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Pardon my President

Why JFK was assassinated.

Everyone knows how President Kennedy's presidency ended. But few know the real truth of why it came to be. There are plenty of theories and accounts of how the assassination happened, who did it, how many shots were fired and the rest. But none have even speculated as to why it happened. This story, based on true events, drawing on hitherto hidden documents found in the crypt of the Roman Catholic church of the Resurrection in Chicago, explains the deeply troubling events that led up to the assassination. Of course, we all know the shock of the event. Anyone who lived through it will tell you exactly where they were and what they were doing at the time of the killing. Just as all those who lived through the nine eleven attack, the Kennedy killing delivered a psychological shock of the same intensity, even though it was just one person who was killed, compared to the two thousand or more who died in the World Trade Center attack. Why is this?

In 1960, the musical Camelot, written by famed composers Lerner and Loewe appeared on Broadway and swept New York audiences off their feet. Based on the myth of King Arthur and the round table, the musical drew heavily on T. H. White's *The Once and Future King*. It contained all the necessary ingredients of a love story and politics: Love, faith and faithlessness, disloyalty, trysts and love triangles (an understatement), not to mention various wars. All of this, though, done with great gallantry, virtuosity, honor and flare. Possibly the idea of the "perfect gentleman" grew from these dim beginnings of Englishness. After a *Life Magazine* article suggested that Jackie was JFK's "Genevieve" the media ran with the idea creating the fabulous image of the Camelot presidency. Never mind that the myth was all about Kings, royalty supposedly anathema to democracy. JFK and his handlers fully embraced the myth. It so

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happened that JFK was at Harvard together with Lerner who sent him advanced recordings of the major songs. JFK's favorite lines appeared in the final number in which Arthur knights a young boy, telling him to pass on the story of Camelot to the next generation. To reproduce the lines here would cost a ton in royalties. Suffice it to say that there were three portentous words included in the four lines "brief," "shining," and "moment."

David Powerhouse was proud of being JFK's personal assistant. Without JFK, where would he be? He treasured the memory of PT 109, the dangerous but raucous days of navy service. Little did he realize then that he would one day end up in the Whitehouse. His friends always asked him what was his job of personal assistant? It sounded like some kind of servant. As far as he was concerned, it was fine for people to think that. He was proud to serve. But in fact, he had two important tasks. First, to keep all negative press coverage to a minimum. Everything that was said to the press had to go through him, except, of course, the president himself, who had a small team of expert writers to help him. And second, to make sure any threats to his well-being were dealt with accordingly. And by the summer of 1963 the FBI was reporting worrying threats almost daily. In fact, things got so bad that Powerhouse insisted on going over to the FBI every day for a briefing, rather than have the FBI visit the Whitehouse every day, an event that would trigger noseey reporters into asking embarrassing questions, or worse, inventing stories of presidential assassination threats.

The trouble was, his boss knew something was going on. "Err, P-H," he said, "you got some sweet thing over there with J. Edgar?"

"Mr. President, no sir!" laughed Powerhouse. "I was going to tell you though. We're very worried."

"Err, why is that, P-H?"

"Threats, sir. They're coming in all over. You're not safe, sir. We need to double or triple your security detail, especially when you go out on campaign."

"Now, you know P-H, I don't scare easily. Any pattern? Nothing coordinated, I hope?"

“No, sir. Don’t think so. At least that’s what the FBI says. Just a lot of chatter and daily threats coming in by phone and letter. They follow them all up of course.”

JFK sat back in his chair and surveyed the oval office. Then he stood and walked over to the south windows. Powerhouse joined him. “What is it, sir? Is there something I can do?”

The president turned and faced him, then put one hand on his shoulder. “You know, P-H, there’s a lot of steamy material out there that could harm me, not so much me, the presidency. You know what I mean?”

Powerhouse looked away, a little embarrassed. “I’m not sure what you’re getting at, Mr. President.”

“Of course you are. I’m sure everyone talks about my, shall we say, adventures. Thank goodness the press treats them like they are part of the Camelot musical. Fantasies that never happened.”

“Sir?”

“Not a word to anyone about this. I’m scheduled to visit Martha’s Vineyard August 30, right?”

“I’d have to check the schedule, just a moment.” Powerhouse ran out to his desk.

“It’s the Chappaquiddick Beach Club Labor Day celebration,” the President called after him.

Breathless, Powerhouse returned to his boss. “Yes, that’s right. You’ll be there a couple of days.”

“Then I want you to do something for me. This is top secret, No one, and I mean no one, must know.”

“OK.”

