contented lieutenants and a smoothly functioning bureau apparatus.

In late October, at a press conference, Kennedy was asked the "criticism of our handling of inter-American affairs" by "advisers in the White House duplicating and sometimes riding people in the State Department."

"My experience in government," Kennedy said, in the a long and semiapologetic reply, "is that when things are no troversial, beautifully coordinated, and all the rest, it may be there is not much going on. . . . So if you really want com harmony and goodwill, then the best way to do it is not to anything. . . . So we are attempting to do something about La America, and there is bound to be a ferment. If the ferment pr duces a useful result, it will be worthwhile. . . ."

Right on, I thought. But my enthusiasm was premature.

The following afternoon I stood in the Oval Office, waiting for McGeorge Bundy to complete a conversation with the president so that I could inform him of my recent discovery that the CIA had been engaged in covert operations in the Dominican Republic, had actually transferred some small weapons to a group that wished to overthrow Trujillo by assassination. Looking toward me, Kennedy said, "You know, Dick, maybe we'd be better off if you were in the State Department, closer to the action." He paused for a moment, then waved his hand as if brushing the idea aside. "Hell," he said, speaking to some undefined space between me and the attentive Bundy, "if Dick goes over there, we'll never hear anything about Latin America."

After Bundy left, I told Kennedy what I had learned. He reacted angrily. "Tell them no more weapons. The United States is not to get involved in any assassinations. I'd like to get rid of Trujillo, but not that way."

Although he had dismissed the idea of my departure, I was now aware that it was on his mind. So I was not wholly unprepared that November day in 1961 when I stood on the porch outside the Oval Office of the White House watching Kennedy walk across the South Lawn toward the helicopter that awaited his departure for a weekend at his Virginia estate. Glimpsing me as he neared the steps of the helicopter, Kennedy beckoned toward me. As I approached him, he smiled, leaned over, spoke loudly into my ear over the noise of the spinning rotors. "You know, Dick, I think you'll be more effective in the State Department." I did not reply.

"Remembering America" Goodwin

nounce it next week. Then We'll talk about it when I get back." there was nothing to talk about. The decision had been My White House days were over. For now. And although have many conversations with Kennedy in the future, the discussion never took place.

> then talk for a while about whether [Big Nurse is] the root of all the trouble here or not, and Harding says she's the root of most of it. Most of the other guys think so too, but McMurphy isn't so sure any more. He says he thought so at one time but now he don't know. He says he don't think getting her out of the way would really make much difference; he says that there's something bigger making all this mess and goes on to try to say what he thinks it is. He finally gives up when he can't explain it.
>
> — Ken Kesey, *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*

Trying to recall the emotions of my brief, decisive encounter with Kennedy is like taking an archaeologist's pick to the surface artifacts of an ancient community, hoping to penetrate through the time-mantled layers — city heaped upon city, each carefully, hopefully, constructed on the ruins of its predecessors — to reach the primeval settlement that was the predecessor of all to come. I am a different person from the young man who, on that uncommonly mild and brilliant November afternoon, was told of his exile from a man he admired, and more than admired. Were the same situation to recur, I would feel differently, respond differently, behave differently. At least I think so. The perverse elusiveness of emotional recollection, further distorted by the irrepressible desire for self-deception, makes all memoirs, including this one, a partial misrepresentation; and, incidentally, makes great poetry possible. "Memoirs," Justice Frankfurter once told me, "are the most unreliable source of historical evidence. Events are always distorted by refraction through the writer's ego." (I.e., the spectrum is not the light.)

Having unburdened myself of this admission, let me tell you exactly how I felt. I was saddened; not stunned, but suffused with a milder melancholy more like that of a rejected lover. It was not a defeat. At least it didn't appear to be. As a deputy assistant secretary of state I would have direct, daily authority over the implementation of Latin American policy; my ties to the president