

SECRETS AND LIES

Seymour Hersh, the profane, controversial, Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist who investigated the My Lai massacre, Watergate, and the C.I.A., is under the harshest scrutiny of his career as he brings forth his long-awaited book on John and Robert Kennedy, *The Dark Side of Camelot*. His pursuit of Kennedy secrets is a tale of debt, deception, and frantic deal-making

BY ROBERT SAM ANSON

STAR MUCKER: Seymour Hersh at Elaine's restaurant in New York City, July 17, 1997—two years after a documents dealer gave him letters which ostensibly clarified President Kennedy's relationship with mobster Sam Giancana and revealed Marilyn Monroe's attempt to blackmail J.F.K.

Let me tell you about our profession," says Seymour Hersh. "We are the meanest, nastiest bunch of jealous, petty people who ever lived."

It is a muggy afternoon in Washington, and inside the paper-strewn warren that passes for his office, the most feared investigative reporter of them all is pissed off. This is not unusual. Seymour Myron Hersh, who describes casual disagreements as "wars," is pissed off much of the time; in fact, it's one of the secrets to his success. Without his anger, Hersh might never have exposed the My Lai massacre, the C.I.A.'s domestic spying, or Manuel Noriega's drug trafficking. "The pathology of Sy Hersh," says his friend

David Obst, "is what makes him probably the most successful investigative reporter of his generation."

Now Hersh is about to publish the biggest book of his career, an exposé that will portray John and Robert Kennedy as reckless and vindictive. Much is riding on *The Dark Side of Camelot*, which ABC has turned into a special with Peter Jennings. (The network hasn't decided if its feature will run.) But Hersh has been distracted by speculation about what Kennedy secrets he has unearthed.

"Insane shit," Hersh says of the speculation, which includes reports that he will reveal Marilyn Monroe to be a blackmailer, J.F.K. a bigamist, brother Robert a would-be assassin, and the whole lot of

them—including father Joseph Kennedy—linked to the Mafia.

Hersh, who hasn't shown a word of the book to outsiders, wishes they would all shut up. "I'm tired of doing books," he says. "I'd like to make a score and get out. Retire." The rest of his words are a blur—something about Kennedy defenders' being "trapped rodents." He doesn't have time to explain. He's gotta go. Now. A C.I.A. man is coming, and the guy's gonna tell him *everything*.

Keepers of secrets tend to do this when Seymour Hersh asks the questions, and the proof is in his prizes—virtually every major award a journalist can receive, including a Pulitzer. "A Vesuvius of a reporter," *New York Times* historian Harrison Salisbury called him. "A

national treasure," adds noted intelligence reporter David Wise.

Then again, there are plenty of less flattering descriptions floating around: bully, braggart, con man. One of Hersh's favorite targets, Henry Kissinger, called him an "extortionist." At the *Times*, where he is remembered as a "dinosaur in a china shop," one editor says Hersh did just about *anything* for a story—a claim Hersh hardly disputes. "You think I wouldn't sell my mother for My Lai?" he says. "Gimme a break."

No surprise, then, that Hersh's Kennedy book—due out this month—has prompted both anticipation and dread. Its contents are well guarded. But according to those familiar with his work, *The Dark Side of Camelot* will be far darker than anything as yet written about John and Robert Kennedy. Its revelations reportedly include: close ties between the Kennedys and organized crime; seamy, previously undisclosed sexual escapades in and out of the White House; the Catholic Church's alleged annulment of J.F.K.'s long-rumored first marriage, to a Palm Beach socialite; the fixing of the 1960 election; assassination plots directed against a variety of foreign leaders; and harrowing depictions of J.F.K.'s flirtation with nuclear war. "The book," Hersh says with a glint in his eyes, "will cause trouble."

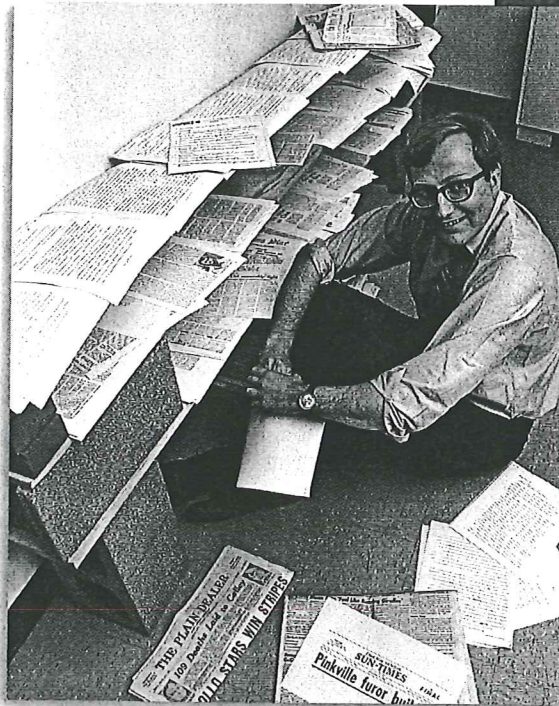
Hersh was born in Chicago in 1937 and grew up on the city's South Side. Though he rarely divulges it, he has a twin, Alan, who is a California physicist. There are also twin sisters. One is a New Jersey psychotherapist, the other a Chicago socialite.

Early on, Sy didn't seem destined for greatness. He was an average student at the University of Chicago and lasted only a couple of semesters at the university's law school. Journalism, though, was something anyone could do.

He started as a \$35-a-week copyboy for the Chicago News Bureau, a local agency right out of *The Front Page*. One of Hersh's first chores was to get a photograph of a young woman who, the Associated Press reported, had been killed in a plane crash. "I call [her family]," Hersh says. "They don't know their daughter is dead. I had to tell them. Shrieking, crying—I couldn't believe it." Two hours later, Hersh was again on the phone to the family. The A.P. had it

wrong; their daughter was alive. "After that," says Hersh, "everything was easy."

Following a series of apprenticeships in outposts such as Pierre, South Dakota, he attracted the eye of the A.P., which sent him to Washington in 1965; by 1966 he was covering the Pentagon. Hersh scored a number of scoops, but quit after two years when editors cut a 10,000-word report on chemical and biological weapons to a more manageable 1,700. Married by then to Elizabeth Klein, a social worker, Hersh turned his reporting into a book (*Chemical and Biological Warfare: America's Hidden Arsenal*), then signed on as press



SY-HIGH: Hersh in his office at Washington's Dispatch News Service on May 4, 1970, the day he won a Pulitzer Prize for breaking the story of the My Lai massacre.

secretary for the anti-war presidential campaign of Senator Eugene McCarthy.

McCarthy appreciated his smarts and deputized Hersh to awaken him every morning. But Robert Kennedy's entry into the race complicated their relationship. Worried that Kennedy would capture Wisconsin's black vote, Hersh and other aides implored McCarthy to take a strong civil-rights stand. When McCarthy demurred, Hersh quit.

Fed up with politics, he returned to Washington to write a book about the Pentagon. Eight months into it, a friend tipped him that court-martial proceedings were under way against an unnamed soldier who had allegedly killed 75 Vietnamese civilians. Two days and

25 phone calls later, Hersh found a wire-service clip identifying the defendant as First Lieutenant William L. "Rusty" Calley Jr. Another round of calls located Calley's civilian lawyer. "I heard he's accused of killing 127," said Hersh, deliberately inflating the number. "No," said the lawyer, "it's only 109." Hersh flew to Fort Benning, Georgia. Ten hours later, the baby-faced Butcher of My Lai was telling him everything.

"You think I wouldn't sell my mother for My Lai?"

Hersh says.

"Gimme a break."

The trick was finding someone to print it. *Life* wasn't interested, and neither was *Look*. But a young friend named David Obst said he'd hustle the piece through his tiny, left-wing Dispatch News Service. The next 24 hours were the stuff of journalistic legend. Cables offered the report to 50 newspapers. Thirty-six took it, and Seymour Hersh was off and running—to fame and a Pulitzer Prize.

