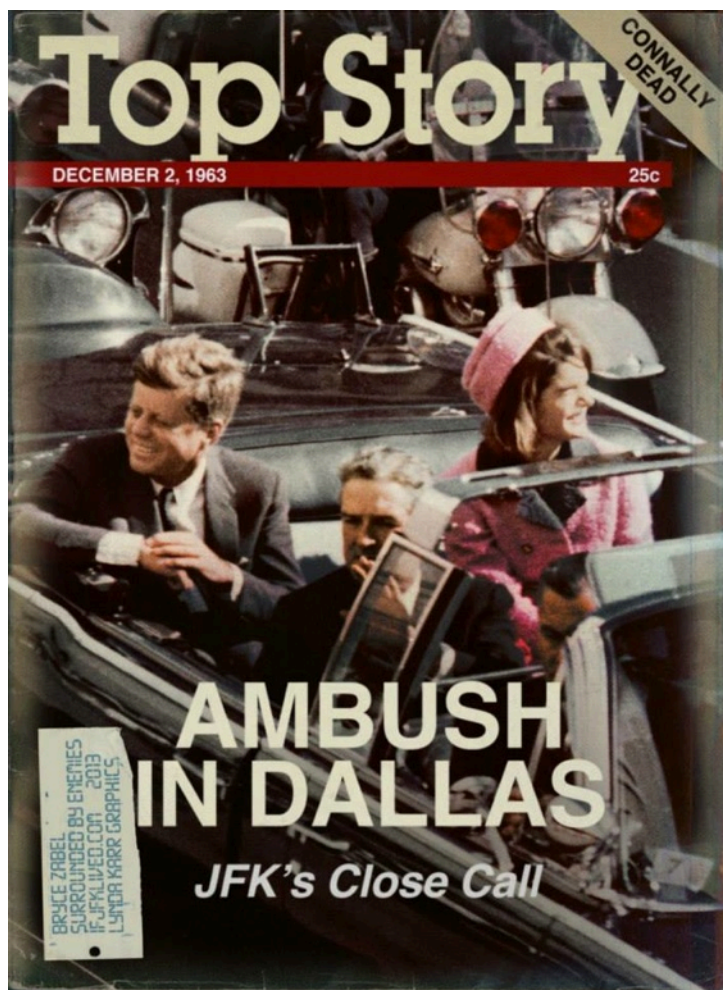


SURROUNDED BY ENEMIES: What if Kennedy Survived Dallas? *A novel by Bryce Zabel*

(EXCERPT from Chapter 1: Seven Days in November)

“The Day JFK Dodged a Bullet”



Our nation and the world breathed a sigh of relief upon learning President Kennedy had miraculously avoided the bullets targeting him in Dallas, but that feeling was overshadowed by an almost unthinkable fact: Someone had tried to murder our President. That thought proved to be so unnerving that country music populist Jimmy Dean scored a December 1963 instant hit with his upbeat ballad, “The Day JFK Dodged a Bullet.” The phrasing fit right in with the mythos that had been so carefully cultivated since a young, brave, PT boat officer named John F. Kennedy began seeking office almost twenty years earlier. It was a

way to see the unnerving current circumstances as proof of the President’s charmed life rather than a shattering of our national calm.

As the events broke that day, however, there was fear and confusion among all the President’s men working in his White House. Many of their

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stories of shock and panic in Dallas have been told now, but other accounts have been lost in the fog of conspiracy. We know the number of bullets but continue to argue about who fired them and from where. We also know now that their intended target, President Kennedy, quickly recovered from his minor injuries and sprang into action.

In retrospect, it is clear that within the first hour after the event, both the President of the United States and the attorney general felt the government they represented was under siege and their civilian authority was in serious jeopardy. How they came to that conclusion, and what they said to those working in the White House in those first days set the stage for an epic confrontation.

Dealey Plaza

As the presidential motorcade turned into Dealey Plaza, Secret Service Special Agent Clinton J. Hill did not like what he saw. To the left of the President's car was an open, landscaped area at the western end of downtown Dallas. Hill, riding on the left running board of the follow-up car, felt his stomach tighten at the sight of so much open space. On the right, he saw the Texas School Book Depository, toward which the President was waving. Hill glanced up to the building's higher floors. The bodyguard's reflex changed the course of history.

A glint of metal in the midday sun flashed from a window on the sixth floor. It is not clear whether Hill saw only the rifle barrel or also, perhaps, the man who was holding it. Either way, there was no time to look, only to act. He launched himself from the running board of his own vehicle and sprinted toward the President's car, screaming, "Go! Go!" as he leaped on the trunk and scrambled forward.

