

SURROUNDED BY ENEMIES: What if Kennedy Survived Dallas? *A novel by Bryce Zabel*

(EXCERPT from Chapter 3: An Election With Consequences)



JFK pointed at the *New York Times* front page. The Big Apple was in a turmoil over the arrival of a British rock-and-roll sensation called the Beatles. They'd be arriving in just days now to play on the *Ed Sullivan Show* Sunday night. The issue of the moment seemed to be providing security against mobs of screaming girls. To better understand this, the President called in Pamela Turnure and Mimi Alford, two young women with White House jobs, and had Mrs. Lincoln put on a 45 rpm record, a song called "Love Me Do," that had been sent up by the mailroom at Pierre Salinger's request. Both men teased the young women about how much

they liked the music but admitted it did have a lot of energy.

The Beatles were coming to America whether America was ready for them or not. Predictions were everywhere that Ed Sullivan would attract the highest ratings in his show's history, even higher than they had been for Elvis Presley's appearances. There would be more security outside and inside CBS-TV Studio 50 (later renamed the Ed Sullivan Theater) than there currently was at the White House.

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“Great,” said the President. “Maybe it would be safe for me to see them.” JFK had taken lately to complaining to his younger brother that he was a virtual prisoner in the White House, with the heavy security and his wife's declared moratorium on public trips. Now, JFK was looking to come out of his shell, even if Jackie and the security teams said he couldn't. Bobby took this as a sign of progress, though in the brothers' typical way of joking with each other, he wouldn't show it.

“Don't go to any theaters, Jack,” Bobby deadpanned. “You know what happened to Lincoln.”

And, yet, that is exactly what President John F. Kennedy did on February 9, 1964. He went to the theater.

The Beatles played two sets of their music that seemed the perfect medicine to lift the national depression. Sullivan smiled, girls screamed and, during the second set, Kennedy was escorted backstage, where he watched along with Bobby and Ethel.

The Kennedy brothers had decided to send the conspirators a message, publicly, that they, too, could keep a secret and pull off an operation. Kenny O'Donnell knew someone who knew someone, and discrete calls were made from secure lines. It came so fast and from so far out of left field that absolutely no one saw it coming.

Millions of Americans and nearly everyone under twenty-five, it seems, remembers the night when the President of the United States appeared on the *Ed Sullivan Show* to greet the Beatles after their second set as the greatest jolt of pop cultural intensity they'd ever experienced. Seeing the Beatles was beyond huge to millions and millions of people. Seeing the President smiling was an unbeatable relief. Together, the two images were off the charts. It was, said Sammy Davis Jr. to *Newsweek*, “magic times magic, man.”

“I wanted to come up to New York to welcome you young men to the United States,” grinned the President as the shocked Fab Four shook his hand on live television. “Now, which one of you is the leader?” Kennedy held out an over-large gold key that had been given him by a stage hand.

John Lennon and Paul McCartney exchanged glances. Neither one wanted to discuss this with the President of the United States. Lennon grinned back. “We don't have a leader in the Beatles,” he declared.

Kennedy did not miss a beat. “Probably safer that way.” He winked and smiled and that photo of the President laughing with the Beatles as they all

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stood together seemed to instantly dispel the rumors that he was shaken and brooding in the Oval Office.

Later, after the show, the President posed for a photo on the stage with the Beatles that did not include the gold key. In fact, by this point, both George Harrison and Ringo Starr had already changed out of their trademark Beatle suits. This is the image that everyone remembers. Kennedy smiling broadly, surrounded by four slightly stunned Mop Tops, an arm on the backs of Harrison and his bandmate John Lennon. Heralding how “The Wild 1964 Election Begins,” Top Story ran it as the cover of its February 24 issue, which quickly sold out on the newsstand, went into a second printing, and sold out again.

Whether President Kennedy had just tweaked the treasonous conspirators who wanted him dead, it was clear he couldn’t have picked a better coming-out party. The record shows that the President of the United States did not look afraid at all and seemed to be enjoying himself as much as these four English lads from Liverpool.

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