says in a calm but firm voice.

Kennedy is still interacting with the crowd, either not hearing Boring’s instruction or, more likely, simply ignoring it.

A few minutes later, Boring repeats the request, but again Kennedy just keeps bantering with the excited crowd.

Eventually, the smiling JFK gives a final few waves and heads toward the waiting black sedans.

As Blaine and his fellow agents walk the President-elect toward the cars, they exchange glances. They’re all thinking the same thing.

Eisenhower would never do this.

It’s been less than ten minutes since the agents met Kennedy, but from a Secret Service perspective, they’ve already learned a few important things.

First, JFK clearly enjoys interacting with the public. Eisenhower avoided crowds, usually just giving supporters a polite wave from a distance. He rarely interacted with anyone who was not in his inner circle, and only when he was being formally introduced. He simply didn’t mix with the general public, and had no inclination to do so. This made the job of the Secret Service much easier, and really, they’d gotten used to it.

It’s an aspect of their job that’s about to change. Kennedy not only tolerates the adoring public, he enjoys the interaction.

Second, the agents clearly registered that Kennedy didn’t respond to Boring’s direct request to leave the crowd. JFK has his own priorities—and taking instructions from Secret Service agents is not one of them. The agents will do their best to get the new President to follow their safety guidelines, but from this moment it’s going to be an uphill battle.

Finally—and perhaps most important—the President-elect had just spontaneously and without warning deviated from a set plan. He was supposed to walk directly from the plane to the waiting cars, and there meet the agents for the first time. Instead, he improvised, walking to the waiting crowd. As a result, everyone else had to deviate from *their* plans and instructions. And deviating from instructions is not something that Secret

Service agents like to do.

Once again, the contrast with Eisenhower is striking. If there was one thing the Secret Service could rely on from the previous President, it's that he always stuck to protocol. No surprise. He's a former military commander—following procedure was gospel.

Throughout his presidency, Eisenhower adhered to every rule, was on time for scheduling, and meticulous down to the smallest detail. He demanded everyone do the same.

By contrast, on day one under Secret Service protection, Kennedy was already off script.

This was only the beginning.

FOUR YEARS EARLIER ...**Newport, Rhode Island***August 1956*

It was late summer, three years into their marriage. Jackie was pregnant for the second time. The previous year, her first pregnancy had ended in a miscarriage after the first trimester, so for this one she was under a doctor's supervision. For the final stretch of her pregnancy, she stayed at her mother and stepfather's home in Newport, Rhode Island, to rest and get ready.

In August, with his wife eight months pregnant in Rhode Island, JFK left for a multiday yacht vacation in the Mediterranean, accompanied by some male friends and also, according to journalists who spoke to the ship's crew, several young women.

On August 23, while JFK was halfway around the world on the yacht, Jackie began hemorrhaging severely and had to be rushed to the hospital in Newport. Doctors performed an emergency Caesarian section, and the child was stillborn.

When she awoke after the traumatic surgery, her immediate family had come to see her, and her husband's brother Robert Kennedy and his wife, Ethel, were there too. But JFK himself was still on a different continent.

According to JFK's friend and fellow Senator George Smathers, he had to implore JFK to rush home from the vacation—on the grounds that the public optics of his not being with Jackie would hurt his career. “You better haul your ass back to your wife if you ever want to run for President,” he urged.

With all the complicated travel home, it took Kennedy more than three days to get to Jackie's side.

Decades later, Jackie confided how much this episode hurt. A close friend from later in her life would say that when it came to JFK's infidelities, "Of course she knew about them," but she was mostly "unbothered by Jack's affairs."

According to the same friend, however, the yacht incident really stung. Jackie was angry and hurt by "his not being there for the birth of a child, for his being off with a mistress while she was in the hospital."

Aside from the few shards of insight from people who knew her, Jackie Kennedy's true feelings about her husband's infidelities will always be a matter of speculation. One thing is certain, however. In the fall of 1960, as her husband prepares to become one of the most important and powerful people in the world, regardless of the struggles within their marriage, Jackie couldn't let any of that show.

In this moment, the idealized, glamorous image of John and Jackie's marriage ... their family ... the success—everything that will later become known as "Camelot"—it's the key to JFK's political future. With the Presidency just ahead, Jackie knows she can't do anything to tarnish it.

Right now, Jackie's job is to smile, charm, look dazzling, and play her increasingly iconic role in the Kennedys' carefully crafted public image.

It's a role she's a pro at—and getting better at every day.

Palm Beach, Florida

November 11, 1960

After a quick drive from the airport in West Palm Beach, Jerry Blaine and his fellow Secret Service agents are back at the Kennedy beachfront estate, in Palm Beach proper.

This time, the President-elect is with them.

The original plan was for Blaine and the other agents to formally meet JFK on the airport tarmac. But thanks to Kennedy's unplanned mixer with the cheering crowd, the formal introductions had to wait until their arrival at the compound.

As they get out of their cars, the agents ready themselves for their moment.

Many of them are military veterans, and under Eisenhower they stood at attention, like soldiers, in his presence. They addressed him as they would a commanding officer, doing everything but saluting. Eisenhower, the consummate general, encouraged this.

For that reason, Blaine and the other agents do the same here, standing stiffly at attention, awaiting the incoming Commander in Chief.

To their surprise, JFK walks up to them with a big grin on his face. He addresses Boring, who came with him from Hyannis Port, in a friendly manner, saying he can't wait to meet the rest of the team.

"I imagine that we're all going to be spending a lot of time together," he adds with a chuckle. "And as everybody knows my name, I think it's only fair that I know theirs as well."

Acting like he's making new pals at a social event, JFK asks each agent

for his name, shaking their hands warmly. On top of that, he asks each where they're from, whether they're married, and if they have kids. For those with children, he wants to know the kids' names as well. From that moment, he always addresses each agent by his first name, never seeming to forget anyone.

As the team adjusts to Kennedy's informal style, they also start adapting to how he works. While he's here at the Palm Beach compound, he tells them he prefers working outside.

Sure enough, he's soon sitting at a table near the pool, joined by an advisor or two. He wears shorts and shirt sleeves, and sometimes even a swimsuit. President Eisenhower wouldn't be caught dead working by a pool, much less in a swimsuit, but as Kennedy pores over documents and plans the transition, he enjoys a gentle breeze blowing through the palm trees.

The first day with Kennedy goes quickly, and after a night at Woody's, the agents are back the next morning at the luxurious Kennedy compound.

The second day is particularly hot, and again, Kennedy works at his outdoor table by the pool.

Occasionally, he glances over toward a new Secret Service agent, Harry Gibbs, who'd flown in the previous night to join the team. Gibbs is standing lookout on a corner of the lawn on the ocean side, not far from the pool, with an elevated view of the beach.

Gibbs is wearing a typical Secret Service outfit, a dark wool suit and tie. His post near the beach is not in the shade, so he's baking in the hot Florida sun. By late morning, the sweat is pouring down his face.

Hopping out of his chair, Kennedy trots over to Gibbs.

"What's your name?" he asks. "I don't think I've met you."

"Agent Gibbs, Mr. President-elect, sir," the agent answers nervously. "My name is Harry Gibbs."

"Nice to meet you, Harry. Now, what are you doing out here in this blazing heat wearing that winter suit?"

Gibbs isn't sure how to answer.

"I've just flown in from Washington," he finally says. "It's a lot cooler there and I didn't have time to change."

"Well, why don't you move over there," Kennedy offers, pointing to a

shaded area of the lawn near the pool.

“Thank you, sir,” Gibbs stammers, “but I’m not allowed to leave my post.”

Kennedy thinks on this a moment. “How many agents are on post right now, Harry?”

“There are four, sir.”

“I’ll be back,” JFK says.

Gibbs watches as the President-elect walks quickly to the house, disappearing inside.

About ten minutes later, he reappears, carrying a large stack of short-sleeved shirts. When he gets to Gibbs, he plops the shirts on the grass.

“Pass these out to the agents with my compliments,” he says with a smile. “I think you’ll do a better job of protecting me if you’re not uncomfortable.”

“That’s very thoughtful of you, Mr. Kennedy,” Gibbs replies.

Kennedy trots back to his table, getting back to work again as if nothing happened.

During his next break, Gibbs follows orders and distributes the shirts to his colleagues. Soon, they’re much more comfortable under the hot sun.

In eight years of working under President Eisenhower, a typical Secret Service agent would hardly ever look the Commander in Chief in the eye, let alone have a conversation with him.

Yet here in Palm Beach, within the first forty-eight hours on the job, they’re literally wearing John F. Kennedy’s clothes.

Concord, New Hampshire

November 14, 1960

Over the past few weeks, the store's proprietor has seen him several times. At each visit, Richard Pavlick wants the same thing: more dynamite.

Pavlick purchased his first stick of dynamite on October 24, roughly two weeks before the election.

He came to buy more on November 3, then again on November 4.

Today, November 14, he's back for even more.

In total, he's purchased eight sticks of the explosive in a three-week period.

According to the shopkeeper, that's enough explosives to destroy "a good sized building."

Naturally, the shopkeeper is curious. So he asks Pavlick why he's buying so much.

Pavlick replies that he wants to "blow up tree stumps."

A decade later, the federal government will criminalize the sale, purchase, and storage of unlicensed explosive devices, including the type of stick dynamite that Pavlick buys. But those regulations and restrictions are still several years off.

For now, any customer can walk into a store and buy explosives as they wish.

That's exactly what Pavlick does, and the storekeeper has no reason to stop him.

In fact, as the proprietor knows, rural landowners do occasionally use stick dynamite to get rid of stubborn tree stumps on their land. So, even after

Pavlick's fourth visit in less than a month, the proprietor doesn't raise any alarms.

If he gave it a bit more thought, though, maybe he would've realized something: those must be some awfully big tree stumps.

Georgetown, Washington, D.C.

November 1960

She likes to go for walks.

In the weeks following the election, Secret Service Special Agent Clint Hill starts figuring out her routines, establishing new protocols to protect the future First Lady.

Jackie Kennedy has been athletic her whole life. She likes to exercise regularly, but since she's currently eight months pregnant, there's only so much she can do. Her doctors advised her not to overexert herself. So her solution? Taking walks.

The problem is, Jackie Kennedy is no longer someone who can simply take a stroll down the street. The public focus on her, already intense during the campaign, has only grown since her husband's election victory. As Hill later recalled of those early days:

I was ... surprised by the level of attention the media was already paying to the new first family—especially to Mrs. Kennedy. The press had rarely covered anything President Eisenhower's wife, Mamie, did, but suddenly the American public seemed to have an insatiable appetite for any news at all about Jacqueline Kennedy.... American women, in particular, were fascinated by what she wore, where she shopped, and what her interests were.

The Secret Service was somewhat unprepared for the degree of attention on her. "The intense interest by the public was also one of the biggest problems Agent Jeffries and I had to contend with in terms of protection,"

Hill later explained. “Whenever we took her anywhere, she’d immediately be recognized, and before we knew it there would be a swarm of people gawking, and often approaching her to shake hands.”

When crowds do approach Mrs. Kennedy, she usually smiles and waves politely—then tries to remove herself as soon as possible. Unlike her gregarious husband, she’s uncomfortable with the constant attention, especially when people get up close.

With the public and media hounding her everywhere, it’s a challenge for Jackie and the Secret Service to even find a safe place to walk.

Eventually, they locate the Chesapeake & Ohio Canal towpath, a gravel path that runs along a canal near the Potomac River. It’s a scenic, heavily wooded location, not too far from the Kennedys’ Georgetown home, and, most important, it’s mostly secluded.

In the weeks following the election, these walks became a regular routine for Jackie, meaning they also became a regular routine for her Secret Service detail.

On many of them, it’s just Jackie and Clint Hill. According to protocol, when a single agent is accompanying his protectee, the agent is supposed to walk a few paces behind, to scan for any threats ahead while also providing a buffer in back. Hill follows the rules, making sure to keep a respectful distance.

“I tried to remain close, but unobtrusive, rarely initiating conversation, but allowing her to take the lead,” he later explained. “I wasn’t there to be a friend—my job was to protect her.”

That’s how it starts. They walk in silence, him a little behind her.

But several minutes into their first walk, Jackie stops for a moment and turns slightly to him.

“My, the river is really flowing today,” she says. “Isn’t that a lovely sound?”

Hill agrees. He learns quickly that Jackie treasures being in nature, finding calm in these wooded walks, a respite from the intense pressures of her life.

Gradually, after a few more exchanges like this on the first walk or two, she makes conversation with Hill. He learns that beneath her surface shyness

and her always perfect manners, she likes to talk and has a lively sense of humor.

He can tell she's still somewhat guarded, but as Hill later says, "I got the feeling that, while she didn't like the fact that she could no longer go anywhere alone, if she had to be with someone, I was acceptable company."

Based on their backgrounds, they couldn't be more different—but in these extraordinary circumstances, they begin to form an unlikely friendship.

"The more time Mrs. Kennedy and I spent together," Hill realized, "the more comfortable our relationship became. I sensed that she was slowly beginning to trust me."

As he gets to know her, he also gets to know her inner circle. He works closely with the family's staff and their child's caregiver. Once the new First Lady starts hiring her team for the White House, he starts working with her new assistant and staff.

In addition, there's someone else who's now an important part of Hill's life: almost-three-year-old Caroline Kennedy.

Even at this young age, Caroline has her own Secret Service agent assigned to her—every member of the First Family automatically gets their own agent—but Hill, because of his proximity to Jackie, starts spending a lot of time with Caroline.

"She was a beautiful little girl with sandy brown hair that curled naturally just below her ears, and big, blue eyes that matched her father's," Hill would later write. "The thing that impressed me most was that even at this young age, she had wonderful manners. This was something that was critically important to her mother."

Although Caroline is not technically Hill's responsibility, he becomes very fond of the precocious two-year-old and is "instinctively protective of her."

Hill's son is only sixteen months older than Caroline, so he and Jackie start comparing notes on the ups and downs of parenting, just as his superiors had hoped.

Caroline's presence also reminds Hill and the other agents that the soon-to-be First Lady's family is about to get bigger. The new baby, due in a month, will also be assigned a dedicated agent. Since the start of the modern

Secret Service, no President or President-elect has ever had a newborn child, so the Service will be in uncharted waters. Having an infant arrive will add even more complications to their ever-expanding responsibilities.

All of it gives Hill a bit of perspective on his own responsibilities. Sure, being assigned to the First Lady's detail may not have been his first choice in the new administration. But at least he won't be doing the dreaded "Diaper Detail."

In no time, Hill's feelings about his job start to shift.

Within a few weeks, he gets to know Jackie Kennedy—as both a future First Lady and a human being. The more he watches her in action during this busy and stressful period, the more his admiration grows.

"Mrs. Kennedy, despite being eight months pregnant, was handling a myriad of decisions and new responsibilities, with the world watching, and she appeared to be fearless," Hill marvels. "I was impressed not only with her capabilities, but also the fact that she was dealing with all of this completely on her own."

Amid difficulties that few people could ever understand, Jackie is handling her situation with poise and grace.

And yet, Hill knows that no matter how much she tries to plan in advance, once her husband assumes the highest office in the land, nothing can prepare her for the enormous pressures she's about to face. At this point, Jackie needs all the support she can get.

Clint Hill understands the job.

Lucky for Jackie, from here on out, he'll do anything in the world to protect her.

Palm Beach, Florida

November 1960

At first glance, the transition seems like the calm before the storm.

But nothing is calm about it.

For every incoming President, the transition is stressful and difficult. After the exhausting yearlong frenzy that is a modern Presidential campaign, each new President needs to quickly hire new staff, master new systems, fill seats for a new government, and suddenly make hundreds of decisions to build a new administration and set policy agendas. With only a few months between the election and the Inauguration, there's not much time.

More than most, Kennedy is feeling the pressure.

During the campaign, one of the biggest knocks against him was that he's simply too young and inexperienced to be President. Obviously, he overcame this perception—but only by a margin of 0.17 percent. Kennedy knows they're still calling him a lightweight ... not a serious person ... who doesn't have the gravitas to be Commander in Chief.

To Kennedy, it doesn't seem fair. He's a former war hero, three-term Congressman, *and* two-term Senator who served on the Labor Committee and the Foreign Relations Committee. That's more political experience than most past Presidents. Along the way, he also won a Pulitzer Prize, for his 1956 nonfiction book *Profiles in Courage*.

Still, the perception remains.

There's only one way to fight it: get to work.

Operating from his father's Palm Beach estate, Kennedy begins the arduous task of appointing his cabinet and filling other top administration

posts. He knows that his every move will be scrutinized and criticized, so he needs to show confidence and maturity.

As with most new Presidents, the appointments process is a balancing act. Usually, key posts go to experienced senior Washington officials—people who convey authority and wisdom. On the other hand, Kennedy's entire campaign was based on moving *forward*, rejecting the status quo—so he'll need younger, dynamic figures who'll excite the northern liberals and the younger voters who supported him and his promise of change and progress.

His early cabinet posts reflect that mix. At Secretary of State, he appoints Dean Rusk, a seasoned veteran who had served in the Truman administration; but for Secretary of Defense, he enlists Robert McNamara, the forty-four-year-old president of the Ford Motor Company, who is an Army veteran but has no prior government experience.

Kennedy also makes history by appointing Harvard-educated economist Robert C. Weaver as head of the U.S. Housing and Home Financing Agency, placing a Black American in charge of a federal agency for the first time in U.S. history.

Each of Kennedy's appointments is greeted with the usual mix of fanfare, outrage, and hand-wringing from the media.

Yet there's one appointment that's more controversial than all the rest—his choice for Attorney General.

JFK should be used to the controversy. His campaign manager was his younger brother Robert F. Kennedy. So as everyone starts jockeying for positions in a potential new administration, they know Bobby won't be left out in the cold.

All along, JFK knew that he wanted Robert in his White House inner circle. Robert, however, didn't want a position where he was directly under his older brother; he wanted to be in an agency that had some autonomy. Yet with no military experience or expertise in foreign policy, he wasn't a good fit for a senior leadership position at the State Department or the Pentagon.

Attorney General was another story.

By most accounts, the idea of Bobby as Attorney General came from a very influential source—Joe Kennedy Sr., Jack and Bobby's father.

Indeed, Kennedy Sr.'s master plan was for John to be President, Bobby to

be Attorney General, and his youngest son, Teddy, would soon fill John's vacated Senate seat in Massachusetts. A Kennedy trifecta.

Even so, JFK is his own man. He's not going to appoint his brother as Attorney General just because his father wants it. Yet as the suggestion makes its way through the Kennedy transition team, everyone has to at least consider it.

On the surface, the idea seems far-fetched. At thirty-five, Robert Kennedy would be the youngest U.S. Attorney General since 1814, when James Madison appointed thirty-four-year-old Richard Rush to the position.

Rush at least had experience, serving as Attorney General of Pennsylvania before taking the federal position. Robert had served only a few years as senior counsel for two Senate committees before JFK recruited him to run his Presidential campaign. And, yes, Robert has a law degree, but he's never worked for a firm or even in a prosecutor's office.

Oh, and there's one other problem. Robert doesn't want the job. He knows that such a prominent post will draw charges of nepotism, hurting his brother's administration from the very start.

As a result, the two brothers initially pass on their father's idea. The transition team instead starts vetting other candidates for Attorney General.

Will their dad be upset? Of course he will. To smooth things over, Kennedy sends the head of his transition team—Clark Clifford—on a mission to New York City, where Joe Kennedy Sr. often works. He wants Clifford to meet personally with the patriarch to tell him they've decided *against* appointing Robert and to deliver their reasons for it. JFK thinks the news will go over better coming from a neutral third party, rather than from himself.

Clifford isn't stupid. Delivering bad news to the Kennedy patriarch is a suicide mission, but he has no choice. He flies to New York City to meet face-to-face with Joe Kennedy.

At the meeting, Clifford carefully lays out the reasons why Robert's appointment would be problematic. He gives Joe the obvious concerns about the younger brother's relative lack of experience and the accusations of nepotism. "He is young," Clifford says. "He has time—start him somewhere else, perhaps number two at Defense. Give him the chance to grow. He will be outstanding."

Joe Kennedy Sr.—self-made multimillionaire, former ambassador to England, and father of eight—listens to every word.

“I am so glad to have heard your views,” Kennedy Sr. eventually replies. “I do want to leave you with one thought, however—one firm thought.” Looking Clifford straight in the eye, he tells him, “*Bobby is going to be Attorney General!*”

Clifford brings the message back to JFK. Mission not accomplished.

What’s even harder is finding the right person for the job. JFK offers the Attorney Generalship to one, then another candidate. Both turn it down. Other potential candidates at first seem well matched, but the vetting process turns up conflicts or problems.

One of those who turn down the position is longtime Kennedy ally and former Connecticut Governor Abraham Ribicoff. After declining the post, Ribicoff offers his own opinion on who should get the job. “I have now watched you Kennedy brothers for five solid years,” Ribicoff tells JFK, “and I notice that every time you face a crisis, you automatically turn to Bobby. You’re out of the same womb. There’s an empathy. You understand one another. You’re not going to be able to be President without using Bobby all the time.”

As Attorney General, Robert would not have to report directly to his brother—he’d have autonomy to lead the Department of Justice—but he could still be part of JFK’s inner circle. They could collaborate on policy, and Robert could offer input on key issues.

JFK comes around to the idea. Robert, he realizes, is the only person who will always tell him the “unvarnished truth.” Plus, with all the arriving newcomers, JFK realizes his need “to have someone whom he knew very well and trusted completely” and with whom he could dispense with formality and “just sort of put his feet up and talk things over.”

From there, JFK makes it official. He wants Robert to be his Attorney General.

Robert, for his part, gets over his misgivings and accepts the post. But the entire team knows that once they share the news they’ll face an avalanche of criticism for it.

Discussing the matter with friend and future *Washington Post* editor Ben

Bradlee, JFK wonders jokingly how he can make the announcement in a way that will avoid a firestorm. He says to Bradlee, “I think I’ll open the front door of the Georgetown house one morning around two a.m., look up and down the street, and if there’s no one there, I’ll whisper, ‘It’s Bobby.’”

Sure enough, when the press and public learn of the appointment, all hell breaks loose. RFK’s appointment is “the greatest example of nepotism this land has ever seen,” *Nation* magazine declares. *Newsweek* agrees, calling it a “travesty of justice.”

It’s not just the press. Vice President–elect Lyndon Johnson agrees with a colleague that “it’s a disgrace for a kid who’s never practiced law to be appointed.” Johnson’s consolation is that he doesn’t believe Robert Kennedy’s appointment will really matter, because, as he puts it, “I don’t think Jack Kennedy’s gonna let a little fart like Bobby lead him around by the nose.”

In the face of criticism, the President-elect maintains his good humor. Later, at an event with Washington insiders, JFK jokes that “I can’t see that it’s wrong to give him a little legal experience before he goes out to practice law.”

The room breaks into laughter.

For Kennedy, it’s a lesson he’s learned a few times now: rather than ignore attacks against him, it’s better to acknowledge them, address them directly, and respond with wit and confidence.

For better or worse, JFK believes he’s making the right decision. He’s going to stick to it. He thinks Robert will be an excellent Attorney General and serve the country well.

At the end of the day, though, JFK is still the bossy older sibling.

Later, when the two of them are about to walk out for the press conference and make the announcement, JFK orders Robert to first find a mirror and comb his hair.

Belmont, New Hampshire

Late November 1960

Postmaster.

That's Thomas Murphy's job title.

At thirty-four, he's relatively young for the job. With short dark hair and spectacles, he's considered a modest man, "soft-spoken." No question, he's a loyal worker who doesn't draw much attention to himself. But his real focus? His family: his wife, Polly, and their six daughters, ages six months to eleven years.

Murphy is not particularly outgoing, but his job as Postmaster means he gets to know many of the people in the vicinity of the local post office. In his case, that includes the town of Belmont, New Hampshire. Murphy lives only three blocks from Belmont's post office, where he works.

As a mild-mannered guy, Murphy gets along with the majority of the residents who come in to mail letters, pick up packages, or buy stamps.

There's one resident who stops by more than most.

Richard Pavlick.

"He was always coming into the post office," Murphy would recall. But Pavlick doesn't come just to mail a letter or buy some stamps. He sometimes comes by just to hang around and chat—and Murphy is the person Pavlick really likes to chat with.

Invariably, Pavlick does most of the talking while Murphy listens. Yet what Pavlick really likes to talk about, well ... it's in the form of complaints.

"He'd talk about anything and everything," Murphy explained. "And whatever he talked about, he was against."

There are likely two reasons why Pavlick gravitates toward Murphy. One is simply that Pavlick used to be a postal worker, mostly in Massachusetts—and so with Murphy, Pavlick can discuss his previous job, talk shop about the current state of the Postal Service, and air some grievances about his career.

There's another reason. On his house nearby, Murphy has a poster with the slogan "Vote Nixon-Lodge." Beneath that, it reads, "Vote Republican." To Pavlick, who is so passionate about politics and adamantly opposed to Kennedy and the Democratic Party, Murphy probably seems like a sympathetic ear.

As a result, Murphy does an awful lot of listening—both in leading up to the Presidential election and in its immediate aftermath. Pavlick's diatribes are "extremely anti-Kennedy and anti-Catholic," as Murphy later described them.

In general, though, the mild-mannered Postmaster doesn't pay much mind to Pavlick. "Most of the time I figured he was just ... shooting off steam," Murphy later explained.

Yet there's one day in mid- to late November that stands out in Murphy's mind.

During one of his visits, Pavlick describes the little day trip he'd taken three days after the election.

"He told me he had visited Hyannis Port, and had seen the new President," Murphy later said. Pavlick relayed all the details: driving to and around Cape Cod, his efforts to see the Kennedy compound, and his eventual stop at Barnstable Municipal Airport, where he watched Kennedy board a plane.

As Pavlick recounts the story, Murphy notices that the former postal worker is especially focused on one observation from his trip. "He remarked how stupid the Secret Service agents were," Murphy explained. "He said they drove in a car behind Kennedy. He said the security was poor."

Pavlick seems almost fixated on the President-elect's security and the Secret Service protocols designed to keep him safe.

Murphy tries to be polite. He's just listening. "At the time, I was busy and didn't pay much attention to Pavlick," Murphy later explained.

In the days following the conversation, however, a question begins to

form in Murphy's mind. A question he can't quite shake.

"I got to wondering why a man who was so outspoken against Kennedy would go all the way to Hyannis Port to catch a glimpse of him," Murphy explained.

It's a good question.

And while Postmaster Thomas Murphy doesn't know it yet, he's about to get his answer.

Georgetown, Washington, D.C.

November 24, 1960

The Kennedys love a celebration.