He had all the trappings of success: a best-selling book (*My Lai 4*), lecture dates, and a regular slot at *The New Yorker*,

which serialized his follow-up volume on the army's investigation, *Cover-Up*. But *The New Yorker's* legendary editor William Shawn thought Hersh needed seasoning—and the best place to get it, Shawn advised, was *The New York Times*. Hersh offered his services to executive editor A. M. "Abe" Rosenthal, who remembered him well. While Hersh had been reporting on My Lai, Rosenthal called and asked for one of his sources. "Find him," said Hersh, and hung up. "Do you know who I am?" asked Rosenthal after calling back. "Yep," Hersh said, and hung up again. When Hersh returned from a reporting trip to Hanoi, Rosenthal hired him and sent him to Washington.

Soon after he arrived, Hersh learned that a four-star air-force general and Vietnam veteran named John Lavelle was being retired with the loss of one of his stars. Hersh CONTINUED ON PAGE 107

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 100 tracked him to a golf course 150 miles from Washington, then went out and hit five irons with him; over drinks in the clubhouse, Lavelle told him how he had mounted a secret bombing campaign in North Vietnam.

The ensuing stories were on the *Times*'s front page for weeks. But Hersh was bored. "I'm tired of writing about Vietnam," he told *Newsweek* in June 1972, after a month on the job. "There are a lot of other issues in America."

One involved the break-in at the Democratic National Committee's Watergate offices. Two young *Washington Post* reporters, Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein, were all over the story. The *Times* pleaded with Hersh to enter the fray, but he kept finding excuses not to. "He felt he was, shall we say, stepping in the footsteps of the *Post*, and he didn't like that," says then Washington-bureau chief Clifton Daniel. "He wanted to be first."

Daniel finally brought him around after Nixon's re-election—with spectacular results for the *Times*. Hersh worked the phone 10 hours a day, seven days a week—and single-handedly put the *Times* back into the game.

But his efforts took a human toll. Early in his reporting, Hersh got wind that Watergate burglar Frank Sturgis was preparing a book on the break-in with Andrew St. George, a prizewinning photojournalist with close ties to anti-Castro Cubans. A meeting with the prospective authors ensued, and St. George says Hersh threatened to turn their book idea into an immediate story. But if they told him more, Hersh said, St. George's name wouldn't appear in the *Times* and the article wouldn't run until Sturgis and St. George gave their O.K. Not so, says Hersh, who insists no such agreement existed.

In any event, Sturgis's revelations were splashed across the front page of the *Times* on January 14, 1973. The story was Hersh's first on Watergate, and the first anywhere to focus on the cover-up that would bring down Nixon. Another notable aspect of the piece: it identified Andrew St. George a total of 23 times. "I did skin him," says Hersh. "It was not nice."

Especially for St. George, who saw the book deal—and most of his assignments—disappear. But St. George did not come away completely empty-handed. After he'd been evicted from his suburban house and had moved his family into a two-room apartment over a bar, a copy of *My Lai 4* arrived. The inscription

read: "For Andrew St. George, who has integrity—even more than he sometimes knows. With respect, Seymour Hersh."

Hersh was too busy to look back. He was on to one sensational exposé after another: the C.I.A.'s domestic spying, the secret bombing of Cambodia, the wiretapping of Kissinger's aides.

The string was interrupted in 1975, when Hersh moved to New York, where his wife had enrolled in medical school. The scoops were fewer than in Washington, and Hersh was miserable. At one point, then *Times* reporter Tom Goldstein heard him barking at a source, "You know who I am? Talk to me!" At another, Hersh became so enraged when an editor changed the lead on one of his stories that he hurled his typewriter through the glass partition of his office.

His mood didn't improve when a tennis injury left him on crutches. Furious at being slowed, he concluded one late-night visit to a friend by throwing the crutches away and crawling the four blocks home. A crescendo of sorts was reached in 1977, when Hersh was reporting on suspected tax fraud by Gulf & Western. When the company's general counsel said he had no knowl-

**"You know who I am?"
Hersh screamed at a source.
"Talk to me!"**

edge of any wrongdoing, Hersh exploded: "I don't care whether you are involved! I'm gonna put your name in the first fucking paragraph! And the second fucking paragraph! And the third fucking paragraph!"

Unfortunately for Hersh, the executive recorded the call and presented the tape to publisher Arthur "Punch" Sulzberger—along with a threat of a lawsuit. No suit was filed, but Rosenthal—who had once heard Hersh practically blackmailing a source—was growing uneasy. Some of Hersh's stories, Rosenthal later conceded to reporter Joseph Goulden, "would not be publishable under standards [Rosenthal] demanded of *Times* reporters a few years later."

The romance was waning for Hersh as well. In 1979, he resigned. "There were a bunch of clown editors there," he told the *Los Angeles Times*. "I was

surrounded by great big toadies."

With an advance from Summit Books, Hersh embarked on a book on Henry Kissinger. "I'd really love to get the son of a bitch," Hersh said.

While researching the fall of Salvador Allende, the Chilean president who'd been undermined by a Kissinger-backed C.I.A. campaign, Hersh encountered a problem. One of the best sources was Edward Korry, a former journalist and ex-ambassador to Chile. The catch: in 1974, Hersh had written a series of *Times* articles naming Korry as a key anti-Allende plotter, and saying that he was under investigation for lying to Congress about his role.

In fact, Korry had not been the ambassador when Allende was overthrown. Moreover, Korry—whom Hersh hadn't interviewed before publishing his initial articles—had been unaware of the C.I.A.'s scheming. Indeed, Korry had been the leading *opponent* of covert U.S. action.

Now, though, Hersh needed the former ambassador. According to Korry, Hersh offered a deal: "He said, 'If you talk to me, I guarantee there will be a front-page story [retracting the original articles].'" Korry agreed, but insisted that the retraction run first. Hersh denies making any deal, but on February 9, 1981, a 2,300-word exoneration appeared on the *Times*'s front page. "I probably punished Korry—unconsciously, anyway—for not telling me more," Hersh later conceded. But he expressed no regrets about Korry, whose diplomatic career had been ruined. "Can I help it," he said to *Times* reporter Richard Witkin, "if he was the only schmuck dumb enough to tell the truth?"

With Korry's material on Chile (and dozens of other embarrassing disclosures), *The Price of Power: Kissinger in the Nixon White House* was a runaway best-seller—much to the displeasure of Kissinger, who accused Hersh of trafficking in "slimy lies." Hersh shot back: "When the rest of us go to sleep, we count sheep. He has to count little maimed, burned babies."

Hersh's next book, *The Target Is Destroyed*—about the downing of Korean Airlines Flight 700—was a flop. And Hersh wasn't doing well at *The New Yorker* either. His patron, William Shawn, had been shoved out, and the new editor, Robert Gottlieb, wasn't interested

in "unsound" exposés. "We don't do that kind of thing here," Gottlieb said as he showed Hersh to the elevator.

Random House came to the rescue, signing Hersh to write a book about the Israeli nuclear-weapons program. *The Samson Option* was another flop, and Hersh's revelations provoked howls. The most aggrieved came from British press baron Robert Maxwell and from Nicholas Davies, foreign editor of Maxwell's London *Daily Mirror*—both of whom Hersh accused of being Israeli intelligence assets. YOU LIAR!

