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

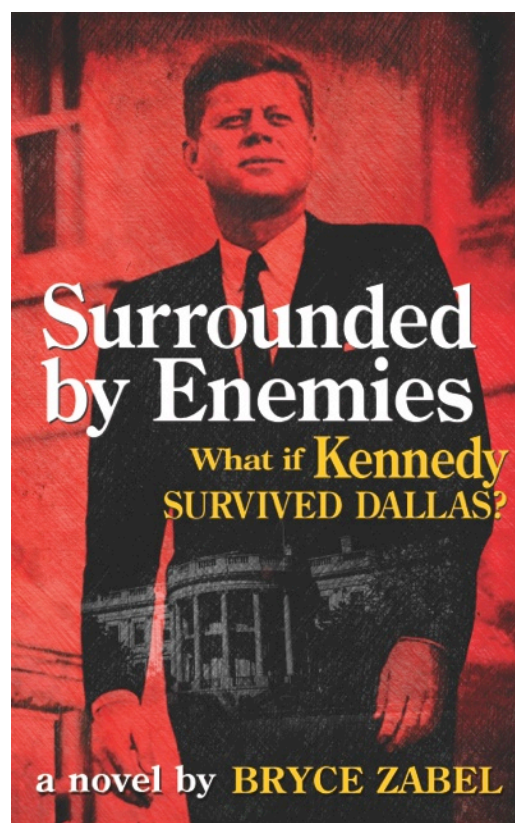
(EXCERPT from Chapter 2: Battle Lines Being Drawn)

November 28, 1963 - December 31, 1963: Giving Thanks

When Thanksgiving came on Thursday, November 28 in 1963, many millions of Americans at their holiday tables gave thanks for the survival of President Kennedy. Pope Paul VI, whom Kennedy had visited in the Vatican only in July, offered a special Thanksgiving blessing for the first Catholic president. In it, he called President Kennedy a “peacemaker” and implied that he had been spared by God to continue his mission.

Look magazine devoted more than a dozen pages and twenty-seven photos to that 1963 celebration. Despite its focus on average Americans, the most famous image from the *Look* spread was that of the President’s mother, Rose, as she took her son’s face in her hands when she first saw him arrive at the Kennedy compound in Hyannis Port and kissed his cheek. “The Lord is not done with you, Jack,” she reminded him. “I hope you’ve said your prayers.” The President had done so, religiously, since Dallas. Now he was celebrating with the First Lady, their children, and both their extended families. Every cousin, brother, mother or anyone else related to the Kennedy name was there as a show of support for John.

Primetime television went back to regular schedules days before, although there were more news cut-ins — the greatest volume ever since the invention of TV news. As in the White House, three televisions were in the study of the Hyannis Port main house so that Jack and Bobby could keep an eye on ABC,



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CBS and NBC simultaneously during the network news block. As the botched assassination that had kept everyone spellbound began to loosen its grip on the national consciousness, the Kennedy brothers were wary and focused, shocked by their enemy's brazen behavior. Should they strike back, surrender, or just go to ground?

Six days out from the ambush at Dealey Plaza, the Kennedys had to come to realize how many moving parts now existed in the management of what had happened there. There were federal and state investigations, a laundry list of potential suspects and a clear battle brewing over jurisdiction.

Massachusetts' newly elected Senator Edward Kennedy, or Teddy as the youngest brother was called, had been told by Jack and Bobby to stay clear of strategy sessions on the grounds that he needed "plausible deniability," a term then gaining currency in the intelligence community. They had kept him at arm's length to this point, because they wanted Teddy to be able to hear what was being said in the shadows of the Senate without having to offer up any real insight from the White House. At his insistence, however, they relented and brought him into their conversations at Hyannis Port.

On Friday, the blood relations were joined by the political family. The White House team contributed Kenny O'Donnell, Pierre Salinger, Dave Powers and Ted Sorensen. This self-described group of "all the President's men" was brought together to review the options that would be on the table when Congress returned from the Thanksgiving break in less than seventy-two hours. It began with them all seated outside at a round table on a cold, dreary afternoon, looking out over the water. Federal agents had established a cordon around the property. They had advised against an outdoor meeting but had been overruled by the President himself.

Web of Suspicion

As the men gathered outside, the scoop from Washington, D.C. was that Senator Everett Dirksen, the Republican leader of the Senate, was going to call for a congressional investigation of the botched assassination at an afternoon news conference. Teddy, being a United States senator, broke the news that everyone had been expecting. They knew Dirksen would try to "stir up his own unique brand of shit" and had been waiting for the moment.