“There’s a very old friend, you have probably met him from time to time, the Monsignor D’Andrea, priest at the Resurrection Catholic Church of Chicago. I want you to go there and accompany him to the compound at the Cape.”

“How do you want me to travel?”

“Rent a Beechcraft Bonanza. It will be able to land at the Cape Airport. And will not attract the attention that a US air force plane would.”

“How long a stay? We’ll have to get the Monsignor back, of course.”

“A couple of days, max, I should say.”

Monsignor Anthony D’Andrea leaned back in the plush leather seat of the Lincoln Continental that purred off down West Nelson street. He turned to take one last look at Resurrection Catholic Church of Chicago a place he thought of as his home. It was an exciting time, a day that would be remembered forever by every American. John F. Kennedy Junior had been elected President of the United States on this day, Tuesday, November 8, 1960. The stout Monsignor had expected to be offered the Whitehouse chaplaincy. But he had declined. One should not move so fast, he lectured the president. JFK was the very first Roman Catholic to be elected President. That was enough. Little did he know, however, that JFK did not have such an appointment in mind. Not at all.

The limousine drove straight on to the tarmac at Midway airport and up to the waiting Beechcraft Bonanza. Powerhouse stood at the bottom of the stairway to welcome him. “Thank you for coming at such short notice,” he said as they shook hands. The Monsignor detected a slightly lilting Irish tone.

“I am honored that the President has thought of me after so many years. It is probably ten years since I last met with him.”

“He speaks of you often. He took his first communion with you, I think, back in 1940, I believe,” said Powerhouse.

“That is probably right. You are very well informed, young man!”

“It’s my job.”

“Perhaps. But in this case it is your destiny and clearly one of devotion,” the Monsignor said with an air of authority.

“Besides, I’ve known him a long time. I served under him on PT-109 during the war,” added Powerhouse.

“Then may I ask why he has sent for me?”

“That I do not know, Monsignor. He has not offered me a reason. He has, however, insisted that this visit be kept secret and away from the public and other prying eyes,” answered Powerhouse, displaying his own air of authority. In fact, he did not especially like the Monsignor. Powerhouse was a protestant after all, a fact that the Monsignor with his especially sensitive

religious antenna, had already detected.

“I see,” the Monsignor replied unnecessarily, “now you have me wondering and worrying”

“You don’t need to worry, Monsignor. He’s fully charged, fit and well.”

They arrived at the Kennedy compound late on the evening of August 30. The Monsignor was made comfortable in the guest house, bid good night and left to sleep, for which he was grateful.

The next morning he was awakened by a light knock. Monsignor called “enter,” and in came JFK carrying a tray of coffee, toast and jam, followed closely by a servant carrying a newspaper, looking a little embarrassed.

“Your breakfast,” smiled the President. “I think I remember that you like a large breakfast to start the day?”

The Monsignor struggled to get out of bed, but JFK put down the tray, took him by his shoulders and said, “stay there my good friend. Relax and enjoy your breakfast. Can we meet in the garden at say 10.00 am?”

“The garden?”

“Yes. We can talk there without any interruption. And there is a gentle breeze. Perfect for a morning walk.”

The President turned and left, not waiting for an answer. The Monsignor set to on his very large breakfast. And in no time he had showered and walked out in the direction of what looked like the garden.

JFK met him half way. “Thank you for coming. I hope you had a nice trip?”

“I am honored to be here with the thirty fifth president of the United States,” said Monsignor with a little hint of a bow. Now what is your pleasure?”

“Well that’s partly what I want to talk about, Father.”

“I am all ears, though pleasure is not usually my business, if you see what I mean,” Monsignor answered with a big Irish smile.

“Exactly. I’ve had some dalliances...”

“Oh now I see. You want to make a confession?” The Monsignor stopped and turned to face the President.

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“I think so.”

“Well it’s about time, isn’t it? When did you last make one?”

“Not for many years. In fact I can’t really remember,” said the President looking the Monsignor squarely in the eye.

“Now I know why you did not take on a Catholic for the Whitehouse chaplain.”

“Come on Tony,” said JFK, “let’s not be disingenuous.”

“Apologies, dear boy, I have sinned too,” quipped Monsignor.

“You don’t mind Tony? It’s what we called you back in my Chicago days.”

“Of course not. And your confession?”

“As I’ve said, I’ve had some dalliances...”

“Why now?”

“Tony. You know what it’s like in the rough world of Chicago and gangsterdom. I know you could get dispatched any time. The same applies to me.”

“You’ve been threatened? I’m appalled to hear that,” cried Monsignor.