Tonight, the night before Thanksgiving, there's a lot to celebrate. For one, Jack and Jackie Kennedy have a new baby on the way, due in a month. In addition, Caroline is a few days away from her third birthday. On top of that, well ... John F. Kennedy is less than two months from being inaugurated as the thirty-fifth President of the United States.

Earlier this morning, JFK flew in his private plane from Palm Beach to Georgetown, to join his wife, daughter, and other family members for the holiday. Jackie and Caroline haven't seen him for more than two weeks, since he left Hyannis Port the day after the election.

Secret Service Special Agent Clint Hill, along with members of the house staff, are at the residence when JFK arrives. Hill has now spent all this time in Jackie's company, but tonight is the first time he's meeting the President-elect.

As usual, JFK arrives with bustle and flourish, and his trademark thick Boston accent soon fills the town house. He is accompanied by his own security detail. One of them is Jerry Blaine, who joined JFK on the flight up from Palm Beach. Today is the first time Blaine and Clint Hill have been in the same place since being together on the Augusta National golf course, the day after the election. It's been only two weeks, but so much has happened, it feels like an eternity.

Within a few minutes of her husband's arrival, Jackie leads him over to Clint Hill.

“Jack,” the First Lady says, quickly making an introduction, “this is Mr. Hill.”

As he did with the agents in Florida, JFK enthusiastically extends his hand.

“I’ve heard a lot about you, Clint,” he says, with his trademark grin. “Jackie tells me you are a devoted walker and that she has been well taken care of these past couple of weeks. I do appreciate it.”

“It’s a pleasure to meet you, Mr. President-elect,” Hill replies.

Like his colleagues down in Florida, Hill can’t help but be a bit dazzled by Kennedy’s personality.

He had clearly spent time in the sun, as his face was tanned. But the thing you noticed most were his eyes and his smile. He had captivating blue eyes, blue as the ocean, and when he looked at you, it was like he scooped you into his universe, paying attention to you and you alone in that moment.... [I]t was easy to see how he had been able to connect with the voters. He was energetic, friendly, a people person. And charming as hell.

With Caroline’s birthday so close, JFK had brought gifts for his daughter. One is especially memorable: a large cage containing two live white ducks. A Florida councilman’s nine-year-old daughter had presented the ducks to Kennedy, asking if he would give them to Caroline for her birthday. JFK, delighted, flew the cage home.

The Kennedy family famously loves animals. These ducks are, as Hill would describe it, “just the beginning of what would be a never-ending flow of animals into the Kennedy household.”

After the initial greetings, the President-elect gets settled and the family goes to bed. For the Secret Service, that means Hill gets to go home to his own family’s small apartment in Washington, D.C.

It only lasts a few hours.

Early the next morning, Hill arrives back in Georgetown before anyone is awake. Today may be Thanksgiving, but Hill and the other agents will be spending the holiday with a family other than their own.

The Kennedys are known for abundant family meals, and this

Thanksgiving is no exception. In the morning, their chef takes over the kitchen; by midday the feast preparation is in full gear.

It's a classic Thanksgiving: turkey, stuffing, creamed onions, string beans, and other holiday staples, as well as a big pot of New England clam chowder—a traditional favorite of the Massachusetts-bred Kennedy clan.

During the bustle of the morning and throughout the afternoon meal, Hill and the other agents stand on guard in the home, never taking part in the abundance. "The smells coming from the kitchen made my stomach growl," Hill later described, "but as an agent, that is something you get used to.... You are there to do a job, not partake in the wining, dining, and socializing."

And then comes the twist.

JFK has decided to get back on his plane—right after the meal—to return to Florida. Apparently, Jackie tried to talk him out of it, but he insisted.

They've barely finished eating when JFK starts gathering his bags and saying goodbye, the Secret Service accompanying him to the door. He's been in Georgetown with Jackie and Caroline for just a little over twenty-four hours.

Hill can't help but be startled. "I had thought the President-elect would stay in Washington to meet with various people about the transition, as well as be there for Mrs. Kennedy in her last few weeks before the birth of their child, so I was surprised to learn that he was returning to Palm Beach for another week or so."

As Hill later learns, JFK's plan is to return in mid-December for Jackie's due date, for her scheduled Caesarian section. With the surgery date in the books, JFK plans to arrive just before the birth.

"It seemed an odd arrangement," Hill thinks to himself, "since most of the people he was interviewing for cabinet and staff positions were based in Washington. It wasn't my business, but I felt empathy for Mrs. Kennedy."

After everyone leaves, Jackie has to deal with the aftermath of the meal. By the time she and her staff clean up it's late. She tells Hill that she's going to bed.

Per protocol, that means his long shift is over. Now he can go home, leaving the junior agents to maintain perimeter security around the Kennedy home.

Driving back to his two-bedroom apartment, Hill hopes his wife has some leftovers in their refrigerator from their own modest Thanksgiving dinner.

Back in Georgetown, Jackie is exhausted. But after 10:00 p.m., when she finally goes to bed, something's not quite right. She can feel it in her abdomen.

What starts as discomfort becomes a sharp pain.

She knows this feeling. A labor contraction—four weeks before her due date.

Everything about it takes her back to her nightmarish second pregnancy, when contractions a month early led to severe hemorrhaging, an emergency Caesarian section, and a stillborn child.

It's the middle of the night.

Clint Hill is gone.

JFK is in a plane halfway to Florida.

Jackie is in severe pain—in a clear medical emergency—and once again, she's on her own.

PART III

The New First Family

A few hours after leaving the Kennedys' Thanksgiving celebration in Georgetown, Secret Service Agent Clint Hill is finally going to bed. He's exhausted from a long day, spent almost entirely with Jackie Kennedy and her family.

Just as he starts to close his eyes the phone rings.

"Hello?" he answers.

It's his colleague Agent Jeffries.

Hill braces himself—a work call at this hour can't be good news.

"Clint, Mrs. Kennedy was having labor pains and has been rushed to Georgetown Hospital in an ambulance," Jeffries says. Hill can hear the urgency in his voice. "Get over there as fast as you can."

Oh God, Hill thinks.

Without an ounce of sleep, Hill gets dressed as fast as possible and heads out the door, assessing the situation. "The baby wasn't due until December 15. The President was en route to Florida. Mrs. Kennedy had already lost two babies. I jumped in my car and raced to the hospital."

Agent Jeffries is already there when Hill arrives.

Jackie has been rushed to a fourth-floor surgical room. Doctors are now performing an emergency Caesarian section, a full three weeks before the originally scheduled procedure. Worst of all, everyone knows that one of Jackie Kennedy's earlier pregnancies ended in a stillbirth—under almost the exact same circumstances.

From what they explain to Hill, when Mrs. Kennedy began experiencing labor pains, she had the presence of mind to call her obstetrician, Dr. John Walsh, reaching him at home. Dr. Walsh immediately arranged for an ambulance, then raced to her home himself.

The Secret Service agents who were guarding the perimeter of the Kennedy home were startled to see the ambulance arrive. They had no idea what was happening inside.

After checking credentials, they let the ambulance and Dr. Walsh enter.

In no time, the ambulance drivers are carrying Mrs. Kennedy out on a stretcher.

By the time the perimeter agents call Jeffries, and Jeffries calls Hill, Jackie Kennedy is already on her way to Georgetown Hospital. The Secret Service and Dr. Walsh are right behind the ambulance.

One key question remains: Does JFK know?

Thankfully, the answer is yes. The moment Jackie was in the ambulance, the hospital and the Secret Service tried to contact the President. He received the news shortly before his private plane, the *Caroline*, landed at the West Palm Beach airport.

Once on the ground, he got on the phone with Dr. Walsh—by then at the hospital—who informed him that Jackie was headed to the operating room for an emergency C-section.

Right there, JFK decided to fly straight back to Georgetown. His advisors and Secret Service agents quickly worked through the logistics. They determined that the *Caroline* wasn't the fastest option for the President-elect's return.

A press plane full of reporters had followed JFK's plane from D.C. to West Palm Beach—and had already landed and refueled. That plane, a four-engine DC-6, would be faster than JFK's private plane.

Now all they had to do was get that plane for the President-elect.

Since their entire objective was to follow JFK wherever he went, the press quickly agreed.

Minutes after landing, JFK, his security detail, a few of his staff, and a whole lot of reporters were on board the DC-6, flying back to Washington, D.C.

So as Dr. Walsh is performing Jackie's C-section, JFK is still in the air, not arriving for a few hours.

Agents Jeffries and Hill start strategizing. Jeffries works with the hospital to prepare for the President-elect's arrival, while Hill rushes up to the fourth

floor to monitor Mrs. Kennedy.

“I waited outside the operating room door as the procedure went on,” Hill later described, “pacing as if I were the father to be, anxious for the outcome.”

Before long, Hill’s pacing is interrupted.

“Sir, I’m supervisory nurse Mrs. Robinson,” a nurse explains as she opens the operating room door. “I’m pleased to tell you that the delivery was successful. At 12:22 a.m., Mrs. Kennedy delivered a six-pound-three-ounce baby boy, and both mother and child are doing fine. Since he is premature, however, the baby is being placed in an incubator as a precautionary measure.”

Hill breathes a huge sigh of relief.

Just then Jeffries enters, letting out a similar sigh as he hears the news.

At least for now, their protectee is safe.

Jackie will soon be moved to a patient room. During surgery, she required a transfusion of two units of blood. At this moment, she’s still under general anesthesia and will remain sedated for the next few hours.

Minutes later, another nurse enters the waiting room. She’s got a bundle in her arms.

The newborn is wrapped in a blanket. Hill notices the infant’s peaceful face and closed eyes, thinking that this kid is “completely oblivious that he was the son of the future President of the United States.”

“I’m taking him to the incubator now,” the nurse explains, and quickly leaves the room.

It’s all moving fast.

Secret Service Agents Clint Hill and Jim Jeffries are among the very first to lay eyes on the baby.

Within a few hours, the news quickly spreads, with three words repeated over and over across the country.

“It’s a boy.”

At 4:30 a.m., President-elect John F. Kennedy and his security detail rush through the front doors of Georgetown Hospital.

It's been roughly four hours since Jackie gave birth to their son.

Wasting no time, JFK immediately asks for his wife.

She's still sedated from the surgery, sleeping in her room, so he sits by her bed.

He barrages the nurses with questions. They assure him she's healthy and that the surgery had no complications.

Secret Service Agent Clint Hill isn't far. He's been standing in or near Jackie's room since the doctors transferred her here. He's also nearby when JFK first sees his newborn son.

JFK peers at the baby in the incubator through the nursery window.

"He was ecstatic," Hill later recalled. "A father again, but this time of a son, born just two days before Caroline's birthday."

Although reporters aren't allowed in the hospital, the press has been following every development, practically minute by minute. Don't forget, JFK was on a plane full of reporters. Every time the President-elect heard an update through the plane's radio, his future press secretary Pierre Salinger, who was on the plane with him, would announce it to the reporters. They were working on their stories straight through the flight.

By sunrise, the morning editions of the papers arrive at newsstands. "It's a Boy for the Kennedys!" one newspaper declares. "Stork Beats Kennedy Plane!" exclaims another. Every detail of the birth—Jackie's unexpected labor pains in the middle of the night, her race to the hospital, and JFK's overnight flights to and from Palm Beach—is covered meticulously.

The press had already reported every statement they could get from Dr.

Walsh and the attending nurses. By morning, journalists had reached out to every person connected to the events, including the two ambulance drivers who had rushed Mrs. Kennedy to the hospital.

“She was the prettiest patient we had ever saw,” the drivers told reporters. The barrage of media requests becomes so intense throughout the day, the ambulance company hires a public relations firm.

As news of the birth spreads, the hospital is inundated with flowers and gifts. By the time Jackie wakes up shortly after sunrise, there are hundreds of bouquets and other presents waiting for her.

Clint Hill has the unenviable task of scanning every bouquet and gift-wrapped present for suspicious content. Most of the gifts and flowers come in standard sizes and shapes. One bouquet, however, is especially elaborate: a large ceramic donkey for a vase, beautifully designed, with two bouquets emerging from it, as if the donkey is carrying the flowers in its saddle baskets. The donkey, of course, is meant to represent the Democratic Party.

Hill, curious who would send this unusual arrangement, looks at the card accompanying it. The flowers are from Frank Sinatra, one of the most popular performers in America. Sinatra—a fellow Catholic American, also from a family of immigrants—was a major JFK supporter during the Presidential campaign, even recording a jingle for him. By the time of the election, he’s one of the Kennedys’ personal friends.

As for JFK, after seeing his child, and with his wife still asleep, he heads home to Georgetown. It’s still dark out, and Caroline will soon be waking up with the nanny.

Outside, reporters see his vehicle leaving the hospital and rush to follow. By the time he arrives at his Georgetown home, reporters join him on the dark driveway.

The Weather
Today—Cloudy with some sunshine; high in mid 50s. Tonight—Cloudy; low in upper 30s. Saturday—Considerable cloudiness and mild. Thursday's temperatures: High, 44 at 3 p. m.; low, 32 at 6:25 a. m. Weather details, Page B10.

The Washington Post

Times Herald

53rd Year No. 356 Phone RE. 7-1234 Copyright, 1960, The Washington Post Co. FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 25, 1960 WTOP Radio (1500) TV (Ch. 9) TEN CENTS

Boy Is Born to the Kennedys

City Crown Captured by Carroll, 7-6

24.065 Watch Di Pietro Star; W-L Rumps, 40-0

A record schoolboy crowd of 24,065 saw John Carroll High win the city championship over Eastern, 7-6, at Griffith Stadium yesterday as the highlight of a big day in sports.

Nick Di Pietro scored all the points for the Catholic League titlist who overcame a first period touchdown made on a 12-yard pass interception by Eastern's Harold "Little Daddy" Frazier.

In Virginia's Old Oaken Bucket battle, Washington-Lee's State champs romped over George Washington High, 40-0.

Elsewhere on the Thanksgiving Day sports front, the Detroit Lions registered a 23-10 upset over Green Bay Packers in a National Football League game that felt about dozed the Green Bay title hopes. In the American Football League, the New York Titans won over the Dallas Texans, 41-33.

On the college front, Cornell lost its traditional game to Pennsylvania, 18-7 as well as Coach George "Daddy" James. The latter was ousted after a 25-year coaching career high above Cayuga's waters.

VMI, Southern Conference titlist, lost to rival VPI, 13-12, when a last-minute bid for a two-point conversion failed. Richmond blanked William and Mary, 18-0. Texas won over Texas A. & M., 21-14, and accepted a bid to Houston's Bluebonnet Bowl.

At Pimlico, Shield Bearer, \$4 outsider, captured the 59th running of the Dixie Handicap before 20,389. Chalk players had little to be thankful for when Harmonizing, odds-on favorite, ran second.

Complete Scores, Pages C1-C8

Col. Tyssowski Of Tyssowski's Dies

Col. John Tyssowski, official of the Woodward and Lothrop department store, died at his Virginia farm home yesterday.



Victim of a Wind Gust

Gale Yvonne, 16-month-old daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Loren Johnson of Ringsdorf, Iowa, rests in bed with broken legs. She was blown from her mother's arms recently by a gust that struck as Mrs. Johnson went out the front door of their home.

Boy Gem Thefts Recall Draining Of Canal for Kennedy Jewels

By Carol H. Bowie
It wouldn't be too surprising if the story of how police drained the C & O Canal in the second, who told police he drained the canal and jewels for Kennedy's jewelry was sold a diamond bracelet worth \$12,000 to a friend for sale in the Kennedy house. The victim of the thefts was identified as the daughter of former United States Ambassador Joseph P. Kennedy and the sister of Robert Kennedy, an attorney in the criminal division of the federal government.

Paul McGee Is Identified By Officer

Suspect in Theater Holdup Viewed in Bellevue by Victim

By Willard Clapton Staff Reporter

A District policeman visited the prison ward of New York's Bellevue Hospital yesterday and identified Paul O. McGee, 22, as the man who shot him in the arm after a holdup of the Apex Theater here Nov. 14.

McGee, a part-time student at American University, and son of a Wall Street broker, surrendered to the FBI Wednesday after being hunted for 10 days following the robbery.

Eight Precinct Pvt. Alfred L. Black, who made the identification yesterday, was wounded slightly in the forearm in a gun battle with the bandit who got \$200 in the theater holdup.

Discovery of bullet holes in McGee's car and blood in his apartment at 1438 Columbia rd. led police on his trail. McGee, weak and feverish from two failed bullet wounds in his leg, limped into the FBI's Manhattan office after 7 p. m. to resume his working vacation at his parents' home in Florida.

There were apparently no signs of the impending delivery when he left here.

But shortly after 10:30 p. m., the ambulance from the Hospital Ambulance Service was summoned to the three-story residence on N. st. n.w.

Dr. John Walsh, who accompanied Mrs. Kennedy to the hospital in the ambulance, said to the hospital that he expected to operate before the night shift.

It is customary for Kennedy's mother and step-aunt who had one child father, Mr. and Mrs. Hugh D. Kennedy, to have a child born at the same time and their teenage son, way, though the rule is not Thomas, William Walton, a Washington artist who served as coordinator of the Kennedy campaign in New York, was a Palm Beach with his brother, guest at the midday dinner, Robert, who spent the holiday but left shortly after.

Senator Flies Back On Reaching Florida

By Tony Gieske and Marie Smith Staff Reporters

A boy was born at 12:22 a. m. today to President-elect and Mrs. John F. Kennedy. It weighed 6 pounds, three ounces.

The baby was born in Georgetown Hospital, where Mrs. Kennedy was taken from the family's Georgetown home at 10:45 last night.

Senator Kennedy was on his way back to Washington at the time. He was notified of the birth 15 minutes after the plane took off.

He had left Washington after Thanksgiving dinner with the family yesterday, and received word of his wife's sudden and unexpected confinement on landing in Palm Beach, Fla.

He took the time to call Georgetown, learned that Mrs. Kennedy was about to undergo a Caesarean section, shifted to the faster press plane and headed back north.

Both the mother and the child were doing well.

The child is the Kennedy's second. The mother had said earlier that the infant would be named for his father if a boy.

Their daughter, Caroline, was born, also by Caesarean section, three years ago this Sunday.

Mrs. Kennedy was not scheduled to deliver her baby until mid-December.

The Senator had flown home to Washington to spend Thanksgiving with his family. He left Georgetown shortly after 7 p. m. to resume his working vacation at his parents' home in Florida.

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French Call Atom-Pool Plan Weak

U. S. Proposal To NATO Parley Debated in Paris

By Robert E. Baker

PARIS, Nov. 24—A resolution aimed at joint control of nuclear weapons by all NATO partners was criticized by French parliamentarians today as being too weak.

The resolution was drawn up by Sen. J. W. Fulbright (D-Ark.) and approved by the United States delegation to the NATO parliamentarians conference here. It was approved by the conference's political committee and subjected to debate in open session today.

The resolution is intended to support the principle of a NATO nuclear-weapons pool.

Sen. Estes Kefauver (D-Tenn.) backs call for 15-nation convention on NATO arms.

Norstad, NATO's military commander, in a speech to the conference on Monday.

But while the Fulbright resolution was purposefully vague so as not to commit the United States too far too early, the French delegation insisted it should be stronger.

French "Disillusioned"

Jean-Paul Palewski, head of the French delegation and longtime supporter of President Charles de Gaulle, said the French were "disillusioned" by the resolution.

A NATO force as envisioned by Norstad would be a true commitment to back up a NATO council resolution of 1955 to use nuclear weapons if attacked, Palewski said. He said later he will attempt to amend the U. S. resolution in a political committee meeting.

The Fulbright resolution

Newspapers all over the country rush out headlines covering the dramatic overnight birth of John and Jackie Kennedy's first son, born just after midnight on November 25, 1960, the morning after Thanksgiving. (Credit: washingtonpost.com © 2024 The Washington Post)

"The baby is fine ... my wife is fine, everything is fine," he tells them, illuminated by the streetlights. He makes a few comments about the dramatic overnight flights and explains that he'll be staying in Georgetown for several days, working on the transition while taking care of his family.

But there's one question the reporters really want answered.

"What is the boy's name?"

No birth certificate has been signed at the hospital. No one has an answer.

In the Kennedy family, there's a precedent when it comes to boys' names. JFK's father, Joseph Kennedy Sr., was named after his father, Patrick Joseph Kennedy. Joseph Sr., in turn, named his first son Joseph Jr. John's younger brother Robert, who married and began having children before him, followed the tradition and named his first son Robert Jr.

JFK pauses in the darkness as they ask the question. Jackie is still sedated at the hospital, but he decides to be the one to tell them.

"It's John F. Kennedy, Junior," he says, in an almost reverential tone.

The reporters scribble in their notebooks as the President-elect and now new father heads inside.

The newspapers already had a round of early headlines covering the birth. Now, there's a new round.

"First Son to Be Named After Father," one newspaper headline declares. "President-elect Says It'll Be 'John F. Kennedy, Jr.,'" reports another.

Just like his dad. What a lucky boy.

Belmont, New Hampshire

Richard Pavlick is getting restless.

It's late November and cold, so the small New Hampshire town is buckling down for a typically frigid and snowy New England winter.

Most residents are planning to stay put and settle in—but Pavlick has some very different ideas.

Since his drive to Hyannis Port, Massachusetts, on November 11, and since his trip to Concord on November 14 to purchase more explosives, not much is known about Pavlick's specific whereabouts and activities for the rest of the month.

During this time there's one thing, however, that indicates Pavlick's current state of mind: he decides he doesn't want his house in Belmont anymore. Yet rather than try to sell it, he simply gives it away.

Pavlick has no children or other heirs. In the final week or so of November, he files paperwork to formally bequeath his home and its belongings, in full, to an organization known as the Spaulding Youth Center, in nearby Northfield, New Hampshire.

To this day, no one knows if he has a long history with the organization, or maybe knows people associated with it, but apparently he considers it worthy enough to benefit from his sudden generosity.

Pavlick's small one-story house is of decidedly modest value—it's on the edge of town and worth only about two thousand dollars*—but that's still quite a significant donation for a local youth center.

More important, after making the donation, Pavlick no longer has a place to live. So where will he go?

The answer arrives in the form of a letter Pavlick writes to a local

newspaper. He declares that after his time in Belmont, he's dissatisfied and wants to live elsewhere. In his words, the town is poorly managed and is still "back in the stone age."

So Richard Pavlick, who has lived in Belmont for eight years, has decided he'll no longer live there.

In the past, he's made some idle threats, but this time he's telling the truth. On December 1, Pavlick loads some clothes and other personal belongings in his 1950 Buick and prepares to leave Belmont for good.

He doesn't have anywhere to go, or a new home waiting, but in the years since his retirement from the post office, he's done a few extended road trips. Thanks to his Army and post office pensions, he has money for motels.

His plan is to head south. This time, though, he's headed farther than Concord, where he bought the explosives ... and farther even than Hyannis Port.

But before he leaves town, he's got one more stop to make.

He's going to the local post office to see his friend Thomas Murphy, the Postmaster.

Georgetown, Washington, D.C.

Late November 1960

She still hasn't seen the baby.

When Jackie Kennedy wakes up, she wants to see her son. The problem is, the doctors haven't cleared her to leave her room, and John Jr. remains in an incubator down the hall.

The Secret Service, the doctors, the nurses, her husband, and other family members have all seen the baby, but not Jackie. Indeed, it takes a full day and a half—an excruciating wait.

Finally, on the evening of November 26, JFK comes to the hospital to join Jackie for the moment when she will finally be able to see John Jr. The hospital staff closes off the hall outside her room, and with help from nurses, Jackie is transferred to a wheelchair. Her husband wheels her down the hall to the nursery.

There, looking through the glass window, she gets her first look at her newborn son.

Naturally, reporters are downstairs in the lobby and outside the hospital, hoping for updates. The news comes quick.

“Jackie Gets 1st Peek at Her Incubator Son!” the *Daily News* exclaims, joining a chorus of other newspapers covering the minutiae of the events in the hospital.

JFK himself often speaks to the gathered reporters when he comes and goes, giving small updates. He tells them that John Jr. has just recovered from a slight respiratory ailment while in the incubator and is now in fine condition.

As for his wife, he tells reporters that Jackie is “a little sick, but she’s getting along alright.” Asked how she reacted to seeing her child for the first time, he says, “She seemed very happy. I guess she’s been worried about the baby.”

In addition to his mostly off-the-cuff remarks to the press, JFK enlists his soon-to-be press secretary Pierre Salinger to give more formal updates on both the family and the nuts and bolts of the transition.

Speaking to reporters, Salinger says that JFK is spending a lot of time with Caroline, assisted by their nanny. Salinger delights the crowd by reporting that JFK told Caroline “that her mother had gone away to bring back a baby brother for her birthday,” and that Caroline is “telling everyone to come and see her baby.” Mixing the personal and Presidential, Salinger informs the same group of reporters that JFK has just picked a new budget director.

Meanwhile, Secret Service Agent Clint Hill is basically living in the hospital, sometimes doing overnight shifts to stay in the immediate vicinity of the soon-to-be First Lady. Sometimes he’s in the room, sometimes in the hall outside. He screens every visitor and continues inspecting all the gifts, letters, and bouquets sent to her. He also talks regularly with the nurses and doctors about the health of Jackie and John Jr.

From his post, Hill also has a front-row seat to JFK’s coming and going.

“The President-elect would visit Mrs. Kennedy and their newborn son each day, in between the never-ending meetings with staff and advisors in preparation for the start of his administration,” Hill later reported. “Each time he came to the hospital, he was extremely cordial and always called me by my name.”

On morning visits, JFK normally checks in with Hill before going into his wife’s room.

“How are you doing today, Clint?” he’d ask.

“I’m fine, Mr. President-elect. Thank you.”

“And how did Mrs. Kennedy fare through the night?”

It was Hill who’d update him on Jackie’s health, sleeping, and comfort.

Although JFK’s visits are usually brief, Hill is impressed by his attention to detail regarding the health of his wife and child. “It was obvious he was

sincerely concerned, and despite the endless decisions that needed to be made as he prepared for the presidency, the well-being of his wife and son was uppermost in his mind,” Hill explained.

Like so many others, Hill continues to be charmed by the President-elect. “The more I got to know him, the more I liked him.”

Most of Hill’s time, however, is spent with the future First Lady. During Jackie’s slow recovery, she often calls in Hill to keep her company. “I’d go into her room and she’d be sitting in bed, propped up with pillows. Dressed in her bedclothes, with no makeup on, she looked younger and more fragile than she had prior to John’s birth, and I could tell she was physically drained.”

When she had family visitors, or when her husband was coming, she’d pull herself together—but not with Hill. “With me, she had no need to impress. She had already become accustomed to my constant presence and realized I would see her at her best and her worst.”