President Kennedy made some small talk, then nodded to Bobby, who announced there would be two primary issues to be debated before dinner. First they would have a spitball session on the issue of what collection of killers had planned the ambush of last Friday afternoon. It would be free-flowing and off the record; no one would ever confirm or deny anything said today on this subject.

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O'Donnell stopped the conversation when he asked, "What if we were put under oath?"

"Well, Kenny, we would never allow that to happen," assured the President. He turned to his kid brother. "Of course, the attorney general may have another opinion."

Bobby assured everyone that no oath-taking was contemplated but that, even if it came to pass, this conversation was protected under the umbrella of "executive privilege." Under oath, all participants would confirm that they were at a meeting, but any other questions would require them to invoke privilege and refuse to answer. "It is my opinion," said the top law enforcement officer in the United States, "that this conversation as well as any other conversations you may have had on these subjects, both in the past and in the future, are protected by privilege."

If there was anyone uncomfortable with accepting this legal strategy and supporting it for the administration, Bobby advised them to leave now. The choice was simple: Stay and learn everything going forward, or resign. Everyone stayed.

The middle Kennedy brother then explained the ground rules for the next hour. He would propose the name of an individual or a group, and O'Donnell, Powers, Salinger, Sorensen and Teddy Kennedy would speculate about what they knew. The President and the attorney general would only contribute after everyone else had spoken. They needed to hear independently what the others had to say. It was safer that way.

The following assessments have, over time, now been confirmed by multiple participants and represent the thinking of the Kennedy inner circle just one week after the shooting.

Lee Harvey Oswald

Hardly anyone in the post-Thanksgiving huddle believed Oswald had acted alone. The information they heard from internal reports and the media shouted otherwise. Emerging facts included Oswald's working with U2 intelligence at the Naval Air Facility Atsugi in Japan, which was the CIA presence in the Far East. The fact that he had renounced his U.S. citizenship to live in the Soviet Union, then returned and was never arrested for treason seemed to be of key importance. His contradictory work with the violent anti-Castro Cuban community while making public appearances supporting Castro raised another red flag. There were already rumors that Oswald had been on the FBI payroll at \$200 a month.

From his jail cell in Dallas, Oswald had found himself a fire-breathing New York attorney by the name of William Kunstler. Kunstler was making a name for

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himself by defending clients no other lawyer wanted to take on. Oswald phoned Kunstler — he was given free access to a telephone by the Dallas Police Department — and Kunstler agreed to defend him pro bono for as long as his case lasted. In conducting the Oswald legal update, RFK referred to him as “Kuntsler,” deliberately transposing the “t” and “s” in the attorney’s name.

The consensus among the group was that there was a great deal more to this Oswald than met the eye. The fingerprints of the intelligence community were all over him. Even so, it was clear that there was a powerful counter-narrative at work that claimed he had acted alone.

The Soviet Union

In the minutes and hours after the shooting in Dallas, suspicion had focused on the Soviet Union. The fear, not unfounded, was that the Soviets might try to decapitate the American government as a distraction for a nuclear showdown. After President Kennedy’s peace speech before the American University on June 10, 1963, both sides had feared that such an overt peace feeler could trigger a counter-reaction from hard-liners on either side of the Iron Curtain.

As the facts came in, however, and the Soviet leadership, particularly Chairman Khrushchev, seemed genuinely shocked, it appeared less and less likely that the Soviet Union was directly involved. There was Cold War suspicion, but the evidence just wasn’t there. With arsenals on both sides pushing toward fifty thousand nuclear weapons, the fact that the Soviet Union was not a prime suspect in an attack on a U.S. President was good news.

The Hyannis Port assembly gave Soviet involvement a very small likelihood and moved on quickly.

Cuba

Fidel Castro, however, was another matter. So was his country. And so were the Cubans who hated Castro and had come to hate Kennedy with the same vehemence. This island nation, just ninety miles away from the Florida Keys had become a centerpiece of Cold War sound and fury since the Cuban revolution had toppled Fulgencio Batista in 1959.

No one doubted for a moment that Cuba was involved in some way. Mutual antipathy and mistrust had dogged the U.S. and Cuba since the Kennedy administration’s disastrous April 1961 Bay of Pigs invasion. The only question was whether Cuban hostility was the organizing principle behind the Dallas attack or whether our Communist neighbor was being used as a smokescreen by other adversaries.

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Certainly, Oswald's membership in the Fair Play for Cuba Committee alarmed both John and Robert Kennedy. With covert help from the Mafia (which was highly involved in Cuban gambling before the Cuban revolution), the CIA had unsuccessfully sought to murder the new Cuban strongman. Was Castro trying to pay the Americans back in the same coin? Or were angry anti-Castro Cubans, based in New Orleans and Miami, the ones who wanted Kennedy to pay the price for not fully supporting the Bay of Pigs fiasco and for taking an invasion of Cuba off the table during the Missile Crisis the previous year?