The driver, Secret Service Special Agent William Greer, inexplicably had hesitated and nearly slowed to a stop, a reaction opposite from what he had been trained to do. Hill screamed, "Greer! Now!"

Greer mashed his foot down on the gas, swerving out of his lane in an evasive pattern. Even as he did, multiple shots were fired, seemingly from a variety of directions, according to numerous witnesses. The presidential motorcade had entered what would come to be called the "Kill Zone."

Hill was the agent assigned to the First Lady but, in an instant like this, he was trained to cover the President, particularly when he saw that the

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agent in the passenger seat, Roy Kellerman, whose job it was to protect the President, was frozen, just as Greer initially had been.

Hill tried to push the President down, but Kennedy's body was stiff; it wouldn't bend even under Hill's muscle. The Secret Service agent instantly readjusted so he could move both President Kennedy and the First Lady into prone positions across the seat. He supported his body over them with both arms.

The President, by his own testimony under oath before his interrogators at his U.S. Senate trial, screamed, "Jesus Christ! They're trying to kill all of us!" His advisers Kenneth O'Donnell and Dave Powers reacted similarly. O'Donnell was JFK's appointments secretary and political sounding board and Powers was the President's long-time close friend. Because of their White House importance, the two men were riding in the car immediately behind Kennedy, and they, too, felt they were being targeted from at least two directions and that everyone was going to die.

Agent Hill was hit twice, one bullet shattering his spinal cord and the other ripping through his left temple. The amateur film of Dallas resident Abraham Zapruder caught the action, including a spray of blood and brains that appeared to knock Hill's head back and to the left. For many observers, the head shot did seem to indicate that at least one bullet was fired from a grassy knoll area nearby and not from the upper window of the book depository, the likely origin of the first spine-shattering explosion.

Later testimony from witnesses told a tale of Secret Service agents in other cars who seemed asleep or operating in slow motion. All that can be stated for certain is that the heroic Agent Hill's instant action had forced Greer to react quickly enough to make up for any other neglect that may have been in operation. Kellerman had similarly snapped into delayed response and had climbed back to the jump seats that Governor Connally and his wife were using. Connally was bleeding badly but he wasn't Kellerman's concern. The Secret Service's job is to protect the President first and the First Lady second, at all costs. The description says nothing about the governor of Texas. And so, even as Kellerman lay across the Connallys, he looked directly past them to Kennedy. "Mr. President, are you hit?"

The President and First Lady were covered in blood and brains that had been splattered from the shots that had nearly taken off an entire side of agent Hill's head and broken his back into pieces. Kennedy answered honestly, "I don't know."

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Historians continue to debate whether four or five total shots were fired and from where. What is known with certainty is that the salvo was aimed at a fast-moving car. That it was a conspiracy seems clear to most today, even though the confessed or convicted participants — now in their eighties and nineties, with many others dead or still at large — have continued to contradict each other about their roles and obfuscate the facts time and again.

What mattered at the instant of what would gruesomely be called the “turkey shoot,” was that bullets were fired from at least two locations. Greer’s evasive driving of the Lincoln made the car difficult to hit, no matter how many shooters were involved. Bullets were flying but most, seemingly, were fired out of desperation by would-be assassins who knew their chance at the target was nearly over.

Even so, Hill was down, Governor Connally had been hit once, and the President’s condition was unknown. That left Jacqueline Kennedy and Idanell “Nellie” Connally still to account for.

Two more shots appear to have hit the Kennedy vehicle in its furious escape. One shattered Agent Kellerman’s shoulder, and entered Governor Connally’s chest, causing severe internal bleeding and collapsing his right lung.

With three confirmed victims and the status of the Kennedys uncertain, Greer zoomed the Lincoln toward Parkland Memorial at speeds approaching eighty miles per hour.

Later asked who “they” were, in response to his statement, “They’re trying to kill us all,” President Kennedy famously told the investigators deposing him, “How much time do you have?”

Hickory Hill

At his suburban McLean, Virginia, Hickory Hill estate, purchased years earlier from JFK, the President’s brother, thirty-eight-year-old Attorney General Robert Kennedy, was lunching with U.S. Attorney Robert Morgenthau, who represented the southern district of New York. They ate hot clam chowder and tuna fish sandwiches.

The younger Kennedy had just finished a swim and was still wet. He appeared to be trying to relax and not succeeding, according to

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Morgenthau. "He had a lot on his mind but he could only share a tiny bit with me. I could see he was frustrated."