Initially Jackie’s sole focus is John Jr., but once he’s out of the incubator ... once it’s clear that he’s healthy and safe, she’s able turn her attention to other matters, especially when he’s sleeping.

Her main focus, unsurprisingly, is her new home.

“She was focused on learning as much as possible about the White House—its history, its decor, and how everything worked on a daily basis,” Hill later recalled. She starts peppering him with questions: “Who did the grocery shopping? Who handled the housekeeping? Where would the family eat their private meals? Was there any privacy? What about functions and dinner parties? What were the various rooms—the Red Room, the Green Room, the Blue Room—used for?”

Hill had worked in the White House Detail under Eisenhower, so he’s familiar with the day-to-day operations and protocols. He’d also worked closely with the full-time White House staff, so he knows the names and job titles of most of the personnel who work there. When Jackie calls him into the room, she often quizzes him.

She would have a list of questions written out on a lined, yellow legal pad, and as I answered her, she would listen intently, taking voracious

notes and interposing questions as they occurred to her. She was savvy and smart, and it was clear that she was eager to make a good impression and wanted to have as much information going into her new role as possible, to avoid making any blunders.

It's only six weeks away from Inauguration Day, and the media is obsessed with everything, from the new First Lady's plans for the White House, to how she'll handle the Inaugural Ball. The scrutiny on her will be nonstop. It doesn't matter that she's exhausted. The brand-new mother is already feeling the incredible pressure.

She's not the only one. As Jackie plans her family's transition, the Secret Service has its own set of challenges. Between the intense media scrutiny, and the unique demands of the Kennedy family, they need to work out the complex interplay between the President-elect's detail, her detail, Caroline's detail, and now John Jr.'s detail.

The Special Agent appointed to John Jr., aka the "Diaper Detail," is Ed Tucker. Tucker soon joins Clint Hill on the same floor of the hospital, back and forth between the nursery and Jackie's room. On one of his first days on the job, Tucker learns one of the quirks of working for the Kennedy family.

"Um, excuse me," a nurse calls to him out in the hallway, "Mrs. Kennedy said she wants to talk to 'Mr. Tucker, the agent out in the hall.' Is that you?"

"Yes. Is she all right?" Tucker asks.

The nurse lets out a nervous laugh. "You may not believe it, but she wants to borrow some money."

Huh? Tucker enters the room. Mrs. Kennedy is sitting up in bed, with John Jr. in a bassinet beside her.

"Hello, Mr. Tucker," Jackie says in her soft, polite voice. "Would you happen to have a twenty-dollar bill on you? My hairdresser is coming over to do my hair and I don't have any money on me."

Thankfully, Tucker had just been to the bank and has cash. He reaches for his wallet and pulls out a twenty-dollar bill.

"No problem, Mrs. Kennedy," he says.

"Oh, thank you, Mr. Tucker," she replies, smiling. "My secretary, Mrs. Gallagher, will reimburse you. I do appreciate it."

It's a lesson that Tucker and the other agents quickly learn: both John and Jackie Kennedy, who grew up with enormous wealth and privilege, rarely actually have cash on them. They frequently ask to borrow it from whoever happens to be nearby. Later, an assistant will repay it, but Secret Service agents learn to start carrying extra cash in their wallets.

Meanwhile, when it comes to personnel, there are a total of five agents dedicated just to Caroline and John Jr. Shifts are split so at least one agent is always with each child.

Combined with the Jackie and JFK details, it can be cumbersome to keep everyone coordinated.

In the hospital, the sheer number of agents may seem like overkill, but the real challenges will start later, when the members of the family are on the move, traveling to and from different locations in and out of the country, sometimes together and sometimes apart.

For the Secret Service, the safety and security needs of children in First Families differ from those of their parents. With the President, the Secret Service's primary concern is almost always the threat of assassination.

When it comes to protecting the President's kids, the agents are on alert for a different type of threat. "There wasn't so much a concern that somebody would kill the President's children," Special Agent Jerry Blaine would later explain. "The Secret Service worried more about kidnapping."

Given the global media attention surrounding John Jr.'s birth ... given the growing international celebrity of Jackie Kennedy ... and given the well-known wealth of both Jackie's and JFK's families, it's hard to conceive of a more obvious target for kidnapping than the two young Kennedy children.

For the Secret Service, the only question is: Will they be ready for it?

Belmont, New Hampshire*December 1, 1960*

With the holiday season underway, the U.S. Postal Service is busier than usual. This means that local Postmasters in cities and small towns across the country are working extra hard.

Thomas Murphy, the Postmaster in Belmont, is one of those public servants.

Since the Presidential election three weeks ago, Murphy hasn't thought too much about politics. Sure, he still has the "Vote Nixon-Lodge" sign at his house, but his main focus, as usual, is his work and family. Hopefully, they'll enjoy a peaceful holiday season in their small New England town.

What Murphy doesn't know, though, is that his life is about to get a lot more complicated.

On December 1, Richard Pavlick walks into Murphy's post office.

In truth, Murphy hadn't thought much about Pavlick. It'd been a couple weeks since he'd last come in. That was when Pavlick told Murphy that he'd made the trip down to Hyannis Port and caught a glimpse of the incoming President.

At the time, the trip seemed strange to Murphy—why would Pavlick drive two hundred miles to see a President he detested?—but Murphy didn't give it much thought.

In the days that followed, though, rumors started to swirl. Apparently, Pavlick was still fuming about the election results and threatening to leave Belmont.

"I didn't pay too much attention to that talk," Murphy later recalled,

“until I picked up the local paper one day and read a letter to the editor Pavlick had written. He said he was leaving Belmont because it was still in the Stone Age.”

For the first time, Murphy begins to wonder whether Pavlick might really be leaving.

And now, here’s Pavlick in the flesh, walking into the post office, asking to talk to Murphy himself.

Apparently, Pavlick wants to say goodbye. They were friends, of a sort.

He tells Murphy he’s leaving that very day.

To where?

Pavlick doesn’t tell him.

“He said he was ‘going to prepare a place for me,’” Murphy later recalled, though Murphy had no idea what that meant.

Pavlick goes on and adds that he “might end up in pieces.”

“He scared me,” Murphy later admitted.

After saying his goodbyes to the post office staff, Pavlick heads for the door and turns back to Murphy one final time.

“I’ll let you know where to forward my mail.”

Washington, D.C.

December 6, 1960

For the week following the birth of John Jr., Jackie recovers from surgery, the doctors and nurses monitor the newborn, and JFK visits every day.

Outside the hospital, reporters are clamoring, looking for any shred of information for a potential news story.

Meanwhile, the Presidential transition hurtles toward the Inauguration, every day bringing new pressures and decisions.

The President-elect takes advantage of his time in Washington, D.C., to take as many meetings as possible. With the help of the Secret Service, he shuttles around town, back and forth from Georgetown to other parts of the city. The logistics are complicated, but for the Secret Service, Washington, D.C., provides a well-established routine, unlike the unfamiliarity of Palm Beach or Hyannis Port.

After a full week, JFK heads back to Florida, where Robert Kennedy and other advisors have set up shop at the Kennedy estate. Then he returns again to D.C. to spend more time at the hospital.

Among JFK's many obligations, one looms especially large: a visit to the White House to see the outgoing President.

To D.C. insiders, it's no secret that Eisenhower and Kennedy didn't have much regard for each other. Kennedy thought Eisenhower was stuck in the past and out of touch, calling him "the non-President." In return, Eisenhower repeatedly dismissed Kennedy as an immature kid, referring to him to friends as "Little Boy Blue" or "the young whippersnapper."

The mutual disdain was amplified during the Presidential campaign,

when JFK repeatedly lambasted the failures of the current administration while Eisenhower worked to get his Vice President, Richard Nixon, elected.

Yet despite their simmering mutual hostility, both Kennedy and Eisenhower share a core belief. In a democratic society, it's critical to demonstrate the peaceful transfer of power. They may have been enemies during the campaign, but it's time to signal to the public that they respect the process and fully accept the results of the election. They're ready to overcome differences to collaborate for the good of the country, ensuring a smooth transition from one administration to the next.

Shortly after the election, once the dust had settled, the Eisenhower and Kennedy teams started making plans for JFK to visit the White House and the Oval Office. Of course, once the plan is made, they notify the press well in advance, so the world can see the current and future Presidents shaking hands.

On the morning of December 6, less than two weeks after the birth of JFK's son, and while his wife is still in the hospital, JFK and his security detail travel from Georgetown Hospital to 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue.

When Kennedy's vehicle arrives, journalists and onlookers have already crowded both sides of the cordoned-off steps on the White House's North Portico.

Exiting his vehicle, the young President-elect immediately bounds up the steps and vigorously shakes hands with the outgoing Commander in Chief.

Once the greeting and handshake are dutifully captured on film, the current President and the future President head to the Oval Office.

In advance of the meeting, both sides prepared lists of subjects to discuss, including Berlin, Cuba, Laos, Africa, Latin America, NATO, nuclear testing, China, and other regions of the Far East. It's in these areas of foreign relations and military affairs that both parties think Eisenhower can offer Kennedy the most useful insights, including unvarnished opinions about the personalities and strengths of various foreign leaders.



During the transition Kennedy greets outgoing President Dwight D. Eisenhower on the White House steps before meeting in the Oval Office. It's important for the incoming and outgoing Presidents to publicly demonstrate the cordial transition of power. (Credit: National Park Service Photo by Abbie Rowe)

The scope of topics is so wide-ranging that they'll eventually have another meeting during the transition, with some portions involving senior advisors—and others just one-on-one.

At some point, when it's just the two of them in the Oval Office, Eisenhower goes out of his way to explain to Kennedy the various measures his administration has put in place to protect the chief executive in the event of a nuclear threat or a foreign attack on domestic soil. He describes elaborate codes and secret protocols, bragging about how fast these measures can be executed.

"Watch this," Eisenhower says proudly. He picks up the phone, dials a number, and with no other introduction speaks the mysterious words "Opal Drill Three."

A few seconds later, a Marine helicopter lands on the White House lawn right outside the Oval Office window, ready to whisk the President to a secure secret bunker off the premises.

Not bad. JFK can't help but smile.

By the end of their discussion, the current and future Presidents have

gotten to know each other better, realizing they share views on many issues. Both appreciate the other's thorough preparation and knowledge of foreign affairs.

Eisenhower urges Kennedy to call on him at any point for advice or wisdom. After all, there are some things about being President that only someone who's actually held the job could ever understand.

After Kennedy leaves, Eisenhower sends a written message to Clark Clifford, the head of Kennedy's transition team. The message says that he'd been "misinformed and mistaken about this young man. He's one of the ablest, brightest minds I've ever come across."

As for the meeting, the symbolism isn't lost on anyone.

President Eisenhower has been an iconic figure in America for nearly two decades. As President, he enjoyed widespread popular support for most of his two terms. His name and image will forever be associated with American life in the 1950s.

But now, Eisenhower's time is over. The torch has been passed.

A new era—filled with change—is about to begin.

Belmont, New Hampshire

Thomas Murphy is on edge.

In the five days since Richard Pavlick stopped by the post office to say goodbye, Murphy has felt uneasy. Pavlick's strange final comments, and his sudden decision to leave Belmont, have made Murphy worry that something bad may happen.

On December 6, Murphy goes into work at the post office, as he always does. Just like any other day, he's taking care of post office customers, handling packages, overseeing the logistics of the mail service.

Nothing out of the ordinary.

That is, until he sifts through the day's mail. That's when he sees it.

A letter, addressed to him.

From Richard Pavlick.

Murphy stops right there, studying the envelope.

The first thing he notices is the postmark. From Washington, D.C.

The letter itself is brief. "He wanted his mail forwarded to general delivery in Washington," Murphy later explains.

As a single data point, probably not a big deal, but when you add all the crumbs together, well ... Murphy isn't stupid.

Pavlick had made it clear he despised John F. Kennedy. After the election, he drove all the way to Hyannis Port, Massachusetts, to see JFK's home. From there, he followed Kennedy to the airport in Cape Cod. And most troubling of all, when he told Murphy about the trip, Pavlick seemed intensely focused on the security, or lack thereof, around the President-elect.

Soon after, Pavlick mysteriously decided to leave Belmont. And where's he going, of all places? The home of the next President. Washington, D.C.

“That was enough for me,” Murphy later declared. “I knew [Senator] Kennedy had a home there and was staying there.”

Whatever Pavlick is up to, the way he’s following JFK from city to city, Murphy figures it can’t be good. Sure, Murphy could have it wrong—maybe Pavlick is just there to sightsee or visit friends. Wouldn’t that be a relief? The problem is, the whole thing smells. There’s no time to take chances. Better to report this.

Murphy isn’t particularly knowledgeable about law enforcement agencies. He doesn’t know what to do with this type of threat. As a company man, he decides to keep it within his own agency.

“I contacted my superiors in Concord immediately,” he later explained. Hopefully, the higher-ups will know how to handle something like this.

Now all he has to do is wait.

And keep a close eye on the mail.

Georgetown, Washington, D.C.

December 8, 1960

After two weeks in the hospital, John Jr. is thriving.

His mother, however, is still recovering from the difficult surgery and the exhaustion of giving birth amid so much chaos.

Mercifully, there were a few peaceful days in the hospital when JFK went back down to Palm Beach during the first week of December, but when he returns to Georgetown, the bedlam of handlers, advisors, press, and additional Secret Service comes with him. And this time, they have the additional pressure of what to do as the family leaves the hospital.

It doesn't matter that Jackie isn't fully recovered—the transition schedule is roaring like a freight train. The show must go on.

On December 8, there's no avoiding the Kennedys' most important event: the christening of John Jr. As the first-ever Roman Catholic First Family, they know the world will be watching. Time to show off their faith. For the christening, they enlist the priest from their regular Georgetown church.

From a planning perspective, the christening was scheduled for December 8, but since Jackie and John Jr. still hadn't been discharged, they decide to perform the ritual in the hospital's small chapel.

Perhaps because of all the controversy and prejudice Kennedy faced during the campaign about his Catholicism, JFK's team brings in extra security for the occasion. According to newspapers, a total of some fifty police officers and Secret Service agents are at the hospital for the event.

The Kennedys don't allow the press corps into the ceremony, but do allow a pool photographer and one newspaper journalist, David Wise of the

Boston Globe. Their reporting and photos can then be shared with other publications.

For the first time since giving birth, Jackie puts on fancy clothes, does her full makeup, and preps for the ceremony. All of it leaves her exhausted.

Indeed, as JFK pushes her wheelchair toward the chapel, she already feels weak.

Accompanying the proud parents in the room are Jackie's mother and stepfather; John's brother Robert and Robert's wife, Ethel; Dr. John Walsh, who performed the Caesarian surgery; the priest; the previously mentioned press; and John Jr.'s godparents, a young couple who are close friends of John and Jackie's.

Of course, several Secret Service agents also join, at least one from each family member's detail. Clint Hill is the one keeping a close watch on Jackie.

"It was clear that Mrs. Kennedy didn't have much energy," Hill later described, "but she was determined to stand for a few minutes during the service." He's not worried about an assassin. He's worried she's pushing herself too hard.

The ceremony itself is small but formal. The men wear suits; the women dress similarly well.

John Jr. wears a traditional white christening gown—the same gown JFK wore when he was baptized, forty-three years ago.

When it comes to holding the baby, Jackie is unsteady, so the godmother holds John Jr. Still, Jackie has to stand for the ritual. She's aware, of course, that any slip or grimace on her part will immediately be read as weakness and plastered on the front page of every newspaper.

She gets into proper position—they all do—and the ceremony begins.

"John Fitzgerald Kennedy Jr. wilt thou be baptized?" the priest asks the newborn.

The baby's eyes remain mostly closed.

The assembled group watches closely. Since this is one of the first times anyone outside of immediate family or doctors have seen the baby, the reporter eagerly scribbles down his impressions of John Jr. "The child's hair, of which there is a good deal, is brown," he writes for the newspaper. "His nose is shiny. His behavior was gentlemanly."

The priest continues. After a few more lines of liturgy, he gently sprinkles water on the baby's forehead.

"John Fitzgerald Kennedy Jr.," the priest finally says, "I baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit."

The ceremony lasts eleven minutes. Although Jackie looks extremely unsteady, she makes it through.

The service itself may be over, but the event is not. John, Jackie, and the other attendees now must pose for press photos.

"I could tell that even this slight bit of activity was wearing on Mrs. Kennedy," Hill later recalled.

For ten more minutes, the camera clicks as Jackie stands there, maintaining her smile. These photographs will be on the front pages of countless newspapers the following morning.

Finally, thankfully, it's all over. Mom and newborn, along with their Secret Service agents, head back to their rooms.

They're hoping to rest, but it won't be for long.

Whether she's ready or not, tomorrow is when the real whirlwind begins.

Bright and early, Jackie is headed to the White House.

THE NEXT DAY**Georgetown, Washington, D.C.***December 9, 1960*

Clint Hill is worried.

Two weeks after Jackie Kennedy had her emergency C-section, she's still recovering. Even now, standing or walking for more than a few minutes makes her feel dizzy and faint. Yesterday, she barely made it through John Jr.'s christening. Today, after being discharged from the hospital, she's going to the White House.

For Jackie, ever since JFK won the election, she's been anxious to see the White House in person. She needs to plan her family's new life there, and to do that she needs to see the interior, learn the layout of the public and private spaces, assess the furniture and decor, and generally understand what their lives will look like.

For decades now, during the transition, there's an unofficial tradition of outgoing First Ladies hosting incoming First Ladies at the White House.

Jackie had hoped to visit before she gave birth, back in November—but the invitation was slow to come, and then, with her premature delivery, it was no longer an option. The only possible day is today, just after leaving the hospital, before the whole family travels south to Florida.

So Jackie has to do the tour now. And while she's still anxious to see the White House, it's an awfully tall order for her today.

Also, the other part of the plan—getting a personal tour from the outgoing First Lady—is a more complicated matter.

Mamie Eisenhower, sixty-five, is a White House legend. She's occupied

it for eight straight years and in many ways molded it in her own image.

Like her husband, Mamie was born in the nineteenth century. She's a woman of traditional, conservative values and embraces the formalities of an earlier era.

Also, both she and her husband like being in charge. According to those who worked for her, she was "imperious" and directed the White House staff with "military discipline." Although she was unfailingly gracious to friends and guests, if you served under her, she was downright intimidating.

For starters, she was hierarchical, making a rule that any person in a position of authority in the White House must always be referred to as "Mr." or "Mrs." Conversely, any person *not* in a position of authority—the servants, cooks, and cleaners, no matter their age or how long they've worked there—can never be called "Mr." or "Mrs." and must be called only by their first names.

Similarly, under Mamie Eisenhower's rules, those staffers on the lower end of the pecking order were not allowed to use the elevator—they had to use the stairs—and they could never walk through the central Executive Mansion, where guests might see them. Instead, the servants and cleaners had to go *outside* the building to get from one wing of the White House to the other, even in winter.

Mrs. Eisenhower relished her role as hostess for the many elaborate White House social events and excelled at playing the part. She was very focused on the "prestige, status, and deference she felt was due the First Lady of the land," and when it was time to receive a line of guests, she'd ask a servant to bring out a platform for her to stand on, to make sure everyone could see her and know who she was.

Mamie Eisenhower loved being First Lady. And after two terms ... let's just say she doesn't relish giving up the position.

Making things worse, she and Eisenhower are handing over their titles and status to political rivals—the Kennedys. Just as President Eisenhower didn't think much of John Kennedy during the bitterly fought campaign, Mamie Eisenhower dismissed Jackie Kennedy as "the college girl."

Since then, Mamie has also had to put up with the fact that the much younger Jackie Kennedy is receiving so much fawning public attention. Mrs.

Eisenhower had enjoyed great popularity as First Lady, but now she's being eclipsed by someone new.

When Jackie first sent a request to Mrs. Eisenhower to visit the Executive Mansion, Jackie heard through a staffer that the outgoing First Lady "hit the ceiling" and responded, "This is my house, and nobody's going to see it."

Eventually, cooler heads prevailed, and Mrs. Eisenhower changed her mind, sending an invitation to Jackie. Maybe Mamie was feeling pressure from the press, or maybe it was that her husband had agreed to meet with JFK. Whatever the case, by the time Jackie received the invite, she was heading to the hospital to give birth. The only date left was today.

Needless to say, the doctors weren't thrilled. "Everyone was concerned about her ability to go through with the White House tour, since she had struggled to stand during the brief Christening ceremony," Clint Hill recalled.

It wasn't just the doctors.

"Mrs. Kennedy herself seemed apprehensive about her physical ability," Hill later remembered, "but she was desperate to see her new home so that she could determine what changes she might want to make once they moved in on January 20, following the Inauguration."

That morning, Jackie Kennedy and Clint Hill discuss the situation, giving Hill an idea.

"How about if I call J. B. West, the Chief Usher of the White House, and ask him to have a wheelchair for you, Mrs. Kennedy?" Hill asks. "I know Mr. West well, and I am sure he will want you to be as comfortable as possible."

"That's a wonderful idea, Mr. Hill," Jackie replies. "Then I won't have to worry about fainting and making the headlines."

Hill makes the call. West readily agrees to have a wheelchair available.

That morning, Jackie and John Jr. are released from the hospital. The plan is for the Secret Service to get them to their home in Georgetown first. Once John Jr. is settled at home, then Jackie can head to the White House.

The only problem is that, after a lengthy discharge process, they're behind schedule. By the time they get to Georgetown, "Mrs. Kennedy barely had time to change clothes and freshen up before it was time to depart."

They've barely begun and Jackie is already exhausted, feeling weak and dizzy.

Hopping in a car, Hill and Jackie race to the White House. It's just the two of them. Hill is driving; Jackie's in the passenger seat.

They arrive at noon. Hill knows all the protocols of entering and exiting the White House, gently guiding her to the entrance.

J. B. West is waiting at the door.

"I'm Mr. West, the Chief Usher," West says, introducing himself.

"I'm Jacqueline Kennedy," Jackie replies, as if he didn't already know.

For West, this is not a small moment. As Chief Usher, his job is to form a close working relationship with every member of the First Family, but especially with the First Lady. He helps oversee every social engagement, monitors the comings and goings of every family member and guest, and generally coordinates day-to-day operations of the White House. Today, he's meeting not just the new First Lady—he's also meeting his new boss.

After the initial greeting, the first thing West notices is that although Jackie is just as attractive and stylish as in her photos, she doesn't look physically well. She appears to be "very thin, it seemed to me, and quite pale," West later recalled.

West ushers Jackie and Hill through the entry and toward the first-floor elevator. This leads to the second-floor private quarters.

"Mrs. Eisenhower is waiting upstairs," West explains as they wait for the elevator. Then, with a knowing look to Hill, he adds, "The First Lady would like to take Mrs. Kennedy on the tour in private."

Translation: no Secret Service agents allowed.

Hill doesn't like it. After her discharge from the hospital and the rushing around at home, she's already exerted herself more than at any point in the past two weeks—and the tour hasn't even started. He's worried she won't make it.

Unfortunately, there's no choice. Mamie Eisenhower has given an order, and neither West nor Hill can overrule it. When the elevator door opens, West escorts Jackie inside.

From here on out, Hill will be waiting down here.

The Oval Office and other "working" rooms of the White House are downstairs. The second and third floors of the building are the "Residence," where the First Family actually lives.

During the brief elevator ride, West notices Jackie “was somewhat ill at ease.”

By the time they reach the second floor, it’s like she’s trying to brace herself for what’s ahead. “As the elevator door opened ... Jacqueline Kennedy took a deep, audible, breath.”

And just like that, Mamie Eisenhower is standing there—small of height, but with perfect posture—in the middle of the Residence’s large receiving room.

West immediately notices that Mrs. Eisenhower doesn’t come to the elevator to greet Jackie. Instead, Mamie just stands there, so Jackie has to walk to her.

From that first moment, he can tell that Mamie Eisenhower is “very much in command.” Jackie, on the other hand, can barely walk and looks miserable.

“As I escorted the young woman across the room to meet her formidable hostess,” West later described, “I was very much aware that neither lady had looked forward to this meeting.”

It takes a moment for Jackie to reach her hostess.

“Hello, Mrs. Kennedy,” Mrs. Eisenhower begins. “I do hope you are feeling much better now.”

Yes, she is, Jackie says weakly.

With a look of satisfaction, Mamie gives West the signal.

Translation: leave us alone. This is one-on-one.

West heads back downstairs to his office.

Agent Hill is also down on the first floor, anxiously waiting. After a half hour, then another, he can’t help but wonder how it’s going.

He’s about to find out: not well. At all.

Belmont, New Hampshire

Belmont doesn't get many visitors.

It's cold in the winter. And snowy. More important, though it's a picturesque town, there are no tourist attractions ... or really any attractions at all.

So on December 9, when a strange car pulls into town, you'd think people would notice.

Then again, why would they? It's just a new car—no reason to be suspicious.

In no time, the driver parks on the central strip, near the main intersection. This is where the town's few main buildings are.

With a shove, the car door swings wide, revealing Frank V. McDermott.

Frank is professional-looking. As he steps out, he glances around. He's not from Belmont, or anywhere else in New Hampshire. He's from about ninety miles away, in Massachusetts.

By trade, he's a federal investigator. More specifically, he works out of the Boston field office of the United States Secret Service.

His destination today? The local post office.

According to the regional postal authorities in Concord, New Hampshire, they've become aware of a possible criminal threat. The authorities in Concord passed that threat to the local U.S. Attorney's office, who passed it to the Secret Service's Boston field office, who then assigned the case, putting it directly into the hands of Frank.

Which explains why, on this day, a Secret Service agent suddenly wants to talk to Thomas Murphy, the local Postmaster.

Washington, D.C.

After ninety minutes, a bell near the White House Usher's office rings twice.

That's the official signal—the elevator is coming downstairs.

Agent Clint Hill and the White House Chief Usher, J. B. West, together run to the first-floor elevator door.

As it opens, two women—the current *and* future First Ladies of the United States—walk out.

Hill takes one look at Jackie Kennedy and is immediately alarmed.

“Mrs. Kennedy was extremely pale and looked like she was about to faint,” he later recalled. “I looked her straight in the eyes and raised my eyebrows as if to say, *Are you okay?* She returned my gaze and gave a slight nod.”

West can also tell something's wrong. “I saw pain darken her face,” he later remembered.

Hill wants to ask questions, but at this moment, in the presence of Mamie Eisenhower, he can't say a word.

The two women walk together toward the South Entrance door as Hill and West follow. From there, Mamie Eisenhower leads Jackie out to the portico, where arrangements had been made to have a White House photographer capture the moment.

The two women exchange smiles and pleasantries, dutifully looking toward the camera and saying polite goodbyes.