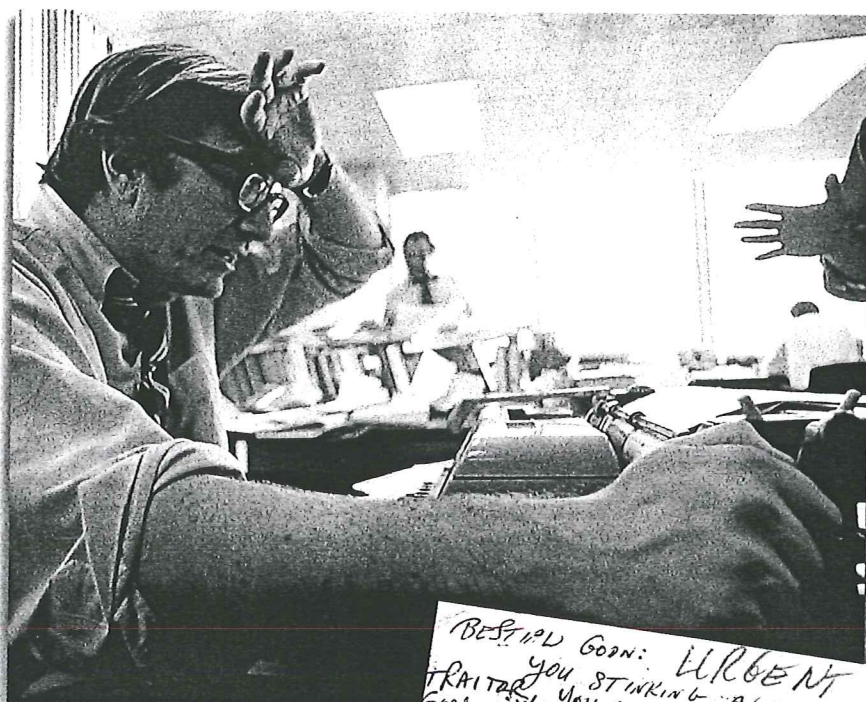
spinning fantastic, unverifiable stories. When a writer for *The New Republic* pressed Hersh for an accounting, Hersh—who now says Ben-Menashe "lies like people breathe"—snapped, "You know what, kid? Come around next Tuesday and tie my shoelace."

The *Times* was unfazed. In 1991, Rosenthal's successor, Max Frankel, brought Hersh back on a six-month contract to investigate "the October Surprise"—the rumor that senior officials of the Reagan campaign had derailed Jimmy Carter's re-election by getting Iran to delay the release of

over the phone. "Sy was caught being his old extortionist self," says a former assistant managing editor. (Hersh denies that he tried to "extort" information from sources.)

Hersh was debating what to do next when he got a call from Emmy-winning producer Mark Obenhaus, who had worked with him on two PBS *Frontline* documentaries in the 1980s. The 30th anniversary of J.F.K.'s assassination was coming up, Obenhaus said. Would Sy like to do an investigation for ABC's *Day One*?

While Hersh publicly disparaged conspiracy theorists—"[If] somebody doesn't write a book for a million dollars, then there was no conspiracy," he told *Rolling Stone* in 1975—the ABC project promised a substantial fee. The offer was tempting, since Hersh describes himself as "chronically broke." And Hersh had a friend who could school him in the intricacies of the Kennedy



"You know what, kid?"
Hersh said to a reporter
investigating his work.
"Come around next Tuesday
and tie my shoelace."

SY ANXIETY: Hersh at work in *The New York Times*'s Washington bureau, 1975. In the 1970s, he had a tumultuous reign at the *Times*, where he made headlines and enemies, and generated piles of hate mail (right).

BESTIAL GODD: URGENT FEB-16-75
 TRAITOR! YOU STINKING ANIMAL, YOU TRAITOROUS
 GODD. YOUR COMMUNIST PULFORAGE OF CLASSIFIED MATTERS,
 YOUR REVELATIONS OF CIA PERSONNEL, YOUR
 REVELATIONS OF THEIR MODUS OPERANDI AND
 MODUS VIVENDI IS OBTENTATIVELY TREASONOUS
 AND TREASONOUS. YOU SHOULD BE PUT TO
 TRIAL AND GIVEN THE SAME PUNISHMENT AS
 THE ROSENBERGS RECEIVED, MAYBE EVEN WORSE.
 BECAUSE OF NEFARIOUS GODD, LIKE YOU
 HITLER CAME ABOUT. YOU TRAITOROUS
 SLUTTER. WHY DON'T YOU GO & LIVE IN
 RUSSIA IF YOU HELP THEM SO MUCH. DISAPPEAR IMMEDIATELY.

screamed the front page of *The Sun*.

Hersh gloried in the attention ("Larger than the headline on the D-day invasion," he bragged), even after Maxwell and Davies slapped libel writs on Hersh and his British publisher, who promptly sued back. But Maxwell wasn't in a position to counter Hersh. Two weeks after suing, he was found floating in the Atlantic, the apparent victim of a heart attack. Maxwell's heirs quietly settled with Hersh by paying him £100,000.

In writing the book, Hersh had relied on Ari Ben-Menashe, a shadowy Israeli exile and arms dealer who specialized in

U.S. hostages until after the election. He never uncovered the "surprise," but Hersh did report that a heavy-equipment manufacturer had provided "missile launchers for the Iraqi military." The company denied the charge and filed a libel suit. In a correction, the *Times* conceded that Hersh's claim was based on "an accusation by an unidentified informant who was himself relying on an anonymous source." The end came when, after six increasingly fractious months, Hersh was heard threatening a source

case: Michael Ewing, a researcher for the House Select Committee on Assassinations, whose 1979 report concluded that Kennedy was "probably" the victim of a conspiracy.

Hersh and Ewing had met in the early 1970s, when Ewing was an aide to Iowa senator Harold Hughes, an important

Hersh source. Ewing, who would marry Hughes's daughter, Phyllis, had also been helpful, providing Hersh with a 60-page memo detailing the C.I.A.'s relationship with organized crime.

Apart from a mutual knack for ferreting out secrets, they seemed an odd match. Where Hersh was loudmouthed and brash, Ewing was low-key and cautious—"a paper person," he called himself, because of his compulsion to squirrel away confidential documents. He

had boxes of them in the basement of his West Des Moines house, some suggesting that the Mob had engineered the slaying of the 35th president of the United States. Ewing's work was far from finished, but he'd gathered enough Kennedy dirt that he regretted naming his only son John Robert. It was his tough-mindedness—and the treasure trove in his basement—that impressed Hersh. “The heavyweight” of assassination researchers, he called Ewing. “The single best.”

Hersh alerted Ewing to the ABC project, and Ewing was interested. In the end, though, the documentary never got off the ground. Months slipped by without further contact. In the interval, Hersh picked up a tip that the Clinton campaign possessed documents tying the candidate to several improprieties. “Devastating,” Hersh calls the information. But he let the story slide. “It's important,” he told a leading Democratic operative, “we get the right kind of president.”

Meanwhile, Bob Woodward had just published his sixth consecutive best-seller (*The Commanders*) and would soon begin a seventh (*The Agenda*). Woodward's success has always been a sore spot for Hersh. Ewing claims that, in 1983, when a visitor to Hersh's office referred to the flowerpot Woodward moved to signal “Deep Throat,” Hersh “threw everything off his desk, smashed his chair against a wall, came over to his filing cabinet, threw off everything that was on top of it . . . kicked something on the floor . . . and, screaming ‘Fuck!’ . . . pulled out the current missile codes for all the nuclear subs in the U.S. ‘I did this without a fucking pot!’ he said. ‘I don't need a fucking pot!’”

Hersh denies that he had the tantrum and that he ever possessed missile codes, but admits he's envious of Woodward's financial success. “I'm pathological on the subject of Woodward's money,” says Hersh. “I'm totally envious. . . . I'd love to have some of that.”

But how? While Woodward was collecting huge advances and delivering lucrative lectures, Hersh was scrounging for comparative scraps. It had been more than a decade since *The Price of Power*, his last major best-seller, and his annual speaking dates had dwindled to a paltry few. “The Cold War is over,” Hersh mourned. “No one gives a fuck.”

