

First Dallas, Now L.A....a

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LOS ANGELES, June 5—For anyone who has had the misfortune of being in the motorcade that Friday afternoon in Dallas, this sickeningly swift plunge from political triumph to personal tragedy is like reliving a nightmare.

One moment there is a candidate, waving to his crowd, enjoying a reception that augurs further victories ahead.

And then there is chaos.

That is how one remembers John Kennedy in Dealey Plaza on Nov. 22, 1963—smiling and waving—and that is the last view the television cameras have given you of Robert Kennedy at the Ambassador Hotel this morning.

Then there is the subliminal signal, at first barely perceived, then instinctively rejected—the little noise or flurry of movement just outside one's range of vision that warns you something has gone wrong—terribly wrong.

In Dealey Plaza, it was the pop-pop of the shots over the noise of the motorcade and the crowds. Last night at the NBC studio in Burbank, where this reporter was gathering election returns, it was the chilling cry, "Someone's been shot at the Ambassador."

And then—in Dallas and Los Angeles—there is the carcening flight through the streets of an unknowing city to the door of a hospital

whose name you have never heard before and now will never forget—Parkland Memorial . . . Good Samaritan.

It takes much longer to drive from the Burbank studio to Good Samaritan than it had taken that helpful bystander in Dallas to drive you from the Trade Mart to Parkland Memorial.

And each mile and moment along the way, you fight back the nausea and tears that rise from the foreknowledge of what the hospital scene will be. Having seen it on the faces of Ralph Yarborough and Jim Wright in Dallas, you know in advance the stricken expression of the men who have seen another Kennedy gunned down.

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Nightmare All Too Real

And that is, of course, the sight that confronts you at Good Samaritan, for this is a nightmare that is all too real.

Instead of the bright daylight of a winter afternoon in Dallas, there is the artificial glare of television lights, cutting through the post-midnight darkness of a balmy spring night in Los Angeles.

But all the old horror comes flooding back, borne by snatches of conversation that one had almost—but not quite put out of his mind.

Two reporters are talking about the priest who had tried to force his way into the emergency room to administer the last rites. (But

surely that happened in Dallas, not here?)

An argument breaks out among the bystanders over the candidate's security precautions. "He had three big men in a wedge around him," one says. "There's just no way to stop a madman with a gun."

The other says, "I don't see why they can't clear people out before he comes through a place like that."

(It must be Dallas; those lines were spoken before; this cannot be happening again; you are losing your mind.)

The argument has begun about the bullets. "If there were only four shots, how could Bobby have been hit twice?" someone asked. "The one that hit his shoul-

der must have gone on to hit someone else," his companion replies.

(John Connally, are you hearing this conversation, too? Do the echoes go from Dallas to Los Angeles and back to Austin, or do they stop here, as time has stopped, as all motion has ground down now, in the darkest hours of the night?)

The nightmare relived is protracted. Already the vigil at Good Samaritan has been longer than the wait at Parkland, and dawn has not yet broken. Like a watchman of the night, ashen-faced Frank Mankiewicz climbs back on his perch atop the squad car, and gives the bulletins on the surgeons' work.

The outcome, this time, is not swift.