“I sensed that Mrs. Kennedy was simply being outwardly gracious. Something had happened upstairs,” Hill recalled.

When the photo session is over, Hill rushes Jackie to the car, but it's not until they're safely outside the White House grounds that they both breathe a

sigh of relief.

According to Hill, Jackie looks “completely wiped out.”

“Mr. Hill,” she says, turning to him, “did you call Mr. West and request a wheelchair?”

“Yes, I called him this morning and he said it would be no problem at all. He said it would be waiting for you. I assumed they had it upstairs for you.”

“Well,” Jackie says, looking flustered, “when I got out of the elevator on the second floor, there was just Mrs. Eisenhower and no wheelchair in sight. She never mentioned it, so I assumed it simply hadn’t been arranged.”

Hill feels terrible. Jackie’s been on her feet, walking through every room of the White House, for ninety minutes straight. No wonder she looks so faint.

“I’m terribly sorry, Mrs. Kennedy. I don’t know what happened.”

Later, Hill will confer with West. And they’ll both share their version of events.

West did indeed receive the request for a wheelchair. According to West, he immediately shared that request with Mamie Eisenhower.

“Mrs. Kennedy’s Secret Service agent phoned from the hospital this morning,” West recalled telling her. “She asked that we have a wheelchair for her when she arrives.”

According to West, Mamie didn’t like hearing this. “Oh dear,” she replied. “I wanted to take her around alone.”

There’s only one problem with that. If they’re alone, that means Mrs. Eisenhower will be the one pushing the wheelchair.

“The thought of Mamie Eisenhower, the grandest of the First Ladies, pushing a wheelchair through the corridors of the White House—especially when the passenger had been a political enemy—was too much,” the Chief Usher recalls.

“I’ll tell you what,” Mamie said. “We’ll get a wheelchair, but put it behind a door somewhere, out of sight. It will be available *if she asks for it.*”

Sure enough, the White House staff puts the wheelchair in a closet near the second-floor elevator.

That’s where the wheelchair was when West left the two women alone. He went down to his desk and “waited in my office for a call for the

wheelchair, a call that never came.”

According to West, Mamie Eisenhower’s plan was to get rid of the ushers and Secret Service as soon as possible, and then hope that Jackie would be too polite or embarrassed to ask for the wheelchair when they were alone.

If that was the case, it worked perfectly.

Jackie clearly wanted the wheelchair but didn’t feel comfortable asking Mrs. Eisenhower personally for it. As a result, Mamie Eisenhower got what she wanted: a one-on-one tour, on foot, where she could call the shots—and not suffer the indignity of serving her successor.

Today, it’s a matter of interpretation as to whether there was real malice on Mamie Eisenhower’s part. Perhaps it was just a miscommunication ... or an excess of formality from all parties.

But both Hill and West—the only two people involved in the incident aside from Mrs. Kennedy and Mrs. Eisenhower—came to the same conclusion.

“The problem was that Mrs. Eisenhower didn’t want anyone to accompany her and Mrs. Kennedy,” Hill later says, “and she certainly wasn’t going to push the new First Lady—her political rival—through the Executive Mansion. She had told West that the wheelchair would be available, but hidden, and brought out only if Mrs. Kennedy requested it.”

Although Hill felt awful for what happened, he never thought Jackie blamed him. “She was intuitive with people,” he later recalled, “and had figured that Mrs. Eisenhower had simply ignored her request.”

Months from now, once Jackie gets to know J. B. West, she’ll suddenly bring up the subject with him.

“Mr. West,” she’ll ask, seemingly out of nowhere, “did you know that my doctor ordered a wheelchair that day I first went around the White House?”

“Yes, I did,” he’ll reply.

“Then why didn’t you have it for me? I was so exhausted after marching around this house for two hours.”

“Well, it was certainly there, waiting for you,” he’ll explain. “Right behind the closet door next to the elevator. We were waiting for you to request it.”

“I was too scared of Mrs. Eisenhower to ask,” she’ll admit.

West, who got to know both First Ladies well, summarized it like this: “Mrs. Eisenhower’s feelings about the young Mrs. Kennedy were never spoken, only intimated.”

In any case, Jackie’s ninety-minute walking tour had left her a mess.

As Hill drives her to Georgetown, it’s clear she desperately needs to rest and recuperate.

Too bad resting isn’t an option.

In about two hours, she’s boarding a flight with her husband, her three-year-old daughter, her newborn son, and the usual array of staff and Secret Service agents. They’re flying to Palm Beach this afternoon.

From the moment they land, crowds and cameras will be waiting.

It doesn't take just a village.

It takes nannies, nurses, drivers, assistants, plus the Secret Service to get the First Family—now with their newborn son and “mound of luggage”—out of the house and into the waiting sedans.

It's a frigid, windy December day, and everyone is shivering as they pile into the cars. To keep away the press and the crowds, the Secret Service has recently started to cordon off the streets outside the Georgetown residence.

At Andrews Air Force Base, in Morningside, Maryland, the Kennedys' private plane, the *Caroline*, is waiting. Since the election, they now use government airfields for takeoffs and landings.

As they get out of their cars, Jackie Kennedy can barely stand up. Agent Clint Hill carefully walks her through the harsh, cold winds that shoot across the wide tarmac.

One by one, they climb the stairs and enter the plane. Inside, JFK helps Jackie out of her coat. “The weather in Palm Beach has been beautiful,” he offers. “Some time in warm weather and sunshine will do wonders for your recovery.”

Settling into her seat, she closes her eyes. Clint Hill, as always, has an eye on her. She looks “pale and clearly exhausted.” But at least now she can rest.

At least, that's what he thought.

Due to a storm that just moved across the East Coast, there's a “great deal of turbulence” for the entire flight. Since the *Caroline* is a relatively small plane, it can't rise to a high enough altitude to get above the storm.

“The bumpiness made it impossible for Mrs. Kennedy to rest,” Hill later remembered, “and while she never complained, I could see that she was exhausted and physically drained.”

Three hours later, the plane touches down in West Palm Beach. It's still light out, and nearly forty degrees warmer than frigid D.C.

When they exit the plane, however, they encounter a different kind of storm.

A crowd of onlookers is waiting at the airfield, bigger than the crowds that greeted JFK here just after the election. Every day, the sheer number of people following their every move seems to get bigger. The press is here too, and there's the usual whirr of clicking cameras—*klkk kllk kllk kllk kllk kllk*—as each member of the group, including the children, exits the plane.

As soon as Jackie sees what's waiting, she turns to her husband.

"I am not talking to the press," she says. "And I don't want any photographs of the baby. I was hoping we would have more privacy down here."

Jack nods in agreement.

Yet as Jackie steps out of the plane the crowd gets rowdier.

"*Jackie! Jackie! Look over here!*" The clicking continues. *Klkk kllk kllk kllk kllk kllk kllk*.

She manages a small smile, the last one she can muster. Then she clutches the railing, still unsteady, as she makes her way down the stairs.

On the tarmac, she stares straight ahead and, with help from those around her, walks directly to the waiting cars.

Clint Hill heard what Jackie said to her husband. As Hill watches her struggling to ignore the chaos, he thinks to himself, "Unfortunately, the privacy she sought would be elusive for the rest of her life. People were fascinated by her, and there would be few places she could escape."

Meanwhile, JFK has a very different reaction. When he sees the crowds, a big smile crosses his face and he starts to wave. As Jackie makes her way to the cars, JFK jogs to the onlookers and begins shaking hands, with the usual handful of Secret Service agents following and guarding him closely.

By the time they get to Palm Beach proper, the light is starting to fade.

The moment they're inside the Kennedy compound, Jackie rushes straight to her bedroom.

In the past thirty-six hours, she's participated in a semipublic christening, had to stand for multiple photo sessions, was discharged from the hospital,

did a ninety-minute walking tour of the White House, had to oversee the moving of her children and belongings from one state to another, and then had a turbulent three-hour flight through a storm front.

She got through it.

But now, the exhaustion and stress are overwhelming. She collapses on the bed.

“I had a weeping fit,” she later recalled, “and I couldn’t stop crying for two days.” According to those who were there, once she made it to the bedroom, she “rarely emerged in the next week.”

Welcome to Palm Beach.

PART IV

The Human Bomb

Belmont, New Hampshire

December 10, 1960

Every day he scans the mail.

Thomas Murphy, the local Postmaster, is hoping for a new clue.

Yesterday, he was relieved when Special Agent Frank V. McDermott showed up at Belmont's post office, asking to interview him. Finally, someone else has shown some interest in whatever Richard Pavlick might be up to. In the interview, the Postmaster told McDermott everything he knew, handing over all the letters and postcards that Pavlick had sent him.

Even more promising, McDermott didn't interview just the Postmaster. He interviewed Pavlick's neighbors, the local police, and other Belmont residents, asking them about Pavlick's history and behavior.

To Murphy's frustration, though, no concrete action is taken.

"I kept hoping they'd pick him up in Washington," Murphy later recalled, but "nothing happened."

The worst part is, investigators can't find Pavlick—or any trace of his vehicle—in Washington, D.C. There aren't enough leads. They don't know where he is.

Murphy has no choice but to wait.

Naturally, he's anxious that something terrible will happen.

He's also hopeful that he might be able to find more info.

"I kept watching the mail, hoping another letter would show up. It finally did. It came Dec[ember] 10."

This time, the postmark is from Aiken, South Carolina. At first, the location doesn't make much sense. But the contents of the letter do—and the

message is ominous.

“Pavlick told me not to forward any mail to him after Dec[ember] 20. He said he might not be around after that date.”

Whatever’s going on ... whatever Pavlick’s up to ... one thing seems clear. It won’t have a happy ending.

Most important, like before, the most significant part of the letter has to do with geography.

“He wanted his mail sent along to general delivery to ‘Palm Springs.’”

As in California.

For Murphy, it doesn’t make sense. Why would Pavlick drive all the way across the country from South Carolina to the West Coast?

Unless, of course, he’s not.

That’s when Murphy realizes what’s really going on. The location—Palm Springs—“was a mistake. He meant Palm Beach, where Kennedy has his winter home.”

In isolation, maybe Murphy was being paranoid—but when you look at it all together ... First, Pavlick traveled to Hyannis Port, Massachusetts. Then to Washington, D.C. Now he’s going to Palm Beach, Florida. If there was any prior doubt about Pavlick’s movements, there’s not anymore. In each case, he’s clearly following JFK.

In that context, the postmark from South Carolina finally makes sense. The town of Aiken—where Pavlick posted his latest letter—is midway between Washington, D.C., and Palm Beach. He must’ve sent it on the way from D.C. to Florida.

If that’s that case, it means that right now, Pavlick is probably close to Palm Beach ... or already there.

Thomas Murphy reaches for the phone.

This time, he knows exactly who to call.

Palm Beach, Florida

Someone else is also scanning the mail.

Since the election, the Secret Service has been closely monitoring the various things sent to JFK and his family. Every new President receives an influx of mail from the general public, but the Kennedys start getting a greater volume of mail than any other First Family to date.

Most of it is adulation. Yet when it comes to the Kennedy family, there's also a sharp increase in what the Secret Service calls the "dark side" of public communication: angry screeds, bomb threats, death threats, and other incitements to violence.

As Secret Service Chief U. E. Baughman later reports, "the number of letters from the lunatic fringe increased by 300 percent" after JFK's election, and many of these messages "threaten his life and the lives of members of his family."

When it comes to who's responsible for tracking and monitoring all mail sent to Florida for JFK or his family, it falls to the Palm Beach Secret Service teams—a group that now includes JFK's detail, Jackie's detail, and the details for both children.

One unfortunate result of all the scanning is that all the mail gets delayed, including harmless personal correspondence.

Jackie notices this right away after some important letters don't arrive.

"It seems that I am not receiving my mail in a timely manner," she says to Clint Hill. "What is happening with our mail?"

"As a matter of security," he explains, "all incoming mail to this address is redirected back to the White House mailroom from the Palm Beach post office for sorting, examination, inspection, and distribution. Unfortunately,

this process causes a delay.”

“All the mail has to be inspected?”

Hill doesn’t want to scare her, but he knows the benefits of explaining the protocol.

“We need to ensure there is no hidden explosive material or poisons prior to delivering letters and packages to you and the President-elect,” he says. “And, of course, we screen for any mail that is threatening in nature.”

He doesn’t tell her about the large volume of hate mail or all the insults and vitriol, some of which is directed at her personally.

Jackie contemplates this for a moment.

“But what about personal letters from my friends and family?” she asks. “Obviously those letters are safe, and it’s important that I receive them in a timely manner.”

She’s not wrong. So Hill comes up with an idea.

She can tell close friends and family to put his name, “Clint Hill,” as the addressee. It’ll be like a secret code for those in the know.

“That way, you can control who has this special access,” he tells her, “and the post office can easily separate those letters and packages.” Anything with Hill’s name on it can go straight to her rather than be rerouted through Washington.

“It will be so clandestine,” Jackie says, seeming to like the idea. “My friends will find it amusing, so secretive!”

From that point forward, that’s the code for Jackie’s inner circle. Send it to *Clint Hill*.

To help make it work, every morning, the first thing Hill does is stop at the Palm Beach post office. Working with the clerks, he goes over all the mail addressed to the Kennedys, pulling out the ones with his name. Then, he personally delivers just those letters and packages.

“I soon learned that Mrs. Kennedy had a large number of family and friends,” he later joked. “I had never received so much mail in my life.”

Of course, the Palm Beach post office had no idea what else was about to show up in the mail.

Riviera Beach, Florida

Richard Pavlick has arrived—or at least he's pretty close at this point.

He's just booked a room at the Lakeside Motel in Riviera Beach.

It's a small city in northern Palm Beach County, Florida, along the Atlantic coast. The city of West Palm Beach, where the airport is located, is about five miles south. Less than a mile east, across the Lake Worth Lagoon, is the upscale community of Palm Beach itself.

Nine days ago, Richard Pavlick left wintry Belmont, New Hampshire, intending never to return. Today he's in a place that couldn't be more different: balmy weather, bright blue skies, and, of course, plenty of palm trees.

The proprietor and other guests of the Lakeside Motel probably haven't noticed this older man who seems to keep to himself.

If anyone saw him unload his belongings from his car, they might have noticed that one of the objects he was carrying was a large Underwood typewriter. Perhaps that's not the most typical thing that someone brings to a motel room. But it's hardly cause for alarm.

What is cause for alarm though? What he's actually typing.

For over a week now, Pavlick's primary form of communication has been sending postcards and letters. Since he left Belmont, there are no records of him talking to anyone during his nine-day journey, but he's left a trail of visits to post offices in different cities.

A few nights ago, in Aiken, South Carolina, Pavlick had sent the postcard to Thomas Murphy. Here in Florida, though, he's been writing about more

than where to forward his mail.

“Am here at the end of my rope,” he writes to an acquaintance in New Hampshire, adding, “[if] I die someplace in Florida you will read about it perhaps within 3 weeks.”

To another acquaintance, he declares on a postcard that “I am never going to N.H. again” and “I came down to die you will see it on T.V.”

For his fellow motel guests, the worst part is Pavlick’s car. At first glance, the slightly beat-up green 1950 Buick looks entirely unremarkable.

But inside?

He’s got several sticks of dynamite, wired with detonator caps.

It’s enough to blow the small motel to smithereens. But tomorrow morning, he’ll be aiming for something far bigger.

THE NEXT MORNING

JFK still goes to church.

In fact, since the election, he's made a point of showing continued pride in his religious faith—as if to demonstrate that all the anti-Catholic prejudice he encountered during the campaign did not—and will not—affect him.

Publicly and proudly, JFK rarely misses Sunday Mass, smiling and waving to the press on the way in and out.

Up at Hyannis Port, he goes to St. Francis Xavier, a church he and his siblings have attended since childhood. In Georgetown, it's Holy Trinity Roman Catholic Church, or St. Stephen Martyr Roman Catholic Church in Washington, D.C. For special occasions he'd sometimes attend the historic St. Matthew's Cathedral, only seven blocks from the White House.

Here, in Palm Beach, he usually attends St. Edward Catholic Church, a prominent institution that's served Catholic residents since the 1920s. JFK's father and mother, and his sisters and brothers, have gone to Sunday Mass at St. Edward for decades. It's a grand structure in the Spanish Renaissance style, only a five-minute drive from the Kennedy estate.

Since becoming President-elect, JFK has already attended St. Edward a few times, back when he was down here between Election Day and Thanksgiving. Naturally, the Florida press quickly descended on the church, with local reporters, photographers, and other onlookers waiting outside to catch a glimpse of him.

Sure, sometimes his regular routine has to be altered. On holidays and other special occasions, such as when JFK goes to confession, he attends a different church over in West Palm Beach—one that the press doesn't know about. He develops a trick to avoid crowds and the long lines for confession.

“He’d have a Secret Service man go stand in line for him,” Jackie later recalled. “You’d have to stand about an hour, then he’d come over and just slip in the line, so nobody really knew who he was. The priest never knew.” As a result, JFK attended confession “like anybody would.”

These occasions are exceptions, however. On most weekends, for regular Sunday Mass, he goes to St. Edward, embracing the community and local press who he knows will be there.

On the morning of December 11, the first Sunday since the family traveled down here together, that’s the plan. Mass at St. Edward. It’s a typical Palm Beach morning, with a clear sky that gets bluer as the sun rises.

The Secret Service have made all the necessary arrangements. They have a car and driver waiting for him on North Ocean Boulevard right outside the Kennedy estate, ready to head to St. Edward. Waiting at the front door of the residence, the agents know in advance exactly when he’ll leave. From there, they’ll escort him on foot to the front gate where the car awaits.

As the President-elect steps outside, he’s dressed in a suit, his usual choice for Mass.

On the roof of the nearby garage, just behind the front wall, is another armed agent. His job is to look out for anyone or anything suspicious inside or outside the property gate.

On most mornings, as JFK and the agents head to the front gate, the President-elect is making jokes or small talk—but today, there’s no record of what he said.

Up above, the morning sun is aglow. All around them, the palms and other trees are perfectly manicured.

It’s a beautiful day in a beautiful life.

Yet as always with John F. Kennedy—as a politician, as a father, and of course as a husband—appearances are deceiving.

Richard Pavlick is parked outside.

He's a patient man. He's been here awhile, watching the property.

It wasn't hard to figure out where JFK lives. At this point, most people in Palm Beach know the address of the Kennedy compound. The home itself is secluded behind a wall and a lot of trees, but the front gate is on North Ocean Boulevard, one of the main roads running parallel to the shore.

Pavlick already stopped here once or twice, either on foot or in his car. He looked around; he scouted the area. He even took a few photographs, using a camera he sometimes brings with him.

Did he do the same while in Washington, D.C.? Did he track down Kennedy's address in Georgetown, and drive or walk by, looking for the President-elect, trying to figure out where he'd have a better shot? No one knows.

Indeed, there aren't many details about Pavlick's few days in the D.C. area, aside from the postcard he sent to Thomas Murphy while he was there.

Perhaps, at the time, the chaos surrounding the birth of John Jr., combined with JFK's complicated travel schedule, made it difficult for Pavlick to predict the comings and goings of the President-elect. Also, a few days after Pavlick's arrival, the press found out that JFK and his family would be leaving D.C. for Florida after the first week of December. If the press learned it, that means Pavlick learned it too. Maybe by that time, he thought it'd be better to head south.

In any case, his long journey from New Hampshire has brought him here—to this time, to this place, in an inconspicuous parked car just outside the Kennedy residence on this sunny Sunday morning.

Instead of parking on North Ocean Boulevard, he parks on Monterey

Road. That's the street that runs perpendicular to North Ocean, intersecting in a T shape directly across from the Kennedys' front gate. It's the road the Secret Service requested that Palm Beach Police change from two-way to one-way so that cars can only drive *away* from the estate, not *toward* it.

This single change is why Richard Pavlick, in his 1950 Buick, can't race down Monterey and ram his car straight through the front gate or wall.

It's a smart adjustment by the Secret Service.

The problem is, Pavlick doesn't need to ram the wall. For maximum damage, he just needs what's in his car.

Thanks to the dynamite he purchased up in Concord, New Hampshire—along with detonator caps, about ten feet of wire, and a trigger mechanism—he's now driving a mobile bomb that can be detonated with the flick of a switch from the driver's seat.

Even if the gate and wall were impenetrable, all Pavlick needs to do is wait for that moment when JFK's car is entering or exiting the property. Right there, Pavlick can throw his own car in reverse, or do a quick U-turn, and drive straight into his target.

With a flick of the trigger, any person or vehicle in the immediate vicinity will be blown to pieces.

The only question that remains is: When is JFK coming through the gate? For Pavlick, that part's even easier.

All you have to do is know Kennedy's religion—his Catholicism, which infuriated Pavlick and so many other Americans during the campaign.

Every Sunday, JFK goes to Mass at St. Edward. Better yet, the church lists the start time on its public schedule.

If you want to catch a glimpse of JFK, all you have to do is arrive outside the Kennedy estate a little before ten in the morning.

That's exactly Pavlick's plan.

It's now 9:50 a.m.

He's sitting in his parked Buick, waiting for JFK to emerge.

It doesn't take long for the front gate to open.

Sure enough, there he is. The tall frame. The tanned skin. The winning smile.

President-elect John F. Kennedy. Just like at the airport near Hyannis

Port, roughly five weeks ago.

As usual, a few Secret Service agents are with him, but Pavlick doesn't much care. Even the best security in the world can't stop what he's about to unleash.

This is the moment Pavlick prepared for—the moment he wrote about: *I came down to die you will see it on T.V.*

This is it, the time to strike.

Pavlick clutches the wheel with one hand and reaches for the ignition with the other.

He's got seconds to pull it off. He's ready.

Until he sees something that stops him in his tracks.

For the most part, Jackie Kennedy has stayed in bed.

Following her difficult discharge from Georgetown Hospital, plus the brutal forty-eight hours that followed, she's exhausted, rarely emerging from her room to see or talk to anyone.

Normally, when they're in the same city, she and Jack attend Mass together. Like her husband, she was raised Catholic and makes it a point to show pride in their faith.

On this Sunday, however, she's not feeling well enough for the trip. It's hard to blame her. She knows if she goes, crowds of onlookers and photographers will likely follow them everywhere, turning church into a circus with them in the center ring.

As a result, on this morning, Jackie decides to skip Mass.

Still, she wants to say goodbye to her husband, so she comes down, bringing Caroline with her. They'll see him off together.

Apparently, though, Jack's already outside, so the two of them—mother and daughter—quickly follow.

Outside the house, but still on the property, JFK and a few Secret Service agents are waiting to get into the car.

Past the gate, a few onlookers have gathered.

JFK spots his fans, cheerfully waving at them as Jackie and Caroline head his way.

At this point, all three Kennedys are still within the confines of the property.

But for a few seconds—the most crucial seconds of all—mother and daughter are so close to the gate you can see them, clear as can be, even if you're on the opposite side of the street.

At the sight of them, Richard Pavlick freezes.

His plan ... his work ... everything was ready to go.

Dynamite? Check.

Clear line of sight? Check.

Timing of his church visit? Check, check, and check. This was the moment he prepared for. He was ready for JFK.

What he wasn't ready for was Jackie, the soon-to-be First Lady of the United States.

She looks just like she does in her pictures. But instead of the abstract, iconic image, she's suddenly a human being.

Next to her is three-year-old Caroline Kennedy, with her reddish-blond hair glowing in the morning sun.

Now Richard Pavlick has a choice. He can easily go through with it—no question, it'll all work. If he rams his car into JFK, or into the car that the President-elect is now entering, no one in the vicinity will survive. Including Jackie and Caroline.

As JFK ducks into the car, Pavlick knows this is his chance. He's only got a few more seconds. It's now or never.

Yet as the gate opens, and JFK's car pulls out, Pavlick simply ... sits there.

He could still make it work. The opportunity is there.

Yet as JFK's car rolls forward, Pavlick doesn't move. The sight of Jackie and Caroline makes him lose his nerve.

JFK's car turns onto North Ocean Boulevard and disappears.

Jackie and Caroline head back to the house.

For Pavlick, it isn't the right moment after all.

But he's a patient man. He knows where JFK's car is headed right now—and that his wife and children aren't with him.

Hitting the gas, Pavlick takes off.

JFK has a head start—but in no time at all, Pavlick's faded green Buick isn't far behind.

Secret Service Special Agent Gerald Blaine is in church.

He's not here to worship.

Blaine's here to protect JFK, who just sat down a few pews back from the priest.

Here at St. Edward Catholic Church, the service is about to start.

Blaine's colleague Agent Jerry Behn is in the pew just behind Kennedy. While others in the congregation say prayers and listen intently to the priest, Behn is scanning the pews, scanning each person, intently looking for anything out of the ordinary.

Two more agents in the President-elect's Secret Service detail are also in the pews. They both sit near an aisle, so at any moment they can spring into action. Like Behn, they're scanning the congregation, watching for suspicious movements or gestures.

Blaine himself isn't in the pews. He stands just inside the front entrance, where he's got one of the best views on who enters or exits.

As the congregants began streaming in, Blaine observes that most are "dressed in their Sunday finest," with the men in suits and the women in "fancy dresses and high heels."

That's why, several minutes into the service, Blaine notices when an older man, looking "disheveled," comes in through the front door.

"He just didn't seem to fit," Blaine later recalled.

Slowly, the man walks past Blaine, headed to the rear of the congregation.

Blaine keeps watching. He can feel it. Something isn't right with this newcomer.

"When he saw the President-elect sitting in a pew about six back from the

front, the man's eyes became transfixed," Blaine later described, "and he began walking in that direction."

Blaine needs to be careful. In this setting, he doesn't want to cause a scene. Blaine keeps his cool, planning his next move.

The moment the older man starts walking toward the President-elect, Blaine follows calmly but steadily behind him.

Blaine continues to keep his distance—remaining a few feet behind. That is, until it's clear "the man was heading for Kennedy's pew."

Grabbing the man's elbow, Blaine gently pulls him back, so he's no longer moving toward JFK.

As the older man stops, Blaine tightens his grip and quickly turns him around. With the same calm, measured movements, Blaine guides the man in the opposite direction, back toward the entrance.

Blaine is careful to do it as naturally as possible, so "anybody who was watching might think he was a church usher."

As they reach the door, Blaine turns to face the man and lets go of his elbow.

From there, Blaine "stare[s] into the man's eyes, without saying a word."

That's their full interaction. They face each other—and stare at each other—for minutes, looking straight into each other's eyes.

"Finally the man turned and walked out of the church." Blaine is still watching as the man heads down the sidewalk toward a parked car.

Crisis averted.

Still, Blaine's job isn't quite done.

As the man opens his car door and slides inside, Blaine makes a note of the "car's description and license plate."