The Kennedys offered a way out. They still sold.

In June 1993, Michael Ewing heard a familiar, fast-paced voice on the phone. “If you want to do a book,” it said, “I'm your man.”

The arrangement would be simple, Hersh said: They'd split everything 50-50. They'd need an agent to hammer out the details, and Hersh suggested that Ewing use his: Esther Newberg, a senior vice president at International Creative Management and a publishing-industry power. She was also a close friend of the Kennedys', having been one of the guests at Chappaquiddick the night Mary Jo Kopechne drowned. But Hersh told Ewing that wouldn't be a problem. “She wouldn't dare cross me,” he said. According to Ewing, Newberg said she'd send him a collaboration agreement—standard industry practice. (Newberg says she can't recall whether she made such a promise.) The agreement never arrived, but Hersh

“I'm pathological on the subject of Bob Woodward's money,” says Hersh. “I'm totally envious.”

and Ewing were too excited to care. Soon after pitching Little, Brown, they were offered a contract for \$1 million.

Hersh's half of the first \$400,000 didn't last long. Within a year, he was asking Ewing if he could keep all of the next \$100,000 they were to split. Ewing, who would be paid back with a larger slice of a later payment, said fine. Sy was his partner and friend, and there'd be plenty of money for everyone. Without a word of the manuscript written, Little, Brown had sold the volume to the Book-of-the-Month Club for \$500,000. “This,” their publisher said, “might be the best-selling book of all time.”

In late 1994, a Capitol Hill source steered Hersh toward some documents that appeared to guarantee it. The papers were said to be from the files of Lawrence X. Cusack, a New York lawyer who'd been not only Francis Cardinal Spellman's attorney but also—reputedly—J.F.K.'s. Cusack had died in 1985, and while rummaging through his father's office, one of his sons, Lawrence “Lex,” a paralegal, had found a file cabinet full of his father's legal papers. The

documents—many of them apparently written in John Kennedy's own hand—linked the president to both the Mob and Marilyn Monroe. Realizing their value, Lex Cusack had taken them to a Stamford, Connecticut, document dealer, John Reznikoff, who was offering them for sale through an Atlanta billion-diamond-and-memorabilia merchant named Thomas G. Cloud.

Cloud said that five “top experts” had verified the documents' authenticity. He identified only one—a Baltimore collector of Kennedy artifacts—and said that he'd sold some of the papers to investors such as Steve Forbes, owner of the largest private collection of presidential documents. When Cloud added that more papers were available, Hersh pounced. The best way to increase the documents' value, he told Cloud, was to include them in a best-seller. “I'm the biggest,” Hersh said. “The only one who sells more . . . is Bob Woodward.” Impressed, Cloud invited him to Atlanta.

The visit—three days before Christmas 1994—left Hersh flabbergasted. There, in just over 60 pages, was seemingly incontrovertible evidence of bribes to J. Edgar Hoover; instructions to employ “Sam G.” (mobster Sam Giancana) to help fix the 1960 election; and—the most jaw-dropping—a contract signed by Marilyn Monroe and J.F.K. Under its terms, he would pay “no less than \$100,000” to a trust for Monroe's deranged mother, Gladys Baker. In exchange, Monroe vowed not to divulge “the nature or the existence of any relationship between J.F.K. and any political or so-called ‘under-world’ personalities.”

Naturally, said Cloud, all this had been done in secret. Recording what they were up to on three-by-five cards, Cloud said, Cusack and Kennedy communicated through a code based on the works of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle—the lawyer assuming the identity of Dr. Watson; the president, that of Sherlock Holmes.

Hersh rushed to call Ewing. “Mike,” he said, “I just solved the Kennedy assassination. . . . It was Sam Giancana.”

Ewing disabused Hersh of that notion, but not of his eagerness for the Cusack file. Cloud, though, wasn't giving it up. Cusack was still agonizing over the kind of book Hersh would write. But Hersh kept pressing, at one point threatening to report Cusack to

the Assassination Records Review Board, which had authority to subpoena any document relating to the Kennedy killing. "They're gonna put [the documents] up for public view at all six National Archives branches," said Hersh. "So then you'll get shit."

Finally, after six months of negotiations, Cloud gave Hersh copies—but Hersh said he would not contact any of the investors. They'd be spooked by a reporter's call.

The stipulations bothered Ewing, who had never come across a "Lawrence Cusack" serving as J.F.K.'s personal attorney. What troubled him more, though, was the Monroe contract. J.F.K., Ewing acknowledged, was a wild risktaker. But would he really sign a document that talked of "'underworld' associates"? That, said Ewing, would be "committing suicide by contract." And if Monroe was blackmailing him, why would he continue to sleep with her? And why would Bobby do the same two years later? "The story," said Ewing, "is full of shit." Replied Hersh, "The Kennedys will never be able to disprove it."

Ewing wouldn't let it go. If they were going to use the papers, he said, they had to be verified through chemical and microscopic analysis. Hersh, however, didn't see a pressing need. Cusack's "experts" had already authenticated the papers. When they were flush with TV money, then they'd do the testing.

Meantime, there were other, less expensive ways to confirm the documents' authenticity. They started with the five signatures listed on the Monroe contracts. Four of the parties were dead—Jack, Bobby, Marilyn, and Monroe's attorney, Aaron Frosch. But the witness to one of the contract amendments was still alive: Janet Des Rosiers, Joe Kennedy's former secretary and mistress, who'd briefly worked in the J.F.K. White House. "She is a silver bullet," Ewing told Hersh. If Des Rosiers confirmed that she'd witnessed the documents, the papers were probably authentic. If she didn't, said Ewing, "we've got real problems."

In August 1995, Hersh visited Des Rosiers at her condominium in Sedona, Arizona. "He was like a boy with a new toy," says Des Rosiers, describing how Hersh whipped out the paper she'd al-

legedly signed. Des Rosiers quickly deflated him. She'd never been in the Carlyle hotel suite (where the document was purportedly signed), she told Hersh; never laid eyes on Marilyn Monroe; never met the attorneys; never been alone with Jack and Bobby. And, she added, that was *not* her signature. "You better be careful," Des Rosiers advised. "Because someone is conning you."

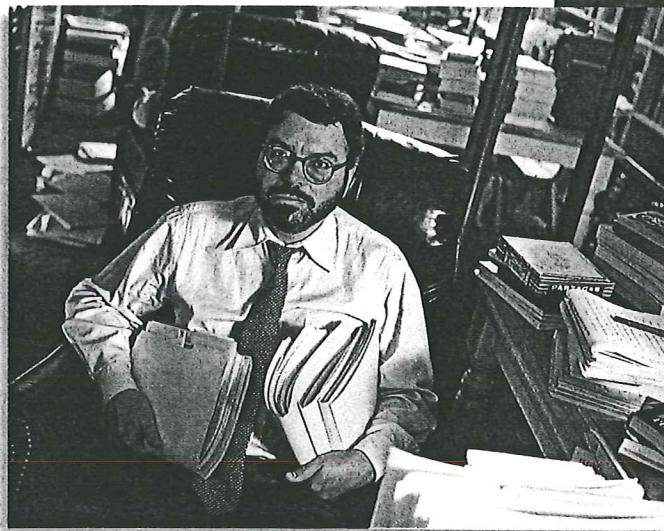
Hersh appeared unconcerned. "Why should I believe her?" he asked. In any event, there was no cause to give up yet. For Hersh had been told that there was another person who could attest to Kennedy's payoffs to Monroe, someone who'd handled the negotiations between Cusack Sr. and Frosch, and been "fired" by Jack and Joe for refusing to ferry the cash. That figure was Clark Clifford, J.F.K.'s acknowledged

sanity. "[It was] like talking to someone in an asylum," says former R.F.K. administrative assistant John Nolan. "I thought he'd really flipped."