“It’s not unusual. But I have good intelligence that the threat level is unusually high.”

“And so you want to make things right with Saint Peter,” asked Monsignor half joking.

“Something like that,” JFK answered a little sheepishly.

“Then let’s get started,” said the Monsignor with a little too much enthusiasm. He pointed to a seat by a small fountain. “Shall we sit?”

“Not sure where to start,” mumbled the President as they sat down together.

“Well, you might start by crossing yourself and saying what everyone else says, ‘bless me father for I have sinned.’ You need not kneel. We can just sit here and talk.”

“Thank you Tony. “Bless me Father for I have sinned...”

The Monsignor interrupted. “Here is where, after extensive self-examination you recount all your sins. In your case, since you have not confessed for a long time, you need to take the time to remember and recount them all. If you like we could stop and when you’ve done that—it’s called contrition by the way—we

can get started.”

JFK felt around in his hip pocket. “I’ve made a kind of rough list. I’ve probably missed some. You want the list?”

“No my son. You must recount them to me. It’s part of your contrition. You must own up to having done all these things, and that they were sinful.”

“OK Tony, here goes. I’ll try to do them in order. The one I regret most was bedding my father’s call girl, Marlene Dietrich, probably in 1962. I felt kind of like a double-crosser doing it...”

“That was not the real sin, was it?” pressed the Monsignor.

“What do you mean?”

“The tenth commandment. Thou shalt not covet thy neighbor’s wife.”

“Oh, right. I guess that applies to nearly all my dalliances.”

“Not to mention the sixth commandment that forbids adultery,” added the Monsignor with a touch of sarcasm.

“Tony, for Christ’s sake! Take it easy. I’m doing this because I want to.”

“You’re doing it for your own sake, not Christ’s. But we will discuss that issue after you’ve recounted your many sins. Please continue.”

JFK turned to look the Monsignor in the eye. “Then there was Judith Exner, you probably know here, he said with a grin. “She was a mob moll.”

The Monsignor stared back, expressionless. “You’re not taking this seriously,” he said sternly. Unless you do, this confession will be a waste of time.” He looked up. “It’s not me. It’s the big man upstairs.”

“Sorry, Tony. It’s just me. I can’t help seeing the funny side of things. It’s my Irish upbringing.”

“The Irish only see the funny side of things when they’re drunk, and even then they’re maudlin. You have not taken anything this morning?”

JFK was about to respond, when Powerhouse came running up. “Mr. President, Bobby’s on the phone. Says he can’t make it this weekend.”

“Tell him fine. I’ll call him back later today.”

“You don’t want to talk to him? He’s excited about his

investigation of the mafia,” queried Powerhouse.

“Not now, David. I’m busy with the Monsignor here.”

Powerhouse ran off and JFK turned back to his confessor. “Then there was Inga Binga the supposed Russian spy, and another spy, I think, Ellen Rometsch I think her name was. The State Department expelled her earlier this year, I believe. And then there was Mimi Alford the Whitehouse intern. She was easily the best, I’d say, but none of the glamor of the other high flyers, if you get what I mean. I encouraged her to do a job on Powerhouse. Well, she didn’t need much encouragement. And there were quite a few others. Two Whitehouse secretaries that we called Fiddle and Faddle. Jackie knew all about them, so they say. She never said anything to me. And a few more. Can’t remember their names. “

“What about Marilyn Monroe?”

“Oh of course. How could I forget her? She wasn’t much in bed, to tell the truth. Great to take to a party though.”

The Monsignor stirred uncomfortably, clearly annoyed. “Mr. President, I must tell you again. Making a confession is a serious undertaking. You must not make light of it.”

“I think I better get back to the house. I’m a little worried about Bobby. He’s like a bull in a china shop sometimes. He needs to be careful with the Mafia. I guess you would know all about that, wouldn’t you Monsignor?”

“The rate we are going, this will take all day and much of night,” complained the Monsignor.

“So be it. I am prepared to do what it takes. But I have a country to run, Tony. You’ll have to fit in with my schedule. Unless of course, Chicago cannot do without you?”

“I am here at your pleasure, I mean, as is needed,” Mr. President. “I too want to serve my country in the best way I can.”

JFK got up to leave, took a few steps then looked back. “Oh, I forgot one more. Mary Meyer. An FBI agent’s wife, I think.” As he turned towards the house, the Monsignor called after him.

“When we resume, I am going to ask you to kneel before me and say you are sorry for your sins. It must be sincere and convincing, you understand?”

JFK walked hurriedly away.