The outside phone rang at about 1:45 p.m. on the other end of the pool and was picked up by Kennedy's wife, Ethel. "You can never get away from this damn job," said Kennedy as he took the call.

On the other end of the line was FBI director J. Edgar Hoover, someone who never called his ostensible boss at home. Neither man had ever had the slightest positive regard for the other. Never much of a conversationalist, Hoover said simply: "I have news for you." The attorney general asked the first thing to come to mind: "How is the President?" Hoover delivered a two-sentence précis of the news, and the two men hung up. In later years, each claimed to be the one to have ended the conversation.

Kennedy asked his guest Morgenthau to excuse him, explaining only that the President's motorcade had been attacked, adding as an afterthought that the governor of Texas and at least one Secret Service agent were wounded. Morgenthau offered his help in any way. "Call everyone you know today," said RFK. "Let me know what they're saying."

Morgenthau nodded his understanding but added his own reassurance: "They're praying for your brother and our country." The New Yorker was escorted to the downstairs living room in the house, where he was left to watch the news on television. "I felt a sense of great dread in those moments," said Morgenthau in a December 2, 1963 piece for Top Story. "I could not bear to stay in this sadness and terror, but I could not leave without permission." Eventually, however, Morgenthau did leave. With no one else in the room and Bobby still rolling from one urgent phone call to another, the New York attorney simply walked from the house, determined to get to his office and roll his own calls so he could give the attorney general the information he had requested.

Bobby Kennedy's first telephone call, revealed during the future hearings of the Joint Committee on the Attempted Assassination of the President (JCAAP), was not to his brother but to national security adviser McGeorge Bundy. "Have the combinations on the President's locked files changed right away," the attorney general said. Kennedy continued to work the phones from his upstairs bedroom so feverishly that he would not change his wet swim suit for more than two hours and only then when his wife demanded it.

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There was concern that whoever was behind the Dallas ambush might be coming to Hickory Hill next. Because of this fear, the Fairfax County police surrounded the grounds of the RFK compound without being asked, and Kennedy did not object. Normally opposed to strict security, he instructed Justice Department spokesman Edwin Guthman who had rushed to be by his boss' side, to replace the police with federal marshals.

Under the supervision of Chief U.S. Marshal Jim McShane, Kennedy's estate was immediately encircled. As McShane testified in late 1964, "If someone was coming to kill that man, we were prepared to make them kill us first."

Parkland Memorial

Parkland Memorial Hospital's Margaret Hinchcliffe, working the emergency desk, had been told to assign teams to handle the injuries that were on the way in. When the President's appointments scheduler and close friend Kenneth O'Donnell approached her with two Secret Service agents, revolvers drawn, he instructed her to assign the best doctor to the President immediately. Hinchcliffe protested this breach of established triage protocol. Seeing her confronted by armed men, Doctor Robert Shaw, senior ER physician then on duty at Parkland Memorial, approached O'Donnell. "I am in charge," he said, "and I will save the President if he needs saving. Follow me."

With that, Dr. Shaw, O'Donnell and the agents found President Kennedy, accompanied by his wife and even more Secret Service agents, and directed them all into Trauma One. Dr. Shaw took one look at the commander-in-chief and said, "Sir, lie down on this gurney here. Immediately."

Kennedy refused, pointing to Connally and Hill, who both had just been wheeled in, unconscious, on gurneys of their own, blood staining the crisp white linens. "They need help first."

Shaw, however, focused on the President. "I can personally vouch for the teams working on both of them, sir, but you are my concern, and the country's. I need you to lie down and let me examine you." Kennedy looked at the First Lady, who nodded that he should do as he was told. Kennedy looked around at the pale tile, sterile instruments, and the clock that read 12:37 p.m. Then he flashed his famous charm. "Well, Doctor, I can assure

you I would like very much to lie down on that gurney, but I can't right now." Kennedy removed his blood-caked suit coat, then began to unbutton his shirt, which was heavily splattered with blood from Connally and Hill.

As Shaw watched, President Kennedy removed his tie and dress shirt, revealing an unusually constrictive shoulder-to-groin brace. "I'm afraid my back needs support occasionally," he told the doctor. In subsequent interviews, Shaw remembered being startled by the President's compromised appearance, which was so uncharacteristic of his normal image. In truth, Kennedy had aggravated his back during a sexual encounter in the White House pool nearly two months earlier.