Hersh remained upbeat even after former J.F.K. aide and current Kennedy-family attorney Myer Feldman told him that he'd seen the papers, believed them to be false. "You're on dangerous ground," Feldman warned. "You could lose your reputation if all this proves to be false."

Feldman, Hersh thought, was just another member of the Kennedy "cult." Besides, he told Ewing, he'd recently had a lengthy session with former J.F.K.

"I just solved the Kennedy assassination," Hersh said. "It was Sam Giancana."



CONSPIRACY LEERY: Hersh's collaborator, Michael Ewing, at home in Iowa on August 21, 1997. Ewing, who'd been researching J.F.K.'s assassination for years, questioned the authenticity of the Kennedy documents from the beginning.

personal attorney and a counselor to presidents since Harry Truman.

Clifford, however, said he didn't know what Cloud and Cusack were talking about. He wouldn't be shocked if the information in the file were true, he told Hersh. He'd handled several "woman problems" for Kennedy, but Marilyn Monroe had not crossed his radar scope.

Having struck out with firsthand sources, Hersh sought confirmation from Marilyn's intimates. He tried everyone from ex-attorney Mickey Rudin to ex-husband Arthur Miller, but they knew nothing about any contracts. Kennedy friends and aides also claimed ignorance—and some wondered about Hersh's

speechwriter Ted Sorensen, who'd seemed rattled by his boss's jottings. "This is a forgery," he'd said. Then: "It does look like his handwriting." And finally: "At least it's a good forgery." Another plus was J.F.K.'s pal Ben Bradlee, who'd been "transformed" by reading the papers. "I didn't really know Jack," Hersh quoted Bradlee as saying. "[The Kennedys] are different than what I was led to believe."

But Bradlee reports a different reaction. "What I don't understand is where he is getting all this crap," he wrote to a friend. "Somebody must be manufacturing it for a purpose, and I would like to know who and for what purpose."

Aware that Cloud, Cusack, and Reznikoff wanted to publish the documents separately as a book, Hersh arranged for them to meet his editor, Jim Silberman, and Charles Hayward, who was then president of Little, Brown. Silberman and Hayward didn't say yes, but they didn't flatly say no either. Hersh and Ewing took Cloud, Cusack, and Reznikoff out to celebrate at a New York steak house.

Goblets of red wine arrived as Cloud laid out some of the document originals—the first time Hersh or Ewing had seen

PHOTOGRAPH BY TOM MADAY

them. One was a handwritten note from Marilyn. "Dear Jack," it read, "I hope you understand I only want to make sure that my Mother is taken care of—this is difficult for me—I am afraid she will not be cared for[,] I will be silent on the secret of yours about Sam G. and others[.] Thanks[.]"

Hersh waved the letter over his head. "The Kennedys were . . . the worst people!" he shouted as patrons at other tables gaped.

Banging the table, he knocked over a wineglass. The documents were spared, but Hersh was drenched. Cusack's credibility also took a hit when he began telling stories of what he said was his long service in naval intelligence. "Total bullshit," Hersh told Ewing afterward. "He's making it all up." (Cusack

Kennedy dish. He emerged with an absurd story that Monroe and Kennedy had been murdered on orders from the Chandler family, owners of the *Los Angeles Times* and, claimed the source, a secret branch of the Mafia.

Former J.F.K. press secretary Pierre Salinger had stories, too. "What do you know about Robert Kennedy?" he asked Hersh and Ewing. Pretty much, they replied. Then Salinger said, "In 1967, I came home and found him in bed with my wife." (Nicole Gillman Salinger, who is now divorced from Pierre, "ab-

you ever talk about this, you're going to be in St. Francis's for 30 years."

According to Ewing, Hersh also learned that President Kennedy suspected that his wife was sleeping with Aristotle Onassis. "She's getting back at me 'cause I have so many," Kennedy is quoted as saying. "I resent it. He's an ugly Greek."

But the liaison that riveted Hersh was John Kennedy's affair with Judith Campbell Exner. When the relationship surfaced during the Church-committee hearings, Exner said it was merely innocent coincidence that while sleeping with Kennedy she was also involved with mobster Sam Giancana and was a friend of Johnny Roselli, both of whom were later murdered. Then, in 1988, Exner said she'd been not only J.F.K.'s lover but also his carrier pigeon to the Mob.

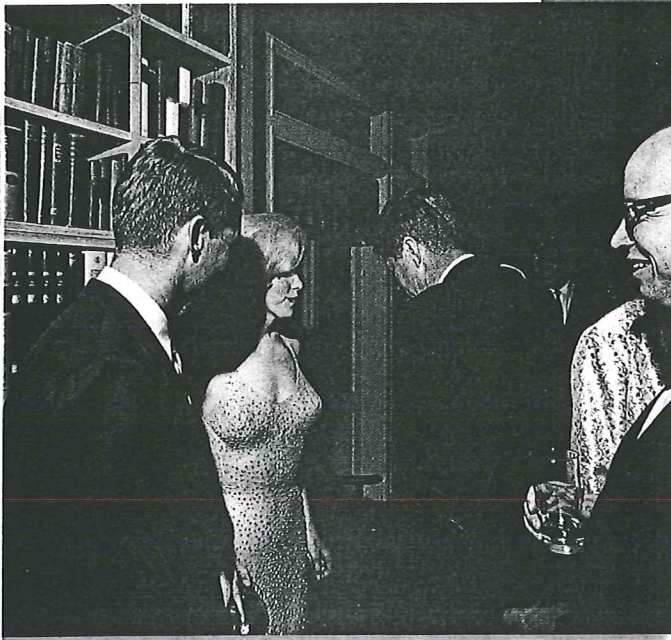
Exner backed up her claim with travel records, showing frequent back-and-forths between J.F.K. and Giancana at the height of the Castro plots. When Ewing produced logs listing Giancana and Exner's telephone calls, Hersh began searching for a go-between. After trying columnist Liz Smith, he settled on a lawyer and Exner confidant. Impressed by Hersh's evidence that former C.I.A. director William Casey had ordered wiretaps on Exner's phone, the lawyer set up a meeting at her California home.

They hit it off splendidly. "Hersh is incredible," Exner gushed to Smith. "I know he is going to reveal the large part Bobby Kennedy played in the C.I.A.-Mafia-Castro business."

Some of the darkest information Hersh picked up had to do with the Kennedys' involvement with the Mob. According to Hersh and Ewing's informants, organized crime had played a decisive role in the 1960 presidential election, first by helping J.F.K. gain the nomination (using laundered cash during the West Virginia primary), then by muscling the November balloting—not only in Illinois, as had long been rumored, but in six other key states.

Bobby's reputation as a Mob-buster, Hersh and Ewing discovered, was not so simple. Yes, he was aware that major felonies were being committed to get Teamsters boss Jimmy Hoffa. But, they learned, he'd also fixed cases of hoodlums who'd aided Jack's election. And

"What I don't understand," wrote Ben Bradlee, "is where Hersh is getting all this crap."



BROTHERLY LUST: Marilyn Monroe with Attorney General Robert Kennedy (left), President John Kennedy (center), and historian Arthur Schlesinger Jr. following the president's 45th-birthday party at Madison Square Garden, May 19, 1962.

declined to comment on his involvement with the navy.)

Later, Hersh found an ominous item in Cloud's background: in 1988 he'd pleaded no contest to a charge that involved the alleged structuring of bank deposits, and did community service. But Hersh wasn't disturbed. The charge, Cloud told him, was a minor violation. "I trust him," Hersh said to Ewing. "He seems like a straight guy."

The Cusack file, however, was still causing fits. Once, Hersh flew to Los Angeles to interview a private investigator said to be a storehouse of Monroe-

solutely" denies having had an affair with Robert Kennedy. "It's true that Robert Kennedy had affairs," she said. "Unfortunately, not with me.")