The Monsignor, brooding and trying not to be annoyed with the most powerful man in the world, went walking around the Kennedy estate, admiring the beautiful gardens, finely clipped lawns, and of course the wonderful views of the ocean. He plodded over the sand dunes and stood looking up at the almost blue sky, a haze of salt air creating a mist between him and the Heaven to which he had prayed so often. He stayed there, lost in time, perhaps praying, his mind a little foggy. He was lost in the Holy Spirit. Then he heard a faint voice calling him.

“Monsignor! Tony!”

He turned to see that the President had returned. Shadowy figures inhabited the dunes around him.

“You are not alone?” asked the Monsignor.

“Sorry Tony. The Secret Service guys. They insist on keeping watch over me when I’m in such a dangerous place as the seaside.”

“Come to me, my son, and kneel before me!” commanded his confessor. The Monsignor stood facing the ocean. JFK walked first down the beach to the edge of the water, then back to his confessor and kneeled before him. The Monsignor placed his hands on JFK’s head. “My son. Please tell me, Jesus’s messenger on earth, that you are sorry for all the sins you have recounted.”

JFK wanted to look up but the heavy hands of the Monsignor made that difficult. “Not sure how to say this and how I can convince you that I’m really sorry,” he said in that well known thick Bostonian accent.

“Just repeat after me, then, my son, and do so with a heavy heart:

“My God, I am sorry for my sins with all my heart. In choosing to do wrong, and failing to do good, I have sinned against you, whom I should love above all things.”

JFK complied, but added, “I am trying to do good. I am trying to make everyone equal, and ensure that the blacks and former slaves among us are treated equally and with humanity.” And as he said this, the Monsignor lifted his hands from JFK’s head who now looked up. The Monsignor saw tears in his eyes. Christ had heard his plea. The President truly cared. He was

sorry. He put out his hand and JFK took it in both hands. "Rise my son, you have confessed your many sins and now must take full responsibility for their correction.

JFK looked up. "What does that mean?" he asked. "I'm doing good every minute I am President. Doesn't that make up for the sins I have committed?"

"Maybe. But we are not quite there yet," answered the Monsignor.

And at that moment, as if on cue, Powerhouse appeared from the dunes.

Powerhouse stopped dead in his tracks. This had to be a first. The world's most powerful man, on his knees in front of a priest, who, in his own opinion, was of dubious character. Although the media had not got a hold of it, he knew from his daily briefings with his FBI contacts that the Chicago Mafia was involved in all kinds of plots, especially in Cuba, and although he had no direct evidence, he assumed that the Monsignor must be involved, given the reach that the Chicago mob had all over Chicago, and even other major cities, especially Las Vegas.

The Monsignor stared his most penetrating stare at Powerhouse. "Mr. Powerhouse," he said, "this is not a good time."

"Asshole," Powerhouse muttered to himself, "who does he think he is?"

The President grabbed the Monsignor's hands and pulled himself up. "It's all right, D-P. We're done here for the moment. What is it?"

"The First Lady will be arriving tonight with the kids. She wants to know if you will be here. She wants you to call her before she leaves."

The President looked at the Monsignor. "Well, Tony, looks like we will have to break it off again."

"We need just another half hour, I think. We made excellent progress this morning," persisted the Monsignor.

A gust of wind blew a little sand past JFK's lined face. He called out, "tell Jackie that I'll call her in a half hour."

Powerhouse backed up over the dunes, yelling over his

shoulder, “in half an hour, then, Mr. President.”

The Monsignor persisted yet again. “Now, Mr. President, we have reached the third and probably most important phase of the confession.”

“Yes, Tony. And what’s that?”

“Repeat after me:

I firmly intend, with your help,

to do penance,

to sin no more,

and to avoid whatever leads me to sin.”

Reluctantly, JFK complied.

“You have to really mean it, my son. I sense an element of reluctance,” frowned the Monsignor.

“Well, it’s impossible, isn’t it? You know me. You know my family. How can I make up for all the sins of my past and even harder, to promise to sin no more. In this complicated world and especially in politics, it’s impossible not to sin. It’s an occupational hazard, don’t you think?”

“My son, you are of course right. That is why you, along with all other good Catholics, must make confession often, preferably on a daily basis, but surely at least once a month, for a man of your standing.”

“And while we’re at it. What about the sins of my father?” countered the President. “They were legion. Am I responsible for them as well?”

“You should take on all the guilt you can, and in that way lead a good life that tries very hard to assuage the guilt of the past.”

“I’m responsible for the sins of my father and everyone else?” asked JFK incredulously.