A pale green Buick. Older model.

License plate number BI 606.

It's a good thing he did. In the days ahead, that plate number is about to become vital.

THREE DAYS LATER

December 14, 1960

Up north, the investigation never stopped.

After Boston Secret Service Agent Frank McDermott conducted his interviews with Thomas Murphy and the other townspeople in Belmont, New Hampshire, his field office reviewed his findings.

The Service concluded that based on the totality of Richard Pavlick's statements and letters—plus the clues to his current whereabouts—Pavlick posed a substantial potential threat to President-elect Kennedy.

The Boston office contacted the main headquarters in Washington, D.C., with a warning that Pavlick was heading there. Headquarters put agents on watch for Pavlick in the capital.

The problem is, nothing turned up. The Secret Service never located Pavlick or his vehicle. The trail went dry.

That is, until Postmaster Murphy received Pavlick's postcard from Aiken, South Carolina, and spotted the "Palm Springs" reference.

On December 14, a Special Agent from the Secret Service's Protective Research Section makes an urgent phone call to the team in South Florida.

For the first time, members of the President-elect's detail hear Richard Pavlick's name—and that he might be a threat. "[T]he above-named person," the D.C. agent informs them, "allegedly was en route to Palm Beach, Florida," and "this person should be considered dangerous as he indicated that he would get blown up but that he would do what had to be done."

On the call, the D.C. agent explains some of the backstory. "This person visited Hyannis Port, Massachusetts, after the last election and had observed the movements of President-elect Kennedy and had stated that the men

guarding Kennedy were stupid.”

Most important, “Pavlick operated a 1950 green Buick sedan automobile, New Hampshire license number BI 606.”

That’s the key.

It’s a direct match for the license plate that Gerald Blaine saw a few days back, on the Buick outside St. Edward Church. Blaine didn’t know it at the time, but the suspicious stranger he chased out of church was already a wanted man.

Headquarters instructs the Palm Beach teams on how to proceed. First, they should “call the Palm Beach, Florida, Police Department and the West Palm Beach, Florida, Police Department and solicit their cooperation in locating this individual.”

Furthermore, “if located the subject should be searched for explosives as well as firearms.”

It’s not just the local police departments that get involved. Headquarters adds that “the Postmasters at West Palm Beach and Palm Beach, Florida, should be alerted to be on the lookout for this subject at their General Delivery Windows and that they should be instructed to call this Service as well as the local police in the event he called for mail.”

Immediately after the call, Secret Service agents in Florida get to work. Warning notices are sent “to all police agencies in this district to be on the lookout for this subject who was wanted by this Service for questioning.”

Roughly six days after the start of the investigation in Belmont, the authorities are now aligned and ready to strike. The Boston Secret Service, the HQ in Washington, the field office in South Florida, the President-elect’s security detail, the Palm Beach Police Department, the West Palm Beach Police Department, and the relevant post offices are all working together.

Their only goal: find Richard Pavlick.

Pavlick doesn't make it easy.

On the morning of Thursday, December 15, at roughly 8:00 a.m., his green Buick pulls into the parking lot of the Twin Palms Motel in West Palm Beach, Florida.

He checks in here after spending several nights in nearby Riviera Beach, less than five miles north.

Why does Pavlick change location? No one knows the answer. Maybe he had problems at the prior motel. Maybe this new place, the Twin Palms, is a cheaper option. Or maybe he simply feels the need to stay mobile, in case the authorities are trying to track him.

The most likely possibility, however, may be the simplest. West Palm Beach is closer to Palm Beach than Riviera Beach is. From his new motel, Pavlick is just a short drive away from both the Kennedy estate and St. Edward Church.

It's been four days since Pavlick drove a car full of dynamite to JFK's home. Since then, he's been lying low. As always, Pavlick is patient. This coming Sunday—three days from now—JFK will again attend church. For Pavlick, it's the perfect opportunity.

How do we know?

Pavlick hasn't stopped writing letters.

Between December 11 and now, he's sent more letters and postcards from his motel room, some typed and some handwritten.

Like before, the messages are ominous.

"I may not be alive more than two more weeks," one letter to an acquaintance in Belmont says. "Then the papers will get a lot of publicity from me, not pleasant ... I would like to tell you what I have in mind and

where but that cannot be done, you will have to read about it or see it on T.V.”

In the letter, apparently written on December 11 but postmarked the next day, Pavlick also writes, “Rode up by the Kennedy place today as they were going to church. This may mean something someday. It may not be pleasant, but you know me.”

In another part of the letter, he writes, “You would be astounded if I told you what may or may not happen, if it happens then all the papers will have a big story that has never happened before.”

As for the recipients, not all are Belmont residents.

One letter, postmarked December 14, is to Vice President Richard Nixon, “expressing his regret that Nixon lost the election.”

Another letter of unknown contents was sent to Norris Cotton, the Republican Senator from New Hampshire.

Once Pavlick checks in at the Twin Palms, he carries his sparse belongings, including his typewriter, from his car toward room 2.

The small motel is on the southwestern corner of a commercial intersection. As Pavlick walks through the parking lot, he’s directly across the street from another economy motel, which is only about fifty feet away.

The name of that place?

Woody’s Motel.

Officer Lester Free, of the Palm Beach Police Department, is having a typical Thursday morning, patrolling the area, as he often does.

Just after 9:00 a.m., he's driving over the Royal Poinciana Bridge, a long, low drawbridge that connects West Palm Beach to Palm Beach proper over the picturesque Intracoastal Waterway.

It's a typically warm day, and the Florida sun gives Officer Free great visibility over the water.

For most, it's a beautiful view—but for Officer Free ... something catches his eye. Not in the water, but on the bridge itself.

Coming the other way, headed toward him in the direction of Palm Beach, is a pale green Buick.

This is the day after every officer in the Palm Beach Police Department received unusual instructions from the Secret Service.

Be on the lookout for a green out-of-state Buick. The car's owner, apparently, is a person of interest and potentially dangerous.

Officer Free doesn't hesitate.

"I wheeled right around on the bridge and followed him," Free later recalled.

Of course, he needs to make sure it's the right vehicle.

As they leave the bridge, Free drives just behind the Buick.

"When he caught the light at Main and Bradley, I got close enough to check the license," Free later recalled.

Plate number BI 606.

He double-checks to make sure. That's the one. Direct hit.

From there, Free radios police HQ. According to the briefing, if they spot the vehicle, the police must alert the Secret Service immediately. Also, the

police were told there may be explosives in the car. Better to get some backup.

As he follows the Buick, Free knows the rules. You can't just pull over a vehicle without cause. He needs a reason. Free had noticed that the Buick was driving a bit erratically back on the bridge, crossing over the center line.

That's all it takes.

At 9:06 a.m., "I pulled him over at County Road," Free later reported.

The officer walks to the driver's side of the Buick.

Behind the wheel is an older man, slightly heavysset, with a wide face and white hair.

His name?

Richard Paul Pavlick.

"What did I do?" Pavlick asks.

Free quickly explains that Pavlick crossed the center line on the bridge.

"Plenty of people do that," Pavlick says. "Why are you picking on me?"

Just then, sirens scream in the distance, quickly getting louder.

"In a matter of seconds, there were ten policemen and four cars there," the officer later recalled.

Pavlick looks around.

Next thing he knows, he's in the back of a police vehicle.

Technically, Pavlick is brought in for “Vagrancy and Reckless Driving by Crossing a Double Yellow Line.” But he knows—everyone at Palm Beach Police headquarters knows—this isn’t about a minor traffic violation.

The clerks at headquarters quickly get Pavlick’s information and process the necessary paperwork.

Within about thirty minutes, they’re ready to question him. It’s the start of what will be a long, whirlwind twenty-four hours, for both Pavlick and the authorities who have him under their supervision.

The first team in is Sergeant Detective Floyd Riggs, from the Palm Beach Police Department, accompanied by a Secret Service Special Agent who had rushed to the station the moment the Service was notified that Pavlick had been detained.

The previous evening, they heard about the investigation. They’re aware of the warnings that started with Postmaster Thomas Murphy and continued with Frank McDermott’s investigation.

As interviewers, it doesn’t take long to ask Pavlick about politics—and his views on John F. Kennedy.

Pavlick plays it cool.

“Pavlick denied any ill feelings or malice toward the President-elect and members of the Kennedy family,” is what they wrote in their report. Pavlick even tells them that he “recalled favorably the President-elect’s father [sic], John Fitzgerald, as a former mayor of Boston.”

So why’s he in Palm Beach?

“He was vague as to his reason for being in the [...] area, saying that he had driven down from Belmont, N.H., via Washington, D.C., Aiken, S.C., and other stops the preceding week.”

While it may be odd that Pavlick doesn't have a ready answer, it's hardly a crime to travel from one city to another, even without a particular reason. Better yet, Pavlick has a history of taking road trips to warmer states during the winter, so it's not unusual for him to be on the road in December.

The interrogators note that "subject answered all questions in a polite, cooperative manner," and in fact seems to almost enjoy the conversation.

After several rounds of questions, they go on to say that "subject made no incriminating statements other than to admit that he had bought some dynamite in Manchester, New Hampshire, about a month ago."

Of course they press him on the dynamite.

Pavlick tells them that he simply "intended to blast out some stumps in his backyard or property" up in Belmont, but that he never used it. He adds that "he was not carrying any dynamite with him in his automobile and did not have any dynamite or explosives in his motel room in West Palm Beach."

So where's the dynamite now?

According to Pavlick, he "buried it in his yard prior to leaving for his trip south."

For what it's worth, Pavlick has no prior arrest record beyond traffic violations, and he owns no weapons. He says he used to own a shotgun for hunting, but sold it a month ago, before he left New Hampshire.

Pavlick also volunteers that his favorite hobby is "raising all kinds of flowers."

The interview goes on for an hour and fifteen minutes, ending at 11:00 a.m.

After that, the authorities don't have much to go on. The police inform the Secret Service that if "no additional evidence [is] developed," they'll have no choice but to "release the prisoner."

Bad news for sure.

But here's the good news: in the hour that Pavlick was being interviewed, the Secret Service field office in Miami as well as agents stationed locally have been very busy.

Pulling together the existing evidence about Pavlick—from McDermott's findings, to Pavlick's letters to Thomas Murphy, to Gerald Blaine's report of Pavlick trying to approach JFK inside St. Edward Church—they start

building a case.

From there, the Service contacts the U.S. Attorney's office in Miami as well as the U.S. Attorney in Concord, New Hampshire.

Together, they come up with a plan, authorizing a federal arrest warrant for Pavlick.

Pavlick is charged under Title 18, U.S. Code Section 871, "Threats against President." According to the formal complaint, filed by the office of U.S. Attorney Maurice Bois in New Hampshire, "The Defendant indicated he was going to make a human bomb and destroy himself and the President-elect, John F. Kennedy."

Now, the Secret Service can keep Pavlick in custody once the local police discharge him.

At this point, however, the authorities have obtained nothing self-incriminating from Pavlick's interrogation—and there's no physical evidence beyond a few ominous but vague letters. They still need more to go on.

Assistant U.S. Attorney Robert Rust, handling the case that day at the Miami U.S. Attorney's office, has an idea. He starts calling "every hardware store and lumberyard in New Hampshire." Finally, on the thirty-seventh phone call, he reaches the New Hampshire Machinery & Explosives Company in Concord. A clerk tells Rust they have receipts indicating that Richard Pavlick purchased several sticks of dynamite at their store in recent weeks.

With this information in hand, Rust hops in his car and drives that afternoon to Palm Beach. He's going to help the Secret Service and local police handle the legalities of Pavlick's case.

The key to everything, Rust and the other authorities believe, could be inside that 1950 Buick.

By midday, several hours after police detained Richard Pavlick, authorities in Palm Beach are scouring his messy car, digging through the interior, under the hood, and, of course, in the trunk.

It turns out Pavlick's story doesn't quite check out.

According to the Service's official report, "A search of the car was made, and two (2) sticks of dynamite were found in a pair of trousers and five (5) st[i]cks of dynamite were found in a box. These were five Atlas Giant Gelatin 40% sticks and two Atlas Farmex Ditching sticks."

These are, without question, the explosives that Robert Rust, from the Miami U.S. Attorney's office, just confirmed that Pavlick recently purchased up in Concord, New Hampshire, over a period of several weeks just before and after the election. The same sticks of dynamite that Pavlick told police he'd buried in his yard.

The cops also find detonator caps, a six-volt battery, electrical wiring, and a detonator switch. Put together, it's all you need to create a lightweight bomb that could be set off with the flick of a switch. Enough explosives, according to the man who sold Pavlick the supplies, to destroy "a good sized building."

They discover that Pavlick had even drilled holes in the chassis of his car to run a detonation cord from the dynamite in the trunk to a detonation switch near the front seat.

With this new physical evidence—and proof that Pavlick lied during his earlier interrogation—the Secret Service can now interrogate him again.

From here, Pavlick's story starts to unravel.

In two further interviews—conducted that night and the next morning—Pavlick continues to formally deny any wrongdoing. But his statements

become increasingly erratic and full of contradictions.

He admits that, yes, he drove past or parked near the Kennedy compound on North Ocean Boulevard on multiple occasions ... and even took photos of it. He admits that he learned the location of St. Edward Church, and went inside on one occasion—although he insists it was not the day that Kennedy was there.



On December 15, 1960, police and Secret Service agents search Richard Pavlick's 1950 Buick. They discover a total of seven sticks of dynamite in the car's trunk. Pavlick originally purchased the explosives in Concord, New Hampshire, then transported them to Palm Beach, Florida. (Credit: Photo by Secret Service)

But the more Pavlick talks—even as he continues to assert his innocence—the more he starts to reveal much darker motivations.

“He stated he had driven past the Kennedy residence and had looked over St. Edward Church and had arrived at the conclusion that anyone who really wanted to kill the President-elect could do it if he was willing to die,” the interviewers write in their report.

Naturally, the agents press him hard on the dynamite.

Pavlick doesn't have any cogent reason for carrying dynamite in his car, or for why he lied about it earlier. And although he denies planning to use the dynamite to kill anyone, he also says, according to the questioners, that "he knew that he would be blown to bits, but that this did not matter."

Eventually, according to the interrogators, Pavlick "confessed his intention of making himself a human bomb and furnished some details of his plan to carry out his threat."

The interrogators drill down on the date of Sunday, December 11, getting Pavlick to repeat over and over again what he did that day. Their goal is to separate the truth from his obvious lies.

Over time, Pavlick gets worn down, and a recurring theme emerges. Gradually, he admits that he has no problem with the idea of killing President-elect Kennedy—nor does he seem to place any value on the lives of Secret Service agents. But he's reluctant to harm innocent bystanders. According to investigators, "he did not want to kill a lot of people but that it would have been 'all right' if he had gotten rid of Kennedy."

It's this idea of protecting innocents that gives the interrogators a better idea of what actually happened—and, most important, what didn't happen—when Pavlick parked outside the Kennedy estate.

The authorities have no doubt that Pavlick was planning to kill John F. Kennedy with the dynamite in his car. But the reason he stopped? An innocent bystander. Or rather, a *particular* innocent bystander: the future First Lady, Jacqueline Kennedy—and, of course, young Caroline Kennedy.

The Secret Service hones in on this detail. According to its official report:

Pavlick said he had been parked on a street directly in front of the Kennedy residence (Monterey Street [sic]) at 9:50 A.M., last Sunday, December 11, 1960, when the President-elect entered a car to go to church and that he had the ten sticks of dynamite all ready to go and all he had to do was drive from his parking place into the side of the President-elect's car, pull the knife switch under the seat of the car and wipe out the President-elect and all the guards. He said that he hesitated because he did not wish to kill Mrs. Kennedy or the children.... He stated he would wait until another time at the church

or some other place to commit this crime.

If that's true, when it came to saving JFK's life, it wasn't the Postmaster, the Secret Service, the local police, or anyone else who had kept him from being killed. Simply put, it was Jackie and Caroline—and really, just outrageous timing and luck.

Looking back at the Secret Service's statement, there's still the question of whether Pavlick had dynamite on his person when he entered St. Edward Church.

Although their search of Pavlick's car did reveal two sticks of dynamite in a pair of pants, the authorities couldn't find any corroborating evidence that he was carrying dynamite that day—and in the end, at least in their reports, they stop pursuing the possibility.

The officials do conclude, however, that after his aborted mission on Sunday, December 11, Pavlick's plan was to strike again on the following Sunday, with JFK's church being the likely location. According to the reports, Pavlick “said he then planned to kill the President-elect and himself at St. Edward Church on December 18, 1960.”

That means if Pavlick wasn't arrested on the bridge, there were only three days left before he would've again gunned for JFK.

The afternoon of his arrest, Pavlick is transferred from the station to the Palm Beach County Jail. Meanwhile, local press has learned of the story, and reporters start heading to the jail. Although the Secret Service is tight-lipped, local police give some statements and information.

With permission from the authorities, some reporters even get to talk to Pavlick himself. He speaks to them voluntarily, making several statements that don't help his case. Although he never overtly admits to wanting to kill JFK, he says of Palm Beach that “the security here is lousy ... I drove around the place [Kennedy's house] several times.... That Kennedy is a fool the way he travels around so much, shaking hands with everybody.”

Naturally, the journalists egg him on, asking for his thoughts about JFK himself.

“I had the crazy idea I wanted to stop Kennedy from being President,” Pavlick says. “Kennedy money bought the White House and the Presidency.”

At one point, Pavlick adds he had no intention to kill Kennedy, but that if he *did* want to kill him, he knows how he'd do it. "I would have waited in my car near his driveway 'til I saw him come out," he explains. "Then I would have driven up alongside—and pffft! That would have been it. I had ten sticks of dynamite and seven detonator caps."

At 8:00 p.m. on the evening of his arrest, Pavlick appears at a hearing. He's advised of his rights. Bail is set at \$100,000, an amount that the press reports is one of the largest ever posted in the history of the county.

Later, the charges will be augmented to include the transportation of explosives across state lines to destroy property, and Pavlick's bond is increased to a total of \$250,000.

At the hearing, the judge orders a psychiatric evaluation for Pavlick at the earliest possible date. This question of Pavlick's mental fitness—whether he is legally competent to stand trial—will become critical in the weeks and months ahead.

At roughly 9:30 p.m., after the hearing, the Secret Service and police, accompanied by Robert Rust, travel with Pavlick to his motel room in West Palm Beach. With Pavlick's consent, they conduct a thorough search and allow him to get some clothes and personal belongings.

Searching his room, the authorities find three more sticks of dynamite, bringing the total number to ten. They also find other evidence, including a notebook with a record of his movements and some letters and postcards that he had written but not sent.



A press photographer captured this photograph of Richard Pavlick just after his December 15 hearing in West Palm Beach, Florida. The snapshot is one of only a small handful of photographs of Pavlick known to exist. (Credit: AP Photo)

Among Pavlick's papers, one unsent typewritten letter is addressed to "All Citizens of the United States of America." Apparently, this was the letter that he intended to be shared publicly after the explosion.

It's vaguely worded but clearly some sort of manifesto. "If death and destruction and injury to persons has resulted from my vicious actions then I am truly sorry," he writes. "It is hoped that by my actions that a better country and a more attentive citizenry has resulted and corrected any abuses of ambitious moneyed persons or groups, then it will not have been in vain."

The "ambitious moneyed persons" presumably refers to the Kennedy family, and the "groups" refers to the Catholic Church.

Reading the letter right there in the room, Robert Rust turns to Pavlick and says, "You really did come here to kill John F. Kennedy."

"Yes," Pavlick responds.

After the search, U.S. Marshals bring Pavlick back to the Palm Beach County Jail, where he spends the night.

The following morning, December 16, 1960, authorities again question Pavlick. He continues to deny any intention to kill, but in a brief handwritten statement he writes, "I believe that the Kennedys bought the Presidency and the Whitehouse [sic] ... it was my intention to remove him the only way that

was available to me.”

In the statement, Pavlick again brings up his reluctance to harm innocents, adding that “circumstances were never satisfactory here at Palm Beach because too many lives would be involved.”

As the Secret Service concludes its final interrogation, there’s one last detail that still needs clarification. Why did he move to that motel in West Palm Beach directly across the street from Woody’s Motel, where all the Secret Service agents were staying?

Turns out this “was not planned,” because Pavlick “was not aware that he was living so close to the protective detail.”

In other words, that part was just coincidence.

After their final interrogation, authorities arrange to transport Pavlick from Palm Beach to the Broward County Jail, north of Miami, to await psychiatric evaluation.

Five weeks prior, Richard Pavlick had been living in the small town of Belmont, New Hampshire, hanging around the local post office.

Now, he’s on his way to a county jail in South Florida, awaiting trial on federal charges.

His life changed with the results of an election—John F. Kennedy’s victory to become President.

A few years later, U. E. Baughman, the Chief of the Secret Service, will write that Pavlick’s Palm Beach plot “ranks with the closest calls any President ever had.” He goes on to reiterate, “Hardly anybody realized just how near we came one bright December morning to losing our President-elect to a madman.”

As the alleged assassin enters his cell in Broward County, one thing is certain. Richard Pavlick will never lay eyes on John F. Kennedy again.

PART V

Aftermath

So what's Kennedy's reaction?

Naturally, the Secret Service notify JFK after Pavlick's arrest.

In conversations with aides, the President-elect treats it almost as a curiosity, or even a joke.

"He wasn't panicked," Kennedy's speechwriter Ted Sorensen later said. "He told me about it and was ... bemused."

No surprise. When it comes to his own security, JFK simply doesn't seem to worry. Maybe it's his personality—or his life experiences.

Why should he worry? Less than two decades earlier, JFK lived through the most destructive war in human history. The PT boat he commanded was destroyed by an enemy warship in the middle of the Pacific Ocean—and he led his injured men, helping them survive despite being stranded for days on tiny islands with no food or water, surrounded by hostile enemy forces, to safety.

After that, he's not about to be intimidated by a loner from New Hampshire driving an old Buick.

Most important, JFK is a month away from being the President of the United States. He's got plenty of other things to worry about.

Which brings us to Jackie. How does she react to the thwarted attack?

To this day, it's not clear if she ever learned about it.

After the Secret Service give the news to JFK, "it was left up to him to decide whether it was something he should share with his wife."

Clint Hill learns what happens, of course—but he decides to wait for Jackie, to see if she wants to discuss it with him. She never brings it up.

It may seem unlikely that she never hears about it, especially considering it was all over the newspapers. But if she does learn about it, she keeps it to

herself.

In the end, the Kennedys don't seem to pay it much mind, but for the agents sworn to protect them it's a major wake-up call.

"I never discussed it with Mrs. Kennedy," Clint Hill later wrote, "but the knowledge that we had come so close to an assassination attempt prior to the Inauguration gave each of us a reason to be more vigilant and determined to ensure the maximum security possible.... Nothing could be left to chance."

"After eight years without an assassination attempt on President Eisenhower," Gerald Blaine later reflected, "the Pavlick incident was a grim reminder that the White House Secret Service could never let down their guard."

"The closeness of the call was appalling," Secret Service Chief U. E. Baughman would add.

Looking back, it came down to pure luck and fortunate timing—Jackie's decision to walk outside with Caroline and say goodbye to her husband—that made the difference between a routine Sunday and an unspeakable tragedy.

"Had [Pavlick] not had a change of heart," Blaine would later say, "there was little we could've done. We would've had a dead President-elect."

The Kennedys themselves may've been unconcerned about Richard Pavlick's thwarted assassination attempt, but the local press flock to the plot. The day after Pavlick's arrest, reporters are chasing facts and filing their stories.

Given the intense ongoing media focus on JFK and Jackie—and every minor detail of the Presidential transition—it seems destined to be a major news story. Indeed, it's all set to break in the afternoon editions of the December 16 newspapers.

Unexpectedly, though, the news cycle spins in a different direction.

At 10:27 that morning, two large passenger airliners collide in the air over New York City during a heavy snowstorm, killing all but one of the 127 passengers onboard.

On the ground, the resulting debris, in Brooklyn and Staten Island, kills five more. Several buildings and homes are also destroyed or damaged. The only surviving passenger is an eleven-year-old boy—Stephen Baltz of Wilmette, Illinois—traveling alone to visit relatives. He's rushed to the hospital with critical injuries. His left leg was broken and he had burns across his face, chest, left arm, and back.

The tragic crash dominates the news, with churchgoers carrying pictures of Stephen, praying for him during the Christmas season. Countless New Yorkers offer to donate blood, flooding the hospital with calls.

During the night, a nurse says he woke up, sounding healthy.

It doesn't last. Young Stephen is the sole survivor for only a night, and dies at 10:00 a.m. the following day.

Needless to say, the country is riveted. It's the deadliest commercial air crash in history at the time, not just in the United States but anywhere in the world. In 1960, mainstream commercial passenger air travel is still relatively

new, so the incident also raises urgent questions about airline safety.

With this unforeseen tragedy dominating the news, the Pavlick story fades from view.

The *Boston Globe*, a newspaper that probably covers the Kennedys more than any other, runs an all-caps headline on December 16.

N.Y. AIRLINERS COLLIDE

The smaller secondary headline is “Ex-Hub Letter Carrier Is Nabbed in Kennedy Death Plot,” with the subtitle “Planned ‘Human Bomb’ Blast Near President-elect’s Winter Home.”

It’s the same at other papers. The *Miami Herald* had sent reporters to Palm Beach to cover Pavlick’s arrest and the unfolding revelation of his assassination plot, but on December 17, the paper’s headline becomes: “Pilots’ Voices May Hold Clue to Worst Air Crash; 132 Dead.” A story about Pavlick’s plot appears below the fold.

While some news organizations do give the Pavlick story consistent coverage over the next week or so—especially the *Boston Globe*, the South Florida papers, and some New Hampshire papers—the story never gains much national traction.

An additional factor for this might be that the coverage itself sometimes takes a lighthearted approach, focusing on Pavlick’s erratic behavior. The *Miami Herald* describes Pavlick “Ho-Ho-Ho-ing like a Santa who lost his beard” in the Palm Beach police station—and pokes fun at his irreverent statements to reporters.

Assassinations may not seem like something to make light of, but the press doesn’t have access to all the facts. Only the Secret Service and the local police know how truly close Pavlick came to killing JFK.

Within weeks, news coverage of Pavlick’s thwarted assassination plot almost entirely ceases. The story basically disappears—from the media and from the public’s consciousness.

As the new year begins, at the start of a new decade, public focus is on the future.

Plus, by mid-January, anticipation has reached a fever pitch for another major news event that’s just days away.

The swearing-in of a new President.

Washington, D.C.

January 20, 1961

The day begins with Mass. After all, it is a Sunday.

JFK attends services at Holy Trinity Church in Georgetown.