Meantime, Hersh's methods were getting him in trouble. Sources complained that he'd abused them—and, Hersh admitted, maybe he was playing a little rough.

One who agreed was Helen O'Donnell, daughter of J.F.K.'s late aide Kenny O'Donnell. She hung up in tears after Hersh announced that her father had been "a drunk" who'd "skimmed" large cash contributions to the Democratic National Committee. "I probably handled it badly," Hersh says. "I probably shouldn't have told her that."

Others, however, did talk, about a range of subjects, including J.F.K.'s sex life. "The guy was really into some kinky stuff," says Hersh. "The stuff that I have that is purely salacious—you can fill books with it." Some of the most stunning material was about J.F.K.'s use of prostitutes—mostly on out-of-town trips, but sometimes in the White House. The prostitutes were allegedly procured by a senior presidential aide who would contact local police for the name of the area's most dreaded psychiatric facility. The women were told, "If

far from opposing the C.I.A.-Mob-Castro plots, as Kennedy hagiography had it, Bobby had been their chief instigator from the spring of 1962 onward. "You're using the wrong gangster," a senior C.I.A. official quoted him as scolding. "I'm going to show you how it's done."

While some of Hersh's sources were long-standing Kennedy critics—such as Jackie's cousin Gore Vidal—others were prominent Kennedy aides, who'd spent decades promoting the family myth. "I hate you guys raking this stuff up," said a top-ranking former Justice Department official, who'd shaken with sobs as Hersh catalogued Kennedy horrors. "But I'm not going to lie to you. This is history. I was there, and it happened."

The events described by the Cusack papers were a different matter. Periodically, Cloud and Cusack would send along another batch, each more damning than the last. "This is literally de rigueur among forgers," Ewing warned Hersh. "They keep trickling out more and more. When you're in doubt, they keep you on the line. It was done in the Hughes and Hitler diaries. It's standard." (Cloud, Cusack, and Reznikoff insisted the documents were authentic.)

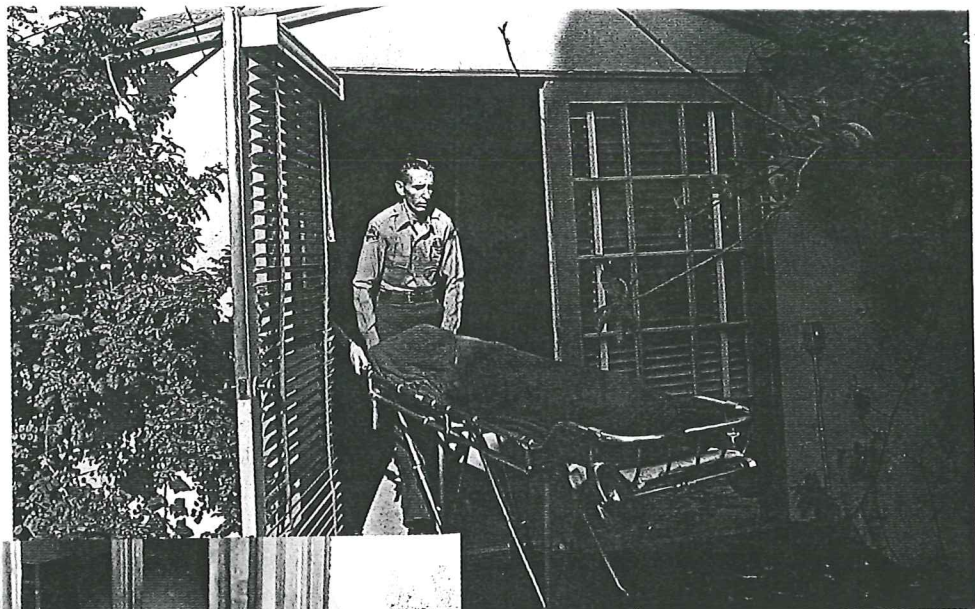
Ewing remained concerned. Hersh's enthusiasm seemed uncontrolled; now he was telling friends that the Kennedys had laundered money through the Boston archdiocese. More alarmingly, Hersh was also helping Cloud sell the Cusack papers by personally talking to investors. "The corroborating evidence he has compiled is incredible," an Oklahoma stockbroker wrote to fellow investors in early 1996. "Seymour said, 'If I could own any of these papers, I would mortgage my house.'" (Hersh claims he was just "shining" the investor.) Hersh's agent, Esther Newberg, decided she had had enough. Warning Hersh that using the Cusack papers would be "damaging professionally," Newberg told Little, Brown that she did not want to be listed in the acknowledgments.

Ewing had mixed feelings. He respected Newberg, who'd cautioned him about lending Hersh money. Ewing hadn't heeded her advice ("Are you going to pay his rent?" he asked), and over the months Hersh had come back to him for more cash. The entreaties were always sincere, but they were straining Ewing's bank ac-

count. "I would borrow from anyone who walks," Hersh says. Ewing had already taken out a second mortgage and had put off paying his income tax to finance Hersh; now his credit cards were nearly maxed out and he'd had to suspend research travel. Meanwhile, his partner was taking his family on holidays to Martha's Vineyard, Tuscany, and Snowmass, Colorado.

Newberg had been right about Hersh's spending. On the other hand, Ewing was aware that Little, Brown had been uneasy about her Kennedy connections from the beginning. If Sy wanted Esther out, Ewing said, she was out. By late spring of 1995, Newberg "recused" herself and turned the project over to Heather Schroder, an ICM agent who'd been handling the book's foreign rights.

Schroder took over shortly before Hersh and Mark Obenhaus tried to sell the book's TV rights. Hersh was enthusiastic, and by that fall they were in talks with PBS, where they had good relations with *Frontline* senior executive producer David Fanning and his number two, Michael Sullivan. Fanning and Sullivan were interested, but didn't see how they'd find the bud-



GOOD-BYE, NORMA JEAN

Above, a Los Angeles police officer removes Marilyn Monroe's body from the mortuary, August 6, 1962. Left, Monroe's bedroom the morning after her apparent suicide. Doctors had to break a window to get inside.

"What do you know about Robert Kennedy?"

Pierre Salinger asked. "In 1967, I came home and found him in bed with my wife."

get Obenhaus and Hersh were asking for. While they scrambled for financing, Obenhaus paid a call on Peter Guber, the recently ousted Sony Pictures chief, who was now running Mandalay Entertainment. Guber suggested that Hersh's information was so good that he worried someone would shoot Hersh—but said he wanted to do features, not documentaries. So it was back to PBS, which by now had come up with a potential backer in Jonathan Taplin, executive producer of the Nicole Kidman film *To Die For*. To spread the costs further, Fanning and Sullivan also had devised a scheme in which a major network would air a two-hour program and PBS would follow up with a three- or four-hour program.

Hersh was thrilled. In addition to collecting a \$125,000-a-year salary to serve as writer and on-air reporter, Hersh was to be awarded 25 percent of the production. Ewing, who was to split a \$50,000

rights fee with Hersh, would make out less well. For serving as "lead researcher," he'd receive a flat \$50,000 and own 5 percent of the production.

Ewing was irate when Hersh faxed him the proposed contract highlights in November. Schroder tried to soothe him. "We don't know if we are going to get any of this," she said, and promised that he'd be kept fully informed.

It appeared Schroder was correct. Taplin soon dropped out, and by the start of 1996, Hersh and Obenhaus were again searching for a backer. Hersh, who'd already failed to lure HBO and talk-show host Phil Donahue, knocked at CBS, but that approach fell through when a snowstorm prevented then entertainment-division president Les Moonves from attending a pitch meeting.

As Hersh and Obenhaus moved on to NBC and ABC, Ewing continued to test the Cusack file—with dismal results. The only good news was that Hersh had persuaded Little, Brown to up the contract by another \$250,000. Even better, ABC and NBC were about to submit

bids of up to \$3 million each. PBS, Hersh told Ewing, was out.

