



The Conspiracy

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Rome.

You always feel it coming. Someone makes you for an American, and the eyes study your face, and finally they unload. They want to know something, and it is always the same thing. It has become even more important than women or automobiles. They want to know who killed John F. Kennedy.

And so you try to explain that the country in which you were born and which you love more than any other is not solely inhabited by hairless pansy fliers who paste orange rugs on their skulls; that we don't only produce sick ex-Marines, love cultists, or silver-haired businessmen with Nazi faces. You try to explain that there are other people in the United States besides Lee Harvey Oswald, Jack Ruby, Jim Garrison, Mark Lane, ex-cons named Torres, Dorothy Kilgallen, the Dallas cops, and all those others who have been splashed all over the front pages of Europe for more than three years. You try to explain all that.

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We were at the bar of the Palace Hotel in Helsinki. Muzak played softly in the background. The customers took Schweppes with their gin. We were talking English. The place emptied around 10, and then the bartender, thin, balding, in his 50s, leaned over. "You have to tell me," he said. "Who killed Kennedy?" The Muzak played "Night and Day," and the bartender smirked when we said Lee Harvey Oswald.

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Perhaps history prevents them from listening. They think we are naive, because their own history has been so bloody and murderous. Europe is a place where cousins killed kings to grab off thrones; where poison and the ax took the place of the ballot box. Mussolini came to full power by murdering Socialists like Matteotti. If that could happen after 2,000 years of civilization, they tell you, how can America hope to be better after 400?

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I was in the airport at Frankfurt. American soldiers with duffle bags slept in the lounge. Announcements were made in four languages. I bought a Paris Herald Tribune at the news stand and sat down to wait. A man was looking over my shoulder at the latest story out of New Orleans. "Eh," he said, in a French accent. "It looks like they are finally getting the truth, no?" A middle-aged German on my other side stood up and left. The Frenchman wanted to know who Clay Shaw was. I told him I didn't know the man, but he didn't believe me.

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They have it all figured out over here, especially since the Mardi Gras broke in New Orleans. David Ferrie flew to Houston, to wait for the car from Dallas carrying Oswald and his accomplice. The car was to be driven by Officer Tippit. The plane would fly from Houston to Yucatan, take on more gas, and go on to Cuba. In this drama, Clay Shaw represents American business; that is, the right wing. Shaw worked for International Trade Marts, and he arranged for Kennedy to speak at the Trade Mart in Dallas, thus determining the motorcade route. He used Oswald and the other pro-Castro accomplices because what would be a better right wing conspiracy than one where the gunmen were leftists?

Tippit panicked and Oswald shot him (the plane was in Houston, of course, because the Dallas airport would be immediately closed). Ruby, who was also in New Orleans in September of 1963, was the back-up man, with access to the Dallas jail,

charged with killing anyone who was arrested.

It all fits beautifully. Europeans still write the best thrillers.

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I was in the Piazza del Popolo, having lunch at Rosati's with Elio Petri, a brilliant young film director. The night before I saw his film, "To Each His Own," about justice in Sicily. In one scene two university professors are in a piazza in Palermo. Suddenly, an automobile explodes. "This place is becoming a regular Chicago," the first professor says. The other nods. There is a second explosion. "Dallas is more like it," he says. Petri leaned forward. "In New Orleans," he said, "they are starting to find out about Kennedy at last, no?" A lovely girl in a green sweater walked by. Petri didn't see her.

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The talk never ends. From the beginning, Europeans saw a conspiracy, and nothing that has happened since seems to have changed their minds. We now know that the Warren Commission report was a shoddy job, hastily prepared, riddled with holes. The Europeans I've met want to know why we do not have a second investigation. If there is nothing to hide, why doesn't the American government do the job, instead of leaving it to a district attorney in the American South? No answers come from Washington. The FBI says that the FBI investigation was impeccable. Members of the Warren Commission say that the Warren Commission did a fine job. No one I've spoken to in the past two weeks believes any of this.

One thing is clear: the Kennedy assassination is no longer a domestic issue. A new, full-blown investigation must be started. We cannot pretend to be leaders of a virtuous abstraction like the Free World when most of that world thinks our government is stained with blood.