As recently as the previous month, the administration had been sending out peace-feelers to Castro through back-channel diplomacy, to the great alarm of Washington national security hard-liners. While it was possible Castro wanted JFK dead, it seemed much more likely that he would know such a situation would be used against him, eventually as a rationale to end his own life and leadership in Cuba.

The issue had another level, however. In order to appease his hard-liners long enough to have a chance at making an accommodation over Cuba, the President had approved continuing a plan known as "Operation Mongoose." It was aimed at de-stabilizing the Castro regime by any covert means necessary. There was no doubt that from a Cuban perspective, the U.S. was sending some mixed signals out of the White House.

Bobby eventually ended this debate saying "I'll give this one top priority." The President admonished him with a dry smile, "Not so fast, Bobby. We're just getting started."

Organized Crime

If the Kennedys had a challenging relationship with Cuba, they had no less of one with the powers of the United States Mafia. Despite — or perhaps because of — the common knowledge that family patriarch Joseph Kennedy had accumulated much of his wealth through illegal activity during Prohibition, Bobby Kennedy had chosen, in the late 1950s, to plant his personal and political flag square in the midst of the organized crime issue. He'd made his national debut as chief counsel for the Senate Labor Rackets Committee, squaring off mano-a-mano on national TV against Teamsters Union president Jimmy Hoffa and other highly placed mob figures. He'd also written a 1960 best-seller, *The Enemy Within*, that attacked organized crime as a greater threat to America than communism.

Indeed, as attorney general, Robert Kennedy had told his fellow crusaders at the Justice Department that failure was no option — they had to crush the mob or the mob would run the country.

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That antagonistic relationship alone made a mob hit a real possibility. Yet the thinking went that if the Mafia wanted to kill a Kennedy, they'd probably go for Bobby first. After all, the Mafia godfathers had expected leniency from the Kennedy administration after their cozy friendship with Joe Kennedy, but instead they were the target of a declaration of war by his children, particularly Bobby.

Still, as with all the suspects, there were twists and turns that made thinking about the mob far more complex than could be seen at first blush.

There was the fact that Joseph Kennedy had convinced some organized crime members to help out with John Kennedy's 1960 election, despite the fact that Robert's recent efforts to put them out of business were starting to border on obsession.

The greatest twist was that leaders of organized crime had been working hand-in-glove with members of U.S. intelligence to assassinate Castro in a classic "enemy-of-my-enemy" operation.

When President Kennedy excused himself to take a phone call, Bobby took the opportunity to alert the others to a "sensitive situation." JFK had, from 1960 through 1962, an affair with the Los Angeles socialite Judith Campbell, who was also involved with Chicago mob boss Sam Giancana. Kennedy had used Campbell (later known as Judith Campbell Exner, after her 1975 marriage to professional golfer Dan Exner) as a messenger to communicate with Giancana, hoping to enlist support for the assassination attempts against Castro. Now the question was whether the mobster's jealousy prompted him to try to rub out the President.

Bobby reminded the group of the need for discretion in this matter and stated that the only reason Campbell was even relevant to today's conversation was her connection to Giancana. In other words, anything else in the area of "relationships" was none of the group's business.

Before the President returned, the attorney general had another "priority" on his list to go along with the entire Cuban problem.

Joint Chiefs of Staff

From the beginning of the Kennedy administration, the leaders of the United States military establishment had treated JFK disrespectfully. He was berated behind his back, undermined whenever possible, and often lectured to his face by members of the Joint Chiefs as if he were a schoolboy. The worst offender here was Air Force General Curtis LeMay, an aggressively confrontational character willing to face doomsday by launching preemptive attacks on both Cuba and the Soviet Union. LeMay was not alone. There were many military

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officers angry at Kennedy for trying to put some brakes on the “military-industrial complex” that President Eisenhower had warned the nation about.

The falling out had started with the planning and execution of the 1961 Bay of Pigs invasion. JFK felt he'd been tricked into approving the invasion of Cuba by exiled resistance fighters and that the military fully expected this to force his hand into ordering a full-scale, U.S. backed invasion. The following year, during the Cuban Missile Crisis, the generals seemed to be arguing for risking nuclear war as an acceptable option. Lately, they were alarmed at the President's increasing skepticism about the slow military escalation in Vietnam. The American University speech had them in an uproar.