Ewing, who'd been unaware of the maneuvering, sent off an angry fax to Schroder. She responded by switching his representation to Wayne Kabak, ICM's executive vice president and general counsel. Still unsatisfied, Ewing wrote a 14-page confidential memo to Kabak, quoting Hersh's private conversations and, in blistering terms, reviewing his treatment by ICM.

Kabak tried to calm Ewing down and told him that Obenhaus had just sent another deal proposal. Though the terms appeared sweeter than those of the first deal, they still apparently accorded Hersh the lion's share of the TV proceeds. But then, Hersh would be doing more of the TV work.

Ewing was furious. Only weeks before, he'd lent Hersh another \$5,000, bringing the total owed, including deferred advances, to \$75,000. Now he thought his partner was trying to screw him. "I've spoken to Sy," Obenhaus had

written in his letter to Kabak. "He... pointed out that neither he nor I ever talked to Mike about the idea of setting up a partnership to produce the film." Not only did that contradict what Hersh had told him more than a dozen times, Ewing said, it also flew in the face of an ICM document that plainly stated, "Ownership of the project would be held by the creative partnership of Hersh, Ewing and Obenhaus."

It was time for a showdown. Before departing for New York, where Little, Brown had set up a meeting with Hersh, Ewing dispatched another lengthy memo to Kabak, excoriating Hersh,

MONROE DOCTRINE: Clockwise, from top left: the purported contract guaranteeing Monroe's silence on matters pertaining to J.F.K.; a supposed schedule of assets detailing Kennedy's deposits into the star's bank account; a receipt allegedly written by Kennedy; a handwritten note said to be from the starlet to the president, vowing to "be silent on the secret."

AGREEMENT

AGREEMENT made this third day of March, 1960, between John F. Kennedy residing at The Carlyle Hotel, New York, New York, and Marilyn Monroe, residing at 444 East 57th Street, New York, New York:

W.I.T.N.E.S.S.E.T.H.

WHEREAS: As a result of the relationship between Marilyn Monroe (herein after referred to as: MM) and John F. Kennedy (hereinafter referred to as: JFK) MM believes that she has suffered irreparable harm to her well-being and to her professional life and career and that such has been the cause of personal hardship and suffering which is not possible to measure and

WHEREAS: MM believes that the relationship between her and JFK has caused her to suffer damages which damages are impossible to measure, and

WHEREAS: Certain promises which were made to MM by JFK can not be fulfilled and

WHEREAS: JFK desires to compensate MM for such damage which may have occurred and

WHEREAS: MM has agreed that such compensation shall be adequate; NOW, THEREFORE, the parties hereto, in consideration of the promises and other good and valuable consideration, to each in the receipt of which is hereby acknowledged and of the mutual covenants and hereby covenant and

SCHEDULE OF ASSETS

(1)	To be deposited upon execution of this Agreement:	\$100,000.00
(2)	To be deposited by October 1, 1960:	\$250,000.00
(3)	To be deposited by April 1, 1961:	\$100,000.00
(4)	To be deposited by October 1, 1961:	\$150,000.00
Total deposits to fund the trust:		<u>\$600,000.00</u>

J.F.K.
MM

January 6 1963

Receipts of gift as listed in book by Monroe check list as here by above legend as a check from Monroe bank gift to her by her account

John F. Kennedy

Core Jack

I hope you understand I only want to make sure that my Mother is taken care of - this is different for me. I was opposed to this will not be carried for

I will be silent on the secret of your about. Don't spread rumors.

Marilyn Monroe

Obenhaus, various ICM agents—even David Obst and his ex-wife, producer Lynda Obst, neither of whom had had anything to do with the project. He also enumerated a long list of demands, hinting that if they weren't met he'd veto any television deal. "When I saw that," says an ICM agent, "I knew we were not dealing with someone who was playing with a full deck."

Hersh secured copies of the memos and used them as Exhibit A during a dinner with Jim Silberman, Charles Hayward, and Ewing on March 28, 1996. How could he work with someone who said such things about his friends?, Hersh demanded. How could he continue with someone so delusional? With that, Hersh told Ewing, "We're done, we're through," and stalked out.

By mid-April, it was clear to Little, Brown that the only way it would recoup the \$800,000 already advanced was if Hersh wrote the book on his own. "Sy has become convinced that the route you have been pursuing is not yielding anything," Silberman told Ewing. But Ewing still had some literary rights. Little, Brown drafted a settlement and talked of a \$200,000 contract for a book on the history of organized crime. Ewing wasn't happy about that either, but said he'd consult a lawyer. When he delayed in getting back to the publisher, Hersh's attorney withdrew his client's approval of the settlement offer. And Silberman dropped the book idea.

Ewing tried to patch things up by offering to waive all TV payments and cut his share of the book money. But Hersh was adamant. "He could come in with a reel of tape of Oswald getting briefed by Giancana," says Hersh, "and I would have said 'Good-bye.'"

Hersh was no longer paying attention to the former friend he'd once described as having "an I.Q. of about 800 and government documents coming out of his ears." Hersh, who was redrafting the overdue manuscript from scratch, claims that Ewing hadn't come close to proving the conspiracy case, a charge Ewing denies. From now on, said Hersh, he'd focus on "people that do things because they can't control themselves."

NBC entertainment-division president Warren Littlefield liked the approach, and in late June 1996 agreed to air a two-hour prime-time special. But barely had filming begun when NBC canceled the project, citing unspecified "creative differences." Hersh heard that

complaints from a well-connected Kennedy relative may have prompted the decision. But according to well-placed industry sources, the decision was made by Littlefield's immediate superior, West Coast president Don Ohlmeyer, who had heard the doubts about Hersh's material. "Some is documented and some isn't," says a network executive. "It seemed suspicious." NBC compensated Obenhaus's production company handsomely to go away; the final settlement, sources say, was in the neighborhood of \$1 million.

With NBC out of the picture, Obenhaus turned to his former employers at ABC News. Roone Arledge proved amenable and Peter Jennings offered to serve as program host. By November 1996, cameras were rolling.

ABC made it clear that the Cusack papers wouldn't be aired without exhaustive analysis. "We need to know that this stuff is good," said Tom Yellin, executive producer of *Peter Jennings*

that didn't prove the papers false; after so many years, fingerprints might have worn off.

Handwriting analysis was another wash. The "expert reports" Cloud handed over were all impressive—and all found J.F.K.'s script to be authentic. Obenhaus's expert—Gerald B. Richards, the former chief of the F.B.I.'s document operations and research unit—couldn't swear that Kennedy's and Monroe's handwriting was genuine, nor could he state that the samples were outright forgeries. But he had one more test to go: microscopic analysis of the typewriting on the Monroe contracts.

The work was just beginning this May when one of Obenhaus's researchers noted that the letterhead used for a transfer payment dated January 9, 1961 (written by J.F.K. on Cusack's stationery), included a Zip Code—not unusual, except that Zip Codes didn't exist until 1963 and weren't in widespread use until 1965. "Oh shit," Hersh said.

At a meeting with Cloud, Cusack, and Reznikoff, Obenhaus offered a possible explanation. Maybe, he said, the document had been "backdated," a common, quasi-legal practice. Yes, they agreed, that had to be it. Hersh, who'd turned in a chapter devoted to the Cusack papers, breathed easier.

As if the project needed more trouble, the media were buzzing about "secret documents" which would reveal Marilyn Monroe's "blackmailing" of the Kennedys. Hersh denied the stories—saying, in effect, that those who had repeated his descriptions of the Cusack papers were liars. Digging deeper, *Vanity Fair's* Marie Brenner put together a rough history of the documents, including Cloud's attempts to sell them to Steve Forbes. Forbes, whom Hersh had still not interviewed, confirmed that he'd been offered the papers, but said he'd decided to pass, partly because Cloud wouldn't allow him to test their authenticity. Cloud denies that he withheld permission.