On this morning, he has even less expectation for privacy than usual. That's because it's Inauguration Day. After the service, John F. Kennedy will take the oath of office to become the thirty-fifth President of the United States. His wife, Jacqueline Kennedy, will become First Lady.

The capital is abuzz—and all over the country and the world people will be watching and listening.

Throngs have already started to gather outside the East Portico of the U.S. Capitol building.

On a raised dais overlooking the crowd, a few hundred official guests and invited guests are seated, carefully arranged.

In a row just behind the lectern are outgoing President Dwight Eisenhower, outgoing First Lady Mamie Eisenhower, outgoing Vice President Richard Nixon, and soon-to-be Vice President Lyndon Johnson. Jackie Kennedy is seated between Dwight and Mamie Eisenhower. Next to Eisenhower, there's an empty seat for the new President.

As the ceremony begins, JFK is still inside the chamber, waiting for his moment.

Outside, the event has some early mishaps.

As Cardinal Richard Cushing delivers the opening invocation, wisps of smoke start drifting up near the lectern. At first, no one quite knows where they're coming from.

Soon, right after the Cardinal says “Amen,” several Secret Service agents and firefighters rush down the crowded aisle on the platform to put out a mechanical fire that had developed in one of the motors used to raise and lower the lectern.

Thankfully, no one is injured, and the platform isn’t damaged. The event can continue.

There are more blessings, followed by a rendition of “The Star-Spangled Banner” by renowned singer Marian Anderson. After Anderson, Senator Lyndon Johnson takes the oath of office as Vice President.

Once Johnson is sworn in, the eighty-six-year-old poet Robert Frost approaches the podium. Kennedy had invited the eminent poet to recite a poem to introduce him. JFK has always admired Frost’s work, and he likes the idea of showcasing American literature during the Inaugural ceremony.

Slowly, Frost walks to the lectern, his white hair blowing in the cold wind. Frost had written a new poem, called “Dedication,” just for the occasion. He carries a few sheets of paper with him, from which he’ll recite the new work.

After a few lines, though, Frost falters. He stumbles over his words, then stops reading entirely. Turns out, the winter sunlight is so bright—reflecting off snow on the ground from a big snowstorm the day before—that Frost simply can’t read the pages.

Vice President Johnson jumps up and tries to come to the poet’s aid, using his top hat to shield the sun. But it’s no use.

After a few awkward moments, Frost himself saves the day. Instead of reciting the new poem he’d written, he spontaneously recites from memory “The Gift Outright,” a poem he wrote two decades earlier. Despite the high pressure of the moment, Frost doesn’t miss a word.

Now the stage is set.

John F. Kennedy emerges onto the platform and approaches the lectern. He’s joined by Chief Justice Earl Warren.

At 12:51 p.m., Justice Warren leads JFK line by line through the oath of office. Raising his right hand, with his left on a family Bible, Kennedy officially takes the oath.

Finally, everyone can say the words: President John F. Kennedy.

All that's left is for the new President to address the nation.

Kennedy had spent weeks working on his Inaugural speech, collaborating with speechwriter Ted Sorensen. JFK felt strongly that it should be brief. "It's more effective that way," he had said, "and I don't want people to think I'm a windbag."

Kennedy is well aware that much of his political success has come from his ability to stir crowds with inspiring oratory. Today, expectations are high.

Back when he started running for President, it was JFK's message of generational change and hope for the future—the "New Frontier"—that defined his campaign.

He sticks with that theme here too.

After only a few lines, he lays it out:

Let the word go forth from this time and place ... that the torch has been passed to a new generation of Americans—born in this century, tempered by war, disciplined by a hard and bitter peace, proud of our ancient heritage—and unwilling to witness or permit the slow undoing of those human rights to which this nation has always been committed, and to which we are committed today at home and around the world.

Addressing Cold War fears, which have dominated recent politics, he adds, "Let every nation know, whether it wishes us well or ill, that we shall pay any price, bear any burden, meet any hardship, support any friend, oppose any foe, to assure the survival and the success of liberty."

Standing up to the Soviet Union is a key part of Kennedy's platform, but he emphasizes a hopeful future rather than continued belligerence. "To those nations who would make themselves our adversary, we offer not a pledge but a request: that both sides begin anew the quest for peace, before the dark powers of destruction unleashed by science engulf all humanity in planned or accidental self-destruction.... Let us never negotiate out of fear. But let us never fear to negotiate."



On January 20, 1961, President John F. Kennedy delivers his Inaugural Address. Behind Kennedy to his right are outgoing First Lady Mamie Eisenhower, First Lady Jacqueline Kennedy, and outgoing President Dwight Eisenhower. To Kennedy's left are Vice President Lyndon Johnson and outgoing Vice President Richard Nixon. (Credit: SAM SCHULMAN/AFP via Getty Images)

His speech, like his campaign, offers an idealistic vision of the United States, all of it culminating with those words that will become permanently linked with his Presidency.

“And so, my fellow Americans: ask not what your country can do for you—ask what you can do for your country.”

It's a phrase that will pass down to future generations, meant to inspire a sense of civic duty and moral responsibility in all Americans, especially young people. As those words hang in the air, he brings the speech to a

rousing conclusion, once again calling for a shared moral purpose.

Finally, whether you are citizens of America or citizens of the world, ask of us here the same high standards of strength and sacrifice which we ask of you. With a good conscience our only sure reward, with history the final judge of our deeds, let us go forth to lead the land we love, asking His blessing and His help, but knowing that here on earth God's work must truly be our own.

The speech lasts only fourteen minutes.

Of course, the crowd cheers, but from up on the podium, JFK has no way of knowing whether his words connected with listeners, or how the address would be received by the wider public.

He doesn't have to wait long.

The speech "stirred the heart," *Time* magazine writes.

The *New Yorker* compares JFK favorably to Cicero, the famous Roman orator.

"The reaction to President Kennedy's Inaugural speech was even more remarkable than the speech itself," James Reston of the *New York Times* writes, because "everyone praised it." The address represents nothing less, Reston continues, than the "revival of the beauty of the English language."

Another effusive review comes from Senator Mike Monroney of Oklahoma, who says it's the best Inaugural speech he's ever heard—and he's heard the previous twelve.

One of the most cherished responses comes from a person sitting only a few feet away.

"It was so soaring," Jackie Kennedy would say. "I knew I was hearing something great."

Right after he finishes, she wants to share her reaction with him. "There was so much I wanted to say! But I could scarcely embrace him in front of all those people."

Instead, she puts her hand on his cheek and tells him, "Jack, you were so wonderful!"

These are the first words Jackie Kennedy speaks as First Lady, to her husband, the President of the United States.

It's a heck of a good way to start a Presidency.
Now comes the hard part.

Miami, Florida*January 1961*

The night after Richard Pavlick's arrest, during his hearing, a federal judge in Palm Beach County told authorities that Pavlick must undergo psychiatric evaluation before the case against him could proceed.

The request raises key questions: Is Richard Pavlick mentally sound? Is he fit to stand trial?

Both the Secret Service and reporters have already learned that on two or three occasions—in previous decades—Pavlick had checked himself in to receive psychiatric care. In fact, on the day after his arrest, he told reporters, “I have what you call a depressive-mania psychosis. I feel melancholy at times.”

Yet at the same time, when it came to killing Kennedy, everything about Pavlick's plot was premeditated. He clearly planned it several weeks in advance, purchased dynamite and the requisite components to assemble a bomb. He even traveled to multiple cities, studying and learning JFK's travel routines.

Eventually, mental health professionals weigh in.

After Pavlick is transferred from Broward County to Miami-Dade County, two court-appointed psychiatrists examine him, one of them selected by Pavlick's lawyer.

They determine that Pavlick is not mentally competent to stand trial. According to news reports following the case, the doctors conclude he has “homicidal tendencies” and is “dangerous” because of his mental condition.

Based on the psychiatrists' recommendation, a Miami federal judge

orders Pavlick confined to a medical center in Springfield, Missouri, which itself is part of a federal prison.

Despite all this, there's still one person who believes that Richard Pavlick is fit to stand trial. That person? Richard Pavlick. He claims he's innocent and is determined to have his day in court.

In March 1962, after over a year of confinement in the medical center, Pavlick finds a lawyer to file a writ of habeas corpus in district court. Upon reviewing the case, a federal judge in Missouri orders that Pavlick be returned to Florida for his competency to be reevaluated.

Thus begins a long legal odyssey that will put Pavlick in front of lawyers, judges, and prosecutors. There are several additional hearings and many motions filed.

The various judges don't agree. A Florida district judge argues that Pavlick's confinement in the medical center is warranted because he's "mentally incompetent as to be unable to understand the proceedings against him and to properly assist in his own defense," but "if released he would endanger the safety of the officers, the property, and other interests of the United States of America."

A Missouri judge, however, believes that Pavlick's rights are being violated, because "the petitioner is being held in prison indefinitely without trial."

The case remains in legal limbo for years, and Pavlick is occasionally transferred to different institutions.

Throughout this time, Pavlick goes on a letter-writing spree, arguing to newspapers, elected officials, and anyone who will pay attention that he's being unfairly detained and deserves his day in court.

In 1966, Pavlick's case takes an interesting turn when a conservative-leaning New Hampshire newspaper, the *Manchester Union Leader*, undertakes a crusade to have Pavlick released. The publisher, a longtime enemy of the Kennedy family named William Loeb, tries to paint Pavlick as a political martyr who was unjustly punished.

The final irony is that Pavlick eventually *is* released—partly because of a growing movement for mental health reform, embodied in a bill passed by Congress three years earlier ... and signed into law by President John F.

Kennedy.

In JFK's own words, thanks to the bill, "the cold mercy of custodial care would be replaced by the open warmth of community."

After a final series of hearings, New Hampshire authorities release Pavlick on December 13, 1966, almost six years to the day after his arrest.

At age seventy-nine, he's free to go wherever he wants.

He returns to Belmont, New Hampshire, which of course puts him in the same small town as someone else who played a major role in his case.

Belmont, New Hampshire

At this point, Thomas Murphy just wants to be left alone.

The longtime Postmaster did everything he could to assist authorities in their pursuit of Richard Pavlick, including helping them after Pavlick's arrest.

From there, Murphy simply wants to return to being a husband, father of six, and loyal employee at the local post office.

To that end, he specifically requests that his name not be shared with or revealed to anyone, especially not the media. He didn't want the spotlight.

Once the story hits the news, though, Murphy's name gets leaked to the press. Reporters inevitably start calling him and knocking on his door. It's a hell of a tale: the small-town Postmaster who almost single-handedly thwarted the assassination of a President.

After refusing several press requests, Murphy finally agrees to an interview. He allows a reporter from the *Boston Globe* to visit him in Belmont.

"The Postmaster Who Saved Kennedy's Life: Murphy Tells How He Helped Trap Pavlick," written by *Globe* reporter Richard W. O'Donnell, appeared in the paper on January 1, 1961. It's a brief story, one of only a few.

Soon after, the U.S. government formally acknowledges Murphy for his role in stopping Pavlick's plot. His one perk? When he goes to work, Murphy starts wearing a tiny commendation pin under his postal coat.

Otherwise, the soft-spoken Postmaster returns to his quiet life, his name forgotten by anyone not directly involved in the case.

Yet the one person who never forgets? Pavlick himself.

From the moment the cops took him into custody, Pavlick blamed Murphy for his arrest and incarceration. Pavlick's subsequent letters often express rage for the Postmaster who, in his mind, set him up and betrayed him.

Eventually, when Pavlick returns to Belmont, he haunts Murphy and his family, sometimes parking his car near Murphy's home and just staring at the house.

"It was terrifying, horrible," Murphy's wife, Polly, later recalled. The local police keep an eye on Pavlick, but there isn't much they can do to stop it.

For Pavlick—and the Murphys—peace finally comes in 1975, when Pavlick dies in a veterans' hospital.

According to Polly, Thomas Murphy "never doubted that he did the right thing, but he did wonder if it was worth all the trouble afterward."

Years later, when Murphy himself died, Polly still kept a small scrapbook with photographs and newspaper clippings about his role in stopping the plot. Her husband never wanted any attention for what he'd done, but Polly was always proud of him.

Her scrapbook may be the last testament to the mild-mannered Postmaster who saved a President's life.

Simply put, Jackie Kennedy becomes a sensation.

No one's prepared for it, including Jackie herself.

Throughout the campaign, the public's obsession with her—her background, fashion, charm, hair, personality, even her voice—had been growing steadily.

But when she occupies the White House and becomes First Lady, her every movement is elevated to the world stage. Now, it's not just Americans who are transfixed.

"Jackie got raves on the street and high praise in Parliament," *Life* magazine writes of JFK and Jackie's visit to Canada on their first international trip after entering the White House. It's Jackie, not her husband, on the cover of the magazine.

"Her charm, beauty, vivacity, and grace of mind have captured our hearts," Canada's Senate Speaker says on the floor of Parliament.

The adulation continues wherever they go. In France, crowds and media follow her everywhere.

During his first press conference with French President Charles de Gaulle, JFK begins by saying, "I do not think it altogether inappropriate to introduce myself to this audience. I am the man who accompanied Jacqueline Kennedy to Paris."

The room erupts with laughter.

The hard part is, this sort of attention and focus on her will never cease. It becomes one of the central paradoxes of the Kennedy era: a shy woman who values privacy above all else now leads one of the most relentlessly scrutinized public lives of the twentieth century.

At her new home, though, Jackie's work is just beginning.

Back when she took her first White House tour with Mamie Eisenhower, it was a miserable experience for Jackie, a moment of almost unbearable fatigue.

There was one major upside, though. It gave Jackie an idea.

During the tour, she was struck by how “drab and ordinary” the interior of the White House was. It’s not that it wasn’t fancy—it had plenty of fancy—but in her mind, the place didn’t convey any deeper meaning. There was no suggestion of the rich history that’d transpired within these walls.

She has a vision for the White House not just as a place where Presidents would live but also as a cultural destination, and not just for the American public but also for people all over the world.

As Jackie’s Chief of Staff, Tish Baldrige, wrote in her notes at the time, Jackie’s priority was “the makeover of the White House itself as a focus of American history and accomplishment, and the raising of the cultural status of the country.”

As she embarks on the project, Jackie refuses to use the term “redcoration”—that was the cliché, that First Ladies always redecorate the White House. Instead, she calls it a “restoration.”

She begins by spearheading the creation of two organizations, the Fine Arts Committee and the White House Historical Association, to elevate the status of the White House to a formal museum. She leads a team of experts to scour the D.C. area, tracking down artifacts from past Presidents and taking pains to itemize and archive them.

To facilitate her new vision, she coauthors a guidebook, *The White House: An Historic Guide*, to be made available to guests and public visitors. The guidebook has multiple editions and remains in print for decades.

In addition to her restoration project, Jackie also reimagines how she and her husband can utilize the White House to elevate and celebrate American artists, thinkers, and teachers. Rather than just host fancy dinner parties for the D.C. political class, she organizes musical and literary events, invites scholars and scientists, and always showcases American talent.

With her love of other languages and cultures, she invites luminaries from all over the world to facilitate cultural exchange between the United States and foreign nations.

It's all a hugely ambitious project, and she does it with her characteristic quiet poise, never demanding praise or attention for her efforts.

Through all Jackie Kennedy's adventures and trials as First Lady, and there are many, there's one constant. Secret Service Agent Clint Hill is always by her side.

On her journeys to London, Paris, all the European capitals—she's one of the most traveled First Ladies ever—then on to India, Pakistan, Greece, Morocco, Mexico, and throughout South America, Clint Hill is there with her.

Whatever activities she does, Hill does them too. Whether it's horseback riding, sailing, traveling around the United States to visit friends or relatives, he's with her in cars, boats, trains, and airplanes.

All the while, their friendship continues to grow, an unlikely bond between a kid from rural North Dakota and one of the most famous women in the world.

Their relationship is built on mutual trust. And throughout all of it, Hill maintains his central vow and purpose: to protect the First Lady at any cost.

It's a mission he brings with him when JFK starts planning his reelection campaign in 1963. Jackie plans to play a bigger role in this campaign, although she doesn't like huge crowds any more than she used to. Still, she knows how important her role is to the public, and she's committed to doing her part.

For Clint Hill and the other agents in the President's and First Lady's details, it means gearing up for the chaos of countless campaign stops, endless travel, last-minute scheduling, and unruly crowds.

Whatever the event, Hill will be ready, including at one particular stop early in the cycle. Although it's a big event, it's one of many on the schedule and should be routine.

It's in Dallas, Texas—on November 22, 1963.

THE FINAL DAY**Downtown Dallas**

Clint Hill is holding tight to Halfback.

That's the Secret Service nickname for the 1956 Cadillac convertible the agents use for protecting Presidential motorcades.

More specifically, Halfback is the follow-up car—the vehicle that drives just *behind* the Presidential limousine, which is also a convertible.

Halfback is huge, able to hold nine passengers in its three rows of seats. It also has a very special feature: elevated running boards along both sides of the car, so that Secret Service agents can stand on either side of the moving vehicle, gripping special handles affixed to the car doors.

By standing on these running boards a foot off the ground, agents get an elevated view of their surroundings and, just as important, an elevated view of the Presidential limo in front of them. The boards also allow the agents to quickly jump down to the ground and back up again, jogging alongside the slow-moving vehicle to handle unruly crowds or other disturbances.

On the morning of November 22, Clint Hill is standing on Halfback's left-side running board as the car heads toward downtown Dallas. Several other agents are seated in the car, and another agent, from the President's detail, is perched on the right-side running board, across from Hill.

It's been a busy thirty-six hours for the Kennedys and the Secret Service.

Yesterday, the President and First Lady, accompanied by Vice President Lyndon Johnson, visited three other Texas cities—San Antonio, Houston, and Fort Worth—with throngs of people every step of the way.

After spending the night in Fort Worth, they took an early morning flight,

arriving an hour ago at Love Field in Dallas. When Jackie and JFK emerged from the plane—with the First Lady dressed in a stylish pink suit with the matching pillbox hat—the huge crowd there “went into an absolute frenzy.”

The arrival was covered extensively by the local media. “I can see his suntan all the way from here!” a TV announcer declared, reporting on location.

As he did all those years ago, the President headed for a fence by the airfield, spending the next few minutes shaking hands—but this time, the First Lady joined him, both of them thanking their fans and supporters.

The Dallas mayor’s wife, part of the welcoming committee, handed Jackie a bouquet of red roses, which she brought into the limousine. Inside the limo, Texas governor John Connally and his wife, Nellie, were already sitting in the middle row. The President and First Lady sat behind them in the last row. And since the rain had stopped, the Secret Service didn’t need the plastic protective bubble that could be put onto the car. Metal armor, bulletproof glass, and other countermeasures weren’t even thought about until after this fateful day.

The trip from the airport through downtown Dallas is only about ten miles. Not far at all.

After a chaotic departure, they’re on their way to a planned 12:30 p.m. arrival at the Dallas Trade Mart, where an audience of 2,600 is assembled, waiting for JFK to give a speech.

From his perch on Halfback’s running board, Hill has a good view of the Presidential limousine—which is at the designated distance of five feet in front of them. The Texas sunlight is bright. The limousine’s convertible roof is down, letting him see it all.

Hill also has a clear view of the lead car, driving in front of the Presidential limo, as well as several police motorcycles driving either in front of the Secret Service vehicles or alongside.

There’ve been crowds all along the route from the airport, but as they head downtown, the numbers are simply massive. “As we turned onto Main Street,” Hill later recalled, “both sides of the street were packed—ten to twenty people deep on each side, spilling onto the street.”

In these situations, the agents have the impossible task of trying to look in

every direction at once, searching for danger.

“I constantly scanned the crowd,” Hill recalled. “People were everywhere—yelling, cheering, clapping. There were people on rooftops and balconies and fire escapes. People hanging out of windows.... Windows were open all along the route.”

On Main Street, the crowd sometimes encroaches a bit too much toward the Presidential limo. On two occasions, Hill jumps from the running board and runs up to a rear platform affixed to the back of the Presidential limo. From that platform, he can help push away bystanders and be ready to jump to Jackie’s aid if things get rough.

Then, once the crowd is cleared from the car, he jumps down from the moving limo and darts back to Halfback’s running board.

In these crowded stretches, the motorcade is barely controlled chaos. “Between the noise of the motorcycles, and the people, you could hardly hear yourself think,” Hill later described.

After several blocks, they turn onto Houston Street, and the crowds finally start to thin.

Now they’re driving through the large, open area known as Dealey Plaza, heading toward their destination only a few minutes away. At this point, the vehicles pick up some speed.

The agents take in their new surroundings, always looking for signs of danger. “Immediately in front of us as we traveled down Houston Street was a red brick building about seven floors high,” Hill later recalled. It’s the Texas School Book Depository. “Some windows were open in the building, but there was no indication of any problem.”

Eventually, the vehicles make a left turn from Houston Street to Elm Street, which runs along a grassy area in the plaza.

In the limo, the passengers catch their breath from the noise and chaos that had filled downtown.

“Mr. President, you can’t say that Dallas doesn’t love you,” the Governor’s wife says, turning to JFK with a smile.

“No, you certainly can’t,” he replies, smiling back.

Behind them, Halfback is moving at around ten miles an hour. Agent Emory Roberts, in the front seat, radios the Trade Mart. “Halfback to base.

Five minutes to destination.” Hill is still on the car’s running board, surveying the area.

The sound is loud—they all hear it.

It was “a sudden explosive noise, over my right shoulder, from the back of the motorcade,” Hill recalled.

“What was that?” Agent Jack Ready blurts. “A firecracker?”

Hill anxiously looks around.

“I turned my head toward the noise, and as my eyes moved across the President’s car, I saw President Kennedy grab at his throat and lurch to his left,” Hill later recalled.

The moment is frozen in front of them, the agents quickly realizing what happened.

President John F. Kennedy has been shot.

Clint Hill is suddenly running full speed toward the Presidential limo. Normally, when their cars are going this fast, agents would never move from one vehicle to the other, but there’s nothing normal about this.

“I wasn’t thinking, only reacting,” he later explained. “Somebody had fired a shot at the President, and I had to get there. I had to get on the car and get myself between the shooter and the President and Mrs. Kennedy.”

While Hill is running, the sound of a second shot rings out.

From Halfback’s passenger seat, Agent Roberts sees Governor Connally suddenly slump to one side. He later recalled that a “feeling of dread” washed over him.

Hill keeps running, as fast as his legs will carry him. *I’m almost there*, he thinks. He’s now so close, he can nearly reach out and grab the rear handle to pull himself onto the limo.

As he runs, he’s staring at the back seat. Then he hears it. A third shot.

This one sounds different.

“The impact was like the sound of something hard hitting something hollow—like the sound of a melon shattering onto cement,” Hill later described. “In the same instant, blood, brain matter, and bone fragments exploded from the back of the President’s head. The President’s blood, parts of his skull, bits of his brain were splattered all over me—on my face, my clothes, in my hair.”

Jackie is right next to her husband when the bullet strikes, and immediately he slumps onto her. “Oh, no, no no. Oh my God, they have shot my husband!” she yells out.

Somehow in the horror of this moment, Hill gets within arm’s reach of the handle on the back of the limousine.

“My legs were still moving,” he later recalled. “I assumed more shots were coming. I reached for the handhold and grabbed it.”

The problem is, as the driver reacts to what just happened—unaware that Hill is running behind the car—he suddenly hits the gas. “My legs kept moving, as I held on, trying to keep up with the rapidly accelerating car,” Hill recalled. “Somehow—I honestly don’t know how—I lunged and pulled my body onto the car, and my foot found the step.”

At that moment, it all gets even more surreal. Jackie Kennedy has pulled herself out of her seat and is now crawling back across the trunk of the fast-moving vehicle.

Good God, she’s going to go flying off the back of the car! Hill thinks.

At first, he doesn’t understand what she’s doing. Yet as he pulls himself up onto the trunk, he sees it. “She was reaching for something. She was reaching for a piece of the President’s head.”

It’s impossible to process what’s happening. Again, Hill simply reacts.

“I thrust myself onto the trunk, grabbed her arm, and pushed her back into the seat. When I did this, the President’s body fell onto her lap.”

“My God, they shot his head off!” she screams, getting her first full look at her husband’s injuries.

Hill is now crawling across the bloody trunk, pulling himself to the rear seat. “Get us to a hospital! Get us to a hospital!” he shouts to the driver.

Hill thinks more shots are coming. Crawling to the rear seat, and bracing his arms and legs, he perches his body like an umbrella over the First Lady and the President. He’ll take the next shots instead of them.

The lead car, the limo, and Halfback have now all accelerated, and the drivers, abandoning the original route, turn off the current street onto an entrance for the highway.

In no time, they’re going full speed toward the nearest hospital. Hill is still in his awkward position, using all his strength to stay elevated above the

rear seat while the First Lady lies beneath him next to her slumped-over husband.

From the corner of his eye, he sees the mass of blood all over the car, covering everyone. In the middle seat, the Governor is hunched over, his wife cradling him.



Secret Service Agent Clint Hill leaps onto the back of the moving Presidential limousine shortly after gunshots are fired in Dealey Plaza. President Kennedy is slumped in the back seat, fatally wounded. (Credit: Zapruder Film © 1967 [Renewed 1995] The Sixth Floor Museum at Dealey Plaza)

After four or five minutes, the vehicles pull into the emergency room entrance of Parkland Memorial Hospital.

The agents in the front seat jump out and race inside, yelling for help. Moments later, they emerge with hospital staff, pushing two gurneys.

“The limousine was there when I went outside,” one hospital resident later recalled. “There were any number of very serious people standing around with submachine guns.” It was hard to tell what was going on. Then, “all of sudden Jackie Kennedy sat up and I knew right away there was terrible trouble.”

From the back seat, Hill takes off his blood-covered suit coat and drapes it over the President. With help from hospital staff, the agents load JFK onto one of the gurneys ... and Connally on another as the group races into the

hospital.

Behind them, Hill helps Jackie out of the car. Both covered in blood, they follow the gurneys. The two of them, probably more than anyone else, saw the true, unspeakable extent of the injuries to JFK.

Inside, the hospital is in chaos, with agents, nurses, doctors, and police racing around and shouting. Staff rush the gurneys down the corridors toward the trauma rooms. Jackie stays next to her husband's gurney, holding his hand.

At one point, a nurse offers to clean off her clothing.

"Absolutely not," Jackie responds. "I want the world to see what Dallas has done to my husband."

They arrive at the trauma rooms. Staff tries to keep everyone out, but Jackie refuses, following her husband's gurney inside.

At that moment, a senior agent grabs Hill. They need to call the White House. Now.

They use a phone outside the trauma room.

Just then, Jackie emerges, her face still spattered with blood.