“You’re President of the United States. It’s only to be expected,” answered the Monsignor with an air of false dignity.

“I am President, Tony, not Christ Himself.”

“Mr. President. This is just banter and delaying tactics. Face up to your sins. Convince me—seriously, for Christ’s sake—that you are sorry for your sins. And once we are there, I can then take you to the next step.”

“Which is?”

“Absolution.”

“You mean, Tony, you can absolve me of all my sins?” asked JFK, full of hope and doubt.

“That’s right, so long as you do penance and make up for the sins you have committed and the evil you have done to others,” came the sacred reply.

“What penance do I have to do, then? It must be an awful lot, given the heavy baggage of my past sins, let alone those I might have to commit in the future.”

“In a nutshell, you must give your life up to Christ,” announced the Monsignor.

JFK replied quickly. “I have already. I am doing the ultimate in public service. And the enlightened legislation I have put forward—the great leap forward— I will save the lives of millions, enrich families everywhere, let alone help spread the message of democracy all over the world. I am in a place where I can make the lives of the poor better, even bearable. Who could do more?”

“All of that is commendable. But I caution you that life cannot be evaluated according to riches or poverty. Of course, we must help the poor. But we must not become rich on their backs. Do you follow me?” The Monsignor’s authority competed with that of the President.

“You sound like Castro, Tony. I don’t know if we must go that far,” JFK grinned.

The Monsignor looked at him sternly. “You have steered us away from our immediate concern. You must dedicate yourself to correcting your sins. You might start with your own family.” The Monsignor almost bit his tongue as he said that. He even blushed a little.

“How would you know, Tony? You have no family,” said JFK, pushing back.

“Must I remind you again, my son, this confession is not about me, but you. Face up to it please! You must if you want redemption!” lectured the Monsignor.

JFK laughed. “Now you’re sounding like Billy Graham.”

“I will ignore that remark, obviously designed to deflect once again away from your responsibility for your own sins,” said

the Monsignor haughtily.

A silence overtook them. The soft crashing of the ocean took hold. A sudden gust of wind whirled though the dunes.

“Well, I’ve done that, haven’t I? I’ve told you of my dalliances,” said JFK quietly.

The Monsignor ignored this further, very annoying, expression of this man’s superficiality. “Maybe you could begin by coming clean with Jackie and apologizing to her,” he said with an unfortunate touch of sarcasm.

JFK returned a look of incredulity. “You’ve got to be joking!”

“No, I’m not. If you are serious about making up for your sins, you might start with those whom you have hurt most,” he said with a deep frown, trying to hold back a smile.

“Anyway, she knows already. She even hinted to a group of tourists she was showing over the Whitehouse, that I screwed one if the secretaries.”

“She is the closest to you. She and your children. If you did that, it would demonstrate to me—but more importantly to yourself—that you are truly sorry for your sins and have acknowledged them.”

JFK sighed. “All right Tony, I will do it. Not today though. It will have to be after the Texas trip coming up in November. You are a hard man of the church.”

“I take that as a compliment, Mr. President.”

“So are we done?” asked JFK putting his hand on the Monsignor’s shoulder.

“Not quite, my son. It remains now for me to formally acknowledge that you have fulfilled the requirements of contrition and penance, and now we reach the stage of forgiveness. Please kneel again, so I can dutifully carry out this task.”

JFK looked around to see if there were any Secret Service looking on. He could see none. They always kept themselves well hidden. But he sensed their presence none the less. He knelt down, feeling the coolness of the sand on his knees. The Monsignor placed his hand on the President’s bowed head and recited:

“God, the Father of mercies, through the death and resurrection of his Son has reconciled the world to himself and sent the Holy Spirit among us for the forgiveness of sins; through the ministry of the Church may God give you pardon and peace, and I absolve you from your sins in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.”

The Monsignor removed his hand and said, “you may rise, now, Mr. President. The process of absolution has been completed. So long as you carry out your serious promise of avoiding sin and making reparations when you can, you will be right until your next confession.”

“Thanks Tony. You’re the one! Now I must hurry back and call Jackie. Don’t worry. I promise I will carry out the tasks I have committed to this morning.”

“See that you do.”

“Are you staying over tonight? It would be wonderful if you could spend time with Jackie and the kids.”

“Thank you, but I have pressing duties back at the parish. There is one last thing I’d like to know, though. How come you chose me as your confessor. You must have many options to draw on, your family priest which I assume you have?”

“You came highly recommended.”

“Oh? Who by?”

“Al Capone.”

Moral: An insincere confession invites dire consequences.

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