Hersh, meanwhile, was still clinging to the hope that the documents were authentic. The originals certainly looked good. "Gorgeous," Hersh called them. "They get you hard." Moreover, Cusack, Cloud, and Reznikoff betrayed no trepidation about the testing.

On the other hand, Hersh had recent-

"When I saw that," an ICM agent says of Ewing's angry letter, "I knew we were not dealing with someone who was playing with a full deck."

Reporting. "Not just that it isn't bad."

Now came the hard part: proving a positive. The first step had already been taken. While at NBC, Obenhaus and his team of researchers had spent six weeks scrutinizing the documents for any textual errors. None had been found.

The next test would be even trickier. In order to do fingerprint analysis, they'd need the originals of several of J.F.K.'s file-card notes to Cusack—and all of those were in the hands of investors. With no noticeable reluctance, however, Cloud rounded them up and turned them over to the expert Obenhaus had engaged, a former N.Y.P.D. crime-lab specialist, who'd used lasers to lift Oswald's prints off the Mannlicher-Carcano rifle found on the sixth floor of the Texas School Book Depository when everyone else had failed. Two months of searching, though, unearthed no evidence of J.F.K.'s having handled the Cusack documents. But

ly discovered that Lex Cusack had shown up at a chapel service at Annapolis wearing the uniform of a lieutenant commander—and Hersh could find no evidence that Lex had attended Annapolis or been in the navy. (Cusack has said the incident was a joke.) Weighing against that was Hersh's interview with singer Phyllis Maguire, a longtime Gancana girlfriend. She said that "Momo" had told her all about the Marilyn contracts. At last, Hersh thought, real-time corroboration. Later, Maguire told Hersh that she had heard of the contracts only in recent months.

Then, in July, the documents fell apart. Examining two of the Monroe contracts, Richards found that some of the characters had been lifted off and replaced—a simple process, employing a "ball-style" IBM Selectric typewriter. But that machine wasn't invented until 1973. Checking further, Richards also discovered that the *y* in Marilyn's signature removed a microscopic fragment of the line beneath, something possible only if a plastic ribbon had been used in typing the Cusack papers—and such ribbons hadn't been around, either, when the documents were supposedly written. Another problem was the Prestige Pica typeface used to create the papers; the sizes of the period and the comma and the quotation mark were subtly different from those of the roll-bar typewriters used at the time. In the file cards on which Cusack typed his "Dr. Watson" notes, Richards came across another glitch: the messages included two different "pitches"—the spacing between individual letters. Machines of the 1960s had only one pitch.

A second expert hired by Obenhaus confirmed Richards's findings, as did a specialist employed by ABC. Cusack's old law firm drove in the final two nails: bills showing that the stationery used for some of the papers hadn't been purchased until 1965, and drafts of two of the Zip Coded documents discovered in a file room that Lex Cusack occasionally used as an office. Someone, it seemed, had been practicing.

By the end of July, there was no doubt: Seymour Hersh had been duped. The question was how to disclose it.

The dilemma was especially acute for Hersh, who'd lent his name to *Clear's* huckstering, and who knew

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only too well how “the original, born-again-Christian greed monster,” as he called Cloud, was using it. Wielding Hersh’s cachet as a Pulitzer winner, Cloud had sold more than \$4 million worth of documents—some for as much as \$100,000 a page—and planned to sell the rest through the major auction houses.

Lawyers Hersh consulted told him he was under no obligation to alert law enforcement; as long as he had done nothing to further a fraud, he was in the clear legally. Ethically, however, Hersh was unsettled. “I don’t want some guy buying documents last week because these assholes told them I was going to write a book,” says Hersh, who wanted the story out immediately. “Somebody may rely on me and somebody may sue me.”

ABC, however, was carefully gathering its own legal advice before deciding how to proceed. Finally, though, calls went out to Cusack, Cloud, and Reznikoff, requesting filmed interviews.

Cusack was eerily calm when Peter Jennings confronted him with the forensic evidence. Maybe the testers had gotten it wrong, he said. Maybe the Kennedys had corrupted Hersh, Obenhaus, Jennings, and ABC. But if the papers were forgeries, he’d see to it that the investors got back every penny. No one was conceding anything.

Parts of the drama were still to play out, including the possibility of criminal charges. But Hersh had moved on. He had words to write—and he didn’t have time to bother with the Cusack papers. Yes, he said, he’d fallen for “one of the great scams of all times.” But doing books was “a process,” and while it went on, “there’s nothing wrong with thinking all kinds of bullshit.” Cusack and Reznikoff maintain that the documents are authentic. And Cloud says, “The jury is out. I want the truth.”

“Any investigative journalist can be totally fucking conned so easy,” Hersh says. “We’re the easiest lays in town. You can still sell me bridges. It’s what I print that matters.” He shrugs. “So what’s new? Boy reporter goes down wrong path.”

Losing a major chapter didn’t bother

him. He had plenty of other disclosures, including, he says, “very serious new stuff on foreign policy . . . things nobody knows.” Hersh isn’t revealing details, but, according to others, the material ranges from the Cuban missile crisis (at one point, J.F.K. considered removing intermediate-range ballistic missiles from parts of Western Europe) to a proposed joint attack with the Soviet Union on the Chinese nuclear center at Lop Nhor (Khrushchev got cold feet). And Hersh is said to have “back-channel” cables—omitted from the Pentagon Papers—linking J.F.K. to the murder of South Viet-

But *The Dark Side of Camelot* will be no love letter. “This is the death rattle,” Hersh says. “The death rattle.” Counting on it, Little, Brown has ordered an initial printing of more than 350,000 copies.

Ewing may tarnish some of the book’s sheen; he’s considering suing Hersh if the book contains any of his material. The Kennedy family, which has been tracking Hersh’s work, has a

“We need to know that this stuff is good,” ABC producer Tom Yellin warned. “Not just that it isn’t bad.”



SEE MORE HERSH: Peter Jennings and Hersh at Elaine’s, July 17, 1997. Jennings is anchoring an ABC News special based on *The Dark Side of Camelot*, but it’s unclear whether the program will air.

namese president Ngo Dinh Diem. “You’ll love it,” says Hersh.

He also believes readers will like what he’s come up with about Marilyn Monroe and Robert Kennedy—he was head over heels about her—and why Bobby agonized so long before entering the 1968 presidential race. “It’s a sad story,” says Hersh, revealing that R.F.K. feared disclosures from an unnamed book. “There are things he did for his brother that are sad. His position with his brother is sad. I guess I came away . . . see[ing] both of them as more tragic figures.” According to those who have worked with Hersh on the documentary, there have been moments when, while recounting private acts of kindness by J.F.K., Hersh has broken down and wept.

policy of not responding to critical books. Hersh is expecting an exception. “They’re going to come after me,” he says.

The greatest danger could come from Cloud’s investors who may try to hold Hersh responsible for their purchase of fraudulent material. They may find an ally in Cloud, who is furious at Hersh for not immediately disclosing the problems with the documents. According to Cloud, he sold hundreds of thousands of dollars’ worth of documents after Hersh suspected there were problems. “He reassured me more than once,” Cloud says. “Never said there were any problems.”

Cloud also disputes Hersh’s general version of events. “If Seymour Hersh wants to go on national TV and take a lie-detector test with me, let’s get it on,” he says. “I don’t understand how a man who has that kind of track record can go out—just because I’m a little peeved compared to him—and lie to people and try to run over people.”

But Seymour Hersh isn’t worrying. Dismissing his former friends’ complaints as those of “a bunch of guys who are going to jail,” he’s spending his days thinking of the president he accuses of causing so much mayhem. “I would have been absolutely devoted to Jack Kennedy if I had worked for him,” he says. “I would have been knocked out by him. I would have liked him a lot.” □