"Somebody get a chair for Mrs. Kennedy!" someone yells.

Afraid she'll faint, Hill rushes to help her sit down. Doctors and nurses are yelling instructions. The President still has a faint pulse and they're fighting to keep it.

For Jackie, though ... she saw up close what state he's in.

"She sat down and looked at me," Hill explained. "Our eyes met, and it nearly broke me. The light was gone, and all that was left in those beautiful brown eyes was pain. Sheer, unbearable pain."

"Clint, take the phone," Hill's colleague says as he's suddenly pulled away.

Now Hill is talking to the lead Secret Service agent at the White House. He tries to convey what's happened but is quickly interrupted by the White House operator.

"The Attorney General wants to talk to Agent Hill," the operator says.

The Attorney General. The President's kid brother.

Before Hill has time to think or prepare, he hears Bobby Kennedy's familiar voice.

“Clint, what’s going on down there?!”

Hill tries to stay composed. “Shots fired during the motorcade,” he says. “The President is very seriously injured. They’re working on him now. Governor Connally was hit too.”

There’s a pause.

“What do you mean seriously injured? How bad is it?” Bobby asks.

Hill takes a moment. He’s just outside Trauma Room No. 1 in Parkland Memorial Hospital. Doctors, nurses, and police are still racing around. A few feet away, Jackie Kennedy is seated, covered in blood, her face blank with shock.

Hill’s voice is shaking, his hand gripping the phone as he answers the question.

“It’s as bad as it gets.”

Hyannis Port, Massachusetts

November 29, 1963

The country basically shuts down.

Schools and businesses close. For four straight days, television networks cease all programming and advertising. They cover just one story, around the clock. The assassination. It was the only story that mattered.

The nation is in shock.

“It was a death that touched everyone instantly and directly,” CBS correspondent Roger Mudd said, trying to find the right words. “Rare was the person who did not cry that long weekend.”

Loss and grief are hard enough. This was a murder seen by the entire country. Everyone’s just trying to make sense of what happened.

Seven days after the assassination, at 8:30 p.m. on a cold, rainy New England evening, a journalist named Theodore White appears at the front door of the Kennedy compound in Hyannis Port, Massachusetts.

Standing in the rain, he’s there because he was summoned.

Jacqueline Kennedy, the most famous widow in the world, asked him to come.

She wants him to interview her.

For Jackie, it’s been a week of unimaginable horror, trauma, and grief. She’s had to suffer through it all in the public eye, with the whole country watching, all while caring for two young children who just lost their father.

White had written a bestselling book about the 1960 Presidential campaign, published in 1961. The book reflected well on JFK. Simply put, the Kennedys liked it.

Now, in 1963, White writes for *Life* magazine. He's about to contribute to a massive special issue about the assassination and memorial service. *Life* is one of the most widely read magazines of the day, and this special issue is sure to be a collector's item.

That's why Jackie summoned White. She wants her words to appear in that issue.

From a press point of view, no one has been as sought-after in the last week as Jackie Kennedy. So for White to have one-on-one access to her, in her home, in this moment of historic grief—it's the opportunity of a lifetime.

And not just for White.

On this night, Jackie has a plan.

As White enters, she's waiting there for him. Dressed in black. A few other close friends are staying with her. And, of course, the Secret Service is there too.

They'll do the interview in the living room.

Once they get started, White asks her all about the terrible day in Dallas, and the chaotic hours and days that followed. She describes her role in the elaborate memorial service that most of the nation had watched on national television.

She even talks about her final moments with her husband's body in the Dallas hospital. "There was a sheet over Jack, his foot was sticking out of the sheet, whiter than the sheet. His mouth was so beautiful ... his eyes were open. They found his hand under the sheet, and I held his hand all the time the priest was saying extreme unction."

Jackie describes how her gloves had stiffened with JFK's blood all over them. When a nearby policeman helped her take them off, she saw her ring was stained with blood too. "So I put the ring on Jack's finger ... and then I kissed his hand."

It's an incredible firsthand account. They talk from eight thirty until midnight, but she didn't bring him here just to relay her final moments in the hospital.

She explains that there's a particular story about her late husband that she wants to share. It's a story only she knows. It's become almost an "obsession" to her, she says, that the country hear it.

It's a story about music.

She tells him that while John F. Kennedy was President, before he went to bed at night, he liked to listen to records on their phonograph, an old Victrola. There was one record, she says, that he liked more than any other. When it was cold and his back hurt, she'd get out of bed and play it for him.

"The song he loved most came at the very end of this record," Jackie explains in her soft voice. It's from a recent Broadway musical.

The lines he loved to hear were:

*Don't let it be forgot,
that once there was a spot,
for one brief shining moment
that was known as Camelot*

The song is from the recent musical *Camelot*, a romance set in the mythic kingdom of King Arthur, featuring the ups and downs of Queen Guinevere, Lancelot, the Round Table, the whole bit.

"There'll be great Presidents again..." she adds, "but there'll never be another Camelot again."

White is writing, scribbling fast. She keeps talking.

"Do you know what I think of history?" Jackie asks. "For a while I thought history was something that bitter old men wrote. But then I realized history made Jack what he was. You must think of him as this little boy, sick so much of the time, reading in bed, reading history, reading the Knights of the Round Table.

"Then I thought, for Jack history was full of heroes," she explains. "Men are such a combination of good and bad.... He was such a simple man. But he was so complex too. Jack had this hero idea of history, the idealistic view..."

And then she comes back to those lyrics, the ones she's so obsessed with. "*Don't let it be forgot, that once there was a spot, for one brief shining moment that was known as Camelot*—and it will never be that way again."

Years later, White would say that Jackie invited him to Hyannis Port "because she wanted me to make certain that Jack was not forgotten in history."

Elaborating, he explained, “What bothered her was history.... She wanted me to rescue Jack from all the ‘bitter people’ who were going to write about him in history. She did not want Jack left to the historians.”

Over three and a half hours, Jackie’s narrative is raw, heartbreaking, and beautiful—a story of her husband—a U.S. President—a man looking for that same innocent feeling that inspired him as a kid. Together, that’s what Jack and Jackie had hoped to build.

When the interview ends, White writes the story right there in the house, so he can file it as soon as possible. *Life* magazine is literally holding its presses, waiting for this last story to complete the issue.

Forever the reporter, Jackie insists on reading what he writes, editing parts herself.

She wants to make sure he includes the part about *Camelot*.

At 2:30 a.m. it’s finally done. White files the story from the house, says goodbye, and leaves Hyannis Port, wondering what just happened.

“For President Kennedy: An Epilogue” appears in the December 6, 1963, special issue of *Life*.

Almost instantly, the word “Camelot”—the bygone, idealized, romantic kingdom—becomes forever linked to the memory of the Kennedy White House.

The word will be used again and again to describe them—in movies, television, and books—a national shorthand, repeated so often that it becomes almost inextricable from the Kennedy name.

The physical imagery made it easy: the dashing leader, the glamorous wife, the beautiful children, the picture-perfect life.

That’s what people saw on the surface.

But thanks to Jackie telling that story? That’s what people remembered.

As White later put it, he was just “her instrument in labeling the myth.”

For years, Jackie played the dutiful role of “Campaign Wife,” political spouse, and First Lady. She suffered for it again and again—so enmeshed in her job, she became as big a part of the Kennedy mystique as her husband.

Now, after JFK’s death, she literally has the last word.

She makes it count.

Throughout her life, Jackie has been enamored of the media, a victim of

it, an employee of it—but make no mistake, she’s a master of it.

According to Gallup polling, which has tracked the popularity of every U.S. President dating back to Harry Truman, the President with the highest average approval rating for the duration of his term is John F. Kennedy, with over 70 percent.

Even more remarkable, in 2023, when Gallup asked Americans to rate every President since 1960, JFK came in first, with a staggering 90 percent approval rating, more than twenty points higher than any other President.

As a young naval officer, JFK risked his life to save his PT-109 crew members from almost certain death.

Later, as a politician, a President, and especially as a husband—it became more complicated.

Today, historians debate—and will probably always debate—the merits of the Kennedy Presidency. There may never be consensus, but a common narrative has emerged. During the Cold War, Kennedy had both failures and successes: the botched Bay of Pigs invasion, then the successful handling of the Cuban Missile Crisis. On the domestic front, he started the Peace Corps and spearheaded the expansion of the U.S. space program, which would later culminate in the Apollo moon landing.

When it came to the most pressing domestic issue of the day—civil rights—he gave memorable speeches but mostly failed to enact meaningful initiatives. Some argue that he paved the way for greater action on the part of his successor, Lyndon B. Johnson.

The fact is, it’s hard to judge, because it ended so soon. He was in office for less than three years. That’s it. We’ll simply never know what he might’ve accomplished, or failed to accomplish, had he served a full two terms.

In the end, as with anyone whose life is taken too soon, we can’t help but see potential ... and the loss of it.

That potential is what JFK himself saw in those history books he used to read as a kid.

It was the same with his Presidency. From the early days of the campaign, to his Inaugural Address, he leaned on that idea, showing us our own potential, making us believe that America *itself* could be heroic. We could be

noble and kind and daring and good.

In soaring words, and in the carefully crafted image that Jack and Jackie created, the Kennedys were proof that our country—our world—could be a place of hope and optimism. A place where justice was possible and the future would shine. As Americans, if we do what's right and work together, anything is truly possible.

Those words are powerful—and at the same time, like Camelot, they can feel like a myth. Life is messy. Suffering and injustice and violence can't be erased with hope and stirring speeches alone. The real world is full of darkness, as Richard Pavlick—and those three shots in Dallas—proved.

So which version is correct?

Without a doubt, John Fitzgerald Kennedy was charismatic, generous, a beacon of idealism and inspiration.

He was also selfish, arrogant, and reckless, especially to those he loved.

A man of virtue—and a man of flaws.

Like all of us.

For decades, we've held him up as a legend and torn him down for his failings.

Yet that doesn't mean he was wrong.

For Americans who came of age during the Kennedy years ... and for those who are inspired decades later ... all that boundless hope and optimism—the beautiful ideal—as a country, as a culture, as people, is still worth striving for.

As JFK said in his famous Inaugural Address, “All this will not be finished in the first one hundred days. Nor will it be finished in the first one thousand days, nor in the life of this Administration, nor even perhaps in our lifetime on this planet. But let us begin.”

Acknowledgments

From Brad:

I will never forget when my high school history teacher Mrs. Ellen Sherman wheeled a TV into our eleventh-grade class and showed us my very first film about the assassination of JFK. That film—and that teacher—changed my life, and I’ve been chasing JFK stories, and his idealism, ever since. So, as always, let me begin with the great Josh Mensch, who helped bring a far more complex eye to this JFK tale and also to my career. When you read these books, you see a synthesis of Josh’s and my writing—but what I’m most proud of are our shared values. Josh is one of the kindest, most generous people I’ve ever met. He’s also a grounded realist, refusing to fall into the traps that are so easy to stumble into, especially around JFK. As you see in these pages, John F. Kennedy is more than an American President. He’s an ideal—a beacon of hope and inspiration, which we as a country are starving for right now. Yet he’s also an example of our flaws and weaknesses. Those complexities are what make JFK so fascinating...and such a perfect symbol of the promise and pitfalls of America. I fully believe in this country—and I also believe we can reach our potential only if we examine our history and are willing to learn the lessons it offers. Josh and my shared philosophy makes these books exist but, far more important, helps our friendship thrive. I love you, my brother. Wherever you are, I’ll be cheering.

I also owe tremendous thank-yous to the following: my First Lady, Cori, the queen of our Camelot. No one is smarter, wiser, or more supportive. Jonas, Lila, and Theo make me proud every day. The very best part of my life is being their dad. Jill Kneerim, my friend and agent, may you rest in peace. I miss you every day. Friend and agent Jennifer Rudolph Walsh brought this nonfiction universe to life—and Jay Mandel at WME has helped it flourish.

Special thanks to Hope Denekamp, Lucy Cleland, and all our friends at the Kneerim & Williams Agency (I don't care if they changed their name).

I want to also thank my sister, Bari, who I would totally make Attorney General. Thanks also to Bobby, Ami, Adam, Gilda, and Will for always being there for us.

My Secret Service is full of sharpshooters: Noah Kuttler, Ethan Kline, Dale Flam, Matt Kuttler, Chris Weiss, and Judd Winick always have my back. Additional thanks to Chris Eliopoulos, Katy Greene, Marie Grunbeck, Nick Marell, Staci Schecter, Sheri Winderman, Pansy and Rob Price, Jason Sherry, Jim Day, Denise Jaeger, Katriela Knight, Jordyn Shapiro, Skylar Hart, and my pal Farris Rookstool, who has answered my questions for decades now.

For research and historical support, we are so grateful to have Jack Klempay, a true knight of the Round Table. His wisdom and expertise are baked into these pages. Thank you, Jack, for all the incredible help. In addition, we want to acknowledge Jonathan Karp for his kindness, Clint Hill and Lisa McCubbin-Hill for their insight, and all those in the Secret Service, who do such vital work for our country.

Special thanks to our family at Lost History, and at HISTORY and Left/Right, for bringing Josh and me together over a decade ago: Nancy Dubuc, Paul Cabana, Mike Stiller, Ken Druckerman, Mike Mezaros, Mary Robertson, and Lee White; and to Rob Weisbach, for being the first to believe.

I also want to thank everyone at Flatiron and Macmillan: our leader Jon Yaged, Meaghan Leahy, Marlena Bittner, Nancy Trypuc, Jason Reigal, Emily Walters, Donna Noetzel, Chris O'Connell, and Keith Hayes, as well as Astra Berzinskas, Malati Chavali, Susan Carner, Tim Greco, Brad Wood, Jeanette Zwart, and the entire sales force who work so hard to make all this happen. I'll never say it enough: they're the true reason this book is in your hands.

I need to add special thank-yous to our terrific editor, the very kind Zachary Wagman, for his input at all levels, as well as the incredible Louis Grilli, who really is the Merlin of this operation, saving us on a nearly daily basis. Especially at the end. Thank you, Zack and Louis! Finally, I want to

thank our true Commander in Chief, Bob Miller. As we've said over and over, leadership isn't about being in charge—it's about taking care of those in your charge. Bob, you constantly take care of us. Your belief in history—and in us—has changed our lives. Thank you for your faith.

From Josh:

It started with a phone call. Roughly eight years ago Brad Meltzer, with whom I'd made a documentary TV series a few years earlier, rang me out of the blue. I'll never forget his first words: "Josh, I promise you this will be strangest call you'll get today." He certainly had my attention. Then he asked a simple question: "Have you ever thought about writing a book?"

The answer I gave was "no." But Brad knows how to read people. From our previous work, he knew I loved American history. Maybe he also sensed that, deep down, writing a book was something I had secretly always wanted to do. Now here we are, almost a decade later, publishing our fourth book together. Brad, what can I say? Thank you for that phone call that changed my life. Thank you for inviting me on this remarkable collaboration. Most important, thank you for being a great friend. Your kindness, generosity, and humor remain an inspiration. I feel blessed to know you.

Of course, creating books takes a lot more than an author (or two) typing pages. It's a team effort, and I owe thanks to so many who've been on this journey with us.

First and foremost, I must thank our fearless leader at Flatiron Books, Bob Miller, who has tirelessly supported our work from the beginning. His belief in and enthusiasm for the series remains our guiding light. Thank you to our excellent editor, Zachary Wagman, for his guidance and support when we needed it most. Thanks also to our previous editors, Jasmine Faustino and Lauren Bittrich. Brad and I owe an enormous debt of gratitude to Louis Grilli, who does so much behind the scenes to make our books possible. Rather than repeat all the other names in Brad's list, I'll simply thank EVERYONE at Flatiron for their truly incredible work helping us bring our stories to the world. It's an amazing team, and Brad and I are honored to be a part of it.

For this book, I also owe a very special debt of gratitude to our researcher Jack Klempay, whose efforts were essential from beginning to end. Jack's expertise and knowledge of the era added important dimensions to our work, and his superb organization was critical. Thank you, Jack, for your counsel and your diligence, especially during the home stretch!

I'd like to express my deep gratitude to my agent Lisa Grubka, who helped navigate so many complicated ups and downs these past few years. Thanks, Lisa, for hanging in there! Thanks also to Brad's agent Jay Mandel, who has long been in the trenches with us. Thank you to our publicist Aileen Boyle, who always does such excellent work. Looking back to the start of these books, I'd also like to thank my former colleagues at Left/Right—and the whole *Lost History* team—who first brought Brad and me together.

As always, I must thank my wonderful— and wonderfully unique— extended family. Thank you to my mother, Elizabeth Mensch; to my late father, Steven Mensch; to Gregory Patnaude; to my stepmother, Pamela Mensch; to my brothers Jonathan Mensch, Jacob Mensch, Joseph Mensch, James Freeman, and Jeremy Freeman; to my mother-in-law, Mary Ellen Smith; to John Acunto, Anna Acunto, London Acunto, Mila Acunto, August Acunto, Kara Acunto, and John Andrew Acunto; and to my nieces, Libby Mensch and Claire Mensch. Thank you also to Lynn James, Daeon James, and Danae James.

Finally, I want to thank from the bottom of my heart my beautiful and brilliant wife, Mary Robertson, for being my soul mate for every step of this journey. My love is eternal. Thank you to our two children, Malcolm and Maxine, who fill each day with joy, laughter, and surprise. You three, I love you more than words can say.

Notes

As a work of history, this book is based on a wide range of primary and secondary sources pertaining to President John F. Kennedy, his family, and his would-be assassin, retired US postal worker Richard Pavlick. The archives of the John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum were of particular importance to our research and writing, and digitized versions are available for all the documents cited in this work. The story of Richard Pavlick's foiled assassination plot is little known even to most Kennedy scholars, and sources on it are scarce. Fortunately for historians, the U.S. Secret Service and the Federal Bureau of Investigation accumulated an extensive decade-long file on Pavlick that is now available to researchers and the public through the Freedom of Information Act. The file includes numerous reports filed contemporaneously by Secret Service agents, as well as newspaper clippings and other supporting documents. Our citations refer to an electronic version of this file, as hosted by the nonprofit Internet Archive digital library. Finally, this book benefits from the written recollections of former Secret Service Agents Clint Hill and Gerald Blaine, who were assigned to the Kennedy family's protective detail. Their respective memoirs, both coauthored by Lisa McCubbin-Hill, provide an invaluable perspective on the inner workings of the Kennedy family during the period covered in this book.

Prologue

No one notices the car: The events described in the prologue will be covered in greater detail later in this book, with references to the source material provided. For a general summary of the events, see Richard W. O'Donnell and Neil Hickey, "Now It Can Be Told: The First Attempt to Assassinate President Kennedy," *True*, March 1964.

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furious and violent backlash: See, for example, Stephen Steinberg, *Counterrevolution: The Crusade to Roll Back the Gains of the Civil Rights Movement* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2022).

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media scrutiny: Lisa M. Burns, *Media Relations and the Modern First Lady: From Jacqueline Kennedy to Melania Trump* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2020), 43–66.

"blow up a mountain": Quoted in O'Donnell and Hickey, "Now It Can Be Told," 18.

Catholic faith: On the issue of religion in the 1960 election, see Thomas J. Carty, *A Catholic in the White House?: Religion, Politics, and John F. Kennedy's Presidential Campaign* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004).

Chapter 1

eighty feet long and twenty feet wide: “PT-109,” Naval History and Heritage Command, November 10, 2015, <https://www.history.navy.mil/research/histories/ship-histories/danfs/p/pt-109.html>.

At the helm: What is related over the following pages has been told many times over the years, starting with an article by John Hersey for the *New Yorker* in June 1944. A more recent and comprehensive account can be found in William Doyle, *PT 109: An American Epic of War, Survival, and the Destiny of John F. Kennedy* (New York: William Morrow, 2015). See also Robert J. Donovan, *PT 109: John F. Kennedy in World War II* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1961).

“Ship at two o’clock!”: John Hersey, “Survival,” *New Yorker*, June 10, 1944.

no time to even load a shell: On the question of whether Kennedy had enough time to attack the destroyer or consider evasive action, see Donovan, *PT 109*, 106; and Doyle, *PT 109*, 94–95.

forty miles per hour: In nautical terms, this is approximately equivalent to thirty-four knots. This is the speed given for the destroyer in most accounts. See, for example, Doyle, *PT 109*, 1.

So this is how it feels to die: Hersey, “Survival.”

surreal sensation: Donovan, *PT 109*, 107–8.

chronic back pain: Robert Dallek, *An Unfinished Life: John F. Kennedy, 1917–1963* (New York: Little, Brown, 2003), 81.

“How are you, Mac?”: Hersey, “Survival.”

rescue mission: For details on the initial rescue of sailors who had been flung overboard, see Donovan, *PT 109*, 111–18.

swim team: Michael O’Brien, *John F. Kennedy: A Biography* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2005), 81–82.

“How do you feel, Mac?”: Hersey, “Survival.”

miraculous swim: For more details on the crew’s swim from the sinking wreckage to Plum Pudding Island, including the famous anecdote of Kennedy dragging McMahon through the water by a strap clenched in his teeth, see Donovan, *PT 109*, 122–28.

Chapter 2

“These barracuda”: Hersey, “Survival.”

Ferguson Passage: On Kennedy’s excursion to Ferguson Passage, see Donovan, *PT 109*, 130–34.

Kennedy decides: On the decision to relocate, see Donovan, 141.

light rain: Donovan, 141–43.

small box of provisions: Donovan, 145–46.

two native scouts appear: Some accounts vary regarding the timeline of Kennedy’s position in relation to the scouts. According to Doyle, the two scouts are still on Olasana when Kennedy arrives, and they accompany him back to Naru. If this was the case, then Kennedy would not have been surprised to see them come to his aid after his canoe capsized. Our version is based on the accounts of Hersey and others, and reflects Kennedy’s own telling of the story shortly after the war. The distinction is largely immaterial in the overall scope of events.

NAURO ISL: Doyle, *PT 109*, 151.

Chapter 3

“I have a letter for you”: Hersey, “Survival.”

rescue mission: For details on the rescue mission, see Donovan, *PT 109*, 153–65.

“Kennedy’s Son Is Hero in Pacific”: *New York Times*, August 20, 1943.

“courage, endurance and leadership”: Cited in Doyle, *PT 109*, 192.

“He saved our lives”: Quoted in O’Brien, *John F. Kennedy*, 160.

“We had to assume”: Quoted in O’Brien, 153.

Chapter 4: Seventeen Years Later ...

“our culture is at stake”: “The Religious Issue: Hot and Getting Hotter,” *Newsweek*, September 19, 1960.

“more or less representative”: *New York Times*, September 8, 1960.

“We’re just raising the question”: As reported in the *Wilkes-Barre Times Leader*, September 8, 1960.

secret meeting: Carty, *A Catholic in the White House?*, 58.

conceal his connection: Carty, 58.

“Roman Catholic contender”: Statement of the Conference of Citizens for Religious Freedom, printed as “Protestant Groups’ Statements,” *New York Times*, September 8, 1960.

“withstand altogether”: “Protestant Groups’ Statements.”

“captive of his system”: *Washington Post-Times Herald*, September 8, 1960.

“raising the question”: *Wilkes-Barre Times Leader*, September 8, 1960.

anti-Catholic sentiment: For a comprehensive account on the role of religion in JFK’s election, see Carty, *A Catholic in the White House?* See also Shaun A. Casey, *The Making of a Catholic President: Kennedy vs. Nixon 1960* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

The early Klan reached its peak: For more on this phase of the Klan’s history, see Elaine Frantz Parsons, *Ku-Klux: The Birth of the Klan During Reconstruction* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2015).

dramatic resurgence: For more on the resurgence of the Klan in the 1920s, see Linda Gordon, *The Second Coming of the KKK: The Ku Klux Klan of the 1920s and the American Political Tradition* (New York: Liveright, 2017). For a perspective focused on the question of religion, see Kelly J. Baker, *Gospel According to the Klan: The KKK’s Appeal to Protestant America, 1915–1930* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2011).

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“Immigration Is Periling America”: *The Fiery Cross*, September 21, 1923.

mostly Catholic: Gordon, *The Second Coming of the KKK*, 54–55.

three “great racial instincts”: Hiram Wesley Evans, “The Klan’s Fight for Americanism,” *North American Review* 223, no. 830 (1926): 52.

“Klansman, Klansman”: Verse from “The Mystic City,” cited in Christine K. Erickson, “Boys in Butte: The Ku Klux Klan Confronts the Catholics 1923–1929” (PhD diss., University of Montana, 1991).

Irish-Catholic community: For more on the religion dimension of anti-Irish sentiment, see Kevin Kenny, *The American Irish: A History* (London: Routledge, 2014), 204–9.

demographic divide: For a critical appraisal of the “urban-rural thesis” in the historiography of the 1920s, see Charles W. Eagles, “Urban-Rural Conflict in the 1920s: A Historiographical Assessment,” *Historian* 49, no. 1 (1986): 26–48.

larger-than-life character: For Smith’s biography, see Christopher M. Finan, *Alfred E. Smith: The Happy Warrior* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2002); Robert A. Slayton, *Empire Statesman: The Rise and Redemption of Al Smith* (New York: Free Press, 2001).

angry demonstrations: See, for example, William E. Nelson, *The Legalist Reformation: Law, Politics, and Ideology in New York, 1920–1980* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001), 17.

pamphlet: Cited in Slayton, *Empire Statesman*, 308.

Herbert Hoover won by a landslide: “Statistics,” American Presidency Project, University of California, Santa Barbara, accessed December 15, 2023, <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/statistics/elections/1928>.

“The greatest element”: Quoted in Finan, *Alfred E. Smith*, 230.

“To tell you the truth”: Quoted in Finan, 230.

“faced with the election of a Catholic”: “The Religious Issue.”

“We believe that Dr. Peale”: “Liberals Accuse Dr. Peale Group of Blind Prejudice on Kennedy,”
Boston Globe, September 9, 1960.

Chapter 5

march in front of the White House: As a person of interest to the Secret Service and the Federal Bureau of Investigation, Pavlick accumulated a voluminous file that has been made available to researchers and the public through a Freedom of Information Act request. The research for this book is based on the digital file hosted by the Internet Archive, last accessed June 6, 2024, and hereafter referred to as the “Pavlick Secret Service File.” For the Secret Service’s record of Pavlick’s earlier political activities, see the Pavlick Secret Service File, 279.

angry letter: For Pavlick’s correspondence with the Postmaster General, see the Pavlick Secret Service File, 302–3.

“A chronic complainer”: *Boston Globe*, December 17, 1960.

“he was always writing”: *Fort Lauderdale News*, December 17, 1960.