As Shaw helped him out of his back supports, Kennedy indicated Trauma Two, where Texas Governor John Connally was fighting for his life. Inside, Dr. Charles J. Carrico, only two years a practicing physician, and two nurses were using surgical shears to cut the clothes away from the Texas governor. What they saw was not good; he had been hit three times, most grievously through the chest. Carrico checked for a pulse and blood pressure, and pronounced both "palpable."

Shaw explained the scene to the Kennedy party. "The governor's in the care of Doctor Carrico. He's on his way to the OR any minute."

From the side of the room, Jacqueline Kennedy spoke softly. "What about the agents? Where are they?"

Without taking his eyes off the President's body, now prone on the exam table, Shaw answered. "One of the agents was alert and is being attended in an OR. The other agent, Agent Hill, suffered extensive head trauma and spinal damage and has not survived his wounds. I'm very sorry." As those words were spoken, the First Lady gasped, looked as if she might faint, and was given a chair by a nurse. His death made Secret Service Special Agent Clint Hill only the second member of the organization to be killed while protecting a United States President during an assassination attempt, along with Leslie Coffelt, who had died protecting President Harry Truman in 1950.

Shaw carefully examined the President's body, looking for wounds, as everyone watched. In a few cases, he used cotton gauze and alcohol to wipe away blood in order to satisfy himself that it had not originated from the President himself. After several minutes, Shaw offered his initial conclusion, spoken to the nurse assisting him: "I see no entry wounds."

President Kennedy was allowed to dress and did so in the same bloody clothes that he had entered with. He had discussed trading shirts and

jackets with O'Donnell, but Jackie was most adamant that he not do that: "Let them see what they've done." The Kennedys resolved then to wear these clothes until this day was over.

Shaw instructed the President to remain in Trauma One for at least an hour for observation. Kennedy said he wanted to meet privately with Nellie Connally but was told such a conversation would have to wait. She was at her husband's side, moving with the trauma team to the OR. Kennedy nodded, turned to O'Donnell: "Right before this happened, Kenny, she said to us, 'You can't say Texas doesn't love you, Mr. President.'"

At Parkland Memorial, chaos reigned. Dallas police officers, FBI agents, and Secret Service agents were everywhere, most of them with guns drawn. An intern was nearly shot when he tried to hide in a linen closet to deal with a panic attack. Meanwhile, Agent Hill was dead, and Governor Connally was near death. Only agent Kellerman looked like he would survive. Yet, despite the blood and carnage, the President of the United States and the First Lady had been physically untouched.

In the middle of this, Kennedy, scheduler Kenneth O'Donnell, and presidential factotum David Powers commandeered Trauma One as a temporary Oval Office, given Dr. Shaw's instructions that the President must stay for medical reasons. Finally, Jack Kennedy heard what he wanted to hear: "Your brother is on the phone."

"They fucking tried to kill us," the President told the attorney general, based on the testimony of Doctor Shaw, who had refused to leave Kennedy's side in case he went into shock. He later said, "It was odd. Aside from the curse word, which hardly surprised me under the circumstances, it was the way he phrased it. They tried to kill us."

Even though Attorney General Robert Kennedy's phone line was thought to be secure, the FBI later disclosed it had transcripts of that call. The fact that the Kennedy brothers were speaking on a line that had been wiretapped without their knowledge would later prove to be more shocking than what was actually said. RFK responded, "I want to know if Sam Giancana is behind this. I need to know right now. Can you say yes or no?"

The President responded, "You're prosecuting him, what do you think?"

In fact, that very day the attorney general was waiting to hear about a verdict in the Giancana case. "He's got motive and he's got the resources," said Bobby.

While Jackie distracted Dr. Shaw with conversation about Agent Hill, the President responded, "We both know plenty of people with motives and

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resources to put me in the ground.” Powers and O’Donnell, who would be called to testify before JCAAP as well as the House Committee on the Judiciary, each remembered the President’s words exactly the same way.

“I have people checking,” said Bobby, “but we can’t count on Hoover or McCone for a straight take.” He was referring to the FBI director, a notorious thorn in the side of the Kennedys and other Presidents, and the CIA’s leader, John McCone. Jack and Bobby agreed to meet that night in the Oval Office, as soon as possible after JFK came back to Washington. The Kennedys had begun the search for suspects.

Less than two hours after his arrival at Parkland Memorial Hospital, Governor John Connally died in the main OR. President Kennedy, who had refused to leave while Connally was alive for fear he would be seen as uncaring toward the man who hosted him in Texas, agreed to his advisers’ demand that it was time to go. President Kennedy and Mrs. Kennedy were driven in separate cars to Love Field, the public airport in Dallas, where they would reunite for the trip home on Air Force One.

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