The military chiefs were outraged at Kennedy's plans to withdraw from Vietnam, furious about his dramatic peace overtures to Soviet Premier Khrushchev, livid about his back-channel approaches to Fidel Castro, and utterly hostile to his plans to end the Cold War while they were determined to win it, even at the cost of a nuclear war.

The men in Hyannis Port agreed that the U.S. military had motive. They also had guns. But would they use them against their own commander-in-chief? Everyone in attendance had read the 1962 thriller *Seven Days in May* and knew the idea was out there in the air. It was possible.

It seemed more likely, however, that the sour, self-righteous attitude in the military might have unleashed a few freelancers who thought they were ridding the country of a treasonous leader and thus acting as patriots. Besides, the military was used to a big flexing of muscle; they lived in a world of invasions, air strikes and nuclear payloads. The idea of triangulating an assassination was more of a finesse job.

Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI)

President Kennedy was also out of the room when the question of FBI involvement was broached. This was yet another government organization that had taken a hostile attitude toward the new president from the moment he took office back in January of 1961.

J. Edgar Hoover had been running the Federal Bureau of Investigation since its 1935 inception, and he now treated it as a lifetime appointment. Both Kennedy brothers had wanted to replace him, but he had blackmailed his way to a reappointment, one of the first that John Kennedy had made after his election. Hoover had simply made clear the vast knowledge he possessed based on surveillance, files, interviews and so forth, all of it aimed at finding embarrassing and politically devastating personal failings of the President-elect and others.

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Hoover's files went all the way back to the years before World War II. It was a powerful sledgehammer, and it worked.

Hoover did not like John Kennedy, went the thinking of the group at Hyannis Port, but he had no reason to see him dead. He enjoyed the power he had over the President and his brother too much. Hoover did not like Robert Kennedy, either, particularly since RFK was, as attorney general, Hoover's boss. Yet Hoover also enjoyed tweaking RFK whenever he could.

There was another angle still. Hoover lived down the street from Vice President Lyndon Johnson. They were close friends and had been for some years. The Kennedy men had always assumed that LBJ got all his blackmail material on JFK that landed the Texan on the 1960 ticket in the first place from Hoover.

So even though J. Edgar Hoover was clearly an implacable foe of the Kennedys, he was not seen as a force behind an assassination attempt as much as he was seen as a force behind the current cover-up. Hoover, for reasons not a hundred percent clear, seemed to be taking the position through his investigation of the ambush that Oswald had likely acted alone. This would be a productive way to misdirect an investigation, the thinking went, particularly if Hoover was part of the conspiracy.

Central Intelligence Agency (CIA)

The already distrustful relationship between the Kennedys and the Central Intelligence Agency was shattered completely when the shots were fired on November 22.

Ironically, at the beginning of his term, JFK supported the agency's aim to accomplish strategic objectives without hurtling toward Armageddon. Spying was also far less expensive than actually fighting wars. Plus, the cloak-and-dagger had appealed to the new President's dash and style. He was actually a James Bond fan of both the books and the new films, Dr. No and From Russia with Love.

The honeymoon had ended less than three months after JFK's inauguration. The Bay of Pigs invasion was a CIA plan that was a leftover from the previous administration. As presented by CIA spymaster Allen Dulles, President Kennedy had been open to it. The fact that it had supposedly been vetted by President Dwight Eisenhower, the general who had succeeded at D-Day, made it even more attractive. In reality, the President's men hugging up their jackets against the November cold thought it had been a con job, a setup all the way.

In the aftermath of its failure, the Kennedys had come to think of the men who ran the Central Intelligence Agency as "virtually treasonous," the same that

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the CIA apparently thought of them. President Kennedy, as angry as he had ever been in his life, threatened to break the agency into a thousand pieces and scatter it to the wind. Soon he had fired Dulles and two other key players, Richard Bissell and Charles Cabell. To say that Allen Dulles was embittered was a grand understatement. By all accounts, he felt a deep and powerful antipathy toward the man who had terminated his career so ignobly.

The President of the United States did not trust the Central Intelligence Agency. The CIA did not trust JFK. They disagreed over many things ranging from the handling of the Cuban Missile Crisis to the administration's Castro policy and its vision for the future of the Vietnam conflict. To have bad blood exist with an organization that increasingly considered coups and assassinations as mere policy choices seemed particularly dangerous.

Secret Service

There was no doubt in anyone's mind that November 22, 1963 was not the Secret Service's proudest day. While the President had survived, his life was saved by agent Clint Hill and not by the organization. It was as if the entire group of agents had been asleep at the switch. The question was why?

It might have been unintentional sloppiness. The Secret Service detail assigned to Dallas had been incredibly "off-procedure" the night before, with multiple agents up until 3 a.m. drinking. None of those agents were likely to have been at the top of their game.