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Chapter 9

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Chapter 11

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Chapter 12

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Chapter 14

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Chapter 15

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Chapter 16

“in need of some updating”: Blaine and McCubbin, *The Kennedy Detail*, 44.

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“home away from home”: Blaine and McCubbin, 45.

The agents make quick plans: The security measures discussed below are described in Blaine and McCubbin, 45–46.

Chapter 17

“You ain’t learning”: Hill and McCubbin, *Mrs. Kennedy and Me*, 5.

“Come on in, Clint”: Hill and McCubbin, 5.

“You are being assigned”: Hill and McCubbin, 6.

“I was devastated”: Hill and McCubbin, 6–7.

“where the action is”: Hill and McCubbin, 7.

Chapter 18

Richard Pavlick later explained: Pavlick writes about this trip to Hyannis Port in his self-published autobiography, titled “An Innocent Man Illegally Arrested Spent Six Years in Hell.” See the Pavlick Secret Service File, 138.

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“I got into my car”: Pavlick Secret Service File, 138.

Chapter 19

Clint Hill stands on the sidewalk: Hill and McCubbin, *Mrs. Kennedy and Me*, 7.

“distinctly European feel”: Hill and McCubbin, 8.

Clint Hill grew up: For Hill’s biography, see Hill and McCubbin, 11–13.

“a home for tea parties”: Hill and McCubbin, 8.

Chapter 20

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Chapter 21

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Chapter 22

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“once she was married”: Quoted in O'Brien, *John F. Kennedy*, 303.

Chapter 23

“Congratulations, Mr. President!”: Blaine and McCubbin, *The Kennedy Detail*, 46.

“It was easy to see”: Blaine and McCubbin, 47.

“Let’s get into the car”: Blaine and McCubbin, 47.

Eisenhower would never do this: Blaine and McCubbin, 47.

Chapter 24

the child was stillborn: On the yacht trip and Jackie's miscarriage, see O'Brien, *John F. Kennedy*, 322–23.

“haul your ass back”: Quoted in Paul F. Boller, *Presidential Wives: An Anecdotal History*, rev. ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 360.

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Chapter 25

“everybody knows my name”: Blaine and McCubbin, *The Kennedy Detail*, 47.

“I don’t think I’ve met you”: Blaine and McCubbin, 48.

“Pass these out”: Blaine and McCubbin, 48.

Chapter 26

Pavlick purchased his first stick: For a complete list of these purchases, see the Pavlick Secret Service File, 550.

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regulations and restrictions: See, for example, Riccola Voigt, “Laws Restricting Bomb Making: Owning, Using, and Creating Explosives,” <https://legal-info.lawyers.com/criminal/criminal-law-basics/bomb-making-is-illegal.html>, accessed March 2, 2024.

Chapter 27

“I was ... surprised”: Hill and McCubbin, *Mrs. Kennedy and Me*, 16.

“I tried to remain close”: Hill and McCubbin, 17.

“I got the feeling”: Hill and McCubbin, 18.

“despite being eight months pregnant”: Hill and McCubbin, 18.

Chapter 28

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“the same womb”: Quoted in Dallek, *An Unfinished Life*, 316.

“unvarnished truth”: Dallek, 316.

“It's Bobby”: Quoted in Schlesinger, *A Thousand Days*, 142.

“travesty of justice”: O'Brien, *John F. Kennedy*, 507.

“it's a disgrace”: Quoted in Dallek, *An Unfinished Life*, 319.

“a little legal experience”: Quoted in William Manchester, *Portrait of a President* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1962), 60.

comb his hair: Dallek, *An Unfinished Life*, 318.

Chapter 29

“He’d talk about anything”: Richard O’Donnell, “The Postmaster Who Saved Kennedy’s Life: Murphy Tells How He Helped Trap Pavlick,” *Boston Globe*, January 1, 1961.

“Vote Nixon-Lodge”: O’Donnell.

“extremely anti-Kennedy”: Pavlick Secret Service File, 274.

“shooting off steam”: O’Donnell, “The Postmaster Who Saved Kennedy’s Life.”

“he had visited Hyannis Port”: O’Donnell.

“security was poor”: O’Donnell.

“didn’t pay much attention”: O’Donnell.

“all the way to Hyannis Port”: O’Donnell.

Chapter 30

“I’ve heard a lot about you”: Hill and McCubbin, *Mrs. Kennedy and Me*, 18.

“charming as hell”: Hill and McCubbin, 18–19.

“never-ending flow of animals”: Hill and McCubbin, 19.

“wining, dining, and socializing”: Hill and McCubbin, 19.

“I was surprised”: Hill and McCubbin, 19.

due date: According to Jacqueline Kennedy’s doctors, her original due date was December 27, 1960.

The planned Caesarian section was scheduled for December 8, roughly two weeks before she was due. See Ludwig M. Deppisch, *The Health of the First Ladies: Medical Histories from Martha Washington to Michelle Obama* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2015), 144.

Chapter 31

“Get over there as fast as you can”: Hill and McCubbin, *Mrs. Kennedy and Me*, 20.

“The baby wasn’t due”: Hill and McCubbin, 20.

Dr. Walsh immediately arranged for an ambulance: Details of Jacqueline Kennedy’s phone call to Dr. Walsh and his race to the hospital are as reported by press accounts. See, for example, *Tampa Tribune*, November 26, 1960.

on the phone with Dr. Walsh: O’Brien, *John F. Kennedy*, 500.

“I waited outside”: Hill and McCubbin, *Mrs. Kennedy and Me*, 20.

“Sir, I’m supervisory nurse Mrs. Robinson”: Hill and McCubbin, 21.

Jackie will soon be moved: Deppisch, *The Health of the First Ladies*, 144.

Hill notices the infant’s peaceful face: Hill and McCubbin, *Mrs. Kennedy and Me*, 21.

“I’m taking him to the incubator”: Hill and McCubbin, 21.

“It’s a boy”: Hill and McCubbin, 21.

Chapter 32

At 4:30 a.m.: Hill and McCubbin, 21.

“He was ecstatic”: Hill and McCubbin, 21.

“It’s a Boy for the Kennedys!”: *Newsday*, November 25, 1960.

“Stork Beats Kennedy Plane!”: *Berkshire Eagle*, November 25, 1960.

“She was the prettiest patient”: *Tampa Tribune*, November 26, 1960.

unenviable task: Hill and McCubbin, *Mrs. Kennedy and Me*, 21–22.

“The baby is fine”: *Akron Beacon Journal*, November 25, 1960.

“It’s John F. Kennedy, Junior”: *Akron Beacon Journal*, November 25, 1960.

“First Son to Be Named”: *Sheboygan Press*, November 25, 1960.

“President-elect Says”: *Daily Herald*, November 25, 1960.

Chapter 33

he files paperwork: Pavlick also donates to the Spaulding Youth Center a small tract of land he owns in nearby Laconia, New Hampshire, where he lived before moving to Belmont. O'Donnell and Hickey, "Now It Can Be Told," 20.

"back in the stone age": Quoted in O'Donnell and Hickey, 20.

Chapter 34

“Jackie Gets 1st Peek”: *Daily News*, November 27, 1960.

“she’s getting along alright”: *Daily News*, November 27, 1960.

Salinger delights the crowd: *Daily News*, November 27, 1960.

“The president-elect would visit”: Hill and McCubbin, *Mrs. Kennedy and Me*, 22.

“How are you doing today”: Hill and McCubbin, 22.

“It was obvious”: Hill and McCubbin, 22.

“I’d go into her room”: Hill and McCubbin, 22–23.

“With me, she had no need”: Hill and McCubbin, 23.

“She was focused”: Hill and McCubbin, 23.

“She would have a list”: Hill and McCubbin, 23.

“Um, excuse me”: Blaine and McCubbin, *The Kennedy Detail*, 49.

“Hello, Mr. Tucker”: Blaine and McCubbin, 49–50.

They frequently ask to borrow: Blaine and McCubbin, 50.

“The Secret Service worried”: Blaine and McCubbin, 49.

Chapter 35

“I didn’t pay too much attention”: O’Donnell, “The Postmaster Who Saved Kennedy’s Life.”

“might end up in pieces”: O’Donnell.

Chapter 36

“the non-president”: Quoted in Dallek, *An Unfinished Life*, 302.

“Little Boy Blue”: Quoted in Dallek, 302.

lists of subjects to discuss: “Informal List of Subjects to Be Discussed at Meeting of President Eisenhower and Senator John F. Kennedy” by Clark Clifford, Clark Clifford Personal Papers, Presidential Transition Files, 1950–1961, Eisenhower-Kennedy meeting, 6 December 1960, CCPP-MF03–006, John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum.

“Watch this”: Quoted in Dallek, *An Unfinished Life*, 304.

“misinformed and mistaken”: Quoted in Dallek, 303.

Chapter 37

“He wanted his mail”: O’Donnell, “The Postmaster Who Saved Kennedy’s Life.”

“That was enough for me”: O’Donnell.

“I contacted my superiors”: O’Donnell.

Chapter 38

fifty police officers: *Tampa Times*, December 8, 1960.

Their reporting and photos: *Boston Globe*, December 9, 1960.

“It was clear”: Hill and McCubbin, *Mrs. Kennedy and Me*, 24.

“wilt thou be baptized?”: Quoted in *Boston Globe*, December 9, 1960.

“The child’s hair”: *Boston Globe*, December 9, 1960.

“I baptize you”: *Boston Globe*, December 9, 1960.

“I could tell”: Hill and McCubbin, *Mrs. Kennedy and Me*, 24.

Chapter 39

she was “imperious”: J. B. West and Mary Lynn Kotz, *Upstairs at the White House: My Life with the First Ladies* (New York: Coward, McCann & Geoghegan, 1973), 130, 132.

she was hierarchical: West and Kotz, 133.

under Mamie Eisenhower’s rules: West and Kotz, 133.

“prestige, status, and deference”: West and Kotz, 132.

“the college girl”: Kate Andersen Brower, *First Women: The Grace and Power of America’s Modern First Ladies* (New York: HarperCollins, 2017), 243.

“hit the ceiling”: Jacqueline Kennedy interview with Arthur Schlesinger Jr., as transcribed and collected in Michael Beschloss, ed., *Jacqueline Kennedy: Historic Conversations on Life with John F. Kennedy* (New York: Hyperion, 2011), 132.

“Everyone was concerned”: Hill and McCubbin, *Mrs. Kennedy and Me*, 25.

“How about if I call”: Hill and McCubbin, 25.

they’re behind schedule: Hill and McCubbin, 25.

“I’m Mr. West”: West and Kotz, *Upstairs at the White House*, 192.

She appears to be “very thin”: West and Kotz, 192.

“Mrs. Eisenhower is waiting”: West and Kotz, 193.

During the brief elevator ride: West and Kotz, 193.

“As I escorted the young woman”: West and Kotz, 193.

“Hello, Mrs. Kennedy”: West and Kotz, 193.

Chapter 41

“Mrs. Kennedy was extremely pale”: Hill and McCubbin, *Mrs. Kennedy and Me*, 26.

“I saw pain”: West and Kotz, *Upstairs at the White House*, 193.

“Something had happened”: Hill and McCubbin, *Mrs. Kennedy and Me*, 26.

“completely wiped out”: “Protecting Jacqueline Kennedy,” Events and Awards, John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum, accessed May 10, 2024, <https://www.jfklibrary.org/events-and-awards/kennedy-library-forums/past-forums/transcripts/protecting-jacqueline-kennedy>.

“Mr. Hill”: Hill and McCubbin, *Mrs. Kennedy and Me*, 26–27.

“Mrs. Kennedy’s Secret Service agent”: West and Kotz, *Upstairs at the White House*, 192.

“The thought of Mamie Eisenhower”: West and Kotz, 192.

He went down to his desk: West and Kotz, 193.

“The problem”: Hill and McCubbin, *Mrs. Kennedy and Me*, 27.

“She was intuitive”: Hill and McCubbin, 28.

“Mr. West”: West and Kotz, *Upstairs at the White House*, 194.

“Mrs. Eisenhower’s feelings”: West and Kotz, 194.

Chapter 42

“mound of luggage”: Hill and McCubbin, *Mrs. Kennedy and Me*, 29.

“The weather in Palm Beach”: Hill and McCubbin, 28.

“pale and clearly exhausted”: Hill and McCubbin, 28.

“great deal of turbulence”: Hill and McCubbin, 29.

“The bumpiness”: Hill and McCubbin, 29.

“I am not talking”: Hill and McCubbin, 30.

“Unfortunately, the privacy”: Hill and McCubbin, 30.

“I had a weeping fit”: Jacqueline Kennedy interview with Arthur Schlesinger Jr. as transcribed and collected in Beschloss, *Jacqueline Kennedy*, 132.

According to those who were there: Hill and McCubbin, *Mrs. Kennedy and Me*, 31.

Chapter 43

“I kept hoping”: Quoted in O’Donnell, “The Postmaster Who Saved Kennedy’s Life.”

“I kept watching”: Quoted in O’Donnell.

“Pavlick told me”: Quoted in O’Donnell.

“He wanted his mail”: Quoted in O’Donnell.

“He meant Palm Beach”: Quoted in O’Donnell.

Chapter 44

influx of mail: Baughman, *Secret Service Chief*, 254–55.

“letters from the lunatic fringe”: Baughman, 255.

“What is happening”: Hill and McCubbin, *Mrs. Kennedy and Me*, 34.

“personal letters”: Hill and McCubbin, 35.

“special access”: Hill and McCubbin, 35.

“I soon learned”: Hill and McCubbin, 35.

Chapter 45

Lakeside Motel: Pavlick Secret Service File, 249, 268.

large Underwood typewriter: Pavlick Secret Service File, 247, 272.

“Am here at the end of my rope”: Pavlick Secret Service File, 231.

“I came down to die”: Pavlick Secret Service File, 231.

Chapter 46

church: For more on the churches that Kennedy attended throughout his life, see “Churches Attended by John F. Kennedy,” John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum, accessed May 26, 2024, <https://www.jfklibrary.org/learn/about-jfk/life-of-john-f-kennedy/fast-facts-john-f-kennedy/churches-attended-by-john-f-kennedy>.

JFK attended confession: Jacqueline Kennedy interview with Arthur Schlesinger Jr., as transcribed in Beschloss, *Jacqueline Kennedy*, 152.

escort: Blaine and McCubbin, *The Kennedy Detail*, 51.

Chapter 47

two-way to one-way: Blaine and McCubbin, 45.

dynamite he purchased: Pavlick Secret Service File, 256.

Chapter 48

They'll see him off: Some accounts suggest that John Jr. is also present in the group saying goodbye to JFK as he leaves for church. If this were the case, presumably the family's child caregiver would be carrying him. Clint Hill does not mention John Jr.'s presence, and we have chosen to follow his version of events. See Hill and McCubbin, *Mrs. Kennedy and Me*, 35.

Chapter 50

Gerald Blaine is in church: Blaine and McCubbin, *The Kennedy Detail*, 51.

“dressed in their Sunday finest”: Blaine and McCubbin, 51.

“He just didn’t seem to fit”: Blaine and McCubbin, 51.

“the man’s eyes became transfixed”: Blaine and McCubbin, 51.

Grabbing the man’s elbow: Blaine and McCubbin, 51.

“church usher”: Blaine and McCubbin, 51.

“stare[s] into the man’s eyes”: Blaine and McCubbin, 51.

Blaine makes a note: Blaine and McCubbin, 51.

BI 606: Pavlick Secret Service File, 277.

Chapter 51

substantial potential threat: Pavlick Secret Service File, 243.

contacted the main headquarters: Pavlick Secret Service File, 263.

urgent phone call: Pavlick Secret Service File, 243.

“this person should be considered dangerous”: Pavlick Secret Service File, 243.

“Pavlick operated”: Pavlick Secret Service File, 244.

Headquarters instructs: Pavlick Secret Service File, 244.

Warning notices are sent: Pavlick Secret Service File, 244.

Chapter 52

roughly 8:00 a.m.: Pavlick Secret Service File, 249.

“I may not be alive”: Pavlick Secret Service File, 231.

“Rode up by the Kennedy place”: Pavlick Secret Service File, 231.

“expressing his regret”: Pavlick Secret Service File, 269.

letter of unknown contents: Pavlick Secret Service File, 252.

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unusual instructions: Pavlick Secret Service File, 244.

“I wheeled right around”: As reported by the *Miami Herald*, December 17, 1960.

According to the briefing: Pavlick Secret Service File, 244.

“I pulled him over”: *Miami Herald*, December 17, 1960.

“Plenty of people do that”: O’Donnell and Hickey, “Now It Can Be Told.”

“In a matter of seconds”: *Miami Herald*, December 17, 1960.

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“Vagrancy and Reckless Driving”: Pavlick Secret Service File, 268.

first team in: The identity of the Secret Service agent who conducted the first interview with Pavlick is not known. The agent’s name and position are redacted from the Secret Service’s case records. See Pavlick Secret Service File, 268.

report: Pavlick Secret Service File, 269.

“subject answered”: Pavlick Secret Service File, 269.

“blast out some stumps”: Pavlick Secret Service File, 269.

no prior arrest record: Pavlick Secret Service File, 272.

“raising all kinds of flowers”: Pavlick Secret Service File, 273.

“release the prisoner”: Pavlick Secret Service File, 244.

Title 18, U.S. Code Section 871: In 1960, the relevant statute provides for penalties for threats made against the President and the President-elect. In Pavlick’s case, the application of this statute was questionable, since even though Kennedy had been declared the winner of the Presidential election, his victory had not yet been certified by the Electoral College. In 1962, the statute was quietly amended to cover all “successors to the Presidency.”

“The Defendant indicated”: Text of the formal complaint is as reported by the *Boston Globe*, December 16, 1960.

human bomb: The phrase refers to news coverage of Richard Pavlick soon to come. See, for example, *Boston Globe*, December 17, 1960.

“every hardware store”: Randy Gaddo, “Colonel Robert W. Rust: The Marine Who Helped Save a President,” *Leatherneck*, December 2014, 33.

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official report: Pavlick Secret Service File, 247.

“a good sized building”: Pavlick Secret Service File, 551.

drilled holes in the chassis: Gaddo, “Colonel Robert W. Rust,” 33.

He admits: Pavlick Secret Service File, 249.

“He stated he had driven”: Pavlick Secret Service File, 249.

“he did not want to kill”: Pavlick Secret Service File, 251.

their official report: Pavlick Secret Service File, 250.

they stop pursuing: Pavlick Secret Service File, 252.

“he then planned”: Pavlick Secret Service File, 243.

“the security here is lousy”: *Miami Herald*, December 17, 1960.

“I had the crazy idea”: *New York Times*, December 17, 1960.

“I would have waited”: *Miami Herald*, December 17, 1960.

Pavlick appears at a hearing: Pavlick Secret Service File, 247.

charges will be augmented: *Fort Lauderdale News*, December 20, 1960.

Searching his room: Pavlick Secret Service File, 247.

“If death and destruction”: Text of the letter is as quoted in O’Donnell and Hickey, “Now It Can Be Told,” 18.

“You really did come here”: Gaddo, “Colonel Robert W. Rust,” 34.

handwritten statement: Pavlick Secret Service File, 249–50.

“was not planned”: Pavlick Secret Service File, 249.

“closest calls”: Baughman, *Secret Service Chief*, 9.

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“He wasn’t panicked”: *The Blade*, November 21, 2003.

“it was left up to him”: Hill and McCubbin, *Mrs. Kennedy and Me*, 36.

“I never discussed it”: Hill and McCubbin, 36.

“After eight years”: Blaine and McCubbin, *The Kennedy Detail*, 52.

“The closeness of the call”: Baughman, *Secret Service Chief*, 10.

“change of heart”: As interviewed in the TV documentary *Kennedy’s Suicide Bomber* (Smithsonian Channel, 2013).

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airliners collide: Details on the crash are from the *New York Times*, December 17, 1960.

surviving passenger: Details on the surviving passenger are from the *New York Times*, June 30, 2009.

“N.Y. AIRLINERS COLLIDE”: *Boston Globe*, December 16, 1960.

below the fold: *Miami Herald*, December 17, 1960.

“Ho-Ho-Ho-ing”: *Miami Herald*, December 17, 1960.

Chapter 58

wisps of smoke: O'Brien, *John F. Kennedy*, 515.

There are more blessings: For a complete list of the day's events, see the Kennedy-Johnson Inaugural Committee's official Inauguration program, accessed June 23, 2024, https://www.google.com/books/edition/Official_Inaugural_Program_January_20_19/J6Z4AAAAAhI=en&gbpv=0.

Robert Frost: O'Brien, *John F. Kennedy*, 515.

"windbag": O'Brien, 514.

"Let the word go forth": John F. Kennedy Inaugural Address, January 20, 1961, John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum.

"stirred the heart": Responses from *Time* and the *New Yorker* are quoted in O'Brien, *John F. Kennedy*, 518.

"everyone praised it": *New York Times*, January 22, 1961.

best Inaugural speech he's ever heard: Dallek, *An Unfinished Life*, 326.

"It was so soaring": Quoted in O'Brien, *John F. Kennedy*, 518.

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“depressive-mania psychosis”: *Miami Herald*, December 17, 1961.

“homicidal tendencies”: *Palm Beach Post*, January 28, 1961.

“dangerous”: *Fort Lauderdale News*, January 11, 1961.

“mentally incompetent”: Cited in *Pavlick v. Settle*, 203 F. Supp. 42 (W.D. Missouri 1962).

“petitioner is being held”: *Pavlick v. Harris*, 222 F. Supp. 79 (W.D. Missouri 1963).

“cold mercy”: Vic DiGravio, “The Last Bill JFK Signed—and the Mental Health Work Still Undone,” WBUR online, October 23, 2013.

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“It was terrifying”: *The Blade*, November 21, 2003.

“never doubted”: *The Blade*, November 21, 2003.

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“Jackie got raves”: “Kennedys Hit the Road: A Visit with Neighbors,” *Life*, May 26, 1961.

first press conference: John F. Kennedy news conference, Palais de Chaillot, Paris, June 2, 1961, John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum.

She has a vision: Perry, *Jacqueline Kennedy*.

“makeover of the White House”: Quoted in Perry, 64.

“restoration”: Perry, 102.

Chapter 62

Halfback: Hill and McCubbin, *Mrs. Kennedy and Me*, 277.

morning of November 22: The assassination of John F. Kennedy on November 22, 1963, has been the subject of countless books and articles, and despite a thorough investigation by the Warren Commission the question of how and why Kennedy was killed remains mired in controversy. Two reliable sources on the events that day are Gerald Posner, *Case Closed: Lee Harvey Oswald and the Assassination of JFK* (New York: Random House, 1993); and Vincent Bugliosi, *Reclaiming History: The Assassination of President John F. Kennedy* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2007).

“absolute frenzy”: Blaine and McCubbin, *The Kennedy Detail*, 199.

“I can see his suntan”: Bugliosi, *Reclaiming History*, 27.

bouquet of red roses: Bugliosi, 27.

“As we turned”: Hill and McCubbin, *Mrs. Kennedy and Me*, 289.

“constantly scanned”: Hill and McCubbin, 289.

“hear yourself think”: Hill and McCubbin, 288.

“red brick building”: Hill and McCubbin, 290.

“Dallas doesn’t love you”: Posner, *Case Closed*, 232.

“Halfback to base”: Posner, 232.

“sudden explosive noise”: Hill and McCubbin, *Mrs. Kennedy and Me*, 290.

“A firecracker?”: Blaine and McCubbin, *The Kennedy Detail*, 212.

“I turned my head”: Hill and McCubbin, *Mrs. Kennedy and Me*, 290.

“I wasn’t thinking”: Hill and McCubbin, 290.

“feeling of dread”: Blaine and McCubbin, *The Kennedy Detail*, 215.

“sound of a melon”: Hill and McCubbin, *Mrs. Kennedy and Me*, 290.

“they have shot my husband”: Bugliosi, *Reclaiming History*, 42.

“more shots were coming”: Hill and McCubbin, *Mrs. Kennedy and Me*, 290.

“She was reaching”: Hill and McCubbin, 291.

“they shot his head off”: Hill and McCubbin, 291.

“The limousine was there”: Posner, *Case Closed*, 286.

“I want the world to see”: Posner, 287.

“unbearable pain”: Hill and McCubbin, *Mrs. Kennedy and Me*, 295.

“what’s going on down there?!”: Hill and McCubbin, 296.

“It’s as bad as it gets”: Hill and McCubbin, 296.

Chapter 63

“It was a death that touched everyone”: Roger Mudd, *The Place to Be: Washington, CBS, and the Glory Days of Television News* (Philadelphia: Perseus, 2008), 133.

bestselling book: That book is White, *The Making of the President*.

special issue: White’s interview with Jackie Kennedy is published in the special issue as “For President Kennedy: An Epilogue for President Kennedy,” *Life*, December 6, 1963. White’s epilogue has also been archived by the John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum.

“There was a sheet over Jack”: Quoted in Theodore H. White, *In Search of History: A Personal Adventure* (New York: Warner Books, 1978), 522.

“I put the ring on Jack’s finger”: White, *In Search of History*, 522.

“The song he loved most”: White, “For President Kennedy.”

“what I think of history”: White, *In Search of History*, 523.

“history made Jack what he was”: White, “For President Kennedy.”

“history was full of heroes”: White, *In Search of History*, 523.

“it will never be that way again”: White, “For President Kennedy.”

“What bothered her was history”: White, *In Search of History*, 520.

holding its presses: White, *In Search of History*, 524.

“labeling the myth”: White, *In Search of History*, 518.

over 70 percent: “Presidential Approval Ratings—Gallup Historical Statistics and Trends,” Gallup, accessed June 24, 2024, <https://news.gallup.com/poll/116677/presidential-approval-ratings-gallup-historical-statistics-trends.aspx>.

more than twenty points: Jeffrey M. Jones, “Retrospective Approval of JFK Rises to 90%; Trump at 46%,” Gallup, July 17, 2023, <https://news.gallup.com/poll/508625/retrospective-approval-jfk-rises-trump.aspx>.

“All this will not be finished”: John F. Kennedy Inaugural Address, January 20, 1961, John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum.

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The Lightning Rod

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Cover design by Keith Hayes

Cover photograph © Everett Collection / Alamy Images

Maps of West Palm Beach and the Kennedy estate courtesy of George S. Brockway

The Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data is available upon request.

ISBN 978-1-250-79057-6 (hardcover)

ISBN 978-1-250-38924-4 (international, sold outside the U.S., subject to rights availability)

ISBN 978-1-250-79058-3 (ebook)

eISBN 9781250790583

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First U.S. Edition: 2025
First International Edition: 2025

* Two thousand dollars in 1960 is the equivalent of roughly \$21,000 in 2024.