Or it could have been more than incompetence. Were they drinking because they knew what was going to happen and weren't going to stop it?

The route had not been properly secured. Instructions to Dallas Police had not maximized their effort but minimized it. The motorcade at Dealey Plaza was traveling below the minimum speed. The agents in the President's car reacted poorly, responding only after Hill, a man who had just been shot, shouted them out of their somnambulance. Certainly the driver, William Greer, would be called before investigators and asked for an explanation for his leaden reflexes behind the wheel of the President's car.

There were so many loose ends. There was, for example, the issue of the decision not to go with the protective bubble-top glass for the President's limousine. It was a Secret Service call, according to protocol, but Lyndon Johnson, as part of his trip-planning responsibilities, had asked directly that it not be used.

The head of the Secret Service James Rowley was no fan of President Kennedy either. He knew better than most that there were more than a few of his agents who had open disdain for the President. Unlike the CIA, their hostility was

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not about policy; rather this emotion came from seeing Kennedy's personal behavior up close. It was a mixed bag. JFK had made friends with many agents, particularly the Secret Service's first black agent, Abraham Bolden. The President always asked Bolden and others about their families, vacations and sporting affiliations.

President Kennedy asked that Bolden be brought into the White House security plans immediately. Bolden was loyal, yes, but he had also heard all the trash talk from other agents and, when asked, he would tell the Kennedy brothers what he knew.

There were reports of Secret Service agents showing identification cards in Dealey Plaza, although there were no such agents deployed, at least officially. The attorney general had heard from a source who heard from someone else that they were the work of the CIA's Technical Services Division.

That would mean that there were CIA agents in Dealey Plaza doing the job of Secret Service agents, and Secret Service agents that had abandoned their own jobs by standing down in their defense of the President.

None of it was definitive proof of anything. The CIA may have learned of the plot and only been monitoring it from the sidelines, and maybe even working to stop it. The Secret Service may have had its agents intimidated and manipulated into adverse choices without support or knowledge of a full plot.

The conclusion was that some elements inside the Secret Service may have had a role among the plotters. As of now, with the information available, it was simply unclear.

Vice President Lyndon Johnson

While the jury was out on the Secret Service, virtually everyone who voiced an opinion had a greater suspicion of Vice President Johnson, a statement that by itself spoke volumes about the man and his reputation.

Johnson was considered to be a devious viper in the nest, the Brutus to Kennedy's Caesar, who with the help of J. Edgar Hoover had blackmailed his way onto the 1960 presidential ticket and who knew he was about to be dumped from the 1964 ticket. Bobby Kennedy loathed Lyndon Johnson and the feeling was mutual.

Meanwhile, back in Washington, a potential scandal for Johnson was slowly building, as the Senate rules committee looked into the activities of the man whom Johnson had appointed to serve as his secretary for the majority of his days on the Hill. Bobby "Little Lyndon" Baker had resigned under pressure from the probe, but the scandal was growing, and it threatened to embroil Baker's former boss. Life magazine had chronicled it all and, unlike prior press coverage,

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had tied the whole metastasizing mess directly to Johnson. The magazine had bigger targets in mind, too. That very morning, editors and reporters were meeting to discuss angles for a broader investigation, this one into the Vice President's personal finances.

LBJ also had strong reason to believe he was about to be indicted and could very well go to prison for his provable role in the Bobby Baker and Billie Sol Estes scandals. There was no doubt that the Texan's lifelong lust and endless scheming for the presidency was relentless. But murder? There were rumors back in Texas about suspicious deaths that LBJ had connections to that a few of Robert Kennedy's young turks actually thought were sufficiently grounded that a grand jury would indict the sitting VP if presented with the facts.

If this line of reasoning were correct, however, it would make Lyndon Baines Johnson the greatest conspirator since Brutus, who precipitated the death of the Roman Republic by helping to assassinate Julius Caesar. Brutus, it was worth noting, was forced to flee Rome to avoid the inflamed passions of the public and ended his own life in suicide.

All Or Some Of The Above

There were other candidates, each one bending and twisting into a Mobius strip of suspicion. In addition to what had already been said, there were other questions:

Was it Big Oil, which Kennedy was threatening by eliminating the industry's depletion allowance worth billions?

Was it Big Money, which Kennedy was threatening by printing U.S. Treasury notes, thereby ending the Fed's monopoly on currency?

Was it Big Steel, which Kennedy had stared down over price increases just a year ago and which never forgave him?

So many theories and possibilities existed that it truly seemed like a joke. How could anyone get into this and find success? Where would